

**Book Review**

**Carolien Stolte and Yoshiyuki Kikuchi, eds., *Eurasian Encounters: Museums, Missions, Modernities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp. 7, 261.**

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Demonstrating how centers and peripheries are often in flux, the authors of *Eurasian Encounters* adopt a polycentric approach to historiography in order to broaden the conversation beyond limiting (e.g., Eurocentric, androcentric) parameters. Thus, in testing, exploring, and re-mapping, the book unfolds in constant negotiation of dual boundaries: (1) those surrounding 1900-1950 East-West intellectual, political and cultural encounters; and (2) the very borders of history—which determine whose stories get told and whose do not. One of the joys of this collection on encounters lies in how the essays encounter each other. The editors are to be commended for their orchestration of such diverse, polyphonous essays (originally presented at a conference in Singapore in 2012). As the editors, Carolien Stolte, a lecturer in history at Leiden University, and Yoshiyuki Kikuchi, a social historian of science at Nagoya Keizai University—themselves an East-West duo—state in their introduction, the book presents “historiographies of vernacular cosmopolitanism, localization, hybridity, adaptation and translation.”<sup>1</sup> Through their careful arrangement and introduction, Stolte and Kikuchi bring these nine essays, grouped into three parts, back into conversation, augmenting, informing, and responding to each other with great depth and profound reverberations.

Part I, “Artistic Spaces,” opens with two chapters on museums. Keeping in mind how collections move, it is interesting to see how their vessels—the museums themselves—travel across borders. In Chapter

2, “The Museum at Aundh,” Deepti Mulgund contributes to scholarly treatments of colonialism and the art museum in an Indian context by insightfully examining the unique case of a museum founded by an Indian, contrasting it to those founded by Europeans as institutions of colonial power. Mulgund’s detailed, well-researched context of the comparative histories of colonial, Indian-established museums in India uncovers the story of Balasaheb Pant Pratinidhi, a self-trained painter, wrestler, and ruler of the rural Aundh region. In constant negotiation with colonizers who viewed their subjects’ lack of art history and antiquities as proof of an inferior civilization, Balasaheb devised an innovative response: to create such artifacts from scratch. One of the most striking illustrations of localization—and how art may serve as an ideological instrument for re-balancing asymmetrical encounters—lies in Balahaseb’s introduction of marble, the classical medium of the oppressor, to local clay and stone artisans. By installing the personified forms of the six Hindu seasons in marble next to Western marbles, Balahaseb turned his museum into a space for dialogue, offering “a mode of speaking back to the canon of Western art.”<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter 3, “Exhibiting the Nation,” Shu-Li Wang continues the discussion of the movement of the museum to Japan and China. Central to Wang’s contribution is her treatment of the importance of translation. With no viable cognate for “Temple of the Muses,” Easterners abroad turned to the World Exposition. The initial Chinese translation of “Exposition” as a form of competition—antithetical to the private, spiritually-driven practice of art collection in China—likely delayed assimilation of the museum there. (Both Japanese and Chinese museum founders settled on the term 博物館, pronounced *hakubutsukan* and *bowuguan*.) Contrary to previous historical accounts, Wang posits that Fukuzawa Yukichi salvaged the term from Japan’s cultural model of the past—China—via a pre-Meiji Chinese text, adapting it to suit the modernist imperial agenda of Japan’s new European model. Only then did China borrow the term back in its refurbished state from the Japanese, marking the Chinese shift from European to Japanese models. While Japan developed its museums according to the European imperial agenda, China incorporated the museum to educate the people and

prevent external plunder of its artifacts,<sup>3</sup> reflecting the divergent agendas of Empire building (Japan) and Empire dismantling (China).

Sonal Khullar shifts from the artistic space of the museum to two artists emblematic of those who produce works that, she argues, ought more often to fill such spaces. Taking a feminist approach, Khullar presents the cases of Pan and Sher-Gil, expatriate artists largely excluded from the canon of art history. While Khullar details how the two are occasionally included as anomalies or exoticized exceptions, they were in fact as deeply engaged in the same discourses of artistic production as their male counterparts. Acknowledging both artists' subjection to the "Plath Effect"<sup>4</sup>—a tendency of using *ad hominem* criticism to deflect the substance of their art—Khullar is careful to link biographical material with concrete socio-aesthetic analysis (e.g., Pan's outsider status in China and unique style of painting as a function of her lower-class upbringing). In fluid prose with lyrical, poetic qualities, Khullar illustrates what happens when the East-West encounter occurs not just between groups and individuals, but among—even within—hybrid individuals such as Pan (Chinese) and Sher-Gil (Sikh-Hungarian), and how such individuals are perceived differently—in fact changed—according to their encounters and movements. This analysis culminates in the striking assertion that "art and travel are one."<sup>5</sup>

In Chapter 5, "Bauhaus and Tea Ceremony," Helena Čapková reveals the Bauhaus as a hub of transnational aesthetic convergence. Clearly written, unpretentious, and deeply informative, this essay makes for an uplifting conclusion to Part I, as it shows what can happen when agents on both sides of the encounter work energetically to promote each other's interests—especially when those interests are one and the same. Čapková provides many superb examples illustrating how influence is bi-lateral, moving back and forth across national and continental borders, constituting a valuable counter-narrative to claims that influence proceeds in one direction. She even goes a step further, demonstrating how, at a certain point, influences become so embedded in both cultures that the sense of the other is lost and all encounters with the other become glorious encounters of the self. Kawakita Renshichiro—founder of a Japanese wing of the Bauhaus—for example, once expressed

admiration for Wassily Kandinsky's "musical visuality," which was inspired by Kawakita's earlier architectural works.<sup>6</sup> One thing we might conclude from Čapková's citation of Bruno Taut's claim that, "the exotic no longer exists in Europe for Japan, or in Japan for Europe,"<sup>7</sup> is that Japan is in fact—as it often likes to claim—part of Europe, not Asia. Another thing we might gather is that at times the European *is* Asian, and vice-versa.

While Part II, "Missions and Education," contains only two essays, their complementary nature conveys an instructive contrast between two cases of Christian missions to the East. The first, in Eastern India, highlights the failure of such encounters; the second, in China, their success. In Chapter 6, "Schooling a Missionary in Early Twentieth-Century Eastern India," Indrani Chatterjee documents and explores, from an Indo-centric, subaltern perspective, the case of Reverend E. Rowlands, a single Welsh Calvinist Methodist missionary whose improprieties with young women from Himalayan hill societies in Eastern India resulted in a letter of protest to his superiors. With dry wit and eloquent, finely-tuned prose, Chatterjee examines the failure of the encounter arising from the missionaries' condescension and lack of linguistic skills and conceptual wherewithal to appreciate the complex social systems and intricate networks of moral dependencies of the local population. Chatterjee demonstrates with authority how two missionary misreadings underlying Rowland's advances threatened to disrupt traditional marital transactions based on the labor value of females in this polyandrous, matriarchal society. Missionaries first misread the local concept of "bride wealth"—a condition of equal exchange of goods for female labor value—as "dowry," a transaction of purchase rather than exchange. Secondly, their misreading of the gender codes of this society, in which women occupied the center of production and men the periphery, is vividly exemplified by one missionary's observation that "men only watched . . . while women worked in the fields,"<sup>8</sup> providing an important lesson on the dangers of seeing things from a single, familiar perspective.

In Chapter 7, "The Catholic Church in China in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," Cindy Yik-yi Chu provides excellent contrasts to the previous essay by highlighting collaborative communication and

connection between Western missionaries and local Chinese in the joint-establishment of two universities—Zhendan (Shanghai) and Furen (Beijing). Employing concepts of glocalization and E.C. Eoyang’s two-way mirror of cross-cultural exchange, Chu shows how both missionaries and Chinese underwent transformation through the processes of evangelization and modernization. Zhendan University in Shanghai—the product of pioneering educator Ma Xiangbo’s collaboration with French Jesuits—“was a merger of two educational systems, the Chinese and the French.”<sup>9</sup> “A superb amalgam” of Chinese and Western pedagogies, Zhendan boasted an innovative curriculum with “equal emphasis on the study of Chinese and Western cultures,” requiring study of “classical Chinese alongside Latin, and modern Chinese along with Western languages and literature.”<sup>10</sup> Chu clearly demonstrates the balance and compromise on both sides: “The need for mutual respect was always there”; the Jesuits “acted with much consideration for the local students,” showing a “deep respect of the ‘other’ as a person.”<sup>11</sup>

Part III, “Shared Trajectories, New Subjectivities,” is comprised of three essays on encounters involving shifts of hegemony, center, and periphery, all of which contribute to reinventing national identities through collaborative development of hybrid architectural, literary, and photojournalistic media. In Chapter 8, “Indigenizing Cosmopolitanism,” Anoma Pieris explores shifting forms of cosmopolitanism manifest in the residential and institutional architecture of Colombo, Sri Lanka from the early-twentieth-century colonial period to independence in 1948. Pieris’s description of the colonial spatial logic of Colombo as a fabricated city designed for plunder reveals it as a particularly charged site for such an inquiry. Pieris notes that Sri Lankan encounters with the European regularly involved hostility, mimicry, and hybridization, providing a fascinating account of how one can read the nuances of each stage in the production of a postcolonial national subject through the local architecture. Pieris’s reference to Nihal Perera’s definition of indigenization “as simultaneously being a form of assimilation and resistance” thus resonates with the Indian and Chinese museum projects in the second and third chapters. Pieris is also attentive to the perils of replacing one form of domination with another (e.g., Sinhalese-Buddhist

for British), as she demonstrates in her reading of Independence Hall (1955), which is “covered with plaster mouldings . . . and surrounded by figures of seated lions, the symbol of the Sinhala race.”<sup>12</sup> Dispelling any doubts that this was a coincidence, Pieris relates how four more lions were added during the 1980s, as conflict between the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority and the Hindu-Tamil minority intensified.

In Chapter 9, “Fighting for the Soviet Empire,” Boram Shin offers a thought-provoking account of how the interpenetration of populations from center and periphery—Soviet Russia (Moscow) and Soviet Asia (Uzbekistan)—leads to shifts in power dynamics entailing a redefinition of the location of each within the other. Under German attack in World War II, Soviet elites were evacuated to Uzbekistan, crossing paths with Uzbek soldiers on their way to the front.<sup>13</sup> With Russian survival resting on the military commitment of its satellite states, instilling patriotism became the central aim of state-sponsored propaganda.<sup>14</sup> Soviet Russia had its own inspiriting mythology of Uzbekistan as a land of unlimited resources; the Uzbek commitment to Soviet Russia, which was much more ambivalent, required the generation of a reciprocal mythology of heroic alliance. In collaboration with local Uzbek cultural elites, Soviet Russian literati mobilized to produce work demonstrating a heroic, shared Soviet past.<sup>15</sup> In order to establish a sense of solidarity against a common enemy, they portrayed Nazis as destroyers of culture and Soviets as “protectors of cultures of all nationalities.”<sup>16</sup> However, when the Russian intelligentsia realized that their poster-boy for a heroic culture—Pushkin—did little to inspire Uzbek soldiers, they resuscitated the more familiar fifteenth-century Chagatai poet Alisher Navoi, holding a party for his 500th birthday in Leningrad to help narrow the distance between “imperial” Russians from the metropole and the “multicultural” inhabitants of their Soviet republic.<sup>17</sup>

In Chapter 10, “Shared Origins, Shared Outcomes;” Andrea Germer presents a superb account of aesthetic cross-pollination between complementary East-West Fascisms in her study of *NIPPON* and *Signal*, the propaganda journals of the Japanese and German war machines. One of the most fascinating aspects of the study is how nationalistic movements can be discerned in the activities of a few individuals—such

as the international-hybrid couple behind *NIPPON*: Natori Yonosuke and his partner Erna Mecklenburg, whom Germer (invoking John Clark) calls “long-distance cultural specialists who carry visual discourses from one context into another and back again.”<sup>18</sup> Natori, who Germer once described as “A Japanese Reifenstahl,”<sup>19</sup> brought to *NIPPON* the new hybrid technology of “photo-stories” he practiced as a photojournalist in Germany. In order to trace the interwoven trajectories of the two magazines, Germer locates another formal aesthetic antecedent of *NIPPON* in Bauhaus visual style, presenting side-by-side cover images of *NIPPON* and *Photographie und Bauhaus*, both of which employed the technique of double exposure “to express simultaneity.”<sup>20</sup> She goes on to describe how *Signal* was directly influenced by *NIPPON*, recalling the bilateral nature of the Bauhaus German-Japanese encounters delineated in Chapter 5. *Signal*’s casting of military conquest as “educational and touristic travels”<sup>21</sup> provides an astonishing parallel to the “art as travel” assertion in Chapter 4. In a key (dis-)connection with the previous essay, *Signal* presents Nazis as defenders of culture, frequently displaying images of cultural activity and war side-by-side.<sup>22</sup>

The anti-essentialist thrust of the final chapter, reflected in Germer’s insistence on tracing trajectories, flows, and points of connection and disconnection, rather than searching for absolute origins, makes for a fitting conclusion, one which echoes the willingness to “write histories with rough edges and unfinished endings”<sup>23</sup> expressed in Chapter 4. In some ways, such approaches appear more true to human experience—perhaps even more poetic—providing a kind of historical negative capability. With critical acuity, *Eurasian Encounters* aims to broaden and redefine historiographical discourse to include—at center stage, from their own perspectives—those who have not yet occupied it. By redefining the nature of the cross-cultural encounter as a bi- (or multi-) lateral equation, the authors go a long way toward restoring balance. As such, their studies are not just re-examinations of the past, but also strategies for the future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Carolien Stolte and Yoshiyuki Kikuchi, eds., *Eurasian Encounters: Museums, Missions, Modernities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 164, 165.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>19</sup> Germer, Andrea, “Artists and wartime politics: Natori Yonosuke—a Japanese Reifenstahl?,” *Journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo*, 24.1 (2012), 21.

<sup>20</sup> Stolte and Kikuchi, eds., *Eurasian Encounters*, 237.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.