THE MINOR TRANSPACIFIC:
A Roundtable Discussion

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IN 2017, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY's (SFU) Institute for Transpacific Cultural Research (ITCR) hosted a series of events and workshops at which scholars who are engaged in cultural studies across Canada, Australia, and various parts of East and Southeast Asia gathered in Vancouver to discuss their research on transpacific cultural studies. We also organized a roundtable at a conference in Portland, Oregon, on the topic of minor empires to rethink relations of power involving Asia and Asians globally as they have unfolded historically and in the current moment. In the subsequent, criss-crossing conversations that developed among participants at both events, "transpacific" and "minor" became generative concepts that provoked us to resituate our research, intellectual and political points of reference, as well as our personal histories and locations in new and challenging ways. As a relatively new field of research, transpacific studies critically interrogates how political and economic ideas about a region variously conceptualized as "Asia Pacific," "Pacific Rim," and "Pacific Basin" have been deployed throughout history. It also explores alternative and oppositional visions of the "Pacific" that resist the power structures codified in treaties, trade agreements, and formal alliances (Hoskins and Nguyen 2014).

The notion of "minor empires" gives us a means not only of identifying relations to the "major" empires such as imperial Britain, the United States, and China but also of understanding how imperial desires and practices have shaped minor players such as Canada, Australia, or Singapore, which are privileged, but not entirely dominant, members of the global public. Their minor status is key to understanding the particular ways in which they continually benefit from the global flow of peoples and capital even when such flows challenge the power of the nation-state. In short, the "minor" names a set of relationships to imperialist imaginaries (i.e., peripheral, junior partner, margin) as well as consciously "minor" roles in their global unfolding. We conceive of the "minor transpacific" as an alternative regional imaginary and a new referential framework that emphasizes the lateral relations among minor

histories and minor locations in the Asia Pacific region. The notion has led to a new network that is beginning to generate dialogue among scholars who otherwise tend not to cross paths with each other because their research is more customarily disseminated in fields that are defined by national or continental imaginaries, such as Canadian studies or Asian studies. Even fields that welcome transnational or comparative works have tended to focus on major economic and political powers, such as the United States and China, and their relations with others or with each other while the relations among minor locations is much less frequently considered. While the methodological expertise of scholars in the network spans the fields of literary and cultural studies, film and media studies, and political and legal studies, we share experiences of negotiating dominant centres of power and knowledge from our minor locations as well as a commitment to seeking out new perspectives and reference points that unsettle our habitual ways of seeing the world and of situating our research.

In this spirit of collaborative exploration, we invited scholars who have participated in these conversations to comment on their conceptions of the transpacific as an analytic and how it is inflected by their experiences of "minor" locations. We also invited them to reflect on how their conversations with other scholars based in British Columbia, exposure to regional histories and debates, and participation in local activities relate to their own transpacific trajectories, both personally and intellectually. The following are our collective thoughts, presented as a roundtable discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung, Simon Fraser University

The minor transpacific names at once a historical condition, a migratory network, a relation to power, and an analytic. In coining this term, we aim to draw attention to the flows of capital, culture, and bodies throughout various regions that border the Pacific Ocean as well as to the complex power dynamics that have at various times constrained and at other times facilitated these movements. More specifically, we put into dialogue sites such as Vancouver, Singapore, and Hong Kong, port cities whose local cultures, languages, and racial and migration histories speak in particular ways to the legacies of British colonialism and ongoing relations with American and Chinese imperialism. For scholars based in Vancouver, locating ourselves within a transpacific formation directs us away from

a national paradigm that orients our attention eastwards and privileges our relations to Atlantic histories and narratives of European settlement. Taiwan's presence in this discussion underscores the importance of Indigenous struggles throughout the transpacific region while highlighting how discourses of Indigeneity are mobilized throughout the Pacific and within various local sites. In addition to highlighting these shared concerns, we also map out how this transpacific network relates to what we may call the current "major" empires – namely, the United States and China – as the "minor" transpacific routinely contends with the barriers these hegemonic powers impose as well as capitalizes on opportunities that are often produced through trade or partnership with them. While nations such as Canada, Australia, and Singapore are less dominant than the United States and China in terms of population, economic power, military might, and many other respects, they are nonetheless still influenced by the imperialist imaginaries of these current major empires even as they are haunted by the ghosts of the British Empire. In conceptualizing these sites as a minor transpacific network, we seek to understand how their historic and contemporary relations to major powers continue to shape them.

The notion of the "minor" in this context is relational and contextual: it does not necessarily denote an oppositional or resistant character, as is sometimes assumed for minoritarian subjects. Rather, the minor *modulates* understandings of power, histories, and relations, as Erin Manning suggests in her evocative use of music scales as a metaphor in her book *Minor Gestures*. Manning conceives of the "major" as a "structural tendency" that is fixed or captured by norms. The minor key, "interlaced with" and not apart from the major, is "a force that courses through it, unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards" (Manning 2016, 1). By paying attention to sites and subjects whose minor status is usually understood in relation to a major formation, we are interested in examining how their lateral – what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (2005) call "minor transnational" – relations *to each other* can modulate our understanding and produce alternative avenues for the critique and contestation of power. As Lionnet and Shih suggest, transnational studies have tended to valorize "the most dominant and the most resistant" (ibid.). Focusing on minor networks modulates such a tendency by foregrounding new perspectives and contexts that unfix familiar positions of dominance and resistance. By gathering together scholars who work in minor locations, we shift our referential frameworks away from dominant centres and towards each

other's local and regional contexts. In so doing, we explore the minor transpacific as a new analytic and consider the potential of the city of Vancouver to become a minor transnational site of knowledge production that is globally significant.

In the roundtable discussion that follows, several common themes recur. When Asia-based and Canada-based scholars engage with each other through British Columbia as part of a transpacific network, they reorient the region westwards and interrupt nationalistic tendencies to look eastwards towards the rest of Canada. Intertwined colonial histories (of British presence in Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong), distinctive as well as overlapping terms of Indigenous struggles (in Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, and Canada), and the ambivalent reach of minor settler societies' hard and soft powers as they relate to major empires resonate throughout the transpacific region. Our discussion also contains personal reflections on the complexity of migration histories, competing feelings of belonging and unbelonging, and ambivalence with respect to privilege and loss – in short, the affective dimensions of transpacific scholarship that are often underexamined in more empirically grounded debates about the transpacific. We resituate questions of identity, feeling, and local histories within the broader frame of transpacific migrations, displacements, and colonialisms in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of our relations to each other.

By tracing connections to sites situated throughout the Asia Pacific, we analyze competing modes of mobility and belonging as occurring simultaneously. Audrey Yue opens this conversation by reflecting on her return migration from Australia back to Singapore, and she considers these countries as well as Canada in terms of settler colonialism and in relation to Indigeneity. She poses the problem of being doubly minor – namely, being a minor actor on a transpacific stage and also marginalized within the nation-state. Jia Tan notes the existence of Victorias in Hong Kong as well as in British Columbia, a continuity that reinforces mutual experiences of British colonialism. But despite parallels such as this one, she notes that the project of comparing Hong Kong and Vancouver is a challenging one because of our learned tendency to orient ourselves to more familiar and dominant powers such as the United States rather than to minor ones. Joanne Leow engages with the question of how to undertake comparative work by focusing on the affective similarities between Vancouver and Singapore. She proposes that we employ a methodology of joining rather than comparison as this would enable us to examine spatial connections within the context of an overarching framework.

Beng Huat Chua opens his reflections by returning us to the recently failed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement to highlight the dominance of the United States and China in hard power terms. Ironically, the relative absence of hard power makes Canada rich in soft power. Canada's limited hard power has been a valuable diplomatic asset as it generates the appearance that Canada is a more welcoming destination for migrants than is the United States and that it is open to critical dialogues.

Like many of the other respondents, Nadine Attewell examines her personal migrations in relation to Vancouver and how they echo her family's movements throughout the transpacific. Key to her piece is the notion of homeliness and how it helps her to understand the inclusionary and exclusionary dimensions of Vancouver. Phanuel Antwi also reflects upon his own uprootings and the implications of relocating to the west coast as a scholar of the black Atlantic. Thinking "black transpacifically" raises new questions about the stakes of doing transpacific cultural research and, specifically, about the kinds of intimacies and oppositionalities that such work creates. The tension between inclusion and exclusion is further addressed by John Erni, this time with respect to the nation-state and the transpacific. He argues that law and economics produce a precarious transpacific zone in terms of mobility and rights, and that this zone demands that we balance our often competing desires for liberal freedom and capitalist privileges. Chih-ming Wang returns us to a discussion of the structures of settler colonialism, while noting that what distinguishes sites like Vancouver from Asian sites of colonialism is a pervasive sense of whiteness. Wang argues that, from Taiwan's perspective, this association with whiteness makes the United States and Canada appear as intertwined and almost indistinguishable. Reading from this angle, he uses Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* to pose questions about how concerns about Indigeneity and sovereignty circulate throughout the transpacific.

ON EDGE CITIES AND FRINGE STATES

Audrey Yue, National University of Singapore

The ITCR draws attention to the strategic advantage of Vancouver to advance the concept of the minor transpacific. The transpacific has emerged in recent years as a new critical framing device to map the histories and flows of connections across the Pacific Ocean. Existing

scholarship has predominantly focused on the relationship between the United States and key centres in the Pacific, such as China and Japan. Canada in general, and Vancouver in particular, are rarely discussed in this scholarship. The cultural location of Vancouver has the potential to challenge this orthodoxy.

Foremost here is Vancouver's status as a minor settler city. Unlike the country's nominal global cities, such as Toronto or Montreal, which facilitate major flows through the east coast that orient us towards the North Atlantic, Vancouver looks outward from the west coast and towards the Pacific. This reorientation has allowed it to emerge as a new and central node in the transpacific imaginary. It is an Asian city in the West, an edge city between Asia and North America, and a port city on the rim of the Pacific.

As a city in the Western world with close to half its population originating from Asian backgrounds, Vancouver is an exemplary site for mediating Asia and the global Asian diasporas. This will enrich earlier transpacific scholarship, which tended to focus on minority migration to dominant host destinations, such as Asian students to North America, Filipino women to the United States, and African Americans to Japan. Vancouver's status as a minor settler city, together with its majoritarian Asian migrants, furnishes a crucial node to advance the eccentric study of diasporic transnationalism. Furthermore, positioned on the border between Asia and North America, Vancouver is a productive interstice from which to engage the externalities and delink the colonialities of these continents. From the new vantage point of this intersection, the edge city of Vancouver promises to reticulate new assemblages across other minor transnational port actors in the Pacific, such as fringe states like Singapore and Hong Kong. Burdened by their precarities but also unrestrained with regard to the force of these same precarities, these minor transpacific cities have converged as new networks of culture, contestation, and change.

Through these new analytics, the ITCR has inspired me to reorient my own cultural location as I currently embark on my return migration journey from Australia to Singapore. In Australia, where I lived and worked for thirty years, Asian engagement with its Indigenous peoples has only begun to open up a third space between black and white Australia. Australia shares similar histories of colonization and settlement with North America. Both were colonized by English settlers. Both rationalized the dispossession of Indigenous lands, the exploitation of indentured labour, convicts and slaves, and the reproduction of white

identity through English legal, cultural, economic, and social traditions.[1] Similar to North America, Australia also saw an influx of Chinese migration during the gold rushes of the 1840s and 1850s, and subsequently introduced immigration exclusion acts that prevented the Chinese (in particular) and Asians (in general) from entry. Australia loosened its immigration restrictions after the Second World War by accepting Southern and Eastern Europeans but opened its doors to Asians only during the late 1970s with the arrival of Vietnamese refugees. Throughout this history and in the current period of multiculturalism, Indigenous and Asian/multicultural histories developed as separate white/Aboriginal and white/multicultural (including Asian and European) discourses due to their distinct structures of bureaucratic control (Curthoys 2000). In this white imagination, both the Aboriginal and the Asian are othered – the former an internal presence suppressed through assimilation and genocide, the latter an external presence excluded and kept at bay. Asian Australian scholars have since recovered the long histories of cross-cultural intimacies between Indigenous and Asian communities. These studies challenge this dissonance by showing how their intercultural alliances have produced new diversities and hybridities through their similarly othered statuses. While some have discussed this alliance in terms of subjugated peripheral histories (e.g., Stephenson 2007), others have used this alliance to expose how white Australian identity is constructed through its triangulation to the Asian and the Aboriginal (Perera 1995).

In Vancouver, such a third space is not confined to the interiority of the nation-state. Asian curators and historians draw attention to Indigeneity by looking inwards, backwards and outwards, at themselves, at their own settler histories, and through other transnational Indigenous encounters, such as those with Taiwan. These critical expressions demonstrate how Indigenous-Asian collaborations can be created from the potent force of Vancouver's exteriority as a minor transpacific city.

As I write this reflection from Singapore, the country is about to inaugurate its first female Indigenous Malay president. This is a significant political milestone in Singapore due to the exceptional status of the Malay race. Since Singapore's independence from the British, race has been mobilized as an official postcolonial policy tool to implement the social integration program of multiracialism. Multiracialism recognizes the nominal equality of four racial groups: Chinese, Malay, Indians, and others (e.g., Eurasians) (CMIO), despite the fact that the Chinese are the dominant demographic group (75 percent of the population)

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[1] See Smithers (2009) for details.

and that Malays belong to the Indigenous group, and in spite of the continued marginalization of Indians and Malays through stereotyping and everyday discrimination. This form of racial equality underpins its governance model and classifies race in a pragmatically haphazard way rather than as a classicist signifier of biological and cultural difference.[2] However, this classification is elided in the official language policy in which English is nominated as the first language (of administration), Malay as a national language, and Malay, Chinese, and Tamil are taught in schools as second languages rather than as mother tongues. In this deployment, race is defined according to ethnic descent but not ancestral language. This typology is also further enacted differently for various groups. In the discourse of *huaren* (people of Chinese descent), the Chinese are unified as a group through the universality of the Chinese language. However, linguistic belonging does not apply to the Malays, who are defined through region, or to the Indians, who are defined through geography (Chua 2009). Against these deployments, the Malay race is exceptional. As an Indigenous group and a national language, it enjoys the highest status. As a regional and religious group, it is the most dominant. However, as a social group, it is the most discriminated against. The presidential honour accorded to Halimah Yacob highlights how these exceptions are implemented in policy to achieve equality. At the same time, Yacob's landmark election has sparked a social media outcry because it was won through a walkover and the people did not get a chance to vote. This moment is thus a timely reminder that the third space of Indigenous-multiracial coalitions can surface as an official force that is socially engineered. The minor transpacific is a critical tool that can work to expose its manufactured nature.

TRANSPACIFIC INTER-REFERENCING

Jia Tan, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

During my short trip to Vancouver and Vancouver Island, I could not help but notice the interconnected colonial histories of Hong Kong and British Columbia. Victoria Park in North Vancouver evoked a park of the same name in Hong Kong, while Victoria Harbour in Victoria reminded me of Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour, whose iconic skyline has appeared in Hollywood blockbusters such as *Die Another Day* (2002), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014). Perhaps it is no

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[2] For example, the state officially identifies its citizens according to ethnic descent (e.g., the Chinese race, the Malay race, etc.).

coincidence that the capital city of British Columbia and the political, commercial, and military centre of early British Hong Kong share the name "Victoria." The area previously known as the city of Victoria saw the earliest development in Hong Kong and is still the heartland of Hong Kong's commercial and political activities. The parallel colonial histories between British Columbia and Hong Kong seemed too apparent to ignore. Yet what struck me was how little I knew about Canada compared to the United States, even though the two countries share histories of the gold rush on their west coasts, Indigenous struggles across their borders, and policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the internment of people of Japanese ethnicity.

Ironically, in comparison to my "unexpected" lack of knowledge of Canada, I have been much more aware of my ignorance of Asian countries due to my own research on film and media. As a scholar who studied in the United States and is now based in Hong Kong, I am familiar with the epistemic asymmetry between Asia and the West pointed out by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) – namely, that the study of the non-West always needs to make reference to theories and cases from the West, but rarely does this hold the other way around. In other words, the point of reference for the study of Asia is usually the "West."

One of the most exciting things about teaching in Asia is seeing a growing tendency among scholars to make comparisons between locations in Asia, or what Beng Huat Chua terms "inter-Asia referencing." Chua (2015, 78) conceptualizes this tendency as "an epistemological shift from the temporally hierarchical Asia-Euro-America comparison, which places Asia permanently in a position of 'catch up,' to one of a horizontal comparison of inter-Asian locations among relatively comparable equals."

Expanding upon the idea of inter-Asia referencing, I propose that the notion of "transpacific inter-referencing" can problematize the existing epistemic structures that rest on the binary of West/non-West or West/Asia. The heterogeneity of the West is often obscured so that a province such as British Columbia, unlike states such as New York or California, is seldom viewed as a point of reference. How can the epistemic hierarchy within the West complicate the de-Westernization of theory? How can comparing Hong Kong and British Columbia, or Hawaii and Indonesia, or other transpacific locales, challenge the linear and progressive narrative embedded in Asia-West comparisons? How can transpacific inter-referencing open up dialogues between Indigenous studies and Asian studies? To answer these questions, the practice of transpacific inter-referencing needs to be undertaken by a collective of

scholars from multiple disciplines across the Pacific. This roundtable discussion initiated by the ITCR is one more step towards transpacific inter-referencing.

LOST ISLANDS AND SALTWATER CITIES

Joanne Leow, University of Saskatchewan

When I moved from Singapore to Toronto in the fall of 2010, I never expected that my research in postcolonial and transnational literatures would come to encompass literary and cultural texts from Vancouver. However, as I encountered texts by writers like Wayde Compton, Sachiko Murakami, Gregory Scofield, Eden Robinson, and Madeleine Thien, I experienced a strange and profound sense of recognition. So many of the ideas of loss, urban memory, capitalist development, city-building (and demolition), and the long legacies of colonial dispossession and displacement were reflected in the literary texts of both Singapore and Vancouver. As I continued to do research on the genesis of both cities, it appeared that their inception as colonial port cities meant that they shared the same grid-like street planning and boxed lots. The segregation of the cities between white and non-white inhabitants proceeded apace as well, producing long-term racializations of the people in these spaces. Colonial city planning, waves of migration, displacement of Indigenous peoples, and a contemporary property market boom meant that these two port cities had parallel but not equivalent trajectories.

For me, Vancouver is associated with loss. The loss of the missing and murdered women of the Downtown Eastside, the loss of the black Canadian neighbourhood Hogan's Alley, the dispossession of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, the loss of the unceded Coast Salish land, and the loss of affordable and equitable housing in the past few decades. Through the literary and artistic texts that I study, these losses are recalled and refracted through the losses endured by my birth city, Singapore: its losses of kampungs, older neighbourhoods, un-regulated spaces, public commons, ordinary landmarks, political rights, artistic freedoms. In each of these specific and collective losses, I think through the transpacific links and histories between these cities, the legacies of British imperialism, Chinese diasporic movements, the global circulation of capital, urban planning, and environmental design. I think of Vancouver and Singapore as intensely felt nodes of these circulations of power, cities where people, development, demolition, and memory amass in living, evolving sites; where people continue to flow through

these gateways to Asia and to North America through official and unofficial routes. I think as well, then, of the historical and contemporary transpacific networks of which both cities are a part: the movements of refugees, domestic workers, migrant labour, and the legal and illegal trade in sand, which makes land reclamation, glass condominiums, and skyscrapers possible.

One question that I am repeatedly asked as a scholar of both the postcolonial and the Asian North American is how comparative work can be done between Singapore and Vancouver, between the literatures written in anglophone Asia and in the Asian North American diaspora. The former is an exceptional postcolonial city-state in Southeast Asia and the latter is a west coast Canadian city with a vastly different geopolitical context. The lost islands in the stories by Wayde Compton and Pauline Johnson are not the same losses experienced by Singaporean exiles;[3] the saltwater city of Chinese immigrants to Vancouver is not the Nanyang for the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia.[4] Yet the transpacific offers me one way to think through this question. Instead of *comparison,* the act of defining something in relation to another, I like to think of *joining,* a theoretically generative act of exploring the interdependences, "intimacies," and linkages between spaces and texts in the context of a larger network of transnational cities that have long histories marked by imperialism and globalization. For instance, close reading of anglophone Singaporean and Vancouverite texts in tandem offers us new ways to consider the legacies of British colonialism in contemporary urban lives and the effects of capitalist development on human relations in these (post)colonial urban spaces. As Lisa Lowe (2015, 11) argues in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, perhaps the need is to "focus on relation across differences rather than equivalence, on the convergence of asymmetries rather than the imperatives of identity." Only then might we be able to come to terms with the ongoing colonial

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[3] Vancouver writer Wayde Compton's (2014) latest collection of short stories *The Outer Harbour* features a short story entitled "The Lost Island," which is a writing back to Pauline Johnson's "The Lost Island," a short story about Indigenous resurgence that is featured in her 1911 collection *Legends of Vancouver* (Johnson 2013). Compton's story examines what might happen if a volcanic island suddenly erupted in Burrard Inlet. In the interlinking short stories that explore ecology, Indigenous and diasporic relations, and urban development in Vancouver, the island is named after Pauline Johnson.

[4] "Nanyang" is the Sinocentric term for Southeast Asia. See Brian Bernard's monograph *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016) for an exploration of how Sinophone diasporic writing from Southeast Asia produces the multilingual literary and imagined space of Nanyang.

legacies and neocolonial realities that span the geographical, social, and symbolic spaces of the transpacific.

VANCOUVER, CANADA: EXCHANGE JUNCTION OF TRANSPACIFIC CULTURES

Beng Huat Chua, National University of Singapore

The "Pacific" – a space defined by the ocean, the west coasts of the North and South American continents, and the east coast (especially the northeast) of Asia – is a space that is "claimed" by various multilateral conventions and agreements that are initiated by the "big" powers and that constitute its boundaries, the most recent being the now failed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. Significantly, this agreement was initiated by four small nations – Singapore, Brunei, New Zealand, and Chile – and later joined by eight other nations, including the United States. Once on board, the big power United States held the future and fate of the TPP in its hands, and, in the end, the agreement was torn up as the very first official act of freshly elected president Trump. The case of the TPP illustrates how the United States, with its post-Pacific War junior partnership with Japan, has dominated the conceptualization of the transpacific in economics, political, and military terms throughout the Cold War years, a dominance that it now has to share, if reluctantly, with a rising China. Within this "hard power" definition of the Pacific, Canada is a very large nation in geophysical terms but one that has a very diminished voice as it must economically orient itself southward as its fortunes are yoked to the US market. However, precisely because of its absence in the big power competitions, Canada is perceived as a much more "comfortable" destination for Asian migrants, students, and tourists. It is, in other words, in all things contemporaneous with the United States but lacks the random violence. In an age in which so-called "soft power" is being heralded, in which "culture" is a diplomatic resource, Canada possesses significant potential in engendering transnational goodwill and understanding, and in furthering human interests. Vancouver has always been the gateway to Canada for individuals from across the Pacific; the histories of different waves of Asian migration to Canada arguably radiate from Vancouver. (I remember arriving at Vancouver airport on a late fall evening, en route to Toronto and eventually to Wolfville, Nova Scotia, to begin my university education in Canada.) Given its gateway position, it is not surprising that Vancouver has the greatest mix of Asian populations relative to other Canadian cities. It is also not

surprising, indeed it is "natural," that scholars in Vancouver would be most interested in and well disposed towards engaging in transpacific intellectual exchanges with their Asian counterparts.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:
OF HOMECOMINGS AND ORIENTATION DEVICES

Nadine Attewell, McMaster University

"All discourse is 'placed,' and the heart has its reasons." (Hall 1990)

We have a history, Vancouver and I. It is where my parents met and married, where I was born and raised. For me, Vancouver is what the cultural theorist Sara Ahmed calls an "orientation device," one that ensures I face "some ways more than others" (Ahmed 2006, 28). Growing up in Richmond, a southern suburb to which Chinese immigrants (mainly from Hong Kong) flocked in the 1980s and 1990s, I could hardly have failed to notice Vancouver's uneasy incorporation into transborder (Pacific Northwest) and transpacific (what we then called Pacific Rim) networks of migration and exchange. But these were brought home – literally – by the stories, objects, food, sounds, and intimacies that collected around my Hong Kong-born mother, and they fuelled our trips to visit her mother and sister in Seattle.

Like my mother, I moved east to study and work, ending up in Toronto. But the Pacific worlds and relationalities to which my Vancouver childhood oriented me continue to tug at me, shaping how and with whom I connect and think and feel, but pushing me, in addition, to new and different kinds of reckonings with the place I am still most likely to call home. Returning to Vancouver for the launch of the Institute for Transpacific Cultural Research, I was struck, not for the first time, by the multiplicity of the Pacifics in relation to which Vancouver does and, importantly, does not get situated: Indigenous, Asian, black, American, independent, imperial, oceanic, continental, coastal, northern, southern. And there are many Vancouvers as well, of course, only some of which are transpacific, and few of which are hospitable. All, regardless, depend on the (attempted) displacement of Indigenous peoples from lands they know by other names altogether. The point is not just that there are many Vancouvers, many (trans)Pacifics. In addition, which ones come into view, and for whom, are, as Ahmed reminds us, a consequence of orientations substantively shaped by histories of material and epistemological violence. The orientation device that is "my" Vancouver is structured by, and in

turn proliferates, gaps, omissions, and opacities that have been central to the transformation of this place into a machine for the (re)production of racial capitalist modernity and settler innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3). While Pacific Northwest histories of anti-Asian exclusion are so well known to me, so familiar, as to feel almost homely – is it the predicament of the diasporic subject to know home by the taste of its racisms? – two decades of living elsewhere, including, for a time, in the United States, have pushed me to attend to other acts of inhabitation and erasure that remain unaccounted for by this knowledge, that mark the city as, no less than Toronto or Kingston or Liverpool, an artefact of transatlantic and not just transpacific economies of exchange.

For me, then, distance has stimulated a process of becoming attuned to the ways that I have been oriented, encouraged to face (up to) some things and not others. Thanks to the exigencies of being in relation – with other places, other people, other orientations – I have come to wonder how and even whether it is possible for me to feel at home in, or with, Vancouver. At the same time, the attachment persists, a product of histories I can't and won't disavow. As we ponder what it means to think and act transpacifically from the particular, minor location of Vancouver, we must consider, I want to suggest, both what such orientations enable us to know and feel, *and* what they do not. Otherwise, we will only reproduce them, acquiescing in the ways we have been made to face that keep other imperatives, other genealogies, other openings out of view.

THE RISKS OF TRANS-OCEANIC INTIMACIES

Phanuel Antwi, University of British Columbia

Transience, displacement, relocation, migration – some common vo-cabulary to describe an academic's trajectory. These words hold entangled affects as many of their attachments and investments cross over. They are so entangled that I often joke about how relocations cause grief. Through my many relocations (from Hamilton, a city in which I spent six years while studying for my graduate degrees; to Halifax, where I got my first job; to Vancouver, where I currently live and work), I feel as if I have joined the legacy of black folks shuttling across and between oceans. I have also come to know, through my trans-oceanic meanderings from central Canada (Lake Ontario) to the east coast of Canada (Atlantic Ocean) to the west coast of Canada (Pacific Ocean), ways that networks of imperial power isolate the histories that take place on one body of water from those that occur on other bodies of water in order to obscure

the trans-oceanic, intercontinental reaches of empire. One way that I refuse this imperial isolation is through stories and the telling of stories (not solely autobiographical stories but also fiction, non-fiction, poetry, music, and research). As a phenomenological method with temporal and historical elasticity, the reimaginative potential of story lets us recognize the inevitable complexity of lifeworlds.

I begin thus because I come to the transpacific as a reader whose scholarship is influenced by discourses of the black Atlantic. I locate myself here to incite a politics of relation between the fields of black Atlantic and transpacific studies in order to underscore the interconnected flows of ideas, people, and lifeworlds on and in both oceans. I also locate myself here to highlight that, while I am as attentive to regimes of exchanges and intimacy as I am to those that obscure history, memory, and lifeworlds,[5] I am also deeply aware of the composite matrix of the Pacific and want to be careful not to transport approaches from the Atlantic onto the transpacific. Wanting to think blackness in transpacific terms, therefore, is not about exchanging the black Atlantic for a black Pacific but, rather, about reimagining a more complex story that brings these lifeworlds to bear on each other. Now living in Vancouver, I am trying to learn the histories of blackness in this region I now call home and am conscious of how blackness is always formulated in terms of obscurity. In Vancouver, much as throughout the rest of Canada, blackness remains *an unattended presence,* one that is present in material configuration but absent in rhetorical and discursive terms. In drawing together these oceans as black archives, I highlight how blackness is constantly under erasure in histories of Canada, Vancouver, the Atlantic, and the transpacific.

Approaching transpacific studies from this angle, I had to resist the impulse to read the transpacific as an under-researched field, as Steven Yao (2002) suggests, or as an under-theorized one, according to Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen. Instead, I read these evaluations of transpacific studies as examples of how the quest for new and original knowledge, unintentionally yet wilfully, reads as absent what is not immediately legible from our various locations. It is this tendency that necessitates that we learn to pay attention to "the ethics of cohabitation" that Judith Butler, in meditating on precarity and vulnerability, suggests constitute "populations living in conditions of unwilled adjacency" (Butler 2010, 134). If we, working in Vancouver, live in conditions of unwilled adjacency on Indigenous lands, then what are we "up against" when we

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[5] Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Sylvia Wynter have all taught me that blackness was, for a long time, obscured by and from the conceptual history of Anglo-European modernity.

do transpacific cultural research from Vancouver? In other words, with whom are we opposing, next to, and working with?

My move to Vancouver has brought Africa closer to my intellectual purview. This is not to say Africa has ever left my lifeviews but, rather, to foreground how Caribbean blackness dominates cultural, political, and intellectual discourses in Canada. However, in Vancouver, where, according to Wayde Compton, blackness is not centralized around one ethnic community, African epistemologies offer conditions of possibility in transpacific conversations. In this context, I find myself simultaneously thinking about black diaspora as well as the indexical nature of blackness on the Pacific in, for example, Vancouver and in Asia (if we consider, for example, the imperial connections between Hong Kong, China, Japan, the Philippines, and a range of countries throughout the continent of Africa),[6] and in Oceania (the colonial projections onto Polynesia, Micronesia, and, particularly, Melanesia), and in Aotearoa New Zealand, and in Australia and in Papua New Guinea, and in the Solomon Islands and in Fiji. Foregrounding the connecting islands and imperial histories on the Pacific Ocean reminds me that black transpacific worlding in the geopolitical context of the Pacific islands and Pacific Rim countries demands trans-local, trans-regional, and trans-temporal considerations. With these plural and multidirectional considerations in mind, I find myself thinking through the collective and analytic space of the Pacific, remembering Alice Te Punga Somerville's (2012) urge to grapple with the disjunctures and unexpected connections born out of colonialism and racism in *Once Were Pacific: Maori Connections to Oceania*. I am also compelled to respond to Robbie Shilliam's (2015) call, in *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, to reimagine the relation between black and Indigenous peoples not only through the lens of colonialism and neocolonialism but also through the lens of collaboration and solidarity. These optics call on us to reimagine the relationships between Indigeneity, migration, and diaspora as an anti-colonial approach to something like international relations.

I also find myself thinking back to the 1955 Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian unity in Indonesia, where newly independent countries wilfully and intentionally assembled to condemn colonialism and respond to the Cold War and the superpowers' interventions within decolonizing countries in Africa and Asia. I am reminded of Malcolm X's (1990) as-

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[6] As an example, if we look at contemporary coverage of Zimbabwe today, and see the responses to Mugabe's being gone, we see how excited the US, UK, and China are about their emerging relations with a newly opened market. China is explicitly positioned alongside the US and UK as imperial powers.

sessment of that conference in the audio recording *Malcolm X: Message to the Grassroots*: "The number one thing that was not allowed to attend the Bandung conference was the white man. He couldn't come. Once they excluded the white man, they found that they could get together."[7] And I think about its epistemological and methodological implications: thinking blackness transpacifically gives us the benefit of decentring Western Europe and defamiliarizing colonial North America from our imaginings.

But to return to and reorient my earlier question, I ask now, what are we "up against" when Asia alone becomes the centre stage of transpacific studies? I do not only mean what other currents of feelings circulate in thinking transpacifically but also what other archives of Pacific history haunt our particular reconstructions of transpacificness? How do we remain attentive to the task of not letting a transpacific approach too quickly align itself with the neoliberal economics and free trade agreement forwarded by the Trans-Pacific Partnership? How do we interrupt the ways in which discussions on the constructions of the transpacific (by which I mean the scholars who come out of the transpacific as well as the ideas that are validated through these constructions) are North American-centric? Might this moment also be an occasion to compare "Area studies" and "Oriental studies" (which, a century before, also created bodies of knowledge about other parts of the world) and consider that, while both provide useful knowledges and archives, they also leave behind genealogies that we must now work through?

I don't pretend to know; however, talking about orientation and accounts of my relocation story directs my attention to the compass, not for its accuracy of pinpointing location or for finding places but as a source of error. As I've learned from geographers and navigators, compass readings have to be corrected for magnetic variation and deviation. Magnetic variation occurs because charts are oriented to true north, whereas the compass, used to determine direction at sea, points to magnetic north. The angular difference between true north and magnetic north is called variation and may be either easterly or westerly. Which is to say, it varies from place to place and from year to year. I find comfort in such unfixity: it forces us to acknowledge how oceans influenced thinking and denies us the illusion of unchanging groundedness. Rather than simply reading variability as a problem, from my view as a black Atlanticist new to thinking blackness in transpacific

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7   Malcom X, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grover Weidenfeld, 1990 [1965]), 5.

terms, this problem of variability underscores error as value, thus challenging norms in the field of transpacific studies. My work on colonial intimacy teaches me that making intimacy political means making errors. In that sense, then, the value of error stresses another value – the payoff of play and risk, of radical imaginations. And if radical imagination is already a risky method, then what would reimagining that risk in a trans-oceanic project that shuttles between the black Atlantic and the black transpacific look like?

THE PUZZLEMENT OF RIGHTS

John Nguyet Erni, Hong Kong Baptist University

I am not sure that I have ever really liked the law, although I feel quite viscerally the importance of having (legal) rights when I recall my own upbringing – in the first instance, as a migrant on the brink of becoming a refugee as a result of a Pacific war and then, at a later instance, as a student-migrant across the transpacific corridor. This visceral feeling is stirred up whenever I cross security border checkpoints at the airport because, as many travellers and immigrants know, that surveillance zone represents a stark crystallization of the ambiguity in sovereign power thrown up by the sliding difference between legality and rights. If one has all the right papers, sovereign power tends to slide towards the legal end of approving one's passage. But if one does not, then sovereign power slips rapidly towards the denial of rights and astonishes the subject with a sensation of terror.

I am infatuated with human rights simply because it is a controversial arena always capable of stirring up critical discussion. On a broad plane, this love of rights speaks to the manifold possibilities of the social actions that rights can enable. As a teacher of human rights courses at the university, I usually walk into class on the first day, proclaiming, with a broad warm smile, how beautiful all the students look. It is the first day of class, so the mix of healthy anticipation and sceptical curiosity naturally produces a decent level of presence: the students tend to listen attentively. What I mean when I compliment my students is that, typically, they are clothed, fed, mentally and physically fit, have access to education, and, most importantly, have the freedom to receive, process, and impart the information they get from the course. In short, they are beautiful people because they have basic rights. And certain laws are indeed in place to offer them this basic cloak of protection. Yet everyone becomes quickly aware of two concomitant truths: first, the rights that enable

this human beauty are owned and managed by the state and, second, this state power that bestows rights includes the authority to take them away when deemed necessary. On this occasion, the first lesson of the class is about the fragility of human comfort. Then, as now, I prefer the critical energy that can arise from the dialecticism between rights and rightlessness, or between beauty and terror.

With respect to these tendencies, one's biography (migrant) and profession (teacher) conjoin because both instances illuminate how precarious human rights can be. In my case, I am a transpacific subject as well as a teacher of cultural studies and law. Each role affords a particular understanding of human rights, but together they inform the kind of critical approach I take to understand "the transpacific."

My own critical observations of the transpacific have been about the fluctuations between liberal freedom reconfigured by mobility, on the one hand, and the restrictive dominance of capitalist economic imperatives, on the other. The same fluctuations can be conceptualized on the personal-biographical, familial, intersubjective, identitarian, cultural-aesthetic, and, indeed, legal-political planes. We need to engage with the transpacific as a controversial site prone to critical (legal) debate, just like the controversial site of human rights itself. We need to find events and conjunctures where the transpacific merges beauty and terror (rights and rightlessness) in a way that unfolds the "undecidability" of the legal presence of rights, as Jacques Derrida (1992) has so majestically intimated in his essay "Force of Law." We can point to labour rights in the transpacific movement (especially as conceived under the TPP), migrant and refugee rights, the right to environmental sustainability, sexual rights across a spectrum of amorous and erotic liaisons, and so on. These are zones amenable to the critical transpacific cultural studies of rights. Here, I want to highlight the importance of those larger institutional fields of practice in the world of human rights, in which a narrative of beauty qua rights protection can quickly and suddenly run the other way, and a disturbance in the public culture of rights can end up instilling a sensation of terror among us. The particular kinds of institutional fields of practice I have in mind – as applied to a transnational zone – include comparative law, critical legal studies, feminist international intersectionalist law, and other shades of cosmopolitan theories of law and rights. I am also thinking of North-South dialogue among legal circles. The zone of the transpacific that would encompass stories, events, and cases affected by the oscillating affirmation and disavowal of rights honestly requires a "de-Westernizing" of legal theory. Chinese, Indian, and Pacific legal

thinkers and jurists on human rights, as well as the legal institutions they help to build and the legal processes they endure, provide the necessary counterpoint to Euro-American universalist practices on this subject.

Many of us know what happens when a hard structure of limitation locks down to generate resistance where once there was freedom; it is astonishing how a piece of legislature or a court decision can instantly kill an entire community's spirit. Witness, for instance, the rapid reverberations of disbelief and ambivalence in the Hong Kong immigrant communities across Canada as the Hong Kong court handed down, on 17 August 2017, with precision and swiftness, the jail sentence of the three youth leaders of the Umbrella Movement.[8]

However, the dialectical possibilities of law and human rights that I have in mind here – whether they arise from the slippage between beauty and terror or from the tension between Northern and Southern jurisprudence – form through a much more protracted historical process of struggle, a process uniquely contoured by a transpacific world that has seen colonialism, the Cold War, mass migration, refugee resettlement, authoritarian governance, environmental crises, ethnic conflicts, neoliberal capitalist expansion, and democratic transitions.

INDIGENOUS TRANSPACIFIC

Chih-ming Wang, Academia Sinica

Though it is embarrassing to admit, and harder to explain to Canadians, in the Chinese language Canada is always associated with the United States, as often expressed in the phrase "mei jia," which combines the first syllables of America (*meiguo*) and Canada (*jianada*) in Chinese to refer to an image of North America as a culturally homogeneous region consisting of two countries. What it means is that, for most Taiwanese, Canadian culture – being a form of Anglo-Saxon culture – is not immediately distinguishable from American culture. For some, it is not that different from Australian or New Zealand cultures. It is arguably a reverse form of racism that Taiwanese cannot tell the shades of whiteness

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[8] On 17 August 2017, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal sentenced Joshua Wong (twenty), Nathan Law (twenty-four), and Alex Chow (twenty-seven) to between six and eight months in prison. In a previous court ruling a year earlier, the three were found guilty of unlawful assembly for their role in the Umbrella Movement, a civil disobedience movement in 2014 that demanded full democracy. However, the Department of Justice sought an appeal to seek a heavier sentence of imprisonment. The imprisonment of these three young leaders has been widely seen as proof of an escalating restriction of freedom of assembly (among other restrictions) in the territory.

or appreciate the different accents of English, but in many ways it is also a legacy of colonialism, under which local differences are overshadowed by a transcendental whiteness that evolved out of settler colonial history. Hence, the critical awareness of settler colonial history in Vancouver, which requires every academic event to begin with an acknowledgment of indebtedness to First Nations communities and land, strikes me as what is remarkable about Canadian culture. Such an acknowledgment, however symbolic and minimal, suggests respect for the Indigenous; it also encourages critical and continuous engagement with the history of Indigenous dispossession as the foundation of Canadian culture. Imagining the Canadian transpacific, as a distinct intervention in the discourse and practice undergirded by neoliberal and imperial logics, therefore requires a foregrounding of the Indigenous question: How are the Indigenous communities related to, affected by, and even shaped into the transpacific currents of investment and migration and the experience of military empire and diasporic dwelling? What cultural resources are there in First Nations cosmologies for articulating the transpacific differently, and what forms of transpacific alliance are there for the Indigenous communities to reflect on? In other words, how would an Indigenous transpacific analytic and imaginary look, and what would it mean for rising Asian economies and the American military empire?

While I myself do not work on the Indigenous question, I have found it helpful to read it into the Canadian transpacific imagination, as in Ruth Ozeki's (2013) novel *A Tale for the Time Being*. Though much of Ozeki's novel is about a teenage girl in Japan, it is set on Cortes Island, off the shore of Vancouver Island, which, before it was "discovered" by the Spanish, had been a traditional territory for the Klahoose, a Coast Salish people who settled there and Toba Inlet "since time before memory," according to the Klahoose First Nation website. A minor, quiet location compared to the action-packed Tokyo, Cortes Island is a sediment of transpacific history: the Indigenous, the Spanish, the Japanese, and the white settler have intersected here, and the Pacific currents that bring a zip-locked bag onto its shores create, or rather reveal, a transpacific connection haunted by ecological disaster, military threat, and economic crisis, which has become a metaphor for our transnational life today. The safety and quietness of Cortes Island, which seems to have cut itself off from the world, thus serves as an antipode to the risky and treacherous world of globalization, a world that, in many ways, has forgotten Cortes Island or treats it merely as a hideout for retirees, burned out writers, and vacationers. In this sense, the minor-ness of Cortes Island has major

significance because it reminds us not only of a sedimented history of Indigenous presence but also of an Indigenous epistemology that undergirds the transpacific world in which we live: our civilization is built on their ruins.

Taking the Indigenous presence seriously in Ozeki's novel and in Vancouver's transpacific history, moreover, encourages us to consider the transpacific in comparative terms: that is, what would it mean to reconfigure an Asian transpacific through an Indigenous lens? How will Asian states confront their own settler colonial history as they try to stretch their arms into the Pacific and beyond? More important, how will an Asian transpacific begin a conversation with the Indigenous population to address their demands for sovereignty, justice, and liberation? Seen from these angles, the Canadian awareness of Indigenous history and consciousness suggests an Indigenous decolonial polemic for engaging the transpacific[9] – to decolonize the transpacific from its will to domination and escape, and to return questions of justice, redress, and liberation to the centre of the transpacific imagination.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung

As we draw together insights from our interlocutors from parts of Asia, Australia, and Canada, our location in Vancouver provokes a new set of questions and new starting points for research when the city is positioned as part of a minor transpacific network. How can putting Vancouver in dialogue with cities that contend with similar colonial histories, such as Singapore or Melbourne, enable us to historicize local relations and produce new analytics for understanding these collective pasts? How might situating Vancouver in relation to territories negotiating contested issues of sovereignty, such as Taiwan or Hong Kong, highlight the limitations of national frameworks for understanding how and why cultures and bodies continue to circulate throughout these regions? How might we view the significance of Vancouver and Singapore as both clamour

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[9]   One example that comes to mind is the recent Indigenous campaign in Taiwan to restore "traditional territory" within but also against the legal norm of the Taiwanese state. Though controversial, the concept of "traditional territory" articulates a decolonial possibility of recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and their "legal" access to the bounty of nature that has long been denied by law and exploited by capital. To declare "traditional territory" within and against the legal norm thus not only problematizes the legal regime of the state but also suggests a decolonial polemic, asking who "owns" territory and how the Indigenous may "re-access" the land.

to be a site of negotiation for the US-North Korean relationship?[10] As a methodological imperative, the minor transpacific challenges researchers who are located in and working on parts of the Asia Pacific region to continually shift out of our familiar habitual referential frameworks and seek new points of reference. Our contributors demonstrate through their engagements with border security and government elections that a minor transpacific approach does not dismiss the importance of nation-states but, rather, seeks to reframe them within a global context in order to highlight common concerns or experiences. As Canadian scholars, by recognizing that colonial histories, multiculturalism, and Indigeneity are also topics of concern for individuals and communities located in parts of the Asia Pacific region, we gain the possibility of rescaling local debates as part of a new regional paradigm rich with alternative referential possibilities. In this transpacific conversation, many of our scholars engage with Indigenous displacement and desires for sovereignty in relation to structures of settler colonialism and policies of multiracialism and multiculturalism in their specific locations. We believe that comparing local conversations about colonialism, race, diaspora, and Indigeneity, and observing how they form broader patterns, can inspire alternative visions of justice, law, and social relations. At the same time, by tracing how concepts are translated and transformed as they travel between spaces, we may also discover different ways of understanding and critiquing colonial histories and state power. As scholars forming a new research network with the goal of pushing existing debates forward, we reorient our respective locations in the region through what Jia Tan calls "transpacific inter-referencing" in order to complicate how we imagine ourselves, our relations, and our futures.

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10 Canadian foreign affairs minister Chrystia Freeland co-hosted a summit on North Korea with (then) American secretary of state Rex Tillerson in Vancouver on 8 January 2018 while, at the time of writing, Singapore is scheduled to host the meeting between US president Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un on 12 June 2018.

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