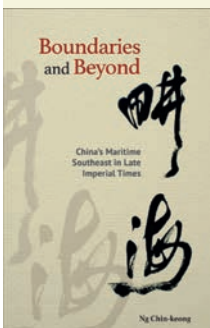


Late Imperial China's maritime boundaries and beyond

Most of us should be familiar with Professor Ng Chin-keong's seminal study, *Trade and Society: The Amoy Network on the China Coast, 1683-1735*, which was first published in 1983. But perhaps we are less familiar with his many other important studies on China's maritime history – mostly articles and chapters in books in English and Chinese – published over the past forty years. Many of these shorter studies are scattered about in hard to find, obscure journals. Ng Chin-keong's new book under review here is a collection of fourteen essays published between 1970 and 2015. The book is divided into four parts loosely arranged around the concepts of physical, political, and cultural boundaries and crossing boundaries as applied to maritime China during the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries. As the author explains in his Preface, the 'boundaries and beyond' used in the book's title "highlights the two contesting forces of continuities and discontinuities that characterized China's maritime southeast in late imperial times" (p. ix). Although boundaries were meant to maintain stability, status quo, and sociopolitical order – to demarcate stability and instability – nonetheless because they were always in a state of flux rulers, statesmen, merchants, and ordinary seafarers had to constantly make adjustments according to particular circumstances.

Reviewer: Robert J. Antony



Reviewed publication:
Ng Chin-keong. 2016.
Boundaries and Beyond: China's Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times
Singapore: NUS Press
ISBN: 9789814722018

Read review online at:
<http://newbooks.asia/review/boundaries-beyond>

AS WITH HIS OTHER STUDIES the essays included in this book concern mostly the economic, political, diplomatic, and social relationships between southern China, especially Fujian province, and Southeast Asia. Avoiding the more typical Eurocentric and Sinocentric approaches to the study of maritime history, Ng instead takes a broad perspective for understanding the interactions and connections between China, her southern neighbors, and Europeans across the wide South China Sea. His first chapter (part 1) provides a concise overview of the long history of maritime southeastern Asia, covering some two thousand years from ancient times to the fifteenth century, a period that was characterized by flexibility and inclusiveness in conducting long-distance trade. The other chapters delineate perceived boundaries between Chinese and the "other" (part 2), undercurrents of social and economic forces that challenged official demarcations (part 3), and transnational movements of people, goods, and ideas across boundaries (part 4). The author views maritime history in terms of a continuous struggle between tradition and innovation through the interactions, compromises, and accommodations of governments and people. In the process old boundaries disappeared only to be replaced by new ones.

In one way or another most of the chapters deal with maritime trade, the interactions between merchants and

officials, and relations between Chinese and foreigners, whose perspectives and objectives were seldom the same. Challenging long held views, Ng shows that Chinese officials tended to be pragmatic and flexible in their dealings with Portuguese traders (chapters 3, 8 & 9) and British officials (chapters 4, 5, 11, 13 & 14). The late imperial state, too, was not universally opposed to merchants and their overseas economic activities; in fact, many officials realized that the substantial revenues from customs fees provided both economic benefits and social stability in seaboard provinces (chapters 2, 9 and 13). For their part, Ng argues that the merchants also willingly made compromises that allowed them to be more acceptable to Confucian elites. In what the author calls the "Confucianization of merchant culture", individual merchants and trade guilds tried to accommodate mercantile and Confucian values by playing down profit-seeking and by using their wealth and organizational capabilities for responsive public welfare (chapter 10). Ng is at his best in his case study (chapter 13) of a successful Fujian merchant in Batavia, Chen Yilao, who was arrested after he returned to his homeland in 1749 and was subsequently sent into life exile. Ng astutely argues the complex and extenuating circumstances in this case and the reasons for Chen's harsh treatment. The author convincingly challenges previous scholarship that has viewed this case as a prime example of Qing anti-maritime attitudes and policies by showing that, in fact, Chen Yilao was not punished because of any underlying governmental hostility towards trade but rather because he had violated the laws concerning crossing borders, remaining abroad for too long, and employment by a foreign government. From the government's perspective the main issue was national security. Taken as a whole, Ng's main conclusion is that despite the strict governmental prohibitions and often ambiguous policies, the late imperial age was a time of vibrant maritime activities and wholesome transnational exchanges that were chiefly the results of "the dynamic spirit of the maritime population" (p. 442).

In any book of this sort – one that is a collection of previously published essays by the same author – there are

bound to be some problems. One problem is overlap between different chapters where some of the same materials are repeated again and again. Another problem, of course, is the lack of updating of essays published in the 1970s (chapters 7, 8 & 9). Although these are still useful chapters on the socio-economic conditions in rural Fujian that provide the context for understanding overseas commercial expansion in the Ming and Qing periods, nonetheless they could have benefitted by the inclusion and updating of recent studies by Paul Van Dyke on Canton merchants or by Philip Kuhn on overseas Chinese.

But those are minor quibbles. Ng Chin-keong and NUS Press are to be commended for making available this fine and useful collection of essays by one of the doyens of Asian maritime history. This book should be essential reading for anyone interested in the history of East Asian maritime commerce, international relations, and transnational migrations, and required reading in graduate courses dealing with those subjects.

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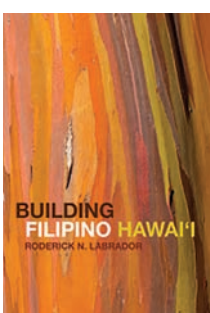
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Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

Building Filipino Hawai'i

Roderick Labrador's *Building Filipino Hawai'i* provides a rich, nuanced account of Filipino identities in a distinctively multicultural American context. The study confronts the tremendous diversity of Filipinos in Hawai'i, who vary in terms of the timing of migration, region, language, and social class. It is in this milieu that Labrador's highly personal account unfolds, documenting efforts to develop a more united Filipino identity in the Hawaiian context.

Reviewers: Shane J. Barter and Rayen Rooney



Reviewed publication:
Labrador, R.N. 2015.
Building Filipino Hawai'i.
Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press,
ISBN 9780252080364 (pb).

Read review online at:
<http://newbooks.asia/review/building-filipino>

LABRADOR PROVIDES A RICH ACCOUNT of diversity among Filipinos in 'Oahu, charting their origins and continued experiences. With Asian migrants excluded from American territories at the turn of the century, the Philippines, located within the American empire, provided cheap labour on Hawaiian sugar plantations. *Sakada* plantation labourers brought to Hawai'i a century ago were primarily Ilocano and most were uneducated. After World War II, more educated Tagalog-speaking migrants began arriving with a new sense of Filipino identity. Today, Filipino migrants continue to arrive in Hawai'i for jobs ranging from nurses and maids to business-

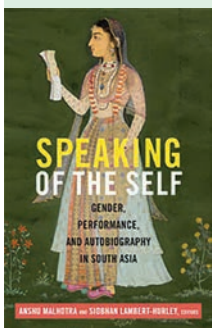
persons and academics. Labrador outlines three primary groups of Filipinos in Hawai'i: Local (born in Hawai'i, mostly descended from sakada migrants), immigrants from the Philippines, and migrants from the continental United States. Labrador succeeds in painting a picture of Filipino diversity, noting how persons of Filipino descent manage and shift their identities over time, evolving different understandings of what it means to be Filipino.

Labrador's study locates Filipinos within Hawai'i rich ethnic tapestry. Filipinos have not seen the upward mobility enjoyed by Chinese, Korean, or Japanese communities. Labrador describes

Speaking of the self

In the last few decades, scholars of South Asian history have disputed the notion that South Asian cultures do not possess the autonomous representation of the individual, particularly in documenting histories, compared to their European counterparts. To that end, the numerous ways in which self-representation has been practiced in this region in different forms and time periods have been increasingly explored in scholarship. The rich collection of essays in this volume, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, challenge the existing boundaries and discourses surrounding autobiography, performance and gender in South Asian history by presenting a varied and fresh selection of women's autobiographical writing and practices from the seventeenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The compelling choice of authors explored in the essays include Urdu novelists, a Muslim prostitute in nineteenth century Punjab, a Mughal princess, a courtesan in the Hyderabad court and male actors who perform as female characters. It moreover challenges conventional narratives in the field of autobiographical studies by relaying in careful detail the different forms which ought to be encompassed within the genre of autobiography such as poetry, patronage of architecture and fiction.

Reviewer: Niroshini Somasundaram



Reviewed publication:

**A. Malhotra
& S. Lambert-Hurley. 2015.**

Speaking of the self: gender, performance, and autobiography in South Asia.
Durham: Duke University Press
ISBN 9780822359838

Read review online at:
<http://newbooks.asia/review/speaking-self>

THE COLLECTION GRAPPLES with several key questions: how does one define autobiography? Does women's autobiographical writing differ from men's? And how do gender and performance relate to the autobiographical format in South Asian history? To this end, the book is divided into three parts, *Negotiating Autobiography*, *Forms and Modes of Self-Fashioning* and *Destabilizing the Normative*, with an excellent introductory chapter. The introduction provides a clear and comprehensive account of the autobiographical form in various literary traditions, the propensity to locate autobiographical writing as a Western field, challenges to such beliefs and debates surrounding the use of the word 'autobiography' itself. It is most convincing in arguing that autobiographical accounts ought to be more widely considered in illuminating the social and political worlds of the respective authors.

Part 1 of the book, *Negotiating Autobiography: Between Assertion and Subversion*, addresses the ways in which women have navigated and disrupted autobiographical practices from the late nineteenth century. Sylvia Vatuk begins with an absorbing account of the writing and life of Zakira Begam (1922-2003), whose writing and reflections on the early parts of her life in Hyderabad in a conservative and educated Muslim household emphasized her love of Urdu literature and its role

in defining her sense of self. Ritu Menon's essay on Nayantara Sahgal and the Indian novelist's autobiographical works provides rich grounds in which to explore the peculiar demands of not only the autobiographical form but a scholar's own engagement with such works. The memoir and diary of Nazr Sajjad Hyder (1892-1967), and the serialization of her works in Urdu women's magazines is addressed by Asiya Alam. Shubhra Ray explores the autobiography of a young Bengali woman Kailashbhashini Debi (c.1829-1895) and how her form of self-representation both located her within the social and political milieu of her time and reform movements, yet also transcended the politics and expectations of her at the time. All four authors in Part 1 augment understanding about the role of literature in creating selfhood from existing scholarship.

The collection proceeds into more unconventional and fascinating territory in respect of the autobiographical form and its subversion in Parts 2 and 3, *Forms and Modes of Self-Fashioning* and *Destabilizing the Normative*, respectively. Uma Chakravarti's thoughtful essay explores three novels on Partition written by Pakistani women, which she considers to be autobiographical in quality, and how memory, violence and public narrative complicated and embedded themselves in such practices. Maha Laqa Bai, an illustrious *tawa'if* (courtesan) at the Hyderabad court, is the focus of Shweta Sachdeva Jha's essay and how an autobiographical record was left by the courtesan, as a defiant form of reinvention, through different acts such as constructing mosques and composing poetry. Afshan Bokhari's account of the Mughal princess Jahanara Begam (1614-1681) similarly looks at Mughal women's power and agency in the period and focuses on masculine strategies adopted by the princess to wield power with respect to her treatises on Sufism and patronage of architecture. Bokhari's essay, with its vivid accounts of the life of Jahanara Begam and use of visual materials, is a particularly notable example of the ways in which women sought to navigate the political milieu of their time and represent themselves in the face of various challenges.

Anshu Malhotra's essay on Piro (d.1872) a Muslim prostitute in Punjab in the mid-nineteenth century, deftly examines how the poetic *kafi* form was used by Piro to narrate the astounding events of her life and her beliefs, particularly in respect of living with a guru of Sikh lineage and navigate her existence "on the edges of her society" (p.226). Siobhan Lambert-Hurley explored the writings of Raihana Tyabji (1901-1975), a devotee of Krishna and nominally Muslim. The clearest assertion of the book's goals is expressed here by Lambert-Hurley who states, in using the word autobiography in respect of Tyabji's form of Bhakti devotionism, that the collection hopes to "disrupt the established Western canon of autobiography" (p.247). Finally, Kathryn Hansen discusses the autobiographies of two male actors, Jayshankar Sundari and Fida Husain, who primarily performed as women.

In complicating the boundaries of women's autobiography in this way, the collection encourages a bold reevaluation of central assumptions in the field of autobiography and gender. The collection stems from activities associated with the research network *Women's Autobiography in Islamic Societies* and thus naturally tends to focus on the autobiographical practices of Muslim women. Greater inclusion of writing beyond Muslim women's writing would perhaps have more accurately reflected the collection's expansive title of *Gender, performance, and autobiography in South Asia*. The authors nevertheless present a significant corpus of scholarship relating to autobiography and gender which can apply broadly not only in South Asia but beyond. By carefully exploring important theoretical aspects and alternative examples of autobiography, the authors open new grounds and sources to critique autobiographical writing and methods. The collection is a significant contribution to the field and will be of considerable interest to both scholars and enthusiasts of autobiography and gender in South Asia.

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the jokes and stereotypes of Filipinos as being uneducated, speaking poor English, eating dogs, and being hyper-sexualized. In Chapter Two, Labrador explores how these stereotypes play out through local humor. He notes a variety of jokes and comedians that poke fun of Filipinos, jokes laughed off as part of the Hawaiian experience, but which also sustain Filipino insecurities. While it may be tempting to see Filipinos simply as marginalized, Labrador goes further, situating Filipinos in relation to indigenous Hawaiians. Filipinos are part of two colonialisms: colonized by the United States in the Philippines, and part of US colonialism in Hawai'i. The Filipino Hawaiian narrative rarely mentions the appropriation of native Hawaiian lands or understands Filipinos as part of the colonial project. Labrador tackles this difficult topic rather fearlessly, locating the position of Filipinos amidst a variety of ethnic communities.

The diversity and status of Filipinos in Hawai'i are important factors in local efforts to create a sense of shared identity. In many ways, this study is not about building a Filipino Hawai'i, but is instead about building 'Filipinos' in a Hawaiian context. This project is carried out in part through university organizations, where more standard narratives of Filipino nationalism and instruction in Tagalog help to construct modern Filipinos, even among those who have never set foot in Southeast Asia. The book details efforts to construct a diasporic identity, creating "born-again Filipinos" (93). Labrador reminds us that

this is also a class project, with powerful business leaders creating community centers and announcing the 'arrival' of Filipinos as a modern community. Efforts to unite and uplift Filipinos in Hawai'i have not been entirely successful though. The book concludes with a glance to electoral politics, which shortly after the creation of a shared community space, laid bare the ongoing divisions among Filipinos in Hawai'i.

Labrador's accounts of Filipino diversity, status, and search for unity are compelling. This said, the book is written according to the conventions of ethnic studies, an intensely personal style that is not for everyone and which may block some avenues for analysis. The personal style is especially strange given how dated many of the accounts appear to be, with material taken mostly from the 1990s. For example, Labrador discusses a racialized Philippine Christmas song that circulated in 1994, but does not offer any recent accounts of such materials or note that this song continues to be sung today. The book's personal approach allows Labrador to capture rich detail, but falls somewhat short in terms of providing a sense of wider context or magnitude. The linguistic and class diversity of Filipinos is clear, but Labrador then treats white, Chinese, and Japanese communities as givens. For example, Chinese migrants have also featured a stunning range of dialects, divided political allegiances, and important class divisions; it is not clear if Filipinos are exceptional here. The book almost gives the sense of entirely distinct, separate ethnic communities,

as there is no mention of Chinese Filipinos or Moros, and there is only limited discussion of persons of Filipino descent who do not identify as Filipino or of persons claiming mixed descent. In terms of magnitude, it would be useful to provide a sense of the frequency of the book's many anecdotes. Labrador mentions local greeting cards with crude jokes, but it is not clear if these were produced by hand one time, or if they are manufactured for sale in stores. Without a sense of who makes these jokes, buys these albums, and exchanges these cards, it is not clear how pervasive these anecdotes are.

All told, *Building Filipino Hawai'i* provides a fascinating account of Filipinos in Hawai'i, noting their fragmentation and locating them in a broader ethnic landscape. It will be of interest to scholars of Hawai'i and migrant identity, as well as anyone interested in Filipino identity writ large. Although it takes place in Hawai'i, many of the issues are those that continue to confront the Philippines as a whole, making the discussion of Hawaiian Filipinos especially important and timely.

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