



Communauté
d'Agglomération de
La Rochelle



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Call for papers - International Colloquium "Transpacific Studies"

November 4-5, 2024, La Rochelle University

Presentation

The shift of the world's center of gravity (both economically and geopolitically) from the Atlantic to the Pacific is a major contemporary topic of study. Coveted by powerful nations anxious to take part in the production of wealth in Asia and to control the growing interconnection of different parts of the globe, this complex maritime space calls for renewed analytic approaches. However, it continues to be studied by scientific disciplines that are as compartmentalized in their subjects of study as they are separated by their cultural areas of specialization. Two major issues emerge from this situation.

Firstly, a global analysis of the human societies living around the Pacific Ocean must be able to put into dialogue the geographical, political, and economic data as well as the social, cultural, and environmental variables that make it objectifiable. At the same time, if the Pacific Ocean represents a third of the globe, it cannot solely be understood as a massive space of empty water surrounded by human societies devoid of interactions other than commercial transactions or competition between powers. It is precisely in order to observe the extent and diversity of exchanges and relations between the inhabitants of Asia, the Pacific islands and the American coasts, that Matt K. Matsuda calls for "*scholars of Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific Islands, and North and South America*" to focus on "*the interconnectedness of different worlds*" (Matsuda, 2012). The study of interconnected Pacific societies takes its full place within the framework of *Pacific Rim*, a geographical region that surrounds the Pacific Ocean and includes the countries bordering it. This area can be analyzed in terms of the aspirations of several countries to play the role of thalassocracies or value chains between continents, as well as in terms of the migrations and diasporas that make it up, the representations of otherness

that distinguish it, the indigenous peoples that inhabit it and the phenomena of climate change that characterize it.

Secondly, the impasses of an ethnocentric reading that focuses solely on the narrative formulated by the winning powers are compounded by those of a perspective that claims to be the spokesperson of the defeated and the oppressed. Yet, as Serge Gruzinsky notes when comparing the Iberian conquest of America and Asia during the Renaissance:

"Bringing the Mexican coast closer to the China Sea also means attenuating our inextinguishable Eurocentrism and raising new questions. It's a matter of reconnecting cables that national historiographies have pulled out, and subjecting the elements thus reunited to a global reading that brings them into dialogue with each other, and not just with Europe. It is by varying the focal points, and no longer by reversing the points of view as in the distant days of the "vision of the vanquished", that we can hope to arrive at a history that makes sense in our time".

The international colloquium to be held on [November 4 and 5, 2024](#) at La Rochelle University therefore aims to build a field of transpacific studies, that is, to structure a multidisciplinary field of research on the cultural, social, political, economic, and environmental dynamics within this zone - considering both the stakes of Sino-American rivalry and the interconnection of Pacific populations from a decentralized perspective. This event will be structured around six research axes:

- 1. Migrations and cultural transformations**
- 2. Orientalism(s) and Otherness**
- 3. Indigeneity in the *Pacific Rim*.**
- 4. The strategic stakes of the New Silk Roads in Latin America and Oceania**
- 5. Sino-American relations**
- 6. A "sea of islands" under pressure**

[About the research axes](#)

1. Migrations and cultural transformations. The ocean routes opened by European colonial ventures in the 16th century sketched out what, in the 19th and 20th centuries, would become a significant flux of transpacific migration from East Asia to Oceania and the Americas. The diasporas and transnational communities present in the *Pacific Rim* should therefore be examined from perspectives that are not confined to the borders between nation-states, and from approaches that highlight *soft power* strategies. Invisibilized or celebrated, marginalized, or assimilated in a process of [miscegenation](#) these migrations have produced shifts in terms of values, norms, beliefs, traditions, art, and languages in the territories where they have settled, whether temporarily or permanently. Studies on the *Nikkei*, people and communities of Japanese

origin living in the Americas since the 19th century, and on the *Dekasegi*, descendants of Japanese who have returned to work in Japan since the end of the 20th century, illustrate the many facets of migration and "hybrid identities" (Hirabayashi et al., 2002). Of particular interest will be Chinese, South Korean, Polynesian, and Melanesian migrations, as well as the links forged between groups of migrants from different countries, such as relations between Asians and Hispanics in the USA (Kang and Torres, 2016).

2. Orientalism and Otherness. The domination of Asian and Oceanian societies by colonial powers was articulated in the 19th century by stereotypes that combined fascination and exoticism towards them (Said, 1978; Wesley-Smith, 2016). This classic "orientalism" (i.e., an ethnocentric approach that amalgamated individuals with a collective, essentialized identity) has evolved, even transformed, in the 20th century. For example, it is possible to observe the emergence of a "digital orientalism" (Suat et al., 2021), i.e. the representation of Asian cultures, traditions and inhabitants through digital media and supports developed in California (such as films available online, video games, applications, social networks) with the aim of offering dematerialized consumer goods produced outside these spaces, but whose content perpetuates a biased representation exogenous to these societies. On the other hand, it is also possible to observe an "inverted orientalism" (Slingerland, 2010), detectable among other things in the cultural offerings of Confucius Institutes, based on a simplification and homogenization of Chinese cultural expressions, such as the preponderance of Mandarin at the expense of Cantonese, or a standardized version of Chinese folklore. This strategy reinforces preconceived ideas about China, but also consolidates its non-coercive influence. Particular interest will be paid to the study of ways and strategies of conceiving and shaping Otherness in the *Pacific Rim* from the angle of creative expressions, social imaginaries and social representations.

3. Indigeneity in the *Pacific Rim*. In the 21st century, indigenous populations living in island and coastal regions of the Pacific Ocean are faced with state strategies that alternate assimilation and marginalization, as well as the consequences of climate change and extractivism. Struggles for recognition of collective rights to their territories and their uses and customs are compounded by the upheavals caused by rising water temperatures, rising sea levels and the pollution of their habitats. For example, Forrest Wade Young's (2012) work on *Rapa Nui/Easter Island* reveals the lasting impact of imperialism on indigenous peoples; in their quest to reclaim their rights to their land, the Rapa Nui must assert their own epistemology in the face of competing discourses coming not only from tourism operators and Chilean authorities, but also from archaeology - particularly when it comes to determining the contours of an "ecological collapse" phenomenon. Of particular interest will be an approach that offers a comparative vision of indigeness on different shores of the Pacific, examining the similarities and differences of indigenous experience in a nation-state such as Indonesia, Japan or Chile, a multicultural state such as Canada, a binational state such as Aoteroa/New Zealand, or a plurinational state such as Ecuador.

4. The strategic stakes of the New Silk Roads in Latin America and Oceania.

Since 2013, China has been organizing a land axis to link China to Europe, as well as a maritime axis linking China to Africa bordering the Indian Ocean. Called the *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*, these axes take the form of roads, railroads, ports, airports, fiber optic networks, gas pipelines, undersea cables, power grids and energy transport networks. In addition to the economic objectives of securing new markets and energy supplies, the country's political goals include guaranteeing internal stability and positioning itself at the center of the Asian continent. In this context, we need to consider how this initiative fits in with the supply of natural resources and the creation of new markets in Latin America and Oceania. Indeed, USA's strategic "pivot" towards the Pacific and its lack of interest in Latin America seem to have been seized as an opportunity by the People's Republic of China to increase its economic and commercial partnership with several Central and South American countries. In the case of the Pacific islands, these are also partners which, having established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, are joining the New Silk Roads in the South Pacific, with a particular interest in infrastructure investment projects associated with sustainable development. Of particular interest will be the PRC's strategies to offer an alternative to a Western tradition of international relations (deemed colonial) as a member of a "Global South".

5. Sino-American relations: two great powers with economies as competitive as they are linked, China and the United States maintain bilateral relations that have deteriorated since the presidency of President Donald Trump, to the point of calling into question American participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership project. The trade war is aggravated by military rivalry over control of the China Sea and open hostility over the status of the island of Taiwan. In the context of strategic competition with China, President Biden is promoting the *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)*, an initiative aimed at securing value chains in a cartography that would link the Pacific coastline of the United States to the Indian Ocean, encompassing Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania (including the Pacific Islands). Particular attention will be paid to the various forms of economic, political, diplomatic, and military cooperation and integration, both institutional and informal, that are taking shape in the *Pacific Rim* around the Sino-US rivalry, as well as to regional political initiatives attempting to emancipate themselves from this competition, such as the "Blue Pacific Continent" promoted by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

6. A "sea of islands" (Hau'ofa 1994) under pressure. Today, the Pacific Ocean is subject to anthropogenic pressures that threaten the sustainability of marine ecosystems. In this regard, global change, industrial fishing, mining, shipping, and military activities are just a few examples of the activities that are increasing the vulnerability of marine ecosystems, while revealing social and ecological interdependencies. As a result, the logics of monopolization and pooling are intensifying, as in the case of the creation of marine protected areas or the management of fisheries on a regional scale. These logics mobilize a range of actors, both human (local communities, international organizations, associations, scientists) and non-human (non-human animals, plants, and

minerals). Particular attention will be paid to the "social and political construction of the ocean" (Dahou et al., 2021) and to forms of marine space management.

How to contribute

Proposals for papers must be sent by June 14, 2024 at the latest (replies by June 28) to the following address: etudestranspacifiquescolloque@gmail.com

Proposals should be written in French or English and sent in .doc or .docx format. They must include:

- The title of the proposal and the focus of the paper
- A summary of the proposal of 500 words maximum
- A biographical note on the author of the paper.

Practical information

- The symposium will take place on the campus of La Rochelle University (La Rochelle, France).
- Presentations will be given in person. Presentations must be in English or French.
- Some travel and accommodation expenses may be covered for selected speakers.
- The organizers plan to publish an edited volume with a selection of the papers presented at the colloquium.

Organizing team

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Calendar

Proposal submission deadline	June 14, 2024
Answer	June 28, 2024
Colloquium	November 4-5, 2024

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