

## Introduction: American Studies in Trans-Pacific Perspective

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The seven essays featured here are products of the International Symposium, “American Studies in Trans-Pacific Perspective,” held on July 9, 2006, at Nanzan University in Nagoya in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Japanese Association for American Studies (JAAS). The purpose of the symposium was to search for a new approach to American Studies that would be truly significant in today’s world.

During the four decades since the founding of the JAAS, we have seen a sea change in the domestic American and international scenes. With this change, American Studies has gone through various phases of renovation, and the multiculturalism that arose during these years has transformed American Studies into a field of inquiry devoted to studying diverse cultures and populations, rather than elucidating a singular American character. Indeed, it should be noted here that the multicultural perspective has long been applied to American Studies; at the same time, it is important to recognize that this approach was utilized mainly to study subjects within the national boundaries of the United States.

More recently, with the progress of globalization, Americanists have extended this multicultural perspective beyond the national boundaries of the United States and have taken up an approach referred to variously as “postnational,” “postnationalist,” “international,” “transnational,” or simply “global.” In doing so they have come to question the validity of American exceptionalism, a long-cherished belief in the uniqueness and superiority of American culture and history. As early as October 1991, Ian Tyrrell, one of the contributors to

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this special issue, wrote an essay in the *American Historical Review*, entitled “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” in which he called for a study of transnational history.<sup>1</sup>

Responding to his appeal, a number of essays, books, and conferences debating transnational studies appeared inside and outside the United States. For example, efforts by students of American Studies to reconstruct their discipline within global as well as multicultural perspectives were evident at the 39th annual meeting of the JAAS held on June 2 and 3, 2005, where, in a presidential address entitled “The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Asian Crossroads,” ASA President Shelley Fisher Fishkin discussed the possibilities of “placing transnationalism in the center of American Studies.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the theme of the ASA’s 2006 annual meeting was “The United States from Inside and Out: Transnational American Studies,” an agenda reflecting the heightened interest in transnational approaches to studying US culture and history currently held by large numbers of Americanists. Indeed, since the early 1990s, we have seen debates on “transnational” history and American Studies in such journals as the *American Historical Review*, the *Journal of American History* and the *American Quarterly*.<sup>3</sup> In *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, edited by John Carlos Rowe, the authors show ways in which American Studies cross national boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, a series of conferences on “Internationalizing the Study of American History” held between 1997 and 2000 resulted in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*,<sup>5</sup> wherein most of the contributors support a transnational, global history of the United States and, moreover, some of them criticize what they view as the trans-Atlantic bias in a U. S. transnational history that lacks perspectives from across the Pacific. These historians point to the fact that the United States borders the Pacific Ocean as well as the Atlantic, and has received many immigrants from the Asia-Pacific region.

Sharing the above interest in transnational studies and criticism of current works of transnational American Studies, this symposium joined in the international debate on transnationalism in American Studies by introducing trans-Pacific perspectives. This meant that, rather than following the traditional westward direction of American expansion and looking from east to west, we approached US culture and history eastward from the Pacific Rim. At the symposium speakers from seven different countries on the Pacific Rim, namely Ian Tyrrell from Australia, Sun Youzhong from China, Seong-Ho Lim from Korea, Oscar V. Campomanes from the Philippines, Victor Vladimirovich Sumsky from Russia, Gary Y. Okihiro from the United States, and Jun Furuya from Japan, presented trans-Pacific perspectives on US culture and society and suggested new frameworks for American Studies.

We will see their papers in the following pages. Their contents vary from discussions of trans-Pacific American Studies in broad and general terms historically and thematically, as seen in the papers by Tyrrell, Furuya, and Okihiro, to

examinations of specific topics and geographic areas such as John Dewey, the image of America as benevolent hegemon, Filipino ideologue Apolinario Mabini, and anti-Americanism in South Korea, by Sun, Sumsky, Campomanes, and Lim, respectively. However, despite their differences, these papers all share perspectives that cross the Pacific. We believe that together they will contribute to the ongoing endeavor to reconstruct American Studies in a way that reflects the increasing diversification of American culture and society in a global context.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1031–55.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Asian Crossroads/Transnational American Studies," *Japanese Journal of American Studies*, 17 (2006): 5–52.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the AHR Forum in *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1031–72 carries Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism," Michael McGerr, "The Price of the 'New Transnational History,'" and Tyrrell, "Ian Tyrrell Responds." See also "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History: A Special Issue," *Journal of American History* 86 (December 1999), and "Special Issue on Multiculturalism," *American Quarterly* 45 (June 1993).

<sup>4</sup> John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).