

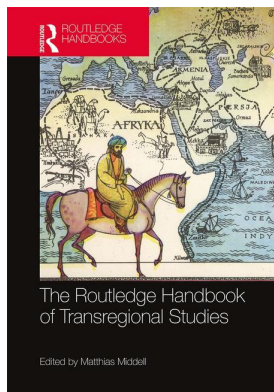
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 20 Sep 2019

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies

Matthias Middell

Area studies scholarship of Asia

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429438233-5>

Prasenjit Duara

Published online on: 08 Nov 2018

How to cite :- Prasenjit Duara. 08 Nov 2018, *Area studies scholarship of Asia from: The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies* Routledge

Accessed on: 20 Sep 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429438233-5>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

3

AREA STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP OF ASIA

Prasenjit Duara

Area studies of Asia can be said to be a product of the post-Second World War new world order under hegemony of the United States (US). Certainly, it was owing significantly to the Orientalist scholarship conducted under the auspices of the older colonial regimes in the region that in turn left a substantial mark on the study of the classical traditions of Asia, histories of the states, and, not least, ethnology of indigenous and tribal peoples. Some of the colonial scholarship, such as phrenology, eugenics, and even linguistics – the nineteenth-century king of the classical disciplines – did not survive well in the post-war period; nevertheless, the legacy of the others was still perceptible until the turn of the twentieth century.

Post-war area studies represented a massive expansion and systematization of the older categories of Western knowledge of Asia, particularly along the areal boundaries of older colonial formations, but, as we will see, these areas became increasingly reshaped by the new realities of nation-states that emerged during this era of the United Nations. Thus East Asia was still understood in civilizational terms as shaped basically by Confucian and imperial Chinese culture, South Asia by Indo-Islamic traditions, and Southeast Asia by a combination of Indo-Chinese and Islamic cultures. The Middle East was defined and shaped by Islamic civilization and ambivalently related to the rest of Asia. Indeed, the flagship organization in the US, the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), does not include Central and West Asia, which has its own association without links to AAS.

While classical studies of civilizations continued to flourish through the study of philosophy, literature, the arts, and history, within area studies these became increasingly amplified by anthropology, political science, sociology, and development economics until the 1990s. First, the modernization paradigm began to shape not only the social science disciplines but also fields such as history, literature, and philosophy, where there were efforts to show that modernity or its offshoots could be found in early history, such as the ‘economic revolution’ in Song China or in Moghul India, or Confucian liberalism and the roots of democracy in ancient India, etc. Second, although these studies in Europe and the US were conducted under the rubric of area studies, in reality these increasingly became nation-based studies. Accordingly, while PhD students in Chinese or Japanese history or literature were expected to learn and use materials in both languages and cultures, in practice most scholars neglected the study or use of the non-national language. Similarly, few students of history or literature in Indian studies studied Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, or Pakistani works and materials. The dominant paradigm thus became a national modernization paradigm.

In this respect, Western scholarship might have been following the trend established within Asian societies, which in this early post-colonial stage focused almost exclusively on national studies, except perhaps in the study of international relations. Japan was an important exception to this phenomenon partly because it rapidly rejoined the ranks of advanced economies; however, this might be more because of its history of pan-Asianism. Even though pan-Asianism had, without a doubt, been seriously tainted by its role in the Pacific War, Japanese scholarship inherited an enormous apparatus and infrastructure of research concerning many parts of Asia, both historical and twentieth-century. Pre-war Japan had the largest research organizations of its time in the world – for example, the South Manchurian Railway Company's (SMR) research organizations – and the bulk of these researchers were engaged in work on Asia, both practical and textual, from Siberia through China to Southeast Asia, to South Asia, and even to the Middle East (Young 1966). There were many fields in East Asia – especially China and Inner Asian studies – where Japanese scholarly knowledge continued to remain superior to any other in the world until the 1980s. Unfortunately, since most Japanese scholarship is in the Japanese language, research in much of the rest of the world was unable to build sufficiently upon it, and in Japan itself, scholarship became highly insular.

The national modernization paradigm continued to dominate scholarship on Asia within developing Asian nations. Very few, if any, regional and national universities contained programmes of Asian studies, let alone area studies. If other parts of the world were to be studied in history or literature, it would usually be a course about the West, which, of course, was the model for national modernization. Occasionally, at a metropolitan university there might have been a programme created about some other part of Asia, such as the Centre for East Asian Studies established in Delhi by the Ford Foundation – in part to advance its Cold War agenda. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences also funded a small number of researchers of other Asian countries in its metropolitan centres, but their research scope was highly circumscribed. Certainly, there was much advancement of national knowledge within decolonized nations, and in countries such as India there was also considerable advancement in conceptual knowledge within several disciplines, such as history and anthropology (which was typically not distinguished from sociology).

The end of the Cold War, particularly in the West by 1990 (some argue that it ended earlier in East Asia with the US's recognition of China and the end of the Vietnam War), spelled important changes in the intellectual paradigm of Asian studies. Several forces coalesced to form this trend. The urgency to fund social science area studies in the West diminished even as American social sciences, in particular, began to consider themselves to be scientific disciplines that were not dependent on the study of languages and contexts. Language, history, and context were, undoubtedly, the main foundations of area studies as it was known until then, and as the renunciation of social scientific reliance upon them grew, the number of social scientists engaged in area studies – particularly economists, sociologists, and political scientists (in that order) – declined very rapidly, for instance in the membership of the AAS. It should be noted that the lead discipline that influenced the other social sciences was economics with its growing mathematical and rational choice orientation; it can also be noted that social sciences in other parts of the world also gradually came under the influence of the hegemonic 'rational choice' and equally context-independent 'experimental' methodologies.

Another trend that emerged more prominently at this time was the leftist and post-structuralist movements in the US. This critique from the left somewhat belatedly discovered the roots of area studies in Cold War ideology, which, grounded most importantly in Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* (1978), followed the contours of colonial knowledge production. But while there might have been a brief period of coming together during the late 1980s between

the Marxists and post-structural and post-colonial critiques enabled by Said's work and that of the subaltern historians of colonial India – such as Ranajit Guha (Guha and Spivak 1988) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) – by the mid-1990s this consensus in the critical study of Asian society and history began to come apart.

The second half of the 1990s was filled with often sharp debates between more traditional Marxist critics, such as Aijaz Ahmad (1995), Harry Harootunian (1999), and Arif Dirlik (1999), directed against a range of newer approaches to critical theory informed by post-structuralism and post-colonialism, or rather, the post-colonial stance. By post-colonial stance, I refer not to a theory but to an assumption that the modernizing nation-states of the post-war era, despite the heroic rhetoric of liberation and solidarity, continued to build upon the racial and exploitative epistemology of the colonial masters. These nation-states were designed to become like their colonial masters, whose imperialist character was ultimately inseparable from their national structures, which were shaped to advance global mastery in a competitive system. Progressive Hegelian history is the ur-form of both imperial and national histories. This 'post-colonial' assumption was compatible with many different theories, including Marxism among thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak (Guha and Spivak 1988) or environmental historians.

The traditional Marxist critique was launched on various fronts. Thus the then emergent theory of globalization associated with anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Ulf Hannerz (1996) was seen as the successor to Cold War modernization theory. Globalization was denounced as the new ideology of the victorious Western powers over the Soviet bloc because it was founded upon new forms of capitalism that sought to conquer the world by developing transnational modes of production and strategies of accumulation. The work of Homi Bhabha (1994) on 'hybridity' and 'colonial mimicry', which suggests subtle modes of inverting colonial hierarchies, was critiqued for ignoring class and structural problems. Harootunian's critique of Bhabha (1999) was contained in the same volume of the journal *Postcolonial Studies* as the exchange between myself and Arif Dirlik (1999) regarding my 1995 book, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*.

Rescuing History makes the argument that modern, linear history was coproduced with nationalism and the former sought to depict the history as having a continuous 'national subject' progressing through linear time despite the absence of such consciousness and realities in earlier periods. Moreover, the narrative structures and rhetorical strategies of a national history sought to appropriate the dispersed past, often suppressing different living forms of community life and identities for the sake of its project. The book tried to recover dispersed histories and trace counter-narratives of the past in China and India.

Arif Dirlik's critique of this book begins with 'the identity of postcolonial criticism'. He presents two arguments: First, post-colonial scholarship becomes involved in the multicultural celebration of identity and, as such, does not reflect upon the structural conditions (capitalism as a totality) that engendered it. It is therefore used by capitalists and fascists for their purposes. Second, by abandoning foundationalism and the search for a subject of history, post-colonialism systematically contributes to the erasure of the revolutionary narrative and thus also ends up serving fascism and other reactionary forces.

With regard to the first point, I agree with Dirlik that all scholars, whether or not they employ the post-colonial perspective, should be more attentive to material circumstances, and I would urge him in this direction as well. But post-colonialism is radically different from multiculturalism in that it is committed to the deconstruction of identity and critiques the latter's identitarian politics. It is even more particularly opposed to the reifications of national culture by fascists and other ultranationalists (Duara 2001). Whereas scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad

continue to insist on a return to a Marxist revolutionary view, most scholars, including Dirlik, are much less sanguine or desirous of returning to the revolutionary narrative.

Critical Asian studies has encountered a world in which the possibilities of non-capitalist emancipation has receded and one where revolutionary states have been discredited. At the same time, capitalist globalization continues to widen the gap between the powerful and the powerless while the erosion of a national society itself unleashes a reaction that results in still more violent and exclusive reifications of nation, race, or culture. It is thus at an impasse. There is no master narrative to organize these effects and resistances to the national modernization paradigm, which has led to considerable confusion about the goals of research programmes in both Asia and among scholars of Asia in the West. But even if we have to wait for new theoretical clarities, there is no shortage of pressing historical problems.

Since the early 2000s, two relatively new fields of enquiry that might suggest new horizons for research – at least for Asian studies – have opened up. The first of these is the study of circulations and connections, especially within and with Asia under the broad title of ‘Inter-Asian Connections’ or more simply ‘Asian Connections’. The second is the problem of environmental sustainability, which will be touched upon in the last part of the chapter. Although the organizing ideas of circulations, flows, supply chains, and networks became popular with the advent of theories of globalization over the last 25 years or so, they also began to penetrate different disciplines, particularly in Asian studies.

Among the most important pioneers in this field was Indian Ocean historical studies. While the original studies of the Indian Ocean – which was, out of necessity, transregional and transnational – by leaders such as Kirti N. Chaudhuri (1985), Janet Abu-Lughod (1989), William Atwell (2005), and Hamashita Takeshi (on the South China Sea, 1994) were inspired by Braudel’s work on the Mediterranean, the next generation of Indian Ocean scholars took it to a completely different level, revealing how these flows of goods, bullion, ideas, doctrines, and microbes effected major changes within societies from very early on. Archaeologists and anthropologists such as Jack Goody also showed that Eurasia was a highly connected zone from the Bronze Age (2006). The early technological revolution enabled intensive agriculture that permitted surplus accumulation, class stratification, literacy, bureaucracy, urbanization, and interlinked city-based civilizations across the zone. The new field of connected and circulatory histories has by now critiqued methodological nationalism at its very roots.

Indeed, these intellectual developments have been underscored by the resurgence of a connected Asia. The post-Cold War advent of globalization itself appears to be mediated by regionalisms, as we see by the appearance of many global regionalisms such as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, the European Union, the Latin America with the Southern Common Market, and others. Within East and Southeast Asia – and more recently in India – Asian economic integration has increased significantly, principally after the end of the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. The economic integration of East, South, and Southeast Asia, which had grown steadily under imperialist dominated trade, declined precipitously at the end of the Second World War. Intra-regional trade began to pick up in the 1980s but it was the Asian financial crisis – the shock of the common crisis – that seems to have awakened the states to the reality of regional networks and focused their attention on cooperation (Duara 2010).

Today what the Asian Development Bank (ADB) calls ‘integrating Asia’, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, Japan, Korea, India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, conducts over 50 per cent of its trade with itself in comparison to trade with the outside world, and compared with only 33 per cent in the 1980s (ADB 2008). Population mobility – especially labour transfers between developing Asia and developed Asia – has also been growing very rapidly. Finally, there is greater integration through tourism, people-to-people relations,

religion, and both high and popular arts. Note for instance, the huge popularity of Korean TV serials and Japanese manga or anime.

Six major indicators of interdependence tracked for the 16 Asian economies have increased markedly in the ten years since the financial crisis. The most important factor behind the increased economic activity is the participation of these economies in a regional supply chain production network. Production is divided up into smaller steps and each part is assigned to the most cost-efficient producer (ADB 2008: 70, 97–8). Accordingly, for instance, an electronic product might be produced or assembled in China with hardware from Taiwan and software from India. Indeed, much of this type of vertical integration of production has been enabled by new information and communication technologies and open markets. At the same time, the bulk of these goods have been produced for consumption in Europe and North America. The present crisis in consumption could well lead to deepening markets for these goods within Asia. In recent years, ASEAN has developed free trade agreements with each of the East Asian nations and India.

Macro-economic interdependence in the region is also indicated by the co-movement of macro-economic variables. For instance, the correlation of gross domestic product (GDP) among many of these states over three-year moving averages is very strong. The GDP correlation coefficient has gone up from 0.07 before the crisis to 0.54 after the crisis. Price movements are similarly correlated and price shocks in one area are being transmitted to other areas with greater intensity. With the growth of macro-economic interdependence, a growing need to manage it has appeared. For instance, exchange rates require monitoring and coordination so that central banks do not shoot each other in the foot (ADB 2008: 153–5).

The *study* of Asian connections has also witnessed major institutional build-up. Apart from the increase in the available number of faculty positions in a connected study of Asia, there are several institutes and centres devoted to such study, such as the India China Institute at the New School in New York. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in the US has led a consortium of universities in Asia, Europe, and the USA in the eight-year project on 'Inter-Asian Connections', which has held five international conferences and sponsored over 90 junior research fellowships in the research of 'Asian Connections'. In Europe, Heidelberg University has pioneered the Europe-Asia Asymmetries project, which conducts the connected study of Europe and Asia over a long historical period. They have also launched a publication series. Similarly, Cambridge University Press has already published several volumes in its series of Asian Connections. Institutions in Asia that have been most active in this field are the Asia Research Institute in the National University of Singapore and Hong Kong University's Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (SSRC 2015).

The second area of enquiry that has emerged is the study of the environment and research projects focused on the crisis of sustainability in the planet. Indeed, the study of Asian Connections has also been moving to address this fundamental issue. One of the most important imperatives to coordinate and manage interdependence in Asia arises from the common and linked set of problems faced by the region in the realm of climate change, environmental degradation, water scarcity, and public health, among others. The provisioning of these items, which the ADB dubs 'regional public goods', is evidently urgent. Consider a colossal and dire public goods problem that cannot be managed without a concerted regional effort. The Himalayas and the Tibetan mountains plateau are the source and watershed of ten major rivers that provide fresh water to many different countries in South and Southeast Asia in addition to China. Climate change and environmental degradation have depleted the water resources available in all these countries and it is particularly extreme in north and north-west China which is suffering the most severe drought in the last half century, with precipitation levels of 70–90 per cent below normal and water tables depleted from excessive well drilling (Selden 2009).

China has been building dams not only on the Yangtze River, but has also built three more on the Mekong River to produce hydropower for its south-west border regions. About 12 more large dams are expected to be built on the Mekong (or Lancang) alone. Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia have expressed grave concerns over water diversions, shortages, and ecological imbalances in the region. Although China and some authorities assert that the impact of Chinese dam building has not affected downstream waters significantly, the Chinese government has not been very forthcoming with the data on the dams and has also not permitted independent scientific studies of the dams. Greater regional efforts must begin with pooling all the necessary data (Gunn and McCartan 2008). Recently there has been a proposal to divert the waters of several Tibetan rivers, including the Yarlung Tsangpo, and the Brahmaputra in India and Bangladesh northwards to irrigate the north China plains. Needless to say, the effects of this diversion on South Asia could well lead to unprecedented water wars (Chellaney 2007). To be sure, the countries in Indo-China and South Asia are also building dams and destructive infrastructure projects without much heed to the grave environmental damage that these can bring.

In this scenario of increasing interdependence, as well as rising tensions over regional public goods and territories, the nation-states in the region have to adapt – if not compromise – their conceptions of territorial sovereignty. Perhaps the most advanced subregion within Asia in developing this responsive – rather than merely adaptive – strategy has been Southeast Asia. ASEAN has created several regional platforms, such as ASEAN itself, ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Moreover, although ASEAN is not often effective in achieving its proclaimed goals in particular areas such as energy conservation or educational development, it has been much more successful in developing the basis of an open and inclusive regionalism that creates commitments to regional prosperity and peace.

The ASEAN strategy echoes, to some extent, the situation at the cross-roads of the vast regional maritime trade networks of the early modern period before European domination since the eighteenth century. Neither the vast regional trade nor the networks was controlled by a single power. Just as importantly, there was no state domination of identity within the regional sphere. Today, within the loose network of economic actors, ASEAN seeks to deploy a regional strategy that involves the major powers engaged in the region. According to Evelyn Goh, ASEAN has succeeded in

integrating China as a regional power, a tier below the US. Meanwhile, Japan and India are integrated at a next lower tier of regional powers and are enmeshed in the developing regional security and economic architecture, while ASEAN retains a central role in the regional institutional process.

(Goh 2007/8: 154)

Thus, if ASEAN is engaging in balancing power, it is doing so with a more complex strategy in view (Goh 2007/8). This strategy can be differentiated from the process of integrating the European Union, in that it builds upon the pre-existing networks of private, public (non-governmental organizations), and intergovernmental agencies rather than integrating nation-states as such. Circulations and networks of interdependence remain key to understanding these processes.

This is not to say that there are no challenges to the ASEAN project. In recent years, it has been confronted by the resurgence of nationalist and global ambitions of the People's Republic of China, particularly in the South China Sea. Until recently, China's attitude toward its Asian neighbours in the south had been most amicable and it had been among the first signatories of

the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, the ASEAN rules of the regional game. China's recent challenges to ASEAN countries over environmental issues and the waters of the South China Sea have troubled the unity of ASEAN. Its turn to the US, which has fashioned the latter's strategy as the US 'pivot to Asia', has perhaps further complicated the situation at present.

But the most powerful challenge to Asian connections, in reality and in scholarship, will be to respond in time to the crisis of sustainability. The national modernization paradigm, with its restricted emphasis on GDP growth and allied fields of knowledge production, will have to yield to a different vision of human and planetary flourishing. The humanities and social sciences have historically contributed to the creation of paradigms of knowledge such as civilizational or modernization theory. Also, in the contemporary world, there are many situations where groups, organizations, networks, and vulnerable communities in Asia as well as allied forces across the globe – non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental and transnational organizations, scientists, religious groups, publicists, and other activists – are making an effort to bring global awareness to issues of climate change, resource conservation, and responsible use of the commons (Duara 2015). By raising the profile of circulatory histories to their true role and by identifying those groups and networks that are still – or have more recently become – committed to the inviolability or even sacrality of the commons, we can try to overcome the disastrous consequences of the national sovereignty paradigm and collectively tackle the crisis of an unsustainable planet.

Select bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, J. (1989) *Before European Hegemony: the world system A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ahmad, A. (1995) 'The politics of literary post-coloniality', *Race and Class*, 36 (3): 1–20.
- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: cultural dimensions of globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2008) *Emerging Asian Regionalism: a partnership for shared prosperity*, Manila: ADB.
- Atwell, W. (2005) 'Another look at silver imports into China, ca. 1635–1644', *Journal of World History*, 16 (4): 467–89.
- Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Chakrabarty, D. (1992) 'Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for the "Indian" pasts?', *Representations*, 37 (1): 1–26.
- Chaudhuri, K.N. (1985) *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: an economic history from the rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Chellaney, B. (2007) 'China-India clash over Chinese claims to Tibetan water', *Japan Focus*, 3: 1–5.
- Dirlik, A. (ed.) (1997) *The Postcolonial Aura: third world criticism in the age of global capitalism*, Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Dirlik, A. (1999) 'How the grinch hijacked radicalism: further thoughts on the postcolonial', *Postcolonial Studies*, 2 (2): 149–63.
- Duara, P. (2001) 'Leftist criticism and the political impasse: response to Arif Dirlik's "how the grinch hijacked radicalism: further thoughts on the postcolonial"', *Postcolonial Studies*, 4 (1): 81–8.
- Duara, P. (1995) *Rescuing History from the Nation: questioning narratives of modern China*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Duara, P. (2010) 'Asia redux: conceptualizing the region for our times', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 69 (4): 963–83.
- Duara, P. (2015) *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian traditions and a sustainable future*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Goh, E. (2007/8) 'Great powers and hierarchical order in Southeast Asia: analyzing regional security strategies', *International Security*, 32 (3): 113–57.
- Goody, J. (2006) *The Theft of History*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Guha, R. and Spivak, G.C. (eds) (1988) *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Gunn, G. and McCartan, B. (2008) 'Chinese dams and the great mekong floods of 2008', *Japan Focus*, 6 (8): 1–6.
- Hannerz, U. (1996) *Transnational Connections: culture, people, places*, London: Routledge.
- Harootunian, H.D. (1999) 'Postcoloniality's unconscious/area studies' desire', *Postcolonial Studies*, 2 (2): 127–47.
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1956) *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, New York: Dover Publications.
- Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon.
- Selden, M. (2009) 'China's Way Forward? Historical and contemporary perspectives on hegemony and the world economy in crisis', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 7 (13): 1–8.
- Social Science Research Council (SSRC) (2015) 'InterAsia program'. Online. Available at: <www.ssrc.org/programs/interasia-program/> (accessed 27 November 2015).
- Takeshi, H. (1994) 'The tribute trade system and modern Asia', in A.J.H. Latham and H. Kawakatsu (eds) *Japanese Industrialization and the Asian Economy*, London: Routledge: 91–103.
- Young, J. (1966) *The Research Activities of the South Manchurian Railway Company, 1907–1945: a history and bibliography*, New York: East Asian Institute, Columbia University.