

Book Reviews

ASIA: COMPARATIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL

Asia-Pacific: A History of Empire and Conflict. By THOMAS CRUMP.
New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007. xv, 1 pp. \$44.95 (cloth);
\$19.95 (paper).
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Readers who are interested in an overview of the recent political history and international relations of the Asia-Pacific region for and from an Atlantic, Euro-American perspective will be well served by Thomas Crump's *Asia-Pacific: A History of Empire and Conflict*. Crump's broadly conceived book is written in an accessible style, presenting recent histories of the major nation-states of the Pacific Rim in uncomplicated, though not unduly oversimplified, narratives. The book is not a specialist's account, but Crump has drawn on solid scholarship of specialists and reporting of international journalism.

The book announces (explicitly, though not with great reflexivity or introspection) its "Atlantic" perspective in its opening sentences: "Asia-Pacific may suggest an ungainly beast ... The problem for Europeans and East-coast Americans is that it is far from their *Atlantic* half of the world" (p. 1). The book places what is overwhelmingly an Asian history into a very familiar American grand narrative of the middle to late twentieth century. In the country-by-country chapters, local (national) periodization is given its due. But the general framing narrative is that of "world history" of the sort that takes the North Atlantic and events there as its points of reference. Chapter-by-chapter national country histories reach back as necessary to the nineteenth or early twentieth century. The focus overall, however, is on national and international-level developments from the Pacific War (also known as World War II) onward. The book is organized into eighteen chapters, the overwhelming majority of which focus on the political history and international relations of individual nation-states. Interestingly, while every other major nation is named in the book's chapters, the chapter on Vietnam is entitled "The Battle for Indochina." Apparently, more than thirty years on, Vietnam remains more a war than a country for those on the Atlantic Rim.

An organizational table following the contents pages lays out the straightforward structure of the book: roughly the first two-thirds are on the "Old Pacific" (further divided between East Asia and Southeast Asia); the last third of the book discusses the "New Pacific," including Russia, North America (the United States

and Canada), and “Australasia” (Australia and New Zealand). This last third of the book also contains thematic chapters on “migration,” mainly from Asia to America, Europe, and Australia (chapter 14), and “crime,” including piracy, smuggling, and terrorism (chapter 15).

Several maps are provided in the introductory pages of the book. In many ways, they aptly depict the tone of the book as a whole: they are clear, crisp products of professional cartography that are pleasing to the eye; yet at the same time, the region as a whole (as it were) that they cover is chopped up and segmented largely to provide country-by-country snapshots. Overall, the maps, as with the text, give a flavor of the topography, but much detail, as well as overall patterns of interconnection, is obscured. Mostly this is attributable to the grand scale of the undertaking (and the limits of space available). But some responsibility also lies with the framing and approach taken as well.

In academia, the book would be most appropriate for use in American or British introductory university courses, either history courses focused on political and international relations history or political science courses with a historical and Asia-Pacific focus or content. Students should find the content eminently accessible and easy to digest. I expect they would find it interesting, without being deeply challenging or confounding to their general taken-for-granted worldviews. If the goal is to appeal to those tastes, then this book would serve the purpose well. (It is perhaps obvious that I am not entirely sympathetic to such an approach; but understanding the Asia-Pacific from deeply ingrained Atlantic-centricism is preferable to complete ignorance of the region and, in many cases, the best one can hope for). The book may also appeal to Atlantic-based (or Euro-American-centric) political scientists and other scholars, especially if they prefer their exotica and case studies served up in easily scrutable form. I would be less enthusiastic in recommending this book to students or scholars whose interests or points of view seek to understand Asia from Asian perspectives and frames of reference. It too easily reinscribes Asian history within the narrative framework of the “American” twentieth century.

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When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the “Riches of the East.” By STEWART GORDON. (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2008). ix, 228 pp. \$17.00 (paper).
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What did Asia look like in the thousand years before the voyages of discovery, when the world started to shrink in ways that seemed impossible at almost any point before the middle of the second millennium CE? This is one of the

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