



Faye Yuan Kleeman, *In Transit: The Formation of the Colonial East Asian Cultural Sphere*

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014. 302 pages. Hardback, \$52.00. ISBN 0824838602.

WITH *In Transit: The Formation of the Colonial East Asian Cultural Sphere*, Faye Yuan Kleeman adopts an interdisciplinary and multi-textual approach for providing a transnational history of Japan's "empire-wide cultural sphere" (9), and the multi-faceted ways in which individuals were embroiled within this sphere. By the onset of the Pacific War, this "cultural sphere" had become articulated within government propaganda as the geopolitical construct of the "Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," the paradigmatic expression of Japanese imperialist ideology. It is this ideological understanding of

the Co-Prosperity Sphere that Kleeman wishes to reread, shifting focus to the cultural and personal interactions between Japan and other parts of East Asia prior to, and continuing after, the manifestation of the concept within Japanese state propaganda. As Kleeman reminds us, it was not through state ideology that people chose to participate in Japan's imperial projects; "rather, it was through the lure of desire and pleasure, through their romantic imaginations" (7). Seeking to "transcend previous studies of the Japanese empire as a hegemonic macrosystem with unifying governing principles" (16), Kleeman uses the medium of biography to view Japan's empire as "a fluid, interconnected site that is dynamic, complex, and full of multiple possibilities and conflicted, competing values and ideas" (18). Whether Kleeman "transcends" the existing literature is debatable; however, what is not debatable is that she enhances the existing literature by providing a rich examination of how certain individuals navigated the complex ideological and geopolitical landscape of the empire. Through this "microscale approach" (16), Kleeman is able to explore a wide range of topics crucial to understanding the complexity of Japan's empire and individual interactions within it, including gender, class, racial and ethnic identity, biopolitics, marriage and romance, ideology, cultural representation, imperial cosmopolitanism, and colonial modernity. Among these, the topic of gender is most fully developed in Kleeman's argument, particularly issues of female subjectivity, with all but the first chapter devoted to female subjects.

*In Transit* is divided into three parts, each containing two chapters, which follow a loose chronological order. An account of Japan's emergence as an empire provides the background to Part I, which examines the Pan-Asianism of the "continental adventurer" (or, *tairiku rōnin*) Miyazaki Tōten and educator-cum-spy Kawahara Misako. Focusing less on Miyazaki's political dealings in China and elsewhere, Kleeman seeks to "bring a cultural dimension to the discussion of Pan-Asianism" (22) through an examination of Miyazaki's incorporation of his political ideals into the performance of traditional narrative chanting, *naniwabushi*.

Chapter 2 continues the theme of Pan-Asianism, but connects with a broader focus of the book: the individual in their relations with the state and its geopolitical interests. Here, Kleeman discusses the exploits of Kawahara Misako, or the "Mata Hari of Japan." Educated by a Sinophile father and motivated by Japan's "civilizing mission" on the continent, Kawahara travelled to China and Mongolia as an educationalist, but ended up working as a spy for the Japanese government in its machinations against the Russians. Kawahara's life history also provides a gateway for exploring gender roles in Meiji Japan. While personifying the ideal of the self-actualizing "New Woman," she was also a traditionalist, and fell into the role of the "good wife, wise mother" in her later life—"two constructions of the feminine that, together, bookended the Meiji period" (45).

Parts II and III continue the theme of gender, but broaden it to include a consideration of ethnic identity during the high period of Japanese imperialism. These parts comprise the bulk of the book and get to the crux of Kleeman's argument. Kleeman examines subjects "who crossed between the metropole and the colonies, blurring the national boundaries and confronting issues of race, gender, and identity" (79).

Chapter 3 covers the life histories of two Japanese aristocratic women: Nashimoto Masako (Ri Masako) and Saga Hiroko (Aisin-Gioro Hiro), who were married off to the loyal courts of Korea and Manchuria, respectively. This chapter provides insights

into the biopolitics of empire and the use of private bodies for public deployment by the state. Marriage challenged the Japan-centric cultural assumptions held by these women, and deeply altered their ethnic identities and affiliations. Chapter 4 looks at celebrities, Kawashima Yoshiko (Aixinjueluo Xianyu) and Ri Kōran (Yamaguchi Yoshiko). The lives of Kawashima (a crossdressing Manchu princess and Manchukuo generalissimo who was raised in Japan by a “continental adventurer”) and Ri (a Japanese actress who was raised in China and affected a Chinese ethnic public persona) provide a gateway for Kleeman to deepen her examination of gender and ethnic hybridity in the context of Japanese imperialism. Chapter 5 turns to literary representations of Taiwan in the works of Masugi Shizue and Sakaguchi Reiko. Kleeman “explores the intersections of colonialism, modernism, body, transnational mobilizations, and the female writerly subjectivity” (161). The final chapter examines the “transmission of knowledge and modernity through the medium of the human body,” with a look at dancers Choi Seunghee from Korea and Tsai Juiyueh from Taiwan (182).

The novelty of Kleeman’s work and her largest contribution to our understanding of Japanese imperialism is the biographical approach she brings to the subject matter. Through a series of life histories, *In Transit* explores the fractured identities created by empire, the multiplicity of personalities that it makes possible, the conflicted and competing loyalties it makes inevitable, and how these were formed and remolded over the geopolitical landscape of the empire. Through this focus on individuals and their histories, Kleeman seeks to answer three questions: “What did common people gain from the empire? How were they persuaded to accept the ideology of Japanese imperialism? What sustained their interest in the project of empire building?” (7). While Kleeman provides compelling answers for the personalities she explores, her subjects can hardly be described as “common people”; rather, they were extraordinary. Kleeman’s analysis of the “cultural sphere” of Japan’s empire focuses on the agents of cultural production within the sphere rather than the consumers. This makes generalizations about the everyday experiences of ordinary individuals—common people—in their consumption of these cultural products difficult. Kleeman’s focus on the lives of a limited number of extraordinary individuals thus makes *In Transit* problematic as a general history of “the formation of the colonial East Asian cultural sphere,” in the words of the book’s subtitle. This, of course, is not Kleeman’s objective, which appears to be the opposite: the formation of individual subjectivities within the cultural sphere. This is an objective which Kleeman’s work fulfills in a readable, insightful, and engaging manner. Finally, the addition of a conclusion would have been helpful in tying up the multiple themes running through the work as well as suggesting future avenues for exploration.

Danton Leary  
*Australian National University*