

heritages they bring could go a long way to breaking down the stereotypes and prejudices that have so often clouded the immigrant experience.

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REMAKING AREA STUDIES: Teaching and Learning Across Asia and the Pacific. *Edited by Terence Wesley-Smith and Jon Goss. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. xxvii, 243 pp. (Tables.) US\$45.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-8248-3321-3.*

This book asks all the right questions and makes a sound contribution to the ongoing debate about what is “area studies” and what should it provide to policy makers, practitioners, teachers and students. Based on a 2002 University of Hawai'i project and conference, in collaboration with other partners across the Asia-Pacific, this timely volume seeks to make its primary contribution in the teaching application of theoretical reconsiderations and institutional appreciation of Asia- and Pacific-based area studies.

This book can serve three audiences: academics interested in theoretical explorations, practitioners needing to know the institutional order and orientation of area studies in Japan, Singapore or the Pacific Islands, and classroom teachers concerned how best to use and teach area studies. The editors, who have clearly put considerable effort into bringing together this wide-ranging collaborative effort, nicely remind us of the “essential mission” of area studies: “the systematic production of knowledge about other places and peoples” (xv). Whether or not one finds congenial the postmodern mood or social constructivist approach of most of the chapters in this volume, their point stands. Area studies remains a useful and much-used form of knowledge, but it is, as the introduction succinctly recounts, in crisis, especially since the shift of American military and financial attention from Asia to the Middle East from 2001.

Each section of this book serves a different audience most directly, but together they make a worthwhile contribution to the study of how we make knowledge about “areas” in general and the Asia Pacific in particular. This first section, featuring Arif Dirlik, Neal Smith and Martin W. Lewis, articulates the grounds and pitfalls in our making sense of area studies. The second gives the needed institutional context of area studies in Asia and the Pacific (particularly Japan's Ritsumeikan University and the National University of Singapore, as well as, more generally, Pacific Island studies) that forms the playing field on which the pedagogical experiments in part 3 have been undertaken. Part 3, on “Asia Pacific Learning Communities,” constitutes the unique contribution of this book and will be a valuable handbook of lessons and tips for college

and university teachers and administrators undertaking collaborative teaching, including trans-Pacific distance courses, with counterparts in Asia or the Pacific. The project in these four case studies of joint course modules was to test the implications of the critical theory represented in part 1 in the context of understanding institutional realities in different locales, per part 2. In short, these experimental courses sought to find out what happens when those we have studied can speak, and even better, converse with our students. The results are believably mixed and so the lessons drawn are that much more persuasive.

Ricardo Trimillos provides a summary of those lessons in an epilogue to the volume, three of which stand out. Area studies is amoebic and socially constructed, the “areas” covered expand or contract as different interests, groupings of societies, or imagined heritages take the public stage—there is no single or essential definition of area studies. Second, interinstitutional interdependence is the only practical way to produce useful area studies now or in the future and this will involve collaborative scholarship and shared classrooms across the Pacific. Third, cyber technology offers both challenges and rewards in this effort (and the pedagogical reports in part 3 neatly document these); we must make use of this technology, but it is not a panacea.

This volume reflects the challenges, as well as the successes, of a critical approach to area studies. It was eight years after the conference that the book was finally published, suggesting the considerable effort the project directors’ commitment to collaborative work has entailed. Doing area studies in this collaborative model is clearly no easy task. The theory section of the book is strongly postmodernist in orientation, with a vigorous strain of neo-Marxist political economy represented in Dirlik’s chapter. Lewis, as well, rehearses the valuable challenge of his and Kären Wigen’s notable redaction of new geography in *The Myth of Continents*. And, Neil Smith invites us to separate “area knowledge” from the politically funded, nation-state-oriented “area studies” of our current universities. All sound warnings and offer tools for overcoming essentialist or colonial assumptions. However, in the process the theorist nearly completely ignores culture and identity. However “constructed” or subject to power-politics these may be they do, after all, play a significant role in area studies. Finally, the difficulties in giving due attention to localities in Asia and the Pacific are reflected in the institutional section of the book which could only really focus on two (Japan and Singapore) in any specificity. This volume alone may not have changed the field, but it provides the stimulus and useful suggestions to empower others to carry on the experiment.

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