

Introduction

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Abstract

The Introduction firstly explains how transimperial history has emerged. Secondly, it outlines the particularities of *modern* transimperial history (vis-à-vis *early modern* transimperial history), in so far as those particularities matter to the issue of knowledge formation. Thirdly and most importantly, it reflects on six aspects of transimperial knowledge that feature in this volume's chapters. These include two descriptive comments on the transimperial knowledge formators and the texts "themselves," as it were. Then, the text makes four more interpretative comments, on background, enabling factors, space, and transformations that occur when transimperial knowledge is created.

Human history has known a wide variety of polity forms, including tribal federations, city states, and, most recently, nation-states. But certainly for the last 2,500 years, empires have been the politically most powerful form, and economically and culturally truly influential to boot.

Sure, some scholars think that the term "empire" has become inflationary, and there is some disagreement about what is and is not an empire.¹ But many agree on at least some of the following traits: empires do not just seek to extract profits but also rule politically, usually at least in principle from a metropolitan center and always with the help of intermediaries; make universalistic claims; are spatially expansive; contain heterogeneous peoples and spaces; and treat those peoples and spaces unequally.² Many also agree that those common traits overarch diverse

¹ Yuri Pines with Michal Biran and Jörg Rüpke, "Introduction: Empires and their Space," in *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5–6.

² Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); George Steinmetz, "The Sociology of Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonialism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014), 77–103; John MacKenzie, "The British Empire: Ramshackle or Rampaging? A Historiographical Reflection," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43:1 (2015), 101, relating the definition he used when working as Editor-in-Chief of the Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Empire. Political-military dominance (rather than economic profit): Osterhammel, "Imperien," 60. On definitional disagreements, see Yuri Pines with Michal Biran and Jörg Rüpke, "Introduction: Empires and their Space," in *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5–6; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "What, Exactly, is an Empire?," in *Connected Histories* (London: Verso, 2022), 104–105; and Marc Beissinger, "Rethinking Empire in the Wake of Soviet Collapse," in *Ethnic Politics after*

“repertoires” of rule and diachronic changes meant to adapt to new contexts. Prasenjit Duara has talked of “family resemblance.”³

Although some *common* fundamental attributes of empires are agreed upon by scholars today, historically, men and women of the pen have been influential legitimizers of *specific* empires. Legitimization has come in different forms. Especially before the modern period, it often was explicit. Scholars, poets, painters, and musicians working for an imperial court lionized “their” emperor (a practice common also in non-imperial princely or royal courts, and at imperial courts also in the modern period). Legitimization could also be more implicit. Especially in modern Europe, many scholarly and non-scholarly texts stressed the distinctiveness of “their” empire and treated them as a distinct unit in space and time rather than as part of an interlocking world. Such texts practiced a sort of “methodological imperialism,” a close cousin of methodological nationalism.⁴

This approach has been in name or at least in effect critiqued for a good time now. Related approaches did not begin in the historiography of Western—that is, European and the US—empires, but, rather, of non-Western empires.

For one thing, in 1997, an early modernist, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, called for entangled histories of early modern Eurasia, including its empires.⁵ Put differently,

Communism, ed. Z. Barany and R. Moser (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 14–45 (a subjective definition, which in turn is criticized, e.g., by Dominic Lieven, *Empire* (London: John Murray, 2000), 6). For an overview of various definitions, see Peter Fibiger Bang, “Empire—A World History,” in *The Oxford World History of Empire*, ed. Fibiger Bang, C.A. Bayly, and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), II:15. *Ibid.*, II:21, identifies four “themes” that “define ... current theories of empire” (my italics): “(a) an economic strategy to monopolize markets, (b) a form of aristocratic class interest, (c) an ideological system and mode of identity formation, and finally, (d) an expression of interstate competition.” For universalism, see Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, ed., *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For “governing” and not just “profiting,” see also and perhaps most interestingly the literature on early modern imperial chartered companies: now classic: Philip Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford 2011); and *Itinerario* special issue 39:3 (2015), especially on the Dutch case.

³ Quotes: Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 16; Prasenjit Duara, “Empire and imperialism,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy and Andrew Sartori (London: John Wiley & Son, 2014), 384. Similarly, Peter Fibiger Bang spoke of “deep commonalities in the imperial condition” while emphasizing also “historically alternating rhythm”: idem, “Empire—A World History,” II:5, 48. And see Jürgen Osterhammel, “Imperien,” in *Transnationale Geschichte*, ed. Gunilla Bude, Sebastian Conrad, Oliver Janz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 2010), 64, for “differences”—or, rather, variations—like the relative importance of bureaucracy and the degree of orientation to the sea.

⁴ Quote: Bernhard Schär, “From Batticaloa via Basel to Berlin. Transimperial Science in Ceylon and Beyond around 1900,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48:2 (2020), 232.

⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31:3 (1997), 735–62.

although pre-modernist historians did not use the term “transimperial,” certainly not at first, they became interested in histories that in effect were transimperial a decade and a half before modernists. This was fundamentally because the real and perceived power difference between Western and non-Western empires was minimal if not simply non-existent in the early modern period.⁶

For another thing, historians of non-Western empires in the *modern* period—which we define broadly as having begun during a long “saddle time” from the last third of the eighteenth to the first third of the nineteenth century⁷—have studied them *not* in separation from other empires for many decades. The reason is simple. Modern non-Western empires were in no position to believe that they were truly distinct, let alone separate. Thus, in Asia, at the latest by the middle third of the nineteenth century, Western empires’ meddling in the very heartlands of empires on that immense continent was such that (however hierarchical) “interactions” could not be denied. Indeed, certainly by the twentieth century, scholars of Asian (and African) empires took a position that was in effect the reverse of that of scholars of Western empires. If the latter framed “their” empires as subjects and as distinct boxes, the former saw theirs as objects subjugated by “the West” and emulating it. Nonetheless, they, unlike their “Western” counterparts, at least recognized interactions between (yes: unequal) empires as a key feature of those empires *themselves*. Moreover, as of late, some historians are showing that non-Western empires did not just play defense but tried to stay on the offense using various tools and tactics.⁸

What about modern Western empires? In 1978, Edward Said argued that “[E]very single empire in its official discourse has said that is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special.”⁹ But for better or worse, he treated different literatures in separation: French texts here, British ones there, plus American ones. Then, from the 1980s, the hub-and-spokes view of empires—a metropole at the center, which entertains rather one-way relations with separate colonies—that underlay

⁶ See, e.g., Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 148; for a case, the Ottoman Empire, see Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1997–98), 30–75.

⁷ We here follow broadly the periodization used in Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 [2009]), 45–76.

⁸ Cyrus Schayegh, *Modern Transimperial History: An Introduction* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press), chs. 3 (“Comparisons”) and 4 (“Power”). For the Ottoman case, see, e.g., Aimee Genell, “The Well-defended Domains: Eurocentric International Law and the Making of the Ottoman Office of Legal Counsel,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3:2 (2016), 255–75; Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Lale Can, *Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Haj at the End of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), xxi.

methodological imperialism came under fire, especially by the earliest generation of scholars who came to form the New Imperial History. In the 1990s, Véronique Dimier, who has contributed a chapter to this volume, was one of the first historians who began to do research that empirically showed how and why British writers from the late 1800s constructed “their” empire in distinction from the French one, and vice versa.¹⁰ In the 1990s, too, an edited volume was published that originated in discussions in the 1980s, and that soon became a classic for students of empire: *Tensions of Empire* (1997). Questioning the empire-legitimizing convention of treating a metropole and its colonies separately, co-editors, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laure Stoler, called on scholars to treat the two as a joint analytical field.¹¹ And as part of this move, Cooper and Stoler also noted that empires should not necessarily be studied in separation—that overlaps and interactions, also beyond competition, were worth investigating.¹² In 2001, Stoler defended the value of studying comparisons by turning them from a method into an object of historical investigation, identifying empires’ “politics of comparison” with other empires as a key *modus operandi* of that polity.¹³ And again in the early 2000s, various texts pushed beyond center-periphery, hub-and-spokes conceptualizations of the metro-colonial relationship—an “opening” of the imperial “box” itself that helps opening the box to the outside, as it were. Thus, in 2001, Tony Ballantyne employed the term “web” to conceptualize how Aryanism developed between New Zealand, India, and Britain in the late 1800s. In 2002, historical geographer, Alan Lester, invoked “circuits” of empire that far transcended the metropole. And in 2007, Stoler, Carol McGranahan, and Peter Purdue called for thinking less of empires and more of changing “imperial formations.”¹⁴

Together, the above-noted approaches—conceptual and intellectual shifts within the field of single-Western-empire studies since the 1990s and earlier accounts of how non-Western modern empires interacted with Western ones—have

¹⁰ Véronique Dimier, *Le gouvernement des colonies, regards croisés franco-britanniques* (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 2004).

¹¹ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Introduction,” in *Tensions of Empire*, ed. idem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56. Classic studies soon followed; see, e.g., Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹² Cooper and Stoler, “Introduction,” 13, 28–29.

¹³ Historians of nation-states and national movements had for some time made similar points. Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88:3 (2001), 829–65.

¹⁴ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002), 25–48; Ann Laura Stoler, Carol McGranahan, and Peter Purdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007).

formed the necessary foundations of, and constitute multiple genealogies for, transimperial history.¹⁵

Per se, however, transimperial history defined as a perspective of the past that studies both governmental and non-governmental relations across empires¹⁶ is relatively recent. It has begun to take shape since the early 2010s: in conferences,¹⁷ blogs,¹⁸ programmatic articles,¹⁹ and far-ranging edited volumes.²⁰

This is where this edited volume comes in. It focuses on a key issue in transimperial history: knowledge formation, with an eye particularly to the roles and workings of *intermediaries* from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, with one chapter taking us to the early postcolonial period.

The volume comprises nine chapters. The first four chapters pivot around an individual. We begin with a chapter, by Marc Palen, on the German-American economist, Friedrich List's 1841 classic neo-mercantilist *The National System of Political*

¹⁵ On a related note, an oft-cited introductory text has noted that "a transimperial approach would ... give non-European empires—such as the Ottoman, the Chinese or Japanese—more space:" Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History—Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16:4 (2018), 430. Also: Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski, "Introduction: Encounters of Empires. Methodological Approaches," in *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870–1930: Empires and Encounters*, ed. idem (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3–33.

¹⁶ Put differently, like some fellow travelers such as Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, I believe that a distinction between governmental and non-governmental actions is both empirically and conceptually well-nigh impossible to make. Drawing a lesson from scholars who have come to regret the division between "international" and "transnational" history—think of Erez Manela, "International Society as a Historical Subject" *Diplomatic History* 44 (2020), 184–209—I will exclusively use the term "transimperial." For one thing, the preposition *trans* (across) suits our field much more than *inter* (between). When we use *inter* in a story, we imply the existence of *separate and for the purpose of the story, uniform* entities. This does not work for empires. They are by definition multi-form; moreover, historians of the most varied modern empires have time and again shown that metropolitan ministries pulled in different directions; and the call to study "metropole and colonies in a single analytical field" highlights not the least intra-imperial inequalities. For another thing, governmental and societal actors who were engaged in relationships across empires affected each other such that it is impossible to sort their actions into two distinct interimperial inter-governmental and transimperial trans-societal sets.

¹⁷ E.g., <https://www.transimperialhistory.com>; <https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/modern-transimperial-and-interimperial-histories-forms-questions-prospects-o>.

¹⁸ <https://www.transimperialhistory.com/>.

¹⁹ Hedinger and Heé, "Transimperial History."

²⁰ James Fichter, "Britain and France, Connected Empires," in *British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Middle East: Connected Empires across the 18th to the 20th Centuries*, ed. idem (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1–16; Barth and Cvetkovski, *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer*; Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, ed., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

Economy. Palen focuses on this text's reception across various empires throughout the long nineteenth century, highlighting the sheer range of interpretations, the importance of translations, and how in those translations, interpretative prefaces helped frame for readers why List matters. Chapter 2 takes place during the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War. Jenny Day examines the double dealings of Wang Zhichun, who leveraged his deep acquaintance with the Qing court, local Chinese officials, and Europeans during a sensitive war-time mission to multiple European imperial metropolises, and in the process toured, and wrote an interpretative account of, European weapons manufacturers, too. In Chapter 3, Ulrike Lindner examines the early years of *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*. Distributed from London by the German-South-African-British Jewish publisher Leo Weinthal, this magazine collated news from across colonial Africa, which helped to sharpen a common, racially based transimperial sense of identity among urban middle- and upper-class whites in Africa. Chapter 4, by Ulrike von Hirschhausen, focuses on Silas Hardoon, an Ottoman Jew who in 1874 migrated to the Chinese treaty port of Shanghai. He married a Chinese woman, became a British Protected Person, and amassed riches and influence by developing a fine-grained knowledge of the city's real estate and by straddling its European institutions and Chinese sociocultural networks.

The last five chapters cover different socio-professional groups. In Chapter 5, Alexander Morrison focuses on Russian military officers in the 1800s. He shows how during tours especially of the French empire's colonies and through other forms of contacts, they—and some other Russians—reflected on other empires' military-colonial administration; how their specialized (and other, general) journals served as a platform for their thinking and exchanged information with similar European journals; how they thought about neighboring non-European empires; and how other Europeans framed a presumably distinct Russian style of colonial warfare. Chapter 6, by Jiajia Liu and William Robert Kelson, examines how Chinese financial intermediaries in the later nineteenth century used, and profited from, detailed knowledge to bring together European banks and governmental and private Chinese loan applicants; and shows how their knowledge structured the nature of private loan letters, so-called chops. In Chapter 7, Florian Wagner focuses on influential academics such as the Frenchman Louis Massignon, who were associated with the *Institut Colonial International* (ICI), which was founded in 1893. Extending his analysis into the interwar years, Wagner shows how those academics and other ICI members leveraged their training and connections in their and other colonies to advocate for the re-vitalization and craft guilds and rural cooperatives throughout the colonial world. Chapter 8, by Patrick Bernhard, focuses on British journalists as well as think tankers and some government officials in the 1930s, with a glance also into the post-World War II period. He demonstrates how those journalists both interpreted and amplified a considerable fascination in Britain and in white dominions with fascist Italy's aggressively state-led colonization projects in

its African colonies. Last but not least, in Chapter 9, Véronique Dimier takes us to the 1950s–70s. Focusing on British and French historians and looking also at postcolonial economic development specialists, she shows how they fundamentally replicated colonial-time views about the presumed clear distinction between formal French and informal British colonial administration and the latter’s presumed superiority.

Examining a range of individuals and socioprofessional groups and tying together not only European actors but also European and non-European actors, this volume’s nine chapters collectively showcase the variety of modern transimperial knowledge formations. Before offering some reflections on those chapters, let me take a step back, and add a general note on transimperial relations in the modern period in which these chapters play out, i.e., roughly the mid-1800s to the mid- to late 1900s.

This note matters because, as we will see, the *general* range of varied transimperial relations is refracted in *concrete* transimperial knowledge formations, including in histories that involve societal actors.

The most important point to be made—the bottomline, really—of transimperial relations in the modern period is that whether, in reality or perception, there was a much clearer difference than in the early modern period in the power and status between Western, i.e., European and the US, empires and non-Western ones. This relative, not absolute difference to the early modern period showed transimperiality in two principal ways. First, intertwined patterns of competition and cooperation between Western empires became more common, more accentuated, and more momentous. And second, Western empires now directly intervened in non-Western empires—often on and across their territories and in their economies and governments—in ways that eclipsed early modern patterns. In turn, non-Western counter-interventions—what James Gelvin has called “defensive developmentalism”—became exceedingly common.²¹

This fundamental pattern, while real, is a generalization, however. It needs to be qualified. First, the sense that the whole world is bifurcated into a Western and a non-Western group of empires²² fully crystallized only during the second half of the nineteenth century. Before, certainly non-Western imperial subjects and governments did not believe that they necessarily have much in common.

²¹ Quote: James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73. Relatedly, Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Empires* (Munich: Beck, 2023), 407, invoke “defensive agency.” For intervention and counterintervention going hand in hand, see Schayegh, *Modern Transimperial History*, ch. 2 (“Facets”).

²² These two groups would comprise polities that ultimately remained subaltern to empires through the 1940s, including nation-states.

Empire-specific religious and/or universalizing civilizational identities were much too exclusive (and became *less* exclusive by the late 1800s).

On a related note, second, even in the late 1800s at least one empire, Japan's, did *not* see itself as simply a member of the non-Western bloc. Sure, it emphasized its difference from racist Europeans and Americans to stress its own attraction to other non-Western empires and their populations. But as importantly, certainly at home but also abroad, it stressed that it was different, and indeed better, than other non-Western empires, including China; this fact showed not the least in its ability to enter an alliance of sorts with the British Empire in 1902. As a consequence, many Japanese thought that their empire led much of the non-Western imperial world, and non-Westerners should accept it as a, if not *the*, leader.

Third, sometimes, cooperation and/or competition between Western empires turned interventionist; think of the US war against Spain in 1898. And Western imperial interventions in non-Western empires on the ground led to cooperative and even competitive patterns between Western and non-Western imperial actors, too. Thus, Britain's Opium Wars forced Qing China literally at gun point to open certain port cities to British and soon other Western state and imperial actors. But to function properly, these actors were forced to systemically cooperate with the most varied Chinese actors, who sometimes became competitors, too.

Fourth, in European eyes, key Asian (but not African) empires persisted in, or civilizationaly echoed through, modern times. Yes, Europeans did not see them as their equals. But even so, some Asians continued to call them names that upheld their distinction if not superiority. In Qing China, imperial-status-conscious Europeans objected to being called *yi*, which they interpreted to exclusively mean "barbarian."²³ Moreover, Asian empires' cultural production, including vast bodies of written literature and imposing representational buildings like the Taj Mahal, were so impressive and in tune with fundamental European civilizational standards, and so age-old and sometimes known in "Europe" since Antiquity, that they complicated European arguments that they were backward and simply and categorically inferior.²⁴

Last, modern Western empires did not look at themselves and at each other as equals. For one thing, there were, among Western empires, two powerful newcomers who were rising fast, which created some concern among all others: the United States and Germany. And for another thing, there were multiple (ways of seeing) inequalities between European empires. One was geographical: here, a northwestern European core—most centrally, Britain, France, and the Netherlands—was

²³ Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 31–68.

²⁴ See, e.g., Phiroze Vasunia, "Akbar's Dream: The Mughal Emperor in Nineteenth-Century Literature," in *Regimes of Comparatism*, in *Regimes of Comparatism*, ed. Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 284–317.

juxtaposed to empires who were (seen to be) at Europe's periphery and hence perhaps not *really that solidly* European: Russia (a bit Asian!?) in the east and Italy, Spain, and Portugal in the south. Another purported inequality was racial: Anglo-Saxons of different stripes—including America and Germany—were by the late 1800s seen to trump Latins and Slavs. On top, within each group, there were purported inequalities and claims to superiority, too: some Frenchmen “recognized” Britain's superiority but framed their country as the big sister of all Latins.

What insights do this volume's nine chapters hold for our understanding of transimperial knowledge formation, then? Our answer begins with two descriptive comments on the transimperial knowledge formators and the texts “themselves,” as it were—comments that are rather self-evident but need spelling out for clarity's sake. Then, we make four more interpretative comments, on background, enabling factors, space, and the transformations that occur when transimperial knowledge is created. Together, it is hoped, these points will broaden how transimperial historians have thought about the topic of knowledge,²⁵ including the role played by intermediaries.²⁶

²⁵ Historians of transimperial cooperations have been especially interested in knowledge. To be more precise, cooperation as a research “perspective has been especially fertile ... in the history of medicine, natural sciences, and humanities.” (Quote: Laurent Derdyvère, Patrick Farges, Indravati Félicité & Élisabeth Goudin, “Introduction,” in *Transimpérialités contemporaines / Moderne Transimperialitäten: Rivalités, contacts, émulation / Rivalitäten, Kontakte, Wetteifer*, ed. idem (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 19. For the social sciences, see also Jeremy Adelman, ed., *Empire and the Social Sciences* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).) This was the case basically because knowledge indeed was a central theme in a transimperial cooperation in the modern period. This, in turn, was the case because the need to economically develop colonies and, in the case of land empires, frontier regions, became ever more important in the modern period: for economic reasons, and as importantly as the central ideological justification for imperial rule over colonies and hinterlands and, in fact, as the ultimate marker of *successful* colonization. Historiographically, this interest in knowledge has built on historians' keen interest, since the 1990s, not anymore in how “the West” spread modern science to “the rest”—see, e.g., George Basalla, “The Spread of Western Science,” *Science* 156 (1967), 611–22 (reflection: Marwa Elshakry, “When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections,” *Isis* 101 (2010), 98–109)—but, rather in how “symbiotic” a manner empire and science have evolved (quote: Andrew Goss, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, ed. idem (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 1.) Pushing further: Pratik Chakrabarty, “Situating the Empire in the History of Science,” in *Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, 10–20. Origins text: Paolo Palladino and Michael Worboys, “Science and Imperialism,” *Isis* 84, no. 1 (1993), 91–102. An early, now classical edited volume was John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); and a now classical monograph is Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Key works include Benjamin Lawrance et al., ed., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and Richard

The first descriptive point concerns the fact that a quite enormous range of textual objects were involved in, i.e., materially underpinned and carried, transimperial knowledge formations. In this volume, these textual objects include Liu and Kelson's bank chops; the manifold prefaces and postscripts that translators of List's classic (and/or their financiers) added to their translations (Palen); Wagner's internal, unpublished ICI reports; Lindner's journal; Bernhard's British newspapers (and his think tank pieces and government reports); Morrison's specialized military journals, the influential "so-called 'thick' journals," and their "reciprocal relationship" for instance with British military and general-geographical journals, which all "published translations of each other's articles"; travelogues (Morrison; Day); and Dimier's Anglo- and Francophone historical monographs and other books.

Second, the knowledge formators in evidence in the chapters fall broadly speaking into two categories. One category involves people who bring together, on the face of it through *their* initiative, information about two or more empires that were spatially separated. Put differently, respective stories involved people from empires that were (seen to be) *roughly* of the same power and status and hence did not systematically territorially intervene in each other's affairs, but rather cooperated/competed. Examples are Palen's Western-imperial translators of List, Lindner's *African World-Cape Cairo Express* covering multiple European colonies, Morrison's Russian officers who were in touch, e.g., with French counterparts, Wagner's multi-European ICI members, Bernhard's British journalists covering Italian colonization schemes, and Dimier's British and French historians. However, as importantly, in each account, there are *gradations* in power and status, too, which create frictions that are central to each story.

Antaramyan: *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), on the Ottoman Empire; Stephen Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020) on Russia; Sherman Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks: Western, Japanese, and Chinese Corporations in China, 1880-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), John Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), and Kaori Abe, *Chinese Middlemen in Hong Kong's Colonial Economy, 1830-1890* (London: Routledge, 2017), on Qing China. From a different, "professional" perspective, see, e.g., the literature on consuls. Two examples include Jeffrey Dyer, "Pan-Islamic Propagandists or Professional Diplomats?: The Ottoman Consular Establishment in the Colonial Indian Ocean," in *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law*, ed. Lâle Can et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), and Nicole Phelps, "One service, three systems, many empires: the U.S. consular service and the growth of U.S. global power, 1789-1924," in Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires*. For a quite different case that is grounded in the (later) early modern period and then falls apart around 1800, see the classic Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

The other category comprises actors who bridge between people from two (or more) empires who came to live face to face. The—however quite varied—examples here are Liu and Kelson's Chinese financial intermediaries, von Hirschhausen's Hardoon, and Jenny Day's Wang Zhichun. These cases correspond to realities in which some empires directly intervened in another one—here: Europeans in China—but in which actors from all empires involved cooperated with each other for varied reasons. These transimperial knowledge creators correspond to an argument that Sanjay Subrahmanyam developed in his Afterthought to the 2009 edited volume *The Brokered World*: “The mere existence of transactions ... is certainly not sufficient to create the go-between. In order for that to happen, the transactions must ... be characterized by forms of friction. The go-between is born of this transactional friction. The go-between is thus the third party in a transaction where the two other parties ... are themselves incapable of completing it in the absence of mediation. ... The go-between thus emerged in a world of imperfect information. ... Information here ... is portrayed as an asset that yields returns.”²⁷ What *differs* from Subrahmanyam's argument, of course, is the fact that the two parties that that knowledge formator brought together were *not* equal in power.

This brings us to our four interpretative comments. The first one concerns background. In each and every chapter, actors from one empire initiated a knowledge-based transimperial relationship with people from other empires as a result of either a rather long-term structural development or of a specific event. Put differently, a transimperial relationship did not “just” happen in a vacuum. There were complex and multiple backgrounds, even causes. In our chapters, specific events are in evidence most clearly in Day's chapter (the 1894/95 Sino-Japanese War) and twice in Palen, who notes that List's *National System* was a direct reply to the British turn to free trade in the 1840s, and that the book's protectionist and Anglophobic message became really transimperially popular following the onset of the Long Depression in 1873 among Britain's less industrially advanced rivals. Meanwhile, long-term structural developments are at play in Morrison's chapter (the question of how to administer new large Muslim-majority lands conquered in Central Asia, aka “the Muslim Question”); Lindner (the need to hone transimperial white racial solidarity); Wagner (interwar ICI members' double fear about capitalism and communism); Bernard (British migration and demographic issues); and Dimier (the problems posed by decolonization).

Secondly, *all* transimperial knowledge creators seem to have enjoyed a varying combination of three (certainly equally varying) “enabling factors” that facilitated or underpinned their work. One factor concerned languages. Wagner mentions

²⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Some Afterthoughts,” in *The Brokered World*, ed. Simon Shaffer et al. (Sagamore Beach: Watson, 2009), 430, 432.

the importance of French as a scholarly lingua franca into the interwar period. Lindner's *African World-Cape Cairo Express* evidently assumed that many potential interested readers in colonial Africa would be able to read English as a lingua franca (in parallel to French?). Liu and Kelson's financial intermediaries knew local Chinese dialects and some English or pidgin. Morrison notes that many Russian officers' fluency in English, French, and German underpinned their ability to engage with related empires. Bernard shows that the fascist Italian empire offered translation help to British journalists covering state-led migration movements. Translations play a central role in Palen's account of the fate of List's classic. And to end with a counterpoint, von Hirschhausen notes that Hardoon, like a few select other Ottoman Jews sent to work in East Asia in the late 1800s, used Judeo-Arabic as a secret language, here for trade.

The other two enabling factors somewhat blend but can be separated for heuristic purposes. It appears that most if not all successful transimperial knowledge formators honed, and had access to, *both* institutions *and* informal, non-institutionalized personal networks. Palen's List nurtured friendships with influential politicians such as Adolph Thiers; but his classic became more visible through the efforts, in the late 1800s, of the German Historical School, which radiated all the way to Japan and, from there, to China, to cite one example. The extensive personal contacts of Liu and Kelson's actors allowed them to properly gauge local and regional businessmen's creditworthiness; but they had privileged access to banks, too, and solved problems at the Sino-foreign Mixed Courts. Lindner's *African World-Cape Cairo Express* entertained correspondents across Africa *and* had access to key print and financial media institutions in London. Von Hirschhausen's Hardoon nourished a most astonishingly intricate social world with Chinese friends, peers, and acquaintances, but simultaneously served on several Western Shanghai municipal councils and enjoyed the protection of the legal institution called "British Protected Person." Day's Wang entertained the strongest of ties with local gentry officials from Southern China *and* with the Chinese Foreign Ministry, among other institutions. Wagner's ICI members came from a rather homogeneous social background that facilitated interaction, *and* they were able to mobilize sprawling academic and colonial administrative institutions for their studies. And, to add a last example, many of Dimier's historians knew each other while at the selfsame time enjoying financial and status-related support from academic institutions including Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and the Collège de France.

A perhaps particularly tantalizing insight may be that gained from reading Morrison, Day, and Liu and Kelson side by side: in all cases, transimperial knowledge creators did *not* come from a well-established, secure, and hence perhaps risk-averse background. Rather, many of Morrison's Russian officers came from "humbler backgrounds" and were "hungry" for success; Liu and Kelson's Hu never

earned a degree under the imperial examination system. And Day's Wang did not pass the Qing Civil Service Examination. In fact, she notes that his "story shows that the Sino-Japanese War was not exclusively a conflict between empires but also represented a transimperial moment of networking, opportunity-seeking, and knowledge-making by men occupying lower levels of the official echelon."

Thirdly, regarding space, two generalizations can be made about the chapters. All involve multiple spaces; and in all cases those spaces are of different types, or, put differently, these spaces evince fascinating differences in function and power. In Day's chapter, multiple Chinese embassies in Europe are a key space—and are connected with multiple different spaces in China, i.e., not just the capital city of Beijing and its Foreign Ministry but also local officials who entertained unofficial relationships with certain diplomats and emissaries. In Bernhard's chapter, London-based newspapers play a central role in gathering, processing, and distributing news about Italy: "Quite a few news editors between Vancouver and Sydney followed the prestigious Times and printed an abridged version of the essay." At the same time, however, some non-British journalists from dominions visited Italy and its colonies on their own. London was an information-processing hub for the journal that Lindner covers, too. List's ability, in Palen's chapter, to develop his neo-mercantilist argument in the first place relied to a considerable degree on the fact that he was not "just" a German but also a US-American *and* lived for years in France, too. In Hirschhausen's chapter, Shanghai is central: Haroon barely moves—because he was able to reliably pull to himself and into his estates economic, cultural, and political actors from across China and beyond. Morrison's Russian officers framed comparable Muslim borderlands like Algeria and Central Asia as object-spaces to be comprehended and mastered; and they performed this move partly by visiting those spaces, partly by meeting in European capitals with peers, and partly by exchanging information via journals in a joint if unequally organized and also in this sense fluid Western information space. And in Liu and Kelson's chapter, financial intermediaries' offices brought together two spaces: the Western-penetrated port treaty cities and "their" often also rural hinterlands.

Fourthly and lastly, as important as the sheer range of these textual objects is the fact that they did their transimperial knowledge formation work in very different ways. Palen's prefaces and postscripts presumably argued from the margin (of the translation) but in effect could be said to be center stage, and were very explicit to boot. By contrast, the whole beauty about Liu and Kelson's bank chops, certainly the earlier version until the 1880s, was that they were extremely short if not vague. The transimperial knowledge was basically stored in the head (and perhaps some notes) of the transimperial financial broker, *not* in the chop itself. Lindner's journal fundamentally functioned like an alchemist. It sought to create gold—a (new) overall all-white European-wide high-status transimperial

identity—by throwing into one single pot, i.e., covering side by side, most often very banal and mundane tidbits of information from this or that individual European empire’s African colony: a work of “comparison,” as Lindner notes. In Wagner’s chapter, we come across ICI members who “regarding Islam ... claimed to know it better than Muslim intellectuals, having a bird-eyes view on the different schools of law present in different empires.” That is, they determinedly discerned, from up high, deep patterns that evaded the empirical, case-obsessed, narrow minds of this or that specific Muslim community. Some of Morrison’s officers saw a fundamental similarity—and hence, a similar threat!—between North African “dervishism” and Russian-Muslim Sufi orders. Day notes that while touring Europe’s armament industries, Wang held that *all* “European militaries developed according to the principle that ‘the best defense is to attack’ (*yigong weishou*) and ‘spar[ed] no effort’ (*buyi yuli*). This approach stemmed from the proximity of European powers, wherein any sign of weakness could be exploited by a neighbor.” Put differently, he made a sweeping generalization that was based on a reading of all European powers as being locked into one common (in)security system. Last but not least, Bernhard’s British journalists did not “just” objectively report on Italy. Rather, as he details, they were knee-deep engaged in transimperial framing and interpreting Italy’s moves, which not the least had what Bernhard calls a crucial amplifier function (and, one might add, a framing function as well).

Building on the above comment, it seems that transimperial knowledge formations always involve some combination of two operations. They assemble a bricolage of “facts” and data. And then, using this or that universalizing yardstick, they create sometimes more and sometimes less sweeping generalizations, that is new transimperial knowledge formations. This operation formed a complex process that we may call commensurabilization. In it, certain facts and data were marginalized if not simply cut from view, while other facts and data were framed to be central and determined to be similar enough to be put into one single commensurable frame. Put differently, this process was inherently shaped by its actors’ power to make and carry out certain knowledge-related and -forming decisions. And this power—however varied and uncertain and in need of constant reinforcement and whatever the downstream consequences on the “consumers” of such transimperial knowledge—this power fundamentally reflected the uneven and uncertain yet definitely existing power relations more broadly across empires in the modern period.

To conclude, while many empirical cases, methodological approaches, and conceptual viewpoints to do with transimperial knowledge formation remain to be explored, it is our conviction that the following chapters individually and collectively point out some fascinating issues, raise tantalizing questions, and point to promising future directions for research.

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