INTRODUCTION: ENCIRCLING THE OCEAN

What stories from Asia to Oceania to the Americas make up Pacific history?

Along the shores of Baja California, sixteenth-century porcelain from East Asia turns up in archeological digs, along with timbers and containers marking the resting place of great Spanish galleons that sailed with cargoes of treasure, silk, and slaves drawn from the Malabar coastline, Portuguese Macao, southern Japan, and the Philippines in transits from Manila across the Mariana Islands to the Americas.

Off the Malaysian and Indonesian coastlines stand *kelong*, fishermen's houses, raised on stilts of timber and lashed with rattan. They sit out in the waters, some within sight of the marketplace or the mosque, between land and sea on mud flats submerged by the tides, places for fishing and spawning cockles.

On the island of Tonga, a woman named Alisi contemplates her life. As a young girl, she dreamed of being a Catholic nun in her village. Instead, she met a man part Tongan, part Samoan, who had a wife and children living in Hawai'i. Alisi had two children with him and lived with her parents and endured the talk of the village, eventually emigrating to the United States and marrying an older man from Mexico with a residency card.

On June 30, 1997, the former British Empire sent Prime Minister Tony Blair with Prince Charles, representing the Queen of England, to Hong Kong, to sit on a stage with Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, the president and premier of the People's Republic of China. With great solemnity, the Prince of Wales read a speech and watched as the British

and Hong Kong colonial flags were lowered. At midnight on July 1, the Chinese flag was raised.

In 2006, a new Auckland museum exhibition opened. Assembled by leading scholars, the interior space was a graceful dome that evoked the canopy of the skies and housed the museum's noted collection of Oceanian, especially Maori, cultural pieces in a technological environment: projections of waves for the visitors to experience, electronic winds and wayfinding programs against the carved prows of ancient canoes. The exhibition itself would also voyage, traveling to Japan, Taiwan, Australia, the Netherlands, and North America before returning.[1]

Imagining the history of Pacific worlds is not the same as locating the Pacific Ocean and then identifying the lands, littorals, and islands within its embrace. For Pacific worlds are not synonymous with just one declared and defined "Pacific," but with multiple seas, cultures, and peoples, and especially the overlapping transits between them.

This is a simple, but important point. The "Pacific" became a named feature encompassing one third of the globe after navigator Ferdinand de Magellan crossed the gigantic blue ocean in the sixteenth century as a legendary exploit of the European Age of Discovery. Yet, what if we do not first approach the Pacific in this way, as an immense space to cross? We might instead see it as a historical assemblage of smaller elements: interlocking navigations, migrations, and settlements within regions linked intermittently from the Philippines and the South China Sea, Sulawesi and the Sunda Islands, and the Banda and Tasman seas. The power of naming the "Pacific" imposed an encompassing European vision of endless water on the diverse particulars of Palauan atolls, the Eon Woerr (over the coral) of the Marshalls, the Japanese Nan'yo (South Seas), or the *moana* of the Maori and the Hawaiians.

The "Pacific" has been reimagined many times by historians, from tales of ancient voyagers, to Magellan's space of transit, to an Enlightenment theater of sensual paradise, to a strategic grid of labor movements and military "island hopping," to a capitalist basin, the key to a Pacific Century of emerging wealth and "globalization" at the end of the last millennium.[2] In a formidable multi-volume survey of a generation ago, the geographer and historian Oskar Spate suggested "there was not, and could not be, any concept 'Pacific' until the limits and lineaments of the Ocean were set: and this was undeniably the

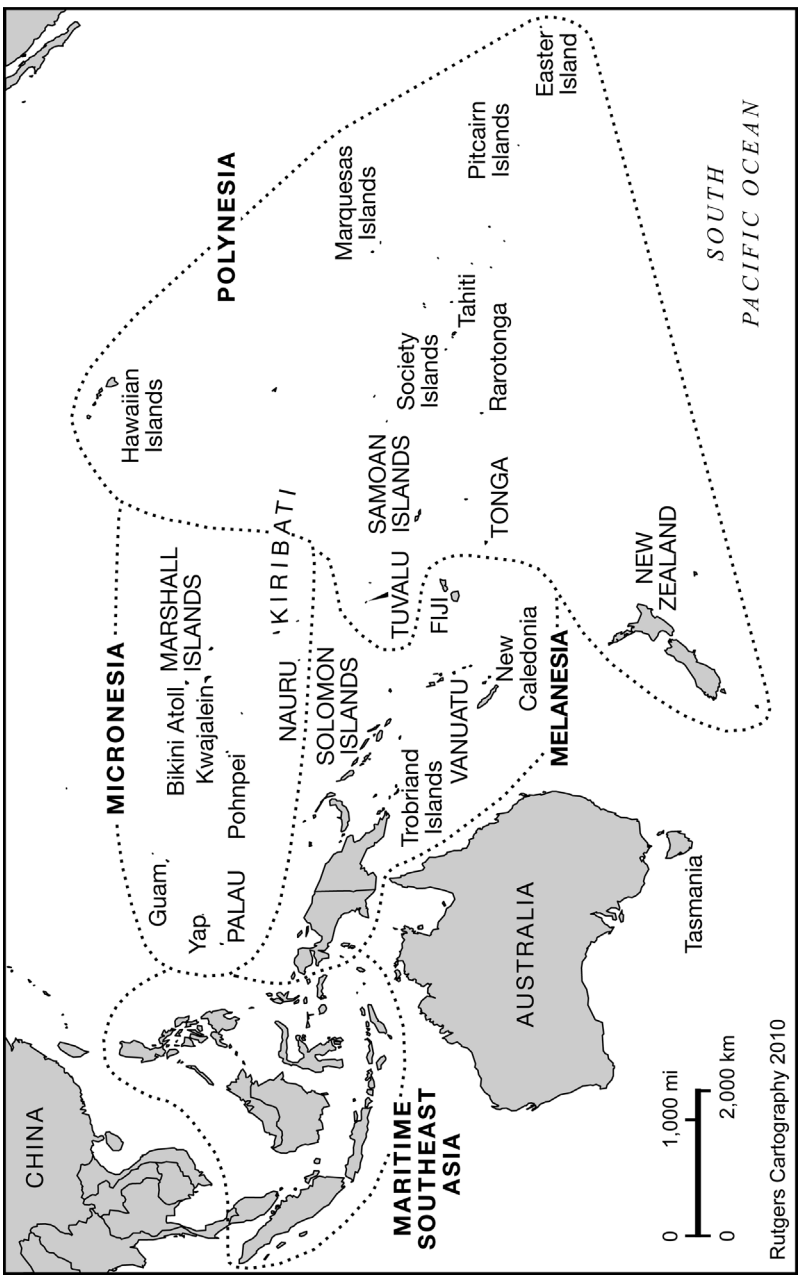
work of Europeans." This had been long true for conventions describing the peoples and boundaries of the great ocean.

In 1831, the French explorer Jules Dumont D'Urville suggested designating three regions of Pacific islands. One was the home of hundreds of distinct tribal societies and languages that flourished in jungles and mountain valleys, and across beaches from the Solomons, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia to Papua New Guinea. These he called Melanesia, for what he thought were the "dark" complexions of the inhabitants. Atoll and small island cultures in stunning multiplicity around the Marianas nearer Taiwan and the Philippines he called Micronesia. Islands from Tonga and Samoa to Hawai'i, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the impassive stone moai figures gazing out from Rapa Nui Easter Island became conventionally known as Polynesia, with related languages and aristocratic polities.

The names have stayed, been misused to collectively stereotype very dissimilar peoples, and have also been appropriated by those same peoples as parts of their own historical identities. *Melanesia* is a clearly racialized construct, yet it did not prevent the Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou in New Caledonia from organizing a "Melanesia 2000" cultural festival to assert the cultural pride of local islands. *Micronesia* may suggest "small," but numerous islands identify as the Federated States of Micronesia. Great canoe voyages from Hawai'i to Tahiti, the Marquesas, and New Zealand have been carried out by a Polynesian Voyaging Society to great acclaim.

Spate also readily extolled the achievements of Asia and the Americas, and civilizations from Aztec and Inca to Malay, Chinese, and Japanese upon the formation of Pacific histories, though maintaining that the great geopolitical space of islands and Pacific "rims" was "basically a Euro-American creation, though built on an indigenous substructure."[3] There is much truth to this. The Pacific as a named, comprehensive entity is historically European.

Still, there are other ways to talk about "the Pacific." If we begin not with the geopolitical "concept" of the sixteenth century, but instead with a multiplicity of locally connected histories, the picture can change. Such a new picture was most soundly articulated by anthropologist, writer, and scholar Epeli Hau'ofa, who envisioned the Pacific as a "Sea of Islands," reckoning not with a vast, empty expanse, nor a series of isolated worlds flung into a faraway ocean, but rather with a crowded world of transits, intersections, and transformed cultures.



Map 2 Conventions and culture zones: Pacific states divided into Maritime Southeast Asia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia.

He was speaking largely of the Oceanian – that is Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian – domains. Scholars also continue to debate about whether such an entity as "Southeast Asia" exists. If we expand the Oceanian web of routes and voyages through time and space, we reconnect such histories with multiple ancient worlds that are in fact Irano-Arabic, Hindu, Buddhist, Malay, Indonesian, Chinese, and Makassan, joined by the mobility of people and practices, trade items, ideas, and beliefs.[4]

Here is an "Asian" Pacific constituted not at the moment of its naming, but as drawn together over millennia through local settlements, coastal waters, island provinces, and halting migrations as well as sweeping achievements on the open ocean. It begins at the Straits of Malacca in the way that a "European" Pacific does at the Straits of Magellan; eventually the both will overlap.

Such a Pacific is best understood in particularities, evoking the sea routes crossed by ancient Tongan exchange networks, the bustling port of Canton, or the factory ships of southern Japanese harbors searching fishing grounds around the Solomon Islands. Conceptually, such subjects can be studied as activities of a global trans-nationalism, maritime worlds defined by goods and peoples moving between islands and continents.

For our purposes here, however, "the Pacific" is better described as multiple sites of *trans-localism*, the specific linked places where direct engagements took place and were tied to histories dependent on the ocean. These are not sequential narratives of civilizations, countries, and nations. "China" with its millennia of dynasties, conquerors, and grandeur is not a subject, but the port of Canton with its customs agents organizing the trade of the world is. No pretense is made to tell the histories of "Australia" or "Vanuatu," but narratives instead mark the incarnated words of convict parties landing at Botany Bay or the shrewd negotiations of Melanesian headmen on the beach at Erromanga. The Pacific War is seen through the eyes of soldiers in Guadalcanal foxholes and islanders fleeing home villages, rather than dispatches of grand strategy from Tokyo or Washington.

This history is episodic, a collected set of characters and experiences that, taken together, define the Pacific. It is still, however, *trans*-local: the stories take on full meanings only when linked to other stories and places. Studies of "the Pacific" are usually divided by specialists of Southeast Asia, East Asia, Oceania and the Pacific islands, and North

and South America. Yet these area studies say even more when they emphasize the interconnectedness of different worlds.[5]

The sixteenth-century pirate Lim Ah Hong is a colorful personage, but his exploits resonate globally because his marauding fleets tied the concerns of Chinese ports to settlements in the Northern Philippine islands and excited Spanish imperial dread. King Kalakaua of Hawai'i circled the globe, negotiated with European leaders, visited with the Meiji Emperor in Japan, and established ties with chiefs in the South Pacific for a federation of Polynesian states. The small phosphate island of Nauru became a protectorate of European empires in the nineteenth century, a Pacific War battleground, and then a detention facility for Asian and Middle Eastern refugees seeking asylum in Australia in 2001. The Pacific is startlingly crowded with such episodes, where local actors were pulled into overlapping circuits of struggle and ambition.

Such connectedness runs through Pacific histories. What oceanographers call the convergences of meanders, the current rings that form adjacent vortices and eddies, are constantly upwelling warm and cold waters from depths to surface. In 2007, ocean scientists in Australia confirmed evidence of an oceanographic phenomenon they called a Tasman Flow, a deep gyre that linked together the Pacific and Indian Oceans to the Atlantic across the lower southern hemisphere.[6]

Engaging such oceanographic thinking in history can be useful. Winds and waters are not mere analogies for historical movements: they have also been actors in the exploration, trade, marriages, alliances – and warfare – that have marked the peoples and civilizations of the Pacific, from monsoons and *voltas* powering ships, to fishing grounds and strategic harbors. The chapters that follow trace the tales of some of these peoples, from those who crossed straits and built cultures of taro, yams, and rice, surmounted by stone platforms, to those who came in ships to conquer with religion, trading goods, and mechanized armies.

The first chapters begin with an ancient Pacific, known through fragments, legends, and traces: the scholarly work of botanists, linguists, and marine archeologists, tracing Lapita pottery and seed crops. Ancient Austronesian migrations on lashed bamboo rafts transit islands and littorals that will become East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. Knowledge and trade from across the Indian Ocean bring Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions, establishing circuits of power among trading empires and coastal sultans.

Spreading outward, faiths and languages travel to the Philippines and east across New Guinea. In mid-Oceania, Tongan tribute systems of tapa barkcloth extend to Fiji and surrounding islands. To the north, similar voyages of trade and tribute pull island communities into the orbit of Oceanian rulers commanding volcanic highlands on Yap. To the south and around the coasts of maritime Asia come Chinese treasure fleets of staggering size, and then interlopers from Portugal and Spain.

In subsequent chapters, Iberians will assert claims with bases in Asia and with Manila galleons carrying cargoes from Canton and the Spice Islands, cresting the blue ocean by way of Guam all the way to Acapulco, tying New Spain to Seville, Mexico to Asia. Dutch East India Company traders arrayed with Bugis and Johore support will war and collaborate with Chinese pirate kings, and govern stockhouses from Batavia to Deshima, a miniature European outpost off the tip of the samurai world in Nagasaki, Japan.

In the middle chapters of the book, famed English navigators like James Cook sail with Polynesian erudites like Tupaia, and Samoan agents of Christianity debate the faith with Kanak elders in New Caledonia. From nineteenth-century New Zealand, Maori chiefs voyage on ships to London and Sydney, returning with new ideas of religion, agriculture, and stockloads of weapons. English and Irish convicts land in Port Jackson, Australia, and Makassan seafarers in the Northern Territories trade with Aboriginal clans. Colonial systems contract, coerce, and sometimes kidnap laborers from India, China, the New Hebrides, and Easter Island to work mines and plantations from Peru to Fiji.

In later chapters, coastal Indians in California struggle with Spanish missions and American settlers and gunboats look to Hawai‘i and East Asia to fulfill a “manifest destiny.” Korean dynasties and mestizo populations in the Philippines contemplate rising tides of nationalism, and traveling monarchs form Polynesian alliances.

In the twentieth century, a militaristic Japanese Empire drives deep into the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, Micronesia, and the Marshalls. Indonesian nationalists stake ancient Javan claims to contested Cold War territories, and anthropologists and anticolonial movements struggle over the meanings of “tradition.” In the twenty-first century, political and diplomatic overtures over nuclear power, fishing resources, tourist economies, and political influence will shape

the lives of women working in Fijian coastal towns, domestic laborers for wealthy families in Singapore, sovereignty activists, and the futures of entire island worlds.

From this confluence of narratives, Asian, Oceanian, European, American, ancient, and modern, a "Pacific" region is assembled, in parts and perspectives from multiple historical experiences. The connecting narratives are framed by histories of Southeast Asia, peninsular peoples of Malaysia and Indonesia, China, and Japan, and more are anchored in Australia, New Zealand, Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and Papua New Guinea, connected by movements of peoples and goods from the American coasts of North and South America. They move from tidal rings to deep gyres, across the deep historical currents of shifting Pacific worlds.

1 CIVILIZATION WITHOUT A CENTER

First they were sea peoples, they came in times that were legendary, passing along to the generations their tools, knowledge of islands, languages, and their tales. Many of these speak of ancestors. Keeping such histories is the work of their descendants. Some are inscribed in the Samoan poetry of Albert Wendt, tracing the bone flutes, the eel skins, and the sky-piercers of his voyaging grandfathers and -mothers. Others surface in archeological sites, where diggers of canoes and shell middens in the Solomon Islands or New Guinea unearth the remains of ancient settlements.[1]

More are pieced together in research laboratories tracing microscopic seed germs and separating out the codings of amino acids from bone marrow. Many are carried along in daily lives where children study the knowledge of wayfinders under palm thatch in Palau, and prayers to the Goddess of the Seas rise along with burning incense from cluttered shrines along the coasts of East Asia and the Indonesian islands around Java. Where do these many Oceanian worlds begin? Tales and traditions from some cultures trace origins to migrations from a legendary homeland; others say that they have always been where they are, having come from the earth itself. Remarkably, histories abound in the Pacific in which both are true about the same peoples.

Genealogies from the western Pacific from Fiji to New Caledonia tell which islanders are "people of the place," who first inhabited unknown landfalls. Fijians say they were shaped out of the moist damp earth and pulled up by a great fishhook. Tonga was populated by men

1 A time of gods and legends: A'a figure, Rurutu, Austral Islands.

tumbling from the sky and women rising from the underworld. Gods fished up the island of Tokelau, and then Tonga, where men brought women from out of the earth.[2]

Journeying among multitudes of islands large and small, and astonished by the presence of peoples everywhere, Europeans arriving in the sixteenth century puzzled over a water world of such remarkably diverse yet apparently related civilizations. Perhaps these were land