

Foreword

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This volume features papers presented at the Fourth International Symposium of Comparative Research on Major Regional Powers in Eurasia, “Regional Routes, Regional Roots? Cross-Border Patterns of Human Mobility in Eurasia,” which took place in Osaka on 11-12 December 2010. The meeting was organized by one of the six groups of the Regional Powers project, Group 5 “Beyond the Contours of State,” which has focused on human mobility and ethnic and confessional minorities in Russia, China, India, and the surrounding areas including Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Baltic Sea. Incorporating historians, political scientists, and anthropologists, we examined entanglements of religion and nationalism and the state’s interactions with diasporas, commercial and intellectual networks (Muslim activities in particular), as well as domestic minorities. By so doing, we detected formative, transformative, and challenging factors not only constraining the very existence of the regional powers, but also affecting the path of nation-building around the contiguous areas.

Bringing scholars together from China, India, Russia, North America, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and Japan, our symposium tried to elaborate a common research agenda and methodology that could facilitate our understanding of the ambiguity of human mobility for the regional powers and their neighbors. We were not optimistic that the study of mobile peoples would lead us to easily overcome grids of thoughts demarcated by nation-state boundaries. We addressed the ways in which the state mobilized and controlled specific types of pilgrimage and “repatriation of fellow nationals abroad” to buttress citizenship within its borders. Simultaneously, we took heed of the substantial role of diasporas, border-crossing merchants, pilgrims, and exiles in boosting and underpinning the imagination of nation and homeland. Moreover, we analyzed the extent to which border-crossers and borderland peoples had enjoyed leverage in realizing varied desires and ambitions through their interactions with their home or abutting countries as well as international orders. Here we tried not to blanket each story with the all-purpose word “identity,” but to scrutinize politics and their specific contexts. Gathering nine papers from the symposium, this volume focuses on four particular issues, with its thematic parts divided accordingly: “The Mobile Businessman: Merchants’ Diaspora and Networks,” “Cries from the Periphery,” “Home, Sweet Home? Invitation to the Diaspora,” and “Pilgrimage: Confession and Consumption.”

The first part “The Mobile Businessman: Merchants’ Diaspora and Networks” selects three typical trading peoples: the Indians from the north and south of the subcontinent, the Chinese from the coast of the East and South China Seas, and the Armenians from the South Caucasus. Stephen Dale traces the history of two Indian mercantile diasporas since the eleventh century: one is the so-called Chettiars from south India, largely Tamil speaking Hindu bankers and merchants in

Southeast Asia, and the other is from north India, mainly individuals of the large Hindu caste group known as Khattris, most of whom came from the Punjab and traded in Afghanistan, Iran, Mawarannahr, and Russia. This study reveals how religious institutions such as temples worked as banking and charitable hubs for the Chettiar merchants and their diaspora communities. In addition, studying Indian merchants (most notably the Khattris) who lived in seventeenth century Iran (Isfahan in particular), the author suggests that despite the absence of temples-cum-banks, the Khattris, like the Chettiars, developed an ethos harmonizing commerce and religion. Examining the Chinese banking business in Singapore in the first half of the twentieth century, Ryoichi Hisasue illustrates the way in which the overseas Chinese mobilizing each of their personal connections grew native capital and invigorated the local economy (most notably rubber plantations in Malaya) accommodating British-centered global free trade. His study indicates the transformation of the business model of overseas Chinese from long-distance trade to investment in the regional economy. Artsvi Bakhchinyan outlines Armenian external traders from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, who worked as intermediaries between the French, Swedish, Russians, and the British aspiring to the Asian market, on the one hand, and the rulers of Safavid Iran as well as Indian and Chinese polities privileging the Armenian merchants, on the other. Here we should particularly underline the role of Isfahan, the Safavids' capital, as a cosmopolitan commercial hub both for the Armenians and the Khattris as seen in Dale's paper. In addition, like the overseas Chinese in Hisasue's paper, the Armenians also well adapted their vast trading networks to changes in economic environments generated by the European domination. It is natural that these merchants became transmitters of modern technologies and political ideas to their fellow communities.

Taking the Kurds and Afghanistan as meaningful examples, the second part "Cries from the Periphery" addresses smaller (tribal or even individual) actors' adroit strategies of survival, but eventually to the detriment of their stable nation-building. With an excellent overview of the Kurds' relation with the Ottoman Empire (and Turkey) and Russia (and the Soviet Union), Michael Reynolds contends that as the Ottoman and Russian Empires had worked as an incubator of nationalism, the collapse of the two states as a result of the First World War was too premature for the Kurds to have their own country. In marked contrast to the Kurds, Afghanistan seems to have barely maintained the contours of its territory as a buffer state amid the Great Game between the Russian and British Empires. Yet it is the great powers' exertion of influence and overt military interventions that have amplified and exacerbated the internal turmoil of Afghanistan even to this day, with each local player seeking to bring one or another outside power in. Analyzing the correspondence between Afghan persons of influence and the British Indian authorities after the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1881), Masato Toriya illustrates how the British sustained close contacts with the Pashtun tribal forces of eastern Afghanistan and thereby curtailed the efforts of Amīr 'Abd al-Rahmān Khān to integrate the country.

The third part "Home, Sweet Home? Invitation to the Diaspora" examines the ways in which "homeland" is imagined and created not only by diaspora peoples but also by the state enticing "fellow nationals" abroad into coming back home. Sumie Nakatani explores shifting meanings of

homeland for Marwari merchants originally from Rajasthan, India. Until the 1930s they invested in towns they had left, with a view toward maintaining a linkage with their place of origin; to remember their ancestors they built houses (*haveli*) with traditional architectural styles observed. This practice began to lose its meaning, however, as whole families moved out of Rajasthan and settled down in cities, their ancestors became only mythically associated with a certain god or goddess, and India became the more significant affiliation. Describing the “Diaspora Policy” of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Gulnara Mendikulova, who herself has been deeply involved in the policy-making, demonstrates the government’s tremendous endeavour and difficulties in creating connections between the Kazakh diaspora and “historical homeland” and in naturalizing Kazakh “returnees” as useful citizens in Kazakhstan.

The final part “Pilgrimage: Confession and Consumption” sheds light on the nexus in which the economic boom in China and India has forced people to rediscover and resurrect “spiritual origins” to critically assess each of their communities, simultaneously creating a lucrative business by facilitating their spiritual pursuits. Studying the revival of the Mao Cult and the excitement at “Red Tourism,” visits to sites meaningful to the history of the Chinese Communist Party, Yoko Takayama traces the formation of propaganda art that fashioned the collective memory of the Chinese revolution, and shows how the art of socialist realism has turned into market-oriented items, for instance, playing cards as souvenirs amplifying the “Red spirit” at the historical revolutionary spots. Closely observing two Hindu pilgrimages, Pandharpur and Aṣṭavināyaka, in Maharashtra in West India, Chihiro Koiso argues that it is after the economic liberalization in the 1990s that these pilgrimages increasingly served as the salvation of those tired of a materialistic way of life. She also illustrates how the holy travels unify the pilgrims and the local populations on the routes through the spiritual experience as well as trading, work for the Maharashtrian government as channels of communication with these people, and consequently buttress a regional collectivity.

Why do we call Russia, China, and India regional powers? Our research group contends that it is because these countries with imperial pasts and legacies have created a variety of hubs of exchange, accommodating and sending out expansively mobile peoples. Conventionally, we take for granted and often prioritize a certain territorial unit in studying questions of nation-building, citizenship, political regime, economic growth, and international relations. But it is the mobile peoples and even individuals who have circulated the idea of nation-state around the globe and brought it back home; challenged the boundaries defining who are citizens and who are not; legitimized and discredited one or another government; generated commercial connections, and played rival states off against each other. The nine papers of this volume furnish us with useful angles to vividly illuminate the role of human mobility that has shaped the contours of the regional powers and their neighbors in the past and present.