QUEERING THE TRANSPACIFIC: RACE AND SEXUALITY ACROSS THE U.S. AND JAPANESE EMPIRES


The primary thesis of *Queering the Transpacific* is that 20th-century U.S.-Japan relations evince a genealogy of the racial and sexual logics that underpin today's transpacific complicity with neocolonial capitalism and violence, but what I heuristically call a “queer transpacific critique” can help foster non-complicity. The project is particularly attuned to the role of progressive discourse in extending the reach of empire. Throughout, I cross-pollinate insights in Asian/American studies in order to analyze the intersection of transpacific racialization and queer exclusion/inclusion, and think through race and sexuality as inter-imperial modalities.

Chapter 1 investigates the “queering of empire” during the Russo-Japanese War era when the ascent of Japan—the young empire configured in Western sexological discourse as more heteroflexible than the West—unsettled scientific racism. Progressive thinkers on both sides of the Pacific called for racial egalitarianism and U.S.-Japanese cooperation without questioning the teleology of empire. Chapter 2 thoroughly unpacks the African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois' support of Imperial Japan by juxtaposing his political realism and doubts about transwar racial progressivism with that of the Asianist revolutionaries Sun Yat-sen and Anand Mohan Sahay. I interpret the role “Japan” plays in his 1928 novel *Dark Princess*, which depicts competing transpacific pluralisms: I argue that in the interplay between its realist and utopic registers, the novel evinces a queer political ontology beyond the imperial logics of the transwar period.

Chapter 3 updates the “racial castration” model in Queer Asian American studies given the rise of Asia and presence of overlapping masculinities in the transpacific. I call for a reconfiguration of the symbolic so as to contend with a world ordering that does not add up to white heteropatriarchy as the sole structuring of the universal. I reread Lonnie Kaneko's 1976 short story “The Shoyu Kid” and Soon-Tek Oh's 1970 play *Tondemonai—Never Happen!* for how they narrate homosexuality during Japanese American internment not as abject, but as entangled with an abusive, “queerly-inclined” U.S. state that was in competition with Japan's model minoritization ambitions. Finally, Chapter 4 expounds upon the queer chronopolitics of the Japanese director Ōshima Nagisa with a reading of his 1983 film *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* as presaging homonationalism at a time when neoliberal logics were cementing and the U.S. state treated potential Japanese economic ascendency as perilous.

People Involved: Alan Williams
Status of Research or Work: Completed/published
Research Type: Graduate Dissertations

Source URL: https://english.washington.edu/research/graduate/queering-transpacific-race-and-sexuality-across-us-and-japanese-empires