

intersectional disability studies. And while Coráñez Bolton is clearly invested in American studies thanks to the country's contemporary political and racial climate, his work is indispensable to Philippine studies, where the discourse of disability is still primarily religious and clinical or rehabilitative. No Philippine scholar theorizes on disability and nation to this extent. Where the book does not bridge the titular "queer politics of disability" to reach present-day Philippine society, emerging scholars seeking to articulate their realities can build on Coráñez Bolton's research to fill in the gap.

Anna Felicia C. Sanchez

*Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines*

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3016-265X>

***Siting Postcoloniality: Critical Perspectives from the East Asian Sinosphere***

PHENG CHEAH and CAROLINE S. HAU, eds.

Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.

Is it still meaningful to speak of the postcolonial today? Scholars of postcolonial studies may recall how Arif Dirlik once criticized the term's overt partiality toward culturalist discourses, which renders the concept vacuous as it becomes "the repository of a grab-bag of issues that anyone can choose from in accordance with his/her political and intellectual inclinations." In his critique, Dirlik also delineates the pitfalls resulting from "the spatial and temporal generalisation" of the term's applicability, and proposes the "testing of the method against the evidence of its new context[s]" (Dirlik 1999, 155).

Implicitly echoing Dirlik's call, while re-evaluating the seminal impact of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), *Siting Postcoloniality: Critical Perspectives from the East Asian Sinosphere*—edited by Pheng Cheah and Caroline S. Hau—reinstates the postcolonial as a useful prism of knowledge production. It does so persuasively by examining checkered histories from vantage points that intersect with the familiar loci of Western imperialism but have generally been neglected by postcolonial studies. Notably, the book explicates the postcolonial disposition of those disregarded "sites" against an unfolding global backdrop affected by three occurrences: the United States' disproportionate influence—politically, socially, and culturally—over international order after World War II; the Sino-Soviet split in the mid-twentieth century which undermined the notion of monolithic Communism and turned bipolarity into tripolarity during the Cold War; and lastly, the geopolitical and economic rise of China in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, *Siting Postcoloniality* aligns as well with the scholarship of Chua Beng Huat, Hamid Dabashi, and Walter D. Mignolo, who advocate reckoning with world regions whose historical and

contemporary circumstances exceed the customary frames of postcolonial theory (pp. 4–5). Collectively, the venues assembled for analyses by the editors are grouped under the rubric of “East Asian Sinosphere” reflected in the title. But the volume actually covers a wider geographical expanse of Asia. In his trenchant introduction, Cheah defines the “Sinosphere” more broadly as “the region of East and Southeast Asia that has been significantly shaped by relations with various dynasties of the Middle Kingdom and the republican and communist regimes of modern China” (p. 5). Across 12 chapters, the book dissects the colonially inflected conditions associated not just with the main spatial locations of Greater China—including the mainland Chinese state, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—but also with the Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia and the Philippines. Through highlighting inter-Asian entanglements, as well as nonconventional hierarchical ties with the West primarily from the twentieth century on, the anthology of erudite essays features postcoloniality as profoundly place-based problems, without ignoring how the Sinosphere has actively hosted the movement of people and ideas across borders throughout history.

Importantly, the Sinosphere is not presented as monolithic. Through multiscale comparisons, the volume weaves an enthralling picture of internal resemblances and differences. Across essays, Taiwan’s historical trajectory of successive colonialisms (Chapter 8) can be read alongside the Philippines’ long encounter with overlapping imperialisms (Chapter 11) to contemplate the enduring legacies of empires that ruled from afar. Within an essay, Lo Kwai-cheung expounds on the anomalous modes of coloniality in Manchukuo and Hong Kong (Chapter 5), while David Wang juxtaposes three literary ecologies outside mainland China to evince a distinctive politics of memory common to Sinophone literary production (Chapter 10). In addition, the comparative scale extends from place to language. The case studies on Hong Kong by Elaine Ho (Chapter 7) and on Taiwan by Lin Pei-yin (Chapter 8) enrich our understandings of the two places by theorizing the multiplicity of languages in one location and the interaction of different linguistic-literary communities among different ethnic groups or within the same ethnicity. In his essay, Cheah further pluralizes the Malaysian case through Hau’s notion of the “Anglo-Chinese,” contending that local-born English-educated Chinese who no longer maintain familial ties with their ancestors’ native land can have a non-postcolonial and “purely instrumentalist attachment” to mainland China and Chinese culture (Chapter 12, p. 269).

But the volume does more than localizing or regionalizing postcolonialism. Taken together, the polylocal analyses vividly manifest what Robert Young frames as “the divergent temporalities of the postcolonial” (Chapter 1, p. 36). Based on specific historical junctures in the Sinosphere, several chapters formulate astute readings of cultural texts that refute prior discourses about linear progress represented by discrete colonial and postcolonial stages. For instance, Dai Jinhua’s sobering essay points out how the end of formal colonialism meant the induction of former colonies and semi-colonized regions into yet another unequal structure of political economy shaped by Western-dominated globalization, which is unconcerned with land occupation (Chapter 2). Besides,

the Sinosphere registers remarkable modes of postcolonial agency. Through her reinterpretation of the PRC's effort in the 1950s and 1960s to fashion its leadership in the Third World caught between US and Soviet hegemonies, Pang Laikwan argues for postcolonialism's chief merit to be its critical reminder to "spatialize our temporality and temporalize our spatiality" (Chapter 4, p. 104). In a resonant manner, Wang develops a unique theory of "postloyalism" to complement postcolonialism that focuses on non-China sites. From Taiwan literature's contemporaneous blend of yearning for a lost republican China and for an anticipated island republic with a pre-colonized past to Hong Kong literature's paradoxical nostalgia for British colonial rule and Malaysian Chinese literature's bold depiction of a counterfactual socialist nation, Wang shows perceptively that what is diverse and can coexist in a single locale may not only be languages or place connections but also senses and feelings of time and history (Chapter 10).

The historical geographies of the Sinosphere thus unsettle Said's field-presiding thesis of Orientalism, which emphasizes the West's ideological power to fashion compliant subjects through colonial institutions that purport to serve a civilizing mission. The case studies in the volume jointly illustrate an alternative modality of postcolonialism that avoids recounting the mechanisms and effects of Said's hugely influential theory. Indeed, for the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s, its project of decoupling from the Soviet Union, which had intellectually guided (rather than governmentally directed) the newly established nation on political, economic, and cultural development, was dissimilar to the resistance against colonialist pedagogy that distorted the subjecthood of the colonized (Chapters 3–4). Viewed holistically with the essays on Taiwan and Hong Kong that reference the Japanese occupation and/or their contentious ties with China (Chapters 5–10), the book successfully demonstrates that it is not just the Anglo-French-American West and their colonies that sustain vertical relations between asymmetrical political territories, thereby troubling the reflexive divide of West and non-West in postcolonial theory.

Of particular interest to this reviewer is the volume's dialogue with Sinophone studies. Indebted to the spirit of postcolonialism, the most influential strand of Sinophone theory—which mainly analyzes forms of cultural autonomy in regions outside and in the margins of China—approaches the current mainland state as a colonial power that has wielded sociopolitical and cultural hegemony over its national peripheries and neighboring Sinitic-speaking regions since the late imperial period. In the volume, Wang urges greater attention toward "the historical implication of Sinophone discourse" (p. 217), for he observes how "colonialism" has been used sweepingly in Sinophone studies to "describe variegated forms of conquest, oppression, and hegemony in such a way as to lose its historical specificity and critical rigor" (p. 216). Likewise, discerning the non-state nature of Chinese trade and migration to Southeast Asia in the Ming Dynasty, Cheah contends that the prevailing model of the Sinophone has mischaracterized Chinese entrepreneurial presence in the region as settler colonialist (pp. 9, 12). In this regard, the book joins Melissa Macauley's *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier* (2021) in recognizing why the

boundary-expanding ethos and practices of the Chinese overseas from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century cannot be construed as colonialism. To be clear, Cheah acknowledges the PRC's colonialist treatment of its non-Han regions and its expansionist ambitions in the contemporary era via the Belt and Road Initiative (pp. 18–20), but he asserts that the diverse historical circumstances related to current-day Southeast Asia should be grasped more accurately. Because diasporic ventures of the Chinese do not entail formal governance, as Macauley notes, they are better described as “Chinese territorialism,” which engages in “resource extraction and commercial supremacy without the establishment of a colonial state” (Macauley 2021, 13). Given how the Chinese eschewed state-making in Southeast Asia, and that they both suffered under and benefited from colonial regimes, postcolonial theory will have to reweigh the efficacy of its set colonizer-colonized framework (pp. 12–13, 25, 221).

Beyond Sinophone studies, Dai similarly cautions against the ahistorical use of the concept of “colonization” in the post-Cold War era of capitalist globalization. Though the term—when used to describe transnational capital flows and the serious ramifications on human lives—can perform social critique against uneven development, its rhetoric may obscure histories of imperial violence that underlie the contemporary world order. The result of the term's referential fungibility could truly be an undesirable dovetailing with the class-blind discourses of nativist conservatives (Chapter 2, pp. 62–65). The accent on a more rigorous and vigilant adoption of analytical categories notwithstanding, the volume is not conceptually fundamentalist. Instead, it exemplifies the ways in which the ambiguity of “colonialism” and “colonization” in the Sinosphere allows for redefining the postcolonial. To cite two examples: whereas Lo uses the verbified “postcolonize” to describe unusual modes of imperial governance across different historical periods in Manchuria and Hong Kong, which result from and respond to consequential geopolitics (Chapter 5), Lin approaches the “postcolonial” condition of Taiwan less as a temporal phase than as a perpetual construction of literary-cultural subjectivity and agency (Chapter 8).

Overall, *Siting Postcoloniality* should be most appreciated for its vanguard effort to nuance and update postcolonial theory by unpacking the illuminating relevance of the Sinosphere experiences. Correcting the field's long-standing geographical bias against Sinitic-influenced regions, the volume brims with insights on fluid subjectivities rooted in the dialectics of coloniality and temporality. Well aware of postcolonial theory's potential indulgence in ungrounded literary and cultural analyses, the chapters never lose track of the geographico-historical specificity of every case, and the key macro transformations in the contemporary world system, in particular the global proliferation of capitalism. Laudably, the volume avoids projecting the simplistic causality between revitalizing postcolonial studies and social change. Rather, it emanates a palpable sense of the contributors' situated social motivations that undergird their cultural critiques deeply engaged with the contemporary world whose geopolitical and economic configuration harks back to the Cold War. Coherently structured and cogently argued, the book marks a timely contribution to postcolonial

studies, Sinophone studies, Cold War studies, and Asian studies. Future scholars of the various fields and other regions of the Sinosphere—such as those working on Singapore and Thailand, whose entangled historical relations with China and Western imperialism were also peculiarly complex—will do well to contend with the compelling ideas in this collection of tremendous significance.

Chan Cheow Thia 曾昭程

*Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5759-8870>

## References

- Dirlik, Arif. 1999. How the Grinch Hijacked Radicalism: Further Thoughts on the Postcolonial. *Post-colonial Studies* 2(2): 149–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688799989724>.
- Macaulay, Melissa. 2021. *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.