

The Indies of the setting sun: how early modern Spain mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West, by Ricardo Padrón, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2020, 352pp., \$34 (paperback), ISBN13 978-0226820019.

Ricardo Padrón's *The Indies of the Setting Sun* investigates Spanish exploration, mapping and settlement of the Pacific to document "a new history of the early modern cartographic imagination" (23). Padrón divides his work into eight chapters that show how Spain's "geopolitical imaginary resisted the twin ideas that the New World was entirely separate from Asia and that the Pacific Ocean constituted the geographical and even ontological boundary between these two parts of the world and their inhabitants" (3). Resistance to this segregation, according to Padrón, is apparent in maps and "cartographic literature" that deploy "a variety of metageographical frameworks available for mapping the world" (7). *The Indies of the Setting Sun* shows how these "frameworks" construct a transpacific space akin to the Transatlantic.

A "casual encounter" in Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional drove Padrón's to examine established conceptions of Spain's "geopolitical imaginary". These should be abandoned, he writes, because:

to understand the way the Indies were constructed by the early modern Spanish geopolitical imaginary, we must let go of the entrenched habit of thinking about early modern European efforts to map the globe exclusively in terms of the continents and the shift from a tripartite to a quadripartite model put in motion by Martin Waldseemüller and his collaborators in 1507. (7)

Padrón thus contests the teleological location of America's foundational narrative in Americo Vespucci's claim that Columbus's momentous discovery was a "new world" and not islands off Asia. This led to the printing of Vespucci's Christian name on Waldseemüller's map, now prominently displayed in Washington's Library of Congress. More recently, Edmundo O'Gorman expounded this view in his influential *Invention of America* (1961), which, Padrón suggests, needs to be reconsidered in light of the "shared transpacific space" sketched in his book (23).

Padrón grounds this transpacific space in early modern maps and narratives, many of which were produced under the auspices of the Spanish crown. These sources relate the Americas to segments of the East Indies explored or settled by Spain or disputed with Portugal, including the Moluccas, the Philippines, China and Japan. He reads this "cartographic literature" closely alongside thirty-five images, mostly reproduced from copies held at the Library of Congress, the Houghton Library of Harvard University, John Carter Brown's Library and France's Bibliothèque Nationale. These maps were mostly printed as stand-alone documents or in official chronicles that have been widely studied by historians. Even when these maps were not designed for strategic purposes, Padrón urges us not to seek geographical realities in them. Instead, they ought to be treated as ecosystems in which social and political parameters mingle seamlessly with technologies of navigation and belief systems: "no matter how natural or right a map may look, it is always the product of a particular history, reflects and supports particular interests, speaks of all sorts of opportunities foregone, and even displaces or erases alternatives that are very much still alive" (278).

Each of the book's eight chapters concentrates on several maps, as well as a handful of texts related to voyages or to subsequent settlements. For example, Antonio Pigafetta's brief description of Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation (1519–1521) is at the centre of

chapter 3, “Pacific Nightmares”, which, alongside chapter 4, “Shipwrecked Ambitions”, deals with sources produced in the three decades following Magellan’s expedition. Padrón examines them “by deploying what [he] call[s] the rhetoric of smooth sailing and the cartography of containment” (8). His “cartography of containment” is evident in Pigafetta’s rendering the Pacific as a sea of “dotted” islands: “What emerges from Pigafetta’s pages, therefore, is not the terraqueous globe of Ptolemaic cosmography, but ... an impossible waterworld dotted by fragmentary landscapes” (84). This “waterworld” tested human resilience to its limits, with Pigafetta showing more concern with human experience than with geography: “Distance is not measured in numbers or leagues, but in the toll it takes on human bodies and souls” (83).

According to Padrón, the post-Magellan worldview derived as much from the “theory of climates” as from “Ptolemaic cosmography”. Likewise, Juan López de Velasco’s *Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias* (1574) “makes sense of the natural world by appealing to the theory of climates rather than to the architecture of continents” (147). Velasco, then cosmographer and chronicler major of the States and Kingdoms of the Indies, Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea, created this cosmography on the basis of Macrobius’s fifth-century division of the world into climate zones, some of which were uninhabitable on account of the heat or the cold.

Velasco’s *Geografía y descripción*, studied in chapter 5, “Pacific Conquests”, is classed as “cartographic literature produced after the revival of Spain’s transpacific ambitions” (9), as are the materials studied in the book’s remaining chapters. This revival arose from the settlement of Manila, annexed after Miguel López de Legazpi reached the islands and named them in honour of Philip II in 1565. Spanish occupation led to the establishment of a hugely profitable trade route, traversed by a galleon to shield its precious cargo from pirates and privateers. The so-called Manila Galleon transported goods, including

silk, porcelain and spices, from Asia to Mexico, returning with a cargo of silver alongside slaves, cocoa, tobacco and produce from the Americas. The journey back to the Americas, the “tornaviaje”, was made possible when Andrés de Urdaneta, travelling with Legazpi, found that, by sailing north to the latitude of Japan, ships could use the trade winds that had shipwrecked previous attempts to navigate the Pacific eastwards. The Manila Galleon’s route and exchanges offer the best example of the Transpacific that Padrón is proposing, leading him to conclude that: “The political, economic, and cultural space created by the efforts of Legazpi and Urdaneta, and by the sailings of the Manila Galleons, is what I refer to in this book as the early modern Spanish Pacific” (18).

Padrón’s book traces a good number of events and voyages, providing as much information about what happened as about how these incidents were represented. This is true of chapter 6, “The Location of China”, and chapter 7, “The Kingdom of the Setting Sun”: whereas the clash between sinophilia and sinophobia is scrutinized in the section on China, Padrón shows how Spanish perceptions of Japan incorporated, among other things, “the spatial structure of Franciscan millenarian historiography” (208). Although China and Japan were a self-contained continental empire and island kingdom respectively, references to Spanish voyages or missionary enterprises appeal to the “transpacific” connection traced in this book. As one example, Padrón notes that Juan González de Mendoza’s *History of the Great Kingdom of China*, “[locates] China in the Castilian transpacific west” (193), an outlook illustrated in a 1593 map by the Dominican Juan Cobo (199).

The Indies of the Setting Sun shows how early modern maps and literature related to the Spanish Pacific contest the “architecture of continents” that organized the world in ways that we might assume to have been obsolete by then. Padrón’s book thus counters the “legions of historians [who] have taught us to look at early modern maps in terms of a single metageography, the architecture of the continents, and to trace its transformation by the new

cosmography and the discoveries made by exploration in the Atlantic” (70). Towards the end of his book, however, Padrón concurs with historians who have written off Spain’s imperial aspirations in the Asia-Pacific in terms of “failure” or “futility”: “It is ironic that the Spanish crown only went public with its ambitious vision of the Indies as a transpacific empire at a time when it had become clear that Spain would be incapable of turning that vision into a reality” (271).

Padrón book’s “reconstructs” a worldview “that enjoyed only a century or so of life, and only among certain people involved in what was ultimately a failed enterprise, that of early modern transpacific empire” (277). Yet he defends the value of examining this transient outlook. Ephemerality, Padrón reminds us, “provides an important corrective to established historical narratives” that showcase “what would eventually become the dominant vision of the world, one that soon came ... to center the map on an Atlantic Basin that was quickly becoming the nerve center of a new, Eurocentric global economy” (277). The Transpacific that emerges from *The Indies of the Setting Sun* is a counterpoint to a Eurocentric Transatlantic that was transformed from a geographical space into a cultural, sociopolitical and military arena. By treating continents, seas and islands as part of a shared “geopolitical imaginary”, Padrón proposes that the Transpacific mapped in *The Indies of the Setting Sun* can challenge a transatlantic hegemony that has already displayed its transience.

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