

Minor Transpacific: Triangulating American, Japanese, and Korean Fictions. David S. Roh. Stanford UP, 2021. xv + 214 pages. \$90.00 hardcover; \$30.00 paperback; \$28.50 ebook.

One of the most important points of origin of the scholarship currently called transpacific studies can be traced back to 1997, when Elaine Kim and Lisa Lowe called for connections between Asian studies and Asian American studies. Since then, a series of interdisciplinary efforts to bridge the division between Asian (area) studies and Asian American (ethnic) studies has formed a core of transpacific studies. David S. Roh's *Minor Transpacific: Triangulating American, Japanese, and Korean Fictions*, conceived with the same motivation to overcome the disciplinary barrier, is a timely contribution to this body of work of the past two decades. Roh juxtaposes works produced by two disparate Korean diasporic subjects: Zainichi (resident Koreans in Japan) and Korean Americans. Although Zainichi have fallen within the realm of Asian studies as a Korea-Japan bilateral issue, Roh argues, the racialization of Zainichi in Japan cannot be fully articulated without taking into account the American military juridical system in East Asia. Similarly, the legacy of Japanese imperialism has played pivotal roles in forming Korean American subjectivities. *Minor Transpacific* is especially compelling not only because it triangulates Korean diasporic literature but also because Roh's multilingual and multidisciplinary methodology, which he terms "a mediated minor transpacific" (7), enables him to *connect* the two heretofore unlinked Korean minorities within the single Korea-Japan-US triangular matrix.

Aptly responding to Kim and Lowe's call, Roh eloquently demonstrates how Korean diaspora is an effective and significant site for bridging Asian studies and Asian American studies. "A transpacific interminority study," he argues, "resolves how Asian American scholars looking beyond domestic literature might detect American racial and cultural discourse in diasporic communities abroad, and conversely, how Asian studies scholars might uncover connections to minority fictions in the United States" (6). His "transpacific interminority study" is also a transpacific interimperial critique; by way of its historical suffering from Japanese and American imperial violence, Korean diasporic literature constitutes

“an emergent third space” that “fails to neatly conform to existing disciplinary and national traditions” (12). Joining forces with scholars such as Kandice Chu, Lisa Yoneyama, and Laura Hyun Yi Kang, among many other experts in transpacific scholarship, *Minor Transpacific* expands this emergent field by deploying Korean diasporic literature for the transpacific critique of Japanese American interimperial violence.

The first two chapters offer single-novel oriented discussions, thus introducing the readers to the effectiveness of Roh’s method of triangulating Korean American and Zainichi novels, respectively. Although Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West* (1937) is an explicit critique of American capitalism and materialism from Korean immigrants’ perspectives, Roh’s transpacific framework recasts the story as an anatomy of colonial labor that both Japan and the United States relegated to Korean minorities. Chapter 2 examines Kaneshiro Kazuki’s *GO* (1996), showing how the formation of Zainichi subjectivity is mediated by American racial discourse imported into Japan through popular culture. It is symbolic that each chapter was originally published in *MELUS* and *Verge: Global Asias*, respectively; resonating with each other, these two interimperial critiques bespeak the productivity of bringing ethnic studies and area studies together.

The following chapters further broaden the reach of *Minor Transpacific*. Taking up two Korean American novels, Ronyoung Kim’s *Clay Walls* (1987) and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (1995), chapter 3 extends the first chapter’s argument about the resilient traces of Japanese colonialism in Asian American literature. Highlighting the so-called comfort women issue as Japanese colonial trauma, Roh proposes to reframe Korean American literature as a kind of “Japanese postcolonial fiction” (76). In light of the book’s main intervention, the last two chapters stand out in successfully capturing actual instances of Zainichi–Korean American encounters. Bringing together Korean-American-Chinese coproduced independent film *Seoul Searching* (2016) and a Zainichi story written in Japanese, Yi Yang-ji’s *Yuhi* (1988), chapter 4 focuses on Korean diasporic international students in Korea and Japan. As a rare instance where Korean Americans and Zainichi have a chance to come into direct contact, the study abroad system “offers a means of resisting a stolid immigration narrative and rearticulating of Korean diasporic subjectivity” (102). Through what Roh terms “minority sojournship” in third national spaces, Korean diasporic international students reconnect with their cultural heritage and decenter (triangulate) the US-Korea and Japan-Korea binaries. Chapter 5, juxtaposing Min Jin Lee’s *Pachinko* (2017) and Kim Masumi’s *Moreru Sōka* (1997), analyzes businesses typically managed by diasporic Koreans—pachinko parlors in Japan and convenience stores in the United States—as sites “for racial negotiation and the main conduits through which Zainichi Korea and Korean American speak to one another” (130). Both businesses are legacies of the racialization of Korean

diasporic subjects, and their narratives, in Roh's words, come to be "transposed" upon one another to foreground their unconstituted mutual engagements.

Minor Transpacific also contributes to Afro-Asia studies from Korean diasporic perspectives. Indeed, Afro-Asia relationality, both friendly and hostile, is an undercurrent running through Roh's book. *GO's* Zainichi protagonist, Sugihara, perceives Japanese anti-Korean racism through American anti-Black racism (67–68). In *A Gesture Life*, Doc Hata cannot conceal his racial hate toward his adopted daughter Sunny, who might be biracial, possibly African American and Korean (97–98). Chapter 5 opens with a brief comment on *Pachinko* by Barack Obama—who characterized himself "America's first Pacific president" and was called the first "Asian American president" (123)—and goes on to address racial tensions between Korean Americans and African Americans in *Moreru Sōka* (144). While it is clear that Roh's methodology can be applicable to diasporic studies other than Korean, it also empowers us to imagine and articulate more inter-diasporic networks such as those between Blacks and Koreans.

Minor Transpacific is a major contribution to transpacific studies, not merely because it succeeds in illustrating how a transpacific framework is fruitful in analyzing literary texts but also because it is designed as a (self-)critique of extant academic disciplines. Any scholar interested in cutting across disciplinary barriers will benefit from studying the way Roh constructs his compelling arguments with apt topics and through rigorous close readings. As Roh concludes the book gesturing toward the US-Vietnam-France and US-Japan-Brazil triangulations (as seen in Viet Thanh Nguyen's and Karen Tei Yamashita's works, for instance), his rich study has the power to "make the invisible visible" (156)—to elicit other yet-to-be-articulated triangles across the globe, a work that is entrusted to readers.

Kodai Abe

Binghamton University, USA