



Conference Call for Papers

## **Reimagining the Pacific: Towards an Oceanic Intellectual History**

The University of Tokyo, Komaba campus, 13-14 March 2025

### **Theme**

How can intellectual historians navigate and chart the seas and oceans? How can they steer away from terra as the traditional locus of modernity? Oceanic spaces have recently gained political prominence, exemplified by the rise of the Indo-Pacific vision and China's Maritime Silk Road project. Maritime and oceanic historiography has simultaneously come into the limelight, as seen in David Armitage *et al* eds., *Oceanic Histories* (2018). Intellectual history, however, largely lags behind this contemporary wave. How can it be updated, expanded or transformed if we consider the aqua dimension seriously? In what ways have seas and oceans been woven into the fabric of texts and other objects of inquiry in this field? Which unexplored writings and creations merit investigation, and what implications do they have for global ecology?

At this conference, we will explore these questions with a particular focus on the Pacific Ocean. The world's largest ocean with countless small islands, the Pacific is a geo-cultural entity that has drawn an assembly of distinctive visions, interpretations, projects and representations. Historically marked by the imbrications of empires, it has been a sited globality of layered political imaginaries stemming from the rim, the antipodal and the local. At one pole, the Pacific has been subjected to hierarchic cartographies, such as "Japanese lake" and "Anglo-Francophone lake," that have denigrated it as a doughnut hole. At another, counter-hegemonic visions from various Pacific islands—spanning from Ryukyu/Okinawa to Oceania—have challenged the existing views of the Pacific and reconstructed the ocean, epitomized by Epeli Hau'ofa's *We Are the Ocean* (2008). Moreover, the Pacific has been the canvas of more diverse thematic experiences than the black and revolutionary Atlantic: island settler colonialism, resource extraction, the total war, thermonuclear testing, the proliferation of military bases, ecological conservation, *etc.*



In short, the Pacific Ocean has been a *global crucible* of variegated visions, interpretations and projects derived from different corners of the planet. Construals of this ocean have been constantly reassessed and contested, but also compounded and hybridized in ways that can produce new meanings and imaginaries of it. At this conference, we shed light on some of the most significant aspects of such ideological entanglements in the imperial and postcolonial periods.

### **Research questions**

In this research exploration, we pay particular attention to the contingency, fluidity, shifting interconnections and/or potential disruptions of relevant dichotomous constructions: terra/aqua, centre/periphery, colonizer/colonized, foreign/indigenous and artificial/natural (or human/non-human). What role did the opposition between land and sea play in intellectual history texts and how did the Pacific Ocean figure in this opposition? How were the inner small islands peripherized in the intrusive schemes for the ocean, such as that of the Asia-Pacific? In what ways have postcolonial Pacific Island thinkers engaged with and recast the colonizer's terms? How crucial has nature been to such hybridized reclamations of the Pacific Ocean? What are the origins of the Indo-Pacific project and to what extent does this liberal international project reflect past imperial views? What power dynamics and historical circumstances help explain the emergence of these hegemonic and counter-hegemonic proposals?

We also take authors' positionalities seriously. What has the Pacific Ocean meant to Ryukyans/Okinawans as people caught between an overwhelming Japanese mainland and the South Seas (Nan'yo)? How have neo-French authors in the overseas territories, including New Caledonia, embraced the Ocean out of their ambivalent positionality? What discursive strategies have historically marginalized Pacific Islanders taken to shake the existing global-political structure? In addressing these and other relevant questions, we will examine how the aforementioned dichotomies have been shifted, challenged and/or disrupted as well as how authors' positionalities have featured in such a reimagining. Shaped by this contingency with regularly reassessed, contested and hybridized visions, the Pacific Ocean is a geo-cultural entity in motion, which is the point of departure for this conference.



We will convene intellectual historians from various areas of study, from the history of political thought to literature, to reflect on the following (non-exclusive) list of topics:

- Meanings of islands and oceans in intellectual history
- Conceptions of land and sea regarding the Pacific
- Imperialism, (settler) colonialism and the Pacific Ocean
- Nuclear energy and the Pacific
- Genealogies of the Asia-Pacific and the Indo-Pacific
- Okinawa/Ryukyu and the Pacific across WWII
- Capitalism and the Pacific Ocean
- Postcolonialism and the Blue Pacific
- Ecology and eco-politics in the Pacific

To apply, please send a 300 words abstract and short bio to [tbaji@waka.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp](mailto:tbaji@waka.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp) before 30 April 2024. Successful applicants will be notified by 31 May 2024. Draft papers, due 28 February 2025, will be circulated prior to the conference. Publication plans will also be discussed.

Note: We have funds, albeit limited, to help cover travel and/or lodging expenses for overseas participants. Please indicate in the abstract whether you need financial assistance (if possible with a rough estimate).

Mode of delivery: Our intention is to hold the conference as an in-person event. However, in cases where in-person participation proves impractical for some paper presenters due to constraints such as overseas travel costs or other reasons, we will explore the option of connecting them online.

Contact info (any query):

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