Review Article

Writing the British Imperial and Colonial History: A Global Perspective

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Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850-1939, by Tamson PIETSCH, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013. 256pp. ISBN: 978-0719085024

The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire, by Giordano NANNI, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012. xviii + 254 pp. ISBN: 978-0719091292

The British colonial world once formed a vast commercial, political, military, and cultural entity, whose sphere of influences stretched from the Far Eastern port of Formosa to the nomadic Patagonian plain of the New World in South America. As a dominant European seaborne Empire, Britain, albeit a latecomer

compared to Spain and Portugal, has been influential in the formation and transformation of considerable parts of our world from the eighteen century onwards, if not earlier. Classical authors, often with great works, such as James Mill and his six-volume *The History of British India*,[1] George Bancroft and an even more colossal, ten-volume *History of the United States of America*, first appeared in 1834,[2] as well as Seeley's *The Expansion of England*, first published in 1883,[3] presented an early stage of writing the British imperial and colonial history. Although focusing in a particular nation or colony rather than taking global perspectives, and perhaps emphasizing more on 'difference' than 'integration,' these classics may be viewed today as an initial attempt to document the history of the British world in an interconnected fashion.

This review looks at recent development of British imperial and colonial history writing from the 1980s to understand how it could, and does, form a crucial part of the world history. It first gives a brief overview of the cultural approach that integrates different locales in the Empire to form a trans-regional and transnational narrative. This practice is exemplified by the series of Studies of Imperialism, the 'new imperial history,' and various scholars associated with them. The essay then looks at inter-colony/dominion interactions with less tangible mechanisms by reviewing two recent publications from the above-mentioned series, *Empire of Scholars* by Pietsch and *The Colonisation of Time* by Nanni. Lastly, it assesses the limitation of the British imperial and colonial history writing in a global context, and identifies possible aspects for further investigation in the field.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH IMPERIAL AND COLONIAL HISTORY

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[1] James Mills, *The History of British India* (London: Baldwin, 1817), first appeared in three-volumes.

[2] George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America, from the Discovery of the American Continent* (Boston: C. C. Little and J. Brown, 1842-1874).

[3] John Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1883).

1984, in retrospect, seems to be a critical year for historians of British Empire. The near completion of post-war decolonization (except for a few pockets such as Hong Kong), the establishment of the Commonwealth, and an ever-expanding European Union, brought Britain as a nation, and its history writing as a field, away from its imperial past. Historians might not forget this global Empire, but the field was in disintegration as national and regional boundaries not only demarcated political entities but also their respective historical accounts, closely tied with post-war ideologies and nationalism. In surveying the field in 1984, Fieldhouse imagines that only an ideal imperial historian, being "in the interstices of his subject, poised above the 'area of inter-action' like some satellite placed in space, looking, Janus-like in two or more ways at the same time,"[4] could accomplish the impossible mission of writing an imperial history.

In this same year, Manchester University Press (MUP) published the first volume of a series of Studies in *Imperialism, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* by John MacKenzie. It was soon followed by an edited volume, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, also by MacKenzie, in 1986. Among many empire-and-colonial-themed series by respectable academic publishers, the MUP series is perhaps one of the most influential, and certainly the most productive. While not pretending to be the 'super-historian' as Fieldhouse described, editors and authors of the series attempt to recover the once-strong interactions between the periphery and the core, and to examine the intricate links among different nodes of the empire and its overseas territories, most notably through cultural approaches. This is particularly obvious in its early volumes written or edited by Mackenzie. Here, the impact of the British imperialism has been understood not via battles and conquests in Asian, African or Australian territories, nor via politicians in Whitehall and merchants of industrial cities. Instead, the focus is on the everyday life of ordinary people in Britain, and their interactions with the conception and reality of the

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[4] David Fieldhouse, "Can Humpty Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12 (1984): 18-19.

Empire at home. The presence of the Empire during the period of 'high imperialism' was felt through cultural encounters such as music-halls, mass media, school textbooks, juvenile fictions, youth movements, and so on, by ordinary Britons who might never ever set steps beyond their home towns and villages in the British Isle.

As a matter of fact, historians of British Empire have been trying to write plausible narratives of the seemingly extraordinary Empire even before its total demise. Up to the 1980s, historians, Marxism-conscious or not, often took the top-down, Eurocentric approach placing London as the source of political and economic impulses, and examined the interconnection between imperial metropolis and peripheries in a more or less unilateral fashion. Among post-Marxist writings, some focused on the vital place of the Industrial Revolution, while others suggested a "gentlemanly capitalism" based on service and financial sectors in southeast England,[5] but the starting point was almost always Britain (or more precisely in some cases, the City of London). Recent works along this line continues to acknowledge that "Britain was very much a part of the empire, just as the rest of the empire was very much part of Britain,"[6] and expands its horizons to cultural and social spheres, but the impulses and inspirations remain largely at the imperial center. One recent example is Cannadine's interpretation of the Empire, the "vast interconnected world," through social hierarchy, or "ornamentalism." Closely related to his early study of class in Britain,[7] it is almost inevitable that this book assumes the origin of a pan-Empire framework in the metropole.

In this sense, MacKenzie and his fellow MUP authors' contribution to a culture-based, network-minded, and de-metropolis approach is evident, despite critics and controversies

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[5] P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansions Overseas I: The Old Colonial system, 1688–1850," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 39, no. 4 (1986): 501-25; "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansions Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850 –1945," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 40, no. 1 (1987): 1-26.

[6] David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xvii.

[7] David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

it has received.[8] Thirty years on, the MUP series, for which now MacKenzie serves as its editor, has seen the publication of a hundred volumes and it is still going strong. If taking the cultural approach in the metropole is one of many possibilities to write the history of the British Empire, a possibility that is open to continuous scholarly debate, one thing for sure is that, this perspective helps to enhance our understanding of the integrity of a colonial world from a globalized perspective. Although the first volumes tend to focus on the imperial center in Britain, the geographic range has since expanded while the trans-regional and transnational bondage maintained. Essentially, it looks beyond particular colonies, dominions or the home country itself, thus reconnecting the flows of people, capitals, and ideas, and saves the history of British Empire from a distorted and fragmented corner. Beyond the cohort of British imperial and colonial historians, readers with wider interests and focuses are now given a history of our world between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, fully intertwined, with colonialism and imperialism as one of many factors that played a part.

Incidentally, the publication of the MUP series has seen itself "largely in parallel, sometimes in direct tension with, and sometimes as an integral part of"[9] the development of the "new imperial history." While the latter is originated separately with "a feminist and a post-colonial orientation," and is "inspired by work from disciplines other than history" for "an explicit political agenda,"[10] it also works on breaking the geographic boundary between peripheries and the core, and through cultural and political perspectives, often specializing on gender and race.[11] For

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[8] The most notable critique comes from Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[9] Alan Lester, "Spatial Concepts and Historical Geographies," in *Writing Imperial Histories*, ed. Andrew Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 120.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Notable scholars and works include Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), and Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

instance, Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects* analyzes the mutual influences between Britain and Jamaica on "making the imperial man" in both locations, setting under the historical background of the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century.[12] The process involves black and white population in Jamaica as well as religious and secular public in Birmingham. In this case, the geographic focus is expanded from the metropole, as often seen in the early volumes of the MUP series, to a dual locality of metrople and colony. The circulation is no longer unilateral, and the impact could be felt both ways. Works by Hall and other scholars related to the 'new imperial history' therefore present a more subtle nature of imperial webs and a further integrated history than we normally have thought.

The Foucauldian discourse on power relationships, and Said's take on culture, knowledge and agency, have been the inescapable key themes for many historical works over this period.[13] In the context of imperial and colonial history writing, one interesting topic is the formation and circulation of colonial knowledge. In *Empire and Information,* Bayly examines the foundation of the colonial conquests and administration by investigating the cultural encounters underlining colonial sovereignty.[14] Intelligence collection on local knowledge played a decisive role in British military expansion and political domination in several frontier wars fought by the East India Company in the early nineteenth century, attested by the unsuccessful stories in Nepal, Burma and the northwestern frontiers.[15] Once again, the encounter was far from unilateral, as local interlocutors were actively engaged in the formation and development of astronomical, medical, language and geographical knowledge, along with colonial officials and scholars.[16] Information collected and analyzed, and knowledge produced and disseminated in peripheries not only facilitate and justify the colonial rule on the spot, but

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[12] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

[13] For MacKenzie's view on Said and Orientalism, see John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[14] C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[15] Ibid., 97-141.

[16] Ibid., 247-312.

also provide feedback to form the opinions in other localities within and beyond the British Empire, as well as laying the foundation of indigenous political awareness back in the location. In this sense, it reaches a similar ground to take the British imperial world into the context of a global connection. Not surprisingly, as a world historian, Bayly's later work, *The Birth of the Modern World,* expands the scope from the field of South Asia to a wider, this time, global context.[17]

CONNECTING THE BRITISH ACADEMIC WORLD

There might be considerable debates on the definition of globalization and how to best take it in the historical study. Nonetheless, the recent history writing of imperial and colonial history shows "the interconnectedness of different parts of the world, it is best understood as a process, or a set of processes, that compress time and space, and accelerate the 'interdependence' of societies and states."[18] And this interconnectedness becomes increasingly vital for historians on British Empire in the twenty-first century; many of them actively expand the thematic horizon to examine less noticeable aspects of imperial and colonial world in order to further our understanding of the period in a transnational and global framework. Tamson Pietsch's choice is universities and academia in British and the settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa.

In *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World 1850-1939,* a 2013 volume of the MUP series, Australia-born Pietsch discusses the formation and development of the British academic world between the nineteenth century and the Second World War.[19] It looks at the establishment of educational institutions at settler colonies and its natural con-

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[17] C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons, 1780-1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

[18] Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, eds., *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

[19] Tamson Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

nection with old universities in Britain, and the human and knowledge circulations in the twentieth century, especially during the two world wars. Based on her recently completed doctoral thesis at the Oxford University, her own experience in higher educational institutions of present-day Commonwealth countries may also help to make an interesting reflection on the imperial academic system over the last two centuries. This is a book about the "institutional and social practices employed by universities and academics across the British settler world."[20]

The first part traces the foundation of educational institutions in settler colonies, often resulting from local political efforts and religious missions in the first half of the nineteenth century. These early establishments obtained inspirations from the home country, initially from the old Oxbridge system, but increasingly from the examining institution of the University of London. For these new settler universities, the University of London and other provincial universities presented a transferable model to provide "professional and vocational training, both in industrial regions of Britain and settler colonies."[21] At the end of 1880, Pietsch concludes, settler universities "reposition[ed] themselves as members of an expansive British academic community must be seen as part of the broader integrative processes reshaping both the empire and the world at the end of the nineteenth century."[22]

The next two parts then investigate the intricate linkage between settler universities and their counterparts in Britain, starting from 1880, by focusing on two themes, 'Connective Mechanism' and 'Networks.' Mechanisms such as professional publications and library collections, leave of absence for faculties (an early version of Sabbatical), and travelling scholarship for exchange students form the foundation of intra-Empire network where people and knowledge were circulated. This academic circulation, however, did not include India and South East Asia, whose educational responsibilities were exclusively held by the

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[20] Ibid., 3.
[21] Ibid., 32.
[22] Ibid., 28-29.

Indian Educational Service.[23] The purpose of this carefully waved web was to "foster ties of mutual understanding of the English-speaking peoples around the world."[24] Another method to enhance this web was a long-distance recruiting system used by many settler universities when hiring new professors and researchers. Settler universities relied heavily on their London-based representatives and associations to search for suitable candidates from the home country, therefore guaranteed a continuous supply of British academia who would naturally extend the existing scholarly network. In the twentieth century, there were also regular intra-Empire meetings held in London, providing another opportunity to further consolidate the scholarly network in occasions such as the 1903 Allied Colonial Universities Conference, and the 1912 Congress of the Universities of the British Empire. The 1912 Congress also invited Indian universities, reflecting the adjusted perspective within the Empire approaching the Great War.

This expansive British academic community was further enhanced during two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. As Pietsch points out, the war "functioned as both an exceptional laboratory and an enormous common room, at once drawing upon and intensifying the processes and networks that had held the British academic world together since the 1880s."[25] Scientists from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South African made vital contribution to the war effort in both wars, best exemplified by the New Zealand-born physicist Ernest Rutherford. As a young undergraduate, Rutherford was the recipient of a travelling scholarship, the 1851 Exhibition Scheme. After graduating from Cambridge, he then worked in Canadian and British universities at different stage of his career. Rutherford's intra-Empire career path was followed by other members of the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge University, of which Rutherford was the Director. The constant flow of human movements, in later years, also stimulated the development of anti-colonialism at the heart of the British Higher Educational system, where In-

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[23] Ibid., 70-71.
[24] Ibid., 49.
[25] Ibid., 139.

dian students at Oxford, and marginalized scholars at LSE[26] led the way to challenge the "gendered and gentlemanly, racial and familial discourses"[27] that underlined this expansive British scholarly network.

As a study spanning over several continents and multiple locations, one of the key themes running throughout is the sense of *space*; a spatial relationship between center and periphery. It is easy to make the comparison to Laidlaw's earlier work, also in the MUP series, on the interconnection of the British administrative network of governance, the formal and informal networks between the Colonial Office in London and the Government Houses in the settler colonies.[28] In the same vein, individuals examined by Pietsh here often "operated at the junction of culture and empire, but his mobility and his continued participation in the world of British scholarship suggest that, although working in a colonial university, he hardly sat at the margins of British academia."[29] The spatial dynamics "points to a limited, exclusionary and irregular scholarly community that was made by very specific forms of long-distance social and institutional relations."[30] For instance, the long-distance recruitment system adopted by settler universities was a "personalized systems of trust were something settler universities had been using since the 1880s as a way of confronting the problem of distance."[31] Reading through this book, we see an expansive network made up by carefully selective nodes and was exclusive not only to other locations of the Empire, such as India, East and South East Asia, and Africa, but also to most European countries and America, except for a few special occasions such as refugee scientists during WWII[32] and Canada's long association with its southern neighbor.[33]

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[26] Ibid., 178-82.
[27] Ibid., 1.
[28] Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815-45: Patronage, The Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).
[29] Pietsh, *Empire of Scholars*, 2.
[30] Ibid., 4.
[31] Ibid., 65.
[32] Ibid., 190.
[33] Ibid., 48.

As the author explicitly acknowledges, this scholarly network of the British Empire is "more than local but not quite global world."[34] However, it does provide us valuable insights to a global Anglophone empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the formation and development of educational systems in some parts of the world that would make considerably regional and international impacts in the second half of the twentieth century.

TEMPORAL INTEGRATION OF THE EMPIRE

If educational institutions, student exchange programs, and overseas faculty recruiting system are still something tangible in the inter-Empire flow of people and ideas, Giordano Nanni's 2012 book, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire*, provides an even more intangible, though equally influential, network.[35] This network connected, integrated, and eventually transformed, geographically remote parts of the Empire based on a uniformed temporal framework that dictated by an Empire-wide time (eventually the Greenwich Mean Time) and a strict doctrine on how to calculate and spend time.

Science and technology are not new subjects to imperial and colonial historians.[36] While the British engineers and colonial administrators had been famous for their passion on railways at home and in overseas territories, the colonial railway has also been investigated through the relationship between technology and sovereignty.[37] Technological development on transportation, communication and media, and its applications throughout the Empire continue to receive scholarly attention.[38] If technology

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[34] Ibid., 2.

[35] Giordano Nanni, *Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

[36] For instance, see Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[37] See Ronald E. Robinson, ed., *Railway Imperialism* (New York: Greenwood, 1991).

[38] For recent works, see, Special Issue 01(Everyday Technology in South and Southeast Asia), *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (2012); Simon Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: the BBC and the British World, 1927-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

once helped to make our world smaller, then writing the history of imperial and colonial technological projects provides a perfect approach to integrated imperial territorial segments to a wholesome entity that transgresses national borders and geographic obstacles.

However, if Nanni's staring point is time, a rather abstract concept that is related to, but not entirely built on, technology, he ultimately works on "a far broader cultural phenomenon . . . to impose a centralized, moral and economic order for coordinating the earthly lives and rituals of all men and women with the temporal order of . . . the colonisers' universe."[39]

In chapter 1, Nanni first set out to investigate how "British identities and civilities came to be defined to a significant extent by certain rituals, routines, and attitudes towards time,"[40] which was exemplified by "a strict respect for the Sabbath ritual and the principles of time-thrift discipline"[41] of the middle-class, Protestant notion. The ubiquitous existence of clock towers in Victorian Britain not only established the technological advancement and necessity (for synchronization of railway communication, for instance[42]), but also to exert the "nineteenth-century British notions of identity, religion, class, and—ultimately—civilization."[43]

The rest of the book then examines the spread of these British notions to two settler colonies through time-related projects in Victoria, Australia (the country where Nanni was born and educated) and the Cape Colony. For European migrants, this was a process that reconstructed a familiar, orderly environment regulated by seven-day week routines; for the Africans and Aborigines, it was the forced surrender of their own calendars and rhythms, seen as the disorderly "Otherness," although not without subtle resistance and negotiation. All these enforcements and struggles would be developed around the key concept of

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[39] Nanni, *Colonisation of Time*, 222.

[40] Ibid., 8

[41] Ibid.

[42] For railway and its impact in Britain, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[43] Nanni, *Colonisation of Time*, 8

time. As Nanni concludes, this study "is concerned primarily with the manner in which time has been constructed and understood, with the meanings and values that have been attached to it, and with the ways in which these have operated as a means of crafting identities and civilities."[44]

The colony of Victoria in the nineteenth century is the case in point in chapter 2 and 3. To replace aboriginal practice and disregard aboriginal concept of time, the book suggests, was ultimately a strategy to secure landownership for European settlers. Local interpretation of seasons in the antipode and aboriginal method of timekeeping, often relying on nature, were defining features of the original inhabitants in Victoria as seen by the colonists. In both official and unofficial accounts, they were portrayed as savage, an inferior race at a less-civilized stage of development. This last conclusion conveniently denied the Aboriginal peoples' attachment to the land because of their not being able to "visibly enclose[d], develop[ed], irrigate[d]" of the lands in question, hence provided the Crown a convenient justification and "legal foundation for British occupation" of this *terra nullies*.[45] Furthermore, colonial administrators and missionaries were keen to tame the seemingly irregular rhythms, irrational ceremonies, and frequent "walkabouts" of the Aborigines. In order to do so, they established mission stations and reserves, and applied strict timetables there to enforce seven-day week schedules and the separation of working and leisure times. By doing so, it essentially severed the Aborigines' links to the nature and its spatial and temporal orientation, replacing it with an imperial standard.

The second case in the Cape Colony is surveyed in chapter 4-6. While three original groups, the hunter-gatherer "Bushmen," the pastoralist Khoikhoi, and the farmer-agriculturalist Xhosa each presented a different type of "African time"[46] in a time-less land of Africa (as was often portrayed by newly arrived European migrants in the nineteenth century[47]), the existence of

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[44] Ibid., 5

[45] Ibid., 60.

[46] Ibid., 129-40.

[47] Ibid., 126-29.

local timekeeping was the target that British migrants determined to get rid of. It was attempted, in the first half of the nineteenth century, by missionaries trying to deploy the Christian notion of Sabbath and a seven-day regime in and beyond the frontier of the then Cape Colony. This was followed by more coercive methods in the second half of the century, when the colonial administration expanded its control after the eighth frontier war (1850-53) and the demand of labour soared after the discovery of diamond in 1867. Here the Lovedale Institute, set up by the Glasgow Missionary Society in western Cape, was taken as an example to demonstrate the institutional effort to train Africans to respect punctuation and time-thrift, and to regulate educational and industrial activities around the clock (literally), in an effort to replace the "African time" with British and Christian mores and values.

We see a few intra-Empire (not only the British one, though) exchanges in ideas and devices. For example, the main questions in a London publication, *Queries Respecting the Human Race, to be Addressed to Travellers and Others,* was adopted by the 1858-59 Victorian Select Committee on the condition of the Aboriginal population.[48] Another example was the transportation of bells, the symbol of Christian time, for chapels in the colonies. The bells in the Moravian station of Ebenezer in Victoria was sent directly from Saxony,[49] and the bell for the Wesleyan mission in Lily Fountain in Northern Cape was donated by one John Erving Esq. of Bristol.[50] However, what underlines this internationalization and standardization of time, ultimately by the world-wide adoption of the GMT from 1884, is a common notion that initiated in Britain based on the regularity of strict routine of time. The process of replacing various aboriginal times with this foreign, British/Christian time in several parts of the Empire "assum[ed] the authority to determine when other societies could work, rest and play, the emissaries of the clock worked daily, and hourly, in their quests to bring about a sense of world-wide 'order,' by exporting their ways of structuring the

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[48] Ibid., 67-72.
[49] Ibid., 98.
[50] Ibid., 170.

flow of time to distant lands, and by preaching to their inhabitants new ways of thinking, about what time itself is."[51] If there used to be multiple and highly localized interpretations of time, the process of colonization effectively erased all the varieties and integrated colonies firmly into a British world that recognized GMT as the standard time and dictated by seven-day week and Christian-based rituals and routines no later than the early twentieth century. As Nanni points out, "time became one of the first units of measurement to go 'global' "[52] in and beyond the British Empire, an international protocol we still observe today.

THE INTER-EMPIRE AND TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

The attention to and writing of imperial history is no doubt undergoing a revival, especially in this post-9/11 era when it is no longer true that "imperial history was seen as fusty, hidebound, backward-looking—and it appeared to many that studying empires necessarily meant being in favour of or nostalgic for them."[53] The challenge to understand the history of the world through the prism of British imperial and colonial experience, however, is undeniable. On the one hand, various approaches continue to be explored and expanded by historians to construct their narratives of the Empire, among which the cultural perspective that we have discussed so far is just one among many. Geopolitics, economics, and military operations remain popular topics, and book with these themes are well-received by general public, university students, and scholars with specific interests alike.[54] As Darwin rightly and repeatedly points out, the British Empire was not "hegemonic" and changed overtime; therefore its

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[51] Ibid., 3.

[52] Ibid., 221.

[53] Stephen Howe, "Imperial and Colonial History," accessed May 23, 2014, http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/imperial_post_colonial_history.html.

[54] Recent examples include: Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires 1400–2000* (London: Penguin, 2008) and *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

historians' method shall also not be "monolithic."[55] On the other hand, despite being the most influential global power for the last two centuries, and possessing a territory where "the sun never sets," this is after all, one European power among many others. It is true that by examining the extremely complicated internal dynamics and external interactions within and around this particular Empire, we obtain tremendous insights into the world of that period, and make valuable methodological and historiographical contributions to the discipline. But this is far from a completed picture.

There are undeniable spatial and temporal limitations here, as the imperial history of any Empire would, understandably, only deal with the lifespan and the sphere of one Empire, regardless of its longevity and expansiveness. After all, each Empire has its own range.

This is particularly problematic in some strategic locations, where several competing European colonial powers worked their ways concurrently. Although the history of Empire is a transnational history that links imperial center and colonial peripheries, it tends to overlook another layer of dynamics, the inter-imperial network that goes beyond any particular imperial border. Take the instance of South East Asia. The last two centuries saw the arrival and departure, conflicts and compromises, of almost all major European and American powers seeking imperial advantages in this region. The British, French, Dutch, Spanish, American and Portuguese colonies in South East Asia existed side by side and interacted actively, often ignoring any artificial imperial border. To some extent, the region managed to maintain the pre-colonial, intra-regional network. This was a site that incorporated colonial peripherals of different European Empires, the long-established indigenous patterns, and influences from its Asian neighbors such as China and Japan. Recent scholarships try to look other Empires and their interactions in the region,[56]

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[55] John Darwin, *The Empire Project: the Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

[56] For works beyond the British imperial writings, see Timothy J. Coates, *Convicts and Orphans: Forced and State-sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550–1755* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

or, adopt frameworks beyond the limitation of any one Empire or other political entity.[57] Both attempt to understand the multiple layered networks in this highly diversified region, often using one particular power, location, or ethnicity as the starting point. Even though this may bring us back to the debate and the dilemma of the validity of national and regional studies once again, the effort to look beyond one framework and to form inter-imperial perspectives has been increasingly acknowledged. In a recent volume that commemorates the 100th publication of the Manchester series, "inter-imperial crossings and intercolonial exchanges"[58] receive their due attention, and are supported by an increasing number of publications taking this approach.[59]

Perhaps a more significant limitation is the imperial and colonial history's ubiquitous ideology, that is, the very existence of imperialism and colonialism. According to Howe, the imperial history exhibits

> a tendency to see colonial power as an all-embracing, transhistorical force, controlling and transforming every aspect of colonised societies . . . The writings and attitudes of those involved with empire are seen as constituting a system, a network, a discourse in the sense made famous by Michel Foucault . . . It inextricably combines the production of knowledge with the exercise of power.[60]

This is certainly evident in most of the works examined here in this essay, a challenge to be negotiated perhaps by the next generations of historians working on the Empire and beyond, who might be able to broaden that focus even further.[61]

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[57] For instance, Mandy Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (Oxford University Press, 2013) examines the history of Kachin in an inter-connected context with influences from British colonial governments in India and Burma, the Burmese Kingdom and the imperial Chinese dynasty.

[58] Thompson, *Writing Imperial History*, 17.

[59] Recent examples in the series on inter-imperial connections include Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870– 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) and John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

[60] Howe, "Imperial and Colonial History."

[61] C. A. Bayly, "Writing World History," *History Today* 54, no. 2 (2004): 37.