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Horodowich, Elizabeth, and Alexander Nagel. Amerasia

Elizabeth Gansen

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**Horodowich, Elizabeth, and Alexander Nagel.*****Amerasia*.**

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. 464 + 13 col., 175 b/w ill. ISBN 9781942130833 (hardcover) US\$40.

Harkening back to Renaissance Europe's *wunderkammer*, or cabinets of curiosities, *Amerasia* is conceived as a "preliminary cabinet display" of artifacts (15). Unlike the eclectic mishmash of objects that characterized many cabinets of curiosities, however, a common thread unites the phenomena in this book: they all attest to a European imaginary in which the Americas were intimately associated with Asia and, in some cases, Africa (15). Elizabeth Horodowich and Alexander Nagel argue that the propensity to conflate one continent with the other was not, as has often been argued, a consequence of a homogenizing European gaze. Rather, artifacts interchangeably denominated as "Chinese," "Indian," and "Mexican"—such as a Mexican shield dating from around 1500, the provenance of which was updated several times in subsequent centuries—evidence contemporary beliefs of a new world that was at the same time part of Asia. One by one, Horodowich and Nagel turn their attention to a variety of artifacts—above all paintings, maps, and woodcuts—that illustrate the different ways in which the Americas appear in the Far East and the Far East in the Americas. While the details of this relationship vary from one object to the next, collectively they substantiate *Amerasia*'s central argument: for centuries after their discovery, American lands and peoples were integrated into a model of the world which asserted geographic and cultural proximity between them and their transpacific neighbours.

*Amerasia* is an important contribution to a growing field of scholarship on how early modern Europeans attempted to make sense of the Americas within a global order that included Asia and Africa. The book joins Ricardo Padrón's *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020) in challenging the reader to imagine the world as it was understood in the early modern period. In so doing, Horodowich and Nagel point to the pitfalls of a backwards gaze that assumes historical inevitability. It is all too easy to project our knowledge of the Americas—a separate landmass an ocean away from Asia—onto the works of early modern historians, artists, and cartographers. Yet even though the lands on early modern maps might assume similar contours to

those that we recognize today as the world's continents, that is not to say that they were interpreted as such by people at the time.

Horodowich and Nagel present *Amerasia* as an initial foray into a topic that demands much more attention. Hence the idea of a "cabinet" that strives to be as comprehensive as possible and that awaits further scholarly contributions on the materials, peoples, and places with which the book engages (15). Each of the book's sixteen chapters focuses on one or more artifacts whose analysis sheds light on the connection between the Americas and the Far East. That each chapter is designed as a unit in dialogue with but separate from the others provides *Amerasia* with much pedagogical possibility in a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses. The disadvantage of this format is that it lends itself to excessive repetition of the central argument and many intertextual references that direct readers to other chapters for further information on a given topic or artifact. The chapters dedicated to cartography in particular are prone to this tendency. These drawbacks, however, are an inevitable consequence of the book's structure and in general they are handled well by its authors.

*Amerasia* concludes with an afterword by Timothy Brook, a well-respected Canadian sinologist. His essay, "Chinese Cartographers Map the World," is a necessary and fascinating counterpoint to the book's primary focus on Europe and its outward glance towards Asia and the Americas. In contrast, Brooks considers the gaze originating "from Asia out to Europe and the Americas" (369). As Europeans were busy writing, illustrating, and charting new worlds, were the Chinese doing the same? Was *Amerasia* a concept with which they also engaged, albeit in their unique fashion? The answers to these questions demonstrate the vast differences that existed in the culture and circumstances of Europe and China at the time, which render a comparison difficult. This afterword signals the potential for continued dialogue in the future between scholars of East Asia and those of early modern Europe and colonial Latin America, exchanges which are ripe with possibility.

In short, *Amerasia* serves as a valuable resource in its exploration of a topic that is increasingly being recognized as an important direction for scholarship on the Americas, and a call to others to take items out of its cabinet display for further examination and analysis.

ELIZABETH GANSEN

Grand Valley State University

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