Previous UC Pacific Worlds Workshops


"By 1945, the US actively positioned itself as a preeminent global power - one that was armed with a development agenda and that prioritized democratic capitalism and a free market. In so doing, it mobilized distinct Pacific crossings, from US engagements with Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore, to Hawaii, Peru, and Mexico. Can these international and transnational engagements be collectively remembered as "Pacific worlds," however? This talk explores some of the possibilities and limitations of an oceanic framework in understanding this mid-twentieth century moment."

November 27th, 2017: Mark B. Kelley, Ph.D. Candidate in Literature, UC San Diego, "Sentimental Seamen: Structures of Labor, Feeling and Bondage in an American Age of Sail."

"This paper analyzes logbooks, journals, portage bills, sailors’ memoirs, and maritime fiction to track shipboard cultures of sympathy in an age of sail. As he argues, a sailing vessel’s arrangement—including its closed quarters, its coordinated labors, and its hierarchical organization—both fostered sailors’ fellow feeling and structured that unity for economic ends. The fluid nature of genre in maritime writing, Kelley concludes, is an extension of sailors’ attempts to find an aesthetic form that best encapsulates their lives' material and affective singularly."


"In the decades after World War II, tens of thousands of soldiers and civilian contractors across Asia and the Pacific found work through the U.S. military. Recently liberated from colonial rule, these workers were drawn to the opportunities the military offered and became active participants of the U.S. empire, most centrally during the U.S. war in Vietnam. Through their military deployments, Man argues, these soldiers took part in the making of a new Pacific world—a decolonizing Pacific—in which the imperatives of U.S. empire collided with insurgent calls for decolonization, producing often surprising political alliances, imperial tactics of suppression, and new visions of radical democracy."

February 5th, 2018: Sarah Schneedwind, Professor of History, UC San Diego, “The Truth about the Early Fifteenth Century Chinese Ocean Voyages.”

The pre-Columbian state-sponsored ocean voyages of early Ming times are sometimes called "voyages of exploration." Eurocentrists (of all political stripes and nationalities) sometimes attribute China's failure to develop sufficiently in a modern direction, leaving it open to 19th c. Western imperialism, to the short-sighted Ming bureaucracy's decision to stop funding the
voyages after 1431. Meanwhile, the current Chinese government is promoting the achievements of the voyages to stoke nationalist pride, focusing for instance on the enormous size of the vessels. This talk will explain why the voyages were begun, why they were ended, and how big those ships really were, placing the voyages in a non-teleological historical framework.

March 5th, 2018: Cristela Garcia-Spitz, Curator of the Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology, UC San Diego, "Patrolling the Past: Bringing the Papua New Guinea Colonial-Era Reports into the Digital Realm."

Patrolling the Past: Bringing the Papua New Guinea Colonial-Era Reports into the Digital Realm

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) patrol reports contain first-hand accounts written by patrol officers (kiaps) as they patrolled rural areas of PNG. The reports are important primary sources for the pre-independence history of the country and continue to be useful in contemporary PNG. In the 1980s, the UC San Diego Library initiated and supported a project to provide better access to the reports housed in the National Archives of Papua New Guinea, resulting in production by the Archives of a large set of microfiche, with copies that were eventually purchased by institutions in Australia, New Zealand and the US. Over the last several years, UCSD’s Digital Library Development Program has been engaged in a project to digitize the reports and make them accessible online. This presentation will provide an overview of the patrol reports, the intricacies of the organizational structure, research interest, and use of the collection, and the processes used to bring the project to fruition.

Cristela Garcia-Spitz recently became the Curator of the Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Library. In her former role as Project Manager in the Digital Library Development Program at UCSD, she worked on several digital projects within the Oceania Collection. She has a background in archives at Princeton University before coming to the UCSD Library. She earned her Masters in Library and Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

March 12th, 2018: David Pedersen, Professor of Anthropology, UC San Diego, “Thinking like a Port: Capitalism and Nature in San Diego.”

This presentation takes up a phenomenon that is surprisingly common worldwide: ethnically diverse working-class people regularly catching and consuming toxin-laden seafood from an urban embayment. The talk focuses on San Diego Bay and explores the way that mainstream academic knowledge production has carved up this complex issue according to several well-worn distinctions: natural/socio-cultural; material/meaningful; and past/present. Drawing on recent critical scholarship at the crossroads of anthropology and history, the talk develops a more holistic and inclusive modality meant to overcome the distortions and reifications yielded by our inherited discipline-specific division of labor. In this way, the presentation seeks to contribute to knowledge production appropriate for ensuring the flourishing of life on the planet, which may or may not be coterminous with the flourishing of academic disciplines.
April 30th, 2018: Karl Gerth, Professor of History, UC San Diego, “Stimulating and Suppressing Desire for Foreign Products in Mao-era China.”

What is the best way to interpret the history of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) since its founding with the Communist Revolution in 1949? This talk answers this question through three related arguments. First, China under Mao was not primarily building a socialist revolutionary state and society. Rather, while there were undoubtedly “socialist” aspects to the PRC’s history, it is better to primarily frame the history of the PRC as a variation of capitalism—state capitalism—rather than socialism. Second, and state capitalism included a critical but less examined element that I call state consumerism, the specific subject of this talk. State consumerism refers to the corollary of state efforts to control accumulated capital, namely, state attempts to control how the country allocated its resources. And, third, as the talk will suggest through the examples of advertising, shopping, and hard-to-acquire consumer goods such as wristwatches and sewing machines, state consumerism not only failed but also backfired and spread bourgeois consumerism and revived forms of market capitalism prevalent in China especially since the death of Chairman Mao in 1976.


Reflections on East Asian-African interfaces often focus narrowly on China's economic and political interests in postcolonial Africa. Yet, relationships between East Asian and African societies both long predate recent engagements and have been shaped by African interests in myriad ways. For example, in the decades before the Second World War eastern African consumers purchased a great variety of Japanese-made clothing and other cotton goods. Despite British efforts to exclude Japanese goods from colonial markets and the diplomatic tensions such efforts produced, most clothing purchased by East Africans in the latter interwar period was made in Japan. The relationship between Japan and colonial Africa would expand significantly in the 1950s, and African demand for Japanese imports would only begin to decline in the early postcolonial era. To appreciate this multidimensional, transregional relationship, this paper examines the intersection of structural shifts in Japanese industry, changing eastern African consumer demands, and the machinations of British imperial economic policy before and after World War II. In highlighting a longer history of East Asian-African engagement, the paper reflects on the nexus of capitalism, empire, and sartorial cultures in the twentieth century.

June 4th, 2018: Mikeal D. Fauvelle, Ph.D. Candidate in the Dept. of Anthropology, UC San Diego, “Acorns, Asphaltum, and Asymmetrical Exchange: Reevaluating Island Economies in Ancient California.”

With an occupational history stretching over more than 13,000 years, California’s Channel Islands offer an extremely rich archaeological record to scientists interested ancient maritime societies. Over the course of this long history, island populations saw the emergence of intensive networks of cross-channel trade, the creation of a shell based currency, and formation of incipient systems of social stratification. Academic debates over the origins of these developments have tended to focus on the perceived marginality of island environments, arguing that food shortages during times of resource stress would have pressured islanders to trade with the mainland. Recent research, however, has shown that our modern understanding of island
marginality was heavily influenced by environmental damage caused by early 20th century ranching. Rather than being terrestrial depauperate, islands may have been highly attractive and abundant environments for their ancient inhabitants. This presentation will overview these recent developments, highlighting experimental data showing that cross-channel trade was likely focused on value-added products rather than subsistence commodities. I argue that our current data does not support a model in which demographic stress or resource scarcity drove the formation of Chumash chiefdoms. Instead, I suggest that these developments were more likely driven by the needs of large-scale regional prestige economies on the islands, the mainland, and beyond.