PART FOUR

THE PACIFIC OCEAN
INTRODUCTION: THE RHYTHMS OF THE TRANSPACIFIC

Henry Yu

Before the nineteenth century, the major seafaring migrants crossing the vast stretches of water were Pacific Islanders who had explored the open ocean in large enough numbers to settle islands all the way across to the Hawaiian Islands (and very likely had reached other sites close to and along the Pacific Coast of the Americas). Transpacific migrations grew from these courageous voyages and those of the various sailors, traders, craftsmen, and laborers who had travelled the Spanish galleon route between Acapulco and Manila since the sixteenth century, into a tenuous network of mass migration routes. The nineteenth century was the first great period of mass migrations across the Pacific, but paradoxically this period was also marked by the virtual elimination of these new migration patterns by 1930.

The first essay in this section uses the example of Cantonese-speaking migrants to illustrate how Pacific crossings between 1830 and 1930 were marked by intermittent rhythms, an unsteady beat of movement and stoppage. This arrhythmia reflected the interaction between the aspirations of migrants and the timing of laws designed to curtail transpacific moves. As migrants from southern China traveled the Pacific in search of their fortunes, they crossed paths with migrants from the transatlantic world who created ideologies of white supremacy to exclude both Asian migrants and indigenous peoples from settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. These politics of racial exclusion framed the lives of almost all of the migrants and the native peoples they encountered in the Pacific, even as migrants and indigenous peoples had their own ideas about what they were doing.

Eiichiro Azuma explains how Japanese migrants understood their migration eastward to the Americas in the context of the broader colonial expansion of Japanese settlement southwards into Micronesia and westwards into Korea and Manchuria. Escaping national narratives of inclusion and exclusion within U.S. and Canadian scholarship that only interpret Japanese migrants within immigrant paradigms of belonging, Azuma analyzes how Japanese migration was understood