The Pacific Rim as a region has drawn much attention since the late 1960s, during the Vietnam War.¹ In the 1970s and 1980s, the term was “almost exclusively an American usage” (Connery, “Pacific” 32). This usage has been criticized by Christopher L. Connery as “capitalistic universalism” (1996, p. 285).² However, in recent decades, since several imposing economic powers have arisen on the Asian brim of the Rim, the term has acquired a more extensive meaning; and its cultural dimensions, especially that of popular culture, have been explored. Bob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake suggest a new way of global zoning: “regions and region-states increasingly override national borders and older territorial forms and create special economic zones of uneven development and transcultural hybridity” and the Pacific Rim is such a region (p. 2). Timothy Gray also believes that this Rim concept is justifiable, because “people sharing the same ocean, share the same values, markets, and environmental and political concerns” (p. 19).

¹ The term ‘Pacific Rim’ originates from ‘Rim of Asia,’ which was used in 1967 in a document on the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations’ study mission to the Western Pacific (Connery, “Pacific” 33). Christopher L. Connery points out there are four main discourses of the Rim: “Orientalism,” “modernization theory,” “left liberal humanist internationalism” and “Cold War discourse” (“Pacific” 33).

² As a political term, Connery criticizes it: “the imagination of the Pacific Rim can be read as one attempt to conceptualize—and it is important to note that this conceptualization is primarily for U.S. consumers—an arena for a hoped-for legitimation through the false promise of spectacularity provided by common Pacific Rim tropes of the dynamic, the new, the revivified, and the miraculous. As Bruce Cumings mocks ‘Rimspeak,’ ‘[t]ropes of dynamism and miracles also say this: Capitalist universalism is the only thing I can see; thus I discover the Pacific Rim’” (“Oceanic” 285).
In the context of this chapter, ‘Pacific Rim’ refers to the northern part of the Rim, covering the countries and areas on the brim such as California, British Columbia, Alaska, eastern Siberia, Japan, Korea, eastern China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. I ascertain the cultural dimension of the region, in particular how a Pacific Rim consciousness is presented in the writings of some American West Coast authors. ‘Pacific Rim consciousness’ can be succinctly defined as consciously identifying oneself with, or actively advocating, the Pacific Rim and viewing the area as one cultural region of coalition, one bioregion. I mainly explore the life and writings of those authors who are Americans of Euro and/or Anglo descents, because when they develop a Pacific Rim consciousness, they share an estrangement from the heritage of European civilizations and share a belief in communion and coalition with Asian people.

Kenneth Rexroth (1905–1982), a poet who was born in the Midwest and was self-educated in New York City, moved to San Francisco in 1927. In 1935, he wrote a poem entitled “Another Early Morning Exercise” (1966, pp. 92–93), which describes what occupied the mind of the narrator as he walked the streets of San Francisco in the small hours. To our surprise, his mind was occupied by the battles that were going on between the Chinese communists and the KMT army in southern China, as well as by Du Fu (pp. 712–770), a Chinese poet whom he had admired and translated. He also praised Du Fu’s anti-war and humanitarian stance:

I wonder if the wooden image erected by his family
still stands in the shrine at Chéng Tú;
I wonder if anyone still burns paper
Before that face of hungry intelligence and sympathy.
He had a hard life, he hated war and despotism and famine

It could be understood why the poet worried so much about the outcome of the battles, for Rexroth, a socialist and anarchist, naturally would support the Chinese Communist. However, his esteem for Du Fu stemmed from an admiration for this ancient poet’s magnitude and altruism. Rexroth’s poem would be even more exceptional if placed in the context of the expansionism of the West. Christopher L. Connery points out that in the eye of American expansionism, which always

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3 Chinese-American and nisei writers in the West Coast are not included, mainly because their Pacific Rim consciousness involves different heritages and different issues of cultural and ethnic identity.