

RICHMOND ELLIS, ROBERT. *They Need Nothing: Hispanic-Asian Encounters of the Colonial Period*. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 241 pp.

Robert Richmond Ellis's *They Need Nothing: Hispanic-Asian Encounters of the Colonial Period* brings together an impressive corpus of works centered on the paradox that Asian cultures represented for early-modern Spanish observers: cultural difference that seemed to undermine Western notions of superiority and universality. The book takes its title from Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza's *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran Reyno de la China* (1585), which expresses awe at the achievements of Chinese civilization despite the author's missionary zeal: "todo lo necesario para la vida humana les sobraua, y de nada tenían necesidad" (qtd. in Richmond Ellis, 86). Richmond Ellis examines these works, primarily penned by Spanish missionaries, under the rubric of Hispanic Asianography, that is, as texts that do not simply produce Asia as an object of academic inquiry but more importantly represent the elaboration of European selfhood through encounters with Asian otherness in the age of global expansion. In addition to the writings of Spanish missionaries and soldiers, Richmond Ellis also includes Asian responses to the presence of Spanish interlopers, ranging from the seventeenth-century Japanese apostate Fabian Fucan's refutation of Christianity to José Rizal's use of Spanish colonial historiography in the construction of a postcolonial Filipino identity.

The work is cogently organized into four chapters divided into the areas of Spanish colonial intervention in Asia: Japan, China, Cambodia and the Philippines. The chapter on Japan's "Christian Century" begins with a nuanced reading of the Jesuit missionary Francisco Xavier's writings in Spanish and Portuguese. In a recurring theme throughout his analysis of Hispanic Asianography, Richmond Ellis argues that Xavier "represents the Other through whom he discovers his own inner self. He confronts this self not when alone or in a state of introspection but when he stands outside of himself and his culture in a foreign land" (36). Richmond Ellis likewise applies this insight to his reading of the Franciscan missionary Marcelo de Ribadeneira's *Historia de las Islas del Archipiélago, y reynos de la gran China, tartaria, Cochinchina, Malaca, Sian, Camboxa y Jappon* (1601), which inadvertently undermines the providential discourse

of Spanish imperialism with descriptions of the religious orders' conflicting methods of evangelization and Japanese reactions to the strangeness of the Franciscans' vow of poverty. The chapter concludes with an examination of Japanese responses to Christian evangelization, which provide a striking counterpoint to Jesuit and Franciscan struggles to reconcile the plurality of the modern, globalized world with their faith in a divine and natural order.

The second chapter examines Spanish histories of China that are precursors to the field of Orientalism studied in Edward Said's seminal work, yet Richmond Ellis demonstrates that far from the essentialism of later Orientalist discourse, the authors of these works demonstrate respect for some aspects of Chinese culture and refashion their European identities through intimate encounters with their Asian counterparts (71). Among the texts studied in this chapter, Miguel de Luarca's *Verdadera relación de la Grandeza del Reino de China* (1575), is of particular interest as it is a rare work of Hispanic Asianography not penned by a member of the religious orders. As Richmond Ellis asserts, Luarca provides a secular perspective to the Europe-Asia encounter that "anticipates a kind of modern travel writing that is in part subjective, or autobiographical, but not fictional" (72). Among the aspects of Luarca's text highlighted in Richmond Ellis's reading is the author's awareness of being observed by the objectifying gaze of the Chinese other as well as his ambivalent use of "indio", which bridges the Spaniard's experience in the Americas and Asia and demonstrates the global articulation of racial and social categories in the early modern period. Richmond Ellis's analysis of Diego de Pantoja and Domingo Fernández de Navarrete's writings on Chinese religion and culture provide some of the most compelling passages in *They Need Nothing*. The author reads Pantoja's *Qike*, or *Tratado de los siete pecados y virtudes* (1604), a guide to Christian self-mastery that was written in Chinese with the help of the Jesuit's neophytes, as evidence of the process of "cultural hybridization" resulting from his order's policy of accommodation. In adapting Christian spiritual exercises to the Chinese language and the Confucian concept of virtue, argues Richmond Ellis, Pantoja's *Qike* created a space of mutual self-reflection through the questioning of the other, which is manifest not only in the Jesuit's writings but also in Confucian responses to his treatise (99). In his attention to the autobiographical aspects of these works, Richmond Ellis provides for

a richer understanding of the theological disputes between Catholic religious orders as rooted in the individual experience of being-other in China.

As Cambodia represents Spain's most short-lived imperial venture into Asia, it likewise merits the briefest chapter, which focuses on the disastrous consequences of Spain's ill-informed intervention in Cambodia and the revival of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's defense of Spanish imperialism. This chapter should be of special interest to Latin Americanists who wish to study how the "polemics of possession" travelled beyond Europe and the Americas during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Richmond Ellis's reading of Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio's *Relación de los sucesos del reino de Camodja* likewise highlights the "incipient imperialist discourse of gender" in which Asian women are represented as suffering under barbarous customs, and examines the Dominican friar's paradoxical condemnation of Buddhist clergymen's practice of sodomy as a result of their vow not engage in sexual intercourse with women (122-23). These are recurring themes in Hispanic Asianography that Richmond Ellis examines with an acute sensibility to the subtleties within these authors' representation of otherness in China.

The most extensive chapter of *They Need Nothing* is dedicated to the Philippines, the Spanish Empire's longest lasting colony in Asia. As Richmond Ellis demonstrates, the corpus of Spanish colonial historiography on the Philippines focuses primarily on the topic of the legitimacy of Spanish sovereignty, thus echoing the polemics occasioned by the Spanish conquest of the Americas. For example, Domingo de Salazar, a missionary of the Dominican order, posited a Lascasian critique of the *encomendero* system in the Philippines, which nevertheless maintained the need of the "purifying mediation of Christians like himself" and thus justified a paternalistic, patrimonial regime similar to Spanish America (143). Richmond adroitly links the eighteenth-century polemics between the Augustinian friar Gaspar de San Agustín and the Jesuit Juan José Degaldo to the nineteenth-century generation of *Ilustrados*, such as José Rizal, who read Delgado's work as a defense of Filipino autonomy from a representative of Spanish colonialism. In their subversive readings of Spanish colonial historiography, the *Ilustrados* embraced the racial category of *indio* "But they did so," Richmond Ellis argues, "at the expense of certain local minorities, and in this way unwittingly replicated elements of

colonial racism, which already posited members of these minorities as inferior to *indios*” (159). The chapter ends with an in depth analysis of Rizal’s critical edition of Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609) and his personal correspondence while residing in Spain. The former is read as a subversive rearticulation of Filipino national history against the grain of colonial discourse, while the latter is posited as a paradigmatic example of “Asian Hispanography” that turns the metropole into the object of a gaze that reflects back upon the postcolonial author’s sense of self (170).

Complemented with keen close readings of both colonial and postcolonial actors’ experiences in the contact zone, *They Need Nothing* proposes an expansive yet coherent corpus that extends into the twentieth century. Richmond Ellis’s work invites a further theoretical engagement that might bridge the study of Hispanic Asianography with other fields of Hispanism as well as with interdisciplinary approaches from the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy or queer studies. In his conclusion, the author touches upon some fundamental methodological and theoretical problems that should provoke a productive debate particularly with Latin Americanists. Richmond Ellis argues that the sixteenth-century European-Asian encounter “was an ‘event,’ as the philosopher Alain Badiou conceives the term” yet *They Need Nothing* proposes an approach to cultural and gender difference that seems directly at odds with Badiou’s “subject-of-truth,” which is developed as an alternative to the other-centered ethics predominant in contemporary philosophy and critical theory (179). Moreover, if the encounter examined by Richmond Ellis truly represents an “event,” then how might we measure its universality in comparison with the global order initiated by the European-American encounter? Through his own revisionist reading of Said’s *Orientalism*, Richmond Ellis seems to directly contest Walter Mignolo’s dictum “there cannot be an Orient, as the other, without the Occident as the same” (51). Further inquiry into these problems has the potential to revolutionize how we study and teach early-modern Hispanism by overcoming the national, linguistic and even continental confines imposed by a residual humanism.

While these theoretical questions are only indirectly addressed in *They Need Nothing*, the work nevertheless stands firmly on the merits of Richmond Ellis’s acute sensibility to the textual nuances of colonial Hispanic Asianography. For a more developed theoretical intervention

on self-fashioning within the global networks of the Spanish Empire, the reader can turn to Michelle Molina's *To Overcome Oneself: The Jesuit Ethic and the Spirit of Global Expansion, 1520-1767* (2013). Though less ambitious in scope, Molina applies phenomenology and affective theory to her reading of Jesuit works in order to show that "From its slow-moving beginnings, globalization has been relational, a human encounter between selves and others, but also between a person and his own self" (9). Both inquiries into the formation of European selfhood within early modern global networks, Molina's and Richmond Ellis's works provide complementary perspectives that open new directions for research and debate. Even on its own, however, *They Need Nothing* is an invaluable resource not only for students and scholars interested in Hispanic Asianography but also for those interested in the networks and actors that linked Europe, the Americas and Asia during the early modern period.

### Works Cited

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