

# Imagining National Histories Transnationally: A Review of Jie-Hyun Lim's *Global Easts: Remembering, Imagining, Mobilizing*

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## 1. Introduction

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a time of change for contemporary historiography. The collapse of the Cold War global structure destabilized not only the future vision of politics but also interpretations of the past on local, national, and transnational levels. Simultaneously, the rise of neoliberalism and historical revisionism around the globe as early as the 1970s made history writing integral to contemporary politics. With the increasing reference to history in public discussions, the historian's role has also shifted from that of a professional who researches within and for academia to an activist that intervenes in public knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The recent rise of populist governments and their active manipulation of memory and history has made historians' role more complex, yet more publicly significant than ever. The question of how to approach the traumatic memories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and how to create a mutual understanding between supposed perpetrators and victims are pressing concerns of contemporary politics and of historians.

Jie-Hyun Lim's *Global Easts: Remembering, Imagining, Mobilizing* is a work that arises out of such concerns.<sup>2</sup> Lim is a South Korean historian, a professor of transnational history and critical global studies at Sogang University. Lim has focused on exploring methods of transnational history as an alternative to national history through the close examination of the functions of memory and nationalism. Describing himself as a "memory activist," his works encompass not only theoretical reflections about global historical disputes but also his efforts as an active scholar bringing together researchers and

<sup>1</sup> Berger, Stephan, 2022, "Engaging Right Wing Populisms: Which Historical Memory for What Kind of Democracy?" trans., Nobuya Hashimoto, *Shiso*, 1174(2) : 80-100.

<sup>2</sup> Lim, Jie-Hyun, 2022, *Global Easts: Remembering, Imagining, Mobilizing*, New York: Columbia University Press.



educators across countries and disciplines in collaboration to imagine transnational history.<sup>3</sup>

Through this compilation of isolated essays, *Global Easts*, Lim cunningly illustrates how the positioning of “West” and “East” itself is a theoretically fragile yet historiographically and politically powerful structure. He demonstrates that the implications of this fragility, namely the ramifications of Eurocentric historical narratives, have surfaced and accelerated in post-Cold War history and memory disputes. On one hand, the book clarifies through the scope of “Global Easts” the controversies and advancements in recent academic discussions of national memory and history. On the other hand, nonetheless inseparable from the former discussion, Lim examines how the masses are situated within the problematic structure of the “Global Easts” and how to narrate their history. Subsequently, the book destabilizes the conventional understanding of contemporary history that orients around Western modernity and democratization, and offers insight with which to imagine comprehensive global histories.

The structure of the book is divided thematically into three parts: Part I Remembering, Part II Imagining, and Part III Mobilizing. Part I Remembering focuses on memory studies and explicates the concept of “victimhood nationalism.” Part II Imagining consists of essays on the historiography of national histories, revealing how “East” versus “West” polemics have prevailed in historical imaginations since modernity. In Part III Mobilizing, Lim introduces the concept of “mass dictatorship” as a framework with which to overcome Eurocentric distinctions between the historical interpretations of democracy and dictatorship. He attempts to view dictatorship in various contexts as formed based on self-mobilization from below. This review essay will briefly introduce Lim’s approach and the three theoretical frameworks that he explicates in *Global Easts*, as well as “victimhood nationalism”, and “mass dictatorship”. Then, I will touch upon the contribution of this work and conclude on its significance to contemporary historiography.

## 2. Approach

In the introduction to *Global Easts*, Lim claims that he owes his academic approach to his personal experience. Growing up under Park Chung Hee’s era of developmental dictatorship and then spending his undergraduate years in the turbulent late-1970s, Lim was keen on observing the implications of South Korea’s rapid modernization. Interested in the topics of political transformation and history, he continued his studies in Poland which was also experiencing democratic yet seemingly authoritarian rule in its post-communist transition. Lim asserts that the experience under two dictatorships that placed themselves on varying sides of the political spectrum was critical to the formation of his problem consciousness. Subsequently, these experiences in multiple *Global Easts* led to his fluid interests and understanding of historical transformation, societal change, revolutions, hegemonies, and habitus.<sup>4</sup>

Following the perspectives nurtured through his experience, Lim’s proposed historiographical approaches can be situated along the traditions of comparative history, transnational history, and more recent trends in global history. He shines a spotlight on the dialogical relationship between competing narratives of history, globally and locally. He is primarily concerned about the mechanism of memory in national narratives and how the emergence or dominance of one memory creates responses in the formation of national narratives for different actors transnationally. He then explores whether these

<sup>3</sup> <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/global-easts/9780231206778> (Last visited September 29 2022)

<sup>4</sup> Lim, 1-22.

functions of memory and history can be compared to historical and political struggles in other spaces, both theoretically and practically. Specifically, Lim compares historical interpretations across countries that he describes as Global Easts including South Korea, Japan, Germany, Israel, and Poland. Resisting the linear conceptions of national history, especially those based on Eurocentric modernist history, Lim attempts to explicate the possibility of transnational history and nuanced national narratives.

While Lim's study encompasses the period since modernity, the discussions center around post-Second World War memory politics in the Global Easts. He explains that although the experiences of these respective regions may differ or seem isolated, their memories became entangled in the global memory space after the war. Globalization, accompanied by political and social turbulence throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century reconfigured collective memories to stretch beyond national boundaries and interlace in multiple ways. Lim repeatedly points out how the Holocaust has become a reference point to describe traumatic memories, citing various examples such as the Stalinist crimes in East Europe, and tragedies in Korea and Japan during the Second World War. Through carefully examining these knots, the author situates the book's project as an attempt to articulate "the possibilities of coexistence of, and dialogue among, competing memories, to build a global memory space that enables their reconciliation."<sup>5</sup>

As Lim identifies himself as a memory activist, this project seems to be a means towards public intervention. He makes a distinction between doing history and memory activism, in which the former is situated as the academic query into the possibilities of history writing, while the latter is focused on the development of public memory practices. The two fields overlap in their fundamental questions and practice, and Lim makes it clear that his work overall belongs in both fields. This particular work *Global Easts* can be interpreted as a historiographical work that provides a segue to public memory practices in which he is currently involved in and those he imagines. Naturally, the theoretical frameworks that he proposes are dialogical products of his query into historiographical theories and memory practices. This stance resembles works of contemporary historians in memory activism, in which they are critically aware of the distinctive roles of history and memory studies yet explore opportunities for collaboration between the fields.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Global Easts

In his introduction "Between Two Global Easts," Lim explains the key concept of Global Easts. Throughout this concept, Lim rearticulates the seemingly rigid "East" and "West" binaries as fluid, adaptable categories. He writes:

*Global Easts*, the title of this book, originated from the displacement of East and West in the historical imagination. "East" in Global Easts is neither geographically nor historically fixed entity in Oriental history, or East Asia, or Eastern Europe. The "Global East" is a "problem space" where the East remains a problem. The supposed solution for this problem space is to become a "West."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>6</sup> Bevernage, Berber and Kate E. Temoney, "History for 'Reconciliation': A Critical Assessment of Three Models and Their Implications" trans., Naoki Odanaka, *Shiso*, 1174(2) : 101-123.

This configuring of East and West regulates—and limits—our historical imagination.<sup>7</sup>

Lim insinuates that the concept allows for the “transversality of historical thinking beyond regional borders and historical specificities.”<sup>8</sup> The “East” in “Global East” is not a fixed entity, meaning that one historical actor can both act as an “East” and “West” in accordance with their context. Lim repeatedly refers to the example of France-Germany-Poland-Russia:

German historical imagination pits German *Kultur* against French *civilization*, Germany as the East vis-à-vis France as the West. However, Germany became the West vis-à-vis Poland, as the *Ost* in *Ostforschung* of Polish studies implies. In turn, Poland considered itself as the West vis-à-vis “Asiatic” Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Lim makes clear how the positioning of “East” and “West” is circumstantial, and that the imaginary “East” is always situated as the lesser deviance of the “West.” Lim demonstrates through the essays that this function of historical imagination is closely tied with nationalist projects in respective countries and the manipulative positioning of “East” and “West” have resulted in historical and political disputes.

The essay “A Postcolonial Reading of *Sonderwege*: Marxist Historicism Revisited” examines how German historians have attempted to recognize the particularity of German modernization that led to the triumph of Nazism, and how this understanding of deviance from the “West” can be observed in various “Global Easts.”<sup>10</sup> As an example of multiple *Sonderweg* or *Sonderwege*, Lim first cites the global project of Marxist historiography which identifies economic particularities as measures of deviance and places nations in linear stages of development. He then observes how East European and East Asian history writing are constructed similarly in terms of attraction, repulsion, or proximity to the West. Tracing this *Sonderweg* discourse, Lim reveals how various colonial modernity and modernization narratives, “be they Marxian, liberal or colonialist,” share the assumption of a dominant “West” as a model and treat subaltern historical actors as resistant to the narrative of progress and development.<sup>11</sup> Lim argues that a postcolonial reading of the *Sonderweg* discourse “demands a radical break with the ‘authoritarian universalization’ of comparative history” based on Eurocentric modernization, and proposes an entangled world history based on the development of world capitalism.<sup>12</sup>

Setting the theoretical framework in the above essay, the three essays “Imagining Easts: Configuration of Orient and Occident in the Global Chain of National Histories,” “World History as a Nationalist Rationale: How the National Appropriated the Transnational in East Asian Historiography,” and “Nationalist Phenomenology in East Asian History Textbooks: On the Antagonistic Complicity of Nationalisms” examine East Asian approaches to history throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lim, 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 129-150.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 151-178, 179-204, 205-225.

For instance, Lim conveys how Japanese historiography since the prewar period has been written to appeal to Western audiences. Prewar historians sought Western elements in Japanese history, “inventing” or “rediscovering” narratives such as imperial heritage and legacy to provide historical legitimacy to the state. Lim analyzes how on one hand Japan saw itself as an East that needed to catch up with the West, and on the other hand, saw itself as the West against neighbors like Korea and China. This also furthered the “rediscovery” of Japanese tradition seen as authentic from Western eyes. Lim also examines contemporary political disputes over history textbooks in South Korea and Japan and argues that while East Asian textbook narratives have been largely shaped by nationalist discourses, optimistic attempts at writing transnational history have emerged that emphasize the transnational perspective. Subsequently, Lim employs the concept of “Global Easts” as a thought framework with which to overcome Western history and decenter world history.

It is noteworthy that through the concept of the Global Easts, Lim emphasizes how the convenient understanding of history by the eponymous Global Easts has led to the affirmation of their respective national agency, through the process of identifying with and resisting the West. The entanglement of the national histories of Japan and South Korea, and Germany and Poland demonstrate how the fluid awareness of being the “West” and the “East” in different circumstances allows the invention of consistent national history. In one way, this affirms the sovereignty and the indissolubility of the respective national spirit, somewhat empowering the Global Easts. However, Lim recognizes that the Global Easts’ desire to rival the West can never be satisfied, as their historical discourses are always entangled with Eurocentric historiography. Subsequently, Lim calls for “recognizing the impossibility of overcoming East/West binary,” and the “deconstruction of the global chain of national history that feeds on Eurocentrism” as the next steps of transnational historiography. These missions run through the following two concepts that he proposes.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Victimhood Nationalism

The framework of “victimhood nationalism” closely follows the function of historical imagination in Global Easts. In the first chapter “Victimhood Nationalism: National Mourning and Global Accountability,” Lim introduces the concept of “victimhood nationalism” as a phenomenon hindering the formation of transnational memory that demands to be dismantled.<sup>15</sup> He notes that the hypothesis aims to capture the global trend of history projects in which nation-states compete “to establish themselves as victims of aggressor nations.”<sup>16</sup> This follows the ironic reemergence of nationalism in the post-Cold War world system in an age of globalization of memory. While memories today are entangled and negotiated across national boundaries, they are often conveniently interpreted within simplified narratives of national histories. In approaching this phenomenon, Lim makes it clear that his aim is not to reproduce the binaries of victimizer and victimized. Instead, he claims to highlight the “transnationality” of victimhood nationalism.

Lim asserts that “victimhood nationalism” involves characteristics of memory and history that

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 25-58.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 27.

require careful analysis. One significant characteristic is that victimhood nationalism allows the individual perpetrator to be transformed into a collective victim. For instance, in the infamous case of the Laudanski brothers in Poland, the only living people convicted for the genocide in Jedwabne, the two perpetrators were exonerated over time as victims of fascism and the then-regime. They were then situated as victims of capitalism under communist Poland, and then as victims of Stalinism. In this way, perpetrators are unjustifiably absorbed into the narrative of national victimhood. Another characteristic is the sacralization of collective memory. Collective memory is formed through social and cultural communication of personal memories, in which each personal memory is incommensurable. A collective of incommensurable memories cannot be generalized and therefore the sacralization of collective memory is contradictory. Yet, this is how national memories defend their victimhood and reject historical scrutiny. Therefore, Lim's intention is to deconstruct victimhood nationalism. He writes:

A multilayered *histoire croisee* reveals blurred complexities of historical reality: a hybridity of plural and contradictory memories at many levels of vernacular, official, personal, and meta-memories among the victimizers and victims, delicate tensions between transitional justices and "liminal justices," victimizers' self-perception as victims, personal victims victimized by the more abstract national victimhood, and the shifting division between victimizers and victims.<sup>17</sup>

Through examining cases in Poland, Germany, Israel, Japan, and Korea, Lim persuasively illustrates how nationalism in the problem space "Global Easts" is driven by the presence of an imaginary victimizer and demonstrates the inherently transnational, yet often exculpatory nature of national histories. Victimhood nationalism in Poland, Israel, and Korea function in the presence of the memory of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. Germany and Japan also maintain "victim" status through decontextualizing events such as the Holocaust and the dropping of the A-Bomb. Here the idea of "Global Easts" is also at play. By choosing a context to situate oneself as the "East" under the threat of the "West," a victimhood narrative conveniently appears on local and global scales. As the imaginary "East" and "West" are circumstantial, this narrative builds on this convenient positioning by memory actors.

The two essays "The Second World War in Global Memory Space" and "Postcolonial Reflections on the Mnemonic Confluence of the Holocaust, Stalinist Crimes, and Colonialism" effectively capture the recent manipulation of memory in nationalist narratives.<sup>18</sup> Lim points out the centrality of the Holocaust in creating victimhood across the global memory space. In memory politics, the Holocaust is situated as the "ultimate tragedy," or an unquestioned signifier of victimhood in narrating the history of the Second World War. Lim cites the solidarity among Holocaust survivors, Korean comfort women, and Australian Aborigines that were displaced by white settlers. Then, he compares the solidarity between Holocaust victims and Japan's A-Bomb victims. Their respective stories are unconnected, but through the formation of collective victimhood, they become entangled and dependent upon each other. As a result of this entanglement, histories that contradict the victim narrative such as Japan's military aggression are made to be forgotten. Lim criticizes this moral performativity of global memory politics oriented around the

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 59-91, 92-127.



Holocaust and proposes to reexamine the singularity of individual memories in association with historical context, especially the continuity from colonial history. Instead of subliming the memories to collective victimhood, he proposes to recognize the multidirectional existence of memory. In this way, Lim attempts to dismantle and reconstruct the global memory regime through the scope of victimhood nationalism.

## 5. Mass Dictatorship

The concept of “mass dictatorship” arises out of Lim’s concern about modern dictatorship and democracy in association with the contemporary history of Global Easts. In other words, this is Lim’s attempt to reconstruct global contemporary history by employing the perspective of Global Easts and victimhood nationalism. The history of “Mass Dictatorship” is no longer about the history of the non-West, but a transnational history of seeing both the so-called West and the non-West as the problem space of “Global Easts.”

Lim acknowledges that transnational reflection on the modern history of dictatorship has only been made possible in the post-Cold War period, and the issue poses significance in the recent rise of populism around the globe. He explains that the idea of “mass dictatorship” is as follows: “despotism does not need massive support from below, but modern dictatorship presupposes that mass support.”<sup>19</sup> This mass support is voluntary and consensual, yet it holds absolute influence in the political structure of democracy. Subsequently, a “dictatorship from above” transforms itself into a “dictatorship from below.”<sup>20</sup> This characteristic of modern-day dictatorship and democracy can be observed across Global Easts in Nazi fascism, developmental dictatorship in South Korea, People’s Poland, and Western populism movements today.

This project is a continuation of Lim’s attempt to overcome Eurocentric history by demonstrating how democracy and modern dictatorship are both similar implications of the making of the nation-state in global modernity. Lim argues against the Sonderweg thesis that situates Germany’s Nazism and other similar emergence of fascism as exceptions to the democracies of the “West” that finds German elites guilty of lacking morals in accordance with Western enlightenment ideals.<sup>21</sup> He points out:

The dichotomy of a particular-abnormal path in the “Rest”—quintessentially represented by Germany—and a universal-normal path in the “West” presupposes a hierarchy topped by the “West.” [...] This Eurocentrism alleges that fascism and the Holocaust can be reduced to manifestations of peculiarities of the premodern “Rest.”<sup>22</sup>

Here, Lim makes a connection to the idea of the “Global East” and illustrates how the dichotomy of democracy and dictatorship is mapped over the presupposed hierarchy of the West and the Rest. What Lim proposes in response is a transnational “history from below.” A transnational history of mass dictatorship allows the dictatorship of the East and the democracy of the West onto the same horizon of global modernity,

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 254.

particularly in the formation of nation-states. Furthermore, this also brings the history of colonialism by the West on the same horizon as dictatorships in the East, which follow similar paths of democratization through coercion and consent. Nazi ideals of establishing a racially purified state are a mirror to Western colonialism, “turning imperialism on its head and treating Europeans as Africans.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, Lim clearly points out how the history of Western colonialism has not been problematized enough by situating the “West” as the universal-normal-path.

Blurring the boundaries between dictatorship and democracy reveals how stories of coercion and consent cannot always be explained within such binaries. It is also noteworthy that Lim situates “internal coercion” as the most powerful means for rulers to mobilize the masses, acknowledging that even seemingly consensual decisions can be circumstantially manipulated through means of terror. Subsequently, the history of “mass dictatorship” highlights the success and failure of regimes involving individuals to surrender their identity and subjectivity in conformity with the model subject.<sup>24</sup> While the function of “mass dictatorship” seems absolute and immovable, Lim emphasizes that individuals under such a structure are not entirely stripped of their agency nor are they identical subjects with the same responses. He writes:

For many people, participation in a self-mobilizing regime means subjection to the structure and an opportunity to appropriate the structure for their own purposes. [...] What one finds among the masses in the mass dictatorship regime are contradictions and dissonance in people’s practices or modes of conduct. [...] Self-contradictions in the modes of everyday life of the masses cast doubt on the binaries of consent and coercion, desire and repression, and self-mobilization and forced mobilization. These are not irreconcilable opposites but aspects of the same process.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Lim denies the complete solidity of a “mass dictatorship” structure as individuals are singular agents that can choose subjection and/or appropriation, or at times resistance to the establishment. He recognizes that these individual feelings and thoughts that shape individuals’ behaviors can naturally be contradictory and irrational. In his epilogue “Blurring Dichotomy of Global Easts and Wests in the Age of Neopopulism,” Lim reiterates this possibility for resistance, yet describes a grim outlook in the recent acceleration of neopopulism under the Covid-19 crisis.<sup>26</sup> He concludes that the geohistorical fixity of the Global West and East is once again delusive in the contemporary global crisis, yet the habit of internalizing the imaginary West and East persists in our everyday lives.

In this way, Lim depicts the transnational history of “mass dictatorship” in line with the global history of modernity. He is most critical of the history of the West which not only treats the Holocaust as an exceptional historical reference point but also neglects their own colonial pasts and their similarly violent natures. Lim describes that by recognizing the transnational perspective of Euro-colonialism, the history of the West and the non-West can be placed on the same historical plane. Being attentive to the power

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 300-308.



dynamics between the imagined West and East, understanding mass dictatorship brings to the forefront the interactions between colonizers and the colonized, imagined superior and inferior. Subsequently, Lim explains understanding history through mass dictatorship, where the transnational perspective meets the postcolonial perspective. The perspective of Global Easts and victimhood nationalism also function in the history of mass dictatorship as ways to analyze the complex interactions, local and transnational, between different actors.

## 6. The problem space of Global Easts today

While Jie-Hyun Lim's *Global Easts* is a collection of isolated essays written over almost twenty years, the author maintains a consistent mission of deconstructing national history and decentering world history. The idea of "Global Easts" is effective not only as a framework of analysis but also serves to bring the conventional historiography that led to such categorization under historical scrutiny. "Victimhood nationalism" and "mass dictatorship" both reveal the centrality of the unquestioned "West" in shaping contemporary history writing and political structure across the globe. The two concepts both cast criticism towards the exculpatory understanding of the past in nationalist projects and urge us towards a transnational understanding of the past and present, stripped of the dichotomy of East and West. Lim's strategy of distancing himself from the Western-led interpretations of memory and history and bringing Global Easts to the forefront is an effective choice, as *Global Easts* is a "problem space" which itself is a question that destabilizes the totality of conventional historiography.

Lim poses significant criticism in understanding memory and history today. One significant aspect that Lim highlights is that of the dominance of Nazi terror in memory politics, especially of the Holocaust. As demonstrated in his explorations on victimhood nationalism, the Holocaust is the reference point for unquestioned moral evil in history. Lim shows that the victim narratives of the Second World War center around comparisons to the Holocaust, as if the comparison justifies the moral superiority of the victims relative to other historical actors. This role of the Holocaust allows for the decontextualization of the victims and the historical event, and unjustly silences critical examination. Lim pays particular attention to these simplistic comparisons in history and warns of such understanding. Instead, he proposes to relativize critically through recognizing the contextualization and decontextualization involved in the process of comparison. Moreover, the centrality of the Holocaust itself reflects the positioning of East and West. Lim rightfully points out how the sacralization of Holocaust in contemporary Western history hides the history of colonialism and imperialism and exempts the West from confronting the guilt of their own violence. Not limited to grappling with the history of the Second World War, Lim's approach offers insight into overcoming the binaries of Eurocentrism and the Cold War, to reconstruct the history of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the post-Cold War contemporary.

Another significant aspect is the criticism of Eurocentric logos that have long shaped the analytical framework of historiography. The positioning of Western modernity as the universal normal path has cast away all others as deviants and denies their singularity and respective contexts. Nevertheless, the imagined Easts have defined themselves in the structure of the Western model of history, either identifying with or resisting it. The project of *Global Easts* makes clear that an understanding stripped of this dichotomy is

necessary for constructing multidirectional global memory. Moreover, the binaries between victimizer and victim, coercion and consent, and dictatorship and democracy, are products of Eurocentric categorization. Although all histories written and to be written are contingent upon the legacy of the Eurocentric tradition, Lim's attempt at an alternate method of history writing deconstructs a part of these dichotomies. As a result, he makes an effective argument that the crisis of democracy today is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon, and can instead be situated in continuity within the history of mass dictatorship.

The thesis that the national is only developed through the transnational is inherent and central to Lim's vision of history. The thesis appears obvious in theory, yet is difficult to embody in methodological practice. In *What is Global History?* Sebastian Conrad points out the characteristic approach of transnational history and conveys its strengths and possible weaknesses. He writes that transnational studies effectively "explore the ways in which a country was situated in the world—and how the world, conversely, reached deep into individual societies."<sup>27</sup> Here, Conrad acknowledges that transnational history is primarily concerned with the development of nation-states in the global context and is effective in its direction of analysis. On the other hand, while Conrad recognizes that transnational history challenges methodological nationalism, he warns that global interactions and domestic development are often difficult to relate together in practice. The interaction of the global and the national is always partial and fluid, so the cause and effect are often difficult to trace. In practice, the national framework often dominates the writing of continuous historical narratives. Conrad's concern here is applicable to Lim's work. While Lim's work effectively tackles methodological nationalism in his approach, the actual historical studies that arise from this approach do risk being skewed in their attention to the global or domestic context. It is essential to keep in mind that historical studies that build on Lim's framework demand effective presentations of historical narratives that convincingly embody transnational and postcolonial perspectives balanced with the local.

Despite the practical challenges, Lim's approach is relevant to understanding the various phenomena of society today. In the immediate post-Cold War, the domination of liberal democracy in the new global system and the rise of historical revisionism demanded many nations to rebuild their national identity and history. The wave of popular nationalist histories raised concerns for historians, and the approach of transnational history emerged under this context. A few decades have passed since then, but the transnational approaches to deconstructing national histories remain more relevant than ever. In the book *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, Yascha Mounk suggests that the continuing economic and political instability, and growing distrust in liberal democracy set conditions for populist politicians to rise to power.<sup>28</sup> He cites Hungary as an exemplary case, where economic stagnation and inferiority in the European Union and anxiety around national identity in the face of an increasing immigrant population, led to the rise of a right-wing populist government led by Viktor Orban. With majority popular support, Orban has since controlled public institutions such as the national media, the police force, and the judiciary. Orban's governance resembles dictatorship, but is built on the liberal democracy established after the Cold War. Mounk argues that liberal democracy is no longer a

<sup>27</sup> Conrad, Sebastian, 2016, *What is Global History?*, Oxford: Princeton University Press: 37-41.

<sup>28</sup> Mounk, Yasha, 2018, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

coherent concept, and that the concept is disintegrating to its “liberal” and “democracy” components. He suggests that while a government can support democracy and maintain power through it, that does not necessarily mean that they hold liberal values. Mounk’s analysis aligns with Lim’s conceptualization of “mass dictatorship”. In Hungary, which finds itself as an “East”, the anxiety arising from transnational concerns gave rise to a populist government through democratic elections. The government then took advantage of the blur between consent and coercion, pursuing policies that resembled dictatorship. Moreover, as Mounk points out, the rise of neo-populism or this trend of mass dictatorship is not only a problem of the imagined Easts but is widespread even in nations that have historically identified as the West. Perhaps the imagined West is experienced no longer, and countries and regions around the world are finding themselves as the problem space, in the position of Global Easts. Hence, Lim’s framework is effective not only in historical reflections but also in understanding the global political atmosphere today.

In these ways, Lim’s *Global Easts* offers significant insight into understanding the development of national history and understanding contemporary society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also effectively integrates historiography and memory studies, while being aware of the distinction between the two. National histories must be narrated with an awareness that they are inherently transnational. The experience of power dynamics, namely of West and East, is circumstantial and should be understood relationally and in continuation of transnational history. Recognizing that the conventional analytical categories do not capture the full reality, historians must be attentive to the configuration of diverse individuals in the collective. Lim seeks possibilities in such approaches and looks to the history of “mass dictatorship” as a step towards resistance to traditional nationalist histories. In an age of political instability and turbulence on a global scale, *Global Easts* holds the potential to make a relevant contribution toward destabilizing and improving the understanding of our past and present.