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Asia, 13th – 21st Century by Francois  
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Chan, Jia Hao

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***BOOK REVIEW : The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Century by Francois Gipouloux***

**CHAN JIA HAO**

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

An English-translated edition of Gipouloux's French monography, this book entrenches readers to think of parallels between the economic prosperity, trade networks and development of an East Asian maritime corridor and a 16<sup>th</sup> century mercantile Mediterranean & Baltic. The 'Asian Mediterranean' is Gipouloux's attempt to invoke Fernand Braudel's study of the Mediterranean, but putting it to the Asian context. Like the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean, he claims that Asia's maritime space has never been homogeneous, providing bridges across various civilizations while jointing autonomous urban regions together, each endowed with ability to control the inflow and outflows of money and goods throughout this transnational space. Nonetheless, the purpose of this book is not centred on comparative studies but rather, using this initial comparison as a pretext to introduce and discuss about Asia's historical trade networks and its uniqueness, alongside structural challenges that continue to surface till today. In view of China's ongoing and upcoming One Belt One Road Initiative that is storming Asia and beyond, this book certainly yields practicality for the relevant academics intending to understand and analyse Asia's power relations, production network and financial flows against the backdrop of a larger global political economy.

Conspicuously divided into five parts, Part I and II focuses mainly on pre 17<sup>th</sup> century period, Part III on 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century during Europeans' discovery of Asia, while Part IV and V discusses economic development and challenges of Asia's coastal cities post 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the first glance of the book's transition from the Mediterranean (Chapter 2 and 3) to Asian kingdoms and cities (Chapter 4), readers may be misled into subscribing to the 'demonstrating effect', whereby the existence of 'Asian Mediterranean' stems out of the original Mediterranean. But when looked closely, the notion of Asia's maritime system postdating the Mediterranean's is being dispelled. While **Part I** heavily discusses the 'two models of expansion without borders' namely the Mediterranean and the Hanseatic league (Chapter 2 and 3), it is only in **Part II** where we clearly witness how Gipouloux liken the tradition of independent cities of the Mediterranean and the Baltic to an existent series of independent trading entities in Asia such as the Srivijaya Kingdom since 7<sup>th</sup> century, Malacca, Naha from 15<sup>th</sup>-onwards and Sakai in the 17<sup>th</sup>

century (Chapter 4). The timeframe comparison between the Mediterranean and these port cities does overlap to indicate that Asia's trading network as a parallel development to the Mediterranean.

Yet, this parallel development is distinct; Gipouloux proceeds to present the fundamental distinctions of the two 'Mediterranean' by introducing government monopolies in Asia vis-à-vis private trade seen in the Mediterranean (Chapter 5), the existence of China's tributary trade system influencing regional trade (Chapter 6) and Japan's national seclusion (Chapter 7). But as he summarizes Asia's maritime system (Chapter 8), it remains clearer that his heavy devotion of the credit of this thriving Asia Maritime System to the Chinese tributary system's organization of trade that co-functions with the existence of two commercial establishments region-wide - the emporium and the entrepot (p.103), was his central argument for Asia's uniqueness. While we found accounts earlier of 'masters of commercial flows' such as Barcelona and Venice that attempted maritime expansion in the Mediterranean, such a massive tributary system stemmed upon heaven's mandate like China's and being embedded into various port cities was never present in a 'Magna Carta' Mediterranean (p. 48). Furthermore in this part, his explicit mention of interwoven trade networks between Chinese, Japanese and Western commercial activities with parallel existence of a 'free price' system (p.103) utilized in these commercial establishments appears refreshing - the concept of a successful Asian Mediterranean from 7<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century possessing non-private trade (state controlled) yet having free price mechanism coexists. This paradox, if expanded and explain more in depth, may well potentially be the 'Asian classic' against modern economic concept that command economies and free market economies are dichotomous rather than complementary.

Nonetheless, such a paradox nicely but intrinsically transits into his **Part III**, where he addresses Asian's 'East-West Overlapping Networks' upon early European discovery and later colonialization; how they overlap and not totally dominate the Asian maritime system. However he did not address why. Linking to the above paradox, we can make some inferences here:

- (1) Colonial powers wanted to control the various already existing 'free price' emporiums and entrepots for economic and resource gains alongside the fact they are well versed in the 'free price' system.
- (2) However, this 'free price' system functions under states' strong control.
- (3) Therefore the colonial powers understand that their exploitations through the 'free price' system in emporiums and entrepots rely heavily on a strong Asian state control.

It is therefore so unfortunate that Gipouloux had left this significant insight out as to the reasons why not all 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese ‘shangpu’ (p.145) and other Asian entrepots were eyed equally by Europeans’ expansions. Geography aside, could it be that Europeans’ preference for dominance lies in entrepots wherever they had highest bargaining power under the free price mechanism? It would be reasonable to assume that not all entrepots had equal level of free price and negotiations. Hence, it would be understandable why Gipouloux could assert that European expansion in trade could be countered by protectionist but productive Chinese industries by late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Working on that, Gipouloux could have use this as pretext in churning more discussion on whether this 19th century playout is ever likely to occur in today’s context given that ‘entrepots’ like Singapore have been more dominated by neo-colonial westernization waves than others, as part of a global cities discourse.

Moving to **Part IV**, Gipouloux seems appears to be more Sino-centric than Asia-centric. He begins by re-examining the way Chinese cities are defined in from primarily Deng Xiaoping’s era, and rearrangements of hinterlands and urban cities as relocation of productions were made in accordance to dynamic agglomeration of markets and urbanisation (p.181). While important explorations such as relocation of Chinese financial centres and competition among Asian countries in being logistic hubs were raised, a large bulk of intra-Asian development and linkages between rural and entrepots are still significantly left out. Finally, **Part V** boldly inches to discuss about a rising China’s expansionism through this East Asian Economic Corridor as with a historical Ming dynasty maritime silk road, its challenges against other states’ sovereignty, as well as bring up the issue of regional economic disparities that had occurred throughout history, either due to geographical or strategic reasons.

As much as I would like to criticize the book for being Sino-centric, Gipouloux indeed covered first the Mediterrean, then Southeast Asia and East Asian polities throughout 7<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century. However, China still seems to be defence for an economically strong Asia at many part of this book. This is worsened when little of contemporary South Asian entrepots has been discussed especially so in the face of addressing European colonialism and maritime silk road involving polities like Sri Lanka which is an integral component of China’s maritime ‘One Road’ today. Analysis of China’s strategies for its expansionism is also lacking here. As mentioned throughout this review, there are also many missed opportunities for Gipouloux to work on. Nevertheless, the book has covered important and timely understanding of urban linkages similar to Sassen’s (2001) discourse of global cities, geo-political issues and Asia’s historical

developments that economic history scholars can tap on for further global political economy studies and research.

Australia hopes the trade deal will improve its relations with China, its biggest trading partner. Ties with Beijing became frayed earlier this year after Canberra called for an international inquiry into the source of the coronavirus, which first erupted in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019. Vietnam strengthened its role as a middle power in the region through its guiding of the deal. "The ball is very much in China's court to come to the table for that dialogue," said Australian Trade Minister Simon Birmingham. "It is crucial that partners like China, as they enter into new agreements like this, deliver not only on the detail of such agreements but act true to the spirit of them," Birmingham told The Age newspaper. *The Asian Mediterranean: port cities and trading networks in China, Japan and southeast Asia, 13th-21st century* by Francois Gipouloux (pp. 669-670). Review by: DEREK HENG. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42921589>. Cite this Item. *Economy, trade and Irish merchants at home and abroad, 1600-1988* by L. M. Cullen. *Economy, trade and Irish merchants at home and abroad, 1600-1988* by L. M. Cullen (pp. 670-671). Review by: EMMET O'CONNOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42921590>. "Global trade and commercial networks: eighteenth-century diamond merchants by Tijn Vanneste. *Global trade and commercial networks: eighteenth-century diamond merchants* by Tijn Vanneste (pp. 673-674). Review by: EDGAR SAMUEL. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42921592>. BOOK REVIEW : *The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13th - 21st Century* by Francois Gipouloux. Author & abstract. Download. This is a book review for Franois Gipouloux's *The Asian Mediterranean: port cities and trading networks in China, Japan and South Asia, 13th-21st century*. Suggested Citation. Chan, Jia Hao, 2017. "BOOK REVIEW : *The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13th - 21st Century* by Francois Gipouloux," MPRA Paper 78703, University Library of Munich, Germany. Handle: RePEc:pra:mprapa:78703. as. Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, Singapore. org. abstract. Book Review. To annotate the abstract at the left please login. (?) classification. Trading Networks. journal. Turkish Economic Review. year. 2017. *The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13th-21st Century*. Franois Gipouloux . Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2011. x + 407 pp. 95.00. ISBN 978-0-85793-426-0. R. Bin Wong. The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13th-21st Century. Franois Gipouloux . Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2011. x + 407 pp. 95.00. ISBN 978-0-85793-426-0. R. Bin Wong.