



**Francois Gipouloux.** *The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13th—21st Century.* London: Edward Elgar, 2011. 407 S. ISBN 978-0-85793-426-0; ISBN 978-0-85793-427-7.

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## F. Gipouloux: The Asian Mediterranean

This book, the work of a well-established scholar on the contemporary economies of East Asia, is a translation of *La Méditerranée asiatique: Villes portuaires et réseaux marchands en Chine, au Japon, et en Asie du Sud-Est, XVIe-XXIe Siècle*, Paris: 2009. The basic idea is a good one; in contemporary East Asia, maritime-oriented centers of commercial activity are in various forms of competition with each other for primacy, and some struggle with the restraints of a state system that has other goals than productivity and profit. If it can be shown that Asian merchants and local rulers have been engaged in similar activities and struggles for hundreds of years, and that they can be fruitfully compared with the better-known cases of the medieval and early modern Mediterranean and the Hanseatic League, this will sharpen our analyses of contemporary situations and move us a bit farther from the hegemony of state-centered narratives in East Asian history.

It is unfortunate, then, to find this book extremely uneven in its exposition and analysis. The current reviewer is a specialist on early modern maritime Asia, and this review will concentrate on the chapters covering that aspect. I will have a bit to say, as a fascinated semi-amateur observer, about the chapters on the contemporary scene. It also is distressing to note many errors in citation, quite a few in translation, and a very high price. As a sample, see pp. 75-77, where an article by Tansen Sen is cited but not his important book; an article by Lo Jung-pang misspells the author's name and gets the date wrong, statements about revenue from trade and about "transfer of ship construction techniques" are not specified in time and have no source citations, and there is no cita-

tion for the reference to the Qing scholars Yan Yuan and Gu Yanwu.

Quite a few European scholars have called the seas of maritime Asia a "Mediterranean", implying potentialities in those seas and their shores to produce something like the pattern of multiple sovereignties, many of them city-states, and trade among them facilitated by mercantile elites in the cities and their procedures and law codes. Gipouloux summarizes the late medieval/early modern Mediterranean case and more briefly that of the Hanseatic League in about 50 pages. In the next 60 pages he sketches the "early outlines of an Asian Mediterranean" from about 600 to 1800 CE, with special attention to Srivijaya, Malacca, Naha in Ryukyu, and the ports of western Japan. For every center discussed except Srivijaya items of modern scholarship important for the author's account and for access to other materials are missing. Many chapters of the Cambridge History of China and the Cambridge History of Japan would have been helpful; Gipouloux has two footnotes to the China series and none to the Japan series. Where Gipouloux has found an important modern study he makes good use of it, as in his use of the work of Billy K.L. So and others on the Song period. But one looks in vain for citations in the text of the works of Hugh Clark, John Chaffee, Angela Schottenhammer, and others, although a few of them are in the bibliography, or for any coherent exposition of the rather extraordinary inside-outside character of Quanzhou in the Southern Song. Although the "Mediterranean" theme would seem to call for some consideration of the varying natures of maritime spaces, such as the dangers of the shoals in the South China Sea, none of this is in this book.

The monsoons are described in passing, but nothing is made of the deep contrast between the yearly alternation they imposed on voyages and the nearly year-round patterns of the Mediterranean. There is little about Japan, almost nothing about Korea or Taiwan.

I find it not too hard to trace a broad sequence of stages in Ming relations with the sea from early fears of Japanese pirates through the brief and contingent state-centered expansion associated with Zheng He to a phase when tribute embassies, many of them managed by émigré Chinese, were the only legal trade, to the immense “Japanese pirate” raids of the mid-1500s, to the legalization of trade at Haicheng in 1567, but I find in Gipouloux only a few pages (84-92) of jumpy allusion in no chronological sequence. The singular sequences that produced and then destroyed a major Dutch trading center on Taiwan (1624-1662) are mentioned only in passing (pp. 72-73, 130-131), with no reference to the recent important work of Tonio Andrade. The great “Canton trade” based on exports of tea to Europe after 1700 is scarcely mentioned. A coherent discussion of the tension between the weight of a centralizing state and the skills and initiatives of Chinese merchants would seem to call for some discussion of the treaty ports, especially Shanghai, after 1842, but there is no coherent discussion.

The book seems to come alive and develop more dense expositions and analyses precisely where this reviewer’s professional competence ends. Gipouloux has spent many years watching and writing about China’s opening to the oceanic world since about 1980. He has learned a great deal from interviews with businessmen of all kinds, which are generously and anonymously quoted. The core of his interest is in the frequently frustrated struggle of Chinese participants in a world-spanning network of maritime trade to avoid the clutches of the state system, from central to local, and to pursue the demanding logics of their own work. There is a very interesting account (pp. 195-219) of the rivalry between Hong Kong and Shanghai for centrality in this maritime network, of the continued shortcomings of institutions and infrastructure that hold back Shanghai, and the very focused work of the Hong Kong business class in meeting the constantly escalating demands for instant coordination of paperwork, container loading, and so on. Gipouloux ends with a plausible long-range prediction of a continued and even widening split between coastal and maritime China and inland areas where state power and investment still are overwhelmingly dominant. But I remain unconvinced that the Mediterranean metaphor or comparison has been of any real help to the discussion of recent changes.

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