

Book Reviews

ERIC TAGLIACOZZO, *In Asian Waters: Oceanic Worlds from Yemen to Yokohama*. Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. 512 pages, €37.00. ISBN 9-780-6911-4682-9 (hc)

Classic Atlantic-centred world maps tend to relegate the Southeast Asian region to the right side of the chart, splitting the Pacific Ocean in two and pushing the Indian Ocean to the periphery as well. Inevitably, even on the more equally scaled Gall-Peters projection, the Asian continent – spanning from the Bosphorus to Japan, and, in its southern quarter, from the Horn of Africa across the water mass of the Indian Ocean up to the shores of the Malay peninsula and Indonesian archipelago – appears marginal. Such graphic renditions have failed to elucidate the centrality of Asia, with its seas and oceans, on the world scene both in modern and ancient times. Global historical literature is not dissimilar in this sense. As opposed to terrestrial histories of the continent, very few scholars have, in fact, ventured to foster a new understanding of the role of “Asian waters” in the history of Greater Asia.

In this regard, Eric Tagliacozzo’s *In Asian Waters* is an impressive effort to fill the aforementioned gap in the literature. The book’s narration spans the prehistory, Middle Ages, premodernity and, in greater detail, modern era of Asia’s seas, occasionally venturing into more contemporary issues. This wide-ranging historical discussion is arranged in six parts and 14 chapters. Each part discusses a specific rubric: transregional maritime connections, state and non-state perspectives on the sea, religions, urban development, Asia’s maritime environments and technologies.

After the Introduction, which delineates the research agenda and main arguments of the book, Part I (chapters 2 and 3) introduces the long history of sea voyages between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, from the earliest stage of human history to the Ming sea expeditions from China to Africa. It then moves on to describe in detail the history of Vietnamese trade between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. Part II tackles the histories of the South China Sea and Indian Ocean from two very different perspectives: that of those who deal in illicit trades (smugglers, traffickers and so forth) (chapter 4) and that of the British imperial advance between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (chapter 5). Based on archival and ethnographic research, Part II reconstructs patterns of mobility and power projection over sea masses from a transareal and holistic perspective. Part III (chapters 6 and 7) illustrates the history of the maritime spread of Buddhism across the Indian subcontinent and South-

east Asia and moves on to recount, ethnographically, the history of Zamboanga, Philippines, as a frontier for the diffusion and (often violent) coexistence of Christianity and Islam. The discussion in Part IV (chapters 8 and 9) focuses on the patterns of urban development in port cities across the region from early modernity to contemporaneity, highlighting recurrent historical and cultural patterns. Chapter 9, in particular, analyses the impact of colonialism and imperialism from the time of the Anglo-Dutch competition, in the second half of the nineteenth century, over the domination of continental trade nodes and peoples' mobilities.

The analysis is expanded in Part V (chapters 10 and 11) and includes the environmental history of Asian waters, focusing first on the history of the development of the trade of marine products between Southeast Asia and China, and, then, on the evolution of the spice trade in Southern India, emphasising the role of generations of traders who exploited colonial circuits to expand their businesses to Southeast Asia, establishing patterns of inter-ethnic business coordination with their ethnic Chinese peers. Lastly, Part VI (chapters 12 and 13) further elaborates on the history of imperialism over Asian waters, showing how technology (particularly advances in lighthouse construction and hydrography, besides those in shipbuilding and military sectors) served both the Dutch and British imperial enterprises and projected state domination (though partial) in the maritime realm. The concluding chapter discusses contemporary China's attempts to exert control over the seas in the Asia-Pacific region and provides a detailed summary of the book.

Given its declared aim to transcend area studies and disciplinary boundaries, the book draws from an immense and multilingual array of primary sources, both archival and ethnographic, and secondary literature, which is carefully arranged to deliver a multi-faceted portrait of the long-term history of these waters. By tackling the above-mentioned rubrics from both macro and micro perspectives, the author succeeds in rigorously delineating wider phenomena against the backdrop of which local histories have emerged. Thus, Tagliacozzo's kaleidoscopic account is enriched by the many actors that have crossed Asian seas, from Ming navy commanders to Dutch colonial officials; from Indian merchants in Zanzibar to the seafaring Bugis people of Indonesia and the sea-food traders of Singapore.

However, despite its ambitious goal, the book at times seems to lose its internal consistency. To this reader, some chapters appeared to be inserted quite arbitrarily without any justification of choice or rationale, except for the fact that the author might have had abundant unused material from his previous extensive fieldwork in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans (all between the late 1980s and early 2000s) to draw upon. Particularly in the more contemporary sections of the book – for example, Chapter 10 – additional care could have been exercised to update some pieces of information that, given the timing of the author's fieldwork, might seem outdated today.

Nonetheless, the book is particularly worth reading for anyone interested in the *longue durée* history of continental and oceanic Southeast Asia. By re-imagining Southeast Asia as a key node in transcontinental exchanges since the Middle Ages, and before the dawn of the “long 16th century”, the book effectively shows the ways in which complex and historically constructed patterns of interaction and exchange eventually led to the development of a free trade area, where – in addition to commodities – peoples, ideas, religions and crafts could circulate, diffuse and adapt locally. The span between the sixteenth and eighteenth century is presented as a watershed moment, in which Europeans began meddling in these established networks and gradually came to take control of them, disrupting their original “openness” and contributing to their “closing”. In this sense, European imperial projects in Asian waters largely followed the model, identified by James Scott, of technocratic simplification for the sake of legibility and control (James C. Scott: *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2020).

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MARTINA CLAUS, *Soziale Protestbewegung gegen das ArcelorMittal Großprojekt im Kontext der Adivasi-Widerstandshistorie in Süd-Jharkhand, Indien* [Social Protest Movement against the ArcelorMittal Megaproject in the Context of Adivasi Resistance History in South Jharkhand, India]. Kassel: University Press, 2021. 388 pages, 24 graphs, €24.00. ISBN 978-3-7376-0949-4¹

The Adivasi, classified as “scheduled tribes” in Annex II to the Indian Constitution, are one of the two major disadvantaged groups in India (the other one being the Dalits, or “scheduled castes”) and are granted positive discrimination. All the tribes have their own history, language and culture, but lack a clearly marked territory. The majority of them live in the hilly, often wooded, areas of central and eastern India, as in Jharkhand, a state carved out of Bihar in 2000. Jharkhand is rich in mineral resources, especially coal, iron ore and manganese, and thus became a site for heavy industry right from the beginning of the 20th century. Jamshed Tata started producing steel there, in Jamshedpur, by 1912. Jawaharlal Nehru, who led India into independence and served as its first prime minister, saw the country’s heavy industry as a precondition for achieving full independence. Major projects were begun with little regard for the traditional rights of the local and tribal population. After independence in 1947, the new government upheld the colonial perception of the state as the

1 The book is available online for open access at <https://doi.org/10.17170/kobra-202104123642>.