
The maritime heritage of Asia in general and East Asia in particular has been the subject of recent intense scholarly research, conferences, and publications. One of the prisms under which this heritage has been and is being examined, explored, and vigorously debated by historians, archeologists, and other social scientists revolves around whether there existed entirely or partially an equivalent or similar, primarily, maritime space or dimension in Asia that compares with the European context and experience that oscillated around and in the Mediterranean World and Sea. While the intellectual attraction to engage this historical and geographical analogy is undeniable, its utility may be showing some signs of fatigue.

The East Asian >Mediterranean<: Maritime Crossroads of Culture, Commerce and Human Migration is, primarily, a collection of research with a few informative general state of the field synthesis papers (19 in all, with a preface, and totaling 402 pages, including footnotes and extensive bibliographies following each essay) that were prepared and presented for the concluding conference of the Munich University project The East Asian ‘Mediterranean’, which was under the able leadership and guidance of Angela Schottenhammer, held at the same venue from 2-3 November 2007, and had the same title as the work that is under review. The synthesis essays by well known senior scholars are all useful. Wang Gungwu’s introduction discusses the China Seas as being Semiterranean or semi-Mediterranean, which over the early modern period became part of an

1) See, for example, two workshops in Japan jointly organized by The 21st Century COE Program, Osaka University and the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore (NUS): “Northeast Asia in Maritime Perspective: A Dialogue with Southeast Asia”, Naha, Okinawa, 29-30 October 2004 and “Dynamic Rimlands and Open Heartlands: Maritime Asia as a Site of Interactions”, Nagasaki, 27-29 October 2006.

enlarged Mediterranean. Roderich Ptak examines the Gulf of Tongking (Tonkin) and the question of whether it was or was not a mini-Mediterranean; despite, an excellent bibliography, the failure to include any footnotes is regrettable. Dietmar Rothermund’s overview of the European quest for the control of the Indian Ocean contains important observations on the continuity and change in the range, and the nature of European interest and developments in Asia. Angela Schottenhammer’s lengthy contribution about Sino-Japanese relations is an insightful combination of synthesis and new research trends on this topic.

According to Schottenhammer’s preface, the major objectives of this work were: 1) “to highlight the broad networks of commercial, cultural and human exchanges in the macro region”; and 2) “to promote cross-cultural and international research” (p. 1) by focusing on culture, commerce, and human movements (p. 2) with the aspiration “that this volume will provide the reader with a relatively wide variety of both interesting and less known aspects of East Asian maritime trade history and constitute a further small step towards a better understanding of trade and interactions in this region during the early modern period”. (p. 3)

Before commenting further on some of the individual essays and discussing whether or not this collection of essays was successful in its objectives and aspiration, there are a number of issues concerning the presentation and the organizational and contextual coherence to be addressed, which are common to the genre of conference proceedings volumes.

A list of contributors and an index are lamentably absent. While the speed in which this volume was produced and published—less than two years after the conference was held—is to be commended, the absence of a list of contributors is not understood. We need to know a little bit more about the background, projection, and interests of some of the newer researchers, especially, if one of the objectives is to promote international research. Furthermore, because there is no statement or discussion about the multi-disciplinary backgrounds or composition of the contributors, the reader has no inkling of what to expect and is interestingly and positively confronted with a significant number of essays [4 or so from archeologists (Uchiyama Junzō, Barbara Seyock, Nogami Takenori, and Josef Kreiner) and 1 from a group of marine engineers (Hikaru Yagi et al.)] in addition to the majority and the remainder of contributors being historians. While acknowledging the difficulty and, possibly, the excessive commitment of time to produce a complete volume index, its absence leaves