

return. The circumstances and nature of the migration of contract labour and illegal migrants is further analysed in Chapter 6 by Johan Lindquist on the migration of Indonesians to Malaysia. Frequent chaotic deportations led to the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia agreeing on bilateral deportation. Human trafficking and deportation are the concerns of not only the governments and recruitment agents, but also local NGOs and the mass media.

Chapter 5 by Sylvia R. Cowan describes another kind of forced return, the return of ‘permanent residents in the United States with Cambodian citizenship’ after serving prison sentences for minor offences (p. 100). These people experienced multiple displacements, having in the first place been displaced from war-torn Cambodia. The forced return of young people who had become used to living in the United States is obviously traumatic, especially with the forced break-up with their families.

Chapter 7 by Carol Upadhyia discusses the return of Indian IT professionals. To welcome and to meet the demands of these IT professionals — who include the ‘global Indian’, ‘who is legally a noncitizen yet a true Indian patriot’ (p. 157) — the Indian government introduced the Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) scheme ‘which granted special rights such as visa-free entry and property rights to certain category of people of Indian origin who have acquired foreign citizenship’ (p. 146). The author provides an interesting analysis of the processes of class and place-making, of the returnees reinventing and colonising cities such as Bangalore to make India their own. But as Upadhyia remarks, ‘the home that IT professionals imagine is a future India’ (p. 157).

Overall, this is an informative book about different kinds of return. The editors have done a good job although the Introduction could have engaged a bit more theoretically with the different kinds of return provided by the various contributors, instead of merely highlighting the four generations of return in different eras (pp. 7–8). The contributors’ studies show that migrant return needs to be understood in changing political economy contexts in which the state and various agents are involved.

TAN CHEE-BENG
Sun Yat-sen University

The Eurasian core and its edges: Dialogues with Wang Gungwu on the history of the world

By OOI KEE BENG

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This book is a delightful and rare opportunity to listen in on a series of dialogues between two renowned scholars, Wang Gungwu and Ooi Kee Beng, on a variety of interesting topics and global issues. While for the most part the answers and responses in these dialogues are principally Wang’s to questions raised by Ooi, the two agree that the book is the latter’s.

Ooi Kee Beng sets the scene for these dialogues and gives his reflections and useful background information on them in the prologue, introduction and epilogue. His dialogues with Wang are organised into five chapters. While the content of the dialogues is very wide-ranging, some crucial topics can be mentioned here to give a flavour of each of the chapters.

Chapter 1, 'Of cores and edges', reviews human history and highlights the core of Central Asia (nomadic Eurasia) in world history. China, the Mediterranean, South Asia and Western Europe all remained edges. The tensions and conflicts between 'nomadic' societies (Xiongnu, Turks or Mongols) and agrarian counterparts (Chinese or Indian) continued until the twentieth century. During this long period, Chinese dynasties remained essentially continental and mainly agrarian, except for the Mongol Yuan and the Manchu Qing, the latter being both agrarian and nomadic. The dialogue goes on to focus on China, covering a range of topics, such as Confucian order, Confucianism, state Confucianism, the Chinese interpretation of democracy, and the role of imperial literati.

Chapter 2, 'The two-ocean Mediterranean', turns to early Southeast Asia, a maritime periphery in world history that was continually dominated by continental power struggles. Mainland Southeast Asia was more impacted, while the Malay world was left more alone. The continental expansions into the Southeast Asian maritime world such as the Thai, Chinese (Zheng He), Chola (Tamil) expeditions were only temporary invasions. While from the fifteenth century onward Southeast Asia turned itself into a semi-Mediterranean, it was not seen as a region until the Second World War, when it became strategically significant, first as embodied in the South East Asia Command (SEAC), followed by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and finally, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Chapter 3, 'Southeast Asia and foreign empires', continues the discussion on the concept of Southeast Asia. Various Chinese conceptualisations of the area or part of the area later coined as Southeast Asia including Nanhai, Dongyang, Xiyang and Nanyang are placed in their historical contexts. Wang points out that it was the Japanese who first put the South China Sea under one jurisdiction and speculates that in fact, both the Kuomintang's Republic of China and the People's Republic of China accepted the Japanese legacy of the South China Sea region. Nation and nation-state constitute the latter part of the chapter, in which Wang insightfully clarifies the evolution of nation-states across the world. In Southeast Asia, the state came first, while nation was constructed by state.

Chapter 4, 'China's struggle with the Western edge', discusses China's dealings with the West. Indeed, 'the West' was not monolithic, and many Wests existed. While China learned from either West A or B, the sense of belonging pushed China to seek inspiration from its own past. And that is why Confucianism still matters to present-day China. Since the West is maritime and thus global while China is still continental, China now seeks to navigate the sea to become a global power. The Chinese maritime initiatives, including redefining and appropriating soft power, can be seen in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. Not surprisingly, a new cycle of Chinese emigrants would be a major concern internationally.

Chapter 5, 'Combining continental and maritime power', highlights the advantage of the United States which, being both continental and maritime, is unique

amongst the great powers. Wang describes the historical trajectory of the global maritime as follows: the ‘Mediterranean expanded into the Atlantic, and made that the second Mediterranean. Europe and America controlled this Mediterranean, and this Mediterranean came to control the world, spreading into the Indian Ocean and then the Pacific Ocean. The expansion now lines all these up, until the other end of the continent is reached’ (p. 214). Thus ends the Central Asian core, and begins China’s move to acquire greater maritime power.

This volume’s richness and depth renders any review superficial. The dialogues swiftly move from the contemporary to the ancient, and from one topic to another, from civilisation, empire, ethnicity, nation-state and religion to the Silk Road, Confucianism, Southeast Asia, Singapore, and contemporary politics, from the Cold War to Maoism. They are also interdisciplinary, linking philosophy, archaeology, history, politics, economics and international relations. Professor Wang’s analyses on the Nanyang, nation-state and soft power, for example, clarify many misunderstandings or inaccuracies on these terminologies. Central Asia as a forgotten key factor in world history (p. viii), a core argument by Wang, resonates with what world historians such as Andre Gunder Frank have addressed (in *The centrality of Central Asia*, 1992). ‘The Global is maritime’, as Wang summarises the answer to the hotly debated question: When did the world become global? To Wang, it seems that world history (or more accurately, civilisational history) can be divided into two periods, the continental and the maritime, and only the latter can be said to be truly global. The book is sprinkled with insights such as ‘Big powers are more alike than they think’ (pp. 208–11). Wang’s interpretation of China’s continental and maritime fronts is vividly illustrated by Xi Jinping’s ‘One Belt and One Road’ (*yidai yilu*), a blueprint for the country’s ambitious entry into the world.

Although frequently mentioned in the book, the term ‘world history’, unfortunately, does not receive any definition or clarification. Since the 1990s, world history has managed to emerge not only as a teaching field, but also as a promising research area. This new field differentiates itself from the old paradigm by paying priority to linkages, connections and interactions, thus challenging and balancing local, national and civilisational narratives of the world’s past. This new world history also advocates and adopts interdisciplinary approaches and incorporates many fresh, sometimes revolutionary, findings on ecological studies, gender perspectives, the history of science and technology, and so on. By this standard, world history as discussed in this book seems more like a revision of that old international relations paradigm — the rise and fall of great powers, continental or maritime, east or west. This is not a surprise as Ooi sees world history as ‘an emergent subject made possible’ by the closure of the ‘unipolar political world’ of the colonial period and the bipolar world of the Cold War (p. viii). Consequently, Ooi seems to regard ‘the endless struggles of civilisation’ (p. viii) as the most puzzling question about history.

The book is based on informal dialogues between two scholars, and inevitably there exist a few inaccuracies. When China’s nationalities policy is discussed, for instance, it is implied that the policy was mainly an application of Stalinist practice (p. 102). My own research on ethnic identification in China (in the 1950s to 1980s) has argued its origins as being more imperial than Stalinist (Yang Bin, ‘Central state, local governments, ethnic groups and the Minzu identification in

Yunnan, 1950s–1980s,’ *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 3: 735–70). Also, when listing the autonomous administrative hierarchy for ethnic nationalities in China, it is erroneous to put *zizhiqu* after *zizhizhou* and *zizhixian* (p. 103). The correct order is as follows: *zizhiqu*, *zizhizhou*, *zizhixian* and *zizhixiang*, in which *zizhiqu* serves as the highest level, equal to that of the province under the central state.

If the Cold War ‘was very much part of the traditional contest between continental power and maritime power; between the core and its edges’ (p. xvi), what about ideology? Current thought considers that ideology was not so important for and during the Cold War, but was it unimportant to an ignorable degree? This seems unlikely, simply because evidence goes to show that at least the common people to a large degree were ideologically brainwashed during those decades.

The book covers such a wide range of topics that almost anyone would find something to intrigue them. Above all, it is the manner in which the dialogues unfold that make this book so readable, in Professor Wang’s compelling responses, insightful comments and sparkling wit and wisdom. I believe that both scholars and common readers alike would find it a hard book to put down.

YANG BIN

National University of Singapore

Southeast Asia

Time, space and globalization: Hadhramaut and the Indian Ocean Rim 1863–1967

By CHRISTIAN LEKON

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In adapting and publishing his doctoral dissertation, Christian Lekon has performed a valuable service for scholars of modern Indian Ocean history, Islam, and the many regions touched by the Hadhrami diaspora. The ambitious reach of this volume thus stretches from Singapore to Zanzibar, Indonesia to the Hijaz. Despite working from secondary sources (often dated, frequently colonial), Lekon has fashioned a novel argument. Borrowing his theoretical apparatus from Anthony Giddens, Lekon brings to the foreground the temporal and spatial elements shaping the divergent historical courses forged by members of this diaspora. Throughout the different places and periods under review, Lekon addresses himself to four principal axes, helpfully characterised in the opening chapter. These are ‘rules of signification’, particularly important to ‘communication technology’; ‘rules of legitimation’, understood in light of ‘collective beliefs’; ‘authoritative resources’ in the context of ‘political institutions’; and ‘allocative resources’ seen as central to ‘economic institutions’ (p. 24). Each axis reappears in subsequent chapters, further refined to match the historical particularities of the moment and place so characterised. After each chapter, Lekon attaches