

administrative deeds of Father Palmeiro. Furthermore, reading this book will help to recognise the depth and extent of the global communication network that the Society of Jesus had established by the early seventeenth century.

***The Eurasian Core and its Edges: Dialogues with Wang Gungwu on the History of the World.***

By OOI Kee Beng

Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015. xix + 254 pp.

ISBNs: 978-9814519854 (Paperback), 978-9814519861 (E-book)

Reviewed by S.R. Joey LONG

National University of Singapore, Singapore

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12773/arwh.2016.4.1.175>

This volume emphasizes the significance of the Eurasian landmass to world history. It employs a dialogic approach to the subject, with Ooi Kee Beng skillfully engaging Wang Gungwu in a series of interviews “on the historical forces that formed the world we know” (p. viii). Wang, the preeminent historian of Asia, brings his thoughtful views and expertise to bear on global developments over the *longue durée*. The end product is a highly readable and engaging work of world history.

For centuries, Wang argues, the Eurasian core stood as the civilizational and power center, interacting peacefully and violently with the states and societies residing along its edges. Through trade and economic exchanges, migration and settlement, and war and the threat of conquest, the mobile and powerful nomads of the Eurasian heartland helped shape the socioeconomic lives of societies settled along the edges of the Eurasian core: East Asia,

South Asia, and Europe. Their forays also influenced state formation in those regions.

The tide turned from the sixteenth century. States located on the western edge of the Eurasian core exploited advances in maritime technology to circumvent the continental powers. Western Europeans had learnt from the ancient Mediterranean world the importance of naval power and technologies. Unlike the land-oriented states located on the eastern edge of the Eurasian core, the Europeans took to the oceans. The Portuguese and the Spanish sailed forth to new lands. The Dutch and the British followed suit. They formed empires, created a maritime global economy, and established maritime ascendancy as the basis of global power.

Then came the United States, a wealthy continental and maritime power, which ultimately overtook Britain as the dominant actor on the seas. During the Cold War, this bicoastal power blocked the Soviet Union's ability to command the seas. The Soviets had Vladivostok and could access the Arctic Ocean. But they remained largely continental actors unable "to service their empire" (p. 226). Successfully containing and defeating Moscow, the United States emerged as the dominant global power. Wang observes: "Britain's imperial history would... show that a maritime power without continental power could not last. Russia's experience would show that continental power without a navy could not get very far" (p. 226). The United States was able to develop and exploit both to dominate global affairs.

Wang uses that distant and recent past to contextualize and review contemporary international relations. He notes Chinese policymakers appreciate that China has to develop a credible navy and significant merchant marine to protect its economic interests, sustain development, and be a key global economic actor. China's shift to the seas, and its building of ports in the Indian Ocean and Pakistan, however, have ruffled feathers in Washington and across the region. Wang offers a sympathetic reading of China's initiative,

rendering it as “just business, and it has nothing to do with military strategy” (p. 171). Even if there are strategic intentions, he argues that unlike the United States, “China’s power at sea will always be constrained by its vulnerability on land” (p. 226). Sharing borders with Russia, India, and the Islamic Central Asian states, China does not enjoy the same freedom of action that Washington possesses. Wang consequently does not anticipate China forcefully challenging American primacy in the region. The United States “may self-destruct, but that won’t be due to the Chinese” (p. 227).

This book is a stimulating read and will provoke debate in many circles. Given its dialogic approach, specialists will no doubt quibble with or yearn for the qualification or elaboration of some of the statements made. For one, the Soviet navy operating during the Cold War, especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis, was not altogether shabby. Rather than just the army, southerners in the United States are overrepresented in all the American military services (p. 221). A copyeditor with a sharper eye could also have maintained consistency in spelling in the text: “Mughal” or “Moghul.” These in no way detract from the sophistication of Wang’s erudite and intricate contentions. His accentuation of the Eurasian core as a key actor in world history serves indeed as a useful correction to accounts that regard the geographical area as peripheral or significant primarily for the history of the Mongols and Silk Road. His grand perspective on world developments across the centuries further gives much-needed historical context to contemporary international politics. Although the Eurasian heartland has become something of a geopolitical backwater, China’s engagement of the Eurasian states in recent years brings Wang’s core back into sharp focus. If China’s diplomatic and economic initiatives result in the establishment of a new power configuration centered in Eurasia, the manner in which the next chapter in world history will unfold will be interesting.