

All in all, the book lives up to its promise to bring the reader into the heart of plantation life. Browne shows how drivers were perhaps the ultimate tool to maintain the status quo within the American plantation regime, providing intriguing insights into the question of why – if resistance was omnipresent – rebellions and resistance rarely toppled the status quo. Highly stimulating to scholars and ideal for students, *The Driver's Story* deserves to be read by a wide audience in the years to come.

Matthias Lukkes, Amsterdam

Yao Chen 陳瑤, *Jianghe Xingdi: Jindai Changjiang Zhongyou de Chuanmin yu Mufanchuan Hangyunye* 江河行地: 近代長江中游的船民與木帆船航運業 (Rivers Flow Eternally across the Land. The Boat Folks and Junk Shipping in the Middle Section of Yangtze River in the Modern Period) (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2023). 389 pp. ISBN 9787100223164.

DOI: 10.52024/yhqwj867

Scholars have long recognized that the onset of the Industrial Revolution in England and Western Europe was closely tied to the expansion of inland waterway transportation. Canals played a crucial role in facilitating coal transport, growing in tandem with the broader application of steam engines.¹ In North America, the “Transportation Revolution”, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, significantly reduced transportation costs by leveraging inland waterways.² A similar transformation occurred in Rhine River shipping, where continuous adjustments in river governance paved the way for modernization.³ Within the scope of the global changes above, the transformation of commerce along China's rivers on the eve of modernization, along with its roots in the late imperial period, deserves particular attention. It provides a valuable comparative perspective to Western Europe, given the similar demographic scale and technological level. *Jiang He*

1 G. Crompton, (2004). ‘The tortoise and the economy. Inland waterway navigation in international economic history’, *The Journal of Transport History* 25:2 (2004) 1–22.

2 George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York 1951).

3 Robert Mark Spaulding, ‘Revolutionary France and the Transformation of the Rhine’, *Central European History* 44:2 (2011) 203–226.

Xing Di (Rivers Flow Eternally Across the Land) offers a compelling series of factual snapshots that reveal different dimensions of life along the middle section of the Yangtze River and its network of tributaries. Recent scholarship has yielded significant insights into the waterways of the lower Yangtze and upstream regions in Sichuan province, particularly in relation to the rise of junk operators' shipping associations (*chuanbang* 船幫) and merchant associations (*shangbang* 商幫).⁴ These studies have deepened our understanding of China's path toward modernity. This book fills a crucial gap by presenting the Yangtze River not merely as a series of artificial provincial divisions, but also as a dynamic human geographical region woven together by the movements of people, goods, and vessels.

The book is divided into two parts. The first section consists of six chapters, while the second contains three chapters, followed by a brief conclusion. The first part provides a chronological account of the various populations involved in waterway shipping, examining the scale of their operations, organizational structures, and engagement with different regimes. With the exception of the first chapter, the author presents concrete judicial cases that reflect the key agents in the power struggles surrounding the river shipping business from the late Ming period to the end of World War II. The second section shifts focus to the material and spiritual lives of these communities, exploring their collective identities and the transmission of knowledge through oral traditions. The two sections adopt distinct approaches: the first follows a traditional historical methodology, critically analyzing documents to construct a coherent narrative on the long-term development of boat-related populations over several centuries. The second section, by contrast, emphasizes personal experiences, daily life, festival rituals, and river songs (*barcarolles*). Each chapter stands as an independent study with its own argument, yet together they form a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of regional history. In both parts, the central narrative reconstructed by the author revolves around the power shift from licensed brokers (*yahang* 牙行) to gentry merchants (*shengshan* 紳商) and their allied shipping coalitions in Xiangtan, a county city in

4 See: Fan Jinmin, 'Qingdai Liujiagang de Douchuan Zihao', ('The Beanboat-shops of Liu-chia-Chang in Qing Dynasty'), *Shilin* (Historical Review) 2007:3, 87-99; Chiu Peng-sheng, 'Guofa yu Banggui. Qingdai Qianqi Chongqingcheng de Chuanyun Jiufen Jiejue Jizhi' ('Laws and Regulations. Disputes Solving in Chongqing during the Early Qing'), in: Chiu Peng-sheng and Chen His-yuan (eds), *Mingqing Falu Yunzuo zhong de Quanli yu Wenhua* (Power and culture in Ming-Qing practices of Law) (Taipei 2009) 275-344.

Hunan province, linked to the major Yangtze River port of Changsha via the Xiang River, during the early twentieth century.

The rising national wealth in Qing China from the late seventeenth century forward fueled a commercial boom by the mid-eighteenth century. As commodity trade along the Yangtze River expanded, imperial authorities grew increasingly concerned about maintaining public order among the mobile, non-agrarian populations engaged in trade and transportation, who operated beyond the traditional administrative framework centered on agricultural communities. To manage this mobility, certain local clans were designated as licensed brokers, tasked with overseeing sailors and merchants arriving in Xiangtan. In exchange, these brokers were granted exclusive rights to mediate transactions for key commodities, including paddy rice.

By law, junk operators' shipping associations from Hubei province traveling along the Yangtze River and stopping at Xiangtan were required to purchase paddy rice exclusively through licensed brokers. However, in 1902, these brokers accused the coalitions of bypassing them and buying directly from local shops. In response, the shipping coalitions defended their actions in the county court, arguing that they had been engaging in direct trade for years. The dispute was ultimately resolved in 1905, when the county magistrate redefined the jurisdiction of brokerage licenses. The new ruling limited the brokers' privileges to the main market of Xiangtan, stripping them of authority over transactions in surrounding sub-markets. As a result, the paddy rice trade, which had already begun shifting to the nearby sub-market of Yisuhe, was officially opened to local shop owners and junk operators' shipping associations from Hubei, allowing them to conduct business legally without broker interference. The author argues that this ruling ultimately favored both the junk operators' shipping associations and the gentry merchants of Xiangtan, who had played a crucial role in local economic and administrative affairs since the mid-nineteenth century. This power shift coincided with changes in China's tax structure. With the land tax frozen at a fixed rate since 1712, provincial governments increasingly depended on *lijin* 厘金, a commercial tax introduced to cover rising administrative costs. As *lijin* was collected at the Yisuhe market, it further strengthened the economic influence of Xiangtan's gentry merchants, who were deeply engaged in the staple goods trade.

The author analyzes judicial documents collected and published by a shipping coalition in Hankou, Hubei province, while also tracing key figures involved in the case through various city archives. Furthermore,

the study draws on shipping and commerce investigation reports produced by officials from both the Chinese Nationalist government and Japanese diplomatic establishments, focusing on major river cities along the middle section of the Yangtze River system. Notably, Xiangtan's historical records have remained remarkably intact, having withstood major conflicts – including the Taiping Rebellion, the Xinhai Revolution, World War II, and the Chinese Civil War – without significant destruction. As a regional historical study, the continuity and completeness of these materials enable the book to present a richly detailed reconstruction of historical events, which is rather rare in other similar inquiries.

Weichung Cheng, Institute of Taiwan History, Taipei

Clé Lesger, *Power and Urban Space in Pre-Modern Holland. Arenas of Appropriation in the Netherlands, 1500-1850* (London [etc.]: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024). 312 pp. ISBN 9781350412378.

DOI: 10.52024/30h74m38

In *Power and Urban Space in Pre-Modern Holland*, Clé Lesger builds on his impressive, career-long research into the urban history of premodern Holland and, in particular, Amsterdam. Here, however, he goes beyond his earlier focus on the spatial aspects of economic exchange by adopting a new perspective on how urban space was appropriated by different groups and how the unequal relations between them were expressed and reproduced in this process. In fact, this book addresses the political economy of early modern Dutch cities, asking why their inhabitants accepted the political and economic inequalities that characterized urban society. In doing so, Lesger distances himself from a “consensual model of society”, articulated in recent studies of citizenship and broader political participation. Instead, he subscribes to a “conflictual model”, seeing contradictions of interest, conflicts, and tensions as rooted in structural inequalities between “social classes”. Early modern Dutch urban society was composed of three classes – elites, middle classes and working classes – whose members occupied similar positions in the social space and, as such, shared interests, dispositions and resources. The key objective of the book, then, is to understand how the power relations between these