caused by internal disturbances in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Tibet, and Kashmir. The displacements convey a tale of not only the ill-planned colonial and political decisions but also the reprehensible outcomes of terrorism and human trafficking that have negatively impacted the lives of over five million people in the Indian subcontinent.

As a millennial, I resonate with Tumbe’s observation that the future is one of greater responsibility. With India’s economic position rising in the comity of nations (it is currently the third-largest economy by nominal GDP purchasing power parity), it is likely to become a country of immigration beyond its immediate neighbors. The impact of climate change on low-lying geographies in India’s neighborhood, and the effect of terrorism on and persecution of individuals belonging to faiths in India, could lead to more migration into the country. All this would make the study of migration and its historical roots a necessity for policymakers, economists, social scientists, and business leaders. To this cause, Tumbe has made a significant contribution.

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Reviewed by Lane J. Harris

Anne Reinhardt’s Navigating Semi-Colonialism is a study of the origins, formation, and evolution of the semicolonial order in late Qing and Republican China. To grapple with the complexity of this order, Reinhardt uses steam navigation as a case study to illuminate the inner workings and central dynamics of semicolonialism. Her choice of case study is inspired, as the history of steamships and steam navigation gets to many of the core issues of semicolonialism, thus serving as a “compelling fragment” of the larger system (p. 6). Defining the term broadly as “the relations of foreign and Chinese power in mainland China under the treaty system” allows Reinhardt to use semicolonialism as a way both to
emphasize the particularity of China’s experience under Euro-American and Japanese imperialism and to compare China’s experience to formal colonies like British India (p. 3). The author’s overall goal, then, is not to produce a study of steamship companies in China—several of those already exist—but to reconstruct the complex political, economic, legal, and cultural framework in which steam navigation developed in semicolonial China.

Reinhardt’s exceptionally well-structured study is divided into seven chronological chapters. She divides the seven chapters into two distinct periods: from 1860 to 1911, when the central dynamic within the semicolonial order was the close interaction of the Qing and foreign powers in developing steam navigation; and from 1911 to 1937, when multiple Chinese nationalisms challenged the collaborative mechanisms at the heart of the industry and began to slowly break them apart. Bridging both periods is Reinhardt’s concept of “collaboration,” which she uses to explain the uneven dynamics at work in the relationship between the Qing and foreign powers as they constructed the steamship network and shaped the businesses that operated within it. Within these collaborative mechanisms, the Qing could assert or defend its sovereignty, but the unequal nature of the treaty system ensured that it could do little to halt the overall expansion of imperialist power.

In the first chapter, Reinhardt discusses the introduction of steam navigation to the China coast, the rapid development of a collaborative mechanism between the foreign powers and the Qing that shaped the early steamship network, and a set of shipping practices that were formalized by the Treaty of Tianjin (1860). Three key decisions shaped this early network and the nature of steamship businesses in China: the decision of the Qing to recognize the informal coasting trade; the decision to limit foreign-flag shipping to the treaty ports; and the decision to subject Chinese-owned vessels of Western design to the same restrictions as foreign-owned steamers. The second chapter discusses the development of early steamship companies that utilized the steam-centered network. After a brief “cosmopolitan” period in which most Chinese and foreign investors were based in the treaty ports, there was an alignment of flag and capital that led to the emergence of the three shipping firms that would dominate the industry for the next half century: Butterfield & Swire’s China Navigation Company (est. 1872), the Qing-sponsored China Merchants Steam Navigation Company (1873), and Jardine, Matheson and Co.’s Indo-China Steam Navigation Company (1882).

Chapter 3 looks at the mutual decision of the three companies to form a shipping conference, a cartel to set minimum freight rates and protect the market for liner companies, in the early 1880s. According
to Reinhardt, the negotiations to create the shipping conference and its internal workings represented the height of collaboration in steam navigation because it allowed Chinese and foreign companies to work together to stabilize profits and maximize their collective dominance of the industry. The three companies continued to dominate the industry until Japan became a treaty power in 1895, after which several new foreign-flag steamship companies, including the Japanese Nisshin Kisen Kaisha, aggressively entered the market.

In the fourth chapter, Reinhardt interrogates the steamship as a “social space.” Informed by work in cultural studies, she argues that a colonial hegemonic project shaped the articulation of exclusionary race-based policies among the steamship companies. In addition to dividing crews along racial lines, rationalized by discourses on the relationship between race and technical competence, the companies also racialized passenger space on steamships. At the same time, however, Reinhardt also shows that British steamship firms utilized a semicolonial figure to run much of their business in China: the comprador. Compradors, essentially private contractors working for foreign and Chinese steamship firms, were responsible for recruiting passengers, locating cargoes, managing warehouses, and hiring teaboys. Motivated almost solely by profit, they failed to police the social spaces of the steamship and turned them into, in the discourse of Chinese elites, “alienated spaces” that lacked any semblance of a normal social order.

In chapter 5, Reinhardt recounts the rise of new anticolonial rhetoric aimed at the shipping industry, rhetoric she describes collectively as “shipping nationalism.” The breakdown of the Chinese state at the hands of the warlords, and the outbreak of World War I, gave Chinese nationalists enough space to articulate new discourses that challenged the broader semicolonial order and the narrower collaborative mechanisms functioning within the shipping industry. These discourses and the strident voices calling for “shipping rights recovery” were also accompanied by the appearance of a number of new privately owned Chinese steamship companies—funded and run by well-known capitalists like Yu Xiaqing and Zhang Jian—that rapidly expanded to challenge the hegemony of the shipping conference during and immediately after World War I. Ardent nationalist discourses coupled with aggressive competition began to undermine the power of the shipping conference.

The establishment of the National Government in 1927 with its goals of ending the unequal treaties and strengthening the Chinese nation fundamentally altered the shipping industry. Reinhardt reconstructs the National Government’s efforts to negotiate an end to the unequal treaties, establish new rules and regulations for the shipping industry, and set up educational institutions to train future officers and seamen.
Although the National Government made great strides, its efforts were undermined by the continued existence of independent military regimes across the country, like the one led by Liu Xiang in Sichuan. Much of the second half of this chapter is taken up with Liu’s support for Lu Zuofu’s Minsheng Industrial Company. As an avowed nationalist, Lu Zuofu wanted his Minsheng Company to consolidate control over steam shipping on the Upper Yangtze River to eliminate foreign competition on that part of the river. One of Lu’s most important contributions to the steamship industry, discussed in colorful detail in chapter 7, was his reconceptualization of the business and steamship space. Embracing a combination of nationalism and Taylorism, Lu rid his company of troublesome compradors, disruptive teaboys, and racialized passenger spaces. Instead, he trained and educated his own staff to transform the space of the steamship into a place of moral uplift and social improvement thus radically remaking the meaning of steamship travel in the late Republic.

Even this somewhat lengthy review is inadequate to convey the complex arguments and fruitful analytical insights found throughout this fine book. Bolstered by extensive archival research in mainland China, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom, and the use of several rare steamship-related periodicals, Reinhardt has crafted a compelling argument about how China’s semicolonial formation shaped the development of the steamship network, the structure of steamship companies, the growth of the industry, and the conceptualization of the social space of the steamship. Above all, she has given us a better framework for understanding older studies of individual steamship companies in China and for contextualizing all future scholarly work on the industry.

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