

## BOOKS

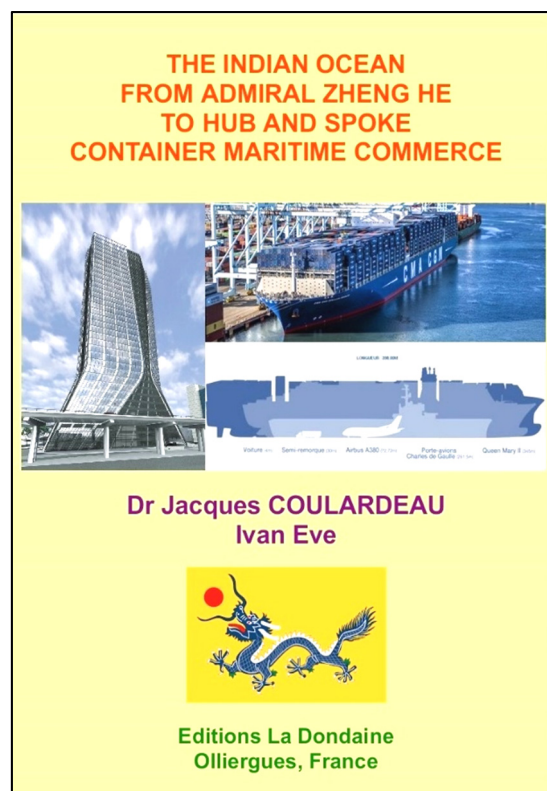
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**JACQUES COULARDEAU and IVAN EVE, *The Indian Ocean from admiral Zheng He to hub and spoke container maritime commerce*, Editions La Dondaine, January 21, 2016, Kindle Edition, 274 pages.**

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This book tackles the New Silk Road from a number of different perspectives, historical, social, economic, and from the standpoint of geopolitics. The reader is given a background regarding the Old Silk Road – its human cost and the socio-economic implications in the present, typified by what is called Post-Traumatic Slavery Disorder and Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome.

We learn about the 13 centuries of slave trading done by the Muslim powers, and of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which lasted 300 years, but produced approximately the same number of casualties. We learn about slavery in India and about the slave-trade in the Indian Ocean. That it had existed since probably the emergence of agriculture, something like 12,000 years ago. Religious motivations



for slavery are also highlighted, alongside the changes in thought and values, from Judaism to Islam, and of course, Christianity.

Afterwards, the book presents the Old Silk Road proper, the ancient network of trade routes that were central to economic and cultural interactions among different regions of Asia, connecting the West and East from China to the Mediterranean Sea. The religious implications associated with the various countries and trade interests are also approached (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam). We learn from that ancient epoch and we're moved to the 15th century, to admiral Zheng He, his great fleet of merchant ships – and the reader learns of his visits to foreign lands, most notably, his repeated journeys into India, Africa, and Arabia.

Past that point, the book moves the reader into the present and reveals great information regarding planned investments in new port infrastructure and upgrades, new trade routes, cross-judicial and economic cooperation between countries for safety and development. Figures regarding freight capacity and throughput are given for some key trade nodes in China, Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai, and South Korea. The authors make important observations, especially regarding China. In maritime trade, it's investing in the port of Colombo and in Hambantota. It is developing the hub-and-spoke model; but China is also developing alternatives to it. To reach America, the railroad option via the Behring Strait. To reach Europe, via the Arctic approach and westward along its ancient route – by linking virtually the whole of Europe through railways, down to Spain.

Coulardeau and Eve take special note of India and Sri Lanka, and do not dismiss them from the greater scheme in the wake of such big projects like the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal – which, for political reasons that the authors identify, are left outside by the main geopolitical power, the USA. Globalization is a multi-door street, but some doors are bigger and wider than others. Such free trade agreements can only push for lower sovereignty at the regional and national level, enforce strict intellectual property laws, and diminish the collective bargaining power of labor.

The race to the bottom is a true phenomenon. It manifests itself when governments implement policies meant to keep domestic purchasing power and living standards low, in the hope of gaining market share for their export-oriented enterprises. These countries are thus

deliberately choking their domestic levels of Aggregate Demand, foolishly trying to import it from abroad in net terms in order to keep their economies working (albeit with considerable unused capacity, while granting unjust and unsound boons to multi-nationals).

Issues of flags of convenience are explored in the book, alongside those of safety. Ships and harbors require protection. Merchandise requires tracking. Elements of corruption, bureaucracy, and the relationship between capital and labor must not endanger the flow of goods and services, or add undesired and unnecessary costs to it. The authors state that what's required for true security is the existence of an international agency, with satellite monitoring capabilities, and with the legal mandate and military means to combat terrorism, human trafficking, drug smuggling, and illegal weapons trade.

I believe the many countries involved in the New Silk Road must follow the two principles behind the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which ended successfully 150 years of religious war and established the notion of co-existing sovereign states. The first tenet said that for the sake of peace, the crimes of all sides must be forgotten. While the second tenet maintained that foreign policy must be carried out with the “interest of the other” in mind. It is precisely this lack of Westphalian sovereignty among nation states today, as well as the desire to severely outsource national and local sovereignty to super-state bureaucracies, that endangers the peaceful process of globalization – and turns it into a deliberate phenomenon of exploitation carried out by cartels, rent-seekers, and usurers: the neofeudal dominion of international shareholders.

**ȘERBAN V.C. ENACHE**