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Book review

Emerging Trends and Challenges of Transportation and Logistics in Asia and the Pacific

Asian-Pacific Rim Logistics: Global Context and Local Policies, by Peter J. Rimmer. 2014. Cheltenham/Northampton (MA): Edward Elgar. £110 (Hardback) ISBN: 9781847206282

Air Transport in the Asia Pacific, edited by David Timothy Duval. 2014. Farnham/Burlington (VT): Ashgate. £70 (Hardback) ISBN: 9781409454069

Review of Developments in Transport in Asia and the Pacific, by ESCAP (Economic and Social Communication for Asia and the Pacific/the United Nations). 2013. Bangkok: United Nations Publication. E-ISBN: 9789210542067 (e-copy available from http://www.unescap.org)

The three books reviewed in this essay deal with emerging trends and challenges of transportation and logistics in Asia and the Pacific. We begin this essay by briefly introducing and summarizing the books' core contents and structure. A short appraisal of their respective key strengths and blind spots is given, after which we move to a number of overarching issues and themes. The essay is concluded with a reflection on agendas of future research on transportation and logistics in Asia and the Pacific.

Duval's (2014) edited volume brings together current threads of academic research on air transport in the Asia Pacific, and uses the various insights to review current tendencies as identified by the air transport industry, governments, and professional associations. There are ample good reasons for editing a volume on air transport in Asia Pacific: the region has been, and will likely continue to be, on a remarkable growth trajectory in terms of air transport connections due to its population and economic development. Furthermore, the institutional, governance and business organisation context in the region has been rapidly changing. Collectively, the book's discussions of market growth, shifting geographies of demand and supply, uneven processes of liberalisation and deregulation, the emergence of low-cost carriers, and shifting governance approaches to air transport result in a timely overview of the key issues. Each of the chapters has been written by leading experts in the chosen field, and they consistently provide an original and well-structured take on their focused topics. There is plenty of empirical material in tables to back up findings, which helps readers in getting a feel for key trends and the sheer scale and speed of change. The foci in the chapters range from discussions of regional specifics (e.g. Australia and South Asia), to stakeholder analyses (e.g. airport management and multilateral liberalisation), to research paper-like analyses of specific issues (e.g. geographical analyses of gateways and aircraft use). In our view, all key topics are covered in the different chapters, and the book thus provides a cogent overview of current trends in commercial air transportation in the region (albeit with a clear-cut focus on air passenger transportation). As a consequence, and in spite of the editor's modest reminder that painting a comprehensive picture is impossible to accomplish, this volume has most certainly achieved what it sets out to do. That said, it is essentially left to the reader to piece together the broader picture: the introductory chapter is very short, and the book ends quite abruptly with a chapter on multilateral air transport liberalisation in the region; a more substantial concluding chapter by the editor would have helped connecting (sic) the insights emerging from the different chapters.

The preface to Rimmer's (2014) book clarifies that the nature and contents of this volume cannot be properly understood without taking into account its specific foundation. The book emanates from Rimmer's Hanjin Shipping Chair Professorship of Global Logistics in Incheon (South Korea). The preface carefully explains his responsibilities in the development of a core module for students in which he put forward an 'intersectionist' approach to logistics. This implies constant consideration of how business logistics and supply chain management meet and overlap. The contents of the course were refined and updated in consecutive years of teaching, partly through engagements with students who did internships as part of the programme. The net result is a textbook that benefits from both the author's longstanding academic standing and feedback loops with its intended audience: the narrative is thus firmly embedded in the region's economic, business and governance realities from both a macro context and practitioners' perspectives. The book is very much an economic geography text: it does not approach logistics from a technical or an operational standpoint, but rather positions it at the intersection of the organisation of economies, governance structures, the deployment of technological skills, and uneven distributions of power. The book is well (if sometimes somewhat rudimentarily) illustrated and has plenty of well-organised empirical materials. It is organised in three main parts, following a welcome introduction in which the author details what makes logistics in the region both pertinent and specific. The first part provides the global context for Asian-Pacific Rim logistics. The author reviews three types of networks (corporations, maritime, and aviation/telecommunication), after which these networks are combined in a meta-analysis of the importance of gateway and corridor concepts. The second part discusses major patterns and issues for specific regions. After a straightforward empirical introduction to the region's major gateways and corridors, more detailed discussions of Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and South Korea follow in different chapters. There is also a more focused elaboration of logistics in Northeast Asia, a region that has long been lagging in establishing an integrated logistics market. The final part focuses on India and Australia. Although interesting chapters in their own right, these contributions are probably the least pertinent given the core theme of the book. In the epilogue, Rimmer revisits the key conceptual implications of the extensive empirical descriptions, and briefly discusses the most likely game-changers for logistics in the region.

One of these potential game-changers is the 'New Silk Road' initiative or 'One Belt One Road' strategy launched by China, which is essentially a metaphor for a set of corridors accommodating infrastructure connections across Central Asia with the overall purpose of increasing trade and thus facilitating economic integration between Europe, the Middle East, and China. This crucial regional economic integration function of transport and logistics infrastructures is the focus of the third

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publication under review: ESCAP's (2013) review of developments in transport in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP is the regional development arm of the United Nations, and serves as its main economic and social development centre for Asia and the Pacific. Its aim is to foster cooperation between its member states, and the transport development review needs to be considered in this light. The 120-page report, which can be freely downloaded, is made up of five formative chapters. The first two chapters focus on integrating regional transport networks and the (subsequent) facilitating of operations on these networks. The advantages and need for regional cooperation are discussed and illustrated through a number of concrete examples. The third chapter shifts attention to a very different topic altogether, and deals with alternative financing sources for transport infrastructures, with specific attention for private-public partnerships and intra-Asia collaboration. The fourth chapter presents a wide-ranging and somewhat disjointed overview of the 'sustainability of the transport model'. We assume that this chapter in particular will be puzzling reading for academics, as it remains unclear what is meant by 'sustainability' (for example, both social effects of a lack of mobility and road safety are presented as 'sustainability' issues). And finally, the fifth chapter again changes course by discussing a very particular topic: the potential of strengthening inter-island shipping in the Pacific. Overall, the report is well structured and effectively illustrated. However, the aim of this document – a review of transport policy measures in the context of an implicit, yet clearly positive attitude towards cross-border integration – has its consequences. The two most pertinent implications are its disjointed contents and the uncritical attitude towards its metanarrative. First, the report does not really present a cogent take on transport: it is essentially a *capita selecta* of issues that were recently addressed by ESCAP; one can only assume that the contents of the report will dramatically shift over time. This implies that specific contents of this particular report may be useful in that they provide decent and well-illustrated introductions to specific issues, but for research purposes this means cherry-picking from this, previous, and possible future reports. Second, and somewhat unsurprisingly, given the nature of ESCAP's aim, there is a strong undercurrent towards emphasising the instrumental role of transport networks for achieving regional integration. However, this somewhat paradoxically implies that for a text that almost inevitably self-presents as being a-political (there is a full page of disclaimers regarding borders and region's names), there are lot of implicit political aspects that remain unexplored. For example, given the financing infrastructure chapter's focus on attracting and steering private investment, it inevitably de facto subscribes to a neoliberal narrative in which it is assumed that transport investments cannot continue to be public.

The rationale for jointly reviewing these three books in a single essay is, of course, that each of these volumes deals with various modes of transportation and logistics in Asia and the Pacific. However, an appraisal of how these three books *collectively* advance knowledge needs to be managed cautiously. Exploring the books' inter-relatedness implies exploring connections and contrasts, but in practice this exercise is somewhat convoluted because similarly looking topics, vocabularies and concepts tend to obfuscate very different approaches that may project diverse outcomes. In this particular case, there are two caveats that complicate a collective appraisal of these books as excursions into the analysis of transportation and logistics in Asia and the Pacific.

First, and as already suggested: the *nature* of the volumes is very dissimilar because their main target audience is so different. Duval's (2014) book is an edited volume specifically dealing with air transport, and we doubt that someone will pick up the book unless s/he already has a keen interest in this particular topic. In addition, some familiarity with key concepts in the study of geographies of air transport (deregulation, gateway cities, etc.) is helpful, and as such this is a book for transport geography *researchers*. Although Rimmer's (2014) book is also an academic text, it is above all a textbook that is somewhat more accessible for an inexperienced reader and university students. The book is a useful primer for the next generation of logistics and supply chain professionals, which de facto instils greater care for a coherent line of argumentation and laying out key concepts as the argument proceeds. And finally, although the ESCAP publication (2013) examines emerging transport trends across the region, it is very much an uncritical overview of some specific transport challenges facing ESCAP's (associate) member states. This report is light on jargon, and given ESCAP's focus on 'regional cooperation' contents are skewed towards policy measures aimed at facilitating cross-border interaction. However, the report's intended audience is a bit unclear, especially given its very diverse contents. The net result is that the three volumes complement each other in the topics they cover, and they collectively highlight that there are different audiences and, related to this, different ways to address the issues at hand. On the one hand, the differences in topics, writing style, organisation, and level of complexity serves as a useful reminder that there are is a more diverse audience than the ivory tower, but it also shows the difficulties of having a conversation between researchers, students who aspire to become professionals, and policy-makers.

Second, although all three publications refer to both 'Asia' and the 'Pacific', in practice the region under study varies immensely in terms of the actual boundaries. In the ESCAP publication (2013), this literally means Asia and the Pacific in the broadest possible sense: the geographical focus extends all the way from Turkey and Russia to Palau and New Zealand. Meanwhile, a formal definition of 'the Asia Pacific' is not presented in the book edited by Duval (2014), but based on the geographical scope of the chapters a more classical (and narrow) approach is taken, which excludes Russia and features Pakistan as western-most country. And finally, and interestingly from a geographical perspective, Rimmer (2014) takes a functional approach rather than resorting to state boundaries: his working definition stretches across the archipelago between the easternmost part of the Russian Federation and Indonesia. The fuzzy boundaries of the region are acknowledged in this book in that in addition to the part of the book dedicated to 'Asian-Pacific Rim' there is also a (shorter) part on 'the wider rim and beyond' dealing with India and Oceania (as well as excursions to other parts of the world), in addition to discussion of the ramifications of 'new silk road'-related developments. Pointing to diverging geographical definitions of 'Asia Pacific' may seem mundane and/or little more than a geographer's idiosyncratic preoccupation, but it does matter. One of the reasons why Rimmer's (2014) book provides readers with the most cogent discussion is precisely rooted in his justification of the 'Asia-Pacific Rim': giving a concrete explanation of why some regions are on and others off the map, and reflecting on how and why this might change in the future is helpful for grasping the line of argument. The justification for the regional focus in ESCAP's (2013) report stems from an inapt regionalisation within the United Nations, and this is not exactly helpful if one reads the report with the aim of understanding 'the region' (cf. Lewis and Wigen, 1997; Taylor et al., 2013). The justification in Duval (2014) for an 'Asia Pacific' book stems from this region, however defined, clearly being a hotspot for growth and wholesale regulatory change. However, the apparent lack of a clear boundary of the region also reflects the volatile geopolitical context especially in view of the recent tension over territorial desputes, which presents uncertainties over transportation and logistics network in the region. The geographical differentiation within these processes is nicely captured in the different chapters, but not considering some of the gateways and corridors beyond this loose definition of Asia Pacific may be detrimental: developments in air transport flows between, say, Australia and Singapore have historically unfolded against the backdrop of the 'Kangaroo Route' connecting Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific with Europe, and contemporary and future patterns and changes cannot be entirely understood with paying attention to developments in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar on these routes (i.e. the so-called 'Falcon Route').

Taken together, the books manage to demonstrate why transport and logistics matter, why they particularly matter in Asia Pacific, and why it matters for understanding Asia Pacific more broadly. However, the

above comments imply that it probably would be a stretch to see the books as complementary: the whole is not necessary more than the simple sum of the different parts, and their individual usefulness will therefore likely be decisive for prospective readers. That said, we found two common blind spots that could be picked up in future research.

The first blind spot is the sustainability of transport and logistics as we know it. Discussions about future patterns invariably start from the perspective of cooperation, deregulation, and the growth this will engender. However, it seems safe to assume that there is by now a broad agreement that one of the key challenges of the coming decades will be to ensure that transport policies and investments contribute to more sustainable development paths, for instance with the introduction of new technologies, renewable energy, and taxation of excessive energy consumption. The need to mitigate the negative externalities of transport is clearly of utmost importance, and it is therefore surprising that none of the volumes devotes much attention to this topic. It is mentioned in passing in different chapters of Rimmer (2014) as he discusses specific initiatives, but given less weight than, say, liberalization and new infrastructures in the epilogue charting future developments. Meanwhile, in his editorial introduction, Duval (2014) recognises that 'climate change' will likely be a major issue for the air transport sector, but the topic does not explicitly feature in the book: most chapters discuss the effects of liberalization on the future of air transport, while emerging sustainability issues are silenced in spite of the air transport sector being one of the most obvious problem areas. And finally, the ESCAP (2013) report does repeatedly use the term 'sustainability', but it is so fuzzy that it is almost void of any meaning. For example, road safety issues feature prominently in the report's sustainability conundrum – although this is of course a pertinent issue in its own right, it does mean that other, probably more commonly used definitions of 'sustainability' hardly feature in the discussion. A comparison with other regions and research agenda may potentially offer useful insights on how 'sustainability' agendas can be incorporated in a beneficial way.

The second blind spot is that although each of the books is written in an implicit economic geography spirit, there is scope for getting more out of this framing. Throughout each of the books, transport and logistics are linked to geographically uneven patterns of governance and economic development. However, there is little explicit consideration of how the transport-development nexus is understood, both in general terms and in the more specific context of the region. For example, surprisingly little discussion is devoted to the role of the state and the (related) political economy of investments in transport and logistics infrastructures, especially given the complex geopolitical relations in the region. For example, since China's ambitious 'One Belt One Road' strategy was revealed, there have been worries that it may lead into a 'war of infrastructure' as large regional players use infrastructure investment as means to compete for political influence. Rimmer's (2014) book comes closest to a targeted discussion, but even there the role of the state is discussed implicitly at best. As a result, one could get the impression that the many infrastructures are simply 'there' or 'impending', as if we are dealing with unfolding natural forces rather than with (particular regional renderings of) neoliberal globalization. We do not doubt that the various authors have more refined modes of thinking about the transport-development nexus than displayed throughout the books, and there are some spot-on (if mostly scattered) observations throughout. However, the relevance of boosterist practices and developmentalist states could have been put more centre-stage. As a consequence, a refined meta-theoretical analysis of, say, the roots of regional integration through deregulation and liberalization is largely absent. We believe that the ramifications of urban boosterism and developmental states deserve to be explicitly tackled: the question of how transport and logistics fit into the development narratives and practices in the region would enhance our understanding of the patterns and processes that are otherwise so clearly described.

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