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[Please refer to the review posted here;  
the published version was mangled  
by the incompetent editorial staff of *The Historian*]

**The Qing Opening to the Ocean. Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684-1757. By Gang Zhao. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. Pp. viii, 267. \$ 56.00)**

[p. 819]

The Chinese government closed the empire to the outside world in the mid-fifteenth century, after the abrupt end of the Ming dynasty's oceanic voyages led by admiral Zheng He, and by the eighteenth century created the exclusionary Canton trade system, to keep out foreign traders and guarantee the security of its agrarian and bureaucratic state: this is a picture of the Chinese position in early modern globalization that still looms large in the historical and popular discourses, in spite of the valiant efforts of specialists in the last two decades to alter the terms of the question.

Gang Zhao's *The Qing Opening to the Ocean* proves that such picture is irremediably flawed, and ultimately undoes the tired idea that every Chinese late imperial regime was, without exception, anti-maritime. In fact, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Manchu-ruled Qing dynasty, far from impeding overseas commerce, supported it with a series of policies characterized by openness to private interests. Undergirding this new view is the recent work of several Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese and Western scholars, and Zhao's merit is to synthesize their contributions and to offer a fresh perspective on China's maritime policy in English. By using published Chinese primary sources, and allied Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean and European records, Zhao illuminates the significance of the opening of Chinese ports to maritime trade decided by the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing in 1684, and its consequences until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Zhao points to the deep roots of Manchu pro-commerce attitudes since before the conquest of China [p. 820] in 1644, when the Jurchen first, and their Manchu descendants later, engaged in brisk trans-frontier trade, and cultivated alliances with Chinese merchants along the north-eastern borders of the empire. Those attitudes informed also later maritime policies. Zhao rightly relegates European state-sponsored traders to the role they truly occupied in Asia until the 1820s: interlopers and transients with a partial view of Chinese policies, seeking an impossible monopoly (that the Dutch and British labeled "free trade") against a long-standing network of Asian trade fully dominated by Chinese merchants.

The book explicitly focuses on Qing state policies, both to counter older narratives, that compared unfavorably Ming China's retreat from the seas to European state sponsorship of oceanic enterprises; and to balance more recent scholarship, all

intent in showing the importance of “marginal” groups (including diasporic merchants) over state actors. This concentration on the Kangxi Emperor’s decisions and Qing official regulations underplays the continuing influence of Chinese private traders (especially from Fujian), and exaggerates the revolutionary role of central policy-making in “unleashing the force of economic self-interest” (141). Yet, this might have been a sensible way to manage a potentially sprawling topic around a chain of specific events (especially the 1684 decision), and remedy the relative scarcity of non-official Chinese sources. Unfortunately, uneven editing mars this valuable volume, and both glossary and index lack several names, terms, and Chinese characters appearing in the text.

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