

record of picking winners, and industry assistance often becomes a waste of taxpayers' funds. But there is little discussion of the difficulties of a tax's ability to achieve its purported goal, and no discussion of the merits of a permit system versus a tax (a permit system is merely mentioned as also preferable to industry assistance).

Harford also seems to be a little soft in his critique of state intervention and government programs more generally. In a book that holds markets as the closest societal construct to natural selection, the lack of discussion about the impact of intervention in the market is stark. Harford does note the difficulty governments have in picking winners, and precluding Chapter 1 is Hayek's famous quote: 'the curious task of economics is to prove to men how little they know about what they imagine they can design.' But there is a vast literature addressing the effects of state intervention, so a few case studies would have enhanced the general discussion of the failures of top-down decision making. These few drawbacks are small and do not compromise the central message that organisations, whether the military, government or business, require regular conflict and critique to adapt to circumstances and innovate to present new and better solutions.

Harford's research is broad enough to be entertaining, while concise and brief enough to appeal to a broad audience. The insights are particularly valuable to those holding positions of authority. *Adapt* contains a mine of ideas for CEOs, military strategists,

politicians, bureaucrats and inventors on how to organise for and deal with failure. Whether the intention is to foster and incubate new ideas, devise welfare programs for the poor, or find out which regulatory regimes create the least harm, this book contains useful suggestions for all leaders.

**Reviewed by Alexander Philipatos**

*Ghetto at the Centre of the World: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong*  
**By Gordon Matthews**

University of Chicago Press, 2011  
 \$12.92, 256 pages  
 ISBN 9780226510200

**I**n the market for 500 knock-off Tag Heuer watches? A container-load of inexpensive African style clothes? A leather-bound Koran or a Bangladeshi curry? Head to Chungking Mansions, 'a dilapidated seventeen-story structure full of cheap guesthouses and cut-rate businesses' just up the road from the ritzy Peninsula Hotel on Hong Kong's famous Nathan Road.

Shunned by Hong Kongers and unnoticed by tourists, Chungking Mansions is a meeting place for developing world traders, a clearing house of cheap Chinese goods, and an African and South Asian outpost in the heart of Kowloon: a 'Grand Central Station in the passage of globalized goods from China to the developing world at large.'

The building's true importance lies not in its cosmopolitanism but in its wildly thriving economy. Hong Kong's uniquely laissez-faire attitude—the city is consistently rated by US think-tank The Heritage Foundation as the freest economy in the world—makes Chungking Mansions' brand of 'low-end globalization' possible.

Globalisation Chungking Mansions-style looks shabby compared to the glitzy shrines to global capitalism touching the clouds across the harbour in Causeway Bay. But for consumers in the developing world, the influence of Chungking Mansions is much more profound.

Gordon Matthews, author of *Ghetto at the Centre of the World* and Chungking Mansions devotee, might just be the first ever anthropologist to use the term 'neoliberal' approvingly.

African and South Asian traders—well off in their own countries but poor by Western standards—come to Chungking Mansions to take advantage of Hong Kong's lax immigration laws and its porous borders, dreaming of the riches they hope to make by taking a load of cheap Chinese goods to sell in their impoverished

and economically backward hometowns. Fortunes are made and lost in the long hallways and hidden stalls of Chungking Mansions, where single guesthouse rooms go for as little as US\$13 a night and competition between the wholesalers on the lower floors is fierce.



Mathews estimates that 20% of the mobile phones currently in use in Africa were sold in Chungking Mansions. Large traders use the building to make contacts on the mainland, shipping containers of phones, clothing, watches and even cars directly from factories in Guangzhou to Nairobi or Lahore. Smaller traders carry a few hundred mobile phones in their luggage, hoping to make just enough profit to cover their airfare and fund their next trip back to Hong Kong.

Immigration officials turn the other cheek when traders repeatedly cross the border on tourist visas. Police largely allow illegal workers to man Chungking Mansions' restaurants, guesthouses and phone stalls, intervening only when there is a complaint or a violent crime is reported. Copy goods (such as 'Sory-Erichssen' mobile phone handsets) are readily bought and sold; authorities only intervene if there is deception on the part of the seller.

Like elsewhere in Hong Kong, business is the top priority.

The attitude of the Hong Kong government stands in stark contrast to the corrupt and statist administrations that traders must negotiate with in their home countries. Many of the small business people who pass through Chungking Mansions operate on the fringes of legality, not because they are dealing in illicit substances or are inherently criminal, but because local restrictions mean they must smuggle Chinese goods across their borders in contravention of import bans, or pay off crooked customs officials.

This, Mathews says, is the coal face of the protectionism versus

free trade debate: where some new regulation can make the difference between a small-time trader being able to feed his family or go out of business.

Goods are usually of inferior quality or are shoddy imitations of Western brands. But for the poor end-consumers in African villages, they are often the only realistic conduit to the globalised world. A young Kenyan woman may never be able to afford a Nokia phone, but she can use her 'Nokla' to communicate with her family, pay her bills, and perhaps start her own small trading business. This, Mathews says, 'is the ultimate significance of these traders: they bring at least a facsimile of global goodness to the world's poorest continent.'

*Ghetto at the Centre of the World* focuses not just on the traders but also on the guesthouse owners, illegal (or semi-legal) workers, asylum seekers, restaurateurs and tourists who congregate and often live in Chungking Mansions. Here, in a place where business matters above all else, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, Ethiopians and Somalis peacefully coexist in a way they never could at home.

Muslims, Christians and non-believers live side by side, but they all share one unifying faith: 'the faith that in the capitalist ghetto of Chungking Mansions, within the neoliberal world of Hong Kong... one can squeeze out enough profit to make a better life for oneself and one's family.'

Low-end globalisation is not just a path to economic development but also a road to greater tolerance. Perhaps the world would be

a better place if there were more spaces like Chungking Mansions.

**Reviewed by Jessica Brown**

*The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*

**By Ricardo Duchesne**

Brill, Leiden, 2011

US\$139.50, 527 pages

ISBN 9789004192485

**W**as Europe the only civilisation capable of spontaneous industrialisation? Is its heritage of individual liberty unique? These questions have long been central in history, economic history, and political philosophy. Until a generation after World War II, they were treated as puzzles about positive internal changes. Scholars rarely examined the comparative performance of non-Western lands assumed to be mired in sloth, barbarism or tyranny. Then, rather suddenly, a revisionist school reared up, insisting that Europe possessed no special institutions or propensity to growth, and was original only in forming militaristic states. The Rise of the West was attributed to plunder and luck—plundering American resources and (in Britain's case) fortunately possessing an abundance of coal. Nor was it conceded that Europe broke away from a world of supposedly uniform achievement, or rather lack of achievement, until the early nineteenth century.

These opinions were advanced by quasi-Marxists and by area studies students affronted at the neglect of their specialisms. Vehemence is hardly strong enough