

## Chapter 11

# Iron Silk Roads: Comparing Interwar and Post-war Transnational Asian Railway Projects

Irene Anastasiadou and Aristotle Tympas

### 1. Introduction

We now know that the building of – or the failure to build – transnational technological infrastructure has been of primary importance to the making of Europe (Schot and Scranton forthcoming). Some of the most influential interpretations of Europe did not emerge in the context of politics, but in the context of certain plans for the development of transnational transportation, energy, and communication networks (Tympas and Anastasiadou 2006, Van der Vleuten and Kaijser 2006, Van der Vleuten et al. 2007: 321–47, Lagendijk 2008, Schipper 2008, Anastasiadou 2012). In this chapter, we refer to studies that focus on the understudied, yet critical, role of institutions and initiatives active in what has been aptly called ‘technocratic internationalism’ (Schot and Lagendijk 2008: 196–217, Schipper and Schot 2011: 245–64, Schot et al. 2011: 265–89). The protagonists of this version of politics were not prime ministers and/or army generals. Rather, they were the managers and engineers of provisional or permanent committees, which were formed to pursue the interoperability of railways across national borders and against political and social barriers. Committees aiming at the advancement of transnational railway and other infrastructural routes were present across Europe from early on (Tissot 1998, Tissot 2003, Anastasiadou 2005, Schot et al. 2011).

Projects for transnational railway routes in Europe contained and advanced certain interpretations of Europe. In the past, we have studied the constant desire to link Greece to the transnational European network by way of a hybrid rail-ferry link across the Ionian Sea (Tympas and Anastasiadou 2006, Anastasiadou 2012). This connection would have allowed Greece to advance its own interpretation of and position within Europe, by gaining independence from its nineteenth and twentieth century Balkan neighbours. It was this link that was missing for the development of what many in Greece were promoting as the modern railway equivalent of the Ancient Egnatia Road. When finished, this Greek ‘Iron Egnatia Road’ would have been a key part of a transnational railway line linking Europe and Asia through a territory controlled by Greece.