

representing themselves but also are equally competent in producing racist, jingoistic, colonialist, nativist, and supremacist theologies” (150).

Sugirtharajah’s book is filled with examples of the ambiguities—and dangers—of interpreting the Bible. He shows, for example, how the figure of Paul has had just as ambivalent a place in Western Christianity as it had among Asian Christian circles. Some Japanese Christians in the late nineteenth century, for instance, saw Paul as a “true Samurai, the very embodiment of Bushido” (169), while contemporary Korean feminists have criticized the patriarchal and oppressive elements in Paul’s writings (171).

If there are any uncomplicated heroes in the book, it is in the marginalized voices of tribal peoples who had been oppressed in the process of post-colonial nation formation: the Indian Dalits, the Japanese Burakumins, the Korean Minjung. Indigenous peoples have drawn upon the Bible to “find liberatory resources that will both confront and challenge the oppressive forces and at the same time empower them to regain their dignity” (210). By uncovering these largely overlooked voices, Sugirtharajah seeks to highlight how these approaches to the Bible were filled with as much “intellectual dynamism and creativity” as Western theological approaches (262).

Sugirtharajah’s central aim, then, is to elevate Asian interpretations of the Bible to the same level as the strands that dominate Western scholarship, to allow for the “coexistence of multiple interpretations with equal hermeneutical standing” (263). Sugirtharajah’s sensitive close readings are a model for how to recover and do justice to these voices.

Besides highlighting these marginalized voices, Sugirtharajah also points us towards avenues of future scholarship. He suggests that historians write a social and cultural history of the Bible in Asia, as well as more archival-based explorations of how the Bible was received at the local level (260-261). These would all be welcome interventions. But one can also glimpse within Sugirtharajah’s work the possibility of placing these indigenous readings of the Bible within a more transnational, global framework. How, for example, did Western theologians and colonialists respond to the anti-imperial and anti-colonial readings of the Bible? And was there cross-pollination among indigenous readings? For instance, were there links between the Korean Minjung and the Japanese Burakumins as they shaped their indigenous theologies? Sugirtharajah gestures to some of these global circulations when he talks about Asian diasporic literature, but one wishes that he had explored these possibilities more. Without a sense of broader global contexts, it is difficult to measure the influence that these indigenous readings had beyond their respective local communities.

But these are minor quibbles. Sugirtharajah’s book deserves to be widely read by anyone interested in how the Bible shapes our thinking about the colonial encounter, as well as those interested in seeing how postcolonial hermeneutics could work in practice.

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Comparative and Transregional

Maxine Berg, Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs, and Chris Nierstrasz, eds. *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 369 pp. ISBN: 9781137403933. \$105.00.

Twenty-one chapters, four editors and a motley collection of research by both established as well as early career scholars, the book *Goods from the East* exposes its reader to the rich and

developing field of global history, studied through trade and trading objects. As the chief editor, Maxine Berg states in her “Introduction,” the book “investigates the trade in products: how they were made, marketed and distributed between Asia and Europe” (2). The book’s strength lies in engaging with new historical approaches that focus on a wide range of subjects, though geographically it is limited to mostly China and India in the “East,” and the Dutch, English, and French societies in “western Europe” (along with other small enterprises like the Swedish). Considering that these were the major nodes in the global commerce of 1600-1800, it is justified however to concentrate on these sites of consumption. Berg, along with Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs and Chris Nierstrasz (the other co-editors), also manage to brilliantly encapsulate the messiness and fluidity of these transactions that operated at multiple levels beyond the official cadre.

Towards the beginning of the book in chapter 2, Jan de Vries provides an overview of the scale and significance of Asian exports in Europe. He sets the tone for the rest of the chapters by arguing that the historical importance of this long era of trade expansion lies in the “realm of knowledge and information circulation” as much as in “transformed tastes and material culture” (34). The following chapters are then split into four parts, to accommodate the multiple dimensions of this trade and its ensuing consumerism. These are namely (1) objects of encounter and transfers of knowledge, (2) private trade and networks, (3) consuming east and west, and (4) a taste for tea. Although they do separately zoom into different aspects and commodities, what ties them all together is the idea of consumption in Europe being shaped by the trade with Asia. This, in turn, influenced all the merchants, middlemen and other actors who were involved in regulating this overseas trade.

Olivier Raveux in chapter 5, for example, tries to show how Armenian merchants adapted the calico printing techniques from Asia but changed the fabric designs to suit the taste of consumers in Marseilles. Alternatively, Meike von Brescius in chapter 11 shows the impact of middlemen, mariners, and private traders—alongside the East India Companies—in supplying Chinese export wares to European markets. Not only, did they cater to different local demands but also fulfilled the need to supply to a mix of buyers from varying social strata with different consumer preferences. Another interesting case examined by Natacha Coquery in chapter 15 deals with the sellers of Paris who took to rampant advertising and thereby fashioning a new language and imagery that was meant for attracting the customers wanting “exotic” items. In chapter 20, Bruno Blondé and Wouter Ryckbosch reveal how the pre-existence of ceramic utensils in urban households catalysed the process of the mass consumption of hot drinks and tea in the cities of the Low Countries. This mechanism of changing customer taste is also evident on the other side of the spectrum through the case study of French Pondicherry. In chapter 14, Kévin le Doudic points out how the idea of “exotic” changed from being identified initially with luxurious Indian household items to being associated with imported European furniture and items for French officials. Maxine Berg, through her analysis of the Bengali muslins in chapter 8, also shows how changing demands and fashion choices in Europe triggered production overseas.

Besides revealing the impact of Eurasian trade in shaping consumer habits within Europe, these cases also reflect the connection that was devised between morality and material culture. With abundance in consumption around this time, the European states became anxious to avoid corruption and channel the energy to civilizing and improving their national economies. Romain Bertrand in chapter 3 pointed out how “information” became a commercial commodity and its meticulous collection was championed as “industriousness” in

the commercial spirit. Dagmar Schäfer, through the study of a catalogue with clothing designs from China, concluded that certain states could even codify designs and fashion tastes as markers of class reflecting a higher moral order.

Perhaps, one of the most exciting articles of this edited volume is the contribution by Felicia Gottmann in chapter 16, where she links gender and body to studies of consumption in France. She argues how the demand for Indian cotton in France soared to extraordinary heights despite strict official prohibitions, and it remained unperturbed through private channels of supplies. The state crackdown in busting these illegal networks led to the frequent targeting of women as the “weaker sex” who were bound to obey, as well as using violence to claim authority over the “body” that was clothed in these forbidden textiles. This framework of the “home” and the “body” has been reused in the conclusion by Jos Gommans to highlight on consumption in India. Even though it does not entirely fit in as an apt conclusion, the chapter itself stands out for its excellent research. It compares the world of consumption in Mughal India studded with ritual significances to the consumption patterns of the Dutch society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While zooming down on one comparable Mughal province, Gommans chooses Gujarat for its urban character. Though it might be contended that his characterisation of the “urban” is slightly west-centric, it is understandable when his chosen unit is compared with its Dutch counterpart. The book, in general, has certain chapters that could have had been better in terms of being less descriptive and delivering more coherent argumentation. Nevertheless, in its entirety, *Goods from the East* remains a successful endeavour for its new approaches to studying Eurasian trade within the global history framework.

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John Donohue and Evelyn P. Jennings, eds. *Building the Atlantic Empires: Unfree Labor and Imperial States in the Political Economy of Capitalism, ca. 1500-1914*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. 215 pp. ISBN: 9789004285194. \$128.00.

As Peter Way observes in his preface to this collection, “for the current generation of leftist historians, Atlantic history fulfills the role that the history of the working class did for the progeny of E.P. Thompson” (vii). But while the Thompsonian tradition of labour history tended to emphasize the local and the regional (recall Thompson’s clarification in the introduction to *The Making of the English Working Class* that he neglected Scottish and Welsh history out of a respectful reluctance to generalize beyond the English experience), the history of Empire requires a much broader canvas. This collection, which includes seven essays covering a geographically and temporally diverse range of topics from the four major European empires, attempts to bridge that gap. Specifically, it explores the complex historical relationships between European capitalism and imperialism, doing so through the theme of unfree labour.

This theme complicates and enriches our understanding of the distinctions between state and market, public and private. For example, states collaborated with non-state and quasi-state entities such as the chartered companies, which functioned as much more than private firms and were in many places the leading edge of the expanding world of European capitalism.