

Ranabir Chakrabarti also addresses the situation in India but takes up Dutch architecture and depictions of the land as well as Indian representations of the Dutch.

An important conclusion drawn by several contributors (Bok, Wagenaar, Kaufmann) is that the long-term and even immediate impact of the VOC was, in fact, quite limited in most regions. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann titles his contribution “Scratching the Surface” and finds that the Chinese were not particularly impressed by the tributes brought by the Company—even when compared to the English—although the VOC may well have influenced Chinese craft techniques. The editors propose that analyses of material culture circulations adopt an understanding of their agents as cultural mediators, both in the sense of carriers of physical objects and ideas and of entities that affected these and their transfers. Astrid Erll elaborates on this proposal through a theoretical model for the study of transcultural mediation; nonetheless, she stresses the importance of considering the specificities of case studies.

The volume contains both black-and-white figures and full-colour plates—including some full-page plates—that serve the contributors’ arguments well. Some plates (such as in Chapters 4 and 9) appear, however, to have been mislabelled or incorrectly numbered. Noticeably, for an edited collection, the volume lacks biographical notes on the contributors, which may be useful for readers wishing to familiarise themselves with the authors. Furthermore, the price of this publication seems likely to restrict its access to and, consequently, its justifiable impact upon researchers from the areas that it concerns. Having studied at an Indian university, I am aware of the budgetary constraints of academic institutions in Asia. The publisher might perhaps consider pricing strategies adopted by others who release regional editions that are sensitive to financial circumstances.

This situation is more unfortunate given that the geographical scope and range of material culture discussed, along with the accessibility of the contributions, make this volume essential for those working on the (material) cultural interactions between the Low Countries and Asia. By engaging with matters of trade and diplomacy, the contributions argue for the consideration of cultural-artistic interactions in the broader historiography of the Company and early modern Asia. The strength of the contributions lies in combining historical and art historical research while looking at specific case studies, which also suggests a viable methodology for future analyses. By considering the roles of “receiving” cultures as well as other intermediaries, the volume is successful in promoting a view of material culture as a product of interested engagements rather than one in which any specific cultural entity appears as the leading actor.

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Jonathan Eacott. *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America, 1600-1830*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. ISBN: 9781469622309. \$30.00.

Eacott’s *Selling Empire* represents a new interpretation of the making of a global British imperial system between 1600 and 1830. The author shows India—as an idea, a place, and a source of commodities—to be an essential component in the formulation and development of imperial ambitions and practices across the world. They argue that “Britons sought to sell the idea of empire using ideas about India”, and present India as vital for understanding the imperial system that emerged from ongoing material and metaphorical interaction. In doing so, this book contributes to burgeoning fields of British corporate and imperial history not by further demonstrating the

interconnectedness of disparate regions and approaching these links through a range of thematic lenses. The book emphasizes the cultural conditions of these links, their political ramifications and how societies in America, Britain, and India responded to them, and we are encouraged to shift our perspective of the British Empire towards a multi-nodal system — both geographically and conceptually. Eacott suggests that through its imperial programme, “Britain had made itself into an India”, as had its colonies in North America, the Caribbean and Asia (437), contributing to dramatic shifts in the global economy and revolutionary changes to localities across the world.

In part, *Selling Empire*'s success rests on successfully bringing together often-disparate historiographies, recognizing especially how new research on the East India Company feeds into ongoing debates about Britain's American colonies. More importantly still, by encouraging this cross-pollination of ideas, Eacott re-assesses sources imaginatively and introduce some fascinating new material. Two elements of their analysis are particularly impressive. First, Eacott takes great care in handling Parliamentary and public debates on the regulation of Britain's India trade in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (72–117). By drawing together the concerns of participants as diverse as monarchs, merchants and weavers, Eacott shows a dissonance within the British empire about how to understand India, culturally and economically, and how this created instability within its emerging global system. Second, *Selling Empire* treats us to an interpretation of imperial and political ideas that rests firmly on their cultural underpinnings and the materiality of Britain's experience of India. Whether in revealing how contemporaries conflated “the horrific tyranny of India with Indian goods” (42) or assessing the relationship between tastes, sensation, and regulation (327), Eacott supplements his detailed study of political debate with a vibrant vision of this global marketplace—and what it meant to contemporaries. The impressive depth of Eacott's research in state, corporate and private archives flourishes within a rich narrative tapestry that never lets the reader forget the luxurious vibrancy of many Indian commodities.

However, while *Selling Empire* presents an array of interesting material and makes a significant contribution to our conception of the global British imperial system, there are places where its vast intended scope is detrimental to the thoroughness of Eacott's research. For example, the first half of the seventeenth century is given only a very shallow treatment, which is probably to be expected in a single monograph covering over two centuries but is inherently problematic given Eacott's goal to trace changing practices and behaviours from this period. Conversely, the geographical scope of *Selling Empire* could be judged too limited to offer a thorough analysis of the global British imperial system. In particular, Europe, and British trade with the continent receives too little attention. In focusing strictly on the relationship between Britain, India, and America, Eacott underplays the weight of economic, cultural and political interaction between Britain and its closest neighbours. This fact weakens attempts to place Britain's empire within a global, entangled environment by simplifying Britain's understanding of its commercial activities and side-lining the lives of actors whose experience of India was rooted in pre-existing trading relationships rather than colonial endeavours in the Atlantic. As such, we are left wondering just what a broader, global interpretation might reveal regarding the shape and nature of Britain's multi-nodal empire.

*Selling Empire* is an ambitious, engaging and critical piece of work. It will contribute to ongoing discussions about how the British Empire emerged and operated within an increasingly global economic environment. Eacott's passionate and detailed accounts of regulatory debates and political discourse, embellished with an appreciation of their cultural and social dimensions, offer a valuable window into the integration of India with British conceptions of state, empire, and identity.