

Although dense at times, this is a wide-ranging work that combines both an in-depth analysis of the search for modernity in post-Revolutionary France and a sound command of the challenges faced by a colonial Algeria, all supported by a significant bibliography. Following the collapse of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Empire, Murray-Miller notes “Algeria persistently stood as a glaring reminder of the contradictions and paradoxes that French modernity embodied in practice” (253); in many ways, his assertion that France’s modernity is both “contradiction and paradox” still rings true. An engaging text, *The Cult of the Modern* deserves a wide readership among those interested in colonial history, providing as it does a new perspective on the contributions of French colonies to our understanding not of just French modernity, but our Western construct of modern society.

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Emily Erikson. *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600-1757*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. 272 pp. ISBN: 9780691173795. \$27.95.

Emily Erikson’s *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600-1757* is a valuable contribution to the history of the English East India Company. The book neither provides a complete history of the Company nor does it focus on all aspects of its activities. Erikson focuses primarily on organizational structure and pays distinguished attention to the relationship between Company trade (“organization”) and private trade (“local information”). The time frame marked in the title is slightly misleading, as the book also touches on some details from the decades after 1757. However, the period of 1660 to 1740, the actual decades of the official acceptance of private trade, are clearly in focus.

The book, based on a solid theoretical foundation of organization theory, network theory and analytical sociology, highlights and examines two key elements to the success of the Company. First, the Company’s generally decentralized organizational structure, especially the acceptance of employees’ private trade; and, second, the institutional settings in Asia, especially the ability of the Company to trade in regions where institutional configurations suited English trade.

Erikson convincingly argues that the incorporation of legitimated private trade and the decentralized organizational structure, as a result, distinguished the Company as unique, and contributed to its success to a significant degree. Private trade had a positive and systematic impact on Company operations. While earlier researchers tended to portray private trade as harmful to Company trade, Erikson includes a new dimension in her analysis: information. Her results clearly demonstrate the role distinguished information played in the Company and are also valuable for researchers focusing on the impact of this dimension in other contexts. Based on that, she states that private trade, overall, was a practice that resulted in the success of the Company. Private trader employees visited new ports, thus significantly expanded the commercial world of the Company. Moreover, this practice enabled the Company to steadily enlarge its stock of local information, and the resulting social networks enhanced the information flow also within the Company itself.

An important claim in the argument is about the relationship between organizational structure and private trade, “monopoly” and “free trade.” Erikson emphasises that these two segments were not independent of each other, but existed in a special symbiotic relationship.

Private trade was not simply a form of free trade: traders used the Company infrastructure extensively (factories, ships, sometimes even Company capital), and depended heavily upon the diplomatic activities of the Company. On the other hand, private traders played a highly important role in the information system of the Company. As “pioneers,” they explored new ports and regions. The information they gathered was incorporated into the Company system and finally led to the extension of the trading network. Additional ports and markets meant new commercial possibilities, thus the net result of private trade was positive for the Company.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide the empirical evidence. Anthony Farrington’s *Catalogue of East India Company Ships’ Journals and Logs, 1600-1834* is the primary source here, and Erikson uses network analysis for studying the effects of private trade. This method allows her to recognize macro-level structures resulting from the individual, micro-level behaviour of actors, and to show how individual decisions created trade patterns. These chapters are well illustrated by charts and tables, which conclusively support the primary results that private trade “knit together otherwise disconnected regions” (119) and that “[w]ithout these traders, the network fragments into large regional clusters dislocated from the main component” (121).

The other key argument of the book focuses on the institutional environment in Asia and its impact on English trade. Erikson creates a typology of Asian cities and trading regions based on local institutional particulars. She distinguishes seven types (market society; open cities; regulated reciprocity; regulated market; unregulated reciprocity; royal monopoly; and European colonies), and, in turn, examines English trade in each. As a key finding, she highlights that the English traders usually preferred Asian ports with more sophisticated economic environments, so “sustained trade occurred at much higher rates for open cities, market societies, and non-English colonial ports” (165). The results, again, are supported by tables summarizing the statistics.

While the quantitative methods and aspects of the book are remarkably elaborated and strong, some qualitative details would have helped to draw a more comprehensive picture of the topic. For instance, while transmission of information between captains is considered a key factor in the analysis, only shipping data and overlap between voyages are used for identifying such actions. Using other documentary evidence could probably shed further light on this crucial claim in Erikson’s argument. To take another example, it is often mentioned that the social network of private traders conveyed valuable information, and helped the Company expand its geographic reach and trade operations. However, information gathered by private traders meant only an opportunity and did not induce these changes automatically. The Company’s decision-makers (or other private traders) had to make the proper decisions, and this required several information-related actions: information had to be transferred to decision makers, it had to be evaluated, and cross-checked with already available data. More information concerning these actions probably would have helped in highlighting the Company’s organizational structure better.

Overall, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade* is a book of particular value. The book’s solid theoretical background and multidisciplinary approach make it an important contribution to the study of the East India Company, while its precise empirical methodology clearly demonstrates the potential of network analysis in historical research. The findings presented by Erikson clearly allow a better understanding of the unique features of the Company’s organizational structure and its role in the success of the Company.