

Since anthropology and sociology in China are practiced mainly “inside” a multiethnic nation that assimilated and borrowed, produced heterodox narratives, and struggled to resurrect some kind of “indigenous”—non-Western—knowledge, it is hard to judge how these two disciplines will develop. Dirlik clearly envisions a twofold process in which particularities of Chinese societies could lead to some indigenization. This indigenization “requires more than just only an affirmation of a Chinese identity” (p. 31); it must simultaneously be linked to the global context, which could get lost in the indigenization process: “The social sciences as they have developed over the last century and a half from their European origins are clearly at risk [in the indigenization process]” (p. 23). On the other hand, this book clearly proves that Chinese names do not necessarily indicate “scholars from China.” There is nothing to fear if all scholars are as well equipped with knowledge from both systems as the contributors to this volume. The book is full of very dense and rich information on the discourses and struggles of Chinese and Western scholars alike to avoid the traps of “*essentialism*”—inventing tradition or indigenizing modernity in response to political needs. This collection of essays is essential for all “sinological sociologists” and will contribute much food for discussion for graduate seminars in sociology, anthropology, and sinology alike.

NORA SAUSMIKAT
German Asia Foundation
 n.sausmikat@asienhaus.de

Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America. By CAROLINE FRANK. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. xiii, 257 pp. \$75.00 (cloth); \$25.00 (paper).
 doi:10.1017/S0021911812001325

While the study of contacts and exchanges between China and non-Asian societies over the past several hundred years is still dominated by variations on the (Western) impact/(Chinese) response model, the recent reemergence of China as a major player on the world stage has led cultural historians increasingly to turn their attention to earlier moments in which China’s presence was powerfully felt well beyond its borders. Their studies have foregrounded the significance of the roles played by Chinese objects and ideas in Enlightenment thought, early modern consumer society, and literary and artistic developments in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. The colonial American engagement with China has, until now, largely been regarded as merely imitative of British trends.

Caroline Frank, in her eminently engaging and often provocative new book, sets out to redress the consequent neglect of this topic and to challenge a number of misconceptions that have arisen from this oversimplified view. The most

consequential of these is the assumption that “the Atlantic world” is an adequate geographical rubric for the cultural history of the early American colonies. The exposure of the colonists to Asian imports, Frank argues persuasively, was both more sustained and influential than has been acknowledged, and we require more capacious paradigms of early modern networks of trade and cultural affiliation in order to grasp fully its implications. Dislodging the focal point of early American history from the Atlantic basin requires coming to terms not only with the extraordinary quantities of Chinese goods (including 70 million pieces of porcelain) imported into the colonies before 1800, but also with their power to catalyze new meanings and associations for those who purchased and displayed them.

In exploring the cultural valences of Chinese objects, Frank cautions against the assumption that the objects evoked the same ideas in the American and British contexts. Attempts to enforce the East India Company monopoly on Asian trade were honored, in the colonies, more in the breach than the observance, and enterprising American pirates and privateers succeeded in smuggling shiploads of Chinese porcelains into the colonies long before the opening of a direct national trade with China. As a consequence of this history, Chinese vases, teapots, and figurines took on a distinct set of meanings within the colonies. Far from simply borrowing from the English an equation of porcelain with fashionable cosmopolitanism, American consumers actively and independently engaged with the imported visual aesthetic of the Far East, putting it to use for their own purposes in the service of specifically American identities. Chinese porcelains collected in England, for example, have most typically been associated with the women who tended to purchase and admire them. In contrast, Frank argues compellingly, Chinese goods often took on masculine associations in the colonies owing to the illicit trade pedigrees of porcelain in the pre-revolutionary period. Because most chinaware was imported illegally, the trade was a hazardous one, and one in which success promised both lucrative returns and affirmations of the trader’s manly determination and vigor. Her conclusions will usefully shake up some of the more facile gendered readings of chinaware inherited from eighteenth-century English satirists.

An equally iconoclastic reassessment of the causes of the Boston Tea Party rounds out Frank’s book. Traditionally understood as a rebuke to parliament for imposing unjust taxes on the colonists, the deep-sixing of a hundred tea chests by Boston’s unruly patriots emerges in her account as the response to a more serious menace increasingly attributed, in the mid-century American imagination, to the commodity itself. Originally reviled by its detractors as an unhealthful beverage and an extravagant luxury, this “cursed weed of China’s coast” gradually morphed into an enfeebling drug deployed by the British to sap the wealth and vigor of the colonists and reduce them to a condition of slavery and dependence. Given the frequency with which China had been cited as a positive model in Enlightenment attacks on abuses of church and state authority in Europe, the association Frank claims between the ideas of Chinese tea and the “oriental despotism” of the East seems, on one level, somewhat improbable, but the general lesson about the transformative potential of meanings attached to imported commodities in such a context remains a valuable one.

Objectifying China, Imagining America, grounded in an impressive array of careful and wide-ranging archival research, offers both a rich trove of colorful local details and a useful mapping of some neglected contours of early American material culture. More important, though, than the mountain of facts Frank has amassed from probate inventories, letters, and newspapers is the novel and revelatory framework she develops for interpreting them. While it is bound to face resistance in some quarters, the author's historical model brings strikingly into view both America's early participation in world trade networks and the significance of its bounty of Chinese goods in forging the colonists' sense of their place in an already rapidly globalizing world.

DAVID PORTER

University of Michigan
dporter@umich.edu

Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang. Translated and introduced by BEATA GRANT and WILT L. IDEMA. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 2011. x, 278 pp. \$70.00 (cloth); \$35.00 (paper).

doi:10.1017/S0021911812001337

Students of Chinese religion have long recognized the importance of *baojuan* (precious scrolls) as a source for studying moral and religious values found at all levels of society in late imperial China. Written in prose and seven-character rhymed verse, and sometimes including lyrics based on popular tunes, the *baojuan* genre probably first appeared in the Yuan (1260–1368), and became increasingly popular during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912). As the expression “proclaiming the scroll” (*xuanjuan*) indicates, this type of literature was usually recited in front of an audience, and a typical audience consisted largely of women. This is also confirmed by the fieldwork conducted by Rostislav Berezkin in present-day China. Yet despite their historical value, few precious scrolls have been translated into English. A notable exception is Wilt Idema's *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008). It is therefore most welcome news that Idema and Grant have followed up their earlier collaboration on gender and literature in *The Red Brush: Writing Women in Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), with this translation of two more precious scrolls, *The Precious Scroll of the Three Lives of Mulian and Woman Huang Recites the Diamond Sutra*. The translation is very accessible, with notes and a glossary, and is suitable as a text for courses on Chinese religion and popular literature.

Although both stories have a long history of textual evolution, particularly in the case of Mulian, the earliest exemplars in printed precious scrolls, on which the translation is based, date to 1876 in the case of Mulian, and 1848 in the