
As is often the case, the subtitle of Jonathan Goldstein's slim book is more revealing of its contents than the title itself. His purpose is to discover the impact of Sino-American trade contacts upon American social attitudes. Struck by the lack of a study of Philadelphia's role in the great China trade of the early nineteenth century, the author also became impressed, as his studies advanced, by the close and sympathetic ties which developed between the merchants of the two countries. This, despite the fact that the trade was based upon the smuggling of opium into China. Goldstein concludes that, with minor exceptions, solid business and personal relationships existed down to the 1840s and that there was little on the American side to suggest the arrant racism of the later nineteenth century.

European interest in China had ancient origins and was based upon the desire for luxury goods imported from the Orient. Establishment of the various Asian trading companies by England, France, and the Netherlands led to increasing commercial contact, familiarity with Chinese society, and interchange culturally. In the eighteenth century Philadelphians became consumers of Asian goods, especially tea, and after independence they helped to open a direct trade to Canton. Goldstein traces the history of these contacts to 1846 and the signing of the first Sino-American treaty. Through these years staples such as tea, silks, porcelains, and “Nankeen” cotton goods entered the city as well as Chinese artifacts, and even improved strains of domestic animals and new exotic plants. Chinese paintings, wallpaper, fans, and other household furnishings acquainted middle- and upper-class Americans with Asian life styles. Interest in China — esteem for Chinese culture — was great enough so that two separate Chinese museums were built in the city. Chinese architectural styles were also emulated by Philadelphians with close ties to Asia. Goldstein has combed the pertinent available manuscripts with extraordinary dedication, especially commercial correspondence. He effectively exposes how commercial and cultural interchange went hand in hand in the years after 1785. The China trade was a valuable and profitable business. A leading firm in Canton was operated by the Wilcocks family of Philadelphia. Benjamin Wilcocks served for a time as consul at Canton.
and was a major trader in opium smuggled in from the Near East and India.

Though some historians have suggested that drug smuggling reflected racist attitudes, the author concludes rather that it fitted the moral standards of the day. Defense of opium smuggling was defense of free-trade principles. Despite the corruption of government officials which it occasioned, the Chinese did not have the same antipathy for American traders as they directed toward the British who fought two wars to continue the trade. What Britain attained by war, America gained by diplomacy, without creating hatreds. While they treated Chinese law casually, Americans greatly respected Chinese merchants for their honesty and high ethical standards. Though the outlines of American contacts with Asia have been thoroughly sketched by others, Goldstein makes an important contribution in relating the social issues connected with the trade to questions of cultural exchange and racist relationships.

Some minor carping: the author might have concentrated a bit more attention on the importance of Chinese styles to eighteenth-century Europeans, the era of "Chinoiserie." That Asian culture was in the mode undoubtedly encouraged American interest in the China trade. The archaic spelling used for St. Eustatius (St. Eustacia) was bothersome. Is it George Chinery (illustration opposite p. 36) or George Chinnery (p. 38)? References to American war vessels as USF Congress and USF Vincennes are confusing. Does the "F" signify frigate? If so, it is a new usage since frigates were ship-rigged; thus USS serves.

All in all, however, this small study is very well done; it is well written, very well researched, very nicely and profusely illustrated, very neatly packaged and published. Author and publisher can look upon it with some real sense of pride.

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The success of this blending of family and business history owes