

have in fact survived the Ming dynasty (chapter 7) and could be observed even to this day. Second, the variety of strategies deployed by the Ming military households not only challenges the conventional view of state-society relations as a zero-sum game but also testifies to the importance in the political realm in pre-twentieth-century China of “using informal institutions to mediate with the state and its agents” (p. 219). Third, the case of Ming dynasty China may not be an isolated one; “[d]id early modern governance mark the moment,” Szonyi ponders, “when getting closer to the state, being seen by the state, talking like a state, could be used to serve one’s interests, generating new patterns of everyday politics” (p. 233)? If the answer is affirmative, comparing and contrasting the art of being governed as it was practiced in different political or geographic contexts may well prove to be a promising avenue for comparative history.

The most fascinating—but also most vexing—aspect of *The Art of Being Governed* is its heavy reliance on family genealogies. While Szonyi, who has also written a book titled *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford University Press, 2002), is no doubt aware of the limitations and shortcomings associated with this genre, to this reviewer at least, there remains in his approach a degree of tension between rhetoric and reality. In particular, while much of Szonyi’s analysis is based on the assumption that the strategies described were actually carried out (military duties were delegated, goods were smuggled, marriages were arranged, temples were constructed, etc.), perhaps to lighten the burden of veracity placed on the family genealogies consulted, he would go so far as to argue that we should treat the accounts found in them as “fictions.” “Families made use of certain narratives to explain a situation,” Szonyi explains. “[A]t the core of this analysis is the question of why they chose these narratives rather than others” (p. 29). I appreciate the need to make this analytical intervention, but I am not entirely convinced that this is sufficient to absolve the problems associated with the heavy dependence of family genealogies as historical evidence.

Finally, on a technical note, I wholeheartedly applaud Szonyi’s decision to place many of the primary documents used in this study on an openly accessible website. As the scholarly community continues to explore the potential and the limitations of the digital world, figuring out how best to share one’s “raw materials”—and rendering one’s research more transparent—will be an increasingly essential task. It is my hope that the physical form of the scholarly monograph will remain, but I would certainly encourage all of us to leverage the ever-evolving state of technology to share our research.

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Silk, Slaves, and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road. By SUSAN WHITFIELD. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. xi, 339 pp. ISBN: 9780520281783 (paper, also available in cloth and as e-book).
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Susan Whitfield’s *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas* is not only about the history of the Silk Road; it is a dialogue that oscillates between the people and the objects that traveled along the Silk Road. It is a book on material culture, an approach historians have

increasingly applied to help us perceive and understand how social reality was structured and framed through objects and material items. This approach also engages with the psychology of taste, individual motivation, metaphorical analogies, and social unity. It does so by recapturing the physical conditions and structural patterns of everyday life among various communities or, in the words of economic determinists, within the capitalistic market. The growth of the so-called school of material culture tended to maximize the amount of attention given to artifacts, crafts, commodities, and the material environment of the societies being studied. The new material culturists continue to prevail, and most of their studies have yielded positive results. Such an approach has an indispensable value of its own and is a remarkable element in examining the history of human progression. Yet, despite the importance of this approach, I am in agreement with J. H. Hutton that all enquiries into material culture must have a factual basis.¹ Without a strong, empirically supported foundation, no historical interpretation can be effectively transmitted from the past to the present through the study of material culture.

Whitfield's new book provides us with a brilliant example of how material history should be written. It highlights the social lives of a series of commodities that we are relatively familiar with, such as glassware and silk; but at the same time, it also brings to light a set of commodities that are inevitably less celebrated within the context of the trade that took place along the Silk Road, including earrings, ewers, stupas, and the Quran. The history Whitfield traces is actually quite ambitious, as she attempts to cast the transregional interactions and material culture across the Eurasian continent into one field of vision. One of the core ideas of the book is to emphasize that the Silk Road did not simply facilitate economic exchanges, but it was also a cultural highway that linked production (the people who made objects), marketing (those who carried and sold objects), consumption (those who bought and used them), and the preservation of heritage (those who conserved, curated, and even worshiped the traded objects). Also central to this book is the argument Arjun Appadurai advances in his classic edited volume *The Social Life of Things*, where he notes that "objects take on different forms and regimes of value as they move through socially mediated worlds."²

Silk, Slaves, and Stupas consists of ten chapters, each of which features a different object and its social and cultural interactions. While the book focuses on the Silk Road, the story Whitfield narrates is truly global. Glass technology was refined in West Asia, on the fringes of Europe, and spread east into China and Korea. Some of the refined glassware was transported across the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean region. The story of silk and the spread of silk technologies also went beyond a Eurasian setting, even reaching the other side of the Pacific Ocean. The popularity of the chinoiserie style reflected the fashion for Eastern goods, while China, Japan, and Korea imported luxurious and uncommon goods from Britain, France, and Italy. Most of these commodities were transported along the Silk Road. If we were to make the Silk Road even more cultural, it occurs to me that the "Silk Road" is now being seen as a particular identity, like a brand, and the goods related to it were desirable, valuable, and profitable for at least two centuries.

¹J. H. Hutton, "The Place of Material Culture in the Study of Anthropology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 74, no. 1/2 (1944): 1–6.

²Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.

Chapter 10, “The Unknown Slave,” is worth our special attention. In Whitfield’s own depiction, this chapter “does not focus on a single object that survives today” (p. 250). Slaves have long since died and decayed, and as far as I know, no museum exhibits the dead bodies of slaves that were traded along the Silk Road, in the same manner that some museums exhibit Egyptian mummies. Even though reconstructing the history of the slave trade seems like an impossible task, Whitfield does a fantastic job of revealing the story of the slave trade along the Silk Road. She does so by using primary materials, such as legal codes (mostly from China) and private writings (from the Middle East). According to the author, the slave markets were enormously profitable across the Eurasian continent. At the same time, slaves were also a global commodity. For example, Dublin was probably Western Europe’s largest slave trading center, whereas Shandong, in Eastern China, was infamous for “selling slaves captured from the Korean peninsula” (p. 261). Similar to the slave trade in other parts of the world, such as the triangular trade that took place between Britain, West Africa, and the New World (the West Indies and British North America), the slaves sold by the Irish and the Chinese were treated no differently from other marketable products, or as noted in Sidney W. Mintz’s narration, “the capital that made capitalism.”³ Although numerous studies have focused on slaves as one kind of commodity, less attention has been paid to the role of the Silk Road within this context. This chapter, thus, adds some depth to the literature on the global slave trade, as it provides and discusses some meaningful case studies that have previously been ignored.

Despite its many contributions to the study of material culture, this book did not conclusively engage with those secondary literatures featuring the variegated facets of the Silk Road (ranging from religions and languages to empires and environmental history), namely the works by Richard Foltz, Valerie Hansen, Peter Frankopan, Jonathan Clements, and Xinru Liu. The book is also missing one crucial segment: a structured conclusion. A more cohesive summary of the revelations presented in the book would help readers better recapitulate Whitfield’s insightful analyses. Nevertheless, as a whole, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas* is an agreeable read, and will keep the attention of anyone interested in the history of the Silk Road and its global connections.

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³Quoted from Julia Ott, “Slaves: The Capital that Made Capitalism,” *Public Seminar*, April 9, 2014, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/04/slavery-the-capital-that-made-capitalism> (accessed November 10, 2018). For Mintz’s discussion, see his *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 55–65.