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# Review Of "Domesticating The World: African Consumerism And The Genealogies Of Globalization" By J. Prestholdt

Timothy Burke

*Swarthmore College*, [tburke1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:tburke1@swarthmore.edu)

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***Domesticating the world: African consumerism and the genealogies of globalization* By Jeremy Prestholdt. California World History Library 6. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. Pp. xiv + 273. 15 b/w photographs. Hardback £35.00, ISBN 978-0-520-25424-4; paperback £14.95, ISBN 978-0-520-25423-7.**

Timothy Burke

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there is little discussion of the Federation of Malaysia or the confrontation with Indonesia. Indeed, the author's conciseness, which in the main is a boon, gives the last two chapters a slightly rushed feel. The addition of another chapter on post-1965 developments would have allowed a fuller treatment of at least some of these issues.

The book is based on secondary literature and documentary collections such as the exceptional *British documents on the end of empire* series. It is also useful that the author's research interests lie in French decolonization, where the printed sources are not as good as for the British Empire. The author quotes widely and appositely, which will encourage many readers to delve deeper. He also has a good feel for nationalist politics, particularly in the French colonies. The book might have been made more user friendly by the addition of a list of abbreviations to guide one through the alphabet soup of political parties in Francophone Africa and of a more expansive chronology than the one provided. Nonetheless, these cavils aside, it is one of the better attempts to grapple with the problem of decolonization and deserves a wide readership.

### Domesticating the world: African consumerism and the genealogies of globalization

By Jeremy Prestholdt. *California World History Library 6*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. Pp. xiv + 273. 15 b/w photographs. Hardback £35.00, ISBN 978-0-520-25424-4; paperback £14.95, ISBN 978-0-520-25423-7.

Reviewed by Timothy Burke  
Department of History, Swarthmore College,  
USA  
E-mail: [tburke1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:tburke1@swarthmore.edu)

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Jeremy Prestholdt's excellent study *Domesticating the world* adds new weight to the need for a comprehensive reassessment of the historical incorporation of African societies into industrial capitalism and the global economy after the early nineteenth century. Although regions of the continent were connected to different circuits of commodities, labour, and capital during this time period, in many parts of the continent, processes of globalization and commodification were often strikingly complex and far-reaching, and took place well before the advent

of formal European colonial sovereignty. Moreover, these processes often occurred in circumstances where local African agency drove or shaped them to a much greater extent than was true in the twentieth century.

Prestholdt extends many of the insights of Jonathon Glassman's work on the East African caravan trade, both through creative, intelligent exploration of questions and concepts that have developed in the historiography of consumption and commodification, and through an intelligent and original linkage of the material world of nineteenth-century East Africa with the history of globalization.

The resulting work has a great deal to offer to a number of different audiences. For scholars interested in cross-cultural or comparative histories of consumerism, Prestholdt develops useful elaborations of established concepts such as emulation, which he recasts as similitude, in order to describe how East Africans performed 'Englishness' or cosmopolitanism, in order to shape imperial and global influence in their local context. While paying close attention to the economic history of the region, Prestholdt also thinks deeply about the performative and communicative character of commodities, and delivers an intricate and detailed analysis of the meaning of goods and of the transformation of social identity through material culture. This has all the strengths of an area-studies-based history, while remaining accessible and useful to comparativists and scholars of globalization. Indeed, Prestholdt successfully demonstrates exactly why scholars interested in globalization must consider its local hermeneutics from the ground up.

'Modernity' is a frustratingly protean term as it is used by scholars, and Prestholdt does not entirely overcome this problem. To some extent, he delivers what is becoming a conventional argument among Africanists, that Africans became 'modern' in simultaneity with the West, and that our ongoing contemporary misperceptions of that history are a consequence of late nineteenth-century imperial ideology. Like many scholars making similar arguments, he is so eager to describe nineteenth-century African cosmopolitans that groups that might have been less touched by global commodity flows, or that might have consciously rejected or contested some of their transformations, are less clearly visible. If 'modernity' in its consuming forms has an older, deeper, richer history in East Africa, which is much less a product of imperial hegemony than has been thought hitherto, then I suspect that the same is true of 'tradition' as a sociocultural artefact

created and deployed by Africans themselves. Nevertheless, this is a creative, insightful, and original book, which deserves to be widely read and used in the ongoing reconsideration of the history of globalization.

### Visible cities: Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the coming of the Americans

By Leonard Blussé. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 133. Hardback £16.95, ISBN 978-0-674-02614-8.

Reviewed by Robert B. Marks  
Richard and Billie Deihl Professor of History,  
Whittier College, USA  
E-mail: rmarks@whittier.edu

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Brief but engaging, Professor Blussé's book – based on the Reischauer Lectures that he delivered while visiting at Harvard University – examines three port cities central to the late eighteenth-century Asian and world trading systems: Canton [Guangzhou], Nagasaki, and Batavia. In three substantive chapters, Blussé looks at the broader historical context of trade in the China Sea (ch. 1), what the ports looked like and how they handled trade (ch. 2), and the ways in which specific individuals experienced Canton, Nagasaki, or Batavia (ch. 3).

Blussé chose these cities because he was interested in exploring places 'where East and West met in strikingly different but also similar ways' (p. 3). As a well-known scholar of the Dutch colonial enterprise in Asia, Blussé was also interested in bringing to Harvard a historical discussion of the maritime world, which he suggests has been 'somewhat neglected' there (p. 4). Fittingly, he claims that focusing on three cities that also served as important gateways to the interiors of Java, China, and Japan will enhance scholarly understanding of the place of Asian states in the early modern world: 'Through the windows of Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia we can witness the advent of modernity' (p. 8).

In the part of the Pacific Ocean in which Blussé is interested – the China Sea from Japan south to the Indonesian archipelago – the vicissitudes of China's official maritime policies, as well as the substantial amount of Chinese private seaborne commerce, set the stage (ch. 1). In the early modern period from 1400 to 1800, what China did mattered. Blussé is

careful to point out, though, 'the limitations of the [Chinese] official mind': that is, what actually happened cannot be captured by reading only official Chinese documents, the mainstay of the Harvard approach to Chinese maritime history (pp. 11–14). Rather, Blussé cites extensive recent research showing that 'early modern Chinese overseas trade expansion should be seen as resulting not from the tribute system of the imperial government, as many Sino-centric historians have maintained, but rather from the commercialization of the local economy ... throughout China's southeastern coastal provinces' (p. 14).

Given that context, Blussé assesses the arrival of Europeans in Asian water, ultimately focusing on the Dutch, and the near-simultaneous expansion of Japanese overseas trade during the sixteenth century. Substantial change came in the eighteenth century, after the Japanese Tokugawa *bakufu* promulgated a series of maritime prohibitions, both the Dutch experiment and the Zheng empire (Koxinga and his son) on Taiwan rose and fell, and the Manchus suppressed the last challenges to their rule. In 1684, China's restrictions on private seaborne trade were lifted, and by 1700 the China Sea was filled with thousands of Chinese junks sailing up and down the China coast and to ports in Japan and Southeast Asia.

But trade was by no means 'free'. The Dutch VOC was determined to maintain its monopoly and squeeze out other European competitors; the Japanese *bakufu* restricted trade to Nagasaki, initially allowing two Dutch ships and thirty Chinese junks annually (p. 48); and when China could control neither its merchants nor especially the English, by 1760 it channelled all trade with Europe through Canton. For the most part, the eighteenth century was an era of managed trade in the China sea, much to the benefit of the managers.

In Chapter 2, 'Managing trade across cultures,' Blussé provides fascinating insights into how, precisely, the Chinese and Japanese organized and managed foreign trade at Canton and Nagasaki, and into the rise and decline of Batavia. Founded by the Dutch explicitly to anchor its Asian trade, Batavia presented a whitewashed European façade to which Chinese merchants supplied nearly all of its basic needs in trade carried on Chinese junks. What kept Batavia going and growing was the two-way trade with China, not trade with the interior of Java. Batavia soon split in two, not simply as a result of the 1740 massacre of Chinese residents, the survivors of which were then segregated into a Chinatown, but because of lesser-known environmental problems. Fish ponds at the mouth of the silted-up