

Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History. By James A. Benn. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015. Pp. xiii + 288. \$65.00 cloth, \$24.00/HKD195.00 paper.

This is not a general history of tea in China, nor does it pretend to be. The operative part of the title is actually the subtitle: *A Religious and Cultural History*. As will be obvious to anyone who reads this book, the author pays overwhelming attention to the religious aspects of tea. Moreover, the book makes no attempt to be chronologically comprehensive. Rather, it focuses very heavily on the medieval period, in particular the Tang dynasty (618–907). Consequently, this is not the book for someone who wants to learn about diverse manifestations of tea throughout Chinese history.

The volume has its strengths and its weaknesses, and it is my duty as reviewer to point out both. In terms of scholarship, Benn's *Tea in China* (hereafter *TiC*) is Sinologically and Buddhologically generally adequate. By and large, Benn's translations are up to snuff, and his references to and annotations for early texts, for the most part, are reliable. Where he goes astray is in placing so much emphasis on the religious affinities of tea, to the degree that it slants the overall development of tea drinking in China.

As Benn would no doubt himself admit, his preoccupation with the religious dimensions of tea is by no means the only approach that one might adopt. Indeed, another book with a completely different outlook on tea appeared at almost the same time as Benn's. I am referring to Bret Hinsch's *The Rise of Tea Culture in China*, which has the striking subtitle *The Invention of the Individual*.¹ As I stated in endorsing Hinsch's book:

In this captivating volume, Bret Hinsch demonstrates as never before how an unpretentious infusion of the dried leaves of a bitter plant from the southern hinterland became the iconic beverage of high culture in central China. Beyond that, he shows how the art of tea drinking during the transition from medieval to early modern China was intimately involved in the development of individualism and self-expression, such that the "new man" of this period had a very different outlook on personhood from individuals of classical times. This is a learned study of the role of tea in Chinese society, one that ranges from literature and aesthetics to gender and morality, covering a host of topics in a most engaging fashion.

Although Hinsch does pay due attention to Buddhism, Daoism, and transcendence, he gives more prominence to topics such as power, connoisseurship, morality, and manhood.

¹ Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

One of the most valuable contributions of Benn's book is his treatment of Myōan Eisai's (1141–1215) *Kissa yōjōki* (A Record of Drinking Tea to Maintain Health). This he does in chapter 7, which ostensibly relates the coming of tea to Japan, but in fact is devoted exclusively to Eisai's extraordinary work. Benn outlines the medicinal and esoteric aspects of tea usage set forth in *Kissa yōjōki*, and concludes the chapter with a complete, annotated translation of this unusual treatise. For this we can be grateful, but that is all we get for Japan, and it is not well integrated into the story of tea in medieval China.

Benn's heavy emphasis on the religious aspects of tea is evident from the beginning to the end of the book. The first chapter is titled "Tea as a Religious and Cultural Commodity in Traditional China," and the first sentence of the first chapter repeats: "This book is about tea as a religious and cultural commodity in traditional China." In the penultimate sentence of the first paragraph of the book, the author even quotes himself: "First, what do I mean by saying that tea was a 'religious and cultural commodity'?"! The first sentence of the concluding chapter repeats yet again: "In this book, we have considered tea as a religious and cultural commodity in traditional China from earliest times through to about 1800" (p. 198). The leitmotif "religious and cultural," often with "commodity" immediately following or lurking nearby, occurs dozens of times in the book, so often that it amounts to a drumbeat, if not a sledgehammer.

Benn's preponderant attention is directed toward the religious dimensions of tea. By including the adjective "cultural" in the description of his endeavour, Benn wants his reader to know that the book is not solely fixated on tea and religion, but that it looks at tea and poetry, tea and art, and so forth, and this he does creditably well. Referring to tea as a "commodity," however, amounts to little more than paying lip service to the economic impact of tea, which was, in fact, enormous, though the book actually contains very little material concerning manufacturing, trade, distribution, political implications, and the like. It is also misleading for Benn to state in the second sentence of his book that "it considers the life of tea in China before the nineteenth century, when tea became a global commodity." As we have already seen in the preceding paragraph, Benn reiterates this claim in the first sentence of the last chapter—"through to about 1800." But the book actually stops with the end of the Ming (1368–1644), thus the eighteenth century is effectively not covered at all, and only the first part of the seventeenth century is touched upon.

Despite his professed and actual devotion to the religious aspects of tea drinking, Benn overlooks a religious figure about whom there were intimate ties to the early history of tea in China, namely, Bodhidharma (fifth to sixth century), the first patriarch of the Chan / Zen school. Although the most colourful legend connecting Bodhidharma to tea is more closely linked to Japan (the story goes that he kept

dozing off while meditating, causing the irascible monk to pluck off his eyelids and throw them on the ground, when—lo and behold—they turned into tea plants!), Bodhidharma is associated with tea as an aid to meditation apart from the extreme legend. What's more, if one objects to the lack of solid historical data concerning Bodhidharma, there is not a shred of evidence for the existence of Shennong 神農 (Divine Farmer), to whom Benn devotes considerable attention as a mythical discoverer of the tea plant. It is all the more odd that Benn ignores Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chan / Zen, since he devotes much of chapter 6 (on the Song period) to tea in relation to Chan / Zen, and he also brings up Zen in other chapters as well. Bodhidharma was most closely linked to Shaolin Monastery 少林寺 (the home of the famous “fighting monks”), an important centre for meditation in China, during a key part of his career.

The ample Bibliography is divided into “Primary Sources” and “Secondary Sources.” Benn's treatment of Chinese and Japanese texts is exemplary, giving transcriptions of the authors' names and transcriptions and translations of titles. Moreover, he has dug up a number of rather obscure references that are quite useful for his purposes. It is surprising, however, that he does not include Mair and Hoh, *The True History of Tea*,² especially since there is such a large amount of overlap between materials covered in that book and Benn's own. To name only a few items out of many that could be cited:

1. Reference to the negative attitude toward tea drinking in Yang Xuanzhi's 楊銜之 *Loyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (Records of the Monasteries [samghārāma] of Loyang) (A.D. 547).
2. The Dunhuang manuscript of the “Cha jiu lun” 茶酒論 (Debate between Tea and Beer) and its longer and later Tibetan counterpart. Appendix B of *The True History of Tea* translates the whole of “Cha jiu lun” directly from the Dunhuang text.
3. Tracing all the words for tea in the world to a single source. This is exhaustively demonstrated in Appendix C of Mair and Hoh, but only mentioned in passing in Benn.
4. Utilization of evidence from archeologically recovered materials, such as those from Famen si 法門寺 (Temple Gate Monastery), about 75 miles to the west of Xi'an, discovered in 1987.

² Victor H. Mair and Erling Hoh, *The True History of Tea* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).

5. Eisai's *Kissa yōjōki*, already mentioned above.
6. "The Autobiography of Lu Yu [陸羽]," founder of the tea cult in China, is presented in English in its entirety for the first time in a history of tea in Appendix A of Mair and Hoh.
7. The Chan / Zen record of Master Zhaozhou 趙州禪師 repeatedly telling a monk to "go drink tea."

Before the integrative research of Mair and Hoh, which began in the sixties, these and many other sources pertaining to the history of tea in China were only to be found scattered in specialized journals and original language sources. Mair and Hoh brought these new additions to the history of tea together in a comprehensive history for the first time.

While Mair and Hoh's book is absent from Benn's Bibliography, it does include Ukers's 1935 *All about Tea*, which—although it was a considerable achievement for its time and served as a standard source on the history of tea for decades—is badly outdated and innocent of direct reference to Chinese sources, whereas Mair and Hoh's book is based on original language sources in all the languages that it quotes, including Chinese.

Another important work that is conspicuously absent from *TiC* was written by another Benn: Charles D. I am referring to the latter Benn's fascinating *Daily Life in Traditional China: The Tang Dynasty*.³ In this remarkable study, Charles Benn looks at all aspects of everyday life during the Tang period, the same period James Benn focuses on in the volume under review. Charles Benn places special emphasis on alcohol and tea, just as James Benn does. However, whereas James Benn stresses the religious implications of tea and alcohol, Charles Benn pays greater attention to the social, quotidian manifestations of tea on the street and in the shops, as it were. Charles Benn's hidden treasure has the added advantage of providing what was at the time the clearest exposition of just what the Chinese term *jiu* 酒 signified (James Benn translates it as "alcohol," which is perhaps better than the usual "wine," but historically is not as accurate as terms like "beer; brew; ale").

Because of Benn's ("Benn" referring henceforth to James Benn) dedication to the religious facets of tea, he gives a somewhat skewed (I would not go so far as to say "distorted") interpretation of the history of tea in China. There can be no doubt that the rise of tea drinking in medieval China was intimately bound up with Buddhism, and tea retained its close association with Buddhism throughout the following

³ Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002.

centuries (this explains why the hyper-Confucian Joseon / Chosŏn / Yi dynasty [1392–1897] in Korea virtually outlawed tea in urban areas). From the Song period onward, however, tea also experienced a completely secular development.

There is still plenty of room for further studies on the history of tea in China. One thing we need to understand better is precisely how Lu Yu was able to bring about the legitimization of the drinking of tea among the broad population at the particular moment when he did. Up to this point, we have been hampered by the lack of a reliable, adequately annotated translation of Lu Yu's *Cha jing* 茶經 (Tea Classic), but have had to rely on Carpenter's pedestrian 1974 rendering.⁴ Let us hope that this lacuna in scholarship on tea will soon be filled by Steven D. Owyong's forthcoming translation of the classic. If it had been available to Benn, his presentation of Lu Yu's role in the history of tea would have benefitted greatly.

There is much we can learn from *TiC*. For instance, the author displays good judgement when he states that “tea was essentially a Tang invention” (p. 95, see also p. 200). And he is also right on the mark when he emphasizes that it was around the time of Lu Yu when tea consumption began to transform from “slurping vegetable soup” (p. 99) to drinking a refined beverage. But I think Lu Yu deserves more credit for this dramatic transformation than Benn affords him when he says, “his book on tea coincided with a rapid development of interest in the topic. By default, his work became the definitive word on the topic for centuries and a blueprint that was copied by other aspiring experts on the subject” (p. 202). I believe that Lu Yu was a genius who brought about the revolution in tea usage by legitimizing tea drinking, not as something uncouth from the barbarian south, but as an elegant and cultivated activity suitable for elites. Naturally, commoners could tag along if they wished.

Reading Notes

Some of the following notes are intended primarily for specialists.

On pp. 9 and 119, Benn refers to *lacha* (wax tea). Since he does not explain what this means, the reader is left mystified. From the glossary, we see that the term is written in characters as 蠟茶, which does indeed literally mean “wax tea.” However, that immediately calls to mind the perfectly homophonous 臘茶. This *là* indicates “end of the year.” Thus *làchá* means both 蠟茶 (wax tea) and 臘茶 (tea picked very early in the spring). This was a famous tribute tea produced in Fujian during the Tang and Song periods. It was referred to as “wax tea” because of its white, milky appearance that looked like melted wax. Hence, it was also called *làmiàn chá* 臘面茶 (wax surface tea) or just *làmiàn* 臘面 (wax surface).

⁴ Francis Ross Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).

On p. 122, the author describes “tiny buds that were covered in a furze that was so fine it looked white.” I suspect that “furze” is a typographical error for “fuzz.”

On p. 157, at the top, it would be helpful for the author to translate *sōjō* 僧正 (“abbot; head monk”[?]).

On p. 7, the author states: “Probably in the earliest times (the Warring States period [ca. 475–221 BCE] or perhaps even earlier), the beverage was made from freshly picked tea leaves that were not processed in any way (possibly they may have been dried in the sun).” This is complete and utter speculation. We have no evidence whatsoever that tea was drunk as a beverage at such an early period. See chapter 1 (“A Botanical Excursion: The Rivals of Tea”) and chapter 2 (“The Heartstrings of National Pride: Southeast Asia and the Origins of Tea”) of *The True History of Tea* for the earliest history of tea usage.

In investigating the history of tea drinking in China, it is essential to differentiate the usage of *tú* 荼 as a medicinal concoction or decoction and *chá* 茶 as a boiled or steeped beverage which evolved from the former. In other words, the word *chá*, the character 茶, and the beverage all appear to have developed out of medicinal *tú* 荼. As described in *The True History of Tea*, all three of these transformations came to fruition around the time of Lu Yu (mid-eighth century).

On p. 7, the author mentions *Shiliao bencao* 食療本草 (Materia Medica of Curative Foodstuff), which he says is a compilation of the late seventh century. He quotes the section on what is presumably “*Cha* (tea).” Yet it is doubtful whether the character *chá* 茶 existed by that date and whether the substance was viewed as being for anything other than medical purposes. According to the *Zhongguo yiji da cidian* 中國醫籍大辭典,⁵ the *Shiliao ben* dates to 713–741, but it is a revised and expanded version of the foundation laid by Meng Shen 孟詵, whose dates are 621–713. It is vital to observe that the original title of Meng Shen’s book was *Buyang fang* 補養方 (Tonic Recipes / Prescriptions). That is to say, it did not mention foodstuff. The text of the *Shiliao bencao*, as enlarged and revised by Zhang Ding 張鼎 during the Kaiyuan 開元 years (713–741) itself was lost early on, but subsequently reconstructed from later sources, undoubtedly with additions creeping in along the way.

There is a fragmentary Dunhuang manuscript (S76) of the *Shiliao bencao* that has been made available for clear, convenient reading through the IDP (International Dunhuang Project). The received text of Meng Shen’s enlarged pharmacopoeia included more than 227 edible items (in some currently available editions, that number grows to 260 entries), but there are only 26 surviving in the Dunhuang fragment.⁶

⁵ Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 2002.

⁶ Wang Shumin, “The Dunhuang Manuscripts and Pharmacology in Medieval China,” trans. Christopher Cullen, in Vivienne Lo and Christopher Cullen, eds., *Medieval Chinese Medicine: The Dunhuang Medical Manuscripts*, Needham Research Institute series (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), p. 303.

Chá 茶 is not among them, so we have no way to check whether the character *tú* 荼 or *chá* 茶 was used, or, indeed, whether either of them occurred in Meng Shen's original compilation.

A similar problem exists with another early citation of *chá* 茶 in Benn's book. On p. 18, Benn makes reference to the occurrence of the term *chatang* [Jap. *chatō*] 茶湯 (hot water for tea); later *chanoyu* 茶の湯 (tea ceremony). This is from a short text by the famous monk-translator, Yijing 義淨 (635–713) about essentials for receiving benefit from three types of water titled *Shouyong sanshui yaoxing fa* 受用三水要行法 (T45.1902.902–3). There are ample grounds for accepting that this text was actually by Yijing, but not necessarily for believing that the text as he originally wrote it had *chatang* 茶湯, rather than *tutang* 荼湯, at T1902.45.0903c07. The *Shouyong sanshui yaoxing fa* is first attested in the *Xu Gujin yijing tuji* 續古今譯經圖紀 (Continued illustrated record of sutra translation of ancient and contemporary times) (T2152 [p0371a04–05]), a preparatory work of Zhisheng 智昇, probably written only slightly before his normative *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (Catalogue of Buddhism from the Kaiyuan reign period) (A.D. 730) and partly incorporated into it. In the *Kaiyuan Shijiao lu*, Zhisheng lists the text several times, consistently attributes it to Yijing, and dates it A.D. 700–710. He once uses *zhuan* 撰 (compose) (0625b01) and once *yi* 譯 (translate) (0671b08), but from the passage in his biblio-biography of Yijing, it is clear that Zhisheng considered the text authored and not translated by Yijing (p0569a20–23). Zhisheng (born after 681–died before 780) probably knew Yijing personally, so the attribution is unproblematic. Internally, the text doesn't pretend to be spoken by the Buddha. The very first sentence seems to report the practice that Yijing saw in the “Western countries.” It also cites the old and the new (by Yijing?) version of the *Sarvāstivādin Vinaya*, which is exactly what would have interested Yijing.

The filiation of this text is too complicated to go into in detail in a book review. Suffice it to say that, for the present, there is no way to determine for certain whether the text originally had *chatang* 茶湯 (hot water for tea) or *tutang* 荼湯 (broth / soup / decoction of bitter vegetable). This is evident from the fascinating paper of Marcus Bingenheimer⁷ which shows how the contents of the *Taishō Tripitaka*⁸ can in no case internally be traced back beyond the Song period, and in many cases its earliest sources are from the Yuan or Ming period. Especially striking for the purposes of this review are the instances of 荼 and 茶 shifting back and forth in different editions of

⁷ Marcus Bingenheimer, “Collation Strategies for the Buddhist Canon—As Seen in the Frequency and Impact of Character Variance in Canonical Editions of the *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (T.2061),” *East Asian Publishing and Society* 4, no. 2 (2014), pp. 155–74.

⁸ Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, chief eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (*Taishō Revised Tripitaka*) (Tokyo: Issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1934).

the same text, and with later editions often replacing 荼 with 茶 (see pp. 159, 160, 166, and 170); Bingenheimer also supplied me with unpublished data showing clearly that 荼 was a variant of 茶 as late as the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, and even till today where one can sometimes see 荼 in tea-related contexts.

This fluidity between *tú* 荼 as a bitter weed to be used in a medicinal concoction or decoction and *chá* 茶 as the invigorating beverage that people have been drinking for the last thousand years and more corroborates the point I have often made about Lu Yu reconceptualizing or rebranding the former into the latter. A search of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (1773–1782) database reveals that all eight occurrences of 茶湯 / 茶湯 in Tang texts have been normalized as the latter. A search in the Scripta Sinica database found two results for *tutang* 茶湯, but not in Tang texts. The first is in a *biji* 筆記 by the Ming writer Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642):

萬曆野獲編/卷二十四/畿輔/京師名實相違/段940

【京師名實相違】京師向有諺語云。翰林院文章。武庫司刀鎗。光祿寺茶湯。太醫院藥方。蓋譏名實之不稱也。然正不止此。儒生之曳白。無如國子監。官馬之駑下。無如太僕寺。曆學之固陋。無如欽天監。音樂之謬誤。無如太常寺。帑藏之空乏。無如太倉庫。士卒之老弱。無如三大營。書法之劣俗。與畫學之蕪穢。無如制誥兩房。文華武英兩殿。真可浩歎。至若京官自政事之外。惟有拜客赴席為日課。然皆不得自由。一入衙門。則前後左右皆紹興人。坐堂皇者如傀儡在牽絲之手。提東則東。提西則西。間有苛察者欲自為政。則故舉疑似難明之案。引久遠不行之例。使其耳目瞶亂。精彩凋疲。必至取上譴責而後已。若套子宴會但憑小唱。云請麪即麪。請酒即酒。請湯即湯。弋陽戲數折之後。各拱揖別去。曾得飲趣否。拜客則皆出長班授意。除赴朝。會謁貴要之外。遠近遲速。以及當求面。當到廳。當到門。導引指揮惟其所適。即使置一偶人於輿馬間。不過如此。世間通弊。固非一二人所能挽回。若前云諺語之屬。則開創之初。必無此事。

and the second is in a late Qing *biji* essay by Xu Ke 徐珂 (1869–1928):

清稗類鈔/詼諧類/京職各署之比擬/段3476

京職各署之比擬

京諺云：「翰林院文章，太醫院藥方，光祿寺茶湯，鑾儀衛轎扛。」又云：「吏科官，戶科飯，兵科紙，工科炭，刑科皂隸，禮科看。」蓋各言其職守也。又巡城御史諺云：「中城珠玉錦繡，東城市帛菽粟，南城禽魚花鳥，西城牛羊柴炭，北城衣冠盜賊。」蓋各言其所巡之地，華樸喧寂，迥不同也。又稱翰林院講讀學士云：「無事日有事，有事日無事。」詹事府衙門云：「開印日封印，封印日開印。」蓋遇翰林院直日，講讀學士遞無事摺，如有應奏事件，則由掌院學士具摺而學士弗與也。至於東宮官屬，則政務清閒，用印日少故也。

All of this confirms my old suspicion that there is a fine dividing line between *tú* 荼 and *chá* 茶, between medicinal and refreshing applications. As for the relative instability of the change from *tú* 荼 to *chá* 茶 and the occasional persistence of the former, it most likely had to do with topolectal differences and orthographical habits.

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Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China. By Stuart H. Young. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 338. \$60.00.

One can imagine two classes of reader who might believe that they need not make a priority of reading this book. The first class would consist of those with no avowed interest in Indian Buddhist patriarchs, whether in China or anywhere else. The second would consist of experts who consider themselves already well informed on the story of Indian Buddhist patriarchs in China and who have now assured themselves in the first instance that the book promises the introduction of no major new historical sources. Both these imaginary types of reader would err by not paying close attention to *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China*. It is true that much of the material relevant to Chinese conceptions of the Indian patriarchs Nāgārjuna, Aśvagoṣa, and Āryadeva (some prefaces belonging to translations by Kumārajīva, some hagiographies and legends of dharma transmission, a few rather cryptic inscriptions at a medieval cave site, plus a couple of ritual texts) have been well studied in Japan and the West. But Stuart Young uses those sources and the stories they tell to range much further afield than one might expect. In fact, Young maintains a tight and unwavering focus on the literary conception of these three intriguing figures in order to ask some profound and searching questions about East Asian Buddhists and their sense of time and history, about their perceived connections to an Indian tradition, and about the precise timelines of soteriology that those connections might imply. These questions have been raised before, of course, but never so acutely as in this book. With both patience and clarity, and a good deal of empathy for the Buddhist tradition, the author shows us how anxiety about the decline, or the imminent absence of, the teaching of the Buddha, was a real and immediate fear for medieval Buddhists in China. Young further leads us to consider why it was that some medieval Chinese Buddhists lighted upon these three Indian figures as solutions to this urgent problem. The book also explores why the focus on Indian sages was