

Like Arai's previous book on Zen nuns, *Women Living Zen* (Oxford, 1999), *Bringing Zen Home* broadens our idea of Zen in a welcome and enlightening way. It also contributes significantly to a range of developing new academic fields, from women's religious studies to the study of therapeutic ritual and everyday "domestic" religion. But this is not just a work of excellent and original scholarship; it is also a book of wisdom, the wisdom of generations of Japanese women who have found relief from their everyday sufferings in the "therapeutic" worldview and meditative ritual practices of Zen. The book is also written in a lucid and graceful style and so may well itself possess the "healing power" of drawing readers into a state of *dokusho zanmai* (reading samadhi).

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James A. Benn, *Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2015, 204 pp. + notes, glossary, bibliography and index. ISBN: 978-0-8248-3964-2 (pbk); 978-0-8248-3963-5 (hbk)

Books on the subject of tea are by no means in short supply. There are examples on leaf varieties, tea etiquette, tea aesthetics, the medicinal and healing properties of tea, and tea espionage, as well as social histories, cultural histories, and just plain old histories of tea. In a fairly crowded field, it is not easy to come up with a new angle on the topic, but James A. Benn, in his work *Tea in China*, has managed just that. And, generally speaking, he has produced an informative and insightful work, with only a couple of minor caveats.

Benn examines tea as a religious and cultural commodity prior to the establishment of the tea trade, and the emergence of tea as a key global commodity. Far from being a mere comestible for assuaging thirst, tea is presented as something that is intimately connected to major developments in Chinese society, helping to shape social and cultural values. (The author at one point, in fact, makes the contentious claim that the rise in the popularity of tea-drinking brought with it a "total reorientation of Chinese culture" (p.17).) The book focuses on the formative stages in cementing tea as an integral part of Chinese social habits, in particular the Tang and Song dynasties, when most of the major developments in tea cultivation and drinking practices occurred, and when tea went from being a local to a national beverage. Two major areas are highlighted to trace the rise in popularity in tea across these dynasties, and its transformation from a pleasant, health-giving drink to something that was claimed to have spiritual, almost miraculous properties – first, the role of Buddhist (and, to a lesser extent, Daoist) thinkers, ideas and institutions in championing tea, with its ability to promote health and wakefulness in meditating monks, as a suitable alternative to alcohol, forbidden in Buddhism (Benn is an historian of medieval Chinese religions, and a Buddhist specialist); and second, the equally important role of the secular, urban elite, who, through their poetry, painting and written treatises of various kinds, transformed the making and imbibing of tea into an exquisitely refined ritual, a signifier of civilized behavior and good taste. There are also chapters on the tea economy of the Ming, and on Lu Yu, author of the first book ever written on tea (*Classic of Tea* or *Chajing*). There is also a quirky chapter which discusses, and then presents the full translated treatise of the Japanese monk, Eisai's

*Kissa yōjōki* (*Drinking Tea for Nourishing Life*), the first such work in Japanese on the subject, and an important source of information for one of the major tea-growing regions of China, Zhejiang Province, during the late Southern Song.

The book has a number of notable strengths. In an early chapter, the oft-repeated (in both Chinese and Western sources) “history” of the beginnings of tea in China is interrogated, and the famous Shennong (Divine Husbandman) story is subjected to proper academic scrutiny (Benn ultimately determines that the story’s emergence was more the result of Lu Yu’s need to root the origins of tea in high antiquity than having any basis in historical fact). Benn’s account of the life of Lu Yu is detailed and insightful, particularly in terms of the network of relationships Lu maintained, which included prominent individuals such as the Buddhist-monk poet, Jiaoran, the Daoist poet Zhang Zhihe, and provincial governor and accomplished calligrapher, Yang Zhenqing. Lu is a pivotal figure in the centre of this network, supplying through his writings the historical and cultural rationale for tea-drinking as a refined, as well as healthy, social practice, resulting in its remarkably rapid acceptance by China’s elite and subsequently by the wider society.

The book draws extensively on an impressively wide variety of sources (in Chinese and Japanese, as well as in English), greatly enriching our understanding of the subject through the inclusion of *materia medica*, poetry, gazetteers, scholarly treatises, official and private histories, and monastic regulations. At the same time, this approach poses a challenge for the author, as he attempts to knit together a diverse array of material into a cohesive whole. The *Kissa yōjōki* section, for example, is an interesting stand-alone chapter, but does not fit as comfortably into the author’s schema as other material. A lesser example is the whimsical debate between the imaginary adversaries, Mr Tea and a Mr Alcohol, taken from an eighth century manuscript, *Chajiu lun*, discovered at Dunhuang. The two beverages ‘fight it out’, pointing up their own merits and highlighting the flaws of their opponent, an amusing reflection of the intrusion of tea, under vigorous promotion by Buddhist monks and institutions, into the social space formerly held by alcohol.

Occasionally, there are points that are confusing, need explaining or are worded too strongly (such as the one quoted in paragraph two of this review). For example, the author informs readers on p.19 that Chapter Two will look at “sources for the early (pre-Tang) history of tea,” but then he states two pages later, in a chapter entitled “The Early History of Tea” that, “the history of tea in China begins with the publication of Lu Yu’s *Classic of Tea* around 780” (i.e. well into the Tang dynasty). The observation that tea was originally ascribed an ancient pedigree, since, in traditional China “it was difficult to present a new cultural development as an innovation,” (p.13) begs further explanation. And one hopes that the author’s assertion that, “it is most sensible...to accept that the prehistory [i.e., pre-Tang history] of tea is impossible to recover” (p.41) may one day be proven incorrect.

Aside from these minor points, this is a well-researched, informative and enjoyable book. The various facets of tea as medicine, as poetic inspiration, as a symbol of refined living, as a medium to transport the drinker into transcendent realms are all here in this valuable addition to tea scholarship.

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