

The editors admirably bring together the work of eighteen scholars from across the world, whose research on famines covers the entirety of Europe across a millennium. The extent to which the authors adopt a shared approach to their topic adds significantly to the value of the volume, which, as the editors explain in the overview chapter, “has been planned from the very beginning with a comparative perspective in mind” (p. 1). One aspect wherein the historiographical coverage is uneven is in the authors’ analysis of the responses to famine in their chosen regions. This is regrettable given that the inclusion of dedicated sections on individual, corporate, and societal responses adds significantly to the understanding of famines in the respective regions. For instance, as outlined in Dominick Collet and Daniel Krämer’s chapter on Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, the impetus for famine relief in the early-nineteenth century was driven not by the state, but by religious institutions, charities, and benevolent societies, who ran soup shops and subsidized the cost of bread for the poor. However, societal perceptions of poverty and hunger were undergoing a steady evolution, as traditional notions of indigence and starvation as signifying moral failure were replaced with a wider awareness of the structural economic causes of poverty. Students of famine in European history, whether with particular interests in local instances or with an eye to wider cross-national patterns, will long owe an intellectual debt to the editors for producing this important volume.

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RAPPAPORT ERIKA. *A Thirst for Empire. How Tea Shaped the Modern World*. Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) [etc.] 2017. xiv, 549 pp. \$39.50; £32.95.

As a relative outsider with a preference for tea, I have always been fascinated by the British habit of drinking strong tea with milk and sugar. This odd mix has made tea even more popular than coffee in Britain, which is strange from a global perspective. If you are curious to know why “England” maltreats its tea in such a way and even revels in doing so, this is a book for you. However, the main argumentation of this book follows a different line: it ascribes a leading role to the main commodity under study, tea, in shaping the modern world. As the author explains, “By tracing the rise and fall of tea’s empire that stretched from western Canada to eastern India, *A Thirst for Empire* reveals the belief systems, identities, profits, politics, and diverse practices that have knit together and torn asunder the modern ‘global’ world” (p. 1).

As the title, *A Thirst for Empire*, implies, “consumerism and imperialism” were intertwined phenomena, meaning that although Western consumption is now ideologically tied to freedom of trade, in the past the spread of consumption was strongly tied to imperialism. This book argues that through enforcement and violence, “Empire” imposed itself on the wider world in the nineteenth century, but it also underlines how “irresistible empire [...] fashioned new wants, new identities, new ideologies, and new things” (p. 12). As such, the author argues that new drink cultures such as tea were consciously created through different knowledge systems, such as advertising, packaging, and branding. This book is a plea to

move “distribution and publicity in their broadest sense [...] from the periphery to the center of commodity studies and world history” (p. 14).

The word “Empire” in the title strongly alludes to the role of the British Empire in popularizing the consumption of tea across the globe. As this commodity became so intimately linked to this empire, both the consumption and non-consumption of tea are tied to its history and evolution. The author argues that “tea’s purported femininity and its association with Britishness was not so much a reflection of the sociology of market but a result of deeply embedded and long-lasting ideologies that at times benefitted sales but also became an obstacle to profits” (p. 10). So, although there is an emphasis on the “modern world” in the title, the scope is slightly different as “*A Thirst for Empire* traces the origins, significance, and foreseen and unexpected consequences, of, as well as opposition to, this effort to create a world market for the British Empire’s tea” (p. 3). Seeing the book in this light also helps us understand how it is structured.

The book follows a chronological and thematic structure, in three parts. The first two parts show how tea became popular in Britain and how the cultural construction of empire also helped to create a fertile ground for the expansion of the consumption of tea.

Part I is entitled “Anxious Relations” and it shows how British consumers became acquainted with tea through European long-distance trade with China between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Still seen as foreign in its essence, the trade and consumption of tea was not necessarily perceived as having a positive influence on the developing British nation as contemporary commentators had their reservations about a foreign substance that “entered” British bodies (p. 18). This first part consist of four chapters explaining what made tea consumption attractive for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century consumers. The author argues that the positive selling arguments of tea especially favoured tea as “an agent of civilization and a temperate pleasure” (p. 4). These positive views started surfacing in Europe after the start of trade with China, but they had already been present in China long before Europeans arrived in Asia. Foreign commerce and consumption in general were under constant debate in Europe in this period of mercantilism.

Such positive views of tea need just as much to be seen in the light of the prevailing (and often considered excessive) consumption of alcohol during this period. So, it is no surprise that the second chapter explains how tea suited Anglo-Saxon mentalities after 1900: Christian consumers and industrial entrepreneurs gave new meaning to tea by pointing to its positive properties in relation to alcoholic beverages. For them, the “sober consumer culture” associated with tea offered an opportunity for more civilized behaviour and for disciplining the industrial workforce and the poor.

As Britain moved towards substituting Chinese teas with tea from the British colonies in India (and later from other areas within the empire), Chinese tea became vilified as adulterated tea and even as “unhygienic”, leading to the packaging of tea as brands advertised themselves as unadulterated and “modern produced tea”. British teas were presented as superior and more “modern” in comparison to how tea was produced in China. Due to the construction of these assumptions, the location of tea within the British Empire became a unique selling point for tea in Britain.

Part II has a slightly different take on tea as it focuses on how the construction of the British Empire and the popularity of tea in Britain went hand in hand, especially after tea plantations in British India were able to supply tea on a large scale to other parts of the British Empire. It focuses mainly on how the taste for imperial teas was fashioned through advertising. The market for these teas was successfully created in Britain and other parts of

the empire, but even foreign markets were targeted. In this struggle for markets within the British Empire and beyond, tea producers moved away from stressing empire and underlined the uplifting character of tea instead.

There were also problems with the image created earlier of tea as a commodity for female consumption at home. In order to enhance markets, producers tried to stress masculinity instead. During World War II, tea producers feared that the authorities might not label tea a necessity or a priority for the war effort. To circumvent this small inconvenience and danger to their livelihood, tea producers turned to publicity. They simply stressed how the uplifting character of tea, an image that had already been cultivated for some time, made it essential in boosting moral. This also presented the opportunity to present tea as masculine, especially by portraying tea “in the battle line” boosting the spirits of British soldiers.

Part III is entitled “Aftertastes” and shows how tea consumption fared after decolonization of the British Empire. The tea industry went into a period of structural change as tea plantations from the former British Empire fell under new regimes with their own agendas. Although in advertising little changed, changes in society made tea look old fashioned, especially with the rise of new beverages such as Coca Cola. Even in Britain, tea lost popularity, which again shows how tea was strongly tied in with the British Empire.

By looking at tea from a global perspective, with its strong emphasis on marketing and advertising in the context of the British Empire, Rappaport has written a rich history of tea. Especially valuable is that, as she puts it herself, “In addition to using both a comparative and connective approach to world history, I emphasize continuities and discontinuities between early modern and modern empires and today’s global world” (p. 16). In short, the author strongly foregrounds the way tea was presented, branded, and sold over almost 400 years in the British Empire.

The main focus on the British Empire is also the weak point of the book. Although the book’s subtitle implies that tea shaped the modern world, this study is actually about the interaction of the British Empire with the consumption of tea. In itself, the book explains why England stuck to tea due to its imperial attachment, but it does not illustrate why most consumers today have decided that coffee is a more attractive alternative. At the same time, many challenges to the “empire of thirst” came from outside the empire itself, such as the smuggling of tea to Britain by Continental Europeans in the eighteenth century, tea production outside the British Empire, and Coca Cola. Although the book makes a claim to global history and world history, in other words to go beyond a national history of British tea, few global historians would agree that substituting national histories for “empire” histories equals a shift to global history, especially when developments outside the empire receive far less attention than those within.

In short, this book is focused mainly on the image and branding of tea, or, better put, the way tea was presented in order to make it an option for consumption within the British Empire and after the British Empire had crumbled. In this, it enriches our views of this development by thoroughly piecing together the secondary literature and good archival research.

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