

Japanese Tea and Transnational History

Robert, Hellyer. *Green with Milk and Sugar: When Japan Filled America's Tea Cups*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 304 pp. \$32.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0231199100.

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Robert Hellyer's new book *Green with Milk and Sugar: When Japan Filled America's Tea Cups* exemplifies the surprising insights that can emerge from transnational research. Hellyer brings his expertise in Japanese history and his own family history to a study of tea that spans the Pacific (and at times the Atlantic) Ocean. By using commodity chains to trace the changing relationships between American consumers and Asian producers, he reveals a fascinating history of the beverage that most Americans more likely associate with the American Revolution than Japan. Hellyer convincingly argues that Americans have had a long and complex relationship with green and black tea that has nothing to do with the Boston Tea Party. Rather, he demonstrates, American tea consumption has a storied history shaped by events ranging from internal immigration debates to Japanese political changes and racialized advertising campaigns. In turn, the rise and fall of green tea in the United States shaped tea consumption in Japan. This slim volume will interest not only tea lovers but those interested in the intertwined histories of the United States and Japan.

Hellyer's book is organized into six chronological chapters that cover the history of what he terms "teaways" in both Japan and the United States from the eighteenth century to the present. Each chapter interweaves the history of members of his own family, who exported Japanese tea to Britain and later the United States, with Japanese counterparts, who produced and marketed Japanese tea. But he considers the experiences of many others, from the women who refined the tea to the brokers who sold it and the American wives who purchased it. Throughout it all, he illuminates everything from the gendering of teaways in the United States to the evolving packaging and sale of tea. Overall, Hellyer makes a compelling case for the significance of tea to the economic and cultural history of the United States and Japan.

Hellyer's first chapter explores practical and ceremonial history of tea usage in Japan and the growing demand for both black and green tea in the United States. Chapter two traces the production of tea in Japan and the consumption of the product in the United States as civil wars ravaged both nations during the middle of the nineteenth century. In chapter three, Hellyer argues that the growth of the Japanese tea industry during the Meiji reforms helped cement the regime's control and ensure the success of its unification strategy. The ability of both commoners and ex-samurai to find places in the tea industry, he argues, "offered a path of transition from being subjects of feudal leaders in the Edo-

period order to citizens of the new Japanese nation” (89). At the same time, increasing anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States propelled the growing popularity of Japanese tea in America. Chapter four delves into that growing popularity, focusing on the popularity of green tea (often with milk and sugar) in the American Midwest during the late nineteenth century. Purchasing and consuming green tea offered midwesterners a chance to demonstrate their sophistication by joining the “established American culture of tea consumption” (104).

Chapters five and six examine the transition of American preferences from green to black tea, a change Hellyer argues was the product of deliberate manipulation by British tea producers, who flooded American consumers with racialized advertisements that denigrated Chinese and Japanese teas in favor of those produced in British-controlled India and Ceylon. This advertising campaign paralleled the rise of anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States, a factor Hellyer considers in light of the 1930s and increasing Japanese imperialism and militarism. Given the virulence of anti-Japanese racism on the West Coast, which manifested not only in sporadic violence but also in laws that restricted opportunities available to Japanese immigrants, it is surprising that Hellyer does not spend more time considering its impact on the declining popularity of Japanese tea.

Much of Hellyer’s research focused on tea sale and consumption in the Midwest, perhaps explaining why he does not fully consider developments on the West Coast. But this raises questions for the reader. Hellyer notes that Japanese tea remained popular in the Midwest longer than it did in other parts of the country, and he posits that the successful Japanese tea exhibit at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition may have played some role in that perseverance. While is possible, it seems equally likely that less immediate anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiments in the Midwest may also have played a role. Moreover, although he spends a significant amount of time discussing the role of tea rooms at midwestern world’s fairs, he does not explore the effects of those same tea rooms at fairs in Seattle, San Francisco, or San Diego. Nor does he integrate the robust scholarly literature that explores the ways in which the Japanese government used world’s fairs to construct its national image. Given his interest in the intersection of tea with Japanese national identity, this is an unfortunate oversight.

No book can consider all angles, however, and *Green with Milk and Sugar* does many things remarkably well. The book’s most intriguing claims explore the relationship between American and Japanese teaways. The ubiquitous consumption of *sencha* in Japan today, he asserts, is not the result of Japanese tradition, but efforts by Meiji leaders to develop an export-driven tea industry to stabilize the economy and occupy the former samurai class. When American demand for *sencha* declined, Japanese merchants marketed it at home, where it now occupies a prominent place in Japanese culture.

Green with Milk and Sugar offers readers a lively history of tea and its significance in Japanese and American culture. By juxtaposing the stories of those involved in the production, marketing, and consumption of tea, Hellyer makes a clear case that the fortunes of many in Japan rested on the popularity of green tea in the American Midwest, offering a compelling reminder of the global effects of commodification and consumption.