

JAMES A. BENN:

Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History.

xiv, 290 pp. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. £24. ISBN 978 0 8248 3964 2.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000506

This is an admirably clear and readable book that brings a high degree of originality to a topic that has been laid before an Anglophone readership for well over a century now – ever since the publication in New York in 1906 by Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 (1862–1913) of *The Book of Tea*. But despite a steady stream of subsequent books and articles, now incorporating the work of distinguished historians of food science such as Huang Hsing-tsung 黃興宗 (1921–2012), not until now has anyone tried to grasp what the story of the rise of tea was actually all about, in other words the entire “alchemy of culture”, to use the author’s expression (p. 41), whence tea drinking emerged. This investigation draws us into a range of sources, from *materia medica* to poems, concentrating on the important part played by Buddhist monks in promoting the drinking of tea to create through a “rhetoric of temperance” a social environment in which they could interact with the secular elite without having to imbibe alcohol – though there is also plenty here on the use of alcohol within Buddhism (pp. 58–9), as well as a careful consideration of other decoctions prepared in monasteries, both Buddhist and Daoist (pp. 130–7).

In fact there is plenty here on a great range of topics, though somehow the narrative remains consistently smooth and uncluttered. Disarmingly enough, the author points out on p. ix that this study had its origins in an MA dissertation completed at SOAS some time ago. In truth there are some figures here who do seem familiar from that work, such as the early eighth-century imperial cataloguer Wu Jiong 毋熨 (p. 51), who feared that tea, though it provided an instant high, caused long-term damage. But I can vouch for the fact that there is also a very great deal here that is completely new to me, such as for example the careful dissection of what the celebrated finds at the Famensi 法門寺 (pp. 61–6) may or indeed may not tell us about tea culture in the late ninth century, to say nothing of the chapters that carry the story forward after that point. In showing that the drinking of tea no more “just happened” than did the smoking of opium, this book will be of interest to a very wide range of historians, besides those interested in Chinese religion.

Of course I am aware that James Benn has other important long-term projects in mind, to add to his earlier work on self-immolation yet another completely unconnected area of study. But after reading in particular the chapter on “The patron saint of tea” Lu Yu 陸羽 (733–804), and his *Classic of Tea, Chajing* 茶經, one cannot but observe that Italian has possessed since the 1990s in the work of Marco Ceresa a good academic translation of this text, while Catherine Despeux has also just published in French a well-annotated *Classique du thé* (Paris: Rivages Poche, 2015). But nothing executed to the same standard exists in English. I do hope that some commercial publisher of translated classics will be able to persuade the author of this path-breaking study to pause in his further researches long enough to provide us with an English version of such a seminal text. I cannot think of anyone even remotely better qualified for this task. When, in the early nineteenth century, the British East India Company maintained in Hertford a college for the education of its future personnel, those destined for a career in Canton were set to acquiring not any competence in Chinese but rather the requisite skills in grading

tea. After two hundred years it is surely high time to show that Britons can both recognize the importance of tea and translate Tang Chinese as well.

T.H. Barrett

SOAS, University of London

MICHAEL PYE:

Japanese Buddhist Pilgrimage.

xvi, 315 pp. Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2015.

£19.99. ISBN 978 1 84553 917 7.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000725

Michael Pye's "general account of the Buddhist pilgrimages of Japan in modern times" (p. xii) draws on his travels there and on artefacts – from scrolls to pamphlets – he has collected and uses as textual sources. It is a richly descriptive survey, from major pilgrimages such as Saikoku and Shikoku, to smaller-scale pilgrimages modelled on these routes, to numerous other multi-site pilgrimages. The descriptions of visits to pilgrimage sites around Japan also make it into something of a travel guide.

Pye defines pilgrimage as "the deliberate traversing of a route to a sacred place which lies beyond one's normal habitat" (p. 16). His main points are that Japanese Buddhist pilgrimages are circulatory, involving a process of going round to sites linked together usually through associations with a Buddhist figure, and that they have three main themes: route, transaction and meaning. Such themes will be familiar to anyone aware of developments in the study of pilgrimage in recent decades. Pye expounds them through what he terms a "study of religions" approach, through which he brings out, via discussions of Buddhist texts, some of the transcendent elements he perceives in pilgrimage.

His discussions of pilgrimage artefacts and texts are highly commendable, although scant attention is paid to areas such as the historical social, political and economic issues (widely discussed by Japanese scholars) that have impacted on the nature and shifted the meaning of pilgrimages over the ages. Likewise there is no discussion of the links between pilgrimage and tourism; Pye seems bemused about why tourism is seen as an interesting area of discussion in the field (pp. 12–3) and disregards it, although he does designate some visitors to pilgrimage sites as "tourists" (p. 177).

Pye has developed his model of pilgrimage "inductively" from his Japanese experiences (p. 6), thereby concluding that there is a "final stage" of meaning – a spiritual dimension – that pilgrims can attain beyond the transactional stage of seeking worldly benefits. Yet, although he states that "it is perverse not to take seriously what the performers of the rites themselves think they are doing" (p. 208), he provides little evidence for such conclusions. For instance, the huge corpus of pilgrim writings in Japan is not examined, and although he has talked to pilgrims we hear little of why they are doing pilgrimages. Instead, Pye comments that "in fieldwork it is not advisable to ask 'why' something is done, and better to elicit any conceptual accompaniment to actions in indirect ways" (p. 208, fn. 2). Surely taking seriously what performers think they are doing would involve asking the "why" question – something I found works rather well in fieldwork. Some Japanese scholars have produced significant answers to "why" (see Hoshino Eiki, *Shikoku henro no shūkyōgakuteki kenkyū*. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2001). While Pye claims that the meanings outlined in guidebooks (often produced by pilgrimage temples) that pilgrims