When I came to North India in the early 1970s I drank a lot of tea. Tea was available everywhere. It was cooked with milk and sugar and thus pretty nutritious. In fact, in my fieldwork it was the breakfast that my host served me every morning at 6 AM and the only thing I would get till 11 or 12 when the first (of two) meals were served. Alcohol was not available in the Hindu pilgrimage center where I did my fieldwork.1 More in general, drinking alcohol was a thing for men in secluded booth or at private parties and mostly not social, but to get drunk. It was also seen as a foreign thing. In my first passport I had a license to buy alcohol in the dry (alcohol-free) state of Tamil Nadu, mentioning that I as a foreigner needed alcohol. For the rest, drinking country liquor (and smoking beedi) was for the lowest castes and my Brahman hosts in North India would frown upon it. They would see it as habits that belong to lower natures and reproduce lower natures. So, tea was the drink and it was safe, because it was cooked. Only once in a while sharbat would be served, a sweet rosewater drink, or some fizzy soft drink like Limca (coca cola was banned in the 1970s; and now again in some states). Since it was the only real universal social drink (coffee was only served in elite coffee houses for men in cities). I took it for granted that it had been in India forever. Moreover, I was aware that tea was produced in Assam, Darjeeling and Ceylon, since we drank tea with these names in Holland. I never wondered why Indians mostly used a relatively cheap British tea brand, called Lipton.

These days of naiveté are over. I now realize that the tea with sugar that I drank at home in Holland had only been spread over the population in the 18th century and that the quintessential British ritual of the afternoon tea is of similar recent vintage. Tea plantations in India were started by the East India Company in the 1820s to break the monopoly of the Chinese and to produce for British consumption. Only in postcolonial India tea became the widespread drink that I found in the 1970s and today 70 percent of India's huge tea production is consumed in India itself. It is hard to imagine India without tea, but it is even harder to imagine that that is such a recent phenomenon.

China's tea is a whole other story. Tea is made from the young leaves of what were originally trees that were for production reasons reduced to shrubs. There is all kind of speculation about the origins and development of tea (bitter drink, called tu or ming). The historian Barend ter Haar argues that in the 8th Century it becomes a replacement for alcohol in the context of the rise of Buddhism (propagating bujiu 佛酒 next to busha 佛杀), and in the context of the emergence of the imperial exams where one needed to keep oneself awake.2 Its popularity grew to the extent that it became a major part of the tributary system. That tea is a useful alternative to alcohol is clear to anyone who has visited China, but how successful it is seems less clear. I have not participated in a banquet in which tea has replaced alcohol and my recollection of visiting several Yi groups in Sichuan is blurred and soaked in alcohol. Men can hardly refuse to drink alcohol if they want to make guanxi while women have an easier time.

Anyway, this is the baked cha as we know it and obviously besides making social relations smooth it has all kinds of medicinal purpose and effect too (different teas, different effects). Whatever the case may be tea is a Chinese commodity that became highly sought after by Western seafaring nations in the 17th and 18th century and most prominently by the British after they had defeated the Dutch sea power at the end of the 18th century. Before that the Dutch had been the most important tea traders


*Corresponding author: Peter van der Veer: vanderVeer@mmg.mpg.de
The trade imbalance between Britain and China was, obviously, something the British tried to change especially with the exponential growth of the tea trade. The solution was opium that was grown in India after it had become more and more under the control of the British who had defeated the French. The Qing government had forbidden the sale of opium and tried to stop British illegal trade. The 20,283 boxes of opium that the Qing official Lin Zexu had thrown in the ocean in 1839 (the cause of the first opium war) had an estimated value of 9 million dollar. After the opium war you had an increasing import, for example in 1860 60,000 boxes. Already between 1830 and 1860 the value of the opium export to China was larger than the value of the import of tea and silk from China. In 1797 the British government took over the opium monopoly from John Company.

Famously the Qing did not think that China needed any imports from outside China, as illustrated in the following quote from a letter sent by Qianlong to George III:

“Our heavenly Kingdom has everything that it needs in abundance and there is no lack of any products within its boundaries. Therefore there is no need to import goods from Barbarians in exchange for our goods.”

It is less clear and a subject of considerable debate among economic historians how much the Qing economy needed silver from Britain. Whatever may have been the case the flow of silver came to an end with the growing exchange of opium for tea.

British trade and imperial expansion went hand in hand. The first opium war was planned by the trader William Jardine of the opium importing firm Jardine, Matheson, and Company. He directly advised Palmerston in 1839-1840 how to conduct the war. On the Chinese side trading guilds (Hong) were active, but less able to influence state policies. While in Britain the tax on tea was a considerable part of the state’s income, this was very marginal in China. The Daoguang emperor blocked the use of a harbor in Fujian where most of the tea came from, although that would have made costs ten times lower and everything was shipped via Kanton till the first opium war. That war was therefore also used as a means to force the Chinese to open more harbors close to the places of production. At the same time the British wanted to circumvent the Chinese monopoly on growing tea by starting plantations in Assam. The labor conditions were those of indentured labor under penal sanction which Hugh Tinker has called ‘a new system of slavery’ and which after the abolition of slavery came to characterize not only plantations in Assam, but plantations all over the British empire. The Indian populations that one finds today in

---

4 Ukers 1953, All About Tea, cited in Mintz, P. 112
5 Peer de Vries, Zur politische Ekonomie des Tees, 1979, 43-44.
6 Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920, London and New York: Oxford University
Mauritius, Fiji, the Guyana’s, Trinidad, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa are largely descendants of these indentured laborers. This was totally different from the small family businesses that grew tea in China. It is therefore the British imperial system that leads to plantation and conditions of slavery, not the cash crop itself (Vries, p. 97). In general small farmers remained dominant in China till the 20th century.

Despite the creation of tea plantations in India and Ceylon the British still needed increasing imports of tea from China and wanted to pay for it with opium from India. Opium was produced in Bengal and Bihar (called Patna Opium) and in West India (called Malwa Opium). Besides raw cotton and later cotton yarn it was the most important export item to China. Since the trade in opium was forbidden by the Qing government both Indian and British private traders played a significant role. The Indian ports were Calcutta and Bombay. The Indian traders were mostly Parsis, Jains and Hindu Marwaris as well as some Baghdadi Jews like David Sassoon and his sons who were to play a significant role in the rise not only of colonial Bombay, but also of Shanghai. The first Bombay traders to go to China were the Jivanjis who adopted the surname Readymoney. Many of the big merchant families of today’s Bombay like the Wadias and the Tatas built their fortune in the China trade. In Bombay the Parsi merchant Jamsethjee Jeejeebhoy had a special relation with the aforementioned William Jardine, the architect of the first Opium War. Jamsethjee built a fleet of cargo ships to serve the trade and in 1842 he was knighted for his leadership in business and philanthropy.7

As argued before Indians did not know tea but slowly got hooked to it during the 19th century and became the world’s largest tea producers. Indians did know opium, but I never read anywhere that opium was a big problem in India. When I did my fieldwork there was opium available in government-run shops as was hashish. Mc Kim Marriott has a hilarious account of the Holi (Spring) festival that is Bakhtinian in nature and in which he was given bhang (milk laced with hashish) and consequently was unable to write any field notes.8 Despite this widespread use of intoxicants I have never encountered a widespread problem with it. The great addiction is alcohol. General consensus has it that it was a problem for Chinese and that it was created by the British to solve their trade imbalance with China. In Frank Dikötter engaging SOAS inaugural lecture he calls China ‘Patient Zero’ of opium addiction and then goes on to bust the myth of China’s opium addiction.9

In nineteenth-century England opium and laudanum were used against pain. It was not seen as causing widespread addiction and, in fact, people could use it in regular quantities throughout life without creating addiction. This was also the case in China, as the following quote from Dikötter shows: “Men and women would smoke a pipe or two at festivals and ceremonies several times a year without ever becoming regular users. R.A. Jamieson, a doctor in Shanghai, noted at the end of the nineteenth century that if those who smoked a few pipes on the occasion of a festival such as a marriage were to be counted, few adult males could be excluded, although regular consumers were very rare. A British consul based in Hainan also reported that ‘although nearly everyone uses it…one never meets the opium-skeleton so vividly depicted in philanthropic works, rather the reverse—a Hardy peasantry, healthy and energetic’.” (Dikötter, p. 5).

Dikötter argues that the spread of opium鸦片 yapian in China from the eighteenth century depended on smoking. Tobacco, found in America, and introduced in China in the late sixteenth century “became the ideal companion of tea,烟茶, yancha. Opium was initially laced with tobacco, but this combination was dropped later. To smoke pure Patna opium from expensive pipes became a sign of high status and wealth. Smoking was a social experience and opium houses, like tea houses, sites of male sociability. The other reason to use opium was medicinal like in England, against fever and especially diarrhea. If it was so harmless, why did it become the object of narcophobia? For this Dikötter suggests a Foucauldian theory, pointing at the rise of the medical profession which wanted to monopolize opium, and the emergence of anti-imperial nationalism with its discourse of enslavement and physical weakness. In the 1940s, however, the Communist in Yan’an used the opium production and trade to finance its struggle against the Guomindang, but as soon as they gained power in 1949 they stamped it out in three years. Cigarette smoking, however, was stimulated. Not by chance therefore China is now the world’s leading tobacco producer and consumer. What to make of the stories of tea and opium? A political economy narrative seems the most convincing and rather obvious. Sidney Mintz is the pioneer of a narrative that focuses on sugar and word capitalism. The commodity shapes the nature of production and consumption and


connects worlds that were hitherto unconnected. The meanings given to such a commodity are secondary to the force of Capital. Whatever disputes about details there may be this is a compelling narrative, but it does not satisfy for it gives us no access to how people shape their understanding of these world historical processes. This is precisely Marshall Sahlins critique of Eric Wolf’s ‘mode of production’ approach in Europe and the People without History. Sahlins examines the indeed quite fascinating refusal of the Qing emperors to be impressed or interested in the products of the British, thus only accepting silver in exchange for tea.10

As is typical for Sahlins’ approach to intercultural encounters he makes much of the Qing understanding of Lord Macartney’s visit to the emperor. According to Sahlins the Chinese emperor indeed had everything in his yuanmingyuan 圆明园, gardens of perfect brightness at the old summer palace that was partly destroyed in 1860 during the second Opium War. This was a huge curiosities cabinet like the ones one had in Europe but much bigger. This was the collection of tributes that signified the sovereign power over the world that was enjoyed by the Emperor. In Sahlins’ words “By setting China apart while at the same time making it the central source of world order, this theory of civilization lends itself equally to projects of imperial expansion and cultural withdrawal, to hegemonic inclusions or xenophobic exclusions, according to the contingencies of the situation.”(Sahlins 427-428) It was not that the Qing were ‘self-sufficient’, but that they found the barbarians too far away and thus too difficult to control.

What we have here in Sahlins analysis are different cosmologies that clash. In work done by James Hevia and others, this analysis is complemented by an interpretation of ritual performance, centering on the question whether Lord Macartney had performed the koutou (kowtow). Hevia focuses on the ‘guest ritual’ (binli 宾礼) which itself is the basis of power, as in Geertz’s power serves pomp, not pomp power.11 Where Sahlins puts the emphasis on cosmology, Hevia puts the emphasis on ritual (li), but, as both authors would probably agree, these two belong to each other. In Lydia Liu’s interpretation of the Treaty of Tianjin after the second Opium War in 1858 the emphasis is on the translation of the word yi 夷, which the British insisted referred to Barbarians, while the Chinese insisted that it only referred to non-Han people.12 This can help us to see that what we have here are not just incommensurable ontologies, but in fact communications, negotiations, and trading commodities and trading insults. It has all to do with notions of hierarchy and precedence, but these notions are not independent of power relations. On both the Qing and the British side ‘honor’ and hierarchy play an important role, but they are part of political economy, not separate from it. To me it makes little sense to think that the Qing and the British did not understand each other, but they had very different objectives and interests. The Qing did not want to enter into the Age of Commerce on British terms, but that does not mean that they were not interested in trade. Moreover, at many other levels it was of course not the Beijing or the Westminster court that were central to actual trade, but local traders and local officials and, very importantly, illegal traders.

In conclusion one might suggest that following the pathways of commodities is a very useful heuristic device, but it is not sufficient if one wants to understand the changes of political economy. These commodities are embedded in social relations and ideas of sociability. The fact that opium is produced in India but does not define international relations or political economy in the way it seems to have done in China shows already that it is not the commodity itself that provides us with a full explanation. That opium cannot have been the sole reason for ‘the opium wars’ seems clear from the fact that it is really after the successful establishment of tea plantations in India that the British feel impelled to force the Chinese to open their economy and society.

---


20世纪70年代早期，我来到北印时品尝过很多茶，那时茶叶到处都能弄到。泡茶时掺着牛奶和糖很有趣。在我做田野调查的地方，每天早上6点钟主人会供应早餐，中午11点钟或12点钟会首次供应点心，一天顶多两次。这时我才能品尝到茶。这个地点是印度教胜迹中心，白酒是禁售的。一般说来，在偏僻的间或或私人派对等非社交场合，男人们饮酒就是买醉的。酒在这里被当做进口商品。第一次出国时我来到了气候干燥的泰米尔纳德邦。在这里能买到酒（没禁酒令），你知道外国人常需要喝点酒。不过，对于印度的低种姓人群来说，他们常喝多村列酒（吸比迪烟），这在北印度像东道主一样的贵族人眼里是不入流的。他们认为这是低等可怜虫的习性。反过来又会产生新的低劣行品。茶作为一种饮料，它是安全的，因为要经过高温杀青。我我只是偶尔才喝茶。

20世纪70年代中期，我去过很多地方，每天早上6点钟主人会供应早餐，中午11点钟或12点钟会首次供应点心，一天顶多两次，这时我才能品尝到茶。这个地方是印度教胜迹中心，白酒是禁售的。一般说来，在偏僻的间或或私人派对等非社交场合，男人们饮酒就是买醉的。酒在这里被当做进口商品。第一次出国时我来到了气候干燥的泰米尔纳德邦。在这里能买到酒（没禁酒令），你知道外国人常需要喝点酒。不过，对于印度的低种姓人群来说，他们常喝多村列酒（吸比迪烟），这在北印度像东道主一样的贵族人眼里是不入流的。他们认为这是低等可怜虫的习性。反过来又会产生新的低劣行品。茶作为一种饮料，它是安全的，因为要经过高温杀青。我我只是偶尔才喝茶。
Peter van der Veer

6

中国的茶叶种植园与家庭作坊式的种茶方式完全不同。因此，可以说正是英国的体制导致了茶叶种植园和奴隶制的形成，而不是经济作物本身（弗里斯，P43-44）。

尽管印度和斯里兰卡的茶园生产茶叶，英国仍需不断地从中国进口茶叶，并企图用产自印度的鸦片来支付进口茶叶的费用。鸦片主要产自孟加拉、比哈尔邦（又称帕塔那鸦片以及西印度地区，又称白皮土鸦片）。除了原棉和之后的棉花，鸦片是出口到中国的商品，由于清政府严禁鸦片贸易，印度和英国的私营商人在鸦片贸易中发挥了重要的作用。在印度，从事鸦片贸易的港口主要是加尔各答和孟买。那些印度商人主要是帕西人、耆那教徒、信奉印度教的马尔瓦尔人以及一些巴格达犹太人，诸如大卫·沙逊和他的儿子们，他们对殖民地孟买及上海的鸦片贸易的兴起发挥了重要的作用。第一批到达中国的孟买商人是吉凡吉斯人，他们做买卖只认现钱。今天，像孟买的惠迭家族和塔塔家族等众多大富商家庭都是同中国的鸦片贸易事业起初家起的。印度帕西商人詹姆塞特吉·吉吉博伊与上文提到的第一次鸦片战争的策划者——威廉·渣甸有着特殊的联系。詹姆塞特吉组建了一支船队，专门从事鸦片贸易，后来因在经商中的领导才能和对慈善事业所做的贡献于1842年被封为爵士。

前文已经提到，在19世纪，起初印度人并不知道茶叶，而后慢慢接受了茶叶，并且成为世界上最大的茶叶生产国。不过，印度人对鸦片还是比较熟悉的。我没有听说鸦片在印度是一大祸患。我在做田野调查时，发现政府运营的商店里就有鸦片和大麻出售。迈克•马里欧特对过春节有过一段有趣的描述，写到在一次巴赫拉库的狂欢中，别人给他抽了大麻，后来他就再也不能写田野调查笔记了。尽管这种无毒物质被广泛使用，我从来没有料想到它会带来如此多的麻烦。其实，最易上瘾的是酒精。很多人一致认为鸦片对中国人确实祸害不小，而对于英国人为了扭转与中国贸易的逆差而制造的麻烦，弗兰克•迪克特在伦敦大学亚非学院的就职演说中说，中国对鸦片烟进行“零容忍”，并始终如一地打击鸦片活动。

在19世纪的英国，鸦片和鸦片酒已被用来镇痛，这也没有引起大众的烟瘾，而事实上，人们在生活中可以长久地使用它，只要严格限制使用剂量，就不会上瘾。在中国这种情况也是这样的，正如迪克特的文章中所写的，“无论男女在一年的几个节日和仪式期间，吸上一两次烟斗大烟，这并不会引起上瘾”（R.A.杰米逊8）。

8  阿马法鲁琪，《鸦片之城》 维多利亚早期孟买的形成，德里：论文集三卷本，2005
9  麦克•马里欧特，《米尔顿•辛格在“爱情盛宴”中的奎师那、神话、仪式和态度》 火奴鲁鲁，夏威夷东西文化中心出版社，1966
10 弗兰克•迪克特，《零容忍—中国与鸦片之魔的传奇》 伦敦大学亚非学院的就职演说，2003
海的一名医生，他记录说，在19世纪末，算上结婚这样的喜庆节日，人们吸上几斗鸦片烟，没有人会染上烟瘾的，尽管当时的瘾君子极少。驻扎在海南的一位领事也在报告中说‘虽然几乎每人都会用到鸦片……，我们也不会看到因吸食鸦片而变得骨瘦如柴的人，他们在慈善宣传里会被描绘的栩栩如生，而情况却恰恰相反’—我们会看到一个身体强壮、健康并且精力充沛的农民’。”（迪克特，p5）。

迪克特声称，从18世纪开始，鸦片在中国的流行主要是依赖于香烟。烟草发现于美洲，16世纪晚期传入中国，并成为品茶的配搭——叫做烟茶。起初，鸦片只是被掺入烟叶里去，后来这种做法就被放弃了，用烟斗吸食纯度高的巴特那鸦片烟成为地位和财富的标志。于是，吸烟就成为一种社会经历，鸦片烟馆就像茶馆一样，成为男人社交的场所。使用鸦片的另一个原因是其医药作用，比如在英国，它被用来治疗发烧，特别是痢疾。既然鸦片的危害没那么大，为什么人们还是谈烟色变呢？对于此，迪克特提出了福柯理论，指出在医学专业兴盛之时，它们需要控制鸦片，于是就出现了反帝爱国主义，伴随这反奴役和图强的呼声。在20世纪40年代，为了同国民党作斗争，延安的共产党人也靠鸦片生产和贸易获取经济来源，不过，在1949年共产党执政后三年内就铲除了鸦片生产和贸易。遗憾的是，吸食香烟又受到了刺激，中国成为世界上主要的香烟生产国和消费国就不足为奇了。

是什么把茶叶和鸦片联系起来的呢？政治和经济方面的原因似乎是被众人信服的，并且十分明显。悉尼·明茨是最早把研究重心放在制糖和资本主义方面的学者。商品决定生产和消费的模式，并且把不同的世界联系了起来，由此，资本的力量超越了商品的意义。无论对其中的细节争论有多少，这都可能是一个关于权力的故事。然而我们并不怀疑，因为它没有告诉我们权力的本身。在1860年第二次鸦片战争期间的部分被毁。圆明园充满奇珍异宝，其数量和规模比整个欧洲人所拥有的宝藏都要大，都要多，其中收藏的珍品象征着皇帝对世界的最高权力。按照萨林斯的观点，“一方面看中国与世界隔离，另一方面看中国成为世界秩序的核心。根据时局进展，这种文明理论会使中国经历帝国扩张和文化没落，再回到主权并存或集权”（萨林斯，P427-428）。这并不是说清朝的“狂妄自大”，而是发现异邦离中国太远，很难控制。

这里其他人的观点与萨林斯的看法并不一致，甚至产生了冲突。在汉学家何维亚和其他学者的研究中，萨林斯的见解得到了补充，他们认为这与清朝觐见礼仪有关，他们围绕马戛尔尼使团觐见清朝皇帝时是否行“三叩九拜之礼”展开讨论。“宾礼”作为清朝礼仪的基础，何维亚把研究的焦点放在了“宾礼”上，正像格林的“宾礼”视角。萨林斯从宏观上关注的地方，正好是何维亚他们从微观上的关注点——“礼节”，但是，这两方面并不可分，这两位学者可能都认同这一点。在莉迪亚·刘对1858年第二次鸦片战争之后签订的《天津条约》的解读中，主要强调如何对“夷”字进行理解。英国人坚持认为它指的是那些野蛮人，而大清朝坚持认为它指的是非汉族的人民。这可以帮助我们认识到，这中间不仅有本体认识方面的不可调和，而且在交流谈判和商品贸易中也尊严不再。所有这些的都与等级制度和优先权这些理念有关，而这些与各种权力关系又紧密相关。无论对于清政府还是英国，“尊严”和“等级制度”都起着重要的作用，它们是政治经济不可分割的一部分。我清政府和英国并不是没有沟通好，而是它们有很多不同的目标和利益。清政府不想走进英国的商贸贸易圈子，但这并不意味着清政府对贸易往来不感兴趣。另外，在其他许多层面，处在贸易往来核心地位的并非北京和英国政府，而是地方商贩和政府官员，更重要是那些非法商贩。总之，有人可能认为从商品发展道路方面进行研究是可行的，但对于理解政治经济所发生的变化还是不够的，这些商品是植根于社会关系和观念之中的。鸦片产于印度，但它没有按照似乎应有的方式来决定中国的国际关系和政治经济，这个事实非常清楚地看到，鸦片战争爆发的原因不可能仅仅是因为鸦片。

11 引自德克斯、艾雷、奥特那编的《文化、权力和历史》中马歇尔·萨林斯著的《资本主义概论—跨太平洋地区的世界体系》一书，普林斯顿：普林斯顿大学出版社，1994