How did tea shape national identity and contribute to an imperialist society in Britain?

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Abstract

Tea undoubtedly played a key role in the economic triumphs of the British Empire, fuelling its physical expansion and global political dominance. Nevertheless, its influence extended far beyond the world's trading networks, penetrating ideas about Britishness and shaping the birth of a national identity that, for much of the 19th century, centred itself around the British Empire. It is this use of tea as a tool for manipulating British ideology that will be the focus of this essay, exploring the ways in which it directly influenced perceptions of the Empire in society. However, as with most things in history, this was never moving in one direction and the matters expressed through tea drinking developed drastically between the 18th and 20th centuries. This shift closely aligned with the rise and fall of the British Empire, as tea, being so tightly interwoven with the Empire, depended on its success. Through posing as a symbol of Britain's imperial success, tea contributed to growing patriotic fervour in Britain, as its consumption became an act of supporting the Empire's endeavours. Similarly, at a time of crisis tea was adopted as a key morale boost in both World Wars, again for its ability to unite British people. However, this essay also analyses the consequent rise of movements against colonialism and thus the way in which tea was no longer something to flaunt, because its connections to slavery became more shameful than impressive. Overall, 'food has long been central to the construction of national stereotypes and identities'[1], but equally is 'not fixed or static, especially in a transcultural and globalising world,' (Fitzwilliam Museum, 2019) in its transformation of these ideas. This concept will be explored in this essay through tea, in its unique ability to both promote and condemn the British Empire over time, contributing to national identity in doing so.

[1] Page 223 Feast and Fast, The Art of Food in Europe 1500-1800; Similar ideas were explored in this book focusing on the representation of different countries through food, including national stereotypes such as *mangia-maccheroni* (Macaroni eater), an effeminate and flamboyant Italian man.

1. Introduction

While the 19th century is often described as an age of scientific innovation, Britain's industrial revolution supported an equally important 'revolution of sociability' (Berg, 2004), as access to new technology facilitated a growing desire for imperial goods. As a result, an intense consumeristic culture emerged in Britain, which, alongside growing patriotism, sparked widespread fascination with various exotic luxuries from across the Empire. This allowed certain commodities to boom in popularity and in some cases, develop into 'perceived necessities' (Bickham, 2008), intertwining themselves with British culture so closely they became integral to it. Therefore, the borrowing of items and knowledge from colonies within their empire meant Britain's own culture was, almost ironically, not in essence British. It was instead a reinvention of these ideas, achieved through the manipulation and exploitation of British colonies which allowed specific commodities to become synonymous with Britishness. As a result, several 19th century luxuries were accompanied by imperial undertones, because their place in British culture was owed to past imperial connections and brutality across the world. Therefore, the fact tea was closely connected with the Empire made it a suitable motif of this new version of 'Britishness' in society.

However, these associations meant that the tea symbolism behind tea developed differently for people elsewhere in the world, as when the commodity was viewed through other lenses, it was not an object of prosperity and world domination, but rather a reminder of oppression and suffering. With these ideas spreading across the globe, they eventually filtered their way back into British society, reforming the symbolism of tea and its place in society. Instead of advocating the Empire and Britain's unmatched influence, it began to do the reverse in some factions of society, promoting matters such as abolition and focusing on condemning the Empire. This can also be seen not just through tea itself, but the accessories and events that accompany it, such as the evolution of ceramics, tea caddies, silverware and decorations.

The drink wasn't just significant in an imperial setting. Although it was by colonialist means that tea rose to such prominence in Britain, it evolved into a symbol of the epitome of Britishness and the values this encompassed. For example, the process of drinking tea had intimate links to the war effort and the industrial revolution, but was simultaneously a demonstration of utmost elegance and aestheticism. Therefore tea was able to penetrate into the lives of many, because through its versatile functionality, it could fulfil the needs of the

masses and thus help 'define English identity, character and class values' (Fromer, 2014), because it was a promotion of ideological Britain on a widespread scale.

2. Tea and the Empire; How did tea contribute to a colonialist society?

2.1 'All about Tea'

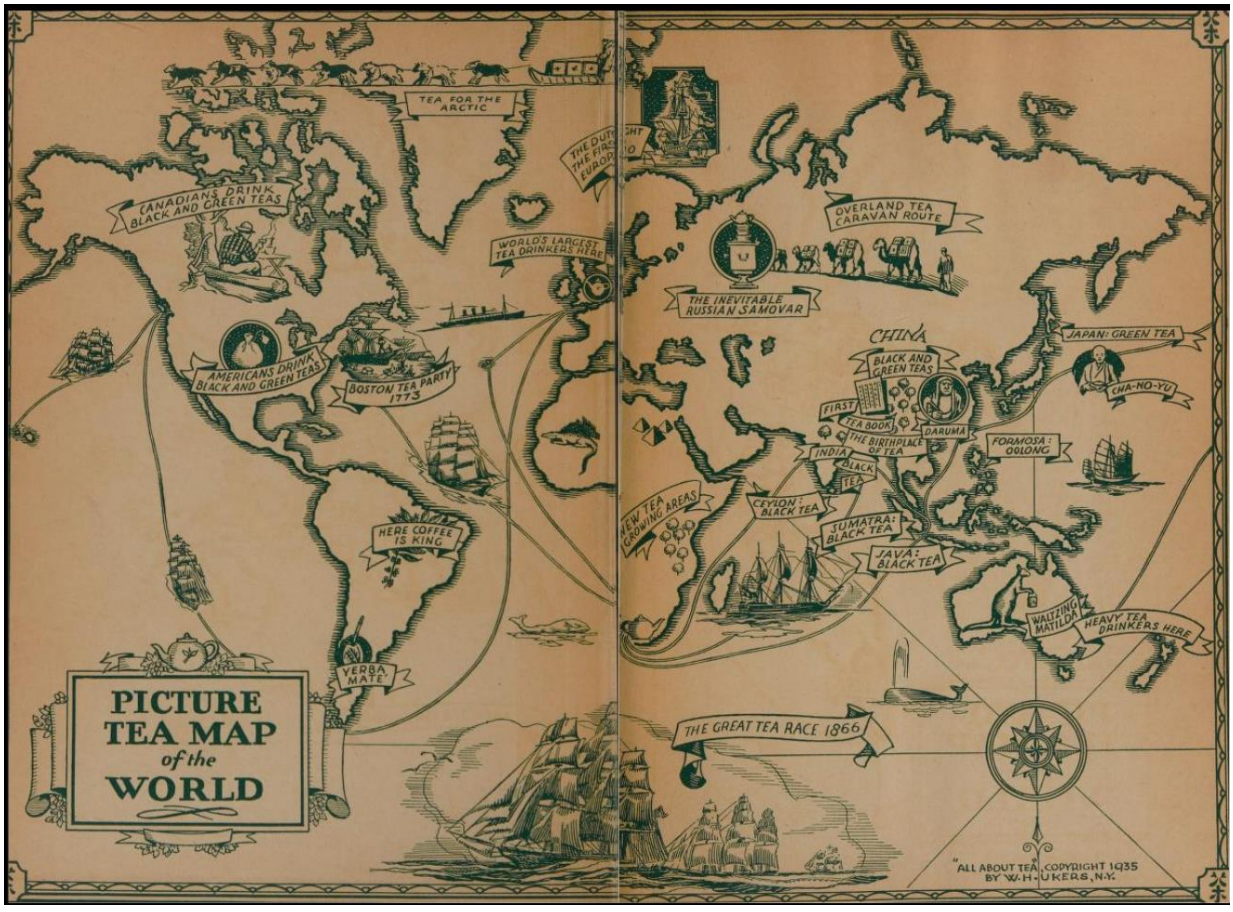


Fig.1 (Ukers, 1935) – A map of tea's role in the world from his book 'All about tea'

Tea's significance as a foreign luxury is key to exploring the extent to which the building of the British Empire and the evolution of society were both under the influence of a 19th century colonialist regime. As the British Empire grew, so too did Britons' pride in it and, by extension, their pride in the colonial means through which this had been achieved. Therefore, with the

Empire in the forefront of society's minds, these ideas contributed greatly to developments in culture and fashion at the time. As with many cultural trends, these Victorian fashions also influenced British national identity, thus allowing the imperial acts associated with these matters to integrate into British ideology too. Commodities of the 18th and 19th centuries (such as tea) therefore contributed to the promotion of imperialism in British society at the time because their popularity reflected and encouraged similar enthusiasm for the Empire that had supposedly produced them.

However, these ideas were not only prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries, as the long term impacts of such concepts can be seen in fig.1, a map found at the start of William Harrison Ukers' 'All about Tea' drawn much later in 1935. Seemingly simple on the surface, the labels for each world region are very telling in the perceptions tea reinforced or even generated towards different nations. Each label, while only brief, highlights the key role of each location in the eyes of someone at the top of an imperial chain and thus sheds light on the inequalities tea helped to instil within the Empire. Ultimately, tea contributed to the formation of a world hierarchy, with Britain, in Ukers' eyes, sitting at the top of this chain. This can be seen through their title as 'the world largest tea drinkers'; they are not the ones responsible for cultivating it, but they are the ones who reap the rewards it produces, allowing them to sit above the rest of the world. Conversely, he recognises India as 'the birthplace of tea', a statement which suggests they are merely the place from which Britain can take their resources, rather than a world leader (or 'tea drinker')[2].

2.2 'Tea; its effects, medicinal and moral'

The 18th and 19th centuries were periods of ardent patriotism and thus, imperialism, as the Empire was a focal point for society at the time – an idea tea was very much a part of, and therefore reflects. As the Empire underwent immense expansion, there was great excitement surrounding its rapid growth and flourishing power, also triggering a deep interest in the commodities and cultures of these new lands which people had been exposed to. However, utilising these imperial goods to create a British identity posed a perceived challenged in the

[2] Ukers also highlights this power imbalance in the prominence of trade routes on his map, placing the Great Tea Race of 1866 in the foreground, as an event which was clearly hugely significant in the creation of such a hierarchy, because it furthered Britain's 'maritime superiority' (Sigmond, 1839).

eyes of early 19th century British society; 'using Asian tea to foster a sense of English National identity threatened to collapse the distinctions upon which that national identity was formulated' (Fromer, 2014).

'India has within her bosom, the richest vegetable and mineral treasures, which are to be given to the rest of the world, to unite together in closer bonds of harmony two great nations, the one capable, by the energies of her people, of governing; the other, by her climate, evidently destined to be the not un-willing vassal of foreigners'
(Sigmond, 1839)

In this extract from Sigmond's 'Tea; its effects, medicinal and moral' 1839, these attitudes are demonstrated clearly, particularly with regard to India. Firstly, the belief they were 'destined' for the exploitation of their resource by the British (and on top of that India's supposed 'willingness' in doing so) highlights a key theme in Britain's outlook on Asia; the lands were ultimately theirs to utilise, regardless of the injustice and suffering it would cause the inhabitants there. This ties into Fromer's claim that the British felt threatened by the prospect of increasing power among the colonies. For example, the reassurance that India was only capable 'by her climate' highlights the view that India was a resource, aligning with contemporary views that colonies wanted to be 'civilised' and were eager to be a subordinate or 'vassal' (Sigmond, 1839) of the British[3]. The manipulation of the political relationship between Britain and India therefore influenced the way in which cultural integration between the two counties occurred; one where India gave and Britain took. This is further displayed when Sigmond then writes that tea:

'*Forms an incentive to industry, contributes to wealth, to national riches and to domestic happiness'* (Sigmond, 1839)

This phrase sheds light on tea's 'unique position as both a luxury and a necessity and how this contributed to its role in building the British Empire' (Fromer, 2014). Being one of the largest

[3] This attitude links into the idea of the 'white man's burden'; the belief that countries and populations should be grateful for Britain's efforts to colonise them, because they are supposedly influencing them positively by inflicting their 'superior' beliefs onto them.

imports for Britain (making up 16% of all Britain‘s trade for much of the late 18th century) tea was a necessity merely because Britain was falling in love with it. Simultaneously it was an exciting and meaningful commodity in its connections to the East, raising an awareness of the possibilities for colonial pursuits there. As a result, it encouraged the imperial endeavours of British merchants and thus supported society’s enthusiasm for it at the time because it acted as a tool through which the East could be explored further.

2.3 ‘A Nice Cup of Tea’

The consumption of commodities such as tea became a way of adhering to Britain’s fervent love of the Empire, because it honoured British imperial achievements, and therefore further allowed for the involvement of colonialism in society. As this idea of committing oneself to the Empire developed, there was a consequent shift in the type of tea which was drunk in order to reflect this. Where Chinese tea previously made up 90% of all the tea in Britain, this quickly dropped to 10%, as the tea trade in India prevailed. This was largely because Indian tea was promoted above Chinese tea throughout the late 1800s, simply due to the fact it was produced from within their own Empire. In this way, while the product itself can represent certain ties to colonialism, the ‘advertisement, retail, preparation and consumption [also] reflected and contributed to British discussions and perceptions of the Empire’ (Bickham, 2008). The effects of this marketing strategy and society’s dedication to Britain is displayed in this first rule of George Orwell’s 11 rules for drinking tea as written in his essay ‘A Nice Cup of Tea’, 1946.

> *‘First of all, one should use Indian or Ceylonese tea. China tea has virtues which are not to be despised nowadays—it is economical, and one can drink it without milk—but there is not much stimulation in it. One does not feel wiser, braver or more optimistic after drinking it. Anyone who has used that comforting phrase ‘a nice cup of tea’ invariably means Indian tea.’* (Orwell, 1946)

While the statement itself doesn’t seem to convey imperial attitudes on the surface, upon exploring the reasoning behind these preferences, the manipulation by the British of Asian cultures becomes only too clear. It is particularly prevalent in the phrases ‘one should use

Indian or Ceylonese tea' and "Anyone who has used that comforting phrase 'a nice cup of tea' invariably means Indian tea". This is because tea, in 19th century society, provided further opportunity for the exploitation of British colonies, as the knowledge around cultivating and drinking tea could be twisted to suit their own society. This was predominantly achieved at the root of tea production, in its growth and marketing of the good, which underwent a radical change from 1830 onwards, one facilitated by colonial Britain's overbearing sway over the world. With the East India Company losing their monopoly over tea in 1834, the first tea plantations appeared in Assam in India in the mid-1830s in order to combat increased competition in the tea market. This displays how Britain's aim of growing the plant 'themselves' involved them exerting their influence in India, as, being part of the empire, this was the easiest way to have control over its production. While there was a narrative behind Chinese tea, with its intricate porcelain tea sets and exotic rituals making a compelling selling point, Indian tea grew deep in the forests and had a reputation as 'jungly and untrustworthy' (Sanghera, 2023), meaning it was less appealing to consumers. In this way, tea acted as a pivot through which consumers could make the conversion to supporting the Empire, and therefore contributed to imperialist society by encouraging this dedication. As a result, ideas of colonialism were inseparable from tea because it was used as tool to promote these patriotic and imperialist values.

2.4 'A good breakfast cup'

Similarly, these links to colonialism can be seen in the evolution of tea sets, facilitated as Britain shifted from wide consumption of imperial goods to goods produced domestically (Ashby, 2014). However, this by no means meant Britain sacrificed their beloved luxuries from across the globe. Alternatively, they focused on "mimicking and adapting these commodities' native consuming practices" (Bickham, 2008), something possible only due to their domination in the areas from which these originated.

'Eighthly, one should drink out of a good breakfast cup—that is, the cylindrical type of cup, not the flat, shallow type. The breakfast cup holds more, and with the other kind one's tea is always half cold—before one has well started on it.'

(Orwell, 1946)

Here, this demonstrates that tea was significant in its knock on impacts and wider sub culture it brought with it. It was not just the drink itself, but the fascinating ritual and intricate tea cups, saucers, teapots and tea caddies that accompanied it which earned the attention of British society. With society so focused of the promotion of their Empire, the chance to produce these good as their own provide further room to eliminate other powers and promote Britishness. The production of tea sets in factories such as the Limehouse Factory boomed as a result, as Britain could easily manipulate the aspects of the other cultures that they had harnessed. For example, many companies, focused on reinventing Chinese tea sets to create iconic 'British' pottery, as seen in fig.2, a mid-19th century bone China tea set. From the intricate designs to the material used, the concepts behind British ceramics were predominantly borrowed from China[4]. This demonstrates the one of the key elements of Britain's colonialist endeavour was not necessarily the physical expansion and control they exerted over people, but the instead the exploitation of knowledge.

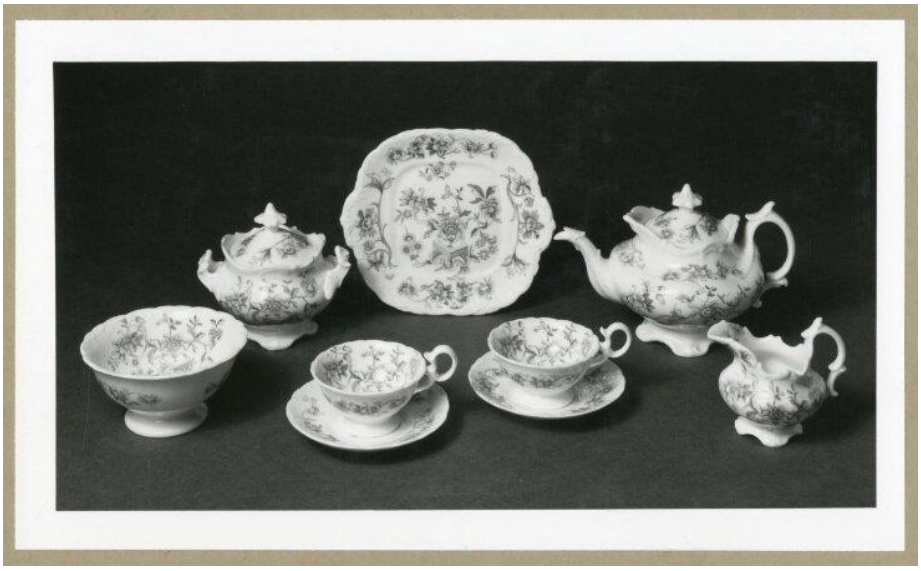
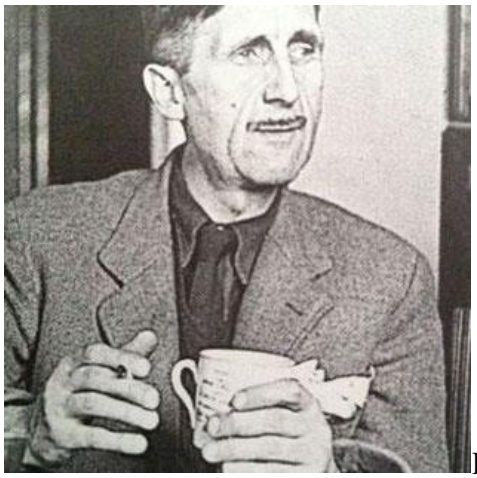


Fig.2 (V&A, 2009)

The evolution of tea sets became more extreme until eventually Britain created the 'cylindrical cup'. Tea was no longer inseparable from the traditional cup and saucer that owed homage to the delicate tea sets brough back from China. Instead, people had gone so far as to consider this method of drinking tea incorrect, and would rather adopt the breakfast cup; just as Orwell can be seen using in fig.3. In this way, while tea itself became a reflection of colonialism, it was

[4] Indeed the material 'China' is even named so because it was the place from which Britain adopted it.

the culture surrounding it that consolidated tea's role in society and its consequent synonymity with Britishness.


Fig.3 (The Tea House, 2021)

3. Tea and the World; How did tea alter attitudes towards the British Empire?

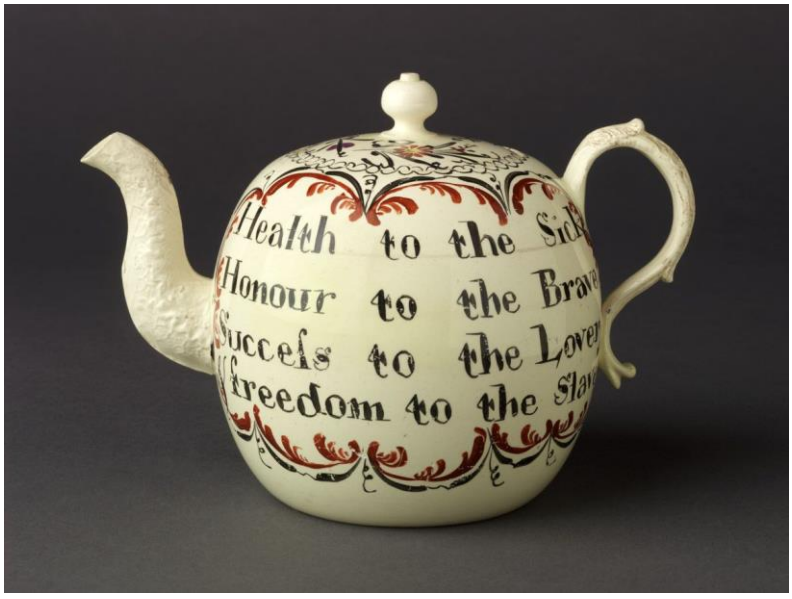
3.1 'Freedom to the slave'

Of course, for many other than the British, tea also became a symbol against colonialism within Britain, as it already had been elsewhere in the world. This happened because as tea became increasing popular, so did sugar (an essential component to a 'British' cup of tea), with its consumption increasing 20 fold and tea doing the same 15 fold (Collingham, 2017)[5]. Tea and sugar came as one, and as a result sugar passed on its colonialist associations to tea, the most significant of these being slavery. Britain had been exposed to sugar as a result of the Empire's expansion to the West Indies, which had consequentially 'doomed millions of Africans and their descendants to slavery' (Bickham, 2008), meaning, by extension, tea can also be associated with these actions. In this sense, sugary tea and the act of drinking it could be seen as a display of support to the exploitative means by which the tea and sugar themselves had

[5] Page 81, Lizzie Collingham, The Hungry Empire - It was also believed the two were complimentary because the harmful sugar could be imbibed in bitter herbal or fruit infusions.

been obtained, with 18th century pamphleteer William Fox arguing "If we purchase the commodity, we participate in the crime.".

However, as a result of the Emancipation Act in 1834, the abolition movement gathered greater momentum in Britain and - almost ironically - one way in which these messages were spread was through tea culture. Some of the most notable examples of this are the efforts of 18th century potter Josiah Wedgewood and his two great partners, Erasmus Darwin and Thomas Bentley[6]. The three men conveyed this abolitionist message through their respective areas of artistic expertise; Bentley and Wedgewood (perhaps most famously) combined in the creation of medallions and later, teapots (such as in fig.4). As a non-conformist protestant, Bentley would advise Wedgwood on matters from taste and fashion to commercial advancement, and, most importantly, his views on the slave trade (Turner, 2022). As the owner of one of the largest pottery factories in the country (the Limehouse factory), Wedgewood had the ability to impress these opinions onto the wider population through his works, as they were common among households nationally.



'Health to the sick,

Honor to the brave,

Success to the lover,

And freedom to the slave'

Fig.4 (Winterthur Museum, 1760-80)

Therefore, in the same way Britain had adopted tea sets as a way of promoting imperial success, they later became a method of raising awareness against this. The notion of drinking tea and sugar whilst campaigning for the abolition of slavery is perhaps a contradictory one, but

[6] The trio united most famously as members of the Lunar Society, in which they discussed the methods through which they would fight against slavery.

ultimately still displays a shift in tea's role in society. Rather than its colonialist connections being harnessed to promote the Empire and its power, tea had shifted towards being a reminder of the suffering and bloodshed Britain had caused, and was being used, even within the very country responsible for it, to oppose this. In this way, the interpretation of tea which those outside of Britain had adopted eventually filtered its way back into British society thanks to the increasingly prevalent anti-slavery movement within the country.

3.2 'The subject of violent matters'

Often understated in its influence, tea was not merely a trophy of Britain's expanding empire, but a physical reflection of suffering for many across the world under British rule, making it a tool of defiance against this. Elsewhere in the world, tea reminded people so strongly of British brutality that, when viewed by those other than the British themselves, the drink transpired to be a motif of colonialist cruelty. This consequent realisation within Britain was therefore hugely important in propelling the abolition movement and beginning to eradicate widespread acceptance of imperialism.

'If you look up 'tea' in the first cookery book that comes to hand you will probably find that it is unmentioned; or at most you will find a few lines of sketchy instructions which give no ruling on several of the most important points. This is curious, not only because tea is one of the mainstays of civilization in this country, as well as in Eire, Australia and New Zealand, but because the best manner of making it is the subject of violent disputes.' (Orwell, 1946)

The most notable example of tea being utilised as a weapon against colonial cruelty was The Boston Tea Party on December 16th in 1773; a clear display of the way in which those outside the protection of British superiority could harness tea as a motif of rebellion. With 300 chests of East India tea being dumped into the sea, "American colonists' ultimate rejection of these imported luxuries, particularly tea, as tools of imperial tyranny ultimately became part of the framework of their political revolution" (Bickham, 2008). This further demonstrates tea's ability to contest colonialism, because its associations with oppressive British rule were so great that it sparked an anger among Americans, undoubtedly contributing to fuelling the

American revolution (September 3rd 1783)[7]. This highlights that tea was undoubtedly an important and effective tool in the rejection of British colonialism because it materialised into a symbol of opposition and an expression of hatred towards the Empire.

This can be explored through the emergence of indenture in India and the Caribbean, 'an institution that catalysed a new relationship between the state and labour management, that fostered new (or, at least, revised) discourses of the role of violence in colonialism' (Auerbach, 2022). Indenture programmes were predominantly used in the Caribbean as a substitute for slavery after the Emancipation Act in 1834, but because of this, they retained similar exploitative principals to slavery, with a total disregard for the welfare of workers and a sole focus on economic efficiency. This 'generated new patterns of response and resistance among subalterns' (Auerbach, 2022), the most notable of these being revolts such as the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, in which 100,000 Indians were killed. Consequentially, tea did not appear in the vernacular histories of Assam or India throughout the 18th and 19th centuries because the 'introduction of tea plantations was a colonial capitalist venture in eastern India' (Das, 2023), instead making it a reminder of the conflict surrounding this. This meant for workers living there, tea, perhaps unsurprisingly, came to represent the suffering they endured at the hands of British imperial rule rather than the iconic delicacy it was considered to be elsewhere. Britain would stop at nothing in their pursuit for the tea plant, least of all for the protection of the Indians working through indenture contracts, ultimately making tea a driving force behind their suffering. In this way, tea became a clear reminder of colonial brutality and was therefore something to despise for many plantation workers.

[7] The movement triggered a rise in coffee drinking in America as an alternative to tea, despite the drink arguably retaining similar connections to colonialism.

4. Tea and Britain; How did tea contribute to national identity over the 20th century?

4.1 'Teaism'

Tea was not, however, always drunk for such valuable causes, as, in a society so concerned with public appearance, tea became not only 'an element of national self-definition [but] a stimulator of the individual prosperity and wellbeing on which that polity was based' (Fromer, 2014). This can be seen in the emergence of 'afternoon tea' and 'high tea', an idea introduced in around 1840 by the Duchess of Bedford, Anna Maria Russell, as opportunities for the latest imperial treasures to be flaunted by wealthy women[8]. It was gentlewomen in particular who 'revelled in the beauty of the paraphernalia that surrounded its consumption (Collingham, 2017), meaning high tea became hugely important in daily life as it allowed them to exercise this beloved ritual. Predominantly therefore, as seen in fig. 5, tea was not a politically fuelled tool, as ultimately this message was a subversive one. Instead, for those members of society less concerned with matters of abolition and Empire, tea was merely an exciting delicacy that could be shared as display of wealth and sophistication, due to the 'purity and harmony' it inculcated (Okakura, 1906).

THE BOOK OF TEA

I

THE CUP OF HUMANITY

TEA began as a medicine and grew into a beverage. In China, in the eighth century, it entered the realm of poetry as one of the polite amusements. The fifteenth century saw Japan ennoble it into a religion of aestheticism—Teaism. Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish some-

Fig.5 (Okakura, 1906)

[8] Page 79, Lizzie Collingham, The Hungry Empire – It was particularly gentlewomen who 'revelled in the beauty of the paraphernalia that surrounded its consumption.

Initially, this was only the case among the affluent in society, who had the ability to invest in the variety of spoils brought home by merchants as reminders of their colonialist successes. However through an idea explored by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his work Distinction, class had a strong influence on matters of 'taste', and gave society the ability to impress ideas about Britishness on the rest of the country, encouraging their habits and rituals to be 'accepted as esteemed by the subordinate classes' (Fromer, 2014). Combined with a huge tax cut (from 119% to 12.5% in the early 1800s), those of lower socioeconomic status were able to invent their own, achievable 'versions' of high tea and were soon equally enraptured by the substance. With the majority of the population beginning to undertake intense manual labour, tea was fuelling the workers who drove Britain's booming economy[9], providing 10-15% of their daily calorie intake at the time (Collingham, 2017). The entirety of Britain was dependent on tea, be it in driving the economy or as the latest symbol of 'Britishness', meaning despite its 'un-British' origin, people's perception of tea was distorted to become something of their own, mimicking colonialist attitudes. In this way, tea can be viewed as a symbol of British colonialism, because while it had developed into a British mainstay, it was simultaneously a display of Britain's imperial success, and in serving both purposes it must therefore remind us of not only Britishness but also colonialism.

4.2 'Keep Calm and Carry On'

No one example captures how deeply tea drinking was embedded in the fabric of British everyday life than the decision of the government in 1942 to buy up every available pound of tea from every country in the world except Japan (Keen, 2016). At a time of crisis, the government were desperate to generate a greater sense of security and comfort within the British community; tea became the means through which this was achieved. The drink was a successful morale boost in several ways, not only for those in the trenches, but also in homes and bomb shelters all across the country. This was not just because of its warming and stimulating benefits, but also because of its ties to British ideology, meaning tea was perhaps most important in its 'phenomenal ability to bring people together' (Meddings, 2017). For example, it provided an egalitarian sharing space in a society of rigid class distinctions (Keen,

[9] Page 81, Lizzie Collingham, The Hungry Empire – 'England's Empire of trade reinvigorated its economy', something which tea was very much a part of as it quickly overtook textiles (one of the most popular imperial commodities) as the largest import.

2016). In the air raids, local Air Raid Wardens and Auxiliaries, mostly women, served tea to anyone, forming huddles, bringing strangers together, and providing a centre for medical help (Keen, 2016), regardless of class. Similarly, much of the tea acquired had to come from outside Nazi territory, meaning almost all of the tea drunk was from the British Empire, or areas which were previously part of it. In this way, there was an added sense of nostalgia in drinking the tea that was being served during the war. This was because there was an element of continuity from Victorian times which allowed the typical 'stiff upper lip' Victorian values to resurface in society. As a result tea once again helped to dictate the set of ideas that governed British ideology during the World Wars, because it proved to be a reminder of the patriotic fervour that was present throughout much of the 19th century, and thus the 20th. Over 3 million cups of tea were served in WW1 and over 12 million in WW2 (Keen, 2016), meaning its widespread consumption in this time of suffering perhaps reverted its purpose to promoting the Empire, as this helped to instil the sense of determination and community that defined much of the First and Second World Wars.

The extremities that Britain went to in order to secure its tea make it only too clear how integral it was to their culture, with the government beginning to stock and ration it before the war had even begun. As a result, in 1942 the commodities that Britain bought, ordered in terms of weight, were: bullets, tea, artillery shells, bombs and explosives (Meddings, 2017). Undoubtedly therefore tea was of the utmost important to British people, as it was not only an existing cupboard staple, but was a necessity for many people, with the average Briton drinking 9 cups a day in the 1930s (Sanghera, 2023). Overall there was an estimated 698 million pounds of tea imported into Britain throughout the war and it is believed that at any given time there were at least 30 million tonnes in Britain (Meddings, 2017). This dependency was particularly strong in the case of war time house wives, with one woman writing "I would sooner they rationed clothes" instead of her tea. Furthermore, after tea was rationed to 2/3 the people's usual intake, the minister for food at the time, Lord Walton acknowledged people not only required tea more than almost anything else, but that they were keen to have their specific brand of tea. As a result, while all other rations were delivered in brown labelled packages, tea was the only commodity that he continued to allow advertised packaging for. This was because he felt without this individuality, the purpose of tea as a morale booster would be undermined, as it was largely the comfort one received from drinking their tea as they like it that made it so effective. In this way, tea contributed to British wartime ideology perhaps as a symbol of respite

and comfort during the harsh times people were going through, as it was both a necessity and a luxury at the time.

Tea was also physically important for soldiers in the world wars. Caffeine can embolden soldiers in critical moments, providing them with energy and stimulating them in the depressing setting of the trenches (Sanghera, 2023). Similarly boiling the water actually protected them from any potential illnesses in it, and got rid of the rancid taste left behind from the petrol cans water was transported in (Meddings, 2017). Not only this, but historically, tea drinking may even have given the British the sober edge over other European powers; while they tanked themselves up on alcohol, the British opted for a caffeinated drink that simultaneously stimulated and relaxed (Meddings, 2017). In this way, British soldiers developed a dependency on tea, one that allowed them to 'keep calm and carry on'; a phrase first coined in preparation for a German invasion of Britain. However, the phrase encompassed wider ideas about British values, promoting a sense of grit and determination alongside a feeling of comfort and relaxation. This was ultimately something tea looked to provide, with its energising properties but also its comforting warmness. In this way, Britain's most popular drink was undoubtedly responsible, to some extent, for building the set of values encompassed in British ideology, as the act of drinking it triggered feelings and thoughts that aligned with these ideas.

Conclusion

Overall, tea was always a reminder of colonial Britain and the cruelty they inflicted, and it was instead the way in which this association was utilised that altered people's perceptions of it. As societal concerns evolved, tea underwent a transformation to suit people's consequent needs, going from a luxury, to a necessity, to a revolutionary symbol, thus presenting colonialism differently in each form. Firstly 'imitative invention adapting the use of non-eastern materials made Britain's new consumer goods 'indigenous' not oriental' (Berg, 2004). This demonstrates how tea's initial purpose was to promote Britishness and (being a key aspect of this idea at the time) the Empire hence making it a means to glorify colonialism. On the other hand, for those who had experienced British cruelty, tea appeared to be a motif of colonial success and therefore made it a suitable symbol of repression and British brutality – something to despise. However, eventually these ideas were returned to Britain, meaning that while tea was still a

ubiquitous symbol of the empire, the way in which it was increasingly being contested allowed it to reflect anti-colonialist ideas as well. The rise of tea arguably followed a cyclical structure in the way it was viewed and utilised in relation to colonialism, as it could be manipulated into a tool, both to promote and oppose British rule. In this way, 'the products from the Industrial Revolution helped foster and establish a British national identity' (Ashby, 2014), one that was initially complimentary, but eventually hugely critical in its representations of colonialism.

Similarly, the way in which tea was able to fuel patriotism in support of the Empire and later contribute to the abolition movement highlights its key ability to intensify moral and attitudes towards a cause. This was certainly the case in both WW1 and WW2, which many historians argue, to some extent, owe their victories to tea. Tea was key in developing ideas about Britishness that facilitated positive mindsets and communities which, alongside its health benefits, supported soldiers and families during the war. In this way, national identity was built upon a set of values that were inspired by the associations of drinking tea; the notion of hard work and determination, the 'stiff upper lip' and British superiority but also the familial comfort and humble warmth it triggered. Overall, tea has a multitude of important ties to values and events throughout history, but, regardless of whether these are positive or negative, it has undoubtedly contributed to ideas of Britishness over the course of the last three centuries.

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