

Tea War: A History of Capitalism in China and India. By Andrew B. Liu. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. x + 344 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$50.00. ISBN: 978-0-300-24373-4.

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Reviewed by Anne Reinhardt

The “war” in the title of Andrew B. Liu’s 2020 book *Tea War: A History of Capitalism in China and India* refers to the competition between the Chinese and Indian tea industries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As tea became a global commodity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China was the exclusive source of the beverage. In the 1830s, frustrated by the restrictions on trade and looking to break the “Chinese monopoly,” British merchants and politicians advocated experimenting with tea cultivation in recently conquered East India Company lands in India’s northeast, initially importing plants, cultivators, and laborers from China in hopes of establishing a rival tea industry. In the middle of the nineteenth century, China’s tea exports to Britain reached their peaks of volume and price, but by 1889 India’s emerging tea industry’s exports began surpassing China’s, and India soon became the world’s leading exporter of tea. This rapid reversal threw the Chinese tea industry into disarray and, facing further competition from tea production in Japan, Ceylon, Java, and elsewhere, Chinese tea never regained its former dominance. In what Liu describes as “near-perfect symmetry,” from the turn of the twentieth century Chinese officials and reformers began to visit tea plantations in India, hoping to return with some of their secrets of success (p. 274).

Through this instance of intense competition in a global market, in which one of the most valuable exports of the nineteenth century came to be dominated by one of India’s most successful colonial enterprises, Liu addresses big questions in the history of capitalism. By examining the dynamic intersections between the tea industries in both contexts, he makes the case that modern capital was not disseminated from the West to the Rest but instead was “global in character throughout its history, in practice and in thought” (p. 14).

Conceived as a “history of economic life and economic thought,” the book is structured around the themes of labor in the tea industry and evolving ideas of political economy related to it (p. 5). It details labor intensification in the nineteenth-century Chinese tea industry (chapter 2) and traces the origins of a labor indenture system in the Indian tea industry to a crisis of political-economic principles among colonial officials following failed experiments to cultivate tea there under other conditions (chapter 3). Chapter 4 makes the case that, despite industry propaganda claiming that Indian tea production was “scientific,” the Indian

industry's dominance stemmed from its particular system of penal labor indenture. Through these chapters, Liu challenges technical definitions of capitalism based on mechanized production and a free proletarian workforce by showing how intensive capitalist accumulation occurred in China and India through presumably "traditional" social formations shaped by global production and trade. The Chinese and Indian tea industries thus provide evidence for the argument that places with "backward" social formations were more predisposed to industrial production than those in the metropolitan West.

Chapter 5 examines the changing political-economic views of Chinese government officials in response to competition in the tea industry, and the book's final section consists of two essays that detail attacks by nationalist reformers on key figures in each industry (the "coolie," or laborer, in the Indian industry and the "comprador," or middleman, in the Chinese industry) as backward and unmodern in the twentieth century. Liu contends that Chinese and Indian reformers embraced naturalized ideas of political economy because these ideas reflected social changes available in their immediate environments, namely the increase in commodified work in both places. Such reformers contributed to the discourses of backwardness in both contexts by identifying practices central to the tea industries as "unfit for the modern world." As Liu puts it, "the story of tea ultimately helps us understand both the historical emergence of modern economic concepts *found within* China and India as well as several key ideas *about* modern Asia in its relationship to the rest of the world" (p. 6, emphases in original).

*Tea War* is at its most compelling at the global scale, in posing ambitious questions about the origins and history of capitalism through this rich case of transnational competition. Liu's close focus on the themes of labor and the ideas of political economy allows the story of the Tea War to speak to these expansive concerns. This tight thematic approach is less satisfying at the level of the transformations in the Chinese and Indian tea industries and the conceptualization of the relationship between the two contexts. Liu's account of the Indian industry traces its development from the earliest experiments through its heyday. The Chinese tea industry has a far longer and more diverse history, but Liu's treatment of the export industry in the decades of the 1860s through the 1890s, paralleling the rise of Indian tea, is surprisingly static. He attributes the process of labor intensification to "the late 1800s" without a clear account of the driving factors behind this change (p. 79). The narrative glosses over how the transformations of the treaty system in this period impacted the export tea industry and trade at its very peak and on the eve of its collapse. Global conditions that Liu addresses in the development of the Indian industry—such as

the concentration of finance capital in London—in addition to the communications revolution of the late 1870s had a significant impact on trade and industry in China as well. Global capitalist competition provides one important way to conceive of the relationship between India and China, but its intersections with the different imperial formations in each context may also yield a clearer sense of the shared structural and material conditions as well as the disparate ways they played out in each place. This desire for a more precise and definitive history, however, should not detract from the substantial achievement of *Tea War*; an argument on this scale demands selectivity in the empirical and interpretive issues it pursues. It attests instead to the vast potential of the Tea War to illuminate this chapter of global history.

*Anne Reinhardt is professor of history at Williams College. She is author of Navigating Semi-Colonialism: Shipping, Sovereignty, and Nation-Building in China, 1860–1937 (2018) and contributor to Beyond Pan-Asianism: Connecting China and India, 1840s–1960s (2021).*

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*Pirates and Publishers: A Social History of Copyright in Modern China. By Fei-Hsien Wang. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. xiii + 350 pp. Glossary, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-17182-1.*

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Reviewed by Puck Engman

According to the classic account, intellectual property law has failed to take hold in China because the country never developed an indigenous counterpart to copyright. In the twenty-first century as at the end of the nineteenth, foreign powers have pressured the Chinese state to introduce copyright laws modeled on European and American doctrine—then by the threat of gunboats, more recently by conditioning trade agreements—but piracy has remained rampant, leading some scholars to suspect that there is something in China’s culture or history that fosters widespread distrust in the social benefits of copyright (a skepticism that, to be sure, is found not only in China). In *Pirates and Publishers*, Fei-Hsien Wang draws on a wide range of archival sources and published works to build a compelling case against what she calls the “cultural determinist explanation” of Chinese piracy (p. 7). Her proposed antidote is a social history of copyright that shifts attention from the codification of rights to potential rights holders: the authors, editors, publishers, translators, and booksellers whose livelihoods depended on the definition and protection of ownership over printed works and the