

TEA: NATURE, CULTURE, SOCIETY, 1650-1850 (22-24 June 2022)



This international meeting will address natural, cultural and social histories of tea between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Arguably the first truly modern globalised commodity, the process by which tea attained such pre-eminence depended not just upon the commercial efforts of merchants, but also upon a cultural framework of knowledge and practice constructed primarily in China, Britain, Europe, and India.

Among other topics, the meeting will explore natural histories of the tea plant; European attempts to cultivate tea; imaginaries of tea in literature and art; tea and material culture; tea, identity, and the formation of the British Empire.

This meeting is generously co-sponsored by the Linnean Society of London, Syracuse University (USA), and Oak Spring Garden Foundation (USA). The conference organisers would also like to thank Todd B. Rubin for his generous support.

*Hosted by the Linnean Society of London and organised by **Richard Coulton** (QMUL), **Jordan Goodman** (UCL), and **Romita Ray** (Syracuse).*



PROGRAMME

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF TEA IN SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

DAY ONE (Wednesday 22 June, 1-5 pm UK time)

- [Markman Ellis](#) (QMUL): **The Poetry of Tea and the Uses of Natural History**
- [Bettina Dietz](#) (Hong Kong BU): **Co-authoring Tea in Early Modern Botany**
- [Mark Nesbitt](#) (Kew) and [Aurora Prehn](#) (Kew / MOBOT): **Reading the Tea Leaves: Tea in the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew**

TEA'S MATERIAL CULTURES BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE

DAY TWO (Thursday 23 June, 4-8pm UK time)

- [Romita Ray](#) (Syracuse): **Jungli Imaginaries? Assam Tea and the Jungle**
- [Emma Newport](#) (Sussex): **Substance, Sinology and Sonneteers; or Literature, Porcelain and Tea Cultures in the Late Eighteenth Century**
- [Katharine Burnett](#) (UC Davis): **Art History without the Art: The Curious Case of Sino-Vietnamese Teapots before 1700**

CHINESE TEA AND GLOBAL COMMERCE

DAY THREE (Friday 24 June, 2-6pm UK time)

- [Kunbing Xiao](#) (Southwest Minzu University): **Branding Bohea into a Successful Commodity: The Collection, Screening, and Allocation of Knowledge along the Value Chain in the Early Tea Trade**
- [Jordan Goodman](#) (UCL) and [Josepha Richard](#) (Bristol/OSGF): **The Quest for *Camellia sinensis*: Joseph Banks, the State and the East India Company**
- [Wouter Ryckbosch](#) (VUB): **Were all Cups of Tea Created Equal? Tea and the erosion of social barriers in the Low Countries during the Enlightenment**



SPEAKERS, TITLES, AND ABSTRACTS

Katharine BURNETT

Art History without the Art: The Curious Case of Sino-Vietnamese Teapots before 1700

This presentation investigates the exchange of tea culture and teapots between China and Vietnam between 1300-1700, with an emphasis on the late Ming period. This is the time when steeped tea became the norm and teapots began to be a required form. Although China was trading tea to other countries at this time, this project begins the exploration of China's cultural exchanges surrounding tea with its Southeast Asian neighbours starting with Vietnam. It aims to find out how Vietnam responded to this trade through its own ceramic industry. Consequently, this presentation also attempts to determine exactly what is a teapot (vs. a water or wine pot) in these early years, which turns out to be not as obvious a task as one might think. In closing, it speculates on the affect that Vietnamese teawares may have had on the teawares produced in/for Great Britain and North America.



Katharine Burnett is Professor of Art History, and Founder and Director of the Global Tea Initiative for the Study of Tea Culture and Science (GTI) at the University of California, Davis. In research and teaching, she explores definitions of culture and how culture is formed. Her publications include *Shaping Chinese Art History: Pang Yuanji and His Painting Collection* (2020), one of Book Authority's 16 Best New Art History Books to Read In 2021; and *Dimensions of Originality: Essays on Seventeenth-Century*

Chinese Art Theory and Criticism (2013), now being translated into Chinese (forthcoming 2023). Her new book projects involving tea include the anthology (as Editor in Chief), *The Stories We Tell: Myths, Legends, and Anecdotes about Tea*, containing a selection of essays written for a GTI colloquium; and the monograph, *Art History without the Art: The Curious Case of Sino-Vietnamese Teapots before 1700*, both in preparation. Indeed, it was a fascination with teapots and the philosophy and politics involved in shaping them that led her to found GTI. Dr Burnett's efforts for GTI have been recognized locally by UC Davis (Chancellor's Award for International Engagement, Global Affairs, 2021); nationally by the US/Canada tea industry (Best Tea Health Advocate, World Tea Expo, 2018), and internationally (O-Cha Pioneer Award, World Green Tea Association, Shizuoka Prefectural Government, Japan, 2021).



Bettina DIETZ

Co-authoring Tea in Early Modern Botany

This paper addresses distributed authorship and the co-authoring of taxonomy in early modern botany. Very few European botanists in the seventeenth and eighteenth century had ever seen a living or dried specimen of the tea plant – Linnaeus’s relentless attempts at procuring a tea bush in the 1750s and 60s document its elusiveness. As a consequence those who included the plant in their publications had little to work with apart from a few descriptions and illustrations in the botanical literature and sparse information that they gathered from their correspondence with other botanists. In response to what was perceived as chronic lack of information not only on the tea plant but on many others as well, early modern botanists developed a networked writing and publishing mode that acknowledged the preliminary nature of their publications and facilitated distributed authorship to correct and update them when new relevant information became available.



Bettina Dietz, Associate professor in history at Hong Kong Baptist University. Research interests: eighteenth-century botany, its information economy, collaborative system of writing and publishing, and use of books; translating science.

Recent publications: *‘Iterative Books. Posthumous Publishing in Eighteenth-Century Botany’*, in *History of Science* (OnlineFirst; scheduled for vol. 2, 2022); *‘Networked names. Synonyms in eighteenth-century botany’*, in *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 40 (2019 (article 4)); *‘What is a Botanical Author? Pehr Osbeck’s Travelogue and the Culture of Collaborative Publishing in Linnaean Botany’*, in Stéphane van Damme / Hanna Hodacs / Kenneth Nyberg (eds.): *Linnaeus, Natural History, and the Circulation of Knowledge*, Oxford 2018 (Voltaire Foundation), 57-

79; *Das System der Natur. Die kollaborative Wissenskultur der Botanik im 18. Jahrhundert*, Köln / Wien 2017 (Böhlau Verlag).



Markman ELLIS

The Poetry of Tea and the Uses of Natural History

This paper engages with the network of tea poems that were published in English in the period 1700-1750, from Tate's *Panacea: a Poem upon Tea* (1700) and Motteux's *A Poem Upon Tea* (1712), to *Tea. A Poem. Or, Ladies into China-Cups* (1729) and *Tea, a Poem. In three Cantos* (1743). These poems worked hard to naturalise tea knowledge and develop scripts for its consumption in England, in a period which saw an exponential expansion in tea drinking. The poets had some knowledge of tea itself, through their own tea drinking habits, but also made use of botanical and medical knowledge, especially that made known in Ovington's *Essay on Tea* (1699) and Cunninghame's two letters in the *Philosophical Transactions* (1702). The paper will consider how poets engaged with natural knowledge, and in turn how poetry shaped the intangible cultural history of tea in Britain.



Markman Ellis is Professor of Eighteenth-Century Studies at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of *The Politics of Sensibility: race, gender and commerce in the sentimental novel* (1996), *The History of Gothic Fiction* (2000), *The Coffee-House: a Cultural History* (2004), co-author of *Empire of Tea* (2015) with Richard Coulton and Matthew Mauger. He edited *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture* (2006) and, with Richard Coulton, Ben Dew and Matthew Mauger, edited *Tea and the Tea-Table*

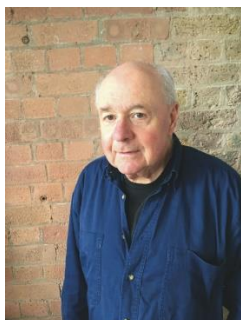
in Eighteenth-Century England (2010). He is currently working on sociability and intellectual culture in London in the mid-eighteenth century.



Jordan GOODMAN and Josepha RICHARD

The Quest for *Camellia sinensis*: Joseph Banks, the State and the East India Company

Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, 1778 to 1820, made friends easily, but when it came to his dealings with the East India Company, the going was tough. No subject provoked as much acrimony as the idea of transferring the tea plant, *Camellia sinensis*, from China to the Company's possessions in India. Charles Jenkinson, the President of the Board of Trade, first brought his concerns to Banks's attention in 1788, when he wrote to him pointing out that the supply of tea, all of it from China, was a drain on the country's silver reserves and since the level of consumption could not be controlled, the only solution was for Britain to grow the plant itself. He asked Banks to give his opinion on the practicality of the idea, given that the Western presence in China was severely restricted. Banks told him what he knew (and did not know) about tea, and gave him his opinion on the practicalities of a tea transfer, which was then shared with the East India Company. This paper explores what Banks knew about tea; the range of his sources - textual, representational and oral - from which he assembled his facts; his opinions on a tea transfer; and especially his difficult relationship, covering a period of three decades, with the East India Company over what to do about tea.



Jordan Goodman is an Honorary Research Associate in the Department of Science and Technology Studies, University College London. He has published widely in the fields of economic history, the history of science, medicine and technology, and cultural history. His latest articles appeared in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* (2017); *Journal for Maritime Research* (2019); and *Revista Scientia Insularum* (2020). His book, *Planting the World: Joseph Banks and His Collectors – An Adventurous History of Botany*, was published in 2020 (paperback 2021) by William Collins/HarperCollins.



Josepha Richard was an Oak Spring Garden Foundation Stacy Lloyd III fellow in 2020, and is currently Assistant Lecturer at the Courtauld Institute of Art and an Honorary Research fellow in History at the University of Bristol. As an historian and art historian of the China Trade, she specialises on landscape paintings and gardens in Guangzhou during the Canton System (1757-1842), and has been focusing on 18-19th century Sino-Western botanical exchanges as part of her ongoing work for the Blake Project at Oak Spring Garden Foundation.



Mark NESBITT and Aurora PREHN

Reading the tea leaves: Tea in the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Each of the many histories of tea depends on the perspective of the historian and the chosen forms of evidence and methodology of analysis. Here we address histories of tea through the biocultural artefacts acquired during the formation, beginning in 1847, and subsequent decade of the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Today the tea collection comprises 378 objects composed primarily of tea leaves - in many formats - rather than teaware or documents. Informed by industry experience, and travel in tea-producing regions, we apply an ethnobotanical lens to read these objects and the rich archives associated with them to cast a new light on the intense period of tea cultivation and production in and outside of China in the mid-19th century and its material reflection in Kew's Museum.



Aurora Prehn is a researcher focusing on tea, *Camellia sinensis*, its diversity and conservation. She is a Research Specialist and the Biocultural Collection Manager in the William L. Brown Center at the Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis. She completed her BA in Anthropology and Environmental Studies from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2013 where her research, and subsequent publication, examined local food culture, health, and the environment. Following graduation she spent five years in the organic tea and botanical industry finishing as a tea taster and educator. After her MSc in Ethnobotany at the University of Kent and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in the UK. Her research took her to the country of

Georgia where she spent three and a half months researching the biocultural relationship and diversity between Georgians, their landscape, and the grapevine. She has been researching the tea and teaware objects in the Economic Botany Collection at Kew Gardens since December 2019.



Mark Nesbitt is a Senior Research Leader and Curator of the Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. After studying agricultural botany at the University of Reading, he spent 15 years researching prehistoric agriculture in the Near East, completing his MSc and PhD at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. In 1999 he joined Kew, focusing on useful plant projects including Plant Cultures, a major outreach programme centred on British Asian communities and plants. Since 2005 he has been responsible for curating the Economic Botany Collection, including development of active research collaborations focusing on the history of materials and medicines, and the repurposing of historic biocultural

collections to address contemporary issues such as decolonisation and sustainability. He also co-chairs an initiative to embed arts and humanities research in Kew's wider science programme. His publications include *The cultural history of plants* (2005), *Curating biocultural collections: a handbook* (2014), and *Just the tonic: the natural history of tonic water* (2019).



Emma NEWPORT

Substance, Sinology and Sonneteers; or Literature, Porcelain and Tea Cultures in the Late Eighteenth Century

Porcelain is a liminal object: between high and low culture, between art and object, it represents complex ideas, technology and aesthetics whilst also being functional and prosaic. Tea-drinking, the function that is arguably most closely associated with porcelain, can be both quotidian and elevated social ceremony. This paper will examine two examples of literary responses to porcelain and tea drinking: “A Specimen of Picturesque Poetry in Chinese Inscribed on the Cup in the Possession of Lady Banks, and dedicated to her Ladyship by the Translator S. W”, which is the work of linguist Stephen Weston (1747-1830) who examined, unsuccessfully, the Rosetta Stone; and Joanna Baillie’s “Lines to a Teapot” (c.1790). Weston’s choice of tea names reveal the failures in the translation process. The transition from object to text takes the cup and its poem further from its Chinese meaning and brings it closer to the European vision of China: a decorative thing to be looked at. By contrast, Baillie’s “Lines to a Teapot” (c.1790) more problematically presents the teapot as an inaccurate metaphor for the slave trade, subsumed into a larger and more nebulous anxiety about global trade.

Porcelain is thus an apparent portal between East and West: porcelain’s portability carries with it cultural associations in which its collectors, in particular, was fascinated. Yet, as a substance, it represents fixed and tangible sign of China, china as metonym for China, which had nonetheless become divorced from the context of China. Efforts to re-contextualise porcelain often involves mixing sparse knowledge of China, gleaned from those living in Canton and accounts by earlier missionaries, with the creative interpretation of writers.



Emma Newport is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Sussex. Her interests include eighteenth-century attitudes to China and women’s roles in exchanges of ideas and objects and so she created the conference series 'Women, Money and Markets (1600-1900)'. She is currently working on an edited collection of the same name. The sixth and seventh Women, Money and Markets conferences will be held at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies in June 2022 and at Sheffield and Chatsworth in 2023.



Romita RAY

Jungli Imaginaries? Assam Tea and the Jungle

This paper will focus on the paradigm of the *jungli* (wild) that was used to characterize *Thea assamica*, the indigenous species of Assam tea that in the 1820s was found growing in the forested regions of northeastern India where it was consumed by the Singpho and Khamti communities. Brought to the attention of the British government, Assam tea would shape powerful visual and material realities that inserted the *jungli* into the inter-related spaces of colonial science, commerce, and spectacle in India and Britain. Key to these realities was the search for tea in Assam during the “tea” expedition deputed by the Governor General Lord William Bentinck in 1835, a scientific endeavor that also resulted in the discovery of a wide array of flora and fauna that would be recorded, collected, and transformed into specimens. Tea was now an entry point into the visual and material realities of the jungle, with images, maps, and specimens produced during and after the expedition drawing the *jungli* into the orbits of journaling, drawing, and taxidermy. Taking my cue from the journals, images, and specimens made and collected by the botanist William Griffith and physician John McClelland, both members of the expedition, I will analyze how Assam tea was positioned as the quintessential *jungli* plant that mediated between the domain of the jungle and that of colonial science and visual spectacle, its economic value driving the need to verify its authenticity with the final goal to cultivate it as a colonial product. These mediations, I will demonstrate, would become enmeshed with the systematic erasure of the jungle to create tea plantations in the 1840s. As plants and animals were emptied out of the forest to grow tea in newly established plantations, the *jungli* would be re-arranged, re-packaged, and re-imagined. As such, my paper will analyze how the *jungli* became inseparable from the visual imaginaries shaped by *Thea assamica*, even as the material realities of Assam tea were destroyed or appropriated to commodify the plant for a newly emergent tea industry in colonial India.



Romita Ray is associate professor of art history at Syracuse University where she also chairs the department of Art and Music Histories. She received her Ph.D from Yale University and her B.A. degree from Smith College. Ray is the author of *Under the Banyan Tree: Relocating the Picturesque in British India* (2013) and *The Eternal Masquerade: Prints and Paintings by Gerald Leslie Brockhurst (1890-1978)* from the Jacob Burns Foundation (2006). She is currently working on a book manuscript about the visual cultures of tea cultivation and consumption in colonial and modern India, brief glimpses of which can be found in blogposts she has published online.



Wouter RYCKBOSCH

Were all cups of tea created equal? Tea and the erosion of social barriers in the Low Countries during the Enlightenment

Tea was one of the first globally traded commodities that developed from an exclusive luxury good into an object of mass consumption. In Western Europe this transition took place over the course of the eighteenth century. It probably did so first in the Dutch Republic, closely followed by England. How the desire for tea, and access to it, quickly managed to transcend traditional social boundaries in eighteenth-century society raises questions regarding the democratising and levelling effect of the new consumer goods and practices that were introduced during this period. Did new consumer practices, such as the drinking of tea, affect social inequality prior to modernisation? In other words, did the consumption of tea in the eighteenth century merely mark pre-existing social boundaries, did it help to dissolve them, or did it help to negotiate entirely new lines of demarcation?

In this paper I will examine the consumption of tea in the Low Countries among different social groups, and the reactions that these (changing) patterns of consumption sorted in the medical literature, popular songs, plays, newspapers and public policy. By comparing the reactions to the social diffusion of tea drinking in the 'aristocratic' Southern Low Countries to the more 'bourgeois' Northern Low Countries, I hope to shed some light on the interaction between changing consumerism and social order in the age of Enlightenment.

Wouter Ryckbosch is Assistant Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. He specializes in the early modern history of the Low Countries, and has published on issues of inequality, consumption and social relations. He recently published an article on the acceptance and valuation of tea in the Low Countries in *Past & Present*.



Kunbing XIAO

Branding Bohea into a Successful Commodity: The Collection, Screening, and Allocation of Knowledge along the Value Chain in the Early Tea Trade

From the mid-17th to the mid-19th centuries, Bohea, the earliest black tea, was one of the most successful commodities in the global market. As Bohea travelled from its place of origin in China's Wuyi Mountains to its major overseas market in Great Britain, its corresponding knowledge also circulated globally among producers, traders, and consumers, transforming in meaning as it moved across time and space. The early success of Bohea in international trade resulted both from its commodity characteristics of low price and durable taste, and from the selecting, screening and editing of knowledge by various middlemen along different stages of the value chain, as well as the interaction and adaption of knowledge with consumers' demands.



Kunbing Xiao is an anthropologist and Associate Professor in the School of Anthropology and Sociology at Southwest Minzu University (China). Her research interests include anthropology of food, tea, and wine, sensory anthropology, and cultural heritage studies. Kunbing received her PhD degree from the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of Xiamen University, China, with a thesis on the Bohea tea trade in northern Fujian from the 17th to the 19th century in the context of modern globalization. From 2014 to 2015, she was an ArgO-EMR research fellow affiliated to the school of Anthropology & Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford. From 2017 to 2018, she was the joint postdoctoral fellow of NYU Shanghai at CGA (Center for Global Asia) and ARC (Asia Research Center) of Fudan University. She is

a visiting scholar affiliated to CEMMC (Centre d'Etudes des Mondes Modernes et Contemporains) at Bordeaux Montaigne University (2022-2023).

