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“Tastes Like Horse Piss”: Asian Encounters with European Beer

Abstract: This paper examines taste as a factor in beer's arrival as a symbol of modernity in India, Japan, and China. From nineteenth-century colonial production of India pale ale to contemporary attempts by global brewing firms to profit from a burgeoning Chinese market, beer has had an important but largely unexamined role in modern Asian-European encounters. This paper follows distinct agents of transmission—merchants, migrants, and empire builders—and their interactions with local drinking cultures to shape the particular tastes and meanings associated with beer in these countries. The case studies illustrate the different relationships that each country had with Western imperialism: India as a subject of British occupation, China as a site of commercial competition between imperial rivals, and Japan as a nascent imperial power in its own right. Beer gained least acceptance in the Indian subcontinent, in part because of Hindu and Muslim moralizing, and it symbolized western modernity for those who wished to challenge traditional culture. South Asian preferences often focused more on alcohol content than on the taste of malt or hops. The Japanese became Asia's most avid consumers of beer, adapting German lagers to local tastes. Chinese beer drinking has been limited to cities, and local brands are also bland, which reflects the place of beer within Chinese meals as a neutral grain. More broadly, I suggest that beer became a subject for nation-building efforts in Asia precisely because of its cosmopolitanism, which provided status to nationalist ideologues and supported their program of transcending regional rivalries.

Keywords: taste, Asia, beer, empire, nation

Japan's first recorded tasting of European-style beer came in 1854 at the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa, which opened trade with the United States. After sampling from kegs of beer presented to the Shogun by Commodore Matthew Perry, one Japanese official compared the exotic liquid to “bitter horse piss” (Alexander 2013: 8–9).[1] Despite this inauspicious start, local entrepreneurs soon began brewing, and within a century, western beer had surpassed indigenous sake as the nation's best-selling alcoholic drink. The Japanese elite were particularly eager consumers of western goods, which they saw as essential for national advancement, but beer also spread throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Mager 2010; Sánchez Santiró 2007). European beer appealed widely as an icon of industrial modernity and an affordable source of alcohol; yet just as important was its taste, which changed over time from bitter horse piss to bland, fizzy lager.

Beer's rapid spread offers insights into the rise of global consumer culture during an era of modernity, nationalism, and empire. Japan, China, and India provide useful case studies because of the range of local drinking cultures and the differing relationships with western imperialism. This essay seeks to combine comparative and transnational perspectives, “following the beer” through multiple agents of transmission: international trade, imperial conquest, and the migrations of professional brewers and everyday consumers (Marcus 1995; Cook and Crang 1996).

European beer first traveled to Asia through imperialists such as Commodore Perry, and many still bemoan bland lager beers as exemplars of cultural imperialism, homogenizing local cultures for the profit of global capitalism. Yet more skeptical observers have interpreted globalization not through the lens of imperialism but rather “localization,” whereby exotic goods acquire new meanings through age-old processes of cultural exchange.[2] While scholars have debated these terms for decades, the case of beer can help us move beyond a simplistic dichotomy by emphasizing the multiplicity of imperial as well as local experiences. India was a subject of British occupation, China a site of commercial competition between imperial rivals, and Japan a nascent imperial power in its own right. In part as a result, European beer became tinged with imperial nostalgia in India—which made for a narrow market—while the drink was domesticated, and in differing ways nationalized, in Japan and China.

Indeed, even as we try to resist the naturalizing pull of nationalistic ideologies, we must recognize the nation as an unavoidable analytical scale alongside the global and the local. It is

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particularly important to keep in mind the relationships between "domestication" or "localization," the adaptation of foreign products to domestic markets and tastes, and "nationalization," the consolidation of local and regional goods into national markets, largely through the expansion of production, transport, and marketing. Although these processes were connected during the nineteenth-century industrialization of beer in the United States, they followed very different chronologies in Asia. Nationalist ideology was also manifested through beer as a symbol of strength, particularly in Japan.

To make sense of these divergent experiences, we must also consider taste as a force in history, although doing so poses distinctive methodological and archival problems. Identical sensory stimulants—say pints of beer drawn from the same keg—are perceived differently by each individual. In order to describe those sensations, to ourselves and to others, we must translate them into shared languages. As the sociologist Priscilla Ferguson has observed, narratives of taste inevitably draw on metaphors (e.g., horse piss), which must be set in historical and cultural context (Ferguson 2011). Interpretation must combine material and social as well as symbolic references, for status markers influence physical perceptions (Shepherd 2012; Korsmeyer 1999). Indeed, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) insisted that taste preferences internalize group experiences and values, which he considered expansively as *habitus*. Therefore, our archive must reach beyond textual references to pair linguistic markers with material and social referents. One such historical project, by Camille Bégin, uses the corpus of food writing in the "America Eats" project to reconstruct "sensory economies," showing in a particular time and place how people valued taste and how physical taste created economic value (Bégin, forthcoming).[3] The formation of tastes for beer can likewise illuminate the production of empire, nation, and modernity in Asia.

Beer

The modern era of imperialism and nationalism was also a time of rapid transformation in European brewing. New technologies of chemical analysis, pasteurization, refrigeration, bottling, and steam transport enabled brewers to increase production for continental and global markets. Yet international competition required more than just shipping product, because tastes for beer varied widely across regions. Britain and Germany dominated beer exports in the nineteenth century, and their differing styles of ale and lager largely framed that competition. Nevertheless, it was a third variety, "adjunct lager," developed in the United States—a former colony settled by both nations—that set standards for the global industry.

Nor was Europe alone in brewing beer, if that word means simply a grain-based, fermented, alcoholic beverage. Maize, rice, sorghum, millet, and other grains have been widely brewed in addition to the barley and wheat preferred in Europe. Scholars use the concept of "operational chains" to analyze the technological steps and cultural meanings in producing alcohol. A common step is the conversion of complex carbohydrates to simple sugars that can be fermented. Known as malting in Europe, it is accomplished by soaking grain until it sprouts, then toasting it to caramelize the resulting sugars, which can then be fermented by the yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. In East Asia, by contrast, rice-based "beers" such as Chinese *huang jiu* and Japanese sake were produced with a mold called *Aspergillus oryzae*, which combined the steps of saccharification and fermentation. South Asia regional drinks included palm toddy, fruit wines, and rice beers; although commonly consumed, they were condemned by the Brahman caste and became associated with tribal peoples such as the Santhals of West Bengal (Jennings et al. 2005; Prakash 1961).

Britain became the first global beer power due to its early industrialization and empire. Porter was the earliest industrial brew, made with darkly browned malts that could withstand the primitive machinery available in the eighteenth century. Technological improvements encouraged a shift to pale ales, which yielded more alcohol than scorched malts. The British exported these ales widely during the nineteenth century, but soon faced competition from continental brewers (Mathias 1959; Gourvish et al. 1994).

Gabriel Sedlmayr of Munich and Anton Dreher of Vienna, the offspring of local brewing dynasties, broke Britain's beer supremacy through industrial espionage in the 1830s. They applied the new technology to Bavarian lager beers, which were made with a unique bottom-fermenting yeast, *Saccharomyces pastorianus*, unlike other yeasts, which foam on top of the fermentation vessel. Lager yeast was hybridized during the early modern era in Bavaria, where brewing was forbidden during the summer months to prevent what came to be understood as bacterial contamination. Brewers stored their kegs on ice in underground caves (*Lager* in German), where they fermented slowly over the winter. Served chilled from the caverns, or later from refrigerated storage, lager made a refreshing drink on hot summer days, unlike the lukewarm brews consumed elsewhere in Europe. Bottom fermentation also yielded a clear, light beverage without the residues that clouded ales, although this advantage became fully apparent only in the nineteenth century when British pale malts (and glass bottles) replaced the traditional Bavarian dark malts (and ceramic tankards). Munich and Vienna soon developed an export trade of their own (Teich 2000; Starke 2005).

Industrial products traveled through migration as well as trade, and lager beer acquired new forms in the midwestern United States following the failed nationalist revolutions of 1848. Transplanted Central European brewers in Milwaukee and St. Louis built vast breweries and transported beer by railroad throughout the United States. The rapid growth of production in Europe and North America outstripped barley supplies, prompting brewers to experiment with cheaper grains as adjuncts. By the 1880s, North American brewers used rice and maize, while British firms extended their malts with sugar. Even in Germany brewers experimented with maize before eventually going back to barley malts (Siebel 1901: 38–40; see also Cochran 1948). The Munich brewers' insistence on their 1516 beer purity law, the Reinheitsgebot, which was applied to all lager beer sold in Germany in 1906, may well have resulted not simply from Bavarian conservatism but also from an appreciation of the commercial value of "traditional" recipes in contrast to newfangled industrial foods.

New technologies and traditional methods were hotly debated within the ranks of an increasingly transnational brewing profession. In 1902, for example, a paper read to the American Brewing Institute by Dr. Carl Rach championing traditional Bavarian beers prompted a response by Dr. Francis Wyatt, who asked rhetorically whether consumers of adjunct lagers were "unreasoning and unsophisticated . . . or do they drink our light and pale American beers because they like them?" (Rach 1902: 173–78; Wyatt 1902: 188). While questions of taste appeared regularly, the authors adopted a tone of scientific objectivity and sought to spread their findings widely. Journals were published, at times bilingually, in English, German, French, and beginning in 1906, Japanese, with the launch of the *Journal of the Brewing Society of Japan*. In both domestic and international venues, Japanese specialists were soon publishing original contributions to brewing science (Saïto 1911: 6–8).[4] Brewers also sought out new markets in Europe's imperial possessions, although debates continued about whether these brews were fit for colonial subjects.

Empire

There is no European beer more closely associated with empire than India pale ale, a hearty brew with hops as preservatives for the long ocean voyage. The historian Alan Pryor has interpreted it as an attempt to conquer and commodify India through the superiority of British manufacturing. First intended to bolster the strength and morale of colonists, it found its primary market among London shopkeepers and clerks with imperial nostalgia (Pryor 2009). Rather than heavy ales fit for the cold, rainy metropolis, Brits in the tropics came to prefer the cool, sparkling taste of lagers.[5] Few colonial subjects proved eager for western beer in any form, but the beverage eventually gained a place within hybrid, postcolonial societies.[6]

Scholars have described European colonists' fear of indigenous foods and their desire to maintain a familiar diet to ensure status and identity (Collingham 2001). Although many explorers and merchants went native, from French fur traders of North America to English East India Company factors, their seemingly uncivilized example only steeled the determination of others to stay aloof from the locals. Beer provided a telling symbol of empire, as was revealed by a common saying among the British in India that "were we driven from the country, no trace, no monument, of our rule would exist ten years afterward, beyond the empty beer-bottles we had left behind us" (Wolseley 1878).

Europeans believed their food to be crucial for health as well as status, and beer gained particular importance within nineteenth-century tropical medicine. Galenic physicians prescribed distilled spirits for its heating properties; for example, Franciscus Sylvius invented gin for the Dutch merchant marine. Rum mixed with lime juice to prevent scurvy became the basic ration of the British navy, whose sailors and marines feared "a sober hour might give the Disease an Opportunity to attack" (quoted in Geggus 1982: 368). Nineteenth-century British soldiers embraced gin and tonic water laced with quinine, a remedy for malaria. Nevertheless, doctors stationed in the tropics increasingly cautioned against distilled spirits and argued instead for less potent drinks. An 1847 survey of British military posts by W. H. Sykes found an association between beer consumption and decreased mortality among the troops (Baber 1996; Sykes 1847: 123).

As the British consolidated their occupation of India after the rebellion of 1857, brewers established a colonial presence. The tropical heat posed a challenge, since bacterial contamination spread quickly through the fermentation tanks, and brewing began in the cooler hill stations. By the 1880s, a dozen breweries operated in the northwestern province of Punjab, and on a smaller scale at Bangalore, Bombay, Lucknow, and Madras. Total production came to nearly 8 million liters a year, or two-thirds of the amount imported to British India (O'Conor 1883: 51; Hunter 2005 [1886]: 616–17).

The advent of German shipping in the Indian Ocean soon brought competition to both metropolitan and colonial brewers. The Beck's brewery, for example, was founded in Bremen largely for the export trade, and by 1890, according

FIGURE 1: *Localizing the spaces of consumption. Chinese restaurant menu for a German beer garden in Qingdao.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY PILCHER © 2013

to the historian Hermann Kellenbenz, it was outselling the leading ale, Bass, in the Calcutta market. By the eve of World War I, German brewers were shipping some 43 million liters of beer annually to the British colony (Kellenbenz 1982: 355, 358). The colonial administrator J. E. O'Conor attributed the growing preference for German lagers over British ales to their lighter body, which he considered more accommodated to the tropical environment. He reported that Bass had even begun to brew a lighter beer to compete with the German imports (O'Conor 1883: 51).

Europeans had likewise introduced beer to China by the early twentieth century. Tsingtao, an antiquated spelling of Qingdao, has passed into legend as the first beer brewed in Germany's Shandong colony in 1903, although Russians had actually established a brewery in the city of Harbin a few years earlier. While heavy Russian beer had little appeal beyond the local market, the Brauerei Germania, with its Tsingtao brand, was quickly recognized for its high quality. A second firm, Brauerei Gomoll, was founded about five years later to produce a Berlin-style Weissbier, but this sour, top-fermented ale, once popular in the Prussian capital, found little appeal in the colonies ("Bierausfuhr aus Japan" 1908: 49).

British colonial officials sought to keep beer an exclusively European drink, although the effectiveness of this policy seems mixed. In 1908, Sir George Watt declared: "Consumption of country-brewed (English) beer and ale by the Natives of India is not important, though in some provinces it is more extensive than in others" (Watt 1908: 761). He cited the Punjab and the hill districts around Madras as areas of growing use. That same year, the colonial government doubled the customs duty on imported beer and other alcohol to discourage Indian subjects from drinking, which caused few objections because foreign brewers now dominated the market. Germans alone were selling twice as much beer as the entire colony had downed three decades earlier, suggesting a growing native market since the European population had not increased at a comparable rate (Ilbert 1910: 307).

In contrast to British India, German colonists in Qingdao encouraged native consumption of beer to smooth intercultural relations. Although the Germans entered China with great brutality during the "Boxer War" of 1900, the sociologist George Steinmetz has argued that long-standing German intellectual Sinophilia quickly overcame the attitudes of scientific racism, prompting efforts at inculcating European culture among the Chinese elite. Schools were integrated, intermarriage was allowed, and beer drinking provided a form of cross-cultural commensality, as postcards from the period illustrate. One photograph captures a railway car meeting between German officials holding Chinese teacups and Chinese mandarins with beer glasses. The drinking arrangements were reversed in a domestic scene, drawn by a local artist, of a uniformed German soldier with a beer bottle and his Chinese wife sipping tea (Steinmetz 2007; Hinz and Lind 1998: 155; Yan 2006: 166).

The Japanese mimicked European beer imperialism, using their breweries as another tool for asserting commercial and military domination in Asia. Already in the 1890s, merchants sent beer samples throughout East and Southeast Asia. By 1905, British India imported nearly 15,000 liters of Japanese beer, a drop in the bucket for German brewers, but still an achievement for the upstart Asians (*Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society* 1896: 78; "Bierbrauerei und Bierexport Japans" 1906: 339). With the outbreak of World War I, Japan occupied Qingdao, hiring away the local German brewmaster to improve production at home. Two years later, Dai Nippon took over the brewery as a base for marketing in China ("Beer Brewing" 1927: 74). Japanese militarism created additional opportunities for overseas investment by national brewers, opening markets in Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria ("Beer Brewing" 1935: 39). An advertisement for the Japanese brand Kirin, published in a Korean newspaper in 1927, depicted a muscular figure with a giant beer bottle casting a shadow across Asia. Written in a combination of Korean and Japanese characters, the text listed Kirin's breweries and sales offices, placing Seoul alongside Tokyo and other Japanese cities. The Pan-Asianist implication was that Japanese settler colonists and Korean elites would grow strong together with bottles of Kirin beer.[7]

In postcolonial South Asia, beer drinking has become largely associated with imperial nostalgia. The independence leader Mohandas Gandhi issued strong warnings against alcohol, following in a long tradition of Hindu and Muslim moralism. The Indian Constitution enshrined prohibition, at least as a goal, while Pakistan and Bangladesh forbid the consumption of alcohol by Muslims. The beer drinking that persists on the subcontinent is largely associated with the British legacy. Bangalore, the beer capital of India, grew into a major city only after the establishment of a British garrison, and it has since become the country's high tech capital. In the north, Punjabis often drink beer and wine at roadside stalls, perhaps using travel as a way to evade moral restrictions, and these informal pubs are often decorated with Union Jacks and other colonial memorabilia (Karnad 2012).[8] The survival of a brewery in Muslim Pakistan has been attributed by newspaper editor Rashed Rahman to "vaguely affectionate memories of the British Raj. 'Everyone knows that when the gora sahibs ["white masters"] were here the beer . . . was the only thing that stopped them from going nuts in the heat,' he jokes" (Foreman 2012).

FIGURE 2: *Kirin beer advertisement in a Korean newspaper fosters pan-Asian strength through the consumption of western-style beer.*
DONGA ILBO, MARCH 11, 1927. MY THANKS TO JAY KIM AND CHI HOON KIM.

The presence of beer in Asia demonstrates both the importance of western products in establishing colonial hierarchies and the diversity of colonial experiences. While beer reinforced British distinctiveness in India, German and Japanese merchants saw the advantage of selling beer to local populations. More local research is needed to understand the ways subaltern populations in South Asia perceived beer, especially because of its previous associations with marginalized "tribal" peoples. Ultimately, the colonial associations of beer seem to have created oppositional cultures that contributed to the spread of nationalism, at least in East Asia.

Nation

Nation building, like imperialism, pursued at times opposing ends, simultaneously seeking to domesticate the foreign by accommodating it to local cultural practices and to nationalize the masses by homogenizing those same local cultures. For Japan, the localization of beer was slowed by the desire for status through the consumption of European culture, even after breweries had begun to source raw materials locally and consolidate national markets. The Chinese recognized the foreign origins of beer, but demanded a local product to overcome the taint of western and Japanese imperialism, and to this day, beer markets in China remain stubbornly regional. Brewing in India has still not overcome imperialist associations, and regionalism remains prominent despite the predominance of a single firm, United Breweries. These diverse outcomes show how beer fit within nationalist narratives, at least for those already predisposed to celebrate with alcoholic drinks.

Japanese modernization followed a top-down agenda under the Emperor Meiji (r. 1868–1912), driven by young samurai behind the throne who feared that failing to adopt western technology and culture would leave the country, like India and China, as victims of European imperial powers. Reformers condemned traditional customs such as the Buddhist taboo against beef, a staple of vigorous westerners. The Meiji government took the initiative in setting up what became the Sapporo Brewery at the Hokkaido Agricultural Research Station in 1876. Kuroda Kiyotaka, director of the Hokkaido development plan and later minister of agriculture and prime minister, declared that beer was the "beverage of the new era" (Alexander 2013: 33).[9]

The historian Harald Fuess has shown the importance of German technicians and styles in founding the Japanese brewing industry. Students went abroad to study western brewing, interning with such renowned firms as the Tivoli Brauerei in Berlin. The government recruited German experts to run the model brewery at Sapporo, while the Japan Brewing Company insisted in its business plan on retaining a "German brewmaster," even though the company was financed and managed by British interests. Fuess has not yet fully explained why the Japanese were so adamant in following German brewing practices and suggests the general recognition of their technical superiority (Fuess 2003: 238–39, 245–58). Central European lager was indeed coming to dominate the late nineteenth-century global brewing industry, notwithstanding the prominent role of British investment capital (Wilson and Gourvish 1990: 122–37).

Japanese breweries insisted on the German authenticity of their products, even as they consolidated production and nationalized commodity chains. Although many entrepreneurs started brewing under Meiji, two *zaibatsu* (business concerns) dominated the market upon the emperor's death in 1912. Kirin, successor to the Japan Brewing Company, was named after a mythological beast, half horse and half dragon, and affiliated with Mitsubishi. A rival concern, Mitsui, unified three regional brands—Sapporo (privatized in 1886), Asahi (from Osaka), and Yebisu (Tokyo)—to form the Dai Nippon Brewing Company (Alexander 2013: 56–64). Kirin sold at a premium, in part because of the quality of imported malt and hops, carefully overseen by a German brewmaster. Dai Nippon pioneered efforts to source ingredients locally, and when traditional suppliers were cut off during World War I, Kirin also brought in a German-American expert to malt Japanese barley. By the late 1920s, brewers had largely freed themselves of expensive foreign malts, although they continued to import hops from Europe and North America (ibid.: 59–61; Small 1980: 676–86; Haas 2003: 14–29).

Drinking cultures emphasized the exotic modernity of beer, as the historian Penelope Francks has shown. Beer halls and cafes, demarcated with western-style tables and chairs, appealed to the denizens of a new Japan, the *salaryman* (white-collar worker) and the *modan gāru* (modern girl). The traditional geisha, although used prominently in beer advertisements, was largely unattainable for the young salaryman, who eroticized instead café waitresses who served beer and other foreign beverages. Advertisers also used images of flappers with bobbed hair to further cement the association between modernity and the foreign beverage. Beer drinking was generally a masculine activity in Japan during this period, and women did not become regular consumers of beer until after World War II (Francks 2009: 158; Tipton 2000: 127–28; Alexander 2013: 185).

One masculine space for localizing western taste for beer and other products was military service. The historian Katarzyna Cwiertka has shown how the Japanese government used dietary reform to strengthen its troops, and beer featured prominently in military rations. Already during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, a journalist following the army at Port Arthur observed: "The path of the army can be traced by beer bottles—Asahi, Yebisu, Kabuta and Saporo [*sic*]" (Barry 1905: 108; Cwiertka 2006: 56–86; Kirin Bīru 1984: 129, 139, 185, 217). A newspaper advertisement from 1932 showed cartoon soldiers assaulting the enemy using a giant bottle of Kirin lager as a battering ram, a humorous reference to the fighting in Manchuria that reached its apex in World War II (Alexander 2013: 131).

The nationalization of Japanese beer culminated in the postwar era, long after the consolidation of national markets, through the embrace of local styles and access to all levels of society. The historian Jeffrey Alexander has explained that wartime rations of beer instead of sake, whose brewing was banned to save rice, instilled a widespread taste for beer, one that continued to grow as rising incomes made it more widely available. In the postwar era, Germany lost its cultural sway, for beer or anything else, allowing beer makers to emphasize Japanese qualities, particularly a shift toward lighter adjunct lagers. Advertisements of the 1950s and 1960s featured local personalities rather than either traditional geisha or westernized flappers. The "dry beer" phenomenon, introduced by Asahi in 1987 before spreading to the West, established Japan as a pioneer in brewing styles and technology (ibid.: 112–22, 143, 156, 176).

In China, beer was initially perceived through the lens of empire, and its nationalization was crucial for local acceptance. In 1906, three years after the founding of the brewery in Qingdao, a German journalist reported enthusiastically: "In China as in Korea, the local population is turning ever more toward a taste for beer (Biergenuß)" ("Bierbrauerei und Bierexport Japans" 1906: 339). Observers cautioned, however, that foreigners generally consumed German beer, while the local population preferred Japanese brands, a dualistic market that was attributed largely to price (*Berichte de K. u. K. Österr.-Ung* 1908, vol. 3: 37; "Beer Not Popular Among Chinese" 1912: 43). Cost certainly mattered, but a study of the Tsingtao Brewery by the historian Zhigou Yang showed the Japanese to be far more aware of local marketing culture than the Germans had been. Under Dai Nippon, advertisements for Tsingtao beer emphasized the local source of the water at Mount Laoshan, a renowned Daoist sanctuary, and replaced German brand names with auspicious Chinese phrases such as "Fortune and Longevity" (Yang 2007).

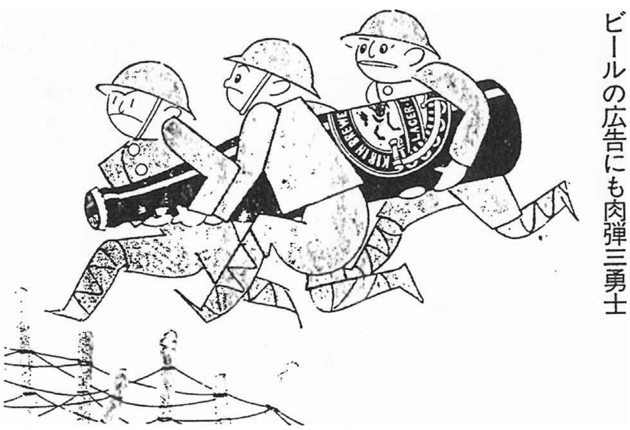

FIGURE 3: *Kirin beer advertisement humorously evoking the sacrifices of three Japanese soldiers who had carried a bomb against the enemy trenches.*

OSAKA *MAINICHI SHIMBUN*, APRIL 21, 1932. AUTHOR'S THANKS TO MICHAEL ROELLINGHOFF.

There is little research on the introduction of beer to Chinese drinking cultures, but Hanchao Lu's social history of early twentieth-century Shanghai described *pulou guan*, proletarian restaurants serving porridge, noodles, or "vegetable rice" to rickshaw pullers, coolies, students, and white-collar workers. These establishments did not serve alcohol but did permit customers to bring their own bottles from nearby wine shops, which stocked bottled beer along with Chinese wines and distilled spirits. Those who could not afford a full bottle had the option of purchasing amounts as small as fifty grams, although they had to provide their own cups. Thus, the Chinese tended to drink beer in familiar settings rather than westernized beer halls (Lu 1999: 259–62).

Nationalism also dictated the choice of brands, particularly as conflicts escalated with Japan. A boycott of Japanese goods organized in 1920 to protest the continued occupation of Qingdao inspired a group of Shanghai businessmen to import brewing machinery and expertise from the United States. Their spokesmen declared: "Loyal Chinese have boycotted all things Japanese and intend to carry the boycott to beer" ("Beer and Boycott" 1920: 222). By the mid-1920s, Chinese-owned breweries included the Li Chuan Brewery in Yantai, near Qingdao, the Five Star of Beijing, the Hsing Hsi of Tianjin, and the Li Yuan of Hangchow (Woodhead 1926: 171–71; Godley 1986: 383–409). Japan's renewed militarism in the 1930s further discouraged beer exports both to China and to Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia (*Journal of the Institute of Brewing* 1932: 384; "Refrigerating Installations in the Union Brewery at Shanghai" 1937: 33).

Even if limited mostly to port cities, beer had become Chinese enough to survive after the Communist Revolution of 1949. According to Yang, the Party saw Tsingtao beer as an important source of foreign exchange with diasporic populations in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Beginning in 1978, with the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, it was even exported to the United States (Yang 2007: 43–47).[10] Nor was

FIGURE 4: *The Tsingtao brewery, founded in 1903, with its iconic German architecture and a Chinese-English sign reading: "Tsing Tao Beer can give you passion and happiness."*
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY PILCHER © 2013

domestic consumption discouraged by the Maoist regime; ninety breweries operated around the country at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Demand clearly exceeded supply, and production grew rapidly after Mao's death. "Literally hundreds of small breweries emerged from the rice paddies," explained the economist Bai Junfei. "Most were state owned at the county level. A county's beer factory frequently was its status symbol" (Bai et al. 2011: 268).

As the Chinese market grew, new encounters with beer at times echoed Japanese reactions a century earlier. One informant recalled first consuming beer as a youth and thinking at the time that it tasted like "horse piss." Later, as he and his friends drank beer more frequently, they came to perceive its taste within the category of "grain (*fan*)."[11] Beer was thus localized within the structures of Chinese cuisine.

In South Asia, where alcohol was discouraged by both Hindus and Muslims, the brewing industry came under native management only after independence in 1947. The biotech entrepreneur Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw has described her father's experience as India's first brewmaster, having graduated in 1946 from the fermentation program at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. R. I. Mazumdar returned home in time to become general manager of United Breweries, which had been constituted in 1915 through the merger of small regional breweries catering primarily to British troops. Once again, industrial consolidation preceded localization. "Mazzy," an Anglicized chap, began each day "mashing-in" the brew, then played a round of golf before breakfast. Over the following decades, he oversaw the company's growth, establishing Kingfisher Lager as the premier national brand (Mazumdar-Shaw 2000: xii–xiii).

The Murree Brewery had quite a different experience in predominantly Muslim Pakistan. Founded in 1860 at a Punjabi hill station, Murree's lager won a prize at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867. The company survived for decades after independence through a loophole in the law forbidding Muslims from drinking, except for medicinal purposes with a doctor's certificate. Even the declaration of complete prohibition in 1977 left widespread bootlegging and illicit drinking, particularly among the Anglophone elite. A government decree closing the company was overturned by the courts as an attack on the minority rights of its Parsee owners. Nevertheless, the rising pressure of fundamentalism at home led Murree to pursue overseas expansion through the South Asian diasporic restaurant market. As chief executive Isphanyar Bhandara explained: "I would like to get this very famous name—it is, after all, a British legacy—on to the streets of the UK. My aim would be to put it in the ethnic restaurants and give the Indian beers, which totally suck, a run for their money" (Crilly 2011; Foreman 2012).

Unlike the United States, where nineteenth-century "shipping brewers" from Milwaukee and St. Louis consolidated national markets with a distinctive adjunct lager, the nationalization of Asian brewing was more disjointed. Japanese *zaibatsu* dominated markets already in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the desire for authentic German beer and competition for rice supplies delayed the spread of a localized adjunct lager until the postwar era. In China, where foreign brewers long dominated production, advertisers had to be sensitive to local consumers in urban markets where nationalist sensibilities were at their strongest. Native beer drinking in India, by contrast, was, and still is, concentrated among those most closely tied to foreign people and goods. Although these economic and social considerations were important in shaping the rise of Asian beer markets, taste also played a significant role.

Taste

One of the great challenges of food studies has been to analyze the connections between taste as an individual physical experience and as a collective social category—between what tastes good and who has good taste. The historian of science Steven Shapin has recently called for studying the intersubjectivity of taste by way of "ethnographies—contemporary and historical—of how taste judgments come to be formed, discussed, and sometimes shared" (Shapin 2011: 177). European beer in Asia presents a valuable case study for such a project by providing rich metaphors, including physical objects such as "horse piss" and "grain" as well as the metaphysical concepts of "strength" and "luxury," whose experiences blended together through narratives of taste.

Communities of taste are perhaps clearest among transnational brewing professionals, who employed chemical analysis and sensory experience to judge their products. A brewing journal commented on the German influence on two Japanese brands in 1897: "The concentration corresponds with that of Bavarian lager beer, and the high attenuation with that of North German beers. In flavor, the Yebisu is vinous, whilst that of the Asahi beer recalls apple must (due to pasteurization)" ("Beer, Japanese" 1897: 347). Taste was also crucial in marketing beer, and a Japanese agent described a blind tasting comparison with a Lipton Tea representative in British Calcutta: "Now, I knew the taste of Kirin Beer more than any, especially because the beer sample was fresh. At any rate, both the manager and I drank and drew the same conclusion as to which one was the best" (quoted in Alexander 2013: 72). The agent's seeming relief about freshness, and the probable lack of it in the samples analyzed in Europe, suggest early industrial limitations on quality control and preservation.

For cross-cultural encounters, nonprofessional judgments are also useful because of their untrained responses. Was the meaning of "horse piss" to a Tokugawa official perhaps an indication of the cultural inedibility of the foreign beverage, and by extension, the foreigners? The Chinese informant a century later likely recognized beer as edible, and the similar statement may have been a judgment about the quality of the beer.[12] Even today, many regional Chinese breweries fall far short of the technical standards of global firms (Clissold 2004: 153–54).

A stale keg of export ale may well have shown some resemblance to equine urine—beyond just the color. Even if observers had never actually tasted horse piss, they certainly had seen and smelled it by living in a pre-automobile society. Draft horses were part of everyday life, and the yellow streams and ammonia fumes were a public nuisance and, if concentrated, a genuine health hazard. The contents of India pale ale made this comparison even more probable, as the brewing scientist Charles Bamforth observed: "Hop bitter acids by no means kill all organisms, and the most prolific inhabitant of those casks bouncing on the ocean waves was *Brettanomyces* (a genus of yeast). The typical flavor notes produced by this organism are 'barnyard' or 'mousy'" (Bamforth 2009: 65).

Although "Brett" is still common in the Belgian farmhouse ales that have recently gained an international cult following, barnyard flavors were likely perceived as backward and inferior, contributing to the preference for lager beers. Even the British editors of the *Brewers' Journal* recognized their ales contained "too much alcohol, too much sediment, too much hops and too little gas."[13] By neutralizing off flavors and offering a crisp, clear product, Central European brewers imbued lager with a taste of purity and modernity.[14]

The blandness of lager beer seems also to have fit with cultural associations of proper foods, as indicated by the

Chinese informant's revealing suggestion that beer came to taste like grain. Elisabeth and Paul Rozin have defined the concept of "flavor principles" as particular combinations of ingredients used commonly in local cuisines, for example, black beans and garlic in southern China. The Rozins suggested that familiar tastes facilitated the historical introduction of exotic crops, which surely oversimplifies complex processes of cross-cultural exchange (Rozin and Rozin 1981: 6–14). Nevertheless, the structural logic of Chinese cuisine, particularly the quest for balance, provides clues as to how beer came to be perceived within the category of grain. Rice, noodles, and other grain foods, known collectively as *fan*, are believed to provide a neutral—indeed, bland—foundation for more highly flavored relishes, which, according to cultural beliefs, should never overwhelm the grain. That beer fit into this category is also suggested by the early practice, before mugs became common, of drinking it out of rice bowls instead of tea cups.[15]

Yet there was no unitary Asian taste for beer, even within particular local cultures, and the preference for blandness was often balanced by a desire for strength. Beer's association with western modernity came partly from the supposed robustness of European imperialists, as reflected in Kirin advertisements. Alcoholic strength was a particular important selling point in South Asia because of low incomes. Punjabi officials subsidized breweries in the early 1970s to wean drinkers off distilled spirits, only to be frustrated by persistent bootlegging ("Where Spirits Command" 1975: 854). Firms touted the great strength of their brands such as Mysore Breweries Limited's "Knock Out/High Punch/Strong Beer," while carefully staying below legal limits, which varied by state between 5 and 8 percent alcohol.

Cost made luxury another metaphor for the "taste" of beer throughout South and East Asia. A recent ethnographic study in Kerala, India, noted the aspirational image of beer among poor male youth, one of whom explained: "You go to a beer parlor and have beer, that is *ash-push* ['intense enjoyment']" (Lukose 2005: 926). Another scholar recorded the complaints of a villager in Zhejiang, China: "In the past, the countryside was well governed, but the officials we've got now spend all their time smoking expensive cigarettes and drinking beer that costs 2.5 *yuan* a bottle" (Sargeson 2002: 952). Advertising clearly helped create these tastes of luxury; for example, an Indian beer brand, Sand Pipers, increased consumption tenfold in the mid-1990s by replacing brown bottles with green, wrapping gold foil over the stopper, and adopting the slogan "champagne of beers" (Majumdar 1998: 89).

Diasporic communities also helped establish tastes for beer in Asia. Already in the early decades of the twentieth century, overseas Chinese merchants helped spread—and at times boycott—Tsingtao beer. One of the fastest growing brands in contemporary India, Cobra Beer, was created for the overseas restaurant market in the 1980s. Once established as a premium brand in British curry houses, its sales took off on the subcontinent as well (Bhatt 2007: 73–81). The craft beer phenomenon has likewise spread to China and Singapore through ethnic Chinese from North America as well as Anglo expatriates.

Shared communities and narratives of taste for beer emerged in Asia in response to the social experiences of empire and nation as well as the physical experiences of flavor. Japanese rejected British pale ale but embraced German lager not only because of changing attitudes toward foreignness but also because lager's lighter flavors fit the local palate and evoked an imagine of modernity. These "intersubjective" judgments took shape not only among professional brewers but also consumers, and tastes in turn helped shape Asian encounters with empire and nation.

Conclusion

The advance of western beer across Asia demonstrates firstly the cultural power of localization, which is not surprising given the long history of Asian civilizations absorbing foreign conquerors. Japan sought out beer most aggressively as part of a modernizing project and eventually used the beverage to support its imperial ambitions. Nationalist associations were also crucial to the adoption of beer in China, and to this day, brands still have fairly strong local identities.[16] India was the most reluctant of the three societies to embrace beer, both because of a long history of temperance and the imperial associations; consumption today is highest in western-oriented cities. These diverse examples illustrate how taste is culturally produced in relation to bodies, material objects, power relations, and places.

Ultimately, the dichotomy between localization and cultural imperialism cannot fully explain the social meanings of beer in Asia. Although scholars have attributed the Japanese embrace of German models to foreign emulation, the preference for Central European lager over British ale could well be seen as a form of localization that fit with tastes for pure, light flavors. The continued evolution of ever-lighter local beer styles, and the spread of Japanese "dry beer" to North America in the 1980s, demonstrates that Asians now shape global as well as local beer styles. Industrial consolidation and market growth outside of Europe and North America have now placed the world's best-selling brands under Brazilian (AB-Inbev), South African (SABMiller), and Chinese (CR Snow, Tsingtao, Yanjing) management.[17]

FIGURE 5: *Craft beer in the Chinese diaspora. Singapore hawker court vendor selling Dead Guy Ale from the Rogue Brewery of Oregon.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK HALPERN © 2014

The case of beer also helps to problematize the spread of nationalism in Asia. The historian Mark Swislocki, writing about food in Shanghai, demonstrated the active construction of regionalism within Chinese culinary identities in opposition to western influences, even in that most westernized of Chinese cities (Swislocki 2009). Beer clearly maintained an identity distinct from Chinese or other Asian traditions, but it was nevertheless incorporated into nationalist imagery, and not only in advertising campaigns. Indeed, beer has become a subject for nation-building efforts in Asia precisely because of its cosmopolitanism, its distinctiveness from the nation, which could simultaneously grant modern status to nationalist ideologues and support their program of transcending regional rivalries, all in a frothy glass.

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NOTES

1. Dutch sailors, exempt from the ban on foreigners, had earlier presented the Shogun's court with beer, but seem to have left no tasting notes.
2. Compare Friedman (2000) and Watson (1997).
3. See also Norton (2006) and Fitzgerald and Petrick (2008).
4. *Journal of the Brewing Society of Japan*, available at www.jstage.jst.go.jp/browse/jbrewsocjapan (accessed May 7, 2015).
5. This transition is described by Purinton (forthcoming).
6. On colonial ambivalence, see Sengupta (2010), Leong-Salobir (2011), and Peters (2012).

7. On Japanese assimilation campaigns, see Uchida (2011).
8. Krishnendu Ray, personal communication, July 24, 2013. I thank Sanchia de Souza for the Karnad citation.
9. On Meiji culinary modernization, see Cwiertka (2006).
10. Gale Robinson and Marshall Goldberg interview with Roger Horowitz, New York City, April 1, 2013. My thanks to Roger for sharing this source.
11. Qian "Cherry" Wang, ethnographic field notes, Shanghai, China, January 2013.
12. On the distinctions between edibility and palatability, see Long (2003: 32-33).
13. Quote from Wilson (1998: 100).
14. Mexican tequila producers sought to cleanse the sour, viscous flavors of indigenous *pulque*. See Orozco (2014: 185–209).
15. Images of drinking beer from rice bowls are displayed at the Tsingtao Beer Museum, Qingdao, China.
16. Yong Chen, personal communication, July 30, 2013.
17. "Top Ten Biggest Beer Brands," available at www.thedrinksbusiness.com/2014/08/top-10-biggest-beer-brands-2/ (accessed January 17, 2015).

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