

Padua 2017 Abstract Submission

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

Corresponding Author

Richard Yntema

E-Mail

Ryntema@Otterbein.edu

Affiliation

Otterbein University

Keywords

Political economy of alcohol; History of distilling; Historic alcohol consumption; Taxation and alcohol consumption

Research Question

How did Holland's distilling industry develop in the 17th century and what accounts for the emergence and growth of grain distillation, that eventually gave rise to the British gin craze?

Methods

Historical. Qualitative and quantitative evidence is used to trace how the consumption and production of distilled liquors developed in the early 17th century and became widespread by the 1690s.

Results

This research sheds new light on the growth and organization of the distilling industry and the role that interest groups played influencing the shift toward the consumption of distilled liquor.

Abstract

Despite the prosperity and significance of Holland's distilling (jenever) industry in the 18th century, relatively little is known about the history and origins of Holland's distilling industry in the first half of the 17th century. While the production and per capita consumption of distilled liquors was negligible in the late 16th century, an era when distilled liquor was primarily prescribed as a medicine, by the end of the 17th century the production and consumption of distilled liquor skyrocketed and became widespread across Northern Europe in the 18th century. The best known example illustrating this phenomenon is the well-known "gin craze" that swept across England, especially London, in the 1730s and 1740s, giving rise to widespread social problems and one of the era's most important social questions.

Given the lack of readily available data, when and why the per capita consumption of distilled liquor changed in the Dutch Republic is a mystery. In the literature, it is typically argued that Holland's distilling industry emerged as a result of the growing wine trade with France in the early 17th century, primarily as a means of processing damaged wines. In this way, the Dutch domestic distilling industry came to compete with the emerging French brandy distilling industry. Nonetheless, it is argued in the literature that French produced brandies dominated in the Dutch market until the Dutch introduced tariffs on French brandies as wars broke out between France and the Dutch Republic. While there were several tariff rounds in second half of the seventeenth century, it was only in the 1690s with the struggle against Louis XIV that the consumption of French brandies fell out of favor in Holland –for patriotic reasons and due to the higher price. At this time, Dutch consumers and producers increasingly turned to grain based distillates, including especially Dutch jenever, that was to become inextricably linked with the English gin craze of the 1730s and 1740s.

The early growth of the consumption of French brandies, and distilled liquor more generally, has been documented in a number of recent studies. As the importation of French wines into Amsterdam and Rotterdam by Dutch merchants increased in the early decades of the 17th century, the importation of distilled liquor also increased. Since data from custom records aside from a few years is lacking for Holland, the growing importation of French (and to a lesser extent other brandies) has been documented based on evidence drawn from notarial records. In

addition to Dutch sources, French data also shows that significant quantities and different types of brandies were exported to Holland throughout this period.

While it is clear that there was a rich trade in imported brandies into Holland, what kind of liquors were distilled in Holland in this period and what was the rate and timing of the industry's growth? More particularly, given the spectacular growth and prosperity of the Dutch gin (jenever) industry in the 18th century, what are then the roots of Holland's grain based distilling industry? In other words, while Holland's distillers are typically assumed to have predominantly made distilled liquor from imported (French) wines before the late 17th century, when and why, then, did grain based distilling emerge? Given the limited readily available archival evidence, definitive answers to such questions have proven to be much more elusive. This paper then raises the question if the market for distilled liquor in Holland was in fact richer and more diverse than has been typically assumed.

Drawing on new archival data and the existing literature, this paper sheds light on the dynamics of Holland's distilling industry's early development. In particular, the paper focuses on the history of Holland's distilling industry starting in the 1630s and 1640s by focusing on the distillers' guilds. The organization, official recognition, and lobbying activities of the distillers' guilds, especially in Rotterdam, the most important center for the industry until it was eclipsed by Schiedam in the 18th century, provide a unique window into the history of industry's early development. The actions of the Rotterdam distiller's guild, especially in its interactions with the town government and with the tax farmers in negotiating the annual payments of the excise on distilled liquor, provide new insight into the workings and size of the distilling industry before the mid-17th century.

This analysis of the political economy of distilling builds on earlier work that has underscored the role played by Dutch wine merchants in Amsterdam and Rotterdam in helping to establish and develop distilling in the Dutch Republic and in France. In this previous work, the emphasis was naturally on wine and wine based brandies. This paper shifts the focus away from the role played by wine merchants in financing, organizing, and developing the wine and brandy trades, focusing instead on the aims and objectives of the distillers as they sought to promote their well-being. Consequently, by focusing on the producers rather than on the merchants, this research sheds new light on the growth and organization of the distilling industry in Holland and the role that interest groups played influencing the shift toward the consumption of distilled liquor.