

FEATURE

Tea Culture and Sino-American Tea Connections

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Abstract

Tea is one of man's favorite beverages. It has a very long history. China is the homeland to tea. Approximately half of the world population drinks tea as a daily routine. No matter in the East or in the West, in Asia or America, tea is enjoyed by broad spectrum of patrons everywhere.

Several thousand years ago, the ethnic tribes living in China's Southwest used tea for medical treatment. Later, tea was found to be suitable for drinking, so tea gradually became a beverage available across the country.

In Tang Dynasty, tea drinking was in full flourish. It was a widespread social custom of the day. Officials and the people in the street, poets and painters, monks and hermits, just about everyone took to tea drinking despite their social status. It was not only a daily need, but also a part of the general lifestyle of the times.

Tea culture was formed by accumulating through numerous generations of tea activities. It has its origin in the remote ancient times with a long course of development. Tea culture is all the more prosperous as China is now experiencing a series social transformation on an unprecedented scale.



Tea is man's favorite beverage. It has a long history. Originated in China, as early as remote ancient times, tea trees were discovered by the ethnic tribes living in the regions what are today's Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces in Southwestern China.

Tea was first used as herbal medicine for treatment. It became a daily drink at later times. In the meantime, tea traversed ages from wild plants to cultivated growth. In the primitive ages of the long past, there lived the Beng Long people in China's Southwestern frontiers where the Lan Cang Jiang River flows past. They worshipped and paid ritual tribute to tea trees, eulogizing this totem deity with all their beautiful poetic words.

Ten millenniums have passed since then. Today tea is a favorite beverage to people all over the world. Half the population on the earth drink tea. In both the East and West tea's social functions have become all the more evident. Tea culture is flourishing with each passing day.

Tea trade between China and the United States could be traced back to the period of North American Colonies and continued after the founding of the United States.

Tea was first brought to North America by the Dutch well before the American Revolution. Later, the British monopolized the business and levied heavy tax on tea shipped from England to the Colonies, severely hurting the interests of the local merchants and the consumers. This gave rise to the well-known 'Boston Tea Party' incident, which eventually led to the War of Independence.

After the victory of the Revolution, in 1784, the American freighter 'China Queen' sailed for the first time to South China's business center Guangzhou and brought a great quantity of tea back to the states. Direct tea trade between the two countries created a big profit for American businessmen.

The large quantities of tea from China furthered the tea drinking habits of the American people. The hot tea was turned into a cold drink as to accommodate itself to the people under item the local circumstances. Canned or bottled tea has become a hot sale for the general public.

In the recent years, the Americans pay a great deal of attention to tea's function as health benefits. Research work is being carried out at universities and research institutions trying to extract from tea certain disease-preventing and disease-curing elements. Tea culture exchanges between China and the United States is making fast progress. The Chinese tea and tea culture are so rich in the Oriental charms that they would naturally make contributions to the multi-racial American culture.

The merits of tea are recognized by both the Chinese and American people. In the new millennium, people have come to realize the significance of tea in their pursuit of green food. Tea is a treasure to the human race.

China-Homeland of Tea

Tea, coffee and cola are three major beverages widely consumed in the world. Tea has a long history behind it. Tea drinking is a culture that has far-reaching ramifications in both East and West involving daily life, social activities,

and health preserving as well as economic development.

China is the homeland to tea, where tea trees initially grew and were cultivated. Historic records as well as material pieces of evidence show that Southwest China is the cradle to tea trees. Approximately four to five thousand years ago tea was discovered by the ethnic tribes there for disease curing and then for daily consumption. Today wild trees as high as thirty meters are found in China's Yunnan province, which are believed to be 1,700 years of age.

The numerable records the history, cultivation, preparation and habits of tea drinking. The most important writings about tea is the "Tea Classics" by Lu Yu of the Tang Dynasty (618 A.D. - 907 A.D). After a decade of diligent studies Lu Yu completed his "Tea Classics" and put it into print in 780 A.D. It was a detailed narration about history, areas of growth, function, cultivation, preparation and habits of tea drinking, the first and best works of the kind in the world, which has extensive and far-reaching influence in the author's time as well as the ages afterwards. Consequentially, Lu Yu was revered as the "Tea Saint."

The history of tea drinking can be traced back to the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, approximately four to five thousand years ago. It was recorded in the famous *Shennong Bencao Jin* (Emperor Shennong's Herbal Classics) that Emperor Shengnong had tasted hundreds of different herbs. Sometimes he encountered twelve poisonous herbs in one single day. By swallowing tealeaves, he successively neutralized the poisonous herbs. Later in the Tang Dynasty tea drinking become a social vogue. Tea drinking was a pleasurable social custom from the royal family and courtiers on down to people at grass root levels. Habits of tea drinking were so widespread that it was regarded as an enjoyable daily social ritual among officials, monks, poets, painters, men of letters as well as the reclusive hermits. Intellectuals of those ages left behind a great volume of poems, chimed

verses, songs and ballads, as well as brush painting rolls. Tea drinking was not just some social custom. It was regarded as the high fashion, from which were derived Tea Rituals and Tea Arts. Over the long years Tea Rituals and Tea Arts were introduced to Japan, Korea and then to the Middle East through economic and cultural exchanges.

There are varieties of tea. Different kinds of tea acquired different names due to different ways of classifying.

Tea is given a special name according to some specific season in which tea leaves are picked such as Mingqian (Pure Brightness, i.e. early April in the lunar calendar) or Yuqian (Pre-Grain Rain, i.e. 6th solar term around May in the lunar calendar).

Tea can also be classified according to the method it is treated such as Caoqing (Fry Green) or Hongqing (Baked Green).

Tea is also named according to the various places where it is grown. Hence Longjing Tea (Dragon Well Tea) from Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province, Qimen Tea from Anhui Province and the Taihu Biluo Cun from Lake Taihu of Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces.

Green tea takes up the best part of China's overall tea production, which comprises 70% of world's total tea output. Black tea is the mainstay on the international tea market. Oolong Tea is primarily a product from Fujian and Taiwan. White Tea, Yellow Tea and Black Tea are specialties of Hunan Province and Sichuan Province. Scented Tea is a special member in the tea family. Jasmine Tea is the internationally known scented tea for its unique flavor.

Because of such a variety of tea products, tea-drinking habits have been much diversified in the course of history. China is a country composed of multiethnic groups. The way people drink tea, the utensils with which they drink tea varies from place to place, from one ethnic group

*Traversing roads strewn with red and purple
Flowers.*

*Nobody returns home without boasting of an
orgy of tea Sipping.*



to another, all characteristic of each one's distinctive traditions. Since the Tang Dynasty (618 A.D. – 907 A.D.) green porcelain and white porcelain tea utensils have been favorites for tea drinkers all over the country. The Zisha (a purplish red clay) tea utensils, the best of the kind, are loved by scholars and all men of letters for several dynasties, particularly in the Qing Dynasty (1664 A.D. - 1912 A. D.) and afterwards.

Some scholars even joined hands with the craftsmen in the designing and making of tea utensils, integrating their exquisite calligraphy poem-writing, and painting skills with the craftsmen's actual making of those tea pots and tea cups. The participation of the scholars in the tea utensil industry has greatly elevated the social status of the tea utensil products, some of which are so pretty and elegant that they became collectibles and precious treasures.

Over the long course of its historical development knowledge and social customs of tea drinking, the technology of tea-growing and tea-processing spread from China first to her western border areas, then to the Middle East, South Asia, Eastern Europe and Western Europe. In the sixteenth century tea drinking was a fad of the British royal family. The British merchants set up establishments in Xiamen (Amoy) engaging exclusively in tea trade. They called it TEA which was transliterated from the local Fujian (Fukien) dialect 'TE'.

It was the Dutch who first had tea shipped to America. After the Anglo-French War, the East India Company imported a huge quantity of tea to America which was very profitable on the local market. The British government imposed heavy tax on tea shipped from England to the Colony. This caused strong reactions

among the local people. In December 1773, the people of Boston dumped 342 chests of tea from three British freighters into the Bay. This was one of the incidents that led to America's War of Independence. After the founding of the United States of America the young country started direct tea trade with China.

Eastward, tea was introduced from China to Korea, Japan and the various Southeast Asian countries. In the Tang Dynasty, China reached a new peak in its social prosperity. Japan sent one group after another of envoys to learn the Chinese culture. As has been described above, the tea drinking vogue was a widespread one. Everyone took to tea drinking from the emperor, the courtiers, on down to scholars, monks, and people in the streets. The Japanese monks brought back home with them the tea drinking custom. Go Sip Tea has become a Buddhist allegorical saying for the Japanese Zenists. Under the influence of the Chinese tea culture Tea Ceremony and Tea Arts are still going strong in Japan today.

Tea has always been a major item in China's export business. What is exported from China is not just tea or the skills and knowledge related to tea growing, tea processing and tea consumption but also its distinctive tea culture which has been disseminated to all over the world as a social behavior of arts and culture.

Tea Culture on the Rise

A great deal has been accumulated in China's tea heritage through her long lasting tea culture activities, both material and spiritual. The connotations of the tea culture are deep and wide. With the progress of China's Open and Reform policy and also, thanks to the steady growth of economy, China's tea culture and tea business are making great strides on the road of modernization. A prominent phenomenon that catches the tourists' as well as the local people's eyes is the mushrooming of teahouses across the land, particularly in the big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Nanchang, Kunming, Chongqing, and many other cities.

These teahouses have taken on a new look as compared to the ones in the past. For example the City of Hangzhou, home to the well-known Dragon Well tea, is where the China International Tea Culture Research Association is headquartered. In recent years hundreds of teahouses, tea pavilions, tea restaurants, tea stores, and tea arts centers, big and small, have sprung up in every corner of the city. Most of those tea-drinking places are well-equipped and elegantly decorated with exquisitely designed tea drinking stands and antique seats. A great number of the teahouses are located close to the picturesque West Lake, some of them nestling in the nearby quiet mountains, some others overlooking the murmuring waters.

The Dragon Well Tea Chamber, the Grand Buddha Tea store, the Green Ivy Tea Restaurant, and the International Tea Drinkers' Village all sit on the city's top scenic spots. A great portion of West Lake's scenery has something to do with tea. Nowadays the tempo of city life is becoming faster. The social life of the city people is getting busier than ever before. Most people, old and young, are more comfortable with a secluded environment to spend their leisure time or socialize with friends. Cozy and quiet, a teahouse is just what they desperately need. Before, the old style teahouse was a place frequented by the seniors. Today, the contemporary teahouse is a big attraction to the young generation.

The owners of teahouses design and decorate stores by integrating business with culture and art. The South Mountain Tea Arts Chamber is a good example. This teahouse, located at the well-known scenic spot Liu-lang-Wen-ying (Orioles Sing Amid Waves of Willows), is imbued with an air of bygone intellectual flair. The pots and cups as well as other utensils in that teahouse are designed peculiar to certain ages in the past. Poems and pictures by eminent poets and calligraphers are inscribed on its tea utensils. On the walls there hang oil paintings, woodcuts and Chinese brush

paintings by famous artists. This makes the house look like a piece of art work in itself.

Sitting in the Nan Shan (the South Mountain) Teahouse one would feel as if he is seating in an art gallery. A good number of their patrons are celebrities of the local art and literature circles. Many calligraphers and painters from the city and its vicinities frequent this dreamland to sip tea.

The 'tea lady' or tea performer is another attraction of Hangzhou's teahouse. Pretty, knowledgeable and resourceful, Hangzhou tea ladies are well versed in tea business. They are a wonderful combination of hospitality and graceful tranquility, their performance of tea arts are perfect blend of subtle and sensibility. In recent years, competitions have been held to elect the city's top ten performers of tea arts. Pictures of the elected were published in the local newspapers. Some of them have college degrees. One ladies elected from the Green Ivy Teahouse has just recently graduated from a university.

When it comes to holiday or some festival, people would pour out to the city's resorts and tourist attractions. Tea sipping is indispensable during such an outing. Out front of teahouses hang red lanterns and flags with teahouse logos, fluttering in the wind. One gets intoxicated relaxing in a teahouse in such a milieu. At this moment man and nature become one. This reminds us of a nation's long tea culture heritage as depicted by a poet:

*Traversing roads strewn with red and purple
Flowers.*

*Nobody returns home without boasting of an
orgy of tea Sipping.*

In many cities, due to intense competition, teahouses are very serious about creating a cultural ambience of their own. The teahouse in Guanzhou is rich in their peculiar South China cultural tradition. Across the chamber, there wafts the soft and soothing Ling Nan (Guangzhou and its vicinities) music from a

Chinese zither. Amid the far-flung fragrancly of sandalwood joss sticks, the tea guests, tea mugs in hand, rest their body and soul, mesmerized. A poet vividly renders a situation like this in a couplet:

*'Tea Melody' flows like a piece of clouds
floating.*

Gone is my soul with the wild crane vanishing.

Teahouses, no matter in Zhejiang and Jiangsu province on the Pacific coast, or in Chengdu and Kunming of China's Southwest, invite, from time to time, experts of Pingtan (Suzhou dialect storytelling mixed with singing) or Sichuan Opera to give performances for their patrons. This would make their teahouses more attractive and, therefore, more profitable.

The rise of Tea Ceremony and Tea Arts, together with increasing international exchanges in tea culture, are indications that China's tea culture is flourishing again in an entirely new age. Tea Ceremony and Tea Arts have a very long history. They became stagnated only in the recent decades.

Since China adopted the Open and Reform policy twenty years ago, her economy has been developing in leaps and bounds. Living standards of the ordinary people have greatly improved. Tea related activities are gaining momentum as China increases her relations with her overseas counterparts. This gives much impetus to the development of China's Tea Ceremony and Tea Arts, which are nurtured by China's long historical-cultural tradition and supported by today's booming economy.

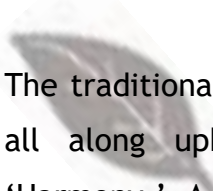
The traditional Chinese culture has been all along upholding the principle of 'Harmony.' A triad concept which was accepted as guidelines by people all over China in the past thousands of years, is expressed in terms of 'Heavenly timeliness, Earthly availableness and Human harmoniousness.' As a famous Chinese old saying goes: "He Wei Gui." That means 'peace or harmony is a sublime policy. The so-called

‘Zhentong Renhe’ (govern wisely and live in harmony) and ‘Xianghe’ (propitiously harmonious) have been all along the idealmoral status as worshipped and pursued generation after generation by the Chinese people.

The concept of ‘Harmony’ is deeply rooted and wonderfully embodied in the colorful Tea Arts - here the word Tea Arts denotes tea making skills and tea connoisseurship. Yet, in a broad sense, Tea Arts is something through which the tea drinkers conduct their spiritual communications with one another. Aesthetically, it is a humanistic enjoyment by way of tea sipping.

Tea Arts performances are also marked with ethnic and regional characteristics involving various aspects of the society-history, religion, ethics, music and dance, painting and calligraphy as well as food and cuisine. It has virtually become an independent, comprehensive system of arts.

For instance, when making Dragon Well Tea, the Tea Arts performers would wear costumes characteristic of Southeast China life style and serve out a round of steaming hot tea accompanied by music from the local bamboo and wire instruments. Familiar to the tea guests, there are classics such as ‘Cunjiang Hua -yue Ye’ (A Moon Lit Night by a Spring Time River Strewn with Flowers) and ‘Yang-guan Sandie’ (The Yang Frontier Pass Refrain). As for the contemporary musicals, you have ‘Caicha Wuqu’ (The Tea Harvest Dance). The tea mugs used on the occasion are glassware through which can be seen the ‘Sparrow Tongue’ like fresh emerald. Green tea leaves accompanied by folk music, the deft Tea Arts performers’ wonderful performances of tea making and tea serving, display of their exceedingly elegant manners, tea, water, container, performance, everything combined, create a real wonderland for the teahouse goers. Tea Arts and tea sipping are always an inspiration and a way of spiritual communications among the tea drinkers.



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The different schools of Tea Ceremony in Asia can be summarized as:

- Japan’s Tea Ceremony boils down to ‘Harmony, Tranquility, Brightness and Solitude.’
- Korea’s Tea Etiquette stands for ‘Courtesy, Respect, Harmony and Love.’
- China’s Tea Culture emphasizes ‘Harmony, Respect, Gratitude and Love’, which are closely linked to the traditional Chinese culture and ethics.

The Chinese tea culture, with all its special charms, has spread far and wide to Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, Europe, and America. Every year, tea culture activities of different themes have been held in Kunming in the Southwest, Guangzhou and Fujian in the South, Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou - a city called by some tea drinkers ‘a brilliant pearl of the contemporary tea culture.’

Some of the tea festivals have become important gatherings for international tea drinkers. The China International Tea Culture Research Association alone has so far sponsored five such international tea culture activities. The 1998 conference held in Hangzhou attracted more



and erupted, thus giving rise to the famous incident 'Boston Tea Party' - the prelude to the War of Independence. After the victory of the American Revolution in 1784, an American freighter the 'China Queen' made her first voyage to China and arrived at the prosperous City of Guangzhou. In May the following year 'China Queen' brought 880,000 lbs. of tea back to New York. More ships were sailing from New York, Philadelphia, and Boston to China. Almost all those

than one thousand tea drinkers from all over five continents. Among them there were about five hundred expert, professors, and businessmen. Also participating were celebrities of the culture circles, tea ceremony and tea performing groups as well as the diplomatic corps in Beijing. Views were exchanged; topics discussed, in regard to the relation and interaction of tea with history, religion, philosophy, medicine, art and literature, science and technology, especially the relationship between tea and social-economic development, including the mood of society.

ships were engaged in tea business. The Chinese people welcomed them. The local people called them 'Hua Qi Guo' (The Motley Flag Country) as the Star-Spangled Banner looked so to them. The Americans liked tea so much that they imported enormous quantities of green tea from China. Tea trade brought the American merchants a great profit. It also helped America's entire sea-faring business to grow. The fastest ship at the time completed her voyage from New York to Guangzhou in 109 days, which was quite a surprise in those days.

Aspiring after a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature in the new millennium, tea drinkers from all over the world are expressing a common wish that tea culture will play a more important role than ever before in the making of a new age.

With large amounts of tea imported direct from China, tea drinking was gradually becoming a widespread occurrence. It has also promoted friendship between the two countries. From the 1890s to the turn of the century tea was the predominant item in China's trade with America. Ninety per cent of the tea consumed in America was green tea from China. India and Ceylon are other two major green tea exporting countries next to China. During the period from the beginning of the 20th century to the founding of the People's Republic of China, due to WWII and economic setback at home, China's tea export business dropped drastically. In the meantime, Japan, India, and Ceylon stepped up

Sino-American Tea Connections

Trade between China and America began with import-export of tea. As is well known, in the very beginning it was the Dutch that shipped tea from China to America. Then the British started dumping their tea onto the new continent, causing a great deal of harm to and anger among the local people. Grievances fermented, built up

their tea export to America. During this period, the great amount of tea America imported was black tea. Tea trade between China and the States prospered once again after President Nixon visited China in 1972.

Take for example the Shanghai's tea export business. In history, the amount of tea exported from Shanghai to the States was second only to what was exported to the United Kingdom. After the 1895 Sino- Japanese War, the average amount of tea exported annually from Shanghai to the States was registered around 10,000 tons, with green tea about 70 to 80% of the total. The rest was black tea and a small percentage was 'tea brick.' In 1895, China's total export of black tea to America was 3,172 tons. Another 8,794 tons of green tea was shipped out of the Port of Shanghai for the States.

In 1902, 5,112 tons of black tea and 7,577 tons of green tea were recorded. Year 1908 saw a slight drop, 4,472 tons of black tea and 6,054 tons of green tea. In recent times, China exported 12,760 tons of black tea to the States in 1986 and 15,000 tons of black tea in 1995. The green tea exported to the States registered an average of 5,000 tons.

Over the years, Chinese tea has become a favorite beverage among American people. In the 18th century, the Americans drank primarily a tea called Wu Yi Yan Cha (a black tea from the Wu Yi Mountain in Fujiang Province on China's Southeast coastline). The Americans in the 19th century took to Chinese green tea. When it comes to the 20th century, the majority of the American people turned to black tea. Since the late 1980s, once again, sales of green tea have begun to climb.

The European immigrants first introduced the tea drinking habits to America. There are two ways of preparation; namely 'Plain Drink' or 'Mixed Drink.' The so-called 'Mixed Drink' is a tea with lemon, sugar, and ice cubes. Today, the majority of the American tea population seems to prefer the 'Mixed Drink.' Due to their life style and eating habits the

Americans convert tea from a hot drink to cold as they would with other beverages - by adding ice cubes to hot tea or simply refrigerating it.

Ice tea is one of the Americans' favorites. Canned or bottled, ice tea is seen everywhere in supermarkets, restaurants and convenient stores. In Hawaii, the local people drink a tea cocktail by adding a portion of black tea to their cocktail. They use only the top grade black tea of the best color, fragrancy and taste so as to achieve the best possible results.

Generally speaking, the Americans are not used to sipping hot tea. But large population of Chinese- American keeps the habit of drinking hot tea. This is especially true for the middle age or older generation. They would sit down to take a sip a cup of steaming hot tea.

More and more Americans have come to recognize tea as a healthful drink. Universities, research institutes and medical organizations are joining hands in carrying out experiments on how tea can be used in the preventive medicine. Tea is a drink rich in vitamin. Every 100 grams of tea contains 100-500 mg of vitamin C. Tea is also rich in many kinds of Animo Acids. One of the elements in tea that have a pharmaceutical value is called tea polyphenol, an element that helps prevent arterially sclerosis, hypertension, and coronary disease. It is also helpful in reducing blood lipid level, treating diarrhea, and weight control.

In China and America, scientists are working hard to tap the function and utilization of tea polyphenol. Tea is also rich in alkaloids and high fat sugar. Tea contains caffeine that can help stimulate the central nervous system, refresh one's mind, and invigorate the mental sharpness. Many Chinese American, professors and writers, while bent on writing their theses in midnight, would like to pour themselves a cup of tea to keep them company. An American writer advises his readers to travel to China to get a taste of the genuine fresh Dragon Well tea: you will feel fresh from head to toe.

In China and America as well, tea is being used as an ingredient in food industry. In New York and elsewhere, you can find the popular tea-mixed ice cream and green tea cake. In China, Tea Banquet is the vogue of the day. Stay in a luxury hotel in Guangzhou or Hangzhou and you will meet a crowd of people who are here to attend a tea banquet.

In recent years, in Europe and America, a good number of experts, scholars, and tea culture enthusiasts have shown great interest in the rising tea culture in China. French TV stations have come to China several times to shoot tea culture special series. The French also organized their tea culture tourist groups to visit China. In the United States, universities and culture circles work together to set up tea culture research societies, which sponsored the international symposium on China Tea Culture Facing 21st Century.

Entering the new millennium, I truly believe that Tea Culture will be more prosperous than ever before. Tea and Tea Culture of the East will make a considerable contribution to America, a multi-cultural country.

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