

A Comparative Study of Tea Customs

UNE ETUDE COMPARATIVE DES CLIENTS DE THE

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Abstract

Tea is becoming more and more popular in this modern time. It is said that people in more than 100 countries and regions all over the world drink tea. However, in different countries, the customs of tea drinking is not the same. In some places, it is taken as an art; in some other places, it is viewed as a way of character cultivation, or a tool of etiquette education. And sometimes, it is just a natural part of daily life. The custom of tea drinking can symbolize culture from which different values and cultural orientations can be learned, which is meaningful to international cultural exchanges. This paper made a comparative study on tea customs in some countries that are typical to represent the main trends of tea drinking.

Key words: Tea customs; Comparative study; Cultural exchanges

Résumé

Le thé est de plus en plus populaire dans cette époque moderne. Il est dit que le thé est bû dans plus de 100 pays et régions du monde boivent. Cependant, dans différents pays, les coutumes de boire du thé n'est pas la même. Dans certains endroits, il est considéré comme un art; dans certains autres endroits, il est considéré comme un moyen de la culture de caractère, ou un outil d'éducation étiquette. Et parfois, il est juste une partie normale de la vie quotidienne. La coutume de boire du thé peut symboliser la culture à partir de laquelle différentes valeurs et des orientations culturelles peut être appris, ce qui est significatif pour le papier exchanges. This

culturelle internationale a fait une étude comparative sur les coutumes de thé dans certains pays qui sont typiques pour représenter les principales tendances de la consommation de thé.

Mots clés: les coutumes de thé; Une étude comparative; Les échanges culturels

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Tea is one of the world's three most popular beverages, and all around the world there are people who drink tea. But tea does not mean the same thing to every culture. In different countries, the customs of tea drinking is not the same because every culture is formed and developed under its own special historical and social conditions.

In some countries, tea drinking is viewed as a combination of material civilization and spiritual civilization. People drink tea not only for quenching their thirst, but also for treating diseases, enjoying visual sense, keeping calm and guiding moral character. In some other countries, tea drinking is just a part of every day life. Along with the development of modern science and technology, traditional way of tea drinking is becoming more scientific and popular, and new forms of "tea" drinking, with no tea leaves, or even no tea taste in the water, are thriving too.

As international exchange is becoming more frequent, cultural communication plays an even more important role in international trade affairs. Therefore, a study of tea customs in different countries is meaningful and necessary in cross-cultural communication.

This paper is to discuss the customs of tea drinking of the traditional character -- drinking tea with tea leaves, in any form, in the tea water.

THE CUSTOMS OF PURE TEA DRINKING

Pure Tea Drinking is to enjoy the taste of the tea itself without any other condiments added into the drinking water. The tea water is made by brewing tea with hot water for a short while. This way of tea drinking originates from China, and is highly recommended in many overseas countries and regions of Oriental culture circle, including the overseas Chinese residing all over the world and Chinese restaurants as well. Traditionally some Oriental countries take tea ceremony as a tool of etiquette education and a way of self-cultivation. It is a kind of harmonious rituals, in the course of which people make tea, appreciate tea, smell tea and drink tea. The ceremony means to promote friendship, refine the mind, consolidate etiquette because people there believe that drinking tea can make them sitting quietly and peacefully, mould their temperament and put a stop to all distracting thoughts. The atmosphere of tea ceremony is in tune with the Oriental philosophy of “quiet”, “peaceful”, and accord with Buddhism and Confucianism’s “introspective practice”. This spirit is the soul of pure tea culture.

The Tea Doctrine of Japan

A typical country that pursues pure tea drinking tradition is Japan. Japanese tea ceremony is a body of moral teachings. “Peace, Respect, Quiet and Restraint” are fundamental spirit of the Japanese tea culture, called “Four Rules of Tea Doctrine”, which ask people to do self-examination through the tea ceremony and communicate with each other to get rid of the grime of inner heart and the ill feelings among them in a quiet teahouse and elegant environment to improve moral sense.

“Peace” and “Respect” are the norms in dealing with interpersonal relationships. “Peace” means peaceful coexistence and harmonious relationship. “Respect” means to be respectful to the elders and hold friends in esteem. “Quiet” is about the atmosphere and environment. Every thing related with tea ceremony should be elegant, quaint and tastefully laid out, resulting in a mood of ethereal edification. “Restraint” is to cleanse one’s heart and limit one’s desires to achieve a lofty spiritual realm.

When tea ceremony is held, the host prepares tea and snacks, and fruit as well to receive guests. Both the host and the guests behave in accordance with fixed rules and procedures. They prize each ceremony with “once in a lifetime” belief, which means even if the attendants and everything are the same, the time can’t be relived. So every ceremony is different. Tea ceremony is to urge people to attach importance to every minute, value everything. It is to link the participants close to each other and produce a feeling of interdependence. This is a kind of feeling easy to result in resonance among the participants and unable to experience in any other occasions than tea ceremony. Therefore, the host will try to leave no stone unturned to the ceremony and the guests will take an

attitude as if there would be no more chance to meet each other again to receive every small ingenuity of the master with sincere heart.

The spirit of ceremony is also extended to the layout of the teahouse, inside and outside, in addition to drinking and eating. The paintings and calligraphys in the room, the horticulture in the garden, the pottery of tea drinking are all the focuses of tea ceremony.

Tea ceremony has cumbersome procedures. The tea is to be ground fine; the pottery is to be wiped clean; the host’s action is to be done standard; the flower is to be arranged according to the season and the status of the guests. After experiencing the whole process, one may feel that it deserves everything done.

When friends arrive, the host should be waiting at the door to welcome them. After they are seated, snacks are offered first for the guests to taste. And then the host will heat water in a charcoal furnace and put the tea into celadon bowl. When the water boils, the host will make tea according to the statutes (a set of complicated rules and the constant repeating of the prescribed motion) while the guests keep silence. After making it, the host will pour tea for guests in turn. When drinking, the guests should inhale the tea and squeak, expressing their appreciation of the tea. After drinking the tea, the guests use their thumbs or clean paper to dry the drinking utensil, and appreciate it carefully while saying “good tea” as a mark of admiration and then they begin to talk with each other. When the ceremony ends and the guests congee. The host would kneel at the side of the door to see them off.

Japanese tea ceremony is handed down from generation to generation until the present. The woman who is adept in tea ceremony before she gets married is often considered to be well-bred. In daily life, the Japanese would have tea to match every meal of the day. Steamed green tea (boiled tea) is their favorite. In recent years oolong tea is gradually becoming popular. And in some places, for example Okinawa, there are some people who like to drink Jasmine scented tea nowadays (“Japanese Tea Ceremony”, 2012).

The Tea Etiquette of Korea

Another country that has the tradition of pure tea drinking is Korea. And tea ceremony is emphasized as a way of education too, though the education is mostly about etiquette. Korean tea etiquette originated from ancient Chinese tea-drinking customs. But it is not a simple copy or transplantation. It brings together the ethics of Confucianism and Taoism, the culture of Zen, and the Korean traditional etiquette in one form to develop a tea culture of its own.

The fundamental spirit of Korean tea ceremony is “sympathy”, “respect”, “frugality” and “honesty”. “Sympathy” requires people to be kind-hearted and sympathize with others. “Respect” means mutual respect and being courteous. “Frugality” refers to being thrifty,

living a simple life. “Honesty” is being sincere, upright. The Korean tea ceremony focuses on etiquette. The whole process has strict norms and procedures to give a quiet, relaxed, elegant, civilized sense.

Korean tea culture has a long history and nowadays May 25 is scheduled as “Tea Day”. The main rituals of this tea festival include Performances of Traditional Tea Ceremony by Korean Tea Ceremony Association, Tea Ceremony of “Grown Up”, Five Elements Tea Ceremony of the Korea times, Xinluo Tea Ceremony and Lu Yu Tea Infusion Method as well by Korea Tea Association.

Grown Up tea ceremony is one of the important activities of the Korea Tea Day. It is an educational ceremony through which the young boys and girls who are coming-of-age 20 will learn traditional Korean culture and etiquette with the purpose of cultivating their sense of social obligation and responsibility.

Five Elements Tea Ceremony of the Korea times is a magnificent rite that shows the process of presenting tea to the tea saint Yan to salute him. The rite represents a kind of Oriental philosophy concerning with the belief of “five”. The followings are some of the examples of the total 12 aspects of the philosophy involved in the ceremony: five steps of etiquette (presenting, making, drinking, eating and enjoying tea), five directions of space (east, south, west, north and middle), five colors of nature (blue, white, purple, black and yellow), five flavors of taste (sour, sweet, bitter, hot and salt), five elements of universe (metal, wood, water, fire and earth), five virtues of man (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and credit) and five styles of tea (yellow, green, red, white and black) etc..

Five Elements Tea Ceremony of the Korea times is a ceremony of national level, reflecting the tea culture of the Korea times. The whole process is full of poetic charms and folk customs.

Besides tea and tea ceremony from China, Korean people have their own traditional “tea” for drinking, which is quite different from Chinese tea. Korean traditional “tea” does not have any tea (leaves) in it at all. Instead, hundreds of other materials, almost everything, can be put into water to make “tea”. The common ones are corn tea, such as barley tea, maize tea and so on; herb tea, such as Schisandra chinensis tea, Lily grass tea and mugwort tea etc.. Almost all fruits, without exception, can be made use of to make fruit tea. Walnut tea, jujube tea, Lotus root tea, Plum tea, persimmon tea, grapefruit tea, orange tea, pomegranate tea are just some of the examples. In recent years, vegetable tea is becoming popular. The raw materials of vegetable tea are the natural plants, such as eggplant, peppers, radishes and so forth.

Korean traditional tea is generally sweet with either sugar or honey added to it. And it is not brewed with hot water, but made by soaking, fermenting or boiling the material for certain time. Sometimes the period of soaking

or fermenting can be as long as one year (“Korean Tea Ceremony”, 2012).

THE CUSTOMS OF FLAVORED TEA DRINKING

The feature of flavored tea is that some kind of flavor or nutrition is added to tea water before drinking. The flavor can be saline taste or sweet taste. The nutrition mainly refers to various milk—milk, goat’s milk, mare’s milk, camel milk etc.. Saline taste flavored tea can be represented by Mongolian milk tea. It is made from brick tea, butter, broth, puffed rice and so on. After boiled in the pot, the water is taken while the residue is removed and used to feed the domestic animals. This kind of flavored tea can add calories, resist cold weather, and make up vitamins. In some places, certain herbal medicine is added to the tea water to treat colds or to relieve summerheat. So it is specially favored by nomadic people who live mainly on meat and lack of vegetables or people who live in the areas that hot weather is common. Sweet taste flavored tea includes green tea and black tea. The flavor of the tea comes from the added sugar or honey or jam or some kind of sweetener.

The Tea Enjoyment of Britain

British people are well-known for their love of drinking tea in the world. Their custom of drinking tea began in the mid seventeenth century. It is said that Queen Anne of the time loved drinking tea and she deeply affected the British culture of drinking tea for breakfast. Later, in around 1840s, Duchess Anna advocated afternoon tea custom. Queen Victoria enjoyed afternoon tea very much and her influence made it spread to urban and rural areas, and finally become a custom of social activity. Now, in social life, it is still suitable for people to relax themselves over a cup of tea together with friends.

English people like drinking rich flavored black tea, adding sugar, milk or lemon in their tea water. They not only pay attention to the taste and quality of tea, but also are particular about the way of enjoying it. They don’t just have one or two same brand of their favorite tea every day. Instead, they try to drink differently every time because they believe that different tea has different functions. Drinking a wider types of tea, you will get a richer variety of nutrients. In order to perk up, they like to drink more intensely tasted India tea or a kind of mixture of several kinds of tea, called “EARL GREY” in the early morning. At afternoon snack time, they like to drink China’s Qimen tea. With fragrant smell and elegant color, this kind of tea is believed to have the function of diluting the greasiness of cream cake. Besides, High Tea should embody elegance and evening tea should be helpful to fall into a natural sleep.

The most unique tea custom in the United Kingdom

is her High Tea culture. British people used to pay more attention to their breakfast, but lunch was not very much emphasized, and not until 8 o'clock in the evening, did dinner begin. The long time interval between breakfast and dinner gave rise to a feeling of fatigue hunger and idleness. To get rid of this feeling, Duchess Anna came up with the idea of refreshing themselves and appeasing their hunger with tea and cake. Gradually, this afternoon tea time (at around 5 o'clock) became a social occasion of friends meeting and enjoying their afternoon time together. On this occasion, tea is only a "prelude". The more important things are enjoying delicious snacks and pleasures of friendship.

Formal High Tea snacks are put on a three-tier rack. The first tier is all sorts of different flavored sandwich (such as ham, cheese flavored tea sandwich), the second is traditional English muffins (scone), the third is small cakes and fruit tower. The snacks should be eaten up from the bottom tier of sandwich to the top tier of cake and fruit tower. In this way, the taste buds will experience the change of flavor from light to heavy, or from weak sweet to strong sweet. In addition to all of these, displaying rare tea set, talking about the tradition of tea drinking and showing English gentleman's easy style are things of interest.

If the High Tea was to kill boring days, to meet the appetite of the Duchess, or to be in a leisurely and carefree mood for those gentlewomen in the past, now the leading role of it is absolutely a relaxation or enjoyment for the public. British people take tea drinking as a dispensing of spirit in the work process in this competing times. And an ordinary woman can make the pastry for tea snacks. Accompanied by congenial friends and favorite tea, a happy feeling of real life can be stirred up by this positive way of passing time (Jia Wen, 2009).

The Tea Drinking of America

It is amazing that more and more people in the United States begin drinking tea nowadays, though coffee is still the most popular drink.

The history of tea drinking in America is not long and the custom of it is out of the ordinary too. The tea consumed in the United States is mainly imported from Argentina, China and some other countries because America does not produce tea. On the market, tea beverage (made through industrial production) is the main commodity but not tea. Tea beverage can be divided into two categories: one is pure tea water (not including any accessories) as if brewed at home, which has a small share in the market; the rest is collectively known as iced tea. Iced tea is flavored tea with various tastes. Tea is the base of iced tea, mixed with multiple other components, including sugar, sour and fruit etc..

Americans like to drink cold tea instead of hot tea because they believe that cold tea does not contain carbon dioxide, has low calorie and little stimulation and is

delightfully tasted. No matter it is tea juice brewed with boiling water, or liquid of soluble instant tea, or canned tea water, they would add ice cake to it or put it into the refrigerator to cool it before drinking. Not only ice but also sugar, lemon, honey, sweet wine etc. are added to adjust the taste. The tea water thus made can be sweet and sour, appetizing and refreshing besides tea aroma. A various kinds of iced tea can be found in the market of the United States. They are mainly canned and made from black tea, green tea, oolong tea of China; some of them are flavored with sugar, and some are sugar-free; still some others are fruity flavored with added supplements. Pure taste tea can also be found in America.

Americans generally pay more attention to the taste of tea water. Nothing else of face value such as the color, the teacup, the teapot, the atmosphere, or the environment etc., in fact, anything of this kind is taken into consideration. So their tea is usually made of tea bags, instant tea or mixed tea powder, and canned or bottled tea water are mostly favored by Americans.

Tea-drinking habits of Americans highlight their characteristics of pragmatism, emphasizing efficiency and seeking convenience. It seems that Americans would not waste their time to make tea, dump tea residue or clean tea utensils. They seem to dislike any trace of tea leaves in the cup either (Zhang, 2004).

TEA IN CHINA

Chinese tea culture has a long history. Originally tea was used as a medicine instead of a drink. It was said that Shennong, the legendary ruler in ancient China, once tasted more than one hundred of plants and was poisoned many times. It was tea that helped him get rid of the poisoning effect. Later the ancient Chinese got to know more and more about tea, and it became a drink instead of a medicine. Tea not only quenches one's thirst, but also helps reduce one's internal heat.

There are mainly six varieties of Chinese tea. They are green tea, black tea, oolong tea, scented tea, white tea and tightly compressed tea.

Green tea refers to tea made without being fermented. It is because the tea liquid and tea leaves are greenish that the tea is thus named. Green tea can help people reduce their inner heat. Many Chinese people drink green tea, and there are many different kinds of green tea. Huangshan *maofeng* tea, Liuan *guapian* tea, Nanjing *yuhua* tea and West Lake *longjing* tea are among the most well-known.

Black tea refers to fermented tea. It is so named because the tea liquid and tealeaves are reddish. It tastes sweet and can facilitate the fostering of *yangqi* in the human body. A lot of Chinese people favor black tea. The most well-known ones are Fujian *gongfu* tea, Anhui *qimen* black tea and Sichuan *chuanhong* tea.

Oolong tea is half-fermented tea. Oolong tea trees

were first found on Wuyi Mountain in Fujian Province. The tea leaves are green in the center and red at the edge. *Oolong*, *tieguanyin* (Iron Goddess Guanyin), *dancong*, and *shuixian*(narcissus) are the most well-known. Oolong tea is an important material of *gongfu* tea. The method of oolong tea drinking is very particular.

Scented tea is made from fragrant flowers. It is produced mainly in Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. The most well-known are jasmine tea, *yulan* flower tea, *zhulan* flower tea, *lotus* flower tea, chrysanthemum tea and rose tea. Jasmine tea is made from jasmine flowers and is the most popular among scented tea.

White tea is non-fermented, non-rubbed, non-scented tea with natural fragrance. It is mainly produced in Zhenghe, Songxi, and Shiji of Fujian Province. The main varieties are *dabai*, *xiaobai*, and *shixian bai*. The most famous is *yinzhen baihao* (silver needle with fine hair on them), which has a history of more than one thousand years. The tealeaves are silver in color and have fine white hair on them, with the tea liquid yellowish in color and sweet in taste.

Tightly compressed tea is made by compressing steamed tealeaves in molds. It is usually shaped like bricks or cakes, so it is also called “brick tea” or “cake tea”. One of the main varieties of this kind is *tuocha*. Among top-grade *tuocha*, there are *Xiaguan tuocha*, *Pu'er tuocha*, and *Sichuan tuocha* (Yang, Wang & Wang, 2006).

China is a multinational country with a vast territory and a large population. Customs from different regions and various nationalities interweave each other into the colorful Chinese tea culture. Although different areas had different tea customs, “Entertain guests with tea” is a basic etiquette all over China. In Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas, green tea is a favorite hospitality; people in Guangdong, Fujian, and Taiwan love oolong tea and Pu'er tea better. Besides, the milk-tea of Mongolian nationality, the three-course tea of the Bai nationality living in Yunnan province and the Mashed tea in Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi Hakka residential area are all of rich ethnic characteristics.

In China, tea is not only used to receive guests, it is also used to meet friends too. Simply, in leisure time, three or five friends would get together, exchanging opinions, talking about ideals and enjoying a harmonious happiness over a cup of tea. More formally, there are various kinds of activities among people who are temperamentally compatible to enjoy tea. The main content of these activities is to enjoy the beauty of tea leaves, the color of tea water, the perfectness of tea heating, the art of tea set and the comfortableness of environment of tea drinking. Chinese tea pays attention to the “mood” and is particular about “taste”. Chinese people prefer drinking slowly and savoring patiently. Accompanied by emotional conditions, a higher level of enjoyment of “taste” and “mood” is to be pursued while thinking about life.

The most unusual thing about Chinese tea is that it is combined with Chinese food and traditional Chinese medicine for the purpose of health care. There are Tea Food and Tea Therapy in China. Tea Food refers to the food with added tea when cooked such as tea porridge, tea biscuits, spiced tea egg, spiced tea dried bean curd, and smoked tea duck etc.. Tea Therapy means tea drink with some Chinese medicine in it as a way of treatment or assist treatment or health care. Tea is believed to have the function of refreshing brain, promoting digestion as well as quenching thirst.

Analysis of modern scientific research has proved that tea contains more than 300 kinds of chemical composition which are beneficial to human health. There are a variety of vitamins, such as vitamin a, b, c, d, e, p, (which are rich), different kinds of amino acid (2-4%) and a large number of rare elements. These are all materials needed by human body. In addition, tea-polyphenols, caffeine and fat polysaccharide, the substances which have multiple medical effects are found in tea leaves too. So, Chinese belief since ancient time that tea can heal toxicosis and treat diseases, preserve one's health and lengthen one's life is proved by modern science. Tea vitamin c can prevent scurvy, have anticancer effect. Vitamin e, p can soften blood vessels, prevent heart disease. Tea Polyphenols can resist toxin, pathogenic bacteria and radiation as well. It can also soften blood vessels, prevent its rupture, stimulate circulation to end stasis, lower blood lipids, prevent thrombosis, and so on and so forth. Besides all of these medical functions, Chinese people believe that tea can bring energy, enhance thinking ability, eliminate fatigue, promote metabolism, maintain normal function of gastrointestinal tract, prevent tooth decay, restrain cell aging, excite central nervous, enhance athletic ability, reduce weight, and improve one's looks in general (“Chinese tea culture”, 2012).

Tea culture is an important part of Chinese culture. In China, tea culture involves many aspects. The study of tea concerns science of tea, art of tea, medicine of tea, trade of tea, tourism of tea, industries of tea and so on. There are monographs on tea leave production, periodicals about tea enjoyment. There are art works related to tea, paintings, novels, poems, stories and tea sets. Moreover, there are ceremonies involving tea such as tea and wedding, tea and worship, tea and religion. In language, there are couplets and idioms, and anecdotes about tea.

As an old Chinese saying goes: KAI MEN QI JIAN SHI, CHAI MI YOU YAN JIANG CU CHA (Seven things are basic necessities for every day life. They are fuel, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar and tea). Tea has become an essential element of Chinese life since long long ago from its original use of medicine, sacrificial offerings and articles of tribute of an early time. There is also another saying about seven basic things a talented person can do or would like to do: QIN QI SHU HUA SHI JIU CHA

(playing musical instrument, having a game of chess, handwriting, painting, composing poem, tasting wine and enjoying tea). So tea is a living necessity in China regardless of the material aspects or the spirit level.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, tea means differently in different cultures. Americans drink tea mainly for health reasons and daily needs as well. It is mainly a beverage of tea. Drinking tea together with friends is an enjoyment of life and a social occasion in Britain. British tea also provides physical and mental relaxation in life and work process. Tea is used as a tool of education in Korea to manifest certain etiquette and opinions of aesthetics as well as spiritual thoughts. Korean tea etiquette is a combination of art and spirit, and the spirit is displayed through the performance of tea art. In Japan, tea ceremony serves as a body of moral teachings. Philosophy and ethics are to be learned through the ceremony. It is a process of self-cultivation and taste of life.

Chinese people began to use tea in their life since an earlier time. Its tea culture is rich and colorful. They melt the ideas of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism together in their tea activities, leaving the room and the choice to people. People at all levels can choose a different form and ideological content of tea from different angles according to their own circumstances and preferences, and can be free to create new activities, so there is no strict organizational forms and sacred rules of the religious order. Quiet, calm, harmonious and beautiful atmosphere is at the core of Chinese tea activities.

What has been discussed above all is just some typical examples concerning tea culture. There are a lot more countries in the world enjoying drinking tea and having their own customs. The mint tea of Morocco has its own

special flavor. The Stretched Tea is peculiar to Singapore. The sweet tea (чай с мёдом) of Russian is unique to its culture.

Tea as a natural health drink is in line with historical trend of world-wide health awareness. Different customs of tea drinking reflect different values and cultural orientation. So learning and understanding tea culture is of important meaning in cross cultural communication in this modern world. It will surely be useful in promoting international cultural exchanges.

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