

The Evolution of Chinese Tea Culture

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Abstract

China is the native place of tea. Chinese tea culture has a long history. However, in ancient China there wasn't the Chinese word "cha" (tea). There was only the word "Tu" which was a bitter edible plant. The two words were used to refer the same thing. The word "cha" came into being after the Tang Dynasty. Tea is a kind of drink made by pouring boiling water onto the processed tea tree leaves. In the everyday life of the Chinese people tea is a common drink. Chinese tea culture emerges much later than her wine culture.

Keywords

Tea, Evolution, China, Ancient times.

1. Introduction

The Origin and Development of Tea

Originally tea was used as a kind of medicine instead of a drink. It was said that Shen Nong, the legendary ruler in ancient China, once tasted a lot of plants and got poisoned many times. It was tea that cured him of the poison. Later the ancient Chinese got to know more and more about tea. Instead of being regarded as a kind of medicine, it became a drink. Chinese tea culture was formed gradually.

It was recorded that tea was drunk in the Western Han Dynasty. During the period of the Three Kingdoms Period, drinking tea was very popular at least in the southern China.

During the Wei Dynasty, the Jin Dynasty and the Northern and Southern Dynasty, drinking tea already became a fashion for those people with high social status. Some literary writings concerning tea came into being, for example, in the Jin Dynasty's "*Xiangmingfu*" was the representative work of the tea literature of that time.

The Tang Dynasty was the mature period of Chinese tea culture. At that time, it was customary to drink tea. People were fastidious about not only the tea production place, the picking and making of tea but also the drinking appliance and the way of drinking tea. LU Yu of the Tang Dynasty was very fond of sampling tea. He lived on the tea mountain of Jiangxi Province and planted tea himself. He was named as himself "Tea God." He first invented the way to boil tea and wrote the book *Tea Canon* (3 volumes), describing in detail the shape and properties, production place, picking and making, boiling, drinking of tea. It was the first monograph about tea in China, it is said that after writing *Tea Canon* Lu Yu went to Yangfen, Sanhe Town, Deqing County, Zhejiang Province by boat in AD764 just in order to spread culture of tea planting and tea drinking. Under the influence of Lu Yu, the local people got into the habit of drinking tea and have kept it to the present day.

With the tea culture prevailing in the Tang Dynasty, tea was planted more widely in such provinces as Sichuan, Guangdong, Fujian, Guizhou, Hunan, Hubei, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Anhui. Moreover, tea trade became one of the main sources of royal government tax revenue. It was recorded that the law of tea taxation took effect in the Tang Dynasty and ever since tea tax was an important financial income for royal government.

Drinking tea was also very popular in the Song Dynasty and the technique for making tea greatly improved. The book of *Chalu* written by Caixiang was a monograph about tea. It consists of two

volumes, one discussing tea and the other discussing tea vessels. There were about ten kinds of famous tea such as "Long," "Longtuan," "Feng" "Yuqian" "Dafang" "Shengxue" at that time. There was even tea brick which was also called cake tea.

In the Song Dynasty, the farmers who lived on tea were called tea farmers. Ten or fifteen families were regarded as one unit. The tea shops were named in correspondence with each family name. The tea managers must hold the tea licence granted by the local authorities after they paid taxes. By the Yuan Dynasty, drinking tea was very common in everyday life. Making tea was one of the seven house chores for the poor housewives of that time. Meanwhile the method of drinking tea changed — no longer adding additional condiment into tea but pure boiling to make tea.

In the Ming and the Qing dynasties, people drank tea in almost the same way as we do today, except that the method of drinking tea was constantly changing. Zhang Yingwen of the Ming Dynasty wrote an additional volume to Lu Yu's Tea Canon, discussing the development of tea culture since the Tang Dynasty. In the Qing Dynasty Lu Qingcan wrote the Sequel of *Tea Canon* (3 volumes), discussing the development of tea culture of each dynasty. It further revised Tea Canon by Lu Yu and became the famous tea monograph of the Ming Dynasty.

Tea seed, together with the technique for planting tea trees, was spread to foreign countries long long ago. In the Tang Dynasty tea was spread to Japan and later the world-famous Japanese tea ceremony got to be formed. At the beginning of the 17th century tea was spread to West Europe and became the favourite drink of European people.

2. Varieties

There were many kinds of tea drinking customs. Take Gongfu tea of Fujian Province for example. Gongfu tea came into being in the Qing Dynasty; One must spend a lot of time selecting tea appliance, making and tasting tea, that's why it was named Gongfu tea (the Chinese word Gongfu means time or time-consuming). The appliance for drinking Gongfu tea was not only small and exquisite but also simple and elegant. The tea pot was as small as a fist and the teacup was as small as a walnut. Drinking process begins with heating the tea pot and tea cup. then fill the tea pot with seven tenth of tea and then ; pour hot water into it. When pouring Gongfu tea one should do according to the skill of Gaochong Dizhen Lingai Tangbei. Kuomochengqing Gaochong was to raise the kettle high and pour the hot water directly into the teapot. Dizhen " was to lower the teapot, making its spout close to the tea cup when pouring tea. Moreover, Gongfu tea should not be poured one cup after another but in a circle, and each tea cup should be poured two or three times so that the tea "would be evenly made and with the same smell. The drinkers would feel that they were treated equally. What is more, when only drops of tea water were left, one would go on pouring them evenly into each tea cup in turn up to the last drop. The tea pot for Gongfu tea was very small, so the person who poured tea should not take the teapot into his hands but take the handle of the teapot with his thumb and middle finger, push the teapot lid- open with his forefinger, make the tea water drip up by means of the pressure of air. After each turn the tea cups were also to be washed with hot water to keep them clean. What is called as "Kuomo skill" was to wipe out the foam at the spout of the teapot with the teapot lip. As for the skill of "Chengqing" it was to pour the water out of the teapot completely so that no bitter smell would be left. When drinking tea, one should not drink it up but smell it first, then taste it and drink it slowly. It should be smelt first from far to near and then from near too far. One should stop after tasting a little of the tea; leaving a lasting and pleasant after taste. Otherwise you would be considered as ignorant of the rules for drinking tea.

Actually, the customs of drinking tea in most of our country are different from that of Gongfu tea. For example, in Shandong Province; one should neither pour the tea cup full nor empty the

tea pot and tea cup. If the guest empties his tea cup, the host will think that he doesn't want anymore and he will not pour any tea for him. Certainly, it is true that the different drinking tea customs make up the rich and varied Chinese tea culture.

3. New Way of Tasting

The ancient Chinese ate various kinds of cakes when drinking tea. They were called cakes and sweetmeats. Now in Qingpu, Shanghai one eats melon seeds, pickles and radish slip and so on when drinking "Granny tea." Fucha tea in the south of China, Xiangcha tea in Wujiang, Suzhou and Rougu tea in Fujian are drunk together with cakes and sweetmeats. At the tea banquet of the ancient Chinese scholars, drinkers' wager game was played to add to the fun.

With the prevailing of ancient Chinese tea culture, it had influenced gradually other folklore culture. In the Tang Dynasty "cha" was given a special kind of meaning and became the good name of girls. Little girls were named "little cha" or "chacha."

Tea can only propagate themselves by seeds and can't be transplanted once they are planted, so most of the betrothal gifts of the ancient Chinese marriage were tea, so betrothal gifts were also called tea gifts. The betrothal gifts from the bridegroom, 3 family were called tea giving " and the betrothal gifts to the bride's family were named 'tea receiving.'

"Listen to her" cried Tai-yu, Just tatzfa little tea from her and she starts order you about.'

Hsi-feng chuckled.

"Asked a favour, you make such a fus!Over drinking tea too.

'Drink our family's tea, a daughter-in-law to be!'

As the whole party burst out laughing, Tai-yu blushed and turned her head away, saying nothing.

(Taken from A Dream of Red Mansions Chapter 25)

4. Conclusion

The Chaozhou tea ceremony is the most representative tea ceremony in the ancient Chinese traditional tea culture. According to research, the tea culture had been perfected during the Tang Dynasty. People along the coast liked drinking tea very much. In Chaozhou, tea was treated as a hospitality. The best etiquette and perfection of it is not only because tea has a health effect in many aspects, but also because tea has had a mood of "being a gentleman and clearing mind and body" since ancient times.

From all of above, we can see that tea culture has become an indispensable part of Chinese culture.

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