
China's Tea Culture and Health Preservation

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I . A General Historical Review on Tea Culture in China

The discovery and the use of tea in China can be traced back to the ancient time of Holy Farmer about 5,000 years ago, the Holy Farmer selected various wild plants as medicine, he tasted the wild plants himself to learn their effect on the human body. It is said that one day he got poisoned seventy-two times when gathering and tasting herbs on a mountain. Later he found a plant which was tea. He brewed the leaves in a pottery tripod and then drank the liquid. As a result, the toxins in his body disappeared. Since then, the ancient people have treated tea as a precious medicine. The story illustrates that the Chinese people first used tea as medicine. After discovering tea, the Chinese people used it as a medicinal herb, a vegetable, and a drink successively over 3,000 years.

From the Han Dynasty, tea's being used as a drink started among a group of high-level scholars, thinkers, literati and statemen. Tea's special functions and spiritual effect attracted them. Tea culture was embryonic from the time of the Han Dynasty.

The Tang Dynasty was one of the most open and powerful dynasties in Chinese history. The real Chinese tea culture, including tea art, the tea ceremony and a complete expression of cultural philosophy came into being. The government began to tax the product and tea taxes thenceforth became an important source of revenue for the following dynasties. Emperors of the later Tang ordered the tea-producing areas to send their earliest and also the best tea to the palace for celebrating the Qingming Festival every year. Tea also became a sacrifice to the Buddha in Tang Dynasty.

Lu Yu, was an orphan abandoned by his parents, He was taken in by Jigong, an elderly eminent Buddhist and brought up in a temple. Lu Yu learned many arts of cultivating and making tea from Jigong, and became an expert in Tang Dynasty. Lu Yu influenced posterity in a most profound way by exalting tea drinking to a lofty cultural and artistic activity. He devoted most of his life to researching how tea should be cultivated, processed, prepared and drunk. He summarized the experiences and wrote the first treatise 《The Classic of Tea》 on tea and tea culture in the world. Lu Yu, laid a solid foundation for tea study in the coming years by his systematic theory of tea-related science and culture. so he was addressed as the “Saint of Tea”.

The emperors of Song Dynasty had a special love of tea, and some of them were well up in the tea ceremony. It had been a tradition to compress tea leaves into cakes for storage. In order to add to the beauty of tea, the Song people began to make such cakes in a more ingenious way and have the imperial dragon or phenix pattern embossed on them. These kind of tea cake were too luxurious for ordinary people. In the Yuan period it moved closer to the everyday life of ordinary people.

A prince of Ming Dynasty had a strong interest in the tea ceremony. He proposed the purification of people's mind by tea and advocating same reforms of the ceremonial procedures. The tea culture went deep into the midst of ordinary people in the Qing Dynasty.

As tea was welcomed by more and more people, tea things naturally became simplified leaving the teapot and cups to play the leading role. Nowadays teahouses became popular in China. Various types of teahouses or tearooms could be found everywhere in big cities, small towns even in countries. For instance in Sichuan the local people went to teahouses not only to drink tea, but also to exchange information and to chat with each other there. Some teahouses served as public places for holding folk cultural activities. Some teahouses accompanied with storytelling and the singing of opera arias. People of various trades drank tea while eating refreshments and appreciating performances. In Hangzhou, tearooms are valued in their genuineness. They emphasize making Longjing tea with famous Runing Tiger Spring's water, and tasting it in excellent environment, thus achieving the true objective of tea art. So people could choose different style of teahouse or tearooms according to one's interest.

II. Tea and Health Preservation

- The medical functions of tea: according to Chinese ancient view:
- Tea is beneficial to health ;
- Tea can relieve headaches and fatigue;
- Tea can help dispel the effects of alcohol and quit drinking;
- Tea can help shake off drowsiness;
- Tea can help the digestion of greasy food;
- Tea can be used to eliminate toxins from the body;
- Tea can help people to purify themselves and eliminate worries;
- Tea is conducive to longevity;

Modern researchers discovered that tea contains amino acids, vitamins, minerals and over 450 kinds of organic substances, such as polyphenols, polysaccharides, antioxidants, etc. That is why tea processes so many functions in promoting health. Chinese scientists, as well as foreign scientists, pay attention to the medical effect of tea, such as antibiotic, antitoxic, antiageing, antiallergic etc. They are also interested in tea's beneficial effect on blood sugar, blood pressure, serum lipid and reducing weight.

The other factors of China's tea culture in promoting health besides medical effect are as follows:

- The pleasure of tea culture.

To Chinese, tea is a spirit in the world, when drink it, one will be filled with the sunshine, the moonlight, the wind, the land and the wonder of the universe. One could feel that human and nature are unified. Tea connoisseurs regard the process of planting, picking, making tea as an artistic enjoyment. Good tea, beautiful

teasets, famous paintings, poems and calligraphies, elegant performance of tea ceremony and all things related to tea will give one great pleasure. As we know, high spirit and cheerful mood can promote health.

- The moral factors of tea culture

Saint of Tea Lu Yu accentuated the moral factors in the art of tea. He advocated that people who loved tea should excel in virtue. One should adopt a correct attitude towards personal gains and losses, free from seeking fame, wealth and position. One also should keep good relationship with each other. One should show respect for the aged and teacher, express love for the young and students. People became sober and sensible through drinking tea. It is believed that the society would be unified only if people get along with each other harmoniously.

- The Chan of tea culture

When talking of Chinese tea culture attention often paid to the relationship with Buddhism. There is a saying “tea and chan is an integration.” In the records that the monks were neither allowed to sleep nor have supper while sitting in meditation at night, but they were allowed drinking tea. Tea could help them keep calm and clear minded. For ordinary people, it is not possible to attain such a high level of meditation as monks, but it is advocated to keep a peace and quiet mind. and abstain from improper desires. This is a principal rule in Chinese health preservation.”

In summary, tea culture is connected with the oldest oriental philosophy and rules of keeping health, not only by its medical effect but also by its spiritual sphere.