**Chinese Tea Culture**

1. Introduction

Tea, developed in and originated from China in the Shennong period around 4700 years ago, is now integrated in and has become one of the most essential parts of Chinese food culture or even Chinese culture itself. An old Chinese saying goes, when opening the door in the morning one is confronted with the task of providing seven daily necessities: fuel, rice, oil, salt, soy, vinegar, and tea. Tea, is prevalent in not only modern China but also ancient China. *The Classic of Tea*, written by the Sage of Tea, Lu yu, spread the spirit of tea into Chinese ancient poem, painting, calligraphy, religion, medicine, known to both ordinary people and loyal family.

1. Tea Culture in Chinese People’s Daily Life

Chinese people used to believe that drinking tea is a way of enjoying life so people who drink tea need to have certain knowledge of tea culture to truly “taste” life. In fact, with time moving forward, the essence of tea culture is continuously developing and changing. More and more Chinese people treat drinking tea as a way of keeping themselves fit or simply a healthier life style than drinking other beverage.

The age of tea drinkers is also getting lower and lower over the years. People who usually work in office will have either green tea, dark tea or scented tea on their tables. They don’t always know too much about tea leaves themselves but instead choose famous tea brands. When they purchase tea, they focus mostly on the taste, nourishing function and convenience of drinking. Traditional tea culture isn’t paid as much attention by them, but they still enjoy the moment of relax while having a cup of tea. Since tea also is very accessible nowadays—you can even find green tea, dark tea or even oolong tea in Chinese Starbucks—young people sometime choose tea even over coffee.

1. History of Chinese Tea Culture

Tea-drinking history is a part of over 5000-year Chinese history. Legend has it that Yan Emperor, one of the ancestor of the Chinese nation, personally tasted all kinds of herbs for their medical value in order to relieve peoples’ sufferings. One day he encountered 72 poisonous herbs and it was the tea that saved his life.

No tea was grown in the north in the Han Dynasty. So it was considered as a rarity by the royal family and officials. However, during Eastern Han, tea began to appear as a common commodity in the market. People from south of Yangzi River started to grow tea bushes. *Chinese Materia Medica* was written by Li Shizhen in this period, which summarized in theory the medicinal value of tea and its value as drink.

Diverse development of tea culture was taken place in Sui-Tang. Tea shops were found in lots of different towns, which brewed and sold tea. Numerous boats carried loads of tea leaves from different tea-growing areas to the market. Later in Song and Yuan Dynasties, tea-growing area continued expanding with the help of drastically improving tea producing techniques. In the same period of time, techniques of tasting tea gradually turn from “boil tea” (煮茶) to “whisked tea” (点茶). The procedure of “whisked tea” includes baking tea, grinding tea, screening tea, boiling tea, making tea, diving tea, and tasting tea. This way of drinking tea later spread to Japan, gradually becoming known as “Mocha” (抹茶道).

In Ming and Qing dynasties, more and more innovative tea sets presented in the market, such as sand-fired pot (紫砂壶). During that period of time, you could find tea houses almost everywhere in China especially in populated urban area like Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, Chengdu or Guangzhou. There was a trend of chatting with friends while having tea in tea houses. Also, influential tea books like *Tea Score* written by Qian Chunnian and *Sequel to The Classic of Tea* written by Lu Tingcan were also produced at that time. There were also lots of tea poems composed by famous poets. Among those poets, the Emperor Qianlong went to the dragon well tea (龙井茶) producing area four times, watched tea picking and tea producing process, tasted dragon well tea and composed a tea poem every time he visited.

Resources

The Journal of Popular Culture.

http://literature.proquest.com/pageImage.do?ftnum=1691780&fmt=page&area=criticism&journalid=00223840&articleid=R04673660&pubdate=1993&queryid=2987746480461

<http://www.ixueshu.com/document/93a88fd8c3807730.html>

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Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0XJ0Pp49lo>