

# Study on inheritance and protection strategies of traditional tea processing techniques and their associated social practices

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**Abstract.** As the tea plant originated in China, China is considered the cradle of the tea civilization. "Tea", one of the three major drinks in the world alongside cocoa and coffee, is important for people around the world. In 2022, China's application for "traditional tea processing techniques and their associated social practices" was deliberated and approved by the 17th UNESCO Intergovernmental Working Conference and they were added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

**Keywords:** tea culture; Intangible cultural heritage; traditional tea processing techniques.

## 1. Introduction

As a carrier of cultural memory and a source of spiritual power, tea culture plays an irreplaceable role in promoting cultural diversity and exchanges among different countries and regions. We should continue to inherit and develop tea culture, and use it as a bridge to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between different peoples and cultures. "Traditional tea processing techniques and associated social practices in China" were inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity after passing the examination on 2022 Nov. 29 at the 17th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in the Moroccan capital Rabat. China now has 43 items on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, making it the most enlisted country globally. This not only marks the international recognition of China's tea culture, but also reflects the world's respect for and attention to the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It also highlights the importance of the inheritance and development of traditional culture in the context of globalization.

## 2. The indissoluble connection between tea and China

### 2.1. History of tea

China is home to tea, the cradle of tea culture and the culture for drinking tea worldwide. The history of making drinks from tea leaves goes back to the time of the Yellow Emperor (One of five ancient emperor, born in about 2717 B.C.) . According to the classic Shen Nong Herbal Medicine, "Shen Nong (3245 B.C.~3080 B.C.) wanted to find edible herbs for his people for their living and avoid them from being poisoned to death. So he ate many toxic herbs when he tried them. Finally, the tea detoxified his body. Clearly, Chinese people discovered and utilized tea 5,000 years ago. At the very beginning, ancient Chinese people chewed tea leaves directly in their mouths to absorb the tea juice from the leaves. By this way, they made their mouth sweet and fragrant and experienced a stimulating convergence. Over the years, chewing tea leaves has become a pastime for people. There are plenty of other theories about who was the first tea drinker in China. It has been reported that ancestors of Bashu area (Central and eastern Sichuan Province and surrounding areas now) were the first to drink tea. In the book Tong Yue (Servant Contract) by Wang Bao (90 B.C.~50 B.C.), Mengding Mountain in Sichuan was the place where tea was first planted in the history of China. In Records of Huayang State, the Ba people in northern Sichuan have started to grow tea trees in the

gardens.<sup>[3]</sup> After the "Qin people conquered Shu", the communication between different regions was strengthened, and the custom of drinking tea spread from Bashu area to the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, which has been proved by Gu Yanwu, a thinker in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. He said in the Volume 7 of his book *Ri Zhi Lu* that "tea drinking began as a hobby after Qin people took Shu area". During the Jin and Southern-Northern Dynasties (A.D. 266~A.D.589), tea cultivation became widespread, and the cultural custom of "tea as a sacrifice" emerged in some regions. However, it was during the Tang (A.D.618~A.D.907) and Song A.D.960~A.D.1279) dynasties that tea thrived. A man named Lu Yu (about A.D.733~A.D.804) made significant contributions to the study of tea during the Tang dynasty. His book, *The Book of Tea*, includes comprehensive summary of the origin of tea, tea-making techniques, tea-drinking methods, tea cooking utensils, water quality, and tea-drinking customs, making it the first and most comprehensive monograph on "tea" in China and the world.

## 2.2. Types of tea in China

There are many different methods of classifying as well as naming tea since ancient times, some of which are named according to their place of origin, for example: Putuo Tea, Xihu Longjing, etc. While others are named according to the different shapes of the leaves, for example: pearl tea, silver needles. Still others are named according to their historical development, for example: Dahongpao and Tieguanyin. Tea trees are widely distributed throughout China, and there are many types of tea.<sup>[6]</sup> Based on the color and processing method of the tea leaves, they are classified into six main categories: Green Tea, Black Tea, Yellow Tea, White Tea, Dark Tea, and Oolong Tea.

### 2.2.1 Green tea

With a history of more than 3,000 years, Green tea is the earliest type of tea in China. The earliest processing method of green tea was to collect the bud leaves of wild tea trees and dry them. However, the period to form tea processing techniques began in the 8th century AD, marked by the steaming and fixing method (to steam or slightly boil fresh tea leaves and dry them into fixed form). It was evolved into the roasting method in the 12th century. The roasting method means to make leaves wither by hand by means of putting them in a pan with low heat. In this way, essence in leaves will be kept. This technique lasts until now. Green tea is made by way that unfermented tea leaves undergo dehydration (Shaqing), and then form a shape or become dry. When brewed, the water with tea retains the fresh green color of the tea leaves, making green tea the earliest type of tea in China and even in the world.<sup>[5]</sup> In China, green tea plant is grown in many provinces, such as Fujian, Guangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Shanxi, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Guizhou and Henan. Among them, Fujian is the largest province of green tea production. Such types of green tea are well known to people: Dongting Biluochun, West Lake Longjing, Xinyang Maojian, Liu 'an Melon Slice, Huangshan Maofeng, etc.

### 2.2.2 Black tea

Black tea has a long history in China, and it is also the most exported tea, accounting for approximately 50% of China's total tea exports. The birthplace of black tea is Mount Wuyi in China in Fujian province. The originator of world black tea is Lapsang Souchong black tea, which has a history of over 400 years. Black tea, originally known as dark tea in China, is a fully fermented tea. It is made by processes of withering, rolling, fermenting, and drying. It is named black tea because of its dark appearance and red color of tea water after brewing. Black tea has a rich aroma and a mellow taste. Many other countries have also introduced tea trees for cultivation. As a result, India and Sri Lanka has become world-renowned producers of black tea in addition to China.

### 2.2.3 Yellow tea

Yellow tea, which originated from green tea, was discovered during the process of roasting green tea when the leaves turned yellow due to inadequate drying. This led to the creation of a new type of tea called Yellow tea. However, historically, yellow tea was defined as tea trees that naturally

produced yellow leaves during their growth process, which is different from how we define yellow tea today. Yellow tea boasts the unique feature —both yellow leaves and yellow soup. "Mendui Wohuang" processing technique is used and it means to pile them into color yellow when they are hot with a kind of digestive enzyme produced. Some famous types of yellow tea include Junshan Silver Needle, Guangdong Daye Qing, Mengding Yellow Bud, and Huoshan Yellow Bud.

#### **2.2.4 White tea**

White tea is a specialty of China, with the main production areas being Fuding, Zhenghe, Songxi and Jianyang in Fujian Province. The reason why it is white is that only delicate leaves or buds with a lot of hairs on the back will be picked and during the processing process, the step of drying or twisting is eliminated. The drying process is directly finished by sun or low heat. With slight fermentation, the outer layer of white hairs is intactly kept. Water of White tea is yellow-green, sweet and light. It has been proved by Chinese medicine theory it boasts medicinal functions, such as treating fever and keeping good health. The most famous types of white tea are Tai Mo Silver Needle, Bai Hao Silver Needle, Bai Mudan, Shou Mei, etc.

#### **2.2.5 Dark tea**

Dark tea is fully fermented tea and is named after its dark brown appearance. The techniques of making dark tea involves dehydration, kneading, fermentation, and drying, with a long fermentation time resulting in the leaves turning dark brown. Sichuan, Yunnan, Hubei, Hunan, Shaanxi, and other regions are the main areas to produce dark tea. The term "dark tea" first appeared in Chinese history in the early 16th century, which is often considered the origin of dark tea. By the end of the 16th century, dark tea had become popular in Hunan Province. As a deeply fermented tea, its color is fine black and the soup is orange. It gives off the pine smoke-like fragrance, and the longer the preservation time, the more mellow its fragrance. Famous types of dark tea include Hunan Dark Tea, Yunnan Pu 'er Tea, Tianjian Tea, Old Man Tea, etc.

#### **2.2.6 Qingcha tea**

Qingcha Tea, also refers to Oolong Tea, is a kind of semi-fermented tea with Chinese characteristics. The processing steps include dehydration, drying, semi-fermentation, baking and so on. Its taste combines the freshness and sweetness of black and green tea and rich in antioxidants and other beneficial compounds. The main producing areas are in northern and southern Fujian, as well as Guangdong and Taiwan. Green tea is also known as "beauty tea" or "fitness tea" for it helps people to break down fat, lose weight loss and keep fitness. Famous kinds of green tea include Anxi Tieguanyin, Fenghuang Danzong, Wuyi Cinnamon and Frozen Ding Oolong.

### **3. Traditional Tea Processing Techniques and Their Associated Social Practices**

Tea-making skills have been an integral part of traditional Chinese culture since ancient times, and have been passed down until the present day. According to the characteristics of different regions, tea makers make different kinds of tea products. They use various tools such as pan, bamboo board and oven; They utilize different core techniques of dehydration, Mendui Wohuang, withering, making it green, fermentation, scenting. Different kinds are formed with different tools and heating methods. As a carrier of Chinese culture, tea culture is truly extensive and profound, and gradually a variety of tea etiquette and rituals developes. The Chinese were the first to drink tea and therefore know it best. The practice of drinking tea is a part of daily life of the Chinese people. Tea has become one of people's favorite drinks, which fascinates people not only in the East but also in the West. In addition, Chinese people are also very particular about the customs of tea drinking. For example, Beijing people love to drink Big Bowl Tea, Chaoshan area KungFu tea, Yunnan Kunming area Jiudao Tea, Shaoxing in Zhejiang Four Time Tea, Guangzhou Yangcheng Morning Market tea, Xizang and Inner Mongolia

Milk Tea, etc. As the result of accumulation of people's material culture, various customs of tea drinking have a profound influence on people's material and spiritual world.

#### **4. Inheritance and protection strategy of tea culture as intangible cultural heritage**

In 1972, the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was concluded, laying a solid foundation for the establishment of intangible cultural heritage. 1989 saw the introduction of the "Proposal for the Protection of Folk Creations (or Folk Culture)", which introduced the concept of folk creations and launched the project to protect folk creation. In 2005, the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in China, which was the first special protection document using the concept of "intangible cultural heritage". In China<sup>[8]</sup>; in the same year, it also issued the Notice on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which pointed out the target for further improving the protection of intangible cultural heritage in the new era. At present, although progress has been made in the protection of intangible cultural heritage, there are still some problems, such as "emphasizing declaration and development, but ignoring protection and on management" and other phenomena that indicates the lack of momentum in the preservation of intangible heritage.

##### **4.1. Corresponding policy proposed by the government**

In 2022, China's General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in the report of the 20th National Congress that "we will advance socialist culture, promote revolutionary culture and inherit excellent traditional Chinese culture in order to meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people, consolidate the common ideological foundation for the unity and struggle of all ethnic groups in the country, and continuously enhance China's cultural strength and Chinese cultural influence."<sup>[1]</sup> Chinese government should play its role by introducing more regulations to protect the heritage and develop intangible heritage. Corresponding protection laws should be introduced to improve the cultural protection mechanism. China, as a large country of intangible cultural heritage, has been actively responding to the call of UNESCO since the inception of the ICH Convention. China is making every effort to set a good example as a major country and show international influence. Better protection of ICH will also help to set an example role for other countries.

##### **4.2. Establishment of a cultural reserve to promote tourism**

Tours help people relax and bring in real feelings both visually and physically. As an excellent cultural resource, tea culture has a huge potential to develop its related tourism culture. In developing tea culture tourism, it is important to showcase the advantages of tea culture in all aspects. We can build high-quality tourism projects that allow visitors to learn about tea culture, and tea making process. They can visit tea-producing areas, participate in tea making and brewing, and taste different varieties of tea in person. When advancing the tourism industry about tea culture, we should notice that people in different regions have different tea drinking habits. Therefore, the government can develop tourism projects suitable for displaying local cultural characteristics, so as to make different scenic spots more personalized, diversified and special. The combination of tea culture and tourism can optimize and upgrade existing tourism areas. For areas that haven't been explored, special projects should be added by the use of ICH tea culture. Creative products such as tea and tea sets can not only provide better travel experience but also promote the local economy. Through the experience of tea culture tourism, visitors can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and the wisdom of China's ancestors. They will indulge in their imaginations and appreciate the profound connotations of Chinese culture. By integrating tea culture into the development of tourism, the tourism industry can attract more visitors, create new jobs, and promote local economy.

### 4.3. Effective use of new media

Generally speaking, the digital age has brought new challenges and opportunities for the development of traditional culture, including tea culture, which is not always popular among young people. To address this, new media technologies can be used to showcase the tea culture from multiple angles, making it accessible to people in different areas. The dissemination of intangible cultural heritage must keep up with the times and use the marketing power of network platforms. In China, short video platforms such as TikTok and Kuaishou (Quick Hand) provide an ideal stage for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, including tea culture. The Internet era provides new possibilities for the inheritance and development of traditional cultural forms.

### 4.4. Carrying out activities of intangible cultural heritage in colleges and universities in an orderly manner

With the development of science and technology and the progress of society, the demand for tea at home and abroad is increasing day by day. Therefore, machines are frequently used to produce more tea. Science and technology is undoubtedly a double-edged sword. Technology promotes social development but has an impact on the training of traditional craftsmen. High requirements for traditional tea makers are that they should not only have professional knowledge, but also corresponding practical experience and the patience to study.<sup>[4]</sup> Activities of intangible cultural heritage in universities is one of the ways to train the next generation of tea art inheritors. Nowadays, many universities in China have set up tea-making discipline and undertaken the mission of training outstanding talents. However, we should redouble our efforts to teach local inheritors and those in universities and encourage more colleges and universities to set tea discipline.

## 5. Summary

In a word, tea culture has been passed down for thousands of years and is a precious heritage of the Chinese people. It reflects the wisdom, diligence, and spiritual connotation of the Chinese people and has become an important part of traditional Chinese culture. Promoting tea culture tourism and the use of new media technology are effective ways to inherit and promote tea culture. At the same time, it is also crucial to protect and inherit traditional Chinese culture, which requires the joint efforts of the government, society, and individuals. By promoting Chinese culture to the world, we can build bridges of friendship between people from different countries and regions for the peaceful development of human society. However, the protection and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture still has a long way to go.

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