

# The Culture of Teahouses in China

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**Abstract**—Starting from the combination of tea and Chinese culture, this paper introduces the historical evolution process of tea architecture in detail, and expounds the combination of tea architecture culture and civic life in various parts of the people. It is pointed out that the long historical accumulation of tea architectural culture not only contains the long tradition of a nation but also hides the psychology of the Chinese nation era and the national psychology, which is the carrier of urban culture.

**Keywords**—architectural culture; historical development; tea culture; cultural integration; teahouse development

## I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of tea culture began with the active entry into the world of Confucianism and absorbed the essence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Buddhism emphasizes "Zen tea blends into one" with tea to help Zen, tea to worship Buddha, not only from the tea taste bitter silence but also from the injection of Buddhist philosophy and Zen. The Taoist doctrine injects the philosophical thought of "harmony between nature and man" into the tea ceremony, which not only sets up the soul of the tea ceremony, but also injects the aesthetic idea of advocating nature, truth and simplicity, and the thoughts of rebirth, precious life and health preservation.

## II. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF TEA ARCHITECTURE

China is the home of tea. It is said that Chinese people began to drink tea in the Shennong Era, at least 4,700 years ago.

### A. The Prototype of Tea Architecture

According to *The Old Man of Guangling*, "At the time of the Jin Yuan emperor there had an elderly woman who carried a teapot herself for sale every day and many people bought her tea" [1]. That is to say, at that time, tea has been traded as a commodity. However, this still belongs to the mobile stallholder, cannot be called "teahouse".

### B. The Rise of Tea Architecture

The earliest record of the tea house in China is the *Feng Shi Tourist and Sketch Book*, which was written during the Kaiyuan period of the Tang dynasty. It was recorded that "since Zou, Qi, Cang, Li, and gradually to the capital, more shops opened and boiled tea to sell. Without asking vulgar guest only needs to put money to drink" [2]. After Tang and Song dynasties, tea houses were set up in many places to sell

tea for business. By the Tang dynasty, Buddhism reached its peak. People's understanding of tea drinking is not only limited to the aspects of medicinal use, thirst-quenching, alcohol elimination, meal preparation, sacrifice and health keeping, but also the tendency to regard tea drinking as some kind of spiritual purport. During the Southern and Northern dynasties, the temple not only paid attention to tea but also became the center of tea production, propaganda and research. The customs of tea drinking in temples have gradually exerted a great influence on folk tea drinking. Tea parties were also held among the people, and there were even official tea dinners. All these have contributed to the rise of tea houses.

### C. The Prosperity of Tea Architecture

The Song dynasty was a flourishing period of tea architecture. It is recorded in *Meng Yuanlao's Dong Jing Hua Meng Lu* that "At the Caomen street, the north hill is in the tea shop, and there are fairy holes and fairy Bridges [2]. Ladies often have tea at night". It can be seen that the teahouse was an important place for people's nightlife at that time. *Du Cheng Ji Sheng* wrote that "Big tea shops hang celebrities' paintings and calligraphies... There are many botchans have gathered here, learn to play Musical Instruments or sing." It can be seen that tea house in song dynasty had gone beyond the meaning of "food" building itself, and had more functions of social and cultural communication. It had become a place for people to drink tea and chat, taste snacks, talk about business, do business, carry out various performing arts activities, industry gatherings and other activities.

### D. The Heyday of Tea Architecture

To the Qing dynasty, the atmosphere of social tea flourishing, the leisure class expanded. In addition, the entry of folk opera came into the teahouse, as a set of leisure, food, entertainment, trading and other functions in one of the multi-functional public activities the teahouse has become the first choice of people. With the rise of social hedonism and secular culture, compared with the previous tea shops appeared in historical records, to the Ming and Qing dynasties tea houses became the carrier of many literary stories [3].

### E. The Decline of Tea Architecture

Under the influence of multiple factors inside and outside, a large class of nomads emerged in recent modern Chinese society. The gang was an organization outside the rule of

orthodox rules. To deceive the public, these gangs used tea houses, temples and guild halls as their activity places. In particular, teahouse played an important role in the communication, information, organization of gang members and daily entertainment. In the late Qing dynasty and the early republic of China, teahouse business was still flourishing [4]. After experiencing the war and poverty, teahouse declined gradually.

#### F. The Rebirth of Tea Architecture

In the 1990s, with the development of market economy, teahouse as a place for cultural life and business communication also naturally returned. Teahouses have become one of the most important choices in people's spare time.

At present, there are mainly three operating characteristics of teahouses:

1) *Traditional teahouses*: For example, Laoshe Teahouse ("Fig. 1") and Huguang Club ("Fig. 2") in Beijing. These teahouses also have performing functions. Often there is a large space with an opera stage in front of the teahouse. In addition to tea, there is also local special refreshment. Normally the performances are traditional folk arts, such as opera, acrobatics and qigong.



Fig. 1. Laoshe Teahouse.



Fig. 2. Huguang Club.

2) *Modern tea house*: These teahouses are mainly for business activities and training purposes. Internal spaces have multifunctional halls with a larger area which can hold a variety of activities such as tea party, cocktail party, dance and training. In addition, there is a variety of Chinese, European, Japanese and Chinese and western combination of decorative style private rooms for business activities, friends and lovers talk.

3) *All kinds of exotic teahouses*: Generally, the area is small, such as a Japanese tea ceremony hall, Korean tea ceremony hall and so on. People get to know the characteristics of other ethnic cultures.

### III. TEA ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE AMONG THE PEOPLE

Tea is an indispensable part of Chinese People's Daily life. As a Chinese saying goes, "open the door to seven things: wood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar and tea". This tea-drinking habit has been deeply rooted in Chinese people for thousands of years. China has a long history of tea culture and tea with the development of various large and small teahouses. Different regional tea houses have their own unique flavour. Different kinds of tea are prepared in different parts of China: Chaozhou fenghuangdancong tea, Taihu smoked bean tea, Suzhou scented tea, Hunan ginger salt tea, Chengdu covered bowl tea, Taiwan frozen top tea, Hangzhou Longjing tea, Fujian oolong tea, etc.

#### A. Beijing Teahouse

Beijing is the ancient capital of the five dynasties and has always been the heart of China. Of course, tea culture is also a collection of the greatest achievements in China. In the Song dynasty, opera artists began to do business in tea restaurants, until the Qing dynasty began to set up a special stage in the teahouse. In Qing dynasty opera flourished. Gradually opera theatre and tea house combined into one, known as "opera teahouse". The chess teahouse is also a feature of Beijing, with long benches and tables that are only wide enough for a chessboard and bowls on each side. Certainly, there are also teahouses for businessmen and craftsmen to talk business and trade.

#### B. Sichuan Teahouse

As the saying goes, "There are few sunny days above the head while there are teahouses in front of us" in Sichuan Province. The image depicts the popularity of teahouses in Sichuan Province. The land of abundance is rich in products. People have more leisure after eating. Especially Chengdu plain, teahouses are everywhere. In 1935, Chengdu New News reported that there were 599 tea houses in Chengdu, while the number of tea customers reached as many as 120,000 a day, forming a real army of 100,000. At that time, the population of Chengdu was less than 600,000. Excluding women and children who are unlikely to enter the teahouse, the proportion of tea customers is undoubtedly quite striking. Therefore, there is a saying that "Sichuan teahouse is the best in the world and Chengdu teahouse is the best in Sichuan".

Teahouse is the place that men place a long line (chat). It is the place that in old society "robe elder brother" talks about official business. It is also the place that villagers have disputes to reason by the local forces robe brother to solve. It can be seen that in the eyes of Sichuan people the teahouse is a fair and clean place. According to Chengdu General View, there were 516 streets and lanes in Chengdu in the late Qing dynasty, and there were 454 teahouses. Almost every street and lane had teahouses. (See "Fig. 3" and "Fig. 4")



Fig. 3. Daci Temple Teahouse in Chengdu.



Fig. 4. Old teahouse in Chengdu.

### C. Wuhan Teahouse

Once teahouses were bristly and tea merchants were all over the world. More than 100 years ago, Hankou was praised as "tea port" by European and American people, and even became the world tea trade capital for a time. The teahouse industry in Hankou has a glorious history. Some data show that in the first year of Xuantong (1909), there were as many as 250 teahouses in Hankou, accounting for Wuhan 60% of the tea houses in three towns. With the rapid development of industry and commerce, the population of Hankou is increasing and teahouse business is flourishing. By 1918, the number of teahouses has increased to 696 Ten years later there were 1,117. After the great flood in Wuhan in 1931, a large number of unemployed people flooded into teahouses. Teahouses do brisk business. In 1933, the number of teahouses increased to 1,373. After the fall of Wuhan in 1938, there were only 250 teahouses in Hankou, which never recovered. Until the liberation of Wuhan, there were only over 300 teahouses in three towns [5].

Wuhan people like drinking tea, especially sitting in teahouses. Teahouses are located all over the streets, rivers and lakes, downtown and other places. Wuhan business has always been developed. Teahouses are often used as trading places by businessmen who come to Wuhan, and many trades are done in teahouses. Thus, there formed a unique teahouse trading custom, for example, looking at the sample, bargaining, using an abacus to ask for prices and discounts, gesturing with the sleeve and talking about prices in code. Ordinary workers also like tea houses. After a hard day's work, they go there to relax, chat or split the bill. Workers from all walks of life have their own fixed teahouses, which become an essential part of their life.

Wuhan teahouses are not distinctive features, tea products are not much name. But just as it is hard to say

whether Wuhan is the north or the south, Wuhan teahouse is difficult to be its own, but it is also a plain attitude of reaching the world. (See "Fig. 5" and "Fig. 6").



Fig. 5. Chuyun Teahouse in Wuhan.



Fig. 6. The inner of Chuyun teahouse.

### D. Hangzhou Tearoom

Hangzhou called teahouse tearoom which cultural significance is more than Sichuan teahouse. The word "room" can be a scholar's room and can be a clean room of Buddhism and Taoism. Compared with teahouse, it has more literate, graceful and elegant. The famous Longjing tea in Hangzhou matches the good west lake water. Participants are different from the Sichuan teahouse only men attend, prostitutes and singing girls and even women and children occasionally participate in it. But tearoom is not a quiet and peaceful place that people in various trades all converge here. (See "Fig. 5" and "Fig. 6")



Fig. 7. Qianyun tearoom in Hangzhou.





Fig. 8. Jinyong tearoom in Hangzhou.

Hangzhou people prefer tea houses, delicate and harmonious. The most important thing is that they love to play tricks but can't get out of line. So too deep feeling and enthusiastic cafe, bar in Hangzhou is the enemy of the idle teahouse full overflow. According to statistics, there are more than 700 tea houses in the alleys and alleys of Hangzhou, which is one of the most crowded in the whole country [6]. So many teahouses have evolved into several genres. There are mainly tea arts, such as Tai chi teahouse. There is special attention to the ecological environment of tea houses, such as Mener tea shop. There are also cultural teahouses integrating natural history, appreciation and tea tasting, such as Heji teahouse and Ziyige teahouse.

#### E. Guangdong Teahouse

The Cantonese teahouse is rich and dignified. Teahouses are commonly called tea buildings, and breakfast is called morning tea. Guangzhou teahouses are rich and dignified. The teahouse is generally three floors high; the ground floor is six or seven meters high, and the two or three floors are about five meters high, comfortable and elegant. There were single rooms, booths, splendid halls, and elegant nave rooms. The dim sum in the teahouse is exquisite, beautiful, new, ingenious and various. It can be said that there is food in tea and tea in food. The business of tea houses is very prosperous from morning till night. Having morning tea is a Cantonese tradition, which continues the slow life of the old Guangdong people. It is also a pleasant pastime, no different from other recreational activities. Lianxianglou ("Fig. 9") and Taotaoju ("Fig. 10") are the famous old tea buildings in Guangzhou.



Fig. 9. Lianxianglou in Guangzhou.



Fig. 10. Taotaoju in Guangzhou.

#### IV. THE CARRIER OF URBAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The unique elegant character and historical origin of tea make the building of teahouse reflect Chinese traditional culture as much as possible in terms of architectural characteristics and atmosphere creation. On the exterior, the teahouses all over the place absorb the traditional architectural style. Architectural details are reflected in the ridge, pilasters, beam, screens and some small components using techniques such as sculpture, painting and decoration. Interior decoration also makes with woodiness, cane to build the atmosphere of primitive simplicity and elegance. The decoration is often with folk goods, jade, antique, calligraphy and painting, etc. On door courtyard, stone column or hall wall, couplet with tea things often can be seen to hang which will increase taste tea interest. The tea couplet is a wonderful work in the treasure house of Chinese couplets. It not only has a simple and elegant beaut but also has a wonderful interest. The traditional performance activities in the teahouse include tea rules, tea etiquette, tea ceremony, tea song, tea dance and tea art.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the long river of history, a tea house with social life, traditional art, ideology and culture forged a difficult relationship. From the perspective of national psychology, the long historical accumulation of tea culture contains a nation's long tradition and hides the psychology of the Chinese nation in an era and a nation. With a long history, perfect form and profound connotation, Chinese tea culture is a combination system from form to content, from material state to spirit, as well as a special creation of wisdom and distillation of Chinese national thoughts. Teahouse is a multi-social structure and multi-level cultural integration system, which has presented the values and influences of different periods, different classes, different people, and different styles on the historical screen. It is a multi-faceted cultural body.

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