

A Comparative Study of the Aesthetic Characteristics of Chinese and Japanese Tea Culture

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ABSTRACT

Ancient China is the first in the world to plant tea trees, make tea and drink tea. As one of the "seven things for the beginning of a day", tea has long penetrated the daily lives of people from all walks of life. Under the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, a unique and long-standing Chinese tea culture has been formed. Japan and China are neighboring countries. Since ancient times, these two countries have exchanged and communicated in economic, political, cultural, and ideological aspects. Tea culture is also one of them. After Zen was introduced to Japan, Chinese tea culture was also introduced. Combining Zen ideology and native Japanese national culture, a distinctive, complete, and mature Japanese tea ceremony culture has been formed. Based on previous studies, this paper discusses the origin and development of tea culture in China and Japan and the aesthetic characteristics of their respective tea cultures using historical documents and comparative studies. Based on Confucianism, the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese tea culture revolves around nature, pleasure, and harmony, whereas Japanese tea culture is based on Zen thought with aesthetic characteristics such as solemnness, loneliness, and imbalance.

Keywords: China, Japan, Tea culture, Comparison, Aesthetic characteristics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, China and Japan have had cultural exchanges that are rich in content and have far-reaching influence. The tea culture of China and Japan is one of the important products of cultural exchanges. During the Tang Dynasty in China, after the famous tea master Lu Yu's "The Classic of Tea" was published, tea was no longer a simple drink. A kind of tea culture derived from daily tea drinking was formally formed. After that, Chinese tea and tea culture were introduced to Japan and a brand-new tea ceremony culture was formed by integrating the local culture. Today, the Japanese tea ceremony culture has developed into an unprecedented period of prosperity and has become a typical symbol of Japanese culture. Both Chinese and Japanese tea cultures have a long history and rich cultural connotations. This article compares the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese and Japanese tea cultures and analyzes the tea cultures of the two countries that are of the same origin but have their own characteristics. It aims to have a deeper understanding of Chinese and Japanese tea culture

and to promote cultural exchanges between the two countries.

2. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE TEA CULTURE

2.1 The Formation and Development of Chinese Tea Culture

China is the hometown of tea. According to Lu Yu's *The Classic of Tea*, the history of Chinese discovery of tea and tea production can be traced back to the ancient Shennong period. Tea has many uses in China. At first, it was used for food and medicine, and later it was developed for drinking. After that, tea was no longer just a refreshing and thirst-quenching drink, and gradually drinking tea rose to a spiritual level of enjoyment. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, tea culture emerged as a new cultural phenomenon. Due to the social turmoil at that time, literati found themselves not powerful enough to help or change

the society in a practical way. Thus, the fashion of talking about social issues emerged among those literati.

Tea, as a kind of drinking during the talk, gradually entered the cultural field. Later, the advent of Lu Yu's *The Classic of Tea* during the Tang Dynasty marked the formation of uniquely charming tea culture in China. *The Classic of Tea* not only contains two aspects of nature and humanity, but also integrates the three schools of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism into Chinese tea culture, pioneering the spirit of Chinese tea culture [1]. It can be said that the Tang Dynasty is an extremely important chapter in the development of Chinese tea culture. At that time, the social environment was stable, the country was prosperous, and the people lived in peace, which provided a powerful external environment for tea planting and the development of tea culture. At the same time, literati and scholars have advocated tea drinking, creating a series of tea cultures such as tea ceremonies, tea poems, tea painting, tea testing, and Zen tea. The habit of tea drinking then gradually prevailed in people's daily life. Based on the development of tea culture in Tang dynasty, in the Song Dynasty, the tea culture reached a new peak. During this period, tea culture for the royals living in the palace had a further development. Also, among the ordinary people, "diancha (whisked tea)" and "douche (tea-tastings)" came into a fashion. In addition, many famous writers in the Song Dynasty, such as Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi, loved tea and were very interested in tea culture, which also led to the further development of the connotation of tea culture. As the dynasties changed, the content of tea making and drinking changed. However, the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese tea culture focusing on nature and simplicity have never changed.

2.2 The Formation and Development of Japanese Tea Culture

In Japan, there are no native tea trees or habit of tea drinking at the beginning. According to historical records, in 804, the founder of the Tendai School of Central Japan, Zhicheng, brought Chinese tea and Buddhism classics into Japan, which was the beginning of Japanese tea ceremony culture. Later, during the Kamakura period, the Japanese monk Ei Sai visited China twice to study Zen and the tea-drinking culture at that time. He brought Zen and tea culture from the Southern Song Dynasty to Japan together and made

outstanding contributions to the cultural exchanges between China and Japan and the development of Japanese tea culture. In 914, the publication of "Tea Taking and Health Preservation" by Ei Sai was of great significance to the formation of Japanese tea culture[2]. This book is known as Japan's "*Tea Sutra (Classic of Tea)*". It introduces in detail the functions of tea, together with the methods of making tea and drinking tea in China at that time. It not only promoted the spread of tea-drinking culture in Japan, but also laid the foundation for the formation of Japanese tea ceremony culture. Thus, Ei Sai is thought to be the first who has significant influence in promoting tea in Japan. After the thirteenth century, with the continuous increase of tea plantation areas in Japan, the Japanese gradually formed the habit of drinking tea, and the Japanese tea culture at that time was greatly influenced by the Song Dynasty in China. Tea drinking was popularized among the high-ranking aristocrats as an identification of their status. Also, tea activities such as tea testing came into ordinary people's lives as a kind of entertainment.

In the fifteenth century, under the promotion of the Ashikaga Yoshima Shogun, tea drinking became a social custom. At the end of the 16th century, the Japanese tea ceremony culture master Senri Shou inherited and summarized the past tea ceremony culture. He incorporated Zen ideas, temple regulations, and monk practice into the Japanese tea ceremony culture to form the "Caoan Tea" culture. Senri Shou makes the tea ceremony culture no longer restricted by material factors, and at the same time completely removes the entertainment of the tea ceremony. He sublimated the Japanese tea culture to the aesthetic realm of "Tao", aiming to remind the world that material needs are irrelevant. The key is to get rid of secular ties and to enter the state of forgetting oneself through introspection and inspiration. Since the age of Senri Osamu, Japan has formed a relatively complete tea ceremony culture. After more than a thousand years of development, Japanese tea culture has become more perfect and mature.

3. COMPARISON OF THE AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TEA CULTURE BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN

3.1 The Natural and Casual Chinese Tea Culture and the Rigorous and Solemn Japanese Tea Culture

Chinese tea culture is characterized by advocating nature, being casual, and not constrained by form. It is a kind of popular culture that can be appreciated by people from all walks of life. In China, the people who drink tea have a broad base, and anyone who loves tea can participate in the tea activity[3]. For example, the teahouse in Chengdu, China, vividly demonstrated the natural and casual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese tea culture. In Chengdu, there are tea houses on almost every street, and tea houses are also the most visited public places. Some tea houses casually placed the tea tables and benches outside the house, then placed a few recliners and tables along the wall. The tea drinkers usually shook the fan, teasing and joking with others, or closed their eyes and meditated, sipping tea, or teasing the birds while tasting the tea. The tea house has gradually evolved into a unique local culture, giving people the enjoyment of casual and natural beauty. However, in Japan, to become a qualified participant in a tea activity, one must have a long time of training and a wealth of a certain amount. Japanese tea culture is very strict, with rigorous requirements and complicated etiquette rules. For example, in Japanese tea ceremony cultural activities, the costumes and accessories of the participants are very grand and strictly designed. They must wear elegant kimonos, white socks, plain white handkerchiefs, and no precious metal jewelry. Moreover, the tea ceremony activities also require the participants to speak and behave appropriately and modestly. When the host welcomes the guests, the guests take their seats first. Then a special tea master will preside over the ceremony in accordance with the prescribed procedure. The movements of the tea master must be standardized and accurate, with a sense of flexible rhythm. During the tea party, the whole atmosphere is very solemn. From the talk between the host and the guests to the placement of tea sets and cups, strict regulations must be followed. There are also rules which regulate the use of the right or left hand during the ceremony. In addition, the flower arrangements on the tea table have hidden

secrets. The host needs to choose according to the season and the identity, status, and age of the guest. The places for tasting tea are generally the tearoom. The topic of tea tasting cannot be chosen arbitrarily. Secular topics such as money and politics cannot be mentioned, whereas topics about nature are generally chosen.

3.2 The Joy of Chinese Tea Culture and the Sorrow of Japanese Tea Culture

Mr. Chen Xiangbai, a famous Chinese tea expert, believes: "Chinese tea ceremony is to guide individuals to complete character cultivation in the process of enjoying the beauty through the process of drinking tea, so as to realize the harmony and happiness of all mankind." Chinese tea culture is formed by the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Confucianism is the core of Chinese tea culture. The positive and optimistic attitude towards life advocated by Confucianism is also integrated into the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese tea culture[4]. This positive and optimistic thinking has also prompted the Chinese people to pay great attention to the pursuit of happiness and enjoyment when drinking tea[5].

In China, people tend to choose bright and spacious places for drinking tea, accompanied by light music such as zither and pipa, or traditional art such as storytelling and Peking opera. In this way, one can not only taste the delicious tea, but also appreciate the art, which makes people happy and ease their minds. On the contrary, suffering, a beauty of sorrow, is an important aesthetic concept in Japanese traditional culture. This beauty of sorrow is caused by the sadness and frailty from the rises and falls in life and all things in nature. Japanese tea ceremony expert Mr. Hisamatsu Shinichi believes that Japanese tea ceremony culture is a comprehensive cultural system and taking tea is the entering point. It is comprehensive, unified, and inclusive. There are various aspects of art, morality, philosophy, religion, and culture. The core is Zen. Japanese tea culture is deeply influenced by Zen ideology. It can be said that Japanese tea culture has a strong relation with religion. "Ji" means "quiet, secluded and mysterious" in Sanskrit, and can be further understood as "Nirvana" in Buddhist scriptures. In the Kamakura period when the thought of Zen prevailed, scholars and literati longed for the quiet world of Nirvana. Therefore, "Ji" developed into a sense of beauty. This kind of sadness, suffering, and ethereal beauty had a great influence on

Japanese traditional culture, as well as the Japanese tea culture.

3.3 The Beauty of Balance of Chinese Tea Culture and the Beauty of Incompleteness in Japanese Tea Culture

Neutralization is not only the way for Chinese people to cultivate their moral character, but also a major aesthetic feature of Chinese tea culture. Chinese native philosophy, Confucianism and Taoism, both advocate and pursue neutrality, which has also influenced the aesthetic concept of Chinese tea culture. The so-called beauty of neutrality is the beauty of balance and harmony. It opposes singleness and extremes. For example, Chinese tea sets usually have a symmetrical design, which also requires an exquisite and smooth surface and a neat shape, in pursuit of a flawless effect. The elegant tea set not only has appreciative value, but also adds the color and fragrance of tea[6]. For example, the blue and white porcelain tea set in the Song and Yuan dynasties is very exquisite in workmanship, beautiful in shape and soft in color [7].

However, Japanese tea culture pursues a kind of flawed beauty. Tenshin Okakura, a master of modern Japanese culture, pointed out in his book "The Book of Tea": "We all understand that it is impossible to reach perfection. Hence, to achieve a certain possible perfection, tea ceremony can be viewed as a kind of worship of incompleteness." [8] In Japanese tea sets, the color or shape is usually unbalanced and inconsistent. Some tea bowls are scraped off irregularly with several pieces of clay; some are left with craftsman's handprints on the surface; some are unevenly colored... These are regarded as premium tea sets. There are also decorations such as hanging scrolls or flower arrangements in the tearoom, which do not give people a neat and uniform feeling, rather uneven. There are also some tea boxes, the surface is very mottled and worn. In the aesthetic concept of Japanese tea ceremony, these flaws have a unique charm and profound artistic conception.

4. CONCLUSION

The tea cultures of China and Japan both have national characteristics and are an important part of their respective traditional cultures. Chinese tea culture gradually develops from the daily event to a spiritual enjoyment, and then discovers its aesthetic value. Chinese tea culture can be called "the

philosophy of beauty". It is based on Confucianism and has the aesthetic characteristics of being natural, easy, pleasant, and neutral. Although Japanese tea culture shares the same roots as Chinese tea culture, it has its own unique charm. Japan first established the spiritual value and aesthetic concept of tea culture, and then gradually popularized the use of tea. Thus, Japanese tea culture can be called the "religion of beauty". It is centered on Zen ideology and has the characteristics of rigorous solemnity, painful beauty, and incomplete beauty.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Ge Gao.

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