

## **Study on Shaanxi Tea and Tea Culture Development Path Based on the Strategic Concept of “Silk Road Economic Belt”**

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**Abstract:** By the method of literature's research and practical investigation, this paper gives a brief introduction of the important status about tea and tea culture in ancient, modern Silk Road and the current situation, based on analyzing the existing problems of Shaanxi tea and tea culture. The aim of this study is to internalize Shaanxi tea and tea culture 's five paths, including market advantage, competitive advantage, and economic advantage, via the construction of Silk Road Economic Belt.

### **The Proposal of Strategic Concept of Silk Road Economic Belt**

The Silk Road is first proposed by Germany geographer Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen. He named the trade route on land from Xi'an, Gansu, Xinjiang, Middle Asia, West Asia to Europe as the Silk Road. On September, 2013, Xi Jinping proposed the strategic concept of reviving the ancient Silk Road and Silk Road Economic Belt on the speech in Nazarbayev University on the tour to Kazakhstan. This strategic concept is based on the ancient Silk Road, and draws blueprint of regional economies and humanistic cooperation of countries along the ancient Silk Road like China (mainly including the west, southwest and northeast parts), Russia, five countries in middle Asia, Europe and Africa and surrounding countries. Therefore, enhancing the cooperation in economy and trade as well as humanity is the top priority in the cooperation among countries of Silk Road Economic Belt.

### **The Important Status of Tea and Tea Culture in Ancient and Modern Silk Road**

Tea is globally recognized as the green and healthy drink. China is the birthplace of tea and tea culture in the world. Tea carries the long history and culture of our country, and is the most important trade goods and culture resource as well as the emblem of Chinese culture and significant symbol. Since ancient times, tea plays an important part in the history of communication in economic and culture home and abroad.

Tea is the eternal melody of Silk Road and ancient Silk Road imparts tea deeper glory in profound implication. The history of Silk Road is the exchange history of Chinese tea to the foreign. Thus Silk Road is also cherished by the tea community as Silk and Tea Road or Tea Road.<sup>[1]</sup> As recorded by related historical data, the tea trade on Silk Road starts from Tang Dynasty, thrives in Song Dynasty and booms in Qing Dynasty. In Hanwu Emperor's period, Zhang Qian from Chenggu of Hanzhong, which is the hometown of tea in Shaanxi, served as an envoy to the west regions twice to show the sparks of fire of foreign trade and spread of tea and other goods. Later in Tang Dynasty, tea was considered as common goods and sold to other countries on land Silk Road. It is incompletely calculated that 42 states and one country in Tang Dynasty produced more than 150 kinds of famous tea, and the total tea production was 0.8-1million Dan, and per capita was about 2.4 Jin.<sup>[2]</sup> The palace tea culture in Chang'an in Tang Dynasty confirms the important status of tea in national drinks, and sado dominates and sweeps the country. Tea was also delivered to Japan and Korea, and contributed to the tea fashion in Arab countries. To Song Dynasty, tea was the predominant goods on the land

trade road and tea-horse trade market was the basic state policy in Song Dynasty. In Ming and Qing Dynasties, Zheng He sailed to the west for seven times, and the tea trade on the sea was opened, which promoted and developed the tea trade and culture communication. Tea was sold to South Asia, West Asia, Europe and North Africa from the ancient Silk Road and became the daily drink of countries along Silk Road, like Russia, Rome, Britain, and was well received and spread.

## **Current Development Situation of Shaanxi Tea and Tea Culture**

### **Basic Situations and Characteristics of the Development of Shaanxi Tea and Tea Culture**

Enormous acreages of green tea are grown in Shaanxi, concentrated in its southern region and distributed in 28 counties, such as Hanzhong, Ankang and Shangluo. According to *the 2015 Shaanxi Tea Industry Development Report*, by the end of 2014, the planting area of tea in Shaanxi has been up to 1.924 million mu and the area of harvested tea has been 1.252 million mu, whose planting scale ranked the first 8 in Chinese tea growing provinces. Therefore, Shaanxi tea industry has become the fifth pillar industry of agriculture in our province. In recent years, with enlarging areas of tea planting, increasing of yields, qualities and output value and improvement of industrial management technologies, some tea leading companies have prominent advantages and great potential, such as Shaanxi Cangshan Qin Tea Group, Shaanxi Ze Fu Tea Group, Shaanxi Pengxiang Group, Ankang Ziyang Panlong Tea and so on. On this basis, the development and dissemination of Shaanxi tea and tea culture have made great progress. The development of Shaanxi tea has the following characteristics:

The quality is excellent. Due to ecological and geographical advantages of Southern Shaanxi, its tea has excellent qualities. For example, in Hanzhong area, which is in high latitude and sea level and has high cloud and mist probabilities, the tea has a long growth cycle, good quality, high levels of Zinc and Selenium and is away from pollution. Moreover, with oil dregs fertilizer, the tea has a strong flavor and taste, and is durable with hot water in long time, green, and natural, organic, non-polluting and of high quality.

The tea seeds resources are rich. Not only Southern Shaanxi has some excellent local tea seeds, but also it has introduced some high-quality seeds from other regions, such as Hunan and Fujian, whose trial planting was good.

There is a certain advantage of regional brands development. Such as, Ziyang Maojian, Qinba Wuhao, Wuzi Xianhao, Jingwei Fucha (known as the mysterious tea on the Silk Road) and so on.

It has a huge consumption market and owns geographical advantages. Xi'an, linking the east to the west and connecting the south to the north, is an opening gate of the northwest and the political, economic and cultural center. Also, it is the center for spreading tea culture, distributing, processing and firstly exporting tea, which has a variety of advantages for promoting tea and tea culture.

### **Main Problems of the Development of Shaanxi Tea and Its Culture**

Although there are some certain historical and practical advantages in terms of the development of Shaanxi tea and its culture, many problems still exist.

The present development of Shaanxi tea and its culture may be far from the long history and culture status and the influence of Shaanxi tea. The scattered tea gardens of Shaanxi tea mostly distributes in mountainous areas of Southern Shaanxi with inconvenient traffic and the tea gardens are mostly the low yield gardens built in the 1960s or the 1970s with small production scales and low efficiency. What's worse, the operators have a low level of education, which makes the tea gardens have the characters of extensive cultivation, low product market shares, weak market risk tolerance and competitive force.

In terms of tea processing, the tea gardens are unable to keep pace with the large-scale planting speed of Shaanxi tea, and the safety and quality standards cannot be guaranteed. The production and processing of family artisanal workshops with low yield and low technology leads to the low efficiency and the low quality, which cannot satisfy the high-end demands of the modern tea consumption market because of the lack of the production and processing lines of industrialization,

mechanization and cleaning as well as the deep-processing and the research production and development of the tea derivatives.

People have poor awareness of brand, market and marketing, and low competitive spirit. In addition, the tea culture has poor promotion force and people have low comprehensive development consciousness of the tea derivatives and scarce capacity. The brands of Shaanxi tea are mostly limited to the local brands with various names and classes, and the superior resources of Shaanxi tea, which have weak competitiveness, small influences and deficient international effects, only scatter. Most brands are consumed by consumer groups in Shaanxi province, and they compete with each other viciously and they cannot make full use of the human history and culture advantages of Shaanxi tea, which makes it lacking in regional effective cooperation and the group cohesiveness. Because of that, its tea industry chain has low correlation and Shaanxi is still lacking in industrial clusters and industrial cluster effect[3].

There are so many enterprises in Shaanxi involved with tea but they scatter everywhere and there is still a lack of a leading enterprise with strong innovation capacity. Most enterprises have poor management level and marketing capacity, cannot conduct different adjustments and optimizations of the market structure according to the different tea cultures and customs of the countries along the silk road in terms of marketing strategy, and lack the strategic researches on domestic and overseas tea markets.

There are so few professionals involved in researching tea. Take Hanzhong area as an example, only over 300 people have the professional titles. There is still a serious lack of high-qualified tea art talents proficient in the history and culture of tea, the tea art and the languages and tea cultures of different countries.

The research level of the research institutions involved in Shaanxi tea falls behind the levels of the research institutions in other tea producing areas and the research contents are mostly limited to the planting and processing level of tea. There is still a lack of related researches on the production and development of the culture, the management, the marketing and promotion, and the derivatives of Shaanxi tea.

### **Development Path Choosing for Shaanxi Tea and Tea Culture Based on the Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt**

At present, how to turn the embarrassment to opportunity, to cater for mass consumption when satisfy the needs of high-end consumers, and to draw support from the construction of the Silk Road economic belt to internalize Shaanxi Tea and tea culture as advantages in marketing, competition and economy, is a major task for Shaanxi Tea industry to face and deal with now. Personally, I think:

Prompt the direct provincial supervision of county finance policy to be practiced at a wider range and scale in the realm of tea industry. The provincial and municipal governments advocate that the delegated counties shall regulate the construction of modernized tea garden based on the practical situation of their development, strengthen the technical upgrade and optimization of 1960~1970s' low-yield tea garden and actively execute standardized production, step up organic tea base construction and the building of product certification system. They shall also establish suitable growing zone for Shaanxi tea in the form of modern tea garden cooperative society, intensify research efforts of agricultural science, plant tea scientifically, effectively bind the revival path of tea industry, the "cast off poverty and set out on a road to prosperity" policy and ecological elder life together, establish a completely integrated instruction and certification system of tea choosing—planting—producing—processing—selling—development of derivative tea products—producing—researching—marketing. They shall propel the construction of an integrated modern tea industry which incorporates tea production, selling, cultural derivatives research (like tea powder, tea beverage, tea cosmetics, medicine, tea package, tea ware, tea souvenir development and production), tea culture travel experience, customary tea art and vacation tour so as to boost the benign development mechanism of dual-track interaction between tea culture and tourism market. Upon choosing the course of tea culture sightseeing-tour, Shaanxi- Gansu Ancient Tea-horse

Road-Qinzhuang Road (Xi'an-Ziyang-Shiquan-Xixiang-Hanzhong-Liuba-Fengxian County -Tianshui-Qingshui-Zhuanglang-Lanzhou-Ningxia), the ancient Silk Road tour along Tea-horse Road (Gansu-Sinkiang-Central Asia-Western Asia-South Asia), Sichuan-Shaanxi cultural ecological tour (Xi'an-Hanzhong-Ankang-Sichuan tea production area) are all good choices. In the meantime, with its historical cultural background and advantages on tourism resources, Xi'an, as an international metropolis in Shaanxi province, can make use of the influence and appeal of Ring Park, Clock Tower, Jingkang Street and Qujiang District, and model after Jinli in Sichuan province, Wide and Narrow Alleys, People's Park and other famous scenic spots, to form a industry chain of Shaanxi tea and Tea culture with its own distinctive style.

Continue to exploit the strengths of South Shaanxi tea distribution area, and combine the conceptions of ecological environment construction and protection, ecological comprehensive treatment and concept of compensation into every part of tea production and development, develop ecological and scientific agriculture, and build Shaanxi's industry chain of ecological and scientific agriculture and food safety. Manage to establish a series of famous green, organic, high-quality, flavorful, harmless and pollution-free Shaanxi tea brands of high-added value with the historical culture as their background, the brands are propped up by ecology and scientific research, and center on the advance of modern technology. Optimize four major tea production bases: Ankang, Xianyang, Shangluo, and Hanzhong. Hanzhong was founded as a rare high-flavor tea production zone nationwide, its focus is green tea and organic green tea market; Ankang's main focus is selenium-rich tea and related industry, to forge its reputation as an origin of selenium-rich tea; for Shangluo, its focus are organic green tea and black tea; as for Xianyang, its focused featured product shall be Fuzhuan tea. Meanwhile, under the premise of respecting the local tea brands, coordination and integration among the most powerful brands shall be implemented to make a batch of tea brands with profound historical culture +strong northwest features+ brand effects. Except that, a batch of talents with international vision, marketing experience and strategy shall be cultivated, especially those high-caliber ones of developmental, all-round, innovative types with high-end techniques and skills and possess the abilities of tea garden planning, tea planting, management, tea processing, quality examination, tea marketing, tea art performance or other ones, increase the research towards tea market and tea culture in different countries, and work out an strategy for the internationalized development of Shaanxi tea to accelerate the internationalization progress of tea industry.

Support a batch of leading enterprises of Shaanxi tea with the ability of "bring in and go out" and bring the power of model into full play. In the meantime, work out some motivational measures to encourage these enterprises to develop innovative management mode. For example, for Cangshan tea Group in Shaanxi, its "peasants +bases +professional society + formula + market" mode of management is worthwhile to be used for reference. This management mode, combined with sanitary tea production line greatly lower the cost of tea picking and it also optimizes the tea quality, and enhances the efficiency rate of tea resources, thus create a diversified development strategy for green tea, black tea and dark tea to go hand in hand, which also meets the needs of international market in a better way.

The government shall lead the way in stimulating strategic cooperation and technology development among tea peasants, tea related enterprises, agricultural colleges in Shaanxi, and tea research and promotion agencies. At the same time, it shall also push the cross-regional collaboration of Shaanxi tea between Shaanxi and Anxi, Shaanxi and Wuyi Mountain, Shaanxi and Quanzhou and other regions. The cooperative efforts made by Quanzhou and Xi'an are especially ground-breaking under the the Silk Road economic belt policy. The two giants can fully accomplish a powerful alliance and build a tea community sharing common fate or a community of the same interest by close collaboration, can strengthen the mechanism of friendly communication and cooperation with the international tea research and publicity organizations in the countries along the line of the Silk Road. Through the co-holding of tea and tea culture seminar with the countries along the line of the Silk Road, and special subject cultural promotion event, academic communication, scientific research cooperation, global appreciation of tea art and promotional event, they can gain more common grounds on Korean tea ceremony, Japanese sado, British afternoon tea, Arabian tea beverage culture

and other common features of tea culture, and carve out the Silk Road market together. Besides, through global exhibition, they can create the Silk Road tea culture industry chain, build Asia-Euro marketing center and open up new ways for regional cooperation. They will also work out tea culture international marketing strategy, jointly disseminate the essence of Chinese tea ceremony and four functions and spirits of Chinese tea culture: “be grateful, be inclusive; be ready to share and to befriend”, which can demonstrate the Chinese culture to Europe, to the whole world and to show its implicit and reserved nature, its philosophy of harmony in diversity, its openness and inclusiveness, its emphasis on win-win relationship, and its praise of peaceful coexistence. All of above reveal the inclusiveness, kindness and cohesiveness of tea culture. Every country shall set mutual benefit and win-win result as a goal and try to find new shining points for their cooperation.

Nowadays, the whole society has come into a big data era in which the network economy is explosive, the information network is developing and the E-commerce is attacking the entity economy. The promotion and advertisement of Shaanxi tea as well as its tea culture have to keep up with the development of the era. It is suggested to tap into great effect and powerful influence of the Internet to transform the traditional trade operation model and set up the concept of globalization; to use the advertising and marketing through we-media, international communication and interactive website to strengthen the establishment and maintenance of the global sales network of Shaanxi tea; to facilitate the integration of online and offline trade space and the integration of the traditional trade promotion model and the Internet-oriented sales model(for instance, combining newspapers, magazines, books, living theaters, films with the sales and promotion of E-commerce). With the help of Xi’an, which is viewed as the Internet hub center of Chinese public computer network and multi-media information network among five North-west provinces, we can achieve the international spread of Shaanxi tea and its culture under the background of big data era. Meanwhile, through exploiting the humanistic advantages of Shaanxi province, which is a large province famous for its culture, painting and calligraphy, literature and writers, we can combine it pottery and jade with Shaanxi tea and its tea culture and integrate the research of tea culture with its creation so as to promote both the producing and the processing of an abundance of tea industries that have enough potential and good prospect and the development of the third industry in Shaanxi province.

## Conclusion

At present, tea and tea culture have become one of the important contents of Shaanxi province in its performing its strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt. The *Opinions on Accelerating the Tea Industry in Shaanxi Province* was published in 2014, and *2015 Action Plan on the Construction of the Belt and Road Initiatives of Shaanxi* was published in 2015 by the government in Shaanxi. At “2016 Silk Fair and the 20th Succession of IFCEW (full name is Investment and Trade Forum for Cooperation between East and West)” that was hosted by Xi’an and participated by guests from more than 90 countries and districts and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, we found that Shaanxi tea has become a crucial component of “the Forum Theme of Ecological Agriculture of the Belt and Road Initiatives” and the Se-enriched tea and its industry in Ankang has become the key recommendation product to enable Shaanxi tea to enter the Silk Road market. Shaanxi tea will enter into the upper and middle reaches by 2020 according to the 2020 planning of the provincial party committee and the provincial government. As the only tea growing province among the five north-west provinces along the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and as the new start-point and important bearing area of the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt, Shaanxi province shall continue to take the spirit of the Old Silk Road, reuse the new chance of the construction of the Silk Road, utilize the unique location advantage and the deep historical as well as humanistic foundation in the construction strategy of the Silk Road and seize the historic opportunity and the essential mission endured by the nation so as to be fully equipped for chasing beyond and remodeling resplendence.

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