The Significance and Connotation of the Intercultural Communication Between Chinese and British Tea Cultures

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Abstract. Embodying the long Chinese history, tea is a typical form and symbol of the Chinese culture, serving as an important means of intercultural communication. It exhibits the extensiveness and profundness of a long-standing and well-established national culture. By analyzing the inherent nature of the culture of tea, this article discusses the historical and connotative differences between the Chinese and the British tea cultures, comparing the two cultures on a cross-cultural level.

Introduction

In the context of cultural globalization, Eastern and Western cultures meet and communicate more and more frequently. As an integral part of many traditional folk cultures, tea shines with its rich connotation and heritage in worldwide cultural communication activities.

History and Connotation of Chinese Tea Culture

China has a long history of growing and drinking tea. Said to be discovered by Shennong in Chinese folklore, tea is popularized in Zhou Dynasty and has been thriving since the Tang and Song Dynasties. Tea is seen in the lives of all different social classes from the royals to the commons. As Chinese tea develops with China's traditional culture, people of different classes at different times of history drink different teas, attaching tea with different cultural connotations. The variety and diversity allow the Chinese tea culture to cross the boundary of social classes, offering various experiences to various people.

Viewed from the inherent nature of Chinese tea culture, the activity of drinking tea represents to some extent a contemporary popular fashion. In the Southern and Northern Dynasties when Buddhism prospered, the vogue of drinking tea started among the monks, since it represents to some extent the Buddhist thought of renouncing the world and the unique combination of Buddhism and Taoism. By then, ancient literati's activities of drinking tea began to convey a religious sense. The drinking of tea was regarded as a symbol of joie de vivre and dignified appearance. Henceforth, the Chinese tea culture came into being out of the humanistic meanings attached on tea.

Notably, the connotation of Chinese tea culture has always been evolving. From growing, picking, making to drinking, it is influenced by not only the regional environment but also the mainstream social ideology including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Since Lu Yu, the Sage of Tea, initiated a tea culture with literati's sentiment and national customs by integrating the three teachings, the Chinese tea culture has bred numerous branches. However, these subcultures have more similarities than peculiarities because they all share the same national and historical origin though with their own respective ethnic and regional features. From an overall evolutionary perspective, Chinese tea culture emphasizes the tea drinker's spiritual cultivation and harmonious coexistence with the nature. Symbolizing clearness and purity, the Chinese tea reflects the drinker's wish to return to and integrate with the nature as well as their high principle to despise materials. Or in turn, the joyful and peaceful feelings brought by the tea make the tea drinker want to live a simple life and cherish lofty aspirations.
**History and Connotation of British Tea Culture**

In the mid-17th century, tea was introduced to the British, and soon became a novel drink aside of coffee and juice. Other than largely favored among the common folks in China, tea in the Britain was first consumed by the upper classes. Initially conventionalized by the Royals, tea in Britain was recognized from up to down, having connoted a status symbol for aristocracy all the way. To say the Chinese tea culture implicating the essence of the Chinese people is an appreciation of external ambiance and internal mindset, the British tea culture is an art of a visualized daily routine. With tea becoming a considerable element in British dietary structure, the British people have been habituated to drink tea during breakfast, afternoon and supper, not to mention business and social occasions. In a manner of speaking, the British tea culture is a culture in the everyday life of the upper class.

The conventional British afternoon tea culturally connotes the organic combination between etiquette and upper class life. The etiquette of afternoon tea is closely linked to the life and habit of the British Royals as they have a complete set of strict rules for afternoon tea defining its time, accompanied food and so on. Secondly, participants in afternoon tea must wear formal clothes, with men dressed in tails and women in long skirts. In modern days, even though clothes are more loosely required, most British people still wear formal dresses and hats to show respect to the host, regarding the afternoon tea as a formal occasion. During the tea, the host serves everyone in person, which is another proof that British manners are absorbed into the national tea culture. Thirdly, the British tea culture defines strictly the tea ware and accompanied food. The cakes, cookies and scones represent the delicacy of British tea culture, and some little fruits bring more colors.

Integrating tea into their dietary formula, British people are pursuing a rich taste, while the Chinese are seeking a plain one. This is a very distinct difference. To say Chinese tea stands for literati and artists, British tea reflects the life and manners of upper class. British tea ware draw inspirations from the nature, carrying delightful patterns such as flowers and plants, alien from Chinese tea ware’s dim texture. These distinct features exhibit the connotation of British tea culture which pursues a sharper sense of form and feeling, and emphasizes on the celebration of life, the formalities of tea drinking and the interests of a certain social class.

**Different Social Functions of Chinese and British Tea Cultures**

China has a long history of tea drinking and tea culture. With the commons more and more closely exposed to tea, the social functions and attributes of tea culture have been evolved.

In the ancient times, tea cultures took shape as the methods of making and drinking tea evolved. Since tea species, processing techniques, making methods, and tea ware varies, there are a variety of circumstances and populations of tea drinking. Different tea cultures are existing all over the world. In China, the drinking of tea requires high-quality environmental conditions, utensils and music. These requirements reflect the literati character of the tea culture, manifesting its social functions. Since most teahouses are established in the peaceful and beautiful natural areas, often by rivers or lakes, tea drinkers can leave their troubles outside, throw themselves into the nature, purify the spirit and relax the mood. Simply speaking, the Chinese tea culture socially connotes the spiritual purification and communication, consequently leading to the indifference to fame and wealth.

At the same time, the tea culture combining the three teachings enhances the communication and friendship among the tea drinkers, furthers their knowledge of self and truth, makes them forget about the material world and integrate into the nature. Thanks to the psychological effect of drinking tea, people can keep calm, adjust to the busy daily life, introspect soberly, and have a better understanding of other people and the whole society.

Britain has a comparatively shorter history of drinking tea than China, while creating a new culture that combines coffee and tea. In Britain, some people like tea, while others prefer coffee. The culture combining coffee and tea embodies a faster pace of life and a more complicated way of living, reflecting the British attitude and cognition of life. For a British, consuming coffee at a cafe...
is a relaxation of both body and soul. The cafe is a place to chat or work, or even only to listen to some music alone and quietly all the afternoon. Representing a richly diverse social culture, coffee is a more casual drink with less restrictions than tea. Thus, many British people will go to a cafe when they are feeling down, which reflects the importance of coffee in their life.

As a supplement and variation of coffee culture, British tea culture combines daily routine with social etiquette, enriching the life of the commons while representing the evolution and transmission of an upper class culture. Popularized from up to down, the British tea culture socially connotes a reference and imitation of the manners and lifestyle of the upper class. Simply, it is more down-to-earth, emphasizing not on the spiritual effect, but on the pursuance of life and the combination between life and spirituality.

The Significance and Connotation of the Intercultural Communication between Chinese and British Tea Cultures

Simply speaking, intercultural communication refers to the collision and merging of similar matters from different cultural backgrounds. In the context of cultural globalization, tea culture which originated in China has taken root in most countries and regions across the world. Cultural interaction concerning tea dates back to the pioneering Silk Road. With modern societies and cultural connotations diversifying, the tea cultures are enriched. Therefore, Chinese and British tea cultures have become more and more similar and faced with more chances to learn from each other.

As tea cultures differ as soon as they began to take shape, the cultural connotations of tea vary with different evolutionary history, lifestyle and cultural values. In cross-cultural communication, the imported culture will diverge if its historical heritage and national connotations are not fully understood. When tea was first introduced in Europe, the Europeans didn't learn about its function in Chinese culture, nor did they appreciate its taste and drinking customs. Instead, they drew a connection between tea and their own lifestyle and habits, and popularized it from up to down, which brings a strong sense of social class factor into the British tea culture.

Tea is a considerable element in Chinese culture. By deepening the knowledge of Chinese tea culture among the Westerners, their tea drinking customs may be altered, and tea may become a catalyst for intercultural communication, clearing away the barriers between different cultural patterns.

Over the past few years, tea has been frequent in the cultural communication events between UK and China which have allowed more foreigners to witness China's economic and cultural growth, and have redefined the connotations of the Chinese culture. Simply, the interaction of tea cultures epitomizes and embodies international cultural communication. By the light of the jointly familiar tea culture, Chinese and Western cultures will blend more easily, with more and more similarities appearing.

In the context of cultural globalization, epitomizing the traditional folk culture, Chinese tea sees a brighter future for development with larger platforms and greater chances around the globe. By observing a particular culture's evolutionary history and the national ideology involved in it, the understanding of the whole nation and its national culture is deepened in such way that a harmonious friendship is built between different nations. This is the essence of the interaction of tea cultures.

In conclusion, although differing in historical evolution, connotation and social influence, Chinese and British tea cultures share the same root. Both reflecting the people's spiritual state and life attitude, they've already become the integral parts of the respective national cultures. Intercultural, these two cultures will continue to learn from each other and serve as a cut-in point for cultural interaction. With tea cultures interacting, cultural communication is much easier, and the identity with the opposite culture advanced.
References
