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The Overseas Promotion and Dissemination of Chinese Tea Culture

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Abstract: Tea culture contains rich elements such as etiquette, morality, aesthetics, and philosophy, which have long become an important symbol of traditional Chinese culture. After thousands of years of inheritance and development, Chinese tea culture has formed a complete cultural system, which covers tea tree planting and production, tea art, tea ceremony, and spiritual value. Against the background of globalization, actively promoting the spread of Chinese tea culture overseas can not only help China and other countries around the world exchange and learn more, but also show the unique spiritual temperament and cultural charm of Chinese civilization. This article discusses the core connotation and contemporary values of Chinese tea culture, and then reviews the historical vein and practical path of its overseas dissemination. This article analyzes the level of cognition and acceptance of tea culture by overseas audiences, and also summarizes some challenges encountered in current communication, such as language barriers, cultural differences, insufficient sustainability of communication, and inadequate localization. Based on these analyses, this article puts forward a set of systematic and operable overseas promotion strategies from the aspects of product innovation, policy support, talent training, long-term operation, cultural adaptation, and accurate communication. The purpose is to further enhance the international influence of Chinese tea culture and integrate it more naturally and deeply into the world cultural ecology.

Keywords: Chinese tea culture; Cultural export; Cultural dissemination; Cross-cultural communication; Go global strategy

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1. Introduction

China is the hometown of tea and the birthplace of global tea culture. Since ancient ancestors discovered the medicinal and drinking value of tea, tea has slowly integrated into people's daily life, social exchanges, etiquette norms, and moral cultivation, and finally formed a tea culture system with strong Eastern people characteristics [1].

Chinese tea culture is not just a culture of drinking. It is more of a comprehensive cultural form that is

highly integrated with traditional philosophy, ethics, literature, art, and folklore. The values it advocates, such as harmony,tranquility, joy, authenticity, reflect the basic attitude of astern people towards nature, society, and life. It is not only a lifestyle culture, but also a carrier of social norms, aesthetic interest, and spiritual pursuit [2].

Historically, Chinese tea culture has spread all over the world through the ancient Silk Road, maritime trade, and people-to-people exchanges, which has had a profound impact on the formation of tea customs in Japan, the Republic of Korea, Britain, Russia, and other countries [3]. In modern times, with the rapid development of economic globalization and digital media, the channels of external dissemination of tea culture have become more diverse. However, there are still some obvious obstacles in cross-cultural communication, such as inaccurate translation of technical terms, insufficient interpretation of cultural connotations, relatively limited forms of communication, and insufficient localization, which limit the international acceptance of tea culture [4].

Therefore, in the new era, people have to think carefully about the ways to promote Chinese tea culture overseas, find ways to improve its recognition abroad, and make the dissemination of tea culture sustainable and high-quality.

2. Overseas dissemination of Chinese tea culture

2.1. Historical development of overseas communication

The ancient Silk Road is the earliest and most important channel for the spread of Chinese tea culture overseas. Through the Land Silk Road, tea and the culture behind it slowly spread to Central Asia, West Asia, and even all the way to Europe. Through the Maritime Silk Road, tea reached Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Southeast Asia, and then was further exported to Europe. Tea was a highly valuable commodity at that time, which not only drove economic and trade exchanges in the areas along the route, but also promoted the cross-cultural dissemination of tea drinking customs, tea-brewing methods, and etiquette, laying the foundation for exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations.

According to legend, tea was first discovered by chance when Shennong tasted hundreds of herbs. At first, it was mainly used as a medicinal plant to clear heat, detoxify, and relieve physical discomfort. In ancient times, people did not drink tea directly as a drink, but as a dish, or cooked porridge with rice and grains. Later, with the gradual improvement of eating habits, people began to brew tea alone, which formed a basic way of drinking tea. In the Ming Dynasty, there was a relatively big change in tea processing: cake tea and pressed tea gradually gave way to loose tea, and the brewing method became simpler. This change greatly promoted the popularization of tea drinking among the people and also created conditions for the large-scale spread of tea culture abroad.

During the Tang and Song Dynasties, Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges were very lively, and it was also a critical period for the spread of tea culture. A multitude of Japanese monks and envoys came to China to learn Buddhism and culture, and brought tea seeds, tea-making techniques, tea tasting methods, and related etiquette back to Japan. These things have been localized and evolved over a long time in the local area, and slowly formed the Japanese tea ceremony that pays attention to rituals and is rich in spiritual connotations [7]. Almost at the same time, the Korean Peninsula also absorbed the core content of Chinese tea culture and developed its own tea ritual system according to local customs.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the rapid development of Western maritime trade, tea began to be exported to Europe on a large scale and became an important international trade commodity. After importing

a large amount of Chinese tea, Britain slowly formed its own afternoon tea culture based on black tea, which had strong social functions. As for Russia, combined with the local climate and living habits, it developed a warm tea culture centered on tea cooking.

The tea trade between China and the West also had its complex side. Britain, facing a large trade deficit because it kept buying so much Chinese tea, started smuggling opium into China to balance the books. The situation eventually led to the First Opium War (1839–1842). In addition, there was a British botanist named Robert Fortune, who entered into China's tea area, stole tea seeds and processing technology, and then brought them to Darjeeling, India. This directly broke China's long-standing monopoly position in the global tea industry, but it also inadvertently accelerated the globalization of tea cultivation and processing.

2.2. Channels and platforms for overseas communication

In the system of external dissemination of contemporary tea culture, the Confucius Institute and Confucius Classroom play a basic and platform role. By opening tea culture courses, holding lectures, organizing tea experiences, cultural salons, and tea tasting activities, they systematically introduce the history, processing skills, tea performances, etiquette, and the cultural connotation behind Chinese tea to overseas students, which is equivalent to building a stable and formal cross-cultural bridge.

Overseas Chinese groups are a very important force in the folk communication of tea culture. In foreign Chinese communities, when traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival come, the local Chinese community often holds some tea festivals, tea performances, and tea set exhibitions to show Chinese tea culture to local people in a very vivid and scenic way, which also enhances its popularity and influence. In addition, official cultural exchange projects, international tea industry fairs, cultural tourism festivals, and inbound tourism activities provide a high-standard and large-scale platform for the display of tea culture.

With the rapid development of digital media and the Internet, online new media has become an emerging main channel for overseas dissemination of tea culture. On international platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, numerous short videos, live broadcasts, documentaries, and graphic content have emerged, talking about tea knowledge, tea-making tutorials, tea set appreciation, tea garden scenery, and tea art performances. These contents make the dissemination of tea culture visual, fragmented, and efficient. In addition, in movies, TV series, cartoons, and literary works, scenes of drinking tea, the beauty of tea sets, and the details of etiquette have also appeared more and more, subtly helping overseas audiences to understand Chinese tea culture more intuitively.

Against the backdrop of "telling Chinese stories in English," the targeted dissemination of traditional Chinese tea culture in English has become a new breakthrough for overseas dissemination. For foreign audiences, use simple, accurate, and easy-to-understand English to explain the basic knowledge, core cultural concepts, and tea-brewing etiquette of Chinese tea, coupled with intuitive visual displays and immersive experience teaching. This practice has broken the language and cognitive barriers encountered by foreign audiences in understanding Chinese tea culture. This English-based communication method is more in line with the reception habits of global audiences, and also makes the dissemination of Chinese tea culture no longer limited to a single content and rigid form, so as to achieve more friendly and efficient cross-cultural communication [6].

2.3. Awareness and acceptance of overseas audiences

In recent years, driven by multi-channel communication, the popularity of Chinese tea culture abroad has increased significantly, and the communication effect is getting better and better. Now, tea has become the second most consumed beverage in the world, second only to water. Like Turkish black tea, Mongolian salty milk tea, and Tibetan ghee tea, these various ways of drinking tea show that tea really crosses the boundaries of countries, nations, and cultures and is deeply integrated into the daily life of people around the world.

Overseas audiences' understanding of tea is no longer limited to common black tea and green tea. Oolong tea, white tea, yellow tea, Pu'er tea, and herbal tea have also slowly entered their vision. At the same time, foreign countries' interest in tea art, tea sets, tea space aesthetics, and traditional tea rituals has also increased significantly. Many foreign enthusiasts began to take the initiative to learn Chinese brewing methods, and even participated in tea ceremony experience activities.

Historically, tea culture has also played a very important role in the development of global society. In 18th-century England, drinking hot tea helped reduce the spread of waterborne diseases and improved public health. During the Industrial Revolution, tea could quickly replenish physical strength, refresh the mind, support workers to continue working, and indirectly improve social production efficiency. Countless examples of cultural exchanges show that tea has not only deeply influenced Chinese society and culture, but also served as an important economic and cultural link connecting China with Britain and even the entire Western world for a long period of history [9].

However, in general, overseas audiences' understanding of Chinese tea culture is obviously limited. Most people only stay at the superficial level of "tea is a healthy drink," and lack an in-depth understanding of the philosophical thought, etiquette spirit, aesthetic pursuit, and life wisdom contained in it. Differences in history, values, and lifestyles in different countries can easily cause misunderstandings or stereotypes, which will also prevent tea culture from being more deeply accepted and recognized [10].

3. Challenges in the Internationalization of Chinese tea culture

3.1. Challenges from language barriers

In Chinese tea culture, there are a myriad of highly concentrated and culturally loaded technical terms and some unique concepts, such as tea art, tea ceremony,tranquility, joy, authenticity, harmony, Zen tea, kung fu brewing, tea table arrangement, Huigan, rock rhyme, and so on. There are deep historical and cultural connotations behind these terms, and it is difficult to find accurate corresponding words in foreign languages such as English. If translated directly, it is easy to lose a lot of semantics, dilute the connotation, and even cause misunderstandings.

Language barriers will directly affect the quality of teaching, communication, and cross-cultural interaction. Even though Confucius Institutes and cultural institutions have made a lot of efforts, there is still a shortage of composite translators who have both professional knowledge of tea and high foreign language proficiency. In this way, it is difficult to accurately and completely convey the core cultural concept to overseas audiences. For those whose native language is not Chinese, it is more difficult to understand the cultural meaning behind the actions of the tea ceremony, the etiquette process, and the choice of utensils by relying on translated texts alone, which further increases the difficulty of in-depth communication [8].

3.2. Challenges to sustainable development

Sustainable operation is a prominent problem in the overseas promotion of tea culture. At present, most of the tea culture communication projects are short-term activities, such as one-time exhibitions, flash activities, and short-term exchange projects. They lack long-term and stable funds, normalized operation mechanisms, and systematic promotion plans, and it is difficult to form a sustainable influence. If people really want to make tea culture "go out, go in and go up," they must set up special support funds for product research and development, brand building, and overseas promotion. At the same time, people should encourage social capital and enterprises to participate and build a diversified investment mechanism.

At the same time, globalization and modernization also bring the risk of cultural homogenization. Under the impact of the fast-paced modern lifestyle, the sense of ritual in traditional tea art and etiquette has slowly weakened, and some cultural characteristics and spiritual cores are in danger of being simplified, weakened, or even dissolved. In addition, the intellectual property protection system related to tea culture is not perfect. Regional public tea brands, traditional skills, and cultural IP are easy to imitate and infringe upon, which disrupts the market order and hinders the long-term sustainable development of tea culture overseas.

4. Strategies for promoting Chinese tea culture abroad

4.1. Innovation of cultural products

To promote the spread of tea culture, people must make some cultural products that both meet modern aesthetics and meet the needs of the international market. On the one hand, people can deeply explore the symbolic elements of tea culture, integrate the patterns, poems, and etiquette of tea into the design of cultural and creative products, and develop tea sets, stationery, clothing, incense, and ornaments that are both practical and artistic, so that tea culture can really enter the daily life of overseas residents. On the other hand, promote the combination of tea culture and the modern content industry, put the stories, aesthetics, and customs of tea into movies, TV series, animations, games, documentaries, and short videos, and vividly present the cultural connotation in a way that young people like and that is also common internationally. At the same time, people can also develop portable tea bags, cold tea, instant tea, and gift boxes to adapt to overseas fast-paced living habits, which can improve the acceptance and spread of tea products and make tea culture more vibrant overseas.

4.2. Policy support and guidance

The government must also strengthen the top-level design and policy guidance, and integrate the overseas dissemination of tea culture into the national layout of cultural exports. With policy support, tea enterprises, cultural institutions, universities, and social organizations can be encouraged to participate in high-end exchange platforms such as the International Tea Expo, Cultural Year and Tourism Promotion, and promote the deep integration of tea culture and the digital economy, cross-border e-commerce, and cultural tourism. At the same time, officials should also strengthen cooperation with international mainstream media and overseas new media platforms, broaden the communication channels, and improve the ability to set the agenda and the right to speak internationally, so that the story of Chinese tea culture can be shown to the world more realistically, comprehensively, and three-dimensionally.

4.3. School education and talent cultivation

Professional talents are the key to the high-quality overseas dissemination of tea culture. It is to systematically

integrate the knowledge of tea culture into the education system of relevant universities at home and abroad, and open some courses and training courses, such as introduction to tea culture, comparison of Chinese and foreign tea customs, tea art and etiquette, and cross-cultural communication, so as to cultivate composite talents who not only understand tea culture, but also master foreign languages and understand the rules of overseas communication. For overseas Chinese teachers and cultural communicators, educators should strengthen special training, improve their ability to interpret tea culture and organize experience activities, and promote the communication content to be more standardized and systematic. Through experiential teaching, immersive practice, and tea art training, overseas learners can slowly go from practical operation to the spiritual level and gradually understand the deep connotation of Chinese tea culture.

4.4. Long-term attention and public participation

To improve the effect of overseas communication, people must shift from short-term activities to long-term operations, so that tea culture can truly be integrated into the daily life of overseas society. This can promote the combination of tea culture and modern social etiquette, business reception and leisure life, highlighting its health, social, and emotional value in contemporary society. Regularly hold some tea art experiences, tea parties, holiday tea gifts, and parent-child tea-brewing activities overseas to improve public participation. It is also necessary to support the construction of overseas tea culture experience centers, theme teahouses, and cultural spaces to provide local people with immersive scenes. At the same time, the content of communication should also keep up with international hot topics, health trends, and lifestyle trends, so that tea culture can always maintain attention and attractiveness overseas.

4.5. Ensuring cultural adaptability

The core of cross-cultural communication is to respect differences and achieve effective adaptation. To promote tea culture overseas, people must pay attention to the issue of localization. People should carefully study the history, culture, religious customs, values, and consumption habits of the target countries and regions, and systematically compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures to avoid conflicts in communication due to cultural taboos or different expressions. In terms of communication content, people can appropriately weaken those ritual details that are too regional and too detailed, and focus on the universal cultural values of health, harmony, respect, and nature, so that overseas audiences can more easily have emotional resonance. In terms of communication methods, people should respect local acceptance habits, achieve “Chinese connotation, international expression,” and realize cultural sympathy, instead of forcibly exporting culture [5].

4.6. Customized communication strategies

Differentiated and targeted localized communication strategies must be implemented for different regions and audiences. In East Asia, people focus on highlighting the ritual tradition, ritual aesthetics, and philosophical thought of tea culture, and strengthen the resonance of history and culture. In Southeast Asia, people can combine existing local tea-drinking customs, focusing on healthcare, folk integration, and the application in daily life. When it comes to the European and American markets, the natural aesthetics of tea, the concept of slow life, the taste of art, and a healthy lifestyle are emphasized. At the same time, people should strengthen cooperation with local institutions, media, schools, and opinion leaders, use local Internet

celebrities, bloggers, and talents to create and promote localized content, improve the affinity and penetration of communication, and let the tea culture really take root in the local area.

In the process of customized communication, using English as the main communication language is an effective way to tell the story of Chinese tea well. When facing a global audience, standardized English expressions can be used to popularize basic knowledge of the six major tea categories, tea origin, tea art and etiquette, and to avoid remote technical terms and complex sentences. It focuses on the universal values of health, tranquility, etiquette, and harmony in tea culture, and clearly explains the spiritual connotation of Chinese tea culture in a simple and vivid way. Combined with English subtitles, tea demonstration videos, cultural commentary short films, and other visual means of communication, it can further eliminate cognitive differences and let overseas audiences truly experience the charm of traditional Chinese tea culture, so as to enhance the communication effect and international influence of Chinese tea culture.

5. Conclusion

With the joint efforts of official promotion and private participation, the overseas dissemination of Chinese tea culture has achieved considerable results, slowly turning from product export to cultural export, which has become an important carrier of cross-cultural communication. However, the internationalization of tea culture still faces some practical challenges, such as language barriers, cultural differences, insufficient sustainable operation, and inadequate localization.

In the future, to further enhance the international influence of Chinese tea culture, people must be upright and innovative, constantly optimize the communication strategy and path, and push forward the aspects of cultural product innovation, policy support, talent cultivation, long-term operation, cultural adaptation, and precise communication. Only by realizing localized expression on the basis of respecting cultural differences, doing a good job in contemporary innovation while maintaining the cultural core, and then telling the story of Chinese tea well in international language and communication methods, can Chinese tea culture be truly deeply integrated into the global cultural ecology, in order to promote civilization exchanges and mutual learning and build a common destiny of mankind. Contribute a unique and lasting cultural force.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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