Chapter 2

The Sprouting and Blooming of China's Tea Culture

China's Yea Culture Sprouted in the Tang Dynasty

Tang People's love for Tea

China's tea culture took its initial shape in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the heyday of China's feudal age. The economic, social and cultural prosperity and busy foreign exchanges at that time provited rich soil for the sprouting of the splendid tea culture of Tang.

During the period the tea plant was cultivated in 42 prefectures of the country, and the habit o fdrinking tea had filtered into the daily life of people of all social ranks and classees. Emperors of the later Tang, who were especially fond of tea, ordered the tea producing areas to send their earliest tea, which was also the best, to the palace, where a grand banquet was held on 5th April every year to celebrate the Qingming Festival, the Han festival to honor the dead, which is also called Plant Festival. Some officials even got promoted because they paid the tea tribute. A satirical ballad ran : "The father wins promotion through tea, which also brings the son riches; hence why don't the intellectuals go a short cut like this instead of troubling so much to study the *Spring and Autumn and A Horseback Diagram from the Yellow River*?" To win the emperor's love, imperial concubines racked their brains to improve

the art if making tea,and gradually a game called tea competition was developed among them. In the Tang Dynasty intellectuals aiming to secure official positions had to go through strict examinations, the final of which was held in the capital and directly presided over by the emperor. In the exam, supervised by many court officials, candidates were shut in separate rooms to avoid cheating and only allowed to take some solid food with them. The only exception was tea which could be sent to each room for the examinee to refresh himself. Princes and ministers, following the example of the emperor, took pride in their good taste for tea . Li Deyu, the grand councilor,even took the trouble to use the best spring water from thousands of miles away to make a cup of tea. It was customary to receive guests with tea and regarded as most impolite not to do so.

Drinking tea was initially advocated by intellectuals , and the habit as well as the art of poetry prospered during the Tang Dynasty. Liquor had always been used by poets to encourage themselves to write, but in the Tang Dynasty alcohol was officially prohibited and production greatly reduced, because it needed too much grain. So tea, a much cheaper stimulant,was used as an alternative. At the time Buddhism was flourishing, and monks in temples were required to sit in meditation in the evening without supper. But young monks always found it difficult. So the Lingyan Temple at Mount Tai made an exception, allowing the monks to have tea during the evening practice. It was not long before the measure spread across the templs of the

whole country and became special beverage for distinguished visitors. Because of the large consumption of tea, temples beganto grow tea plants themselves. Because they were mostly located in mountains with plentiful rainfall and sunshine, temples always produced tea of good quality. It was also no coincidence that Taoists, who also lived in seclusion in mountains, had a green thumb as well as good taste for tea.

With the popularity of drinking tea among ordinary people , tea shops appeared everywhere,even in the Central Plains provinces, such as Shandong, Hunan and Shanxi, where tea production was comparatively low.

The tea trade, a useful means for the Tang Dynasty to increase state revenue, was also employed to promote exchanges with neighboring ethnic grouos. Bartering tea for horses was very common in border areas at the time.

The Tang people's universal love for tea gave impetus to research into tea. Ten main functions of tea were summarized as follows:

1. Tea is beneficial to health and able to dredge body channels and relieve headaches, xerophthalmia and fatigue;
2. Tea can help dispel the effects of alcohol and quit drinking;
3. Tea, when dressed with sauces can serve as nourishing"porridge" to allay hunger;
4. Tea can help drive away summer heat;
5. Tea,a good refresher, can help shake off drowsiness;
6. Tea can help people to purify themselves and eliminate worries;

7. Tea help the digestion of greasy food. making it indispensable in the life of Chinese ethnic minority people. whose staple foods awe meat and milk products;
8. Tea can be used to eliminate toxins from the body;
9. Tea is conducive to longevity;
10. Tea can aid self knowledge.

Lu Yu,the Saint of Tea

Chinese people always attach the same importance to the quality of their material and their spiritual lives. For instance, they eat and drink to satisfy their physiological requirements, and to refresh and form their minds as well. Drinking alcohol, always regarded as etiquette at banquets and sacrificial ceremonies, is also customary for soldiers who are to go into battle to show their heroism and boldness. Chinese people are particular about the aroma, color and taste of their food dishes, which are taken not only to fill the stomach, but also as objects with aesthetic value.

So naturally, tea, a drink specially advocated by intellectuals, became a material full of cultural and ideological meaning. It was the Tang people who further developed the art of making and drinking tea, imbuing the whole process with the rhyme of the philosophy of life. Lu Yu, the first person who perfected the art of tea, created the tea

ceremony and promoted tea culture, was addressed respectffully as the "Saint of Tea" in Chinese history.

Lu Yu, born at Jingling, Fuzhou (present-day Tianmen County in Hubei Province), livd during Tang's flourishing ages of Kaiyuan and Tianbao. An orphan abandoned by his parents, he was taken in by Jigong, an elderly eminent Buddhist, and brought up in a temple named Longgai. Jigong loved tea very much and grew many tea plants around the temple. Little Lu Yu learned many arts of cultivating and making tea from Jigong, and gradually became an expert. According to legend, once when Jigong was called up to teach Buddhism at the imperial court, he felt quite disappointed at the tea there. But one day he was suddenly overjoyed after taking several sips of tea, saying, "Ah, it's made by my disciple Lu Yu. He's come." It was true. Lu Yu had been specially summoned to make tea for him.

Though growing up in a Buddhist temple, Lu Yu was more interested in Confucianism. The reclusive life in a lonely temple was too much for him. So he managed to flee away and join a theatrical troupe. As he was clever, he not only acted but also wrote many humorous plays. Later he won the recognition of Li Qiwu, prefect of Jingling, who helped him to go to nearby Mount Tianmen to learn Confucianism from an old scholar. But the good times did not last long. Lu Yu's study was interrupted by An Lushan's Revolt in the north, which drove the

emperor Tang Xuanzong south to Sichuan from the capital Chang'an. Lu Yu was forced to go with the fugitives to Huzhou, a tea-growing area in the south. There he collected much useful information about the cultivation, picking and baking of tea, and also made friends with the most famous poets, monks, calligraphers and statesmen of the period through their mutual love of tea. On the basis of profound discussion with his friends on the art of making and drinking tea and his own long-term exploration of the theory of tea culture, Lu Yu wrote The Book of Tea, the first treatise on tea and tea culture in the world.

The Book of Tea by Lu Yu and the Tea Culture in the Tang Dynasty

The Book of Tea contains ten chapters. The first chapter deals with the origin of tea, the soil and climate suitable for its cultivation and its nature and functions. Chapters two and three cover the equipment for the processing of tea and the actual processing. Chapter Four looks at utensils for making and drinking tea; Chapter Five deals with making tea and the arts applicable to tea-making; Chapter Six explores the technique of drinking tea and standards of tea appreciation. Chapter Seven records the history of Chinese people's tea-drinking habits while Chapter Eight describes China's tea-producing areas and the qualities of different teas. Chapter Nine outlines the numbers of tea-related things

to be used on different occasions and the final chapter details tea paintings and advocates using this vivid art form to introduce tea to tea drinkers.

The Book of Tea is not only a treatise on tea, but also a reflective synthesis of natural and social sciences and the material and ideological world. It creates an art of the process of drinking tea, including its baking, water selection, the display of teasets and drinking, all of which are imbued with an aesthetic atmosphere. The book also accentuates the moral factor in the art of tea. Lu Yu held that people who loved drinking tea should excel in virtue. He made the golden mean of Confucianists, the perseverence of Buddhists in seeking truth and the Taoists' theory that man is an integral part of nature all blend harmoniously in the process of drinking tea, allowing the drinker to attain mental purity in the aroma of tea. The Book of Tea is regarded as the authoritative summary of Chinese tea culture before the mid-Tang period. Later Tang thinkers continued to write works on tea culture, such as the Sixteen Varieties of Tea Su Yi, which added new ideas to the art of tea,and the Comments on the Waters for Making Tea by Zhang Youxin, which detailed the value of the water in the rivers, springs, pools and lakes of the whole country. Liu Zhenliang, a eunuch who had reached a high level of attainment in tea culture, even summarized the ten virtues of tea. However, these thinkers were only experts standing on the

shoulders of Lu Yu, who pioneered tea culture and became the saint of tea in the eye of later generations. Late in the Tang Dynasty Lu Yu was posthumously called the God of Tea.In China gods did not come from Heaven, but were seen as the spirits of great people. Lu Yu, an eminent contributor to the culture of tea,was undoubtedly worthy of the title.

Tribute Tea and Game Tea in the Song Dynasty

In the Tang Dynasty the habit of drinking tea spread from the imperial court to towns and the countryside; and it was the literati, hermits and Buddhists who played a leading role in the advocacy of tea culture. But things changed in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when the influence of intellectuals on the culture of tea weakened. Although many famous literati, such as Su Shi, the great writer of the Northern Song, and Li Qingzhao,the celebrated woman poet, and Lu You,a prolific poet of the Southern Song, were fond of tea and wrote some literary pieces on tea, they contributed little to the construction of tea culture. Tea culture at that time was expanded and publicized by two polar strengths-the imperial court and ordinary people.

Tribute Tea in the Song Dynasty

Song emperors had a special love of tea, and some of them were well up in the tea ceremony. Emperor Song Huizong even wrote a

treatise on tea, entitled Grand View on Tea. Because of the supreme standing of the emperor, the natural and artistic qualities of the tea given as tribute to the imperial count were seriously taken by tea makers.

It had been a tradition down the ages to compress tea leaves into cakes for storage. When the tea culture was in bloom, the Song people, in order to add to the beauty of tea, began to make such cakes in a more ingenious way and have the imperial dragon or phoenix pattern embossed on them. Such tribute tea was mainly produced in the Jianzhou Prefecture, and designed by two famous officials,Ding Wei and Cai Xiang.

Jianzhou, a prefecture originally called Jian'an, was located in present-day Fujian Province. A place with beautiful scenery and many Buddhist temples, it had flourishing tea cultivation, and had been designated to produce tea cakes for the court even before the Song Dynasty.

During the reign of Emperor Song Taizong, Ding Wei was the superintendent of imperial tea production in Fujian. A talented man of many parts, Ding Wei was good at writing poems, painting, playing chess and music, and well versed in Buddhism and Taoism. To win the emperor's favor, or a higher position and better salary, Ding Wei took a lot of trouble in creating new styles of tea cakes. During the Tang

Dynasty, the cakes had a hole in the middle for a string to rum through to hold them together and were roughly made. Ding Wei stopped the making of holes and designed many new patterns and dies for tea cakes.

Cai Xiang, a man of letters, and also the best calligrapher of the time, had different rules of conduct from those of Ding Wei, who liked to humor the emperor. Cai Xiang often remonstrated with the emperor, suggesting he live a simple life and show more solicitude for the ordinary people. During his two tenures of the magistracy of Fuzhou, he had done the local people a lot of good, building up seawalls, irrigating farms and planting pines for a distance of 700 **li** to protect roads. Noble and unsullied, he demonstrated the virtue of a true tea scholar. He once wrote a treatise on tea, the first part of which described the criteria for judging the quality of tea: the color, fragrance and taste. The latter part centered around teasets, especially the harmony between the colors of the sets and the tea itself. Cai Xiang also made a contribution to the production of tea cakes in the shape of dragon, which were smaller and more exquisite than earlier ones.

Differing from ordinary tea products, tea cakes in the shapes of dragons and phoenixes were full of artistry and Chinese cultural features. Besides the specially designed dragon and phoenix patterns, the dies, called **kua,** came in various shapes, such as squares, flowers, big and small dragons, and were delicately made. It was quite

complicated to make such tribute tea, for the tea leaves has to be picked at dawn before the Grain Rain (6th solar term), and carefully selected, steamed, pressed, ground, caked, baked and packed before sent to the emperor. Some pattern dies, one inch in diameter, were used to make only 100 tea cakes each every year. It goes without saying such tea cakes were luxuriously packed, first in the leaves of a special kind of tree, then in layers of yellow silk, and then in red laquerware caskets with gold padlocks and official red seals, and finally in special bamboo cases. Such tribute tea, called "Bird-Tongue Budlet," could have at most three budlets on each leaf. According to contemporary records, one cake of such tea had a value of 400,000 copper coins. These expensive teas could only be enjoyed by the emperor and his empress and concubines. The officials, if they happened to be awarded one cake by the emperor, would never enjoy it but make it a present to some noble friend or worship it as a curio.

Ouyang Xiu, a celebrated literatus and statesman of the Song Dynasty, was granted only one tea cake during his twenty years of tenure of office at the imperial count; and it was almost impossible for ordinary people to have even a look at it. Such luxurious practice deviated from the spirit of tea culture amd the rule of simplicity advocated by Lu Yu. But on the other hand, it demonstrated the great intelligence of the laborers who made the tea cakes.

Game Tea in the Song Dynasty

Game tea, a method in ancient China for people to value the quality of different teas in company, was well under way in the Tang Dynasty and occurrde at all social strata in the Song.

Game tea first appeared in Jian'an, where the tribute tea was produced. At that time there were 1,336 official and private baking shops in the Beiyuan hills, so it was natural for game tea to be created for appraising the quality of various teas from different workshops. Fang Zhongyan, a famous man of letters of the Song, once wrote the Song of Game Tea,in which he described, "Before presenting the tribute tea to the emperor, tea men in the Beiyuan hills gathered to compete with each other. Baking podw scattering around, clear water from the Zhongling River boiling in cookingpots, tea dusts flying in mortars, snow-white tea foams bubbling in the cups of the tea men, the game tea was a grand view. The delicate fragrance of the tea, more pleasant than any other smell, floated in the aie, greatly refreshing people's mind. Whenthe game was set, the winner would be elated as if walking on air, and the loser feel as ashamed as a defeated soldier." The game tea soon spread to ordinary people and literati, and later even to the imperial family. Tea and Gambling Houses, painted by a Song artist named Lian Songnian, gave a vivid description of the scene of the game tea.

The game tea blazed a new trail for the art of tea as recorded in The Book of Tea by Lu Yu. Traditionally, when tea leaves were directly cooked in a pot, drinkers often sat aside to observe the changes in the tea water, meditating on the profound mystery of nature. In the Song Dynasty, however, people usually poured boiling water into cups where tea dust was placed, and stirred the water with a bamboo brush to make the tea and water completely blend with each other and foam grew like the head on a glass of beer. The person who could stir up the most and nicest foam would win. Actually what counted were the quality of the tea leaves and the skills of the competetors. In the modern Japanese tea ceremony tea is still maie from dusts, but the art of making foam has been lost. In recent years, however, the Fuzhou Tea Ceremony House of China has brought this special and ancient art to light again after long-term research.

As the game tea flourished throughout the whole country, teasets, especially the vups, were given more importance by the Song people. They were fond of light-colored tea, so tea things made of black porcelain and celadon, which could better set off the tea, were highly prized.

In the view of ancient Chinese literati, the game tea relied too heavily on people's skills and lacked natural charm. They paid more attention to the environment and atmosphere of the tea ceremony. For

instance, Fang Zhongyan, the great thinker of the period, liked to chant poems and play the zither in a riverside pavilion and have rare birds and ancient trees around him while cooking a pot of tea. The famous Song poet Su Dongpo thought the natural rhythm contained in tea could only be perfectly learned while collecting water from the river and cooking the tea in the wilds on a moon night when the toll from an ancient temple and the sound of the watch from the old city echoed around.

The Development of the Tea Culture in the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasty

The Culture Was Simplified in the Yuan Dynasty

The skills of tea making had taken a great leap forward in the Song Dynasty, but tea cakes in shapes of the dragon and the phoenix were too luxurious for ordinary people, and at odds with the natural qualities of tea. The Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) was established by the Mongols, who originally were nomadic people in the north of China. In the early Yuan the Mongols could hardly agree to the exquisite culture of the Song , but with the infiltration of the Han culture and out of the need to balance their greasy diet, they gradually accepted the tea culture and simplified it. So tea cakes began to fade out, and other varieties were mass-produced, such as tender tea (similar to the modern green tea, whose tea

leaves were picked in early spring), dust tea (with additives like walnut, pine nut, sesame,apricot and chestnut). Nut tea was welcomed among ordinary people. Even today, people in Hunan and Hubei still have the habit of drinking nut tea.

In the Song Dynasty tea was used in various rites by the imperial court and upper class people, while in the Yuan period it moved closer to the everyday life of ordinary people. Actually it was representative of folk customs of the time; for instance, newly married girls showed their respect for parents-in –law and guests by presenting tea, tea was also a common subject in Song paintings, such as The Game Tea by Zhao Mengfu, which described the scene of game tea among ordinary people, and the unsigned Steamed Bread and Hot Tea, which vividly portrayed young brothers drinking tea and tasting steamed bread together. Such paintings reflect the affinity of tea with people's relationships. In a dynasty with many nationalities like Yuan, this affinity was especially important; no wonder that later tea was widely popularized.

The literati of Yuan followed their predecessors in advocating a simple and natural way of holding the tea ceremony. They usually made and drank tea in the hills, by rivers,under ancient trees and in front of thatched cottages. It was a reaction against the luxurious and difficult style if the Song Dynasty, and also a manifestation of Yuan people's wish to return to nature.

The Tea Ceremony Advocated by a Ming Prince and Ming Paintings on Tea

Established during the waning of China's feudalism, the Ming Dynasty (1369-1644) was inevitably confronted with many social problems, such as the surviving forces of the Mongols, the power struggle inside the imperial count and the peasant uprisings. The Ming rulers had to adopt a high-handed policy to consolidate their power, and the literati were the first to bear the brunt. They were forbidden to hold gatherings, and liable to be accused of opposing the court at every move. In such circumstances many intellectuals found tea a good means to express their noble aspirations and their contempt for meretricious bigwigs.

Zhu Quan , the seventeenth son of the first Ming emperor, had helped Zhu Di, the fourth son, to usurp the throne. But unfortunately the new emperor became suspecious of Zhu Quan and exiled him to the south .Feeling as depressed as the literati, Zhu Quan , a good disciple of Buddhism and Taoism, began to incline towards a reclusive life and also take a strong interest in the tea ceremony. He wrote the *Manual On Tea* , proposing the purification of people's mind by tea and advocating some reformsof the ceremonial procedures established after the abolition of tea cakes. His proposas wer th ebasis which shaped the form and spirit

of the Ming tea ceremony. The literati at the time usually burnt insense before the tea ceremony to air the room and worship heaven and earth; then they laid the table with tea things and cooked water, ground tea leaves, made tea and stirred out the bubbles with a brush. (Zhu Quan made his teapot in the shape of a Taoist alchemic vessel, and had it covered with rattan after the simple style of ancients. Later someone used bamboo, a symbol of moral integrity, as the covering.)

Many books on the tea culture appeared during thr Song Dynasty. For instance, Gu Yuanzhong wrote a book also named *Manual on Tea*, and Xu xianzhong wrote *A Complete Gamut of Waters*. These books, similar to Lu Yu's The Bok of Tea,summoned up the development of tea culture down the ages and described the new features of that in early Ming Dynasty.

Several painters also made a contribution with their brushes to the promotion of the tea culture. For example, the Tea Ceremony at the Huishan Hill. Lu Yu and His Tea and Tasting Tea by aWen Zhengming, and Making Tea, Playing the Zither and Tasting Tea and With Fragrant Green Tea by Tang Yin vividly presented the life of leisure of the Ming literati-beside gurgling mountain prings or surging rivers, inside ancient pavilions, they played the zither and drank tea, voicing their aspirations to the green mountains and white clouds, and encourage themselves to hold fast to their integrity in adversity.

In the later Ming, the active part in the tea ceremoiny waned because of the repressive policy adopted by the imperial court toward the literati. They had to move the tea ceremony into their houses , and the natural and the noble qualities were gradually lost. Many new devices were added to the tea ceremony : for instance, the “100 Tea Patterns ,” which meant ripples of various patterns, could be stirred up in a cup od tea.

The Tea Culture Went Deep Into the Midst of OrdinaryPeople in the Qing Dynasty

Deep penetration into ordinary people’s life was the feature of the tea culture of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The superb skills needed for the tea ceremony and profound spirit expressed in the tea culture were too far away from the llife of ordinary people, so in the Qing period they made some adaptations. The most conspicuous one was the popularization of teahouses , where people of different social strata communicated freely with each other. As tea was welcomed by more and more peoplpe, tea things naturally became simplified, leaving the teapot and cups to play the leading role.The teaset was often called “Set of Mother and Son,” because it was like a mother breast-feeding her

sons when tea was poured into the cups from the pot. So the affinity that tea had with people's relationships was furhter strengthened.

Though the number of items needed for a set of tea things was lessened, the workmanship of them grew more excellent, especially that of the teapot. More shapes were designed, and more materials, such as purple sand, copper, porcelain, goid, silver, jade and cloisonne enamel, were developed to made the pot. At the time tea export as on a large scale,and teasets were sold abroad as incidental items. Collectors inside and outside Chinsa gradually made it a status symbol to collect Chinese teapots. Moreover, when there were foreign guests visiting China, officials got used totreating them with tea. Drinking tea, as a social custom and part of the etiquette of China, spread to other parts of the world quickly,and tea culture became a treasure of all humanity.