

# Intercultural Communication in the Digital Tide: Innovative Strategies for Language Application in Tea Culture Dissemination

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**Abstract:** *With an attempt to facilitate the utilization of modern technology to disseminate tea culture in the global context, the paper probe into the issues of historical cannon translation by using literature review method. Previous studies have shown that although traditional translation work has established a solid foundation for intercultural communication of tea culture, it is still necessary to develop more innovative dissemination strategies to address the challenges in the process of cultural transmission in the digital age. This is to promote appreciation and respect for different cultures and the development of intercultural communication.*

**Keywords:** *Tea culture; Intercultural communication; Digital age*

## 1. Introduction

Tea, as a cultural icon, has transformed from its role as a daily beverage into a multidimensional carrier encompassing lifestyle, art, and philosophy. In its evolution into a global cultural phenomenon, language has played a crucial role. As a pivot of cultural transmission, it has facilitated communication and understanding between different cultures. Current research reflects that tea acts beyond a mere communicative bridge; it serves as a medium promoting social and cultural interactions. Despite the global dissemination of tea culture, the task that its unique connotations should be accurately and conveyed to bring Chinese culture to the global stage still faces challenges. Particularly in exceeding traditional methods of promotion, ensuring the professionalism, accuracy, and attractiveness of the content is especially important. Scholars have delved into the impact of multilingual translations tea documents and classics like "The Classic of Tea" on the Western perceptions of tea culture, while there is still a gap in research on employing modern technologies for its global dissemination. In the digital age, technological development has created novel applications like automated translation, social media, and online platforms, significantly diversifying communication channels and providing new opportunities for cultural exchange. This paper explores the potential and practical operation of these tools in disseminating Chinese tea culture and how to provide new chances for tea culture transmission that it can offer fresh insights into its international exchange and cognition, and inject new momentum into the field of tea culture research.

## 2. The origin and historical evolution of tea culture

### 2.1 The origins and peak of tea culture literature

The history of tea can be traced back to the Western Han Dynasty, which can be evidenced by tea remains from 2,100 years ago at Hanyangling Xi'an, Shaanxi, and from 1,800 years ago at the Guru cemetery site in Ali, Xizang. Apart from physical discovery, documentary records also provide for the history of tea, such as "Tong Yue" made by Wang Bao during the Western Han Dynasty, which mentions "Brew the tea and prepare clean tea utensils" and "Go to Wudu to buy tea". Interpreted from perspective of the dual-evidence method, this statement has relatively high credibility<sup>[1]</sup>. The ancient Chinese utilization of tea is closely related to the legend of Shennong tasting various herbs, who is regarded as a pioneer in agronomy and medicine, and whose medicinal value of tea is documented in Shennong's Classic of the Materia Medica: "Shennong tasted all kinds of herbs and accidentally ate seventy-two poisonous plants in the day, but he used tu to detoxify"<sup>[2]</sup>. The word "tu" here is considered to be the ancient name for tea. Initially, tea was used as a medicinal herb for its functions of stimulating the mind, aiding digestion, and treating diseases. However, in the "The Book of Tea: Six Drinks" by Lu

Yu of the Tang Dynasty, it states: "The use of tea as a beverage started with Shennong and was used and popularized during the time of Duke Zhou" [3]. This statement indicates that the basic function of tea as a beverage was also discovered by Shennong, and later applied and promoted during Duke Zhou's era.

During the Tang and Song Dynasties, Chinese tea culture reached its peak with many famous tea literature works being created. In the Tang and Five Dynasties, there were 16 tea books, of which four complete classics exist today, namely Lu Yu's "Tea Classic," Wang Fu's "A Debate between Tea and Wine," Su Geng's "Sixteen Soup," and Zhang Youxin's "Record of Decocted Tea and Water" [4]. The phrase "Tea emerged in the Tang and thrived in the Song" aptly summarizes the prosperity of the tea industry in the Song Dynasty. About thirty categories of tea books were produced during the Song Dynasty, of which more than ten have been handed down to the present day, far more than in the Tang Dynasty. For example, Cai Xiang's "Tea Record," Zhao Ji's "Theory of Tea" and Xiong Fan's "Xuanhe Beiyuan Gong Tea Record", etc., all deeply reflect the profoundness of Song Dynasty tea culture and the growth of tea art. Additionally, the Song Dynasty witnessed the international spread of tea culture. The Japanese Zen monk Eisai Zenji who visited China twice to study wrote "Drinking Tea for Health," which had a significant impact on Japanese tea culture, laid the foundation for the evolution of the Japanese tea ceremony and became the precursor of the internationalisation of tea culture.

## **2.2 The global reach of tea culture literature**

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the expansion of the Maritime and Overland Silk Roads facilitated the spread of Chinese tea culture worldwide, which led to an increased global fascination with Chinese tea. Many documents about tea were translated into foreign languages, further promoting the global spread of Chinese tea culture. In 1559, the Italian Giambattista Ramusio compiled "Navigatiane et Viaggi" based on Marco Polo's travelogue, one of the early European documents about Chinese tea. In the 16th century, after missionaries Gaspar da Cruz and Matteo Ricci went to China, they brought detailed accounts of Chinese tea customs to Europe based on their experiences in China, enriching Europe's grasp of tea culture<sup>[5]</sup>. In 1935, William Harris Ukers, the founder of "Tea and Coffee Trade Journal," introduced the translated text of "The Classic of Tea" to English readers for the first time in his notable work "All About Tea." Ukers likened this work to a Western equivalent of the "Classic of Tea," as it occupies as a cornerstone in English tea studies in the English-speaking world, akin to an encyclopedia in the field of tea. Soon after, in 1974, the first complete translation of "The Classic of Tea: Origins and Rituals" by Francis Ross Carpenter was published. This translation filled a gap in Western literature in tea studies, providing more reference information for Western countries to study tea culture. It was eventually included in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, marking a milestone in the global dissemination of Chinese tea culture.

In modern tea literature, the non-profit organization "Global Tea Hut" released the full English translation of "The Classic of Tea" belonging to its e-magazine in 2015. After that, it continued to translate chapters one to three and four to six of "The Sequel to The Classic of Tea" in its 2019 and 2020 issues. This version, a collaboration between Chinese and foreign translators, remains the original style and provides the translation with detailed annotations to help readers better understand the text. These literary works have served as conduits for global engagement with Chinese tea culture. Furthermore, the modes of exchange and interaction in tea culture have become increasingly diverse. Since the first International Tea Culture Seminar in 1991, the conference has evolved into an academic event in the field of tea culture, held biennially and organized by the China International Tea Culture Institute. It serves not only as a platform for exchange in tea studies but also performs academic trends and innovative theories in the field.

## **3. Translation of traditional tea culture and methods of cultural propagation**

### **3.1 Literary translation and the spread of tea culture**

"The Dream of the Red Chamber," as a cornerstone of ancient Chinese literature, is not only a cultural encyclopedia of the late Ming and early Qing periods but also an accurate reflection of China's rich cultural heritage, particularly in its portrayal of tea culture. The English translation of this classic novel allows English-speaking readers to glimpse into the intricate life details of classical Chinese society. For example, in David Hawkes's rendition, a conversation associated with tea between Baoyu and Daiyu in Chapter 55 is translated as: "You've been drinking so much tea; do you know this is the

Jia's tea? When will you consent to be a member of the Jia clan?"<sup>[6]</sup>. Here, "drinking tea" transcends mere a description of a daily routine, but contains metaphors for marriage customs and family bonds of the Jia clan, highlighting the significant role of tea in ancient matrimonial rituals. The nuanced translation of tea culture in "The Dream of the Red Chamber" elevates tea from a sole beverage to a potent cultural emblem, underscoring its significance in strengthening family bonds and social interactions. This precise cultural translation not only enriches English readers' grasp of tea culture but also enhances their appreciation of traditional Chinese wedding customs, presenting tea as a multifaceted symbol within Chinese culture to a global audience and promoting deeper cross-cultural understanding and dialogue.

### ***3.2 Diplomacy and the spread of tea culture***

Tea, in Chinese culture, extends beyond a traditional drink and medicinal resource, playing a vital role in fostering social and cultural exchanges. Historically, tea, as a valued diplomatic gift, facilitated the establishment of friendly relations in international settings. During the Ming Dynasty's Wanli era, Chinese envoys carried tea through Mongolia, eventually presenting it to the Russian Tsar after an arduous eighteen-month journey. This behaviour signified not only international camaraderie but also marked the beginnings of cultural exchange. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the diplomatic value of tea has been further strengthened, becoming a bridge for communication between China and the rest of the world. Diplomats utilized English as a tool of communication to effectively promote Chinese tea culture. They accurately narrated the history, varieties, and brewing skills of Chinese tea. And through precise English translation, diplomacy amplified tea's status as a cultural icon internationally. Furthermore, Chinese government officials introduced Chinese tea culture in English at global forums, showed tea art demonstrations and gave precious tea gifts, thereby overcoming language barriers and leveraging tea as a tool for fostering international understanding and collaboration. This type of event not only showcases the goodwill of the Chinese people but also reflects the nation's cultural allure and its pursuit of harmony. A notable instance of this was Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971, where the gift of West Lake Longjing tea symbolized the thawing of Sino-American relations. News reports described it as: "... a gesture of China's goodwill...", emphasizing the pivotal role of tea in transcultural diplomacy and conveying China's intentions for peace and friendship to the global community.

### ***3.3 Religious philosophy and the spread of tea culture***

The integration of Chinese philosophical thought with tea culture is manifested in the shared pursuit of harmony, tranquility, and the beauty of nature. Tea culture has embodied the essence of Taoism's principle of "following nature," Confucianism's "Doctrine of the Mean," and Buddhism's focus on "inner purity," forming a life art that emphasizes internal cultivation and social harmony. Influenced by Taoism, tea drinking is regarded as a practice aligning with natural rhythms, seeking a harmonious balance between body and mind, and pursuing a connection with nature. The English translation of Taoist texts has allowed tea culture concepts that were previously confined to Chinese speakers, to resonate within the English-speaking world. For example, a sentence in "The Classic of Tea" states: "...to drink bitter tisanes to cleanse the body and spirit...", introducing the Western world to Chinese philosophical notions of harmony and nature. This has not only promoted the interchange of religious and philosophical ideas but also enriched tea culture with a spiritual and philosophical aspect. The English translation work introduced these concepts to international readers, transcending language boundaries, and making these ideas accessible to global readers to understand traditional Chinese philosophy. This cultural and philosophical dissemination exemplifies cross-cultural communication theory, highlighting the importance of translation in imparting deep cultural essence and philosophical connotations. It also underscores the unique value of tea as a medium for cultural transmission.

## **4. Reinventing tea culture communication in the digital age**

### ***4.1 Challenges in the traditional tea culture dissemination***

Chinese tea culture, showing its unique and irreplaceable role in global cultural exchanges, has made remarkable contributions to the global tea field. Despite significant achievements in promoting tea culture, China still faces challenges in this digital era, particularly in becoming an impactful presence overseas. On the international stage, the influence of Chinese tea culture needs to be amplified

in terms of its reach, depth, and overall impact. So far, the English translation of contemporary tea culture classics hasn't yet evolved from basic translation to truly engaging with global audiences. The main hurdles in spreading Chinese tea culture in international inheritance and promotion are mainly concentrated in three areas: the limitations of the communication model, the shortage of skilled professionals, and the inconsistent translation standards.

Firstly, the reliance on traditional communication methods has limited the spread of Chinese tea culture. Currently, tea culture mainly relies on paper media, traditional sales paths and diplomatic protocols to promote it, which are often time-consuming and demanding on human resources, and do not make full use of the efficiency of modern communication channels, thus hindering cultural inheritance. In addition, tea culture promotion is mainly text-based, underutilizing dynamic visual and multimedia resources. Consequently, traditional paper books are unable to meet the evolving demands of contemporary readers<sup>[7]</sup>. Furthermore, adaptations of literature into movies and TV series cater mainly to domestic audiences, limiting their international reach. Moreover, most major tea industry events and conferences are held domestically, which participate primarily local connoisseurs and lack sufficient international exposure or media backing, thus struggling to captivate a global audience.

Secondly, the issue of a critical shortage of skilled translators has curtailed the development of Chinese tea culture. For Chinese literature to truly reach a global audience, a highly skilled team of translators is indispensable. The number of translators working on Chinese literary works in the English-speaking world is limited, and the overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature requires the participation of more outstanding native translators<sup>[8]</sup>. Similarly, the international dissemination of Chinese tea culture also depends on translation experts proficient in Chinese, English, and possibly other languages to accurately convey the essence of tea culture. There is an urgent need for such multilingual and multicultural communicators to aid in making tea studies literature globally accessible and in spreading tea culture more widely. These people are not just beneficial for international tea events but also foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Finally, the problem of inconsistent translation standards has posed a significant challenge to the dissemination of tea culture. Without establishing and following uniform translation standards in translation works, the burden on translators increases, and international audiences may become confused about tea culture. For instance, the term "black tea" is interpreted differently in various countries. In Sri Lanka, a type of black crushed tea is translated as "black tea," whereas in China, the common black tea is also referred to as "black tea." Similarly, Japanese Gyokuro is known as "Gyokuro," while there is also a translation for Chinese Jade Dew tea as "Chinese Gyokuro"<sup>[9]</sup>. Such variances in translation exacerbate confusion in the dissemination of tea culture, adversely affecting its international promotion.

#### ***4.2 Digital strategy for spreading tea culture***

In today's digital era, internet technology has not only connected the world more closely but has also opened innovative avenues for the global spread of Chinese tea culture, albeit complicating cross-cultural interactions. Since intercultural communication involves sharing information and understanding among people from different cultural backgrounds, language becomes an indispensable tool in these interactions. In response to the boundlessness, immediacy, and universality of the internet, along with the popularity of social media, innovative approaches for tea culture communication in this data-driven era are emerging. These include advancements in language translation technologies, the use of intelligent media and social platforms, and the integrating virtual technologies for interactive experiences, all of which collectively create a new frontier in the cross-cultural communication of tea culture.

Take language translation as an example, automated translation technology has played a core role in cultural exchanges. Modern language service platforms, such as Google Translate and Bing Microsoft Translator, are continually improving their translation abilities with extensive databases and advanced deep learning algorithms. For example, the ancient Chinese tea classic, "The Classic of Tea," is now accessible to a global audience through these platforms, enabling readers worldwide to understand its profound content. Additionally, specialized translation databases and corpora for tea culture terminology offer more precise translations tailored to the industry, addressing the issue of inconsistent terminology in translation practices, easing the workload of translators, and ensuring the accurate representation of tea culture terms.

The combined use of intelligent media and social platforms has significantly advanced the global

reach of tea culture. By contrapuntally posting instructional videos and interactive live streams about tea art on online media platforms like YouTube or Instagram, tea culture enthusiasts around the world can participate in real-time and learn about the appreciation and preparation of tea. Furthermore, platforms like TikTok, with their unique storytelling and interactive elements, make the dissemination of tea culture more attractive and immersive. For example, tea artists sharing short videos of tea ceremonies via TikTok stories enable audiences to experience the allure of tea art even if they are not present on-site.

Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality technologies have introduced novel ways to experience and learn about tea culture. VR headsets allow users to step into a digitally reconstructed Song dynasty tea garden, immersing them in the historical tea-making process and the profound traditions of tea culture. Accompanied by English or other language narrations, these experiences can make users transcend geographical and linguistic divides, offering them a deeper understanding of the essence of tea culture. AR applications, on the other hand, allow users to gain information about the type, origin, history and brewing techniques of the tea narrated in corresponding languages by scanning product QR codes, which not only improves the consumer experience but also deepens their connection with tea culture.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the globalization and digitalization era presents both challenges and new opportunities for the spread and development of Chinese tea culture. According to cross-cultural communication theory, effective cultural communication requires the need for not just accurate language transmission but also a profound understanding of cultural contexts and the use of appropriate media. Therefore, the international dissemination of tea culture can be bolstered by leveraging efficient translation technology, the extensive use of diverse intelligent media and social platforms, and the innovative use of virtual reality and interactive experience technologies, which can enhance the global audience's deep understanding and appreciation of Chinese tea culture. In the future, tea culture is poised for more profound global interaction and resonance, deepening worldwide comprehension of the spirit and philosophy of Chinese tea art, realizing the transformation of Chinese culture from merely extending outward to being truly embraced globally, and promoting the dual enhancement of cultural and commercial values.

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