

The Continuity and Development Path of Tea Culture in the New Era

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Abstract: As an excellent traditional culture and world intangible cultural heritage, tea culture is full of profound connotations and depth, and has continuously innovated and optimized in the historical development process to this day. In the new era, tea culture is facing both opportunities and challenges, with new situations arising in terms of value connotation, dissemination form, and audience, while there are still many problems to be solved in terms of development models and group cognition. The exploration of how to inherit and develop tea culture should start from multiple aspects such as needs, connotations, and values, allowing tea culture to burst into its own vitality in the new era. The culture of Chinese tea fully formed and presented a robust development trend in the Tang Dynasty. In a cultural environment that was inclusive and mutually integrated, tea culture burst forth with unique energy and rich connotations. In terms of essence, tea culture refers to the abilities and qualities related to tea that are passed down among certain members of society^[1], it involves numerous aspects such as social etiquette, spiritual cultivation, health preservation, literature and art, and has been absorbed by many schools of thought in Chinese philosophy, presenting various characteristics of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and others. In addition, tea culture, with its core of humanistic spirit, contains various elements of natural and social sciences. It presents a trend of integration and interaction with the economy, politics and other aspects, and is closely related to social development. As the productivity develops, the development of tea culture has gradually become diversified, from the initial sales of a single type of tea to the combination of different types of tea, and the matching sale of tea-making utensils. The combination of sophisticated tea-making techniques and exquisite tea-making tools fully reflects the artistic connotation of Chinese tea culture and lays a solid foundation for the later development of tea culture.^[2] Over the past century, tea culture has accumulated a rich connotation through historical changes, maintained vitality in the face of new conditions, and continuously developed and improved through constant innovation and practice.

Keywords: tea culture; cultural heritage; cultural development

1. The Current New Situation of the Development of Tea Culture.

As an excellent traditional culture and world intangible cultural heritage, tea culture has a long history and increasingly enriched connotations. It gradually integrates into people's daily lives in the process of historical changes, constantly shaping people's spiritual world in cultural inheritance, and develops in conjunction with society in traditional customs, cultural character, and other aspects.

In today's era, with the continuous innovation and development, many new platforms for cultural development have emerged with the assistance of big data and the internet. As a result, tea culture has gained many resources and opportunities, and formed a new trend. The key point in developing tea culture is to seize the opportunity and ride the wave of its development.

1.1. The Broadening of the Connotation of Value.

Under the influence of the present age, tea culture has been endowed with more connotations that differ from those of the past. While maintaining the inherent values of harmony and peacefulness, it has shed the shackles of the past and displayed a brand-new development trend in a diverse and open atmosphere.

Since ancient times, China has been known in the world as a country of etiquette, and every aspect of Chinese life is permeated with ritual. Tea ceremony is also an important opportunity for the

combination and expression of Confucianism and tea culture. ^[3]As an integral part of traditional tea culture, tea ceremony is used in various occasions such as hospitality, the imperial court, marriage, and sacrificial ceremonies, and its serious connotation as a ritual system is therefore emphasized.

With the weakening of hierarchical views, the institutional requirements of tea ceremony in the present era have gradually decreased, and the scope of its etiquette has expanded to ordinary social interactions, retaining the emphasized standards of social etiquette from the past, such as "a good household does not serve unsifted tea to guests." The communication and exchange are carried out in a more equal manner.

At the same time, the revival and innovation of various tea-drinking forms such as "making friends over tea" and "stove-boiled tea" as well as the popular development of tea brewing methods, have injected more elements of daily life into the once elegant and solemn tea ceremony culture, gradually making tea culture an existence that can be appreciated by both the refined and the common.

The tea culture, which contains numerous philosophies of life, has been constantly enriched and developed under the influence of the fast-paced society. Today's tea culture emphasizes the "atmosphere", which is different from the traditional strict requirements of tea ceremony and tea art. It advocates creating a relatively relaxed atmosphere that allows people to break away from the tense work environment, emphasizing its "freedom" and "comfort", and greatly weakening the sense of restraint in the past. The philosophical connotations related to spiritual transcendence in the past tea culture have gradually been enriched and continuously generated contemporary connotations under the influence of the current society.

1.2. Diversified Forms of Communication.

In the rapidly evolving digital age, new media technologies are spreading quickly and various channels for obtaining information are becoming more convenient. As a result, the dissemination of tea culture is constantly being innovated and gradually moving away from traditional forms.

The "tea + "business model is particularly noteworthy as it has shown promising growth. It makes full use of the interplay between tea culture and the tea economy, developing locally branded teas that reflect unique regional characteristics.

For example, the Jingshan Academy in Hangzhou, Zhejiang has incorporated Jingshan tea culture into the tourism industry, utilizing the historical and natural landscapes of the tea horse road and tea plantations to promote Jingshan tea culture through specialized activities like educational tours, tea art appreciation, tea brewing instruction, and Jingshan tea banquets, among others, catering to different groups of individuals. Meanwhile, e-commerce platforms sell tea and cultural products, creating a joint online and offline platform that can achieve double benefits of economic income and cultural promotion.

In addition, there are various forms of promotion emerging, such as creating cultural and creative brands with museums, setting up mobile tea stalls, and organizing seasonal tea parties. Tea culture is gradually moving from old books and stories to people's daily lives, with a more diverse and refined meaning reaching a wider audience.

1.3. Expansion of the target audience.

Previous studies have indicated that the consumption of tea is influenced by income, preference, culture, occupation, age characteristics, and consumption habits^[4], the income level has a significant impact on the per capita consumption of tea in our country.^[5]

Under the conditions of the new era, with rapid economic development and constantly improving levels of mass consumption, the audience of tea culture is increasingly comprised of young people and middle-income individuals.

Tea, with its warm and soothing nature, not only contributes significantly to one's health but also plays an important role in providing psychological comfort. The various elements of tea culture contain metaphorical usage, whether it be as an essential item in daily life like 'tea' in 'the necessities of life such as firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea', or as a medium for spiritual practice like 'tea' in 'Zen tea'. ^[6]All these elements nourish people's souls in the moments of drinking and tasting tea. This characteristic of tea culture aligns with the current dual pursuit of material and spiritual abundance, which has attracted considerable attention from a large number of working professionals and young

people, further expanding the audience of tea culture.

Moreover, the efficacy of different types of tea targets different populations. Green tea has anti-aging and radiation resistance effects, White tea has lung moisturizing and beauty-enhancing effects, Oolong tea has digestion-aiding and refreshing effects, and Black tea has stomach-warming and intestine-nourishing effects. All of these can provide unique health benefits for different groups with specific needs. This is also in line with the current consumer perception of prioritizing health regardless of age, which has led to a broader audience.

2. New Challenges in the Development of Current Tea Culture.

The development of tea culture is presenting new trends but also facing many challenges. As a culture that has been developing for a long time, tea culture still encounters numerous difficulties in breaking through the existing development model. Problems such as insufficient degree of innovative transformation, hindered driving force, severe homogenization, and insufficient breadth of audience continue to emerge. Currently, the inheritance and development of tea culture have entered a new predicament that urgently needs to be resolved, facing many new challenges.

2.1. Development model is highly homogenized.

Although the current forms of tea culture dissemination are diverse, there are still issues with low levels of innovation and redundant content in the development process. Online platforms such as informative software and public accounts tend to focus superficially on tea-related knowledge. Despite the abundance of promotional materials, the contents are often similar and can lead to cognitive fatigue in users, making it difficult to arouse deeper interest in tea culture. Hence, the promotional effect of tea culture development under this model is relatively poor.

Furthermore, taking Zhejiang's West Lake Longjing Tea as an example, the offline development model also faces the problem of low cultural propaganda efforts and severe homogenization. Tea farmers in the Meijiawu region use nearly identical traditional "tea house" operation models, with most of them failing to integrate local environment, landscape features, and cultural atmosphere into innovative development models. As a result, they do not provide a clear way for tourists to understand West Lake Longjing Tea and its tea culture, and the economic benefits and cultural dissemination effects have not met expectations.

From the above two aspects, it can be observed that both online and offline expressions of tea culture have difficulty in breaking away from the relatively rigid traditional ways, leading to a severe phenomenon of homogenization. This makes it difficult for the audience to select valid information when receiving messages, ultimately causing a significant decline in the promotion of tea culture.

2.2. Insufficient awareness among the young demographic.

The coexistence of multiple cultures is also to some extent impacting the survival space of tea culture.^[7]In terms of its role as a beverage, tea culture faces significant competition pressures in terms of promotional scale, appeal, and other aspects from coffee and milk tea cultures, which are more favored by the younger generation, and it is difficult to maintain a favorable position.

Under the influence of Western dietary habits and cultural influences, a portion of the younger generation has a low awareness of tea culture, considering it as a representation of outdated social etiquette and rejecting it. Additionally, some young people, only coming across tea ceremonies through historical books and classic works, rigidly define tea culture as an extremely elegant culture and choose to keep their distance.

From the two examples above, it is clear that there is still insufficient understanding of tea culture among young people, leading to various misunderstandings. It is precisely their one-sided and erroneous interpretation of tea culture that has hindered its dissemination among their audience, especially the younger generation, and further hindered the inheritance and development of tea culture itself. In the face of this dilemma, it is even more necessary to focus on promoting the connotation of tea culture in the follow-up development, add more characteristics of tea, and focus on how to make the group truly feel and understand tea culture, and continuously enhance the strength and depth of promotion.

3. Path of inheriting and developing tea culture in the new era.

In the current situation where opportunities and challenges coexist, how to achieve the inheritance and development of culture is an urgent problem facing tea culture today. The underlying logic for the development of tea culture is to break through traditional modes of the past and make good use of all available resources, while fully tapping into the era's connotations that can be absorbed by tea culture and striving to explore more dynamic and interesting forms of development. Through continuous improvement and enrichment, the development of tea culture can be transformed into an excellent intangible cultural heritage that is popular among the public, providing an effective way for the development of other cultures.

3.1. Meeting the demand for youthfulness.

With the continuous expansion of the audience of tea culture, its development and dissemination should start from the demand side, making relevant adjustments according to different groups in different aspects of cultural communication.

As the main force of cultural dissemination and an important power in cultural inheritance, the younger generation should receive more attention. How to make them more interested in actively learning about tea culture, acquiring knowledge related to tea, understanding non-material cultural heritage of tea, and promoting the excellent spirits in tea culture are necessary aspects to consider in the future development of tea culture.

Developing a tea culture that is close to the youth is essential, as the young are an important audience. Using various forms of online promotion such as vlog (short videos), plog (picture sharing), and strengthening promotion with platforms such as Red and YouTube to expand electronic communication channels, using online forms that are more accepted by young people to popularize tea culture knowledge.

The development for the youth also includes setting up checkpoints, concept stores and other development models, promoting the integration of tea culture into the new industry through the establishment of young cultural and creative brands, the research and development of tea-flavored aromatherapy, and the design of "tea doll" mascot IP, and achieving development for the youth through deep integration.

Meanwhile, tea classification is carried out through innovative economic promotion models such as MBTI-exclusive and birthday-month-limited methods that are more appealing to younger generations. Optimization of packaging design is achieved while marketing and sales are carried out through meticulous means such as blind boxes and personalized customization. The aim is to emphasize tea culture among younger generations in tandem with the development of the tea economy.

In addition, in the process of development, other groups' needs should not be neglected. Based on the original various development methods, some elements suitable for the young group should be added to make the tea culture burst out youthful energy.

3.2. Add contemporary connotations.

Cultural optimization and enhancement require a continual enrichment of new advanced cultural elements and the introduction of excellent cultural elements suitable for the development of tea culture in the new era. Injecting vitality is essential to make tea culture superior and of higher quality.^[8]In the context of the new era, tea culture should conform to its development trends, actively guide the expansion of its value connotations, and incorporate more factors belonging to the era and society.

Fully leveraging the mediacy of tea culture, endowing the connotations of "harmony and happiness" with elements of daily life, will be an important aspect of the current creative transformation of tea culture, and also have significant implications for the innovative development of tea culture itself. Among them, incorporating the elegant elements of tea ceremony culture from the past into current social interactions is a good way to combine tea culture with team-building culture, celebration culture, and other content, emphasizing the scenarization and socialization of drinking tea, adding the "vulgar" part to the "elegant" connotation. Let the tea culture be open to the public and become a culture that can be appreciated by the refined and the vulgar.

Furthermore, the development of current tea culture requires breaking away from the relatively

fixed modes of the past and adopting more innovative and modern approaches. Incorporating elements of modernity and daily life into the promotion of tea culture is a good choice. Creating mobile tea gardens, "cloud tourism", filming documentary series, and launching related entertainment programs can help to promote tea culture in a way that is closer to people's lives, thereby weakening the historical distance and alienation that arise from the culture's inheritance and breaking down the "walls" that exist between the culture and the general public. Integrating tea culture with new media in the current era, or promoting it in conjunction with current hot topics and intellectual property, will allow tea culture to present more vibrant colors of the times, explore new connotations in interesting ways, and gain its own development while adding meaning to its history.

3.3. Seeking Cultural Value.

Tea culture is a reflection and fusion of traditional Chinese culture, and it embodies a steadfast demeanor that is lacking in today's tumultuous society.^[9] Tea culture, whether in terms of its philosophical connotations or the spirit it embodies through historical development, is an important component of excellent traditional culture with its own superiority and significance. How to correctly understand the cultural and spiritual value of tea culture is also an important issue that needs to be explored at present.

By showcasing the production of tea and the culture of tea drinking through innovative forms such as documentaries and fun drawing series, and combining new media methods with offline exhibitions to present the essence and research of tea, the spirit of craftsmen and the doctrine of the mean within tea culture have been fully explored and the charm and cultural value of tea culture have been jointly displayed, establishing cultural confidence and laying the foundation for the inheritance and development of tea culture in the future.

At the same time, experiential activities such as picking tea leaves, selecting tea, and frying tea, as well as watching tea-making competitions and tea art displays, and tasting different types of tea, are important ways to promote the development of tea culture, providing a hands-on experience and feeling the charm of intangible cultural heritage firsthand.

In addition, it is also an effective way to fully explore the effective cultural value of tea culture and integrate it into national education. This method combines tea drinking culture with traditional virtues education, integrates tea culture into health and wellness education, and promotes the value of tea culture through various elements that are close to people's daily lives. It allows people to appreciate the unique power of tea culture while understanding its value in everyday life.

4. Conclusion

In the current era of development, the development of tea culture has many opportunities, but it also faces many challenges such as severe homogenization and insufficient public awareness while presenting a positive trend. How to seize opportunities and confront difficulties will be constant considerations for the future development of tea culture.

As an important part of China's outstanding traditional culture, tea culture should not gradually fade out of people's vision with the development of the times, nor should it lose its own connotation under the influence of new cultural trends. Developing tea culture requires the full utilization of available resources and the creative transformation and innovative development of tea culture, incorporating more elements of youth on the basis of exploring its original connotation, and adding more colors of the times to this culture with rich historical background. In the future development, we look forward to tea culture having more vitality while developing towards young people, seeking more cultural value in the process of meeting the needs of youthfulness, and making tea culture continuously enter people's hearts, and walking out a development path of its own in the new era. We also believe that tea will definitely form a certain development model in future practice, creating a new world of tea culture belonging to the new era.

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