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# Tea and Teamen

# 爱茶者说

Words of Wisdom on Tea from Wang Xufeng (Volume I)



● 王旭烽论茶 (第一卷)

获奖作家王旭烽谈茶论道

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# Tea and Teamen

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## Author's Preface:

# The Spirit of Chinese Teamen

It is self-evident that China is the homeland of tea and Chinese tea culture is an indispensable part in world tea culture. Then it is without doubt that it is of great necessity to study teamen, the agents of Chinese tea culture. What we intend to illustrate first is the definition and content of Chinese teamen's spirit.

We have already found that the relationship between the spirit of Chinese civilization or Chinese culture and the spirit of Chinese teamen is one between a parent system and a subsystem, which has been proved with numerous facts in the history of tea culture. Chinese teamen who are represented by Shennong<sup>①</sup> in ancient time, Lu Yu<sup>②</sup> in the Tang Dynasty and Wu Juenong<sup>③</sup> in modern time share the same characteristics which reflects the spirit of Chinese culture because they are both bookmen and teamen at the same time. The combination of these two identities determines the close relationship between Chinese tea culture and Chinese culture.

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① Shennong (神农): As a legendary figure in ancient China, he is described as a tribal leader, god of ancient farming and herbal drugs.

② Lu Yu (陆羽, 733 –about 804): He is regarded as the Chinese tea sage since he made a great contribution to Chinese tea culture. He wrote *The Tea Classic*, which is taken as a classic works in tea culture.

③ Wu Juenong (吴觉农, 1897-1989): Born in Shangyu, Zhejiang Province, he is the founder of Chinese modern tea industry as well as an agriculturalist. His works *A Study on The Tea Classic* is a standard book in modern time to study Lu Yu, the tea sage. He is also the founder of the first tea major in Chinese university and tea research institute. Owing to his great contribution in the tea field, he is regarded as the modern tea sage in China.



Shengnong

Therefore, the spirit of Chinese culture is always reflected in the spirit of Chinese tea culture. For example, Chinese teamen are characterized with desire for peace, belief in man-nature harmony, aspiration for happy life, independence of personality and peculiar oriental aesthetic standard, all of which are parts of the spirit of Chinese culture and world culture.

Let's first go to peace spirit, which is the essence of Chinese teamen. They love peace and believe that gentleness is the means to realize. In their minds, peace spirit can only be expressed in the way of gentleness. Therefore, peace and gentleness are closely related and mutually dependent, just like lips and teeth. In this sense, peace is a form as well as a spirit and gentleness is a spirit as well as a form.

Chinese teamen are supporters, practitioners and guardians of peace, which is in accordance with moderation, neutralization and affinity symbolized by tea. It is this spirit that makes teamen detach themselves from darkness of the reality and devote themselves with heart and soul to all scientific causes, advanced and civilized careers for human beings.

We have already found that in the long history of tea culture, real teamen like Lu Yu, Wu Juenong, Zhuang Wanfang<sup>①</sup> etc. had ever experienced a period in which they pinned their hope on idealistic political administration: Lu Yu turned to Confucianism instead of Buddhism<sup>②</sup>; Wu Juenong devoted himself to feminist

① Zhuang Wanfang (庄晚芳, 1908-1996): He was born in Fujian Province, China. As a famous scholar for tea study in Zhejiang University, he is the founder of "Tea Cultivation"(a branch of tea study) and is regarded as a giant in tea study in China.

② Since the Han Dynasty, Confucianism has been regarded as an official theory which is used to regulate people's behaviors in the society while Buddhism advocates that people should concentrate themselves on meditation so that they can understand Zen and detach themselves from pains of troubles and death. It is obvious that Confucianism puts emphasis on the administration of the society and social responsibility while Buddhism stresses personal self-cultivation.



movement in his youth; Zhuang Wanfang delivered revolutionary leaflets when he was young. However, political pursuit was absolutely neither their ultimate ideal nor their life sustenance. Wu Juenong, who was once a deputy director of National Agriculture Department, said that he had devoted his whole life to the tea industry on his deathbed. It is obvious that tea is his lifelong hope and destination. It is obvious that these teamen just took political activity as a means to realize peace, their final pursuit.

The author of *Treatise on Tea*, Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song Dynasty, is one of those who are rulers of the country and claim themselves as teamen. Since he studied tea culture from the perspective of an emperor instead of a real teaman, his understanding of tea involved the part of luxurious consumption. Emperor Huizong reminds me of the General Toyotomi Hideyoshi who forced Sen Rikyu, the father of tea in Japan to commit suicide. The General is not a qualified teaman though he seriously took Sen Rikyu as his tea monk and made great contribution to Japanese tea culture. Both Emperor Huizong and Toyotomi Hideyoshi cannot be taken as real teamen since what they had done showed neither peace nor gentleness.

If we make a little bit analysis, we may find that “peace” (和) in Chinese tea culture is not the exact one mentioned in Japanese sado spirit “hamony (和), respect, simplicity and reclusion”. From the perspective of culture inheritance, “harmony” (和) in Japanese sado comes from Meditation while “peace” (和) in Chinese tea culture comes from Confucianism which is the essence of Chinese tradition. Confucianism puts the emphasis on “going into the society” and takes etiquette, righteousness, benevolence, filial piety as the essence people must observe in daily life, all of which cannot go without “peace”. It is obvious that moderation in Confucianism and peace in the spirit of Chinese teamen are imbued with the same spirit. Peace implies a desire for an ideal society, in which everyone has a peaceful and fair life.

In the period of feudalism, there are also some politicians who self-cultivate themselves to become teamen. But it is unfortunate that most of those teamen who are characterized with peaceful spirit are very often frustrated in politics. Many of



these teamen who are engaged in politics result in frustration and are demoted. Su Dongpo<sup>①</sup> is a case in point. He was demoted and sent to Hainan Province<sup>②</sup> where he wrote a famous tea poem *Water from the River to Cook Tea* to record his life there:

*Since right fire must be matched with right water,  
From the fishing stone I fetch clear water in the river.  
I put the water into the vat together with the moon reflection.  
And with ladle I take the water and put it into the water pot.  
White foams are rolling like waves when cooking the tea.  
The souging wind in the ears is the sound of pouring tea.  
Three bowls of tea is not enough to have a ready pen,  
I can do nothing but sit at night and listen to the night drums.*

For a long time, this poem only had been used as an example of how to brew a good cup of tea with top water in my tea study. Until the day when I arrived in Dongpo Memorial Hall in Hainan, I had a new understanding of the great figure. Before that what I had read was the elegance and pleasure of a scholar in tea drinking. Who had ever expected to read an utmost restraint from an old man who was suffering great pain in life? The utmost restraint in suffering is exactly a tea man's attitude toward life. In contrast, another great poet Li Bai<sup>③</sup> who is well known for his indulgence in wine drowned himself in river when encountering the same suffering.

Generally speaking, teamen and wine drinkers take different attitudes to show

① Su Dongpo (苏东坡, 1037-1101): Born in Meishan, Sichuan Province, he is a great man of letters in the Song Dynasty with Shi (轼) as his original first name and Dongpo (东坡) as his courtesy name.

② Hainan Province: Lies in the southmost part of China, it was a remote area in old days and life there was hard. But nowadays it is a prosperous province with tourism as its main industry.

③ Li Bai (李白, 701-762): He is a great romantic poet in the Tang Dynasty. It is said that he drowned himself after being drunk out of political depression.



their disagreements in life. In these cases, most teamen would show their stand by avoidance or nonintervention. In this way, they detach themselves from wars of outsider exclusion, politician conspiracy or violence. But it doesn't mean that a teaman doesn't have his principle in life. Instead, detachment is his own way to say no, which distinguishes itself from the way of suspension in Buddhism. Gentleness doesn't mean confusion of truth and falsehood, nor does it care the suffering in life. On the contrary, the very striking characteristic of teamen is to preserve peace even at the risk of their life. They never shun or suspend their fighting in the war. However, they don't advocate violence against violence because they are humanists and non-violent supporters. For example, after witnessing The April 12 Massacre in Shanghai on April 13, 1927, Wu Juenong returned home at night with blood blots on his shoes. At that very night, this modern tea sage wrote to officials of the Kuomintang government with other key men to protest against the bloody violence. The letter paper he used was marked China Agriculture Association which was newly founded. During the period of Anti-Japanese War, Wu Juenong devoted himself to tea industry to offer economic help to support Anti-Japanese War by going back and forth between the front and the rear. Once he was nearly killed in a car accident on the mountain road. In 1940, the hardest year in the War, he established the first program of tea major in university in China, making a preparation for Chinese tea development in the coming peaceful time in the near future. The tea major was founded as schedule despite that several days before a new semester, Sun Hanbing, the director of teaching affairs, who was Wu's staunch supporter, was killed by a Japanese plane. This is the way Chinese teamen work for peace without any hesitation even at the risk of life and it is still of great significance nowadays.

Man-nature harmony is another belief Chinese teamen hold. The theory that man is an integral part of nature results from ancient Chinese people's understanding toward the world, which was summarized briefly by Lao-zi, a great Chinese philosopher in the Spring and Autumn Period. He said in *The Tao Teh King*:



道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。无名天地之始。有名万物之母。故常无欲以观其妙。常有欲以观其徼。此两者同出而异名，同谓之玄。玄之又玄，众妙之门。

天下皆知美之为美，斯恶矣；皆知善之为善，斯不善已。故有无相生，难易相成，长短相形，高下相倾，音声相和，前后相随。是以圣人处无为之事，行不言之教。万物作焉而不辞。生而不有，为而不恃，功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。不尚贤，使民不争。不贵难得之货，使民不为盗。不见可欲，使民心不乱。是以圣人之治，虚其心，实其腹，弱其志，强其骨；常使民无知、无欲，使夫智者不敢为也。为无为，则无不治。

道冲而用之，或不盈。渊兮似万物之宗。解其纷，和其光，同其尘，湛兮似或存。吾不知谁之子，象帝之先。

天地不仁，以万物为刍狗。圣人不仁，以百姓为刍狗。天地之间，其犹囊籥乎？虚而不屈，动而愈出。多言数穷，不如守中。

谷神不死是谓玄牝。玄牝之门是谓天地根。绵绵若存，用之不勤。

The Tao Teh King by Lao-zi

Unity produces duality; duality produced trinity; trinity produces all things.

In the eyes of Chinese teamen, man is one part of nature, just like tea. Both man and tea are products of the nature. Chinese people believe that the greatest sound is void of speech, the greatest form has no form. Therefore, the highest realm for Chinese teamen is that they integrate themselves into the nature, taking the sky as the ceiling and the earth as the bed. It is easy to understand why they cook and drink tea in the open air very often, which gives the great freedom for their behaviors and thoughts. It also accounts for the reason why Chinese teamen do not observe strict procedures for tea brewing as Japanese do. Since Chinese teamen believe that tea is one part of the nature, Lu Yu the tea sage introduced tea sets for outgoing in one chapter in *The Tea Classic*, in which it says that a “holding-all basket” is used for holding every tea set. In ancient China, Officials of Han people preferred to sit or lie near the clear spring, drinking tea or wine; common people had their own Chinese salons in teahouses, rambling on everything; other ethnic people chose to drink tea while they were singing and dancing. In this sense, tea is secular and close to people’s daily life. Instead of having a significant function, it is just a proper



media between human beings and the nature. After knowing this, we feel easier to understand why there are less strict classification, less standard for tea brewing and less family featured tea ceremony in Chinese tea culture. In nature, tea is a friend, not a strict teacher. When you go closer to it, you may develop a mutual dependence with it. But when you leave it, you may forget it completely. An ancient sage said: A fish forgets the existence of water when it is swimming in the water; a man forgets moral regulations when he is performing them. Then shall we say that teamen forget tea when they are enjoying tea drinking to their heart's content? And this is regarded as the highest realm of the theory that man is one part of the nature.

Next, we'll talk about teamen's aspiration for happy life.

The idea of life appreciation originates from the theory of Taoism, which puts stress on being immortal by self-cultivation. For Taoists, the ultimate wish of a person is to live forever on the earth. Therefore, the spirit of teamen features the love for secular life and it takes happy life as a goal, which distinguishes itself from life attitude of Buddhism. This philosophy results in a conception of life which is closely connected with tea because tea has been used as a kind of medicine for more than 5000 years and has made great benefit to people's health. It is known that the essence of a happy life is to live on and live well. It is natural to understand that the life of Chinese teamen is full of pleasure which is both sensual and emotional. After the Second World War, it is a common phenomenon that lack of confidence about the meaning of life made many people depressed and puzzled. Thus, Chinese life appreciation may act as an effective medicine to heal the wounded heart with plenty of gentle sunshine from its oriental perspective.

The last spirit of Chinese teamen I want to state is independent personality, which will be illustrated from different life attitudes of Chinese and Japanese tea sages. Lu Yu, the Chinese tea sage refused to be employed as a teacher of the prince and preferred to ramble about and lament at midnight in order to maintain his personal integrity while Sen Rikyu, the Japanese tea sage realized the combination



between power and tea ceremony to make tea popular with the help of the power of the emperor and samurai but was finally killed by the sword of the samurai. It is easy to understand that the different experiences of these two tea sages from China and Japan respectively result from different backgrounds. But what stands out is the independent personality of the Chinese scholar who stresses to keep and perfect his own personality in hard time. This spirit has always been kept on by Chinese teamen. For example, in 1948, Wu Juenong resigned himself from the Kuomintang government and set up tea industry with non-government fund. In 1966, Zhuang Wanfang wrote to the General Secretary in the province to express his own idea about the Cultural Revolutionary. Both of their actions are supported by the independent personality of Chinese teamen.

It is of great significance to keep the independence of personality in society in which people desire for material welfare and their value orientation veer off course. Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go? From ancient time to nowadays, Chinese teamen have been keeping exploration on the above questions, which makes the spirit of tea culture connect closely with the essence of the human's spiritual life. What the depth Chinese tea culture has!

It is definitely true that Chinese teamen are the carrier of Chinese traditional culture, because during the process of tea dissemination from China to other countries, Chinese teamen are totally involved and make their every effort to spread Chinese tea culture and Chinese culture. In this sense, Chinese teamen play an indispensable role in Chinese tea culture and world tea culture.



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