



## Cultural Comparisons: A Comparison of Tea Drinking Traditions in Java and Sichuan

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### ABSTRACT

*Tea is a type of drink that has been around since ancient times. In fact, in some regions, tea has become an integral part of culture and an inseparable part of people's social life, and also contains philosophical values. In each region, tea has its own characteristics. This is based on the variety and type of tea leaves themselves as well as the way they are served which are different in each region. The diversity of types of tea and forms of presentation certainly cannot be separated from differences in the environment where the tea leaves grow, as well as the origin of the tea in a particular region. These two factors refer to the practice of drinking tea and the different ways of serving tea in each region. China will immediately come to mind when you hear the word tea, because its tea culture is still strong today. On the one hand, Indonesia still adheres to its tea drinking culture. Tea has its own position in the traditions and practices of several cultures in China and Indonesia, especially in the Sichuan region and the island of Java. The aim of this research is to explore some of the differences that exist in tea drinking traditions in Java and Sichuan. We will also explore various cultural aspects that influence the practice of drinking tea, such as how tea is served, the type of tea used, related customs, and the symbolic meaning attached to the tea drinking ritual itself. So that in the end, readers will be able to appreciate the cultural diversity that exists in this world and encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience in tea drinking practices in both regions. The research method that is used is qualitative method of library research, namely collecting data by searching for sources and reconstructing information from various sources such as books, journals and existing research. The findings from this research are differences in the presentation and way of enjoying tea in Java and Sichuan.*

**Keywords:** Tea; Tradition; Culture; Java; Sichuan

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### ABSTRAK

Teh merupakan salah satu jenis minuman yang sudah hadir sejak jaman dahulu. Bahkan dalam beberapa wilayah, teh telah menjadi budaya yang integral dan menjadi bagian yang tidak terlepas dari kehidupan sosial masyarakat, juga mengandung nilai filosofis didalamnya. Pada tiap wilayah, teh memiliki ciri khasnya tersendiri. Hal ini didasari dari ragam dan jenis daun teh itu sendiri maupun cara penyajiannya yang berbeda pada tiap-tiap daerahnya. Keberagaman jenis teh serta bentuk penyajian tentunya tidak lepas dari perbedaan lingkungan di mana daun teh itu tumbuh, serta asal-usul teh masuk ke dalam suatu wilayah. Kedua faktor tersebut merujuk pada praktik minum teh serta cara-cara penyajian teh yang berbeda pada tiap wilayah. Negeri Tiongkok akan langsung terbesit di benak begitu mendengar kata teh, dikarenakan budayanya teh-nya yang masih kental hingga saat ini. Di satu sisi, Indonesia juga masih memegang teguh budaya minum teh-nya. Teh memiliki kedudukannya sendiri dalam tradisi serta praktik beberapa kebudayaan yang dilakukan di Tiongkok dan Indonesia terkhusus pada daerah Sichuan dan pulau Jawa. Tujuan dibuatnya Penelitian ini adalah untuk menelusuri beberapa perbedaan yang terdapat dalam tradisi minum teh di Jawa dan Sichuan. Serta akan digali berbagai aspek budaya yang mempengaruhi praktik



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minum teh, seperti cara penyajian teh, jenis teh yang digunakan, adat istiadat terkait, serta makna simbolis yang melekat pada ritual minum teh itu sendiri. Sehingga pada akhirnya, para pembaca akan dapat menghargai keanekaragaman budaya yang ada di dunia ini dan mendorong pertukaran pengetahuan serta pengalaman dalam praktik minum teh di kedua wilayah tersebut. Metode kualitatif studi pustaka (*library research*), yakni pengumpulan data dengan cara mencari sumber dan merekonstruksi informasi dari berbagai sumber seperti, buku, jurnal, dan riset-riset yang sudah ada. Penemuan dari penelitian ini merupakan perbedaan penyajian serta cara menikmati teh di Jawa dan Sichuan.

**Kata Kunci:** Teh; Tradisi; Budaya; Jawa; Sichuan

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## 1. Introduction

In Chinese culture, tea is something that can not be eliminated and even reduced even if only a small amount. Even China has a sentence that reads “There are seven basic necessities when opening the door: fuel, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, tea (Ye Yu, 2001: 7). Tea has become a daily drink, from waking up to getting back ready for bed at least about three times they drink tea. Even tea is also a way or symbol of respect for someone, whether after eating, drinking, resting, or inviting guests, tea is always there with them. Conversely, if tea is not present when they invite guests, the master or mistress of the House will be considered disrespectful (Herdina Perwitorini, 2003: 1).

While in Indonesian Society, tea reflects a change in culture and history that has developed over the centuries. Tea has been deeply rooted in Indonesian culture and has become one of the identities that bind the Indonesian nation, then the role of tea in the lives of Indonesian people is very important. So that tea can survive until now, where there are many other cultural influences on the drink. If in China tea is a symbol of respect, in Indonesia tea is also a symbol. Tea is a symbol of togetherness, hospitality, and social unity in Indonesia (Dendy Raditya, 2020). In an activity that requires a group of people to gather, tea is sure to be a drink that will entertain guests. That is why the presence of Indonesian tea is timeless.

The tradition of drinking tea has become an integral part of cultures in various parts of the world, including in Java, Indonesia, and also Sichuan, China. The practice of drinking tea is not only a daily activity, but also reflects aspects of the social, cultural, and philosophical life of the local community. It contains traditions, customs, and symbols that describe a rich and diverse cultural heritage.

In Java itself, the tradition of drinking tea has become an integral part of people's daily lives. Tea drinking traditions in Java often involve spiritual elements, Customs, and special procedures. Tea is not just a drink, but also a medium to convey the cultural values inherent in Javanese society. The tea ceremony in the Javanese slametan tradition, for example, became an important moment in religious and social events. Tea is served in a special way, such as using a traditional glass, and consumed in a sacred atmosphere.

Meanwhile, in Sichuan, the tradition of drinking tea has also become an important part of people's daily lives. Sichuan is known for its famous gongfu Cha style of tea drinking in China. Tea in Sichuan is often a place for socializing and meeting friends. In the tradition of Sichuan tea drinking, attention is paid to the aroma, taste, and presentation of the tea consumed. Tea drinking in Sichuan has a deep symbolic value, with an important role in creating harmony and social closeness between individuals.

Although the tradition of tea drinking is a common practice in both cultures, there are significant differences in the traditions and manners of tea drinking between Java and Sichuan. These differences are influenced by historical, social and cultural factors that shape the identity of each region.

The purpose of writing this article is none other than to get to know and juxtapose cultures related to the practice of drinking tea in Sichuan and Java where both places still keep a myriad of traditions from the past that are still preserved today. Differences in the practice of drinking tea in the two regions are driven by several different factors such as, different types of tea leaves and a variety of flavours. Until the differences in taste that encourage the differences in the presentation of tea in Sichuan and Java.

## **2. Method**

This research uses a qualitative method. Qualitative method of library research, namely collecting data by searching for sources and reconstructing information from various sources such as books, journals and existing research. The findings from this research are differences in the presentation and way of enjoying tea in Java and Sichuan.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **History of Tea in China**

China, especially Yunnan province, is the birthplace of tea. The Chinese tea plant, *Camellia sinensis*, thrives in Yunnan's warm and humid tropical and subtropical climate. In the ancient forests of Yunnan, even wild tea plants that have been aged 2,700 years. In addition, some of the tea trees planted in this place have reached the age of 800 years, a testament to the rich heritage of Chinese tea.

One of the oldest legends about Chinese tea involves a figure named Shennong, who is considered the forerunner of Agriculture and medicinal herbs. According to legend, Shennong was the inventor of tea who used the plant as a poison-destroying drug. It is said that Shennong directly tried many herbs and when he was exposed to poison from one of the herbs he tried, he used the tea to heal himself. Although eventually his life ended because of consuming poisonous herbs without drinking the poison-busting tea, Shennong made a major contribution in the introduction of tea as a medicinal herb.

At first, Chinese tea was used as an ingredient in medicinal herbs around the 8th century BC. The Chinese people at that time chewed tea leaves to enjoy the pleasant taste as well as the health benefits it contained. Tea is also often combined with various types of food and is used in a variety of soup concoctions. During the Han Dynasty (221 BC-8 AD), tea began to be processed in a simple way, formed into spheres, dried, and stored. The tea is then brewed and combined with other herbs, such as ginger. This custom later became strong in the culture of the Chinese people.

In the year 800 AD, a scholar named Lu Yu wrote a very influential book in the world of Chinese tea entitled "Ch'a Ching" or "Book of tea". Lu Yu, an orphan raised by a Buddhist priest scholar, has keen observation and deep knowledge of tea. He traced various methods of growing and managing ancient Chinese tea during his lifetime. In his book, Lu Yu defines tea, including how to grow it, how to choose and brew it,

and the correct way to enjoy tea. This book became an important guide for tea enthusiasts and helped popularize the habit of drinking tea in Chinese society.

The custom of drinking tea in China over time spread and firmly entrenched in all walks of life. Tea drinking became an integral part of the daily life of the Chinese people. After the Ming Dynasty, various types of popular tea began to be developed in the Cantonese (Guangdong) and Fukien (Fujian) regions. Tea is not only a drink, but also a part of the tradition in entertaining guests and is still so awake practice to this day.

### **The History of Tea in Java**

The history of tea plants in Indonesia, especially Java, has a long journey. In 1684, the tea plant (*Camellia Sinensis*) first entered Indonesia in the form of seeds originating from Japan. These tea seeds were brought to Jakarta (Batavia) by a merchant, doctor, teacher, and botanist named Andreas Cleyer, who was a German citizen and worked in the VOC.

At first, tea is only used as an ornamental plant and has not been traded. In 1694, a priest named F. Valentijn reported the existence of young tea shrubs growing in the Garden of the Governor General Camphuys Palace in Jakarta, which originated in China only in 1728, the Dutch colonial government began to pay more serious attention to the potential of tea by bringing tea seeds in large quantities from China. However, the attempt was not completely successful.

In the 19th century, tea became one of the plants required to be planted by the people through the CultuurStelsel policy implemented in 1830 in Indonesia. This policy required the people to grow tea on their own land or rented land provided by the Dutch colonial government. At harvest time, the tea that has been produced by the people will be purchased by the Dutch at a price determined by them.

This policy resulted in a significant increase in tea production in Indonesia, with the people forced to engage in the cultivation and production of tea. This makes tea an integral part of the daily lives of Indonesian people. The practice of growing, picking, and selling tea has become an integral part of economic activities and social life in various regions in Indonesia. Although the CultuurStelsel policy had economic goals for the Dutch colonial government, its impact on Indonesian society could not be ignored. The practice of growing and producing tea became part of people's routines and identities, influencing their way of life, habits and cultural values.

In 1841, the area of tea plantations in Java had grown to 2,129 hectares, and the development accounted for quite significant. Because according to records, in five years the total area of the tea garden increased to 3,193 hectares. The policy of forcibly planting tea ended in 1870 after the Dutch colonial government imposed a policy of economic liberalization by issuing an agrarian law. The enactment of this law transformed the region of Priangan (now West Java) into "Green Gold", where tea became an important commodity in the economy.

Since then, tea drinking has become a very inherent tradition in the daily lives of Indonesian people. Tea is not only drunk as an invigorating drink, but also a symbol of togetherness, hospitality and social unity. The culture of tea drinking in Indonesia continues to evolve over time, with different variations of tea, such as black tea, green tea, herbal tea, and traditional Indonesian teas such as teak leaf tea or soursop leaf tea. The

presence of tea in the lives of Indonesian people reflects the changes that have occurred over the centuries. Although initially brought by the Dutch colonial government, Tea eventually managed to take root in Indonesian culture and become an integral part of the nation's identity. To understand more deeply the cultural and historical aspects of this nation, it is important for us to have knowledge about the history and role of tea in the lives of Indonesian people.

### **Types and Varieties of Tea**

Sichuan is famous for its diversity of distinctive types of tea and has a long history in tea drinking culture. The following is a brief description of some of the famous types of tea in Sichuan:

1. *Sichuan Green Tea*: green tea is the most common and popular type of tea in Sichuan. The tea leaves used for green tea are harvested, then treated with mild heating to prevent oxidation. Green Sichuan tea has a fresh and delicate aroma, as well as an earthy taste. This tea is known for its high antioxidant content and has health benefits.
2. *Sichuan Pepper Leaf Tea*: this tea is unique because the tea leaves come from the nutmeg plant that grows in Sichuan. Nutmeg leaves give this tea a special aroma and taste. Nutmeg Leaf Sichuan tea has a fresh, spicy, and slightly tangy taste. This tea is also believed to have an invigorating effect and can help improve digestion.
3. *Sichuan Pu-erh Tea*: Pu-erh tea is a type of tea that undergoes a process of fermentation and maturation in a long time. This tea is famous for its rich aroma and taste and good quality. *Pu-erh tea* is often served in the form of compresses or tea circles that are squeezed and then brewed with hot water. Sichuan *Pu-erh tea* has distinctive characteristics with a strong aroma, delicate taste, and is often associated with benefits for digestion and heart health.
4. *Sichuan Ya'an Fur Peak Tea*: Teh Sichuan *Ya'an Mao Feng* berasal dari kota Ya'an di Sichuan. This tea is famous for its slender tea leaves and open ends. Sichuan *Ya'an Mao Feng tea* has a fresh, sweet and tangy taste. This tea is often appreciated for its high quality and high cultural value.

If Sichuan is able to produce a variety of tea with a unique taste, of course, Java can also do the same. In Java, there are so many different types of tea with their own uniqueness and peculiarities. Here is a brief description of some types of tea in Java:

1. *Tegal Teapot Tea*: Tegal Teapot tea is one type of tea that is very famous in the Tegal Area, Central Java. This tea is known for its presentation using a teapot (teapot) of clay. Tegal Teapot tea has a distinctive aroma and taste, and is often served with palm sugar to provide a natural sweetness.
2. *Puntang Mountain Tea*: Puntang Mountain Tea is a tea that comes from Puncak, West Java. This tea is grown on the slopes of Mount Puntang which has an ideal height for tea cultivation. Puntang Mountain Tea has a soft taste, fragrant aroma, and golden color.

3. *Tambi Wonosalam Tea*: Tambi Wonosalam tea comes from Wonosalam, East Java. This tea is known for the peculiarities of its oval-shaped tea leaves and blackish green. Tambi Wonosalam tea has a strong taste and distinctive aroma.
4. *Teh Kebun Ratu Puncak*: Teh Kebun Ratu Puncak is a tea that comes from Puncak, West Java. This tea grows in tea gardens located in the Highlands of Puncak. Teh Kebun Ratu Puncak has a fresh taste, fragrant aroma, and golden color.

Those are some types of tea that can be found in Java and Sichuan. Each of the above types of tea has unique characteristics inspired by the environment, craftsmanship and processing methods, as well as the traditions of the local region. This diversity makes tea an integral part of the culture and life of the people of Java and Sichuan, and an attraction for tea lovers around the world who want to explore the richness of Indonesian and Chinese tea.

### **Differences in how to Drink Tea**

In Java, where tea drinking has become an ingrained habit, tea itself is often enjoyed at a variety of diverse times. Starting from the morning to accompany breakfast, afternoon to accompany chatting time when welcoming. Even at night, just to warm up. The way of presentation is so diverse. Each region has its own peculiarities. Like in the field for example. Where there is an icon of a jar / teapot so that it shows that the area is the source of the largest tea producer in Central Java, which began during the *Cultuurstelsel* by *van den bosch*. In Tegal itself, the presentation of tea comes from the acculturation of Chinese culture. Namely using several small cups accompanied by a teapot or teapot. Teh Poci, which is famous in Tegal and surrounding areas, is also popular in Cirebon, Slawi, Brebes, Pemalang, and surrounding areas. Teapot tea has a unique way of serving, where jasmine scented tea is brewed in a teapot and given sugar cubes as a sweetener. After that, the tea is poured into small cups. Interestingly, connoisseurs of this tea are only advised to add sugar cubes without stirring. The philosophy behind this presentation is that life can be bitter at first, but with patience, we will experience the beauty and delicacy of life. Therefore, rock sugar is allowed to melt and spread by itself in tea (Soesanti Harini H, 2018).

In addition to the tradition of Teapot tea, Java also has another tea drinking tradition that is no less unique, the tradition of Nyaneut. Nyaneut itself is a typical tea drinking tradition of the Sundanese people, precisely in Garut, West Java. Nyaneut has a deep meaning in the daily life of Sundanese people. First of all, this tradition strengthens the bonds of togetherness and brotherhood in a large family or community. When served at a traditional event or an important meeting, this one tea drinking activity also becomes a symbol of unity. In addition, Nyaneut also reflects local wisdom in utilizing the surrounding nature. The use of fresh tea leaves and special drying techniques indicate hereditary knowledge passed down from generation to generation. In addition to cultural aspects, Nyaneut tea is also related to health and well-being. The process of processing and serving this tea preserves the nutrients in the tea leaves, providing health benefits in the form of antioxidants and other beneficial substances. This tradition also reflects the views of the Sundanese people on the importance of maintaining balance in life, including in utilizing natural resources.

Then in Sichuan, tea culture is also served as a tourist attraction that attracts tourists to come to visit, by displaying the traditional Chinese tea ceremony in front of the tourists. The art of brewing tea or also called the traditional Chinese tea ceremony is one of the oldest and most unforgettable ancient Chinese arts. The Chinese tea ceremony dates back 1,200 years to the Tang Dynasty. Chinese people believe that the Chinese tea ceremony brings harmony, peace, and happiness. Before starting the Chinese tea ceremony, you need to prepare the tools that will be used, such as teapot, kettle, tea pitcher, brewing tray, deep plate or bowl, tea towel, water, tea leaves, tea leaves holder, snifter cups, and tea cups. First bring the water to a boil and then pour the water throughout the equipment to make tea. Usually at the Chinese tea ceremony, tea leaves will be displayed and admired from the appearance, quality, and aroma to the guests. Tea making begins with scooping the tea leaves and pouring them into a teapot, this step is called "the black dragon enters the palace." The next stage is to boil or heat the water, this is a crucial stage because the temperature required is quite varied. Then put the teapot into the bowl and fill the teapot to spill then adjust the temperature in the teapot and in the bowl. Pour the tea that has been brewed in a teapot into the tea pitcher, then pour the tea into snifter cups using the tea pitcher. Then the tea cup is placed upside down, supposedly this movement will bring prosperity and happiness to the guests. Then slowly the water is removed from the snifter cups but not for drinking, but discarded. Still using the tea leaves in the snifter cups, move the tea leaves into the teapot then pour hot water into the teapot right on top so as not to remove the flavor from the tea leaves, then close the teapot tightly. The last Step is to pour the tea into the tea pitcher and then the tea in the tea pitcher is poured back into the snifter cups before ending up in teacups. The tea is finally ready to be enjoyed. In addition to the Chinese tea ceremony, Sichuan people also make tea culture a characteristic of the local community. Sichuan people themselves enjoy tea all day by going to the tea house.

The Tea house is also an important place for Chinese people, especially those in Chengdu, Sichuan. Chengdu is one of the cities in China that still keeps the original purity of tea today. There are at least 10,000 tea houses in Sichuan province. Just like Javanese people, Sichuan people are also very fond of gathering and spending time chatting while drinking tea. In addition to spending time to talk, in the old days tea house is a place to gather all the circles. Uniquely, in this tea house in addition to drinking tea, Sichuan people also come to spoil their eyes with a variety of "performances". In our place, there are always various interesting performances that can distract the people of Sichuan from the fatigue of their daily lives. The performances in question are very diverse, ranging from women practicing fan dances, martial arts performances, and we can even see some ear cleaners who carry out their ancient work with hair shavers. Where they will later go around and clean the ears of customers at the tea house they stop by. Many tea houses also display a puppet show to attract attention from the surrounding community.

Tea house was once used as a place where buying and selling, negotiations, as well as a place of meditation. Even the tea house has also become one of the means of recreation when the holidays, in the development of a tea house that currently also has a hotel and restaurant.

#### 4. Conclusion

Tea has many varieties and types that grow and are known in various regions. But not only that tea also has a myriad of different histories from different regions. In China, tea leaves are found in ancient forests. Unlike Indonesia, where the tea plant was brought in by foreign nations. The journey of tea to become a legendary drink also lasts a long time, throughout the age of tea itself that still exists today. The existence of tea until now can not be separated from the public's view of tea that is full of noble values and wisdom. The look and symbolism of this tea is what makes it still exist. Not necessarily just such a view, the people of Java and Sichuan involve tea in ceremonies and ceremonies that are certainly loaded with culture. So that this not only makes tea a drink, but tea also stores culture, traditions, noble values, and a long history in its small leaves.

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