

# The Exploratory Study of Feasibility of Chinese Tea Culture Entering the Curriculum of Chinese Primary and Secondary Schools

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**ABSTRACT.** Coffee culture is becoming increasingly popular among the younger generation in China today, on the contrary, teenagers and young adults seem to have forgotten the traditional Chinese tea culture. This article tries to figure out how to make traditional Chinese tea culture enter the curriculum of Chinese primary and secondary schools by analyzing the ways in which the other two traditional Chinese culture, Peking opera and Chinese martial arts, which have already entered the primary and secondary schools, and by combining with the reference to the related curriculum setting of China National Tea Museum and Wuhan University. The methods employed in this exploratory study are mainly literature study and case study. And there are four aspects of tea culture entering the curriculum mentioned: selection of subject, the training of teachers, content of lessons and policy support.

**KEYWORDS:** tea culture, primary and secondary schools, China, traditional culture

## 1. Introduction

There are more Chinese children who like coffee and soft drinks rather tea now than before. While as the birthplace of tea, it is a pity that children here now can hardly distinguish the types of tea. Furthermore, if they have small gatherings, such as group discussions and informal meetings, they prefer to choose coffee houses instead of tea houses. We can also see that there are plenty of cafes on the streets of China, not only are the global chain of coffee shops like Starbucks spreading across all commercial streets, but local coffee chains that take the high-end style, such as Luckin Coffee which follows Starbucks' pace blossoming everywhere. And taking Wuhan City as an example, there are 142 Starbucks and 172 Luckin Coffee shops that can be searched on Public Comment Network (Chinese Yelp). By contrast, these commercial districts rarely have tea houses for young people spending their time. In brief, drinking coffee has become a fashion for young Chinese, even primary and secondary school students tend to choose to go to cafes instead of tea houses for weekend gatherings. On the other hand, drinking tea seems to have become a habit of the older generation, and at the same time the students now know very little about tea.

## 2. The reasons for ability of Chinese tea culture entering the curriculum of primary and secondary schools of China

How to let students know more about Chinese tea culture? Propaganda and slogans are not enough for this. While education is always a better way for younger generation to learn and inherit culture. Thus, it will be a good attempt to add tea culture education into the school education.

However, there are many traditional Chinese cultures that not all of them are suitable for entering the curriculum of primary and secondary schools while tea culture contains three elements which make it appropriate to do so. Firstly, the Chinese have the sense of cultural identity with tea and have the habit of drinking tea in a wide area since ancient times. In the Tang Dynasty, drinking tea has become a common practice for the whole people which has developed from the life of the blue blood to mass behavior. [1] And during the same period, 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, the first academic monograph of tea, *The Classic of Tea*, written by Lu Yu, was published, since then tea culture has deeply been rooted in Chinese culture. [2] Besides, as China is the birthplace of tea, primary and secondary school education has certain obligations to revitalize Chinese tea culture. Secondly, the practical operation of making tea is rather simple, and there are less restrictions on the venue. Therefore it has feature of strong

operability. Moreover, in 2016, China's tea planting area accounted for 60% of the world's tea planting area, dry tea production accounted for 42% of the world's tea production, and since 2006 China has surpassed India in this, [3] it has consistently ranked first in the world. Because China has large quantities of tea production, the essential consumable for this course, dry tea, is easy to obtain. Thirdly, the contents of tea culture course are extensible and interesting. There are a variety of tea in China, and each type of tea has its rich history. In recent years, more and more universities in China have begun to develop liberal arts education at the undergraduate level. At present, there are relatively few universities offering Chinese tea culture courses. While Wuhan University has opened one as a optional course for liberal arts education, which only exists two years has become one of the most popular courses there. This course leads students to distinguish tea in tea tasting, learn tea history, and understand the customs and ceremony of drinking tea. Moreover, the tea sets are well-equipped in class so that students can learn to make tea in practice. Students there said that it is too popular to register this course, which shows that they are very interested in tea culture course in terms of the contents, which is not only has theoretical part but also practical part.

### 3. Experiences of Chinese martial arts and Peking Opera entering the curriculum

Chinese martial arts and Peking opera are excellent traditional Chinese cultures, which have entered the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. As tea culture is a part of Chinese traditional culture as well, it is worthwhile to study their experiences and analyzing the reasons.

#### 3.1 Cases

The entry of Chinese martial arts into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools has experienced the process from small-scale spontaneous attempts to large-scale policy promotion. And the policy will be mentioned later. In 2001, in Cangzhou County, Cangzhou City, Hebei Province, in order to develop Chinese martial arts resources in Cangxian County, the county party committee and county government made the decision of "making martial arts enter schools and become a part of courses". Later in August, more than 150 primary and secondary school physical education teachers in the county began to conduct intensive training in three batches. The training contents were the county's self-made martial arts exercises and the national elementary one-way long fist positions. Soon in September, the students in the county's primary and secondary schools started to "exercise the fist positions..." [4] In 2007, in Shuangjie Village, Shuangjie Town, Beichen District, Tianjin, under the active coordination of the village party branch secretary Liu Chunhai and the attention and support of the District Education Committee there, Bao's eighth extremes fist positions was officially included in the teaching content of physical education in the model primary school of Beichen District. It became the first intangible cultural heritage of martial arts that entered curriculum in China, which also explored the diversification of physical education. In addition, it became a compulsory part in courses since it entered the curriculum of the model primary schools. What is noteworthy is that there are some achievements that students made from this, for example, the fifth grader Li Ting and forth grader Pang De won the championships in the Tianjin Chinese Martial Arts Game in 2009. [5] The school-based martial arts textbooks are also constantly being explored and improved in Shanghai Fengxi Primary School. They compiled one textbook *Hand Exercises & Six-Step Fist Positions—Elementary Martial Arts Exercises for Children* at first. After few years developed, the textbook series *Martial Arts for Children* are finished, which integrates martial arts, moral education, and martial arts skills and has formed a scientific school-based series. [6] That means there are phased goals of martial arts knowledge for different grades.

Peking Opera has also experienced this process. In March 2008, Shanghai Jianxiang Primary School was appointed as one of the first batch experimental schools for Peking Opera entering the curriculum. Later in September 2016, this school won the honor of Shanghai's excellent traditional cultural exercises because of its Peking Opera education, and this award was for the top 10 of the combination of education and intangible cultural heritages. The school also collaborated with the Shanghai Peking Opera Theater in compiling the school-based textbook *Peking Opera for Students of Jianxiang Primary School*, which was the result that accumulated over years through the form of teaching and research activities that listed the teaching difficulties of each chant and formulated the targeted plans. During these process, they collected relevant repertoire information such as the knowledge of Peking Opera and the background of the transcripts. Next, they set the repertoire in different levels according to different grades and correspondingly wrote lesson plans. As a result, this

textbook includes singing scores for graders from first to fifth with corresponding teaching design, teaching tips, and related integrated instructional design of fine arts to popularize Peking Opera teaching. [7]

### **3.2 Analysis on the reasons**

The mode of entering the curriculum from Chinese martial arts and Peking Opera can bring us inspiration by analyzing the common factors of their processes. From the above materials, we can see that Peking Opera entered the curriculum by being a part of music courses, and Chinese martial arts entered the curriculum by being a part of physical education classes.

The reason why these two were able to do so in advance is because, on the one hand, they can find corresponding existing subjects and integrate them well without setting new subjects.

On the other hand, both of them entered the "secondary subjects" of China, not the "main subjects" that means it did not waste their time. What needs to be explained here is that due to the academic pressure of being outstanding in the college entrance examination, students here have heavy workloads of study. And under the circumstances of limited time and huge academic pressure, many students and parents think that if the scores are useless for college, then they are time-wasting for further studies. So people here regard Chinese, mathematics, and English as "main subjects" for elementary school students. As for middle and high school students, people gradually attach importance to some other non-physical related subjects according to whether the examinations are going to be taken by students or not. Whereas, music and PE classes seem to be less useful for the college entrance examination and high school entrance examination, so a lot of people consider them as the "secondary subjects" in the "secondary subjects".

Accordingly, even if new things were added into these two existing subjects, it would not really affect their scores for better college or high school, which significantly reduced the resistance for Chinese martial arts and Peking Opera entering the school curriculum.

## **4. Four aspects of the feasibility of tea culture entering the curriculum**

### **4.1 Subject selection**

By analyzing the reasons for the success of Chinese martial arts and Peking Opera entering the school curriculum, it may draw a feasible way for tea culture to enter the curriculum. Firstly, it could profit from the experiences of the other two traditional Chinese cultures that it is better to choose existing subjects which are in the related field or have similar context to add tea culture education in. Hence, Chinese and history are the most suitable choices, while students will not have history until they go to secondary schools. So if tea culture education is added to the primary school curriculum, it may only be integrated into the existing Chinese class, and students may learn some tea-related Chinese idioms and allusions at the same time, for instance, "the tea cools down as soon as the person is gone" which describes the superficiality of human relationships, "after over a cup of tea or after a meal" means "during one's leisure time", "weak tea and scanty meals" means "humble food" or "bread and water" in English. If it is integrated into the secondary school history class, referring to the Song Shilei's Chinese tea culture course of Wuhan University, it can start from the origin and development of tea, including the development of tea in various periods in ancient China, and the evolution of the drinking method of Chinese tea, such as the primitive drinking method (porridge drinking method, mixed drinking method, direct boiling and drinking), cooked tea of Tang Dynasty, Dian Cha of Song Dynasty, and the tea-making method of Ming and Qing Dynasty. What is more, different drinking methods in different periods also have different tea-making techniques. All these could combine with the content of existing history class in secondary school.

Secondly, it may be a better choice to integrate tea culture education into history than into Chinese. On the one hand, if tea culture is integrated into the "main subject" Chinese, there will be the illusion of a "wasting time" in learning it for parents and students, which looks like not only bring no direct benefits but also occupy the time of "main subject". Because the results cannot be directly reflected in the "roll-out bonus" which means learning it cannot improve their scores to bring them to a better college. People are living in the fast pace of life nowadays and becoming rather utilitarian in learning specialties, whereas, tea culture courses seem to be unable to bring extra points to learners. Thus, to a

certain extent, students and parents think that learning it is a waste of time. On the other hand, tea culture as an aspect of traditional Chinese culture, there are more content that can be combined with the knowledge of history. In the meantime, tea culture education increases the hands-on part of the history class which can also make the traditionally "boring" history class more vivid. Therefore, if the tea culture education enters the curriculum from junior high school, the history class can be given the priority; if it enters the elementary school courses, the Chinese class can be selected.

#### **4.2 Training of teachers**

If tea culture education is added into existing subjects, the teachers of existing subjects also need to be trained in tea culture teaching. Teachers can be dispatched to be trained by experts. For example, when Peking Opera entered the curriculum, Shanghai Jianxiang Primary School sent music teachers to Shenyang City to participate in the teacher training of "Peking Opera in Class" of national primary and secondary school since 2008, and all music teachers had participated in the Peking Opera singing training in Shanghai. [7] Another example is the China National Tea Museum in Hangzhou, which set free tea art training for elementary and middle school teachers during the summer vacation from 2008 to 2014. According to statistics, Chinese teachers accounted for the largest proportion, at 31.46% [8]. As a free training for voluntary registration, it demonstrated that it is possible to conduct tea culture training for Chinese teachers and integrate tea culture education into Chinese courses. Secondly, there is little difference in the proportion of primary and secondary school teachers, with primary school teachers accounting for 45.55%, and secondary school teachers accounting for 54.45% [8], which indicated that there is no big difference in teachers' interest in tea culture due to the different teaching objects.

#### **4.3 Content of lessons**

Combining with free tea art training courses offered by the China National Tea Museum for elementary and middle school teachers in the summer from 2008 to 2014 [8] and Song Shilei's course *The Introduction to Chinese Tea Culture* at Wuhan University, the tea culture courses can be divided into theoretical courses and practical courses. Theoretical part involves the origin of tea, related history, types of tea, tea-making techniques, historical customs and current customs of tea including local customs. The operational part involves the learning and use of tea sets, the brewing methods of different teas, etc. In fact, some of the contents needs to be learned together with theory and operation. For example, when distinguishing the types of tea, people should learn by smelling, seeing, and tasting the tea. Similarly, the learning and use of tea sets should first explain its cultural connotation, and then learn practical operation step by step

#### **4.4 Policy support**

Just as the process of Peking Opera and Chinese martial arts entered the curriculum of primary and secondary schools with policy and authority support, tea culture education also needs it. The introduction of Peking Opera into curriculum has received policy support since 2008. "The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has taken the lead in adding 8 model opera lessons in the music textbooks of 20 schools in 10 provinces." [9] In September 2015, *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education Work* proposed "Local courses such as dance, drama, and opera should be added to comprehensively strengthen and improve school aesthetic education work from 2015." [10] In 2017, "Opinions on the Implementation of Opera Entering Schools Curriculum" proposed, "...strive to accomplish that all students can enjoy an excellent Chinese opera performance for free", "taking students' participation in Chinese opera practice activities as an important part of the school's aesthetic education practice activities." [11] Chinese martial arts entering the curriculum also received attention in 2008. Zhou Heping, Vice Minister of Ministry of Culture proposed that "intangible cultural heritage entering the curriculum, being compiled in textbooks and coming into campuses are the fundamental measures for the sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage protection." [12] In addition, the General Administration of Sports and the Ministry of Education jointly created the *National Series of Martial Arts Aerobics for Primary and Secondary School Students* and requested that it needed to be promoted in the form of broadcast exercises in primary and secondary schools across the whole country from September 1, 2010. [13] Likewise, the

tea culture education cannot be added into the curriculum smoothly without these kinds of policy supports.

## 5. Conclusion

Tea and coffee are the two most popular beverages in the world and both of them have long histories. As coffee is becoming increasingly popular these days, Starbucks can be seen everywhere on the streets in China, and the numbers of local coffee shop have also rose rapidly, such as Luckin Coffee. Young people seem to be more interested in coffee, and tea is being pushed out of business among them. As a result, it is necessary to make tea culture education enter the curriculum which is also feasible to do so. When coffee culture is becoming more and more prosperous, young Chinese have gradually forgotten the existence of tea drinks. How to promote tea culture in the future and how to set tea culture courses is worthwhile to reflect on China's basic education. All in all, as the traditional Chinese culture of martial arts and Peking Opera, their experiences of entry into the curriculum provided a new way for tea culture education. Moreover, it is inseparable from the collaborative advancement of all aspects of the education system. In addition to special training of experts for teachers, it also needs the support of the same educational policy as Chinese martial arts and Peking Opera.

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