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A Foreign Infusion: The Forgotten Legacy of Japanese *Chadō* on Modern Chinese Tea Arts

Abstract: This paper traces the historical antecedents and influences on modern Chinese tea arts. What is now commonly known as *gongfucha*, which has become the standard Chinese tea ceremony, was originally a regional custom from the Chaozhou area of China. Through the twentieth century this custom was first taken up by Taiwanese pioneers, repackaged as an element of quintessential Chinese culture, and then exported back to mainland China since the 1980s. During this process of the reimagination of the Chaozhou practice of *gongfucha*, foreign elements of the Japanese tea ceremony, especially influences from *senchadō*, were included. As it becomes adopted throughout China as a new national custom, however, this foreign contribution is obscured and forgotten, and replaced with a national narrative that emphasizes links to the past.

Keywords: tea, China, Taiwan, Japan, *gongfucha*, *sencha*, tea arts, tea ceremony

ANYONE WALKING INTO A STORE that sells tea in China these days can expect to see a setup of tea brewing vessels consisting of a tray, a small teapot, a few even smaller teacups, and various tools such as scoops, pitchers, and a small kettle. The teapot is usually made of *yixing* clay, from the town of Yixing in Jiangsu province, but it can sometimes be replaced with a small *gaiwan*, or covered cup, made of white porcelain. Relative to the size of the brewing vessel, a lot of tea leaves are typically used, with the expectation that the same leaves will be infused repeatedly before being discarded; the kettle is there to expedite this process by providing ready access to hot water. This method of brewing tea is usually called *gongfucha*, which has no real English translation aside from the literal "making tea with effort/skill." To non-Chinese, this type of tea brewing is often simply introduced as the Chinese tea ceremony, and can easily be found in teashops from San Francisco to Moscow. It is therefore somewhat surprising that thirty years ago in most of China this method of brewing tea would have been virtually unheard of and viewed as a curious, but distinctly foreign, practice.

Out of the three words in "Chinese tea ceremony" only "tea" is an indisputable term. The practice is Chinese indeed, but only in the broadest sense of the word that it originated somewhere in what is now China. Nor is it really a "ceremony," for the practice of using very small cups and small teapots, and infusing the leaves repeatedly, is only a means to drink tea in a specific way. Although there have been recent attempts to infuse this practice with symbolic meaning, it remains a means to an end, not an end in itself. *Gongfucha* is in fact a custom that originated in Fujian and Guangdong provinces of coastal southeast China, and is most heavily identified with the region of Chaozhou located at the border of these two provinces. It was one among many regional forms of tea consumption in China.

Over the course of the last few decades, *gongfucha* has been transformed from a regional practice to one with a national identity, and is increasingly talked of as a Chinese way of tea, rather than simply as a Chaozhouese method of brewing tea. This process took root not on the Chinese mainland, but in the politically and geographically separated island of Taiwan, and then spread to the rest of China after the economy slowly opened up when Deng Xiaoping took power after 1976. Not only does this new form of tea brewing, named *chayi* (tea arts) by its proponents, owe its form to Chaozhouese tea practice, but it also borrows aesthetic and philosophical underpinnings from the Japanese tea tradition. As this new and improved *gongfucha* became the de facto standard for much of China, it also underwent a transformation whereby the complex origin of this new form has been masked, perhaps forgotten, and instead the story is now retold in a more assertive manner along national lines.[1] This article examines the complicated source materials from which

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modern-day *gongfucha* draws its inspiration and seeks to recover lost narratives that have been subsumed by nationalist discourses.

Roots of a Local Tradition

While tea has been consumed in China since at least the Tang dynasty (618–907), it was not until the Ming dynasty (1386–1644) that brewing with whole leaves, which is how we generally brew tea now, became the dominant practice. *Gongfucha*, which necessarily uses leaves rather than powder, was first mentioned in text during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). To these observers it was a novelty and something different from the normal. Yuan Mei (1716–1797), the famed Qing dynasty gastronome, wrote in his book on food, *Suiyuan shidan* (The Menu of the Sui Garden), of his time in the Wuyi Mountains, where tea was brewed in pots that held no more than one ounce of water and drunk from cups "no bigger than a walnut." The same tea leaves were infused at least three times and retained their aroma despite the repeated infusions. This experience completely changed his view of Wuyi Mountains tea; originally he had thought of it as too intense, bitter, and not very good, but upon trying the tea in the mountains in the method he described, he found it fragrant and comparable to other famous teas, such as Longjing and Yangxian, both from his home region of Jiangnan (Yuan 2000 [1792]: 293). Yuan did not use the name *gongfucha* to describe the kind of brewing he experienced, but the emphasis on the use of small cups, small teapot, and repeated infusions highlights the essential components of *gongfucha*.

One of the first known usages of the term *gongfucha* comes from an essay written by Yu Jiao (1751–?), who served for a time around 1800 as a low ranking official in Guangdong province (Yu 1988 [1801]: 4–5). His description was general, but the process of drinking this *gongfucha* echoes Yuan Mei's experience, suggesting that they are indeed the same. It involved a teapot made with *yixing* clay, a kettle on top of a straight, vertical stove, and a dish made of porcelain, on which the tiny teacups were arranged. The number of cups depended on the number of people having tea. There were other small tools such as bamboo picks (to unclog the teapot when leaves got stuck) and paper fans (to aerate the charcoal for boiling water). He described the tea as "strongly fragrant, even more elegant than chewing plum blossoms" (ibid.: 372–73). It was to be appreciated carefully in order to fully realize its taste and flavor and not to be drunk in large quantities.

The foreignness of this way of drinking tea was apparent, because the tone in which both Yuan and Yu wrote their observations indicated they were observing something they had never seen before and thus they described it in detail in a way only outsiders would; in both cases there was a revelation that this way of brewing tea yielded a vastly different experience than their normal usage of tea. This impression of the uniqueness of *gongfucha* as a way to drink tea persisted into the twentieth century. Lin Yutang (1895–1976), the notable writer and translator who was a native of southern Fujian province where *gongfucha* has long been the dominant practice, pointed out in his *The Importance of Living*, originally published in 1937, that brewing tea in the *gongfu* style was "an art generally unknown in North China." *Gongfucha* was something done by "connoisseurs and not generally served among shopkeepers" (Lin 1940: 218). Native pride aside, Lin was speaking philosophically of tea as part of his description of Chinese aesthetics aimed at an English speaking audience. He tried to link *gongfucha* with tea texts of the past to emphasize that it was a part of the canon of traditional Chinese cultural practices. Yet it is telling that he himself readily identified it as a regional custom that was little known even within large parts of China. *Gongfucha*, therefore, can be seen as one variation of the totality of Chinese tea tradition, but hardly as a representative or dominant tradition.

Twenty years later in 1957 a Chaozhou native, Weng Huidong (1885?–1965), wrote the first dedicated treatise on *gongfucha*, documenting the process of preparing and brewing tea in this style. He also noted in the preface to his work the reaction of Chinese from other parts of the country when they saw *gongfucha* in action. The astonishment they had for this strange practice was coupled with a fascination that it was so popular in the area, drunk in the fields and on the factory floor. Weng's tract, never formally published, was meant as a record of this practice (Weng 1997 [1957]).

Weng first lists the utensils that were necessary to brew tea using the *gongfucha* method, which consisted of a small teapot, small cups, a dish, a kettle with a stove, a bowl for waste water, and other small sundries. This list is essentially the same as Yu Jiao's description from 150 years earlier. Although things like the quality of the tea and water, teaware, and fire are all important topics that he covered, the key, as he begins discussing the method itself, was the procedure of brewing. Therefore it should only be served by someone already practiced in the arts of *gongfucha*. Switching to someone who was a relative novice would only ruin the tea and was never to be done, even for seemingly meaningless procedures, such as warming the teapot with hot water. It was the host's responsibility to handle everything during a session (Weng 1997 [1957]).

There are seven basic steps. First, one should prepare all the wares and start the fire. Second, as the water warms, one

should prepare the tea leaves by separating out the finer grains from the larger leaves. The larger pieces would go near the spout at the bottom, while smaller leaves would fill the middle, and then the finest particles would be placed on top. One should take care not to overfill the teapot, for it would then produce a tea that is too strong and bitter. Third, at the right moment, one would take the now heated water and pour into the pot in a careful and controlled manner. Fourth, the bubbles that are produced from the pouring of water onto the leaves should be scraped away with the teapot's lid. Fifth, after replacing the lid onto the teapot, hot water needs to be poured onto the teapot itself to keep it hot to concentrate the fragrance in the pot. Sixth, the cups need to be warmed as well with hot water. Steps five and six should be repeated until the tea is brewed and ready to be served, at which point the tea should be poured from the teapot into the cups in an even manner, leaving no trace of water in the pot itself. The tea is now ready to be drunk hot, with a quick emptying of the cups by each individual and three sniffs of the cup's bottom for the fragrance. The process could then be repeated for multiple infusions (Weng 1997 [1957]).

This process described by Weng can be considered the canonical *gongfucha* practice. It fits historical descriptions of *gongfucha* and also contemporary practice by tea drinkers. Others in China saw this as an interesting, historical, but regional custom. More general books on the subject of tea culture in China from the latter half of the twentieth century show that from the perspective of outsiders, Chaozhou's tea custom was merely one of many in China, and it did not have pride of place or special significance beyond a more elaborate than usual set of procedures. Feng Shiye's 1971 book *Yincha de yishu* (The Art of Drinking Tea), published in Hong Kong, mentions Chaozhou's tea practices as one among many in the category of "Han people tea drinking customs" (Feng 1971: 19–21). Books published in Mainland China have a similar take on the matter. For example, Yu Yongming's book *Shuocha yincha* (Talking Tea While Drinking Tea) mentioned *gongfucha* only in passing in the subsection "Fujian and Guangdong people drink *wulong* tea," under the larger heading "Tea Drinking Customs" (Yu 1999: 103–4). To the rest of China *gongfucha* was interesting, but no more so than any other regional tea culture; it was novel for its unique procedures and implements. There were many other traditions in China for tea drinking (Wang 1991: 116–31; Yin 1989: 106–17).

The Birth of Tea Arts, *Chayi*

The puzzler, therefore, is when did Weng Huidong's canonical *gongfucha* evolve from being identified as a solely regional custom practiced by a small number of people in a well-defined geographic area to something that is seen nationwide, often without reference to its provincial roots? One possible clue lies in the aforementioned book by Feng Shiye. The term he used in describing the practice of drinking tea, *chayi*, or tea arts, is a shorthand for the title of his book, *The Art of Tea Drinking*. This has become the predominant term used to describe the contemporary, nationwide practice of tea that is based on Chaozhou's *gongfucha*. *Chayi*, however, is a neologism without historical background. The definitive *Hanyu dacidian*, which is the Chinese equivalent of the Oxford English Dictionary, lists no entry for this term in the 1989 edition, nor does the Taiwanese *Zhongwen dacidian* published in 1968 contain it (*Hanyu dacidian* 1987–95, vol. 9: 381–84; *Zhongwen dacidian* 1962–68, vol. 28: 12237–45). In contrast, a more recently published dictionary meant for the mass market does contain *chayi*, defining it simply as "arts related to the brewing, drinking, and serving of tea" (*Zhonghua xiandai hanyu cidian* 2009: 147). The term *chayi* therefore could not have appeared before about 1970; Feng's book would be a relatively early example of it.

The choice of *chayi* over *chadao* is also indicative of the self-conscious nature of the creation of *chayi* as a discipline. The early pioneers of tea arts were very aware that the term *chadao*, or the Japanese equivalent *chadō*, is intrinsically linked with the Japanese tea ceremony. Thus using *chadao* to talk about this renewal of Chinese tea practice was deemed problematic, since it would confuse novice practitioners and members of the public by mixing terminology, as well as raising questions about the potential copycat nature of the revival (Fan 1992: 171).

The term was, and still is, most widely associated with various teahouses categorized as *chayiguan*, tea art houses, that specialize in serving tea as a beverage. They began appearing in Taiwan during the 1970s and proliferated throughout the island in subsequent decades, and are now ubiquitous in many Chinese cities. These are establishments that provide a quiet, peaceful setting for drinking and enjoying tea, and sometimes host cultural events and discussions, in a way not too different from the coffeehouses of Europe. Proprietors of the first generation of tea art houses in Taiwan, some of whom are still leaders in Chinese tea aesthetics, were very conscious of their status as pioneers in a new movement.[2] The practice of these new tea art houses contrasted sharply with traditional teahouses in Taiwan, which were often associated with gambling, smoking, and prostitution. In fact, some early tea art houses were threatened with shutdown notices because they were suspected of operating establishments of ill repute. It took years of public advertisements and various promotional campaigns to change public perception of these new institutions. They also consciously presented their own offering as distinctly cultural and modern; in contrast, the older teahouses were backward and something to be discarded (Wicentowski 2000).

One major concern among these new proponents of tea drinking was the need to create a new style of tea brewing that gave it an aesthetic value. In the writings of many authors who discuss the history and practice of Chinese tea from that period, it is quite apparent that the need to equal Japan's accomplishments in the arena of tea culture was strongly felt. The Japanese, as is well known, have a long-established tradition of *chadō* (The Way of Tea), formalized by the tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591) in the sixteenth century and refined over the succeeding centuries. By the twentieth century it drew on a rich tradition mixing history, aesthetics, and Zen Buddhism into a complex ceremony that could well claim to be an art form, and is often treated as such by practitioners and outsiders alike. It is also supported by an elaborate institution of formal schools and lineages, and actively promoted by the Japanese government as something quintessentially Japanese (Surak 2013). Chinese tea drinking customs, in contrast, were largely utilitarian. The various regional customs of tea drinking were all means to an end; they deliver the drink to the drinker, without much pomp and circumstance, albeit in different and unique ways. In the Jiangnan region, the historic cultural center of China, the preferred tea is green tea of various sorts. These are usually brewed in large cups or tall glasses and sipped as needed, without ceremony or fanfare. In the imperial capital of Beijing and other northern regions the preferred drink is jasmine tea, which is a fragrant but low-grade tea.[3] This is made crudely in large pots and drunk as a weak drink. The various ethnic minorities of China each have their own tradition of tea consumption suited to their local conditions, but none can claim anything resembling the Japanese tea ceremony with its rich historical tradition and complex symbolism.

We can get a glimpse of the type of rhetoric employed by the new owners of these tea art houses in their promotion of *chayi*. One institution active in the teaching of this new tea arts is the Lu Yu Tea Culture Institute, named after the eighth-century author of *The Classic of Tea*, the world's first treatise on the drink, and headed by Cai Rongzhang. Aside from offering classes to consumers eager to learn this new style of tea brewing, the institute began publishing a monthly magazine titled *Chayi yuekan* (Tea Arts Monthly) in 1980, focusing on tea culture, industry news, and advertisements. In a piece somewhere between an advertisement for a particular tea art house and a reflection on the reasons for opening a shop, the new owner of a place called *Xianjing chayiguan* (Wonderland tea art house) noted how it took him six years of contemplation before finally opening his shop. The impetus came from a conversation with a friend who used to live in Beijing (called Beiping in the article) about how teahouses

FIGURE 1: *Zhou Yu, the owner of the Wistaria House in Taipei, brewing tea.*
PHOTO BY ANDREW HARTO © 2015

were commonplace in various cities in China. He specifically mentioned that these were teahouses which were "purely for drinking tea" (*chun chicha*) and not for food or other purposes. In contrast, Taiwan, especially Taipei, had very few places for drinking tea. Instead, it was a city filled with coffee shops frequented by the youth, who were only after the stimulating effects of coffee and the foreignness of the drink. Whereas Japan has long had its *chadō* and England its teatime, and even America was increasing tea consumption by the year, the new owner wondered if China needed to wait until tea became the most fashionable drink in the world before Chinese would return to it as a drink ("Renjian xianjing" 1981).

The rest of the article described the establishment of Wonderland tea art house and its serene, tranquil, and traditional setting. Although full of marketing hyperbole, the article nevertheless reveals the central claim by proprietors of the new tea art houses that they were recovering a lost tradition by means of emphasizing the pureness of tea drinking as an activity. Tea, in this mode of consumption, was not just for quenching thirst, nor was it meant for accompanying other activities. It was a pursuit in itself, and the reference to Japanese *chadō*, perhaps the most revered among various tea traditions, is a powerful reminder that among Chinese there was simply no comparable case; Chinese tea drinking practices lacked the aesthetic rigor of the Japanese tea ceremony, and these young practitioners were going to change that.

Running underneath the discussion of elevating tea into an art form is a quiet but steady current of nationalistic rhetoric. Quite often, as in the article referred to above, links are made to mainland China and tea arts is presented as something that is distinctly Chinese. The term *Zhonghua chayi* (Chinese tea arts) is employed frequently to refer to the Chineseness of this

FIGURE 2: *Tea service at the Wistaria House in Taipei, a good modern approximation of Gongfu-style tea.*
PHOTO BY ANDREW HARTO © 2015

practice. Part of the reason for this is political. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Republic of China government in Taiwan retained its claim as the only legitimate government of China despite losing its seat in the General Assembly and its place on the Security Council in the United Nations to the communist People's Republic of China in 1971. While China was undergoing tremendous political and cultural upheaval through the Cultural Revolution, Taiwan could plausibly continue to profess to be practicing an orthodox form of Chinese culture. Tea arts, in this case, was uniquely situated as something that Taiwan could lay claim to as distinctly Chinese, and as something that it was trying to revive and promote while China was abandoning traditional ways. In 1981, in association with the Kuomintang government, a number of new tea arts practitioners and tea company owners formed the Republic of China Tea Arts Association. The primary mandate of the association was to "revive Chinese tea arts culture, promote Chinese tea drinking techniques, raise the standard of living, encourage international exchange, and leverage the economic benefits of the tea industry" (*Zhonghua minguo chayi xiehui kai faqiren hui* 1982).

It is interesting to see the word "revive" used in association with tea arts, since tea arts itself was such a new idea, and "Chinese tea arts culture" (*zhonghua chayi wenhua*) was a neologism at best. We see this sense as well from the tea art house owner who referred to Beijing when discussing Chinese mainland tea culture, even though no one from Taiwan had traveled to Beijing for at least three decades due to the political chasm of the two polities, and in any case what they were practicing in Taiwan as tea arts was nothing like what people in Beijing would drink.[4] Along with the need to rival the aesthetic sophistication of the Japanese tea ceremony, these new practitioners had to search for something unique and distinctively Chinese. The only possible candidate suitable for this new tea arts was Chaozhou's *gongfucha*. In terms of complexity, *gongfucha* was unique in China for having a full set of implements, from kettles to teapots to cups and other accessories, and emphasized the relationship of the person drinking the tea and the person brewing the tea. It also required a modicum of skill to brew well. Whereas many of the dominant traditions in the cultural and political centers of China used large vessels to brew, which meant that individuals had little agency in the outcome of the tea drunk, the requirement in *gongfucha* of brewing in small pots virtually demanded that the person drinking the tea had to be the person brewing it, and whether or not the tea was tasty depended on how well the host was able to handle the tea. This personal connection to the tea consumed is very conducive to building a closer bond to the tea itself for the practitioner of tea arts.

There is also a more immediate reason why *gongfucha* became the basis for the emerging tea arts movement. Taiwan has strong links with the Chaozhou region specifically and Fujian and Guangdong provinces more generally. Many Taiwanese are from the area of Chaozhou, and the typical method of brewing tea in Taiwan is from the same tradition as that used in Chaozhou area. Therefore, many of the proponents of the tea arts movement were already familiar with Chaozhou *gongfucha* when they wanted to elevate Chinese tea into the realm of art. It was a ready-made base on which to build a new structure.

Finally, the development of tea arts in the 1970s coincided with Taiwan's rapid economic advancement in its postwar recovery. It was during this decade that Taiwan gradually emerged as one of the "Four Little Dragons" of Asia (Vogel 1991). The cultivation of interest in tea arts was symptomatic of the rising standards of living on the island; as urban professionals increasingly had disposable income as well as leisure time to spare, they began pursuing activities and hobbies that could be seen as cultivating one's cultural training.[5] Drinking tea in a way that requires training meant that the person doing so had both the financial means and leisure to enjoy this hobby. Purchasing and then showcasing newly bought utensils also allowed for a market of teaware appreciation to develop. Both of these are symptomatic of Pierre Bourdieu's idea of distinction and probably furthered interest in this new way of drinking tea (Bourdieu 1984). Tea being an important export product in Taiwan also meant that there was a ready supply of it when the population began to show interest in drinking finer teas. The island therefore provided a perfect incubation setting for the development of a new tea culture

based on the tradition of Chaozhou *gongfucha* using tea from Taiwan as its base.

Inventing New Traditions

The aforementioned need to have a Chinese equivalent to the Japanese *chadō* did not preclude *chayi* proponents from borrowing liberally from the Japanese tradition. In addition to the more famous *chadō*, which uses powdered tea, there also exists a rival tradition called *senchadō* (Way of Steamed Tea), based on the use of *sencha*, a whole leaf Japanese green tea that is steamed during processing and steeped for drinking, rather than powdered and whisked as in the more well-known tea ceremony.[6] *Senchadō* developed in Japan as a countermovement to the more rigid *chadō*, and was itself consciously borrowing its utensils as well as practices from Chinese tea drinking as whole leaf tea was introduced to Japan in the seventeenth century (Graham 1998). In formulating new ways of drinking tea, the Taiwanese practitioners were surely aware of *senchadō* and its influence, and drew upon some of the elements of this tradition when coming up with their own, improved version of *gongfucha*.

The most striking parallel to *senchadō* in the tea arts movement is the newfound interest in the spatial arrangement of teaware and control of the movement of the physical body in relation to these wares. The introduction of the *chaxi*, or tea setting, into the Chinese tea tradition formalizes a previously unimportant part of the tea drinking experience. Whereas texts on *gongfucha* frequently discuss how to brew tea, they are focused on the technical aspects of tea brewing. Authors such as Weng never mentioned how items should be placed in relation to each other on the table, nor do they discuss the value of contrasting shapes for various items in one's tea service. *Chaxi*, on the other hand, is a physical setting for tea utensils that is meant to please the drinker visually and serves little practical purpose. The idea is that the arrangement of cups, pot, kettle, and other tools should impart a sense of aesthetic elegance and thematic coherence. Although traditions of teaware connoisseurship go far back in Chinese history, the concern for spatial arrangement on the tea table and visual appreciation of the process of drinking tea were fundamentally new ideas for Chinese tea aesthetics.

Moreover, with the introduction of *chaxi* came the formalization of the rules for movement. Prior to the 1970s, when discussing *gongfucha*, no one had ever talked about how one should move or place items. The Japanese tea tradition, on the other hand, places great emphasis on the process itself, with movements within the tea room strictly regulated by rigid rules. Failure to adhere to these rules is considered poor form that should be corrected through practice (Tanaka 1973). These rules are very detailed, with differences between schools based on small variations in how the tea ceremony should be conducted. While *senchadō* does not have as strict a set of standards, in formal gatherings various schools still maintain clear rules over how the entire tea ceremony should proceed. Manuals for newcomers to the hobby include step-by-step instructions, complete with pictures. The beginner tea ceremony for *senchadō* in one such manual includes fifty-two steps (Ogawa 2000: 42–47).

The importation of the idea of *chaxi* meant the need to elevate the casual movements of the traditional *gongfucha* practice and to regulate them. Manuals similar to the Japanese ones began to appear that detail the step-by-step process of how to brew tea using the new tea arts style, based on *gongfucha* practice as a foundation, with the addition of otherwise superfluous procedures such as inspecting the leaves by sight and smell that add to the complexity of the steps involved (Cai 1985). The most obvious Taiwanese modification in the creation of the new tea practice, from a technical standpoint, is the introduction of an aroma cup (*wenxiangbei*), elongated in shape and intended to accentuate the smell of the tea. Instead of pouring directly into the drinking cup, as is customary in Chaozhou, tea should first be poured into these aroma cups, with the liquid then transferred to the drinking cup. The drinker should then first sniff the aroma cup for the lingering fragrance before imbibing the liquid. Another innovation was the fairness cup (*gongdaobei*), shaped much like a creamer and used for decanting the tea that will then be distributed to individual cups. These two items became part of the classic set of necessary teaware for serious practitioners in the 1980s. Both are widely used in Taiwan, although the aroma cup is somewhat less popular in the People's Republic of China.[7]

The formalization of the movement and process of tea drinking in this new style also meant that it was no longer something one could easily do anywhere. Weng mentioned how the drinking of tea took place throughout Chaozhou: in factories, along the road, at home, and in the fields. The new tea arts practice required planning, with the careful placement of items being an important component of the experience. Having a cup of tea in the tea arts style on the shop floor of a bustling electronics factory in early 1980s Taiwan was well-nigh impossible, whereas the boss's office might be an appropriate venue for such activities. By making the brewing process more complicated, it necessarily meant that the activity became something done more deliberately and outside the natural places where people drank tea.

The new tea drinking ritual also gained a performance aspect previously absent in earlier descriptions. Drinking tea

became something that can be appreciated not only through oral or olfactory means; it was now possible to enjoy and evaluate visually as well. In a manual for new tea drinkers published in 2002, Cai described what by then was an accepted norm for tea brewing, which he called the "small pot tea method" (*xiaohu chafa*), a new name for basically the same practice as *gongfucha*.[8] Cai explicated detailed instructions on each step to be taken, even down to how to hold the teapot and how high to raise it when pouring (Cai 2002: 143–46). Some of these movements had a practical rationale behind them, but others were for nothing more than visual beauty.

Another striking feature of Cai's work is that by 2002 when this manual was published, the nomenclature of this new custom, so recently invented, had already been changed. The use of the term *chayi* had, at least in this book, been complemented by the word *chadao* (The Way of Tea), which are the same characters as the name for the Japanese tradition of tea. Even though *chadao* is the term seen in the title of the book, within the book itself *chayi* is still used as the primary term to describe the practice of tea, with a distinction that *chayi* is not simply "tea added to art" (Cai 2002: 214–15). Rather, *chayi* is the embodiment of the art of the creation of the tea leaves itself. That Cai felt comfortable enough in 2002 to use *chadao* in the title of his introductory book may indicate a growing confidence that this movement was no longer simply copying the Japanese, and may also be reflective of the changes in relative strength and weakness of Asian economies and cultural influence since the 1970s.

This is not to say that the terms *chayi* and *chadō* are entirely distinct. In fact, the connections between them are copious and may explain the desire by early Chinese pioneers of tea arts to avoid the Japanese term in order to distinguish their invention from Japanese practices. For example, in many publications from Taiwan starting in the early 1980s, there is a steady fascination and description of Japanese tea culture and its various aspects, from the artistic and ritualistic to the philosophical. In all of the books that were analyzed for this project which were published in Taiwan, each has at least some coverage of the Japanese tea ceremony, either its form, aesthetics, or philosophical underpinnings. In particular, the Japanese sentiments of harmony (*wa*), respect (*kei*), purity (*sei*), and tranquility (*jaku*), which form the main aesthetic foundation of the modern Japanese tea ceremony, have been imitated and modified by both Cai and Fan Zengping, another tea scholar, but in different forms. Cai advocates the use of beauty (*mei*), health (*jian*), cultivation (*xing*), and ethics (*lun*) (Cai 2002: 222–24). Fan, on the other hand, favors the formulation harmony (*he*, same character as the Japanese *wa*), thrift (*jian*), silence (*jing*, similar meaning to the Japanese *jaku*), and cleanliness (*jie*) (Fan 1992: 44). Although they do not necessarily follow the Japanese formulation set down by Sen no Rikyu, the use of four simple words and the conveyance of concepts of silence, tranquility, and self-cultivation are clear echoes of the Japanese tradition.

In the midst of this transformation of *gongfucha* from merely a tea drinking custom into an "art," the regional character of *gongfucha* became muted. Nowhere in Cai's introductory manual from 2002 is it mentioned that the tea custom he is describing is a derivation of Chaozhou *gongfucha*. In fact, the preferred name for this new practice continues to be Chinese tea arts (*Zhonghua chayi*), once again emphasizing the essentialized Chineseness of the practice and decontextualizing the very local roots of the tradition. It is also interesting that the term used is the more politically neutral Zhonghua, Chinese, rather than the very charged Zhongguo, China. Zhonghua is cultural, which encompasses the diverse regions of Greater China, such as Hong Kong and Macau, as well as the overseas Chinese communities, many of which have large populations of Chaozhou and Fujian origins. In contrast, China has political significance and is identified first and foremost with the state. By using Zhonghua, it emphasizes the cultural and civilizational aspect of the tea practice and underplays the political connotations of this name. However, it also gives the tea tradition a national quality that was not present only a few decades earlier.

Linking Up with History

While Taiwan had an outsized influence on the development of tea arts as a practice, it was in China where *gongfucha* was able to achieve critical mass and become something more than a regional custom. The Ten Ren Group, the largest chain store of tea sellers in Taiwan, invested heavily in the Mainland market, and has become the most important player in the China tea market. Since 1993, when they first entered China with a few stores in the major coastal cities, they have expanded to over 1,300 outlets throughout China. With their success in China, they also brought with them the new tea culture that had evolved in Taiwan and used it as a basis to educate a new generation of tea drinkers in China. Customers who visit Ten Fu (Ten Ren Tea's mainland China affiliate) can expect to sample teas brewed in the tea arts style by the saleswomen before they buy, as well as attend lessons held by various centers in major cities.[9]

The appearance of national chains of teashops also coincided with changes in how *gongfucha* is presented in print. Echoing Cai's changing choice of nomenclature mentioned earlier, we see how *gongfucha* began to be linked up with

historical precedents, however tenuous the connections. In a book on the custom of *gongfucha* published in 1994 by Shantou University, which is located in the Chaozhou area, the authors continue to propound the idea that *gongfucha* was a unique, local practice that was special to Chaozhou (Chen and Xu 1994: 13). Only a short time later, local scholar Chen Xiangbai tried to link up Chaozhou's *gongfucha* with China's historical precedents, going so far as to assert in a series of books that China has always had *gongfucha*, and it only migrated from the central plains to Chaozhou during the Qing dynasty (Chen 1997: 22–26; Chen and Chen 2004: 12–13). While recognizing the uniqueness of *gongfucha*, Chen's claim now places *gongfucha* in the historical development of tea culture in China itself. He even contends that regarding *gongfucha* as a regional custom is an "error," and that it was a lost tradition in need of proper recognition. In other words, spreading Chaozhou's *gongfucha* tradition throughout China is merely correcting a historical wrong and restoring Chinese tea culture to its rightful trajectory. It is, as Chen Xiangbai and Chen Zailin (2004: 14) note, "an extension of the *chayi* from *The Classic of Tea*. It is precisely the fruit of a process of over a thousand years of accumulation, dissemination, and development from the *gongfucha* art from *The Classic of Tea*."

The claim made here is clearly quite problematic, especially because the brewing of whole leaf tea did not become mainstream practice until the fifteenth century. By claiming that Chaozhou's *gongfucha* tradition has always been the center of Chinese tea culture, the authors ignore historical inconveniences such as how to reconcile whisked powdered tea, the dominant trend from the Tang to the Yuan dynasties (roughly ninth to fifteenth centuries), with the small cup, small pot method found in Chaozhou. Instead, Lu Yu is the central figure around which the history of tea began, and retrospective histories of the beverage in China all claim to be descended from Lu Yu's work. More general books on the history of tea tend to follow this linear developmental model, with one dynasty's tea practice seen as building on practices of previous dynasties and culminating in modern tea arts (Zhang 1987; Yao 2004).[10] The overall tenor of such studies is that the contemporary tea arts practice is merely an extension of an older form of tea from earlier times, rather than a new form that was invented in the latter half of the twentieth century based on a regional custom. In addition to papering over obvious problems in the claim to historical authenticity, these narratives also ignore the role of foreign influences on the development of tea arts. Even Chinese works that discuss Chinese and Japanese transmission in tea culture tend to emphasize China as the source and Japan as the recipient and developer of tea knowledge, but rarely mention that the direction of transmission could have occurred in reverse (Graham 1999: 1–9; Teng 2004).

The idea that the current Chinese tea practice based largely on *gongfucha* is merely an extension of a historical tradition that traces its roots all the way back to Lu Yu bears all the characteristics of an "invented tradition," as expounded by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983). If we examine the text of the *Classic of Tea* we will see that the tea described in that text bears little resemblance to what we consider tea now. The tea used was powdered and ground up, then boiled in water, with added fragrance such as spices and salt. The tea, as produced according to Lu Yu's instructions, would be unrecognizable by most Chinese today as tea. It is perhaps closest to the current Inner Asian practice of boiling tea in a cauldron, with the exception of the use of milk or, in the Tibetan case, yak butter. It certainly would not be in accord with Feng's principles of Chinese tea drinking, nor accommodate any of the philosophical underpinnings of Cai or Fan. Reading *chayi* into Lu Yu's *Classic of Tea* is merely wishful thinking.

The attempt to link *gongfucha* and the new tea arts with historical precedent is also a reflection of the unique circumstances surrounding China after the Mao Zedong era. The introduction of tea arts beginning in the late 1980s helped fill a void left by the cultural devastation that had taken place during the Cultural Revolution. Rising standards of living from the 1980s onward, just like a decade earlier in Taiwan, generated interest in leisure activities such as the practice of tea drinking, and its sources of popularity among increasingly wealthy urbanites are similar to those found in Taiwan as well. In a country ravaged by two decades of endless political campaigns, the introduction of a new, refined tea drinking method found a ready audience (Zheng 2004).

Even though attempts to insert *gongfucha* into the long historical narrative of Chinese tea is problematic, this is not to say that the act of drinking tea itself was an invented tradition; Chinese have been drinking tea in various ways for probably over two thousand years.[11] Although historically it is inaccurate to say that *gongfucha* or *chayi* has always existed in the Chinese tea tradition, as some writers would claim, the current widespread adoption of a nationwide custom of tea drinking that is so deliberate is an important new phenomenon. Whereas previously there were many different local traditions of tea drinking, nowadays it is possible to find teashops large and small throughout China serving tea using largely similar teaware, with the same method of brewing the same leaves repeatedly, and drinking from the small cups that are characteristics of *gongfucha*.

In this way, the emergence of tea arts in Taiwan, its spread to mainland China, and its gradual adoption throughout

much of the country as the de facto form of formalized tea drinking echoes what Kristin Surak has found for the Japanese tea ceremony and her concept of "nation-work" (Surak 2013: 1–12). Nation-work, as Surak explains, is the process through which the abstract concept of the nation is made tangible through practice. In this case, the tradition itself is at least partially invented, with a regional custom appropriated, foreign practices borrowed, and then, after mixing, inserted into a narrative of national tradition with deep historical roots. Chaozhou's *gongfucha* is justified retroactively as the orthodox successor to all historical tea practices in China, and therefore the rightful form for a modern Chinese tea practice. Most Chinese living in urban areas can now recognize *gongfucha* as a more formal way of drinking tea, without necessarily knowing how to perform the required movements themselves, much like how the average Japanese could perhaps recognize the very basics of a tea ceremony without being able to enact them. Recognition, more than performance, is key. Contrast that with the China that Weng Huidong lived in where visitors to Chaozhou would not recognize *gongfucha* at all, and we can see how rapid the transformation has been.

The adoption of *gongfucha* as a de facto national tea tradition does not mean the complete evisceration of local cultures. Because practicing *gongfucha* requires a certain amount of time, money, and effort, preexisting local tea traditions continue to live on in various forms, with some surviving better than others.[12] While these local cultures may indeed be more historically authentic, the emergence of a national tradition with *gongfucha* as its basis has also led to continually evolving developments in the Chinese taste in tea. The explosion of interest in *pu'er* tea in the past decade, for example, is one such development that would never have been possible before the widespread adoption of *gongfucha* (Zhang 2014). Similarly, even more recent interest in white tea (*baicha*) and certain types of black tea (*hongcha*) depend upon the common brewing methods developed in the past few decades.

Largely absent from this is the acknowledgment that the cultural transmission of tea traditions is not unidirectional. The possibility of reverse influence, as shown here with Japanese *senchadō*, is largely ignored in the existing narrative surrounding *gongfucha*. Even though modern *gongfucha* practice owes much to Japanese tea aesthetics and philosophy for its theoretical underpinnings, the dominant narrative is that of an unbroken development from Lu Yu to the present, free from any outside influence. This narrative not only serves to emphasize Chinese political unity, it also reinforces the reach of the Chinese nation beyond current political borders to include the diasporic communities of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and the West, all of which have sizable migrant populations from the Chaozhou region and are accustomed to *gongfucha* as a method of drinking tea. In this way, *gongfucha* was a tradition born out of a coastal area, incubated in a diasporic community, enriched with foreign ideas, and then reimported by returning merchants. If we look beyond national borders, however, we can see that the circulation of ideas between China and Japan, in this particular case through the intermediary of Taiwan, has helped produce the most significant shift in East Asian tea culture since the change from powdered to leaf tea. China is, of course, the original source for tea and tea culture, but in the case of *gongfucha* as practiced today, it has also received the benefit of fertile soil in a foreign land.

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NOTES

1. Tan and Ding describe the process through which the transmission and dissemination of this new tea practice occurred, although in a form not quite the same as the traditional (Tan and Ding 2010).
2. The most prominent of these is probably Zhou Yu, the proprietor of Wistaria Tea House, still in operation today in Taipei. Their website is located at www.wistariateahouse.com/.
3. The base tea used to make jasmine tea is usually low-grade green tea; using high-grade tea and then flavoring it with flowers is simply not economical.
4. Beijing's teahouse culture was very different from the type propounded by the new owners of these tea art houses. Lao She's play *Teahouse* is a very detailed portrayal of the type of environment common in those teahouses (Lao 1980).
5. In Ang Lee's movie *Eat Drink Man Woman* there is a scene in the Wistaria Teahouse of Taipei that displays this new middle-class dimension of the new tea arts movement.
6. The whisked tea tradition in Japan is originally an import during the Song dynasty, whereas *sencha* arrived in Japan sometime during the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century or so (Graham 1998: 1; Hasegawa 1983: 85).
7. One possibility for this difference in preferences is that Taiwanese teas are made with an emphasis on fragrance, whereas mainland Chinese teas value taste over smell.
8. Other types of brewing methods exist, but they largely conform to the important principles and differ only in small details.
9. The salespeople are almost invariably female at Ten Fu. In the dozens of shops I have visited I do not recall having met a single salesperson who was male.
10. While Zhang's work was published in the 1980s, it is noteworthy that he works in Taiwan, while Yao's work came much later in 2004.
11. The earliest written record of tea comes in the Han dynasty in 59 BC (Mair and Hoh 2003: 30).
12. For example, the most prominent among these is perhaps Chengdu's teahouse culture, which continues to thrive locally

(Wang 2008). In contrast, Beijing's traditional "big bowl tea" (*dawancha*) is now mostly nonexistent, replaced by hundreds of tea art houses.

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