

Introducing three-course tea culture, promoting Dali tourism.

(A Draft)

Dali Changshan Gantong Tourist Cable Car Inc.

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The First Yunnan Spring Tea Expo held on April 5, 2001 saw Dali Changshan Gantong Tourist Cable Car Inc. demonstrate an ancient Bai minority Three-Course Tea ceremony, a unique way to prepare and serve tea with food alongside with singing and dancing. The demonstration won a wide admiration from the audience who came from Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and other mainland provinces. The Bai minority's Three-Course Tea has a long history of over a thousand years. Why does it still have such an attraction and impact on today's tourists? Let's trace its historical formation.

I. The origin of the Three-Course Tea.

In Dali, among the Bai people, Three-Course Tea has a long cultural history. As early as Nan Zhao (649-902 A.D.), Three-Course Tea was served as an official beverage at court banquets attended by ambassadors from foreign countries. In the Han Dynasty, people talked about the baked tea in Dali. In the Tang Dynasty, recorded in a book entitled, *Southerners*, pepper, ginger and longan were cooked to make a drink. The above shows that prior to the Tang Dynasty, Dali Bai minority people had been boiling tea leaves with other ingredients, instead of pouring hot water on tea leaves which was adopted much later in the Ming Dynasty. With the influence of incoming Buddhism into China, tempers had been built and tea trees planted. Later tea was served with vegetarian food at Buddhist meals and meditation. Gradually, old temples hidden in deep mountains became places for famous tea. And tea was widely adopted by gentry and intellectuals, eventually it became a popular beverage among the ordinary people.

In Ming and Qing Dynasties, tea industry in Dali Bai area was further developed, so was the tea culture. There had been written records, such as in *Yunan Travelogue*, its author Xu Xiake mentions Dali tea, its cooking and serving in at least fifty places in the book. He also describes how the Three-Course Tea is served at the annual Lantern Festival, "first course clear, second course flavoured with salt and spices, third time honey." Even in the famous romance novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, there is a mentioning of the tea being served three times. The above are some of the earliest written records of the Three-Course Tea.

Today Three-Course Tea is prepared in a similar way imitating the ancient

fashion: first course bitter, second course sweet, third course refreshing. Drinking the Three-Course Tea has become a custom from long historical developments.

II. Continuity and further development of Three-Course Tea.

With its long history and rich cultural and symbolic meaning, Three-Course Tea is still popular among Dali Bai minority people today. They continue the original tea fashion at various holiday meals, birthday banquets, weddings and gatherings. Guests taste the original flavour of bitter, sweet, and refreshing tea, enjoying the tea preparation and ceremony while making a reflection over their lives.

The first course—"bitter tea": set up a triangle cooking structure above the charcoal fire, use a copper kettle to boil water, and a clay pot to make tea. Preheat the clay pot until its bottom looks almost white, put in tea leaves, shake the pot to ensure the leaves are equally baked. When the leaves are browned, pour in a small amount of water. The pot will make some noise, pour in more boiling water. Let the tea sit for a while before pouring it into the special serving utensil called ox-eyed cup. Serve the tea to the elders first. As far as the custom goes, the host or hostess should drink it first before the guests have their turn. Raise the tea cup with both your hands and say "please," then drink it up. Your guests can now drink their tea and thank you for your hospitality. The first course tea has a light brown colour with a strong aroma, but tastes very bitter. The symbolic meaning of the taste is that only when one is willing to taste the bitterness of life, can one hope to become a real person.

The second course—"sweet tea": baked tea leaves first, adding thin slices of a special Bai dairy product called creamy fans, other ingredients include walnuts, sesame seeds, and brown sugar. The ratio is 20% of the mixture to 80% of tea inside a bowl or a large tea cup. The second course of the tea tastes sweet, neither strong nor weak, with a fragrance. Symbolically, it means after a long struggle in life, finally it is time to enjoy.

The third course—"reflecting tea": first put inside a tea cup some red pepper corns, slices of fresh ginger and pieces of dried longan, drops of honey, and a bit of brown sugar. Pour in half cup of boiling tea. Guests are expected to shake the cup, mixing the tea with other ingredients, and drink it while it is hot. This course of tea carries a rich body of spice and sweet, symbolically suggests that life is short, however the course seems sometimes long.

III. The name and the meaning of Three-Course Tea.

The name of Three-Course Tea first appeared in a tourist guide book published in 1981, introducing the customs and festivals of Dali Bai minority people. Shortly after the initial appearance, newspapers,

magazines, hotels, restaurants, tea houses, and even trading conferences and performance groups started exploring Three-Course Tea as their interest in ancient Bai people's tea ceremony. Scholars began to promote the Three-Course Tea culture, helping develop the tea industry and tourism in Dali. Following the basic procedure, scholars summarized certain rules for Three-Course Tea, such as "three courses, six principles, and eighteen steps," laying down a foundation for further the development of Three-Course Tea ceremony.

We have already discussed the three courses.

The six principles are: charcoal fire; copper kettle; clay tea pot for baking tea leaves; high quality tea; special ingredients; baking fresh tea each time. The eighteen steps for a tea ceremony are: inviting the guests to sit down; greeting the guests; serving snacks; examining the tea leaves; carefully baking the leaves; mixing the ingredients; boiling water; warming up the tea cups; serving fresh tea for each course; slowly pouring tea into tea cups; serving the elders first; hosts and guests making a toast; appreciating the colour of the tea; smelling its aroma; tasting the tea; talking about tea and tea art; making a wish; and holding up your hands in front of your chest to say thank you.

Today there are different ways of serving Three-Course Tea, for example, folk style service involves singing and dancing; there are also cultural and art style; trade and business style; travel and entertaining style, and so on.

IV. Facing new challenges, Dali Changshan Gantong Tourist Cable Car Inc. simplifies the ancient Three-Course Tea ceremony.

With the nation's strategic planning to open up Western China for developments, tradition and customs are facing new challenges. Three-Course Tea is no exception. It will be in conflict with contemporary beverages in the commercial market. If we do not bestow the old tea art form with a new meaning and bring it up to date with our time and life style, the ancient tea culture could be easily replaced.

Our company has developed an improved way of serving Three-Course Tea by imitating the tradition, but not limited by the tradition. We have also changed the traditional procedure by simplifying the part of singing and dancing. In our tea ceremony, we emphasize the art of preparing the tea; while using the soft elegant Nan Zhao Buddhist music as the background for the ceremony, we foreground Bai people's ritual worship of heaven, earth, land and nature. The guests will be able to hear the sound, watch the movements, smell the fragrance, and taste the flavour. Emerging from the dense atmosphere of tea culture, our guests will feel Dali's unique natural environment with its rich history and culture. We have also shortened the courses "first course bitter, second course sweet, and third course reflecting" to simply three words as "baking, mixing, and

boiling” to include the most important steps of the tea preparation for a rich aroma, best flavour, and the original taste of the Three-Course Tea. This is our contribution to the tea culture in Dali.

V. Promote Three-Course Tea as a brand name tourist product.

Contemporary tourism is a mixed industry. We believe as long as we continue to promote Three-Course Tea as our brand name product, we will be able to see a positive large-scale reaction in the future, which will, in turn, help develop the whole travel and tourist industry in Dali.

How are we going to promote Three-Course Tea as our name brand cultural product, and promote tourism in Dali? Dali enjoys a unique, excellent geographical and natural environment. Its ancient cultural history makes the city a famous site for tourism. Yunnan is the original home for tea farming and tea production. Among all kinds of different teas in the province, Three-Course Tea has its own unique style. Thus our plan is to promote this product and make it into a brand name new product.

VI. Our plan for the future.

1. Organize “International Three-Course Tea Festival.”

This event can either coincide with the annual March Dali Festival, or as a separated event. Its mission is to showcase our tea art and tea culture, marketing new tea products, and establishing the brand name of Three-Course Tea in order to create market effects. During the festival, we will invite national and international tea scholars, tea drinkers and tea guests, well-known owners of tea houses in the country to discuss tea culture from the perspectives of history, aesthetics, literature, folklore, and rituals. We will also organize tours to tea farms, green houses, and tea factories.

Following the festival, we will continue our promotion of tea ceremony, tea art, and tea rituals, using existing media to broaden the influence of tea culture, knowledge of tea drinking, travelling and tourism.

2. Organize interest groups and publish a newsletter magazine.

We plan to organize a few interest groups, such as Three-Course Tea Study Group, Three-Course Tea Association, Three-Course Tea Club, etc. The organizations can invite members of the existing Dali Tourists’ Association to participate, so that we can share tourist information and cooperate in future events. The organizations can jointly publish a weekly newsletter/magazine under a tentative name “Three-Course Tea Culture and Travel,” aiming mainly to promote Three-Course Tea, as well as different local minority cultures. The publication must contain local colour, interesting and easy to read and at the same time, written with expertise and scholarly quality to best serve different types of readers and

tourists.

3. Establish Yunnan National Tea Cultural Museum to best represent the large variety of tea ceremonies in the province.

There are 56 nations in China, among which, 25 are living in Yunnan. So Yunnan is truly the homeland for all these nations to live in harmony. In the long history, different nations have developed their own ways of drinking tea, forming now a wide variety of tea art and tea cultures. Our company plans to invest in building a Yunnan National Tea Cultural Museum at the foot of Mount Changshan where the famous Buddhist Gantong Temple is situated. The museum will host Three-Course tea as its main tea ceremony, however, it will also exhibit a long list of many other national tea cultures, such as the Tibetan creamy tea, Bulang minority's sour tea, Hani minority's boiling tea, Jilou minority's cold tea, Lili minority's salty tea, Pumi minority's oily tea, Yi minority's other year's tea, Naxi minority's tiger and dragon tea, Aini minority's clay pot tea, Hui minority's pot tea, Shani minority's copper kettle tea, Miaonu minority's vegetable wrapped tea, Jinpo minority's fresh bamboo tube tea, De Ang and Jinpo minorities' preserved tea, Naxi and Nu minorities' salty tea, Bulang and Ahchang minorities' green bamboo tea, Wa minority's burnt tea, De Ang minority's clay pot tea and the Chinese covering-up cup of tea—all these tea traditions will be displayed under the same roof of the museum for their tea cultures. The proposed museum will help promote the national tea culture and tourism, presenting Dali as a tourist centre for its rich cultural and ritual tea ceremonies.

The proposed Yunnan National Tea Cultural Museum aims not only to promote pure academic and scholarly studies of Three-Course Tea, but most importantly to face the challenges of today's tourist markets, and to develop a tourist centre with tea gardens, manufacture facilities, on-going exhibitions and trades and sales. Overall the museum will combine tea culture with entertaining to become an important part of the Dali travel and tourist industry. Tourists from all over the world can come to the museum to learn about tea farming, to participate in discussions, studies and researches, or simply to come for a relaxing, daily tea-tasting holiday.

VII. Summary:

We believe with the advantage of our rich tea culture, Dali contains a greater potential for business. As long as we have a clear vision, and as long as we can produce a fresh design with new contents and meaningful activities, we should be able to make the Three-Course Tea our brand name cultural and tourist product successfully.