

Tea in British culture, Circa 1660 to 1914 – When did tea become the national drink in Britain? –

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Summary

I try to identify when tea became the national drink in Britain. I argue that the quality of tea in question must be identified first. Historians on food culture find evidence in the literature reaching conclusions that tea became the national drink in the 18th century. Tea became popular among the upper and middle classes even in the 17th century, followed by the wide spread of weak and adulterated tea among the working class spontaneously. Weak and adulterated tea was one of the most important foods for the working class even in the 18th century.

However, the rise in income and the decline in tea prices were indispensable to making pure tea available for the working class. The decline in tea prices was achieved by the reduction of the duty in the 1850's and the 1860's, the development of transportation system, and opening of imports of Indian and Ceylon tea. The income of the working class rose during the nineteenth century. The emergence of new companies with innovative strategies, also contributed to the expansion of consumption of tea. Statistical analyses show that the average tea consumption in the 1850's was not enough to have several cups of tea per person per day. I conclude, therefore, that only the custom of tea drinking was formed by the nineteenth century at latest, but it was after the 1870's that tea of a relatively high quality became the national drink.

Key words

national drink, weak and adulterated tea, decline of tea price, The Commutation Act, Indian tea

Proceedings

In this presentation, I would like to talk about my research that analyses when tea, which is a national badge of Britishness, became the national drink, from cultural aspect as well as socio-economic aspect that includes statistical reasoning. From now on, I use the word tea without making clear distinction between black tea and green tea as long as it is not necessary.

First, I use the word "tea" as a drink only to mean the drink made of mainly infusion of tea-leaves. This can be accepted as a general definition. Herbal tea, which is popular in Europe, cannot be said tea made of herbs or fruits.

The strength of tea must be defined as well. The necessity arises from the fact that tea can be infused many times. The working class took fairly weak tea made by infusion of tea-leaves used for many times in the eighteenth century. In my understanding, this is the source of confusion about the prevalence of tea.

According to The Tea Council, desirable tea-leaves per cup of tea are about two or three grams. From these facts, two or three grams can be said the desirable tea-leaves for a cup of tea in the present time. According to the book written by Mrs. Beeton in 1861, 'the old-fashioned plan of allowing a teaspoonful to each person, and one over, is still practised.' This shows that at least in the middle of the nineteenth century, the desirable amount of tea-leaves per cup was equivalent to the present one.

Ukars explains to what extent the chemical contents can be extracted by a brew. It is said that 82% of Caffeine and 38% of Tannin and 61% of other soluble contents can be extracted by a first brew with boiling water for five minutes under cozy. However, these chemical contents are weakened in a second brew. The chemical contents like Caffeine cannot exist after the third time. Thus, tea made of tea-leaves infused for many times cannot bear the quality that is required to be said as tea.

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In the light of the above arguments, I define that tea as a drink in Britain is an infusion made of the first brew of tea-leaves of two to three grams per cup (about 180 cc) with boiling water.

Then I analyse from the cultural aspect how the custom of tea drinking took root in Britain. In Britain, tea was sold in coffee houses as a healthy beverage in comparison with alcohol. It was also sold as a medicine at the pharmacy. The opportunity to change tea from a medicine to a beverage became possible due to the Orientalism of the Portuguese Princess- Catherine of Braganza. On the marriage with Prince Charles in 1662, Portugal presented tea and sugar to Britain and Catherine herself introduced the custom of tea drinking in the English Court that made tea fashionable among ladies of the aristocracy. By the end of the seventeenth century, tea drinking was widely accepted as a new custom by many upper class households. As long as coffee house remained as a meeting place for men, the extent of diffusion was limited. Instead, tea became popular among households as beverage for women.

At the stage of change in popularity from coffee house to tea garden in the eighteenth century, tea drinking turned not only to man's activity but family's. In the nineteenth century, each class formed their own custom of afternoon tea or high tea, deeply influenced by the working or life style.

Manner and custom for tea has been altered in the way of the British since tea was introduced to Britain. There are various manners in tea. The practice of pouring milk into tea did not exist in Chinese culture. Even when the Chinese took pleasure in tea drinking as a beverage, the British considered it to be medicine in the early period of tea history in Britain. An advertisement by Thomas Garaway, who dwelled on the effect of tea, gave a sort of proof that it was good for health to put milk. Gervas Huxley, the author of *Talking of Tea*, mentioned the tea drinking habit with milk and with sugar. Although milk is naturally used for strong tea such as Indian or Ceylon, which became common in the second half of the nineteenth century, this custom could be said to have been established almost a century earlier than Indian or Ceylon tea were entered. Also more than a half of the types of tea drunk at that time were mainly China green, which means they were not as strong as pouring milk in it. Therefore, the ritual can be said to have not originated from either the strength of tea or appearance of Indian and Ceylon teas, but originated from medical reasons

How chinaware was transformed is helpful to understand the diffusion process of tea. Chinaware imported from China fascinated the upper class because of its novelty. English translation of Chinese tea ware was produced. It was after introduction of tea that a saucer was made for a teacup and a handle was added to a teacup. These inventions were caused due to their necessities. The handle could protect a drinker's hand from the heat. The pattern that the saucer is attached to the cup needs more attention than that of the cup only and allows various ways performing themselves. Even today the meaning of tea drinking seems to differ between drinking from the teacup and drinking from a mug. There is no ceremonious manner in tea in the mug, but the saucer

causes the manner to start. The more set of the china increases, the more ceremonious character strengthens. The entertainment of tea drinking depends not only on the beverage, but also on the activities. Therefore, the manner of drinking is the greatest matter of concern.

The circumstances, under which tea was adapted, seem to have naturally existed in Britain. Being introduced in the seventeenth century, tea was formidably expensive, so that the drink was made very weak with a pinch of the leaves and brewed for a few minutes. On the other hand, a custom of drinking infusions from herbs has been well known from the old times. These conditions were linked to each other. There were how to imitate Chinese tea mixed with several herbs. Poorer people took it by sweetened with sugar.

It is not doubtful that the British chose tea in early time, as a means of drinking in dietary life, although most tea was neither real nor healthy, because smuggled tea-leaves were also adulterated and even real tea-leaves were often reproductions from used ones in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

It is necessary to see when pure tea was provided from an economic and social viewpoint. Since being first introduced to the royal family and the upper class, tea has been regarded as a status symbol. However, as it was expensive due to the heavy duty, smuggling and adulteration were widespread which made it impossible to estimate how much pure tea was actually consumed. Smuggling of tea was prevalent as well as legal trade by the East India Company. Smuggled tea was distributed to the common through peddlers and petty shops that were expanding in the eighteenth century. The Commutation Act in 1784 reduced duty remarkably. This decreased the gap in competitive advantage between the legal and illegal traders. The duty, however, was raised to finance the Napoleonic war. It became difficult for workers to buy tea again.

Tea drinking had become popular and achieved an important position in eating habits before the price of tea declined following the reduction of duty. Thus, the drink in tea-style became a national beverage by the nineteenth century at the latest, but this also included adulterated tea and herbal infusions.

The reduction of duty and the decline of tea prices were necessary to make pure tea obtainable, which was neither adulterated nor reproduced tea with used leaves. The duty on tea had risen and fallen so that it financed the government revenue. Freedom of tea trade was achieved after the end of the monopoly of the East India Company and appearance of Empire teas such as Indian and Ceylon.

One of the causes of the working class turning to weak and adulterated tea was the severe pressure of poverty. For the working class, tea sweetened by sugar that have high calorie was an important source of nutrition. But there was a growing cult of 'respectability' among the working class too. Gradually the standard of living improved and the importation of cheaper tea from India allowed working class mass consumption of proper tea to spread.

The statistics shows that the alleviation of duty on tea can be seen after 1850 and the decline of tea price had not followed it until 1865. In addition, the social factor pushed up the tea consumption.

The Temperance Movement was effective to dissuade the consumption of alcohol in the nineteenth century, but alcohol drinks never surrendered to tea. Even at the mid-nineteenth century it was difficult to say that pure tea became common, because it was still costly and was widely adulterated. Indian tea drove China tea away from the market in the last half of the nineteenth century. Indian tea, which was stronger in taste than China tea, was more suitable for British culture adding milk and sugar in tea. By participation of Ceylon tea in the 1880's, adding milk and sugar to "strong" tea became a firmly established way of drinking. This period is roughly when the public became free from the fear of tea adulteration and pure tea was widely available, that is when Indian and Ceylon teas were occupying the market instead of China tea, as China tea was subject to greater adulteration than teas from other countries.

Moreover, tea companies faced the market competition in the purity and the low price, by selling packet tea under their own brand names.

The following two conclusions can be derived to answer the question "when was tea drinking fully established in all classes in Britain?" The first point is that the tea drinking habit became popular much earlier than it was thought. It had taken by the nineteenth century at latest. The

second point is that people began to drink the pure tea, without adulteration and colouring only after 1870's, which is about one century later than that mentioned in the first point.