

Cultural Comparison between Argentine Yerba Mate and Chinese Tea

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Abstract. As a social phenomenon, tea culture is the product of long-term formation. The fine Chinese tradition has nurtured the rich Chinese tea culture. The Argentine yerba mate has also been endowed with profound cultural connotation and emotional value in the development of history. Although there are differences between Chinese and Argentine tea cultures in terms of origin, drinking methods and social functions, they all reflect the cultural characteristics and historical heritage of their respective countries. By reviewing the development and evolution of Chinese and Argentine tea cultures in different historical backgrounds, this paper discusses their social values and spiritual connotations, with a view to promoting intercultural communication and understanding.

Keywords: Comparison of Tea Cultures; Chinese Tea; Yerba Mate.

1. Introduction

Tea is an evergreen woody plant. Due to the good taste and health benefits of tea, drinking tea has gradually become a habit of people. Over time, various customs of drinking and brewing tea developed, creating a rich and colorful tea culture. In the process of commercial trade and cultural exchange, tea has traveled all over the world and gradually formed a comprehensive and mature cultural system.

In China, tea is the art of deep cultivation and is known as "the jewel of food culture". Similarly, in Argentina, there is Mate culture. Yerba mate is hailed as a "national treasure", symbolizing the country's unity and cultural identity. Two very different countries, through the profound cultural connotation and emotional value of tea, demonstrate the extensive influence of tea in the global market, and thus promote the spread and mutual understanding of tea as a cultural symbol in the world. In the era of globalization, the research on tea culture exchanges between China and Argentina has shown great significance. The purpose of this paper is to compare Argentina's national drink mate tea with China's tea, to deeply understand the development and evolution of tea culture in different backgrounds, and to promote the exchange and understanding between different cultures.

2. The History of Tea

2.1. Origin and Development of Yerba Mate in Argentina

Mate originated from the Guarani tribe of the Indian tribe and is mainly produced in the southeastern part of the South American continent (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay). In 1592, Hernando Arias de Saavedra, the lieutenant governor of Paraguayan Creole, discovered roasted and crushed mate leaves from weapons and leather bags carried by a group of captive Guarani natives during a military operation. The Guarani people refer to the mysterious powder as caá, which means grass, plant and jungle. For these indigenous people, the mate tree is a gift from the gods. They used the leaves as a drink or as currency to barter with other people. [1] However, a few centuries later, the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870) brought great disaster to Paraguay, which not only suffered heavy casualties and lost much of its territory, but also lost control of the mate plantations to neighboring Brazil. By the early 20th century, the boom in Brazil's coffee industry led to a sharp decline in mate production. Over time, Argentina gradually became the world's largest producer and consumer of



yerba mate, which it remains today. This story of intersecting tradition and commerce is an evolution of historical events, demonstrating the complex historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors behind the tea.

In terms of production, Brazilian Mate is often referred to as Mate Fresca, or raw mate, which is tea that has been picked fresh from leaves and has not been fermented in piles. Mate tea from Argentina is called Mate Cocido, which means ripe mate. Ripe tea is tea that needs to be processed by mass fermentation and other processes. In Argentina, women prefer cooked or sweetened tea, while men prefer raw tea that is strong and stimulating. In winter, people drink hot mate and in summer, they switch to tereré, a cold tea made from chilled fruit juice. With the continuous development of the mate tea culture, a new kind of tea similar to the Chinese "milk tea", mate con leche, has appeared. The change involves adding ingredients such as sugar, milk, and fruit juice to the tea drink to enhance its flavor. The development of mate tea and Chinese tea in this respect shows the consistency, and both are constantly exploring innovations to meet the taste needs of different groups of people.

In the development of Argentine mate, the representative brands include Rosamonte, Taragui and La Merced. These brands occupy an important position in the market and continue to promote the development and growth of the Argentine mate industry. According to the National Institute for the Study of Mate in Argentina, sales of processed mate totaled about 320 million kilograms in 2023, setting a record. [2] At the same time, with the increasing demand for healthy drinks in the global tea market, Argentine mate has gradually stepped out of South America and entered the international market. In January of 2024, the production of mate tea in the Argentine market was 20 million kilograms, and the total export was nearly 4 million kilograms, which is loved by more and more consumers. After years of baptism and development, Argentina mate has become a unique tea in South America, constantly attracting more people's attention and favor, showing a strong momentum of development.

2.2. Origin and Development of Chinese Tea

Compared with the development of mate tea, Chinese tea has a longer history. The use of tea in China dates back to at least thousands of years ago, and the earliest "drinking" of tea may have appeared in the Shennong Herbal Classic of the Spring and Autumn Period in the 3rd century BC, which mentions that "Shennong tasted hundreds of herbs, encountered 72 poisons in the day, and got tea to solve them". By around the 2nd century BC, tea had become a food, and was widely cooked and used.

Tea drinking was invented by the ancestors of Bashu, and then spread to the Central Plains, the east of the Yangtze River and the coastal areas. In the Qin and Han Dynasties (221-220 BC), although the economic and cultural conditions in the Yellow River Basin were superior to those in the Yangtze River Basin, tea did not attract much attention. In contrast, tea culture spread more smoothly in the Yangtze River basin and spread to the middle reaches of the Han Dynasty. By the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, tea was sold as a commodity in the lower reaches of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces for hospitality, outings, sacrifices and other activities.

The Song Dynasty continued and developed the production, trade, and culture of tea, pushing the tea culture to a prosperous stage. Different from the previous dynasties, the Song Dynasty regarded tea as an important strategic material to maintain peaceful relations with ethnic minorities in the border areas. The government of the Song Dynasty established a relatively sound tea horse system and discussed the tea horse system to ensure the government's monopoly on the tea horse trade and meet the military and political needs. It can be said that the tea horse trade in Song Dynasty was subordinate to political and military interests. However, whatever the purpose, the prosperity of the tea horse trade promoted the development of tea drinking customs and tea culture of nomadic peoples in the north, and created conditions for the formation of Mongolian tea culture and the expansion of tea through the Mongol Empire in the Yuan Dynasty, eventually extending overland to Central and Western Asia and Europe. [3]

The consumption of loose tea emerged during the Yuan Dynasty, primarily among the common people. It is characterized by its ability to retain the natural shape of tea leaves, which are complete, fluffy, and easily dispersed. In contrast, cake tea was steamed and pressed into a large cake-like shape and predominantly used in the royal court. During the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang abolished cake tea and introduced techniques for producing yellow tea, black tea, and scented tea successively. In the Qing Dynasty, Chinese tea gained global popularity and dominated the international market as China was the sole exporter at that time. The main production methods involved baking and pan-frying green tea while also producing oolong tea, black tea, scented tea, green tea, and white tea were developed. The period from 1846 to 1886 marked a prosperous era for Chinese teas." The tea garden area has continued to expand, leading to a rapid increase in tea production, effectively promoting the development of foreign trade. Currently, China's tea production has witnessed recovery and growth due to government support and attention. Efforts have been made to restore old tea gardens, establish new ones, improve varieties, implement scientific cultivation practices, and steer the tea economy towards stable development. Alongside the flourishing traditional art of tea-making, there has emerged a trend of "new tea drinks" that incorporate original leaf teas with healthy and flavorful ingredients. Since 2010, the market for these innovative beverages has thrived nationwide as high-quality teas are carefully selected using professional equipment and combined with fresh milk lids as well as fruit or cheese garnishes—resulting in rich flavors and personalized fashion statements. This blending of tradition with modern consumers' preferences for taste, health consciousness, and style exemplifies the growing vitality and allure of Chinese culture's beloved beverage.

3. Tea Drinking RITUAL

3.1. Tea Drinking Ceremony of Argentine Mate

Mate is a kind of drink made by brewing. In order to brew mate well, contemporary people are very particular about the water temperature. Mate can't be brewed with hot water, because too low a temperature will cause the mate to be insoluble, while too high a water temperature will make the ingredients of the mate dissolve too fast, and after a few times there is no taste. The ideal temperature for mate water is 80 degrees Celsius, and it is best to use a thermometer to control the water temperature before the water starts to boil to avoid overheating.

When drinking the tea, the host prepares the leaves of mate, a special teapot for mate, a straw and a hot kettle. Pour the mate leaves into the kettle and fill them halfway or two-thirds of the way up, then gently shake the container to form a slope. Insert the straw into the tea leaves so that they are buried deep in the tea pile to avoid clogging. Pour in a small amount of slightly hot water first to loosen the tea leaves slightly, then slowly inject the hot water into the cup without completely covering the tea leaves and allowing the tea leaves to soak in the water. Argentines often share mate with friends and family, and each person drinks from the same teapot in turn. The ritual of drinking mate in Argentina is designed to promote sociability, sharing and tradition. It embodies the Argentines' pursuit of a simple and friendly lifestyle and carries the significance of cultural traditions and family ties.

In Argentina, almost every day of the locals' day involves the participation of mate tea. At breakfast time, drinking mate is a ritual and many people say, "I can't start the day without a good cup of mate". Before lunch, mate provides a moment of respite from anxiety or hunger. At various times of the day, Argentines often choose to brew a cup of mate while carrying out various work and study tasks.

In addition, Argentines also have different classifications for making and drinking mate tea, among which mate de pomelo is used for brewing, which coincides with the "green, orange Pu-erh" in Chinese tea, adding pomelo and orange flavor to the tea. Mate tea teapots are mostly made of palm-sized gourds, which grow in the same area as the Mate tree. The Indians who first drank mate used to carve tribal totems and spirits into the gourd shells; After the arrival of Europeans, mate was quickly widely accepted, and the use of high-grade mate tea utensils and elegant drinking of mate tea became a fashion among Westerners, and the mate tea pot also quickly developed into a luxury. [4]

Craftsmen used complex techniques to decorate the teapots, such as silver hammer 搽 gourd to form the teapot body and carve personalized patterns to customize the unique teapots. Collectors collect vintage teapots, but people still like to use gourd-made teapots to brew the original mate tea. The texture and craftsmanship of mate teapots reflect their grade, from simple engraving to metal punching, molded, leather wrapped and other types, showing a variety of artistic expression and functional combination.

3.2. Chinese Tea Ceremony

In general, mate tea and Chinese tea are brewed leaves with different levels of maturity, and Chinese tea has gone to the extreme of classification. According to the degree of product processing, tea can be divided into primary tea, in-process tea and deeply processed tea. If the primary tea is subdivided according to the oxidation status of tea polyphenols, it includes: green tea, yellow tea, dark tea, green tea, white tea and black tea, which are known to public. [5]

Chinese tea culture is characterized by a large variety of tea leaves. For example, green tea is made without fermentation or slight fermentation, which retains the freshness and fragrance of tea. Representative varieties include Longjing tea, Biluochun, Xinyang Maojian, etc. Yellow tea is a kind of slightly fermented tea, with a unique yellow color and flower fragrance. Representative varieties include Huangshan Maofeng, Junshan Yinzhen and so on. These abundant choices provide tea lovers with more choices in taste and flavor, meeting the needs of different groups of people.

Chinese tea ceremony focuses on etiquette and brew skills, reflecting the Chinese people's reverence for and inheritance of tea culture. The tea ceremony plays an important role in Chinese society and embodies the essence of traditional Chinese culture. As with mate tea, tea drinkers choose the right tea set, such as teapot, teacup, etc., according to the variety and taste. For example, pottery is suitable for brewing black tea, oolong tea, etc., and glassware is suitable for brewing green tea and herbal tea. In addition, the most representative of Chinese tea ware is purple clay tea ware. Purple clay tea sets meet the tea people's requirements for the color and flavor of tea soup, and long-lasting heat preservation, long-term stewed does not break, at the same time, the unique simple texture of purple clay tea sets also highlights the profound cultural heritage of the Chinese nation.

At the beginning of the tea ceremony, tea drinkers use clean fresh water to boil. High-quality tea leaves are selected and placed in the tea set to be steeped. Observe the color of the tea, check for clarity, turbidity or confusion, and evaluate the quality of the tea. Take a deep breath, smell the aroma, and experience the purity and richness of the tea. Take small bites to taste the sweetness of the tea and feel the change and aftertaste of the tea in the mouth. After drinking, you can offer tea to the host to express gratitude and respect. The tea drinking ceremony of Chinese tea and mate tea is not only a way of drinking tea, but also a process of artistic enjoyment and spiritual pleasure. Through the meticulous process of brewing and tasting tea, people can feel the history, philosophy and aesthetic conception contained in tea culture.

The rigor and delicacy of the tea ceremony reflect the Chinese people's respect and love for tea culture. After a long period of training and practice, tea artisans have mastered the techniques and etiquette of making tea. They treat each tea brewing process with a pious mind, treating tea art as a traditional art and paying attention to the perfect performance of every detail. In the tea ceremony, tea brewing is not only a simple process of making drinks, but also a ceremony of spiritual communication and aesthetic enjoyment. Through the process of brewing and tasting tea, people can experience the profound connotation and spiritual realm conveyed by tea culture, and feel the combination of history, philosophy and life wisdom. Therefore, the tea ceremony is not only a traditional custom, but also a way of cultural inheritance and artistic expression.

4. The Function of Tea

With the passage of time, tea has gradually integrated rich cultural elements. When its material form is combined with thoughts, emotions, morals and etiquette, spiritual and social values are generated, so that the use of tea has been upgraded from the simple function of quenching thirst and awakening the brain to the height of spiritual civilization.

4.1. Establish National Image.

Mate tea and Chinese tea culture have shown unique value in terms of their respective contributions to national image and cultural icons. Both its origin and development are closely related to the country's history. Along with the tea ceremony and tea drinking culture, a small tea leaf carries thousands of years of dietary wisdom of the people. As a traditional drink in Argentina, yerba Mate's close connection with Argentine national culture has been highlighted through celebrations such as Mate National Day, and it is considered a cultural symbol of Argentine characteristics. Yerba mate not only continues the tradition, but also highlights the unique cultural charm of Argentina in its global dissemination and the national image.

In contrast, Chinese tea, as a traditional cultural symbol with a long history, represents the wisdom of the Chinese people, and inherits the cultural essence of thousands of years through tea ceremony and tea drinking culture. China is the hometown of tea. Tea making, drinking, and tasting have a history of nearly 5,000 years, and tea is closely related to people's lives. The Chinese tea culture is extensive and profound, featuring a variety of famous teas, unique tea sets, exquisite tea art, fragrant tea banquets, tea people, tea rituals, tea customs, tea poetry and tea paintings. Tea is the reflection of the daily life of the Chinese people, the record of activities, the accumulation of history, and the medium that the Chinese people's spirit can support. [6]

In general, both mate tea culture and Chinese tea culture serve as vehicles for the preservation of their respective traditional cultures and contribute unique artistic charm to the national identity. These two tea cultures play distinct roles in cultural heritage and international exchanges, highlighting the significant role of tea as a symbol of cultural diversity worldwide while enriching the multifaceted facets of human Civilization.

4.2. Strengthen Social Ties.

In terms of social roles, mate tea and Chinese tea, although bred in different cultures, play an important role in strengthening social bonds, passing on cultural values and promoting virtues. People's love for these two drinks is not only a material need, but also a part of their spiritual and cultural life, reflecting the importance their respective societies attach to communication, etiquette and moral education.

Mate tea was originally a custom of the aborigines, but with the acceptance of colonists and immigrants, it gradually became a drink shared by different social classes. The practice of tea drinkers sitting around campfires, passing around and taking turns drinking medicine from jars, gradually evolved into the traditional custom of mate tea. The difference is that Argentines cherish mate because of the profound meaning of this traditional ritual. For them, drinking mate is not only an act, but also a social and emotional ritual. Unlike Uruguayans, Argentines place more emphasis on the spirit of sharing and solidarity, highlighting the values of collective cooperation and mutual help by drinking mate together. In Argentina, mate is unique in that it requires inviting others to share the drink. It is not served directly, but is drunk with water, a gesture that expresses the feeling of hospitality. Therefore, yerba mate is not only a tea drink, but also a cultural symbol, representing the emotional connection and social cohesion between people. This spirit is imprinted in the genes of yerba mate, and it is destined to continue to grow and pass on.

In China, as the traditional culture emphasizes progress and self-improvement, it advocates active participation in society and the pursuit of life value. Tea culture plays an important role in Chinese society. Literati express their sense of mission and responsibility through tea culture, and advocate

the concepts of incorruptibility, friendship and caring society. Tea is regarded as the "drink of the soul", which contains truth, kindness and beauty, and educates people in ethics and etiquette. Through drinking tea, people show respect and care for others, reflecting a gentleman's demeanor and incorruptible quality.

In addition to its common spiritual function, Chinese tea culture also serves as a means of aesthetic education. Over time, the aesthetic significance of tea has deepened and expanded. Tea is intertwined with music, poetry, painting, and other arts, imbuing it with a more profound meaning. With its beautiful shape, captivating aroma, and unique aesthetic value, tea possesses an enchanting allure. Its name evokes picturesque imagery and fascination. Through cultural influence, Chinese tea cultivates individuals' intellectual and moral character while promoting social norms and harmony; thus bestowing upon tea culture an enhanced artistic charm and enriched cultural connotation. The societal role of this tea culture reflects the spirit of pursuing harmonious human relations and humanistic care deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture; thereby playing a pivotal role in fostering social development and cultural heritage.

Of the two kinds of tea drinks, mate strengthens the bond between the Argentine people, while Chinese tea emphasizes the etiquette between people and focuses on self-cultivation. Both emphasize the role of sharing and unity and promote the connection between people. People sit together to drink tea, talk to each other, and enhance mutual understanding and trust. This process of sharing tea promotes the development of interpersonal relationship, creates a harmonious atmosphere, and stimulates the feelings of mutual help and support. Through drinking tea, people on both sides pass on ancient cultural traditions and values, and these shared values promote cohesion among members of society, strengthen the stability and harmony of the society as a whole, and help build a more harmonious and inclusive social environment.

4.3. Enhance Cultural Communication

Good culture needs to be spread. Based on discussing the similarities and differences between Argentinean mate tea culture and Chinese tea culture, we see the unique development tracks and communication strategies of the two tea cultures. Although they come from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, mate, and Chinese tea both carry profound cultural significance and present more and more opportunities for communication and integration in the era of globalization.

In terms of communication, yerba mate is not only widely consumed in Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, and other Latin American countries, but also bears witness to the historical development of the South American continent in the process of development and communication. This element of tea culture with a long history has formed its own unique culture in the ups and downs of the historical process and has had a profound influence on the whole South American continent. At the same time, studies on the cultural customs and dissemination of mate tea show that it serves more for the identity of the Latin American community. This cultural identity can be reflected in the daily life of the Argentine people. Mate Day is the biggest carnival in Argentina except National Day. During this festival, in the streets of Buenos Aires, you can see many young men and girls dressed in beautiful clothes to distribute small boxes of yerba mate to pedestrians, which is not only a celebration, but also a kind of inheritance and promotion of traditional culture. In terms of literature, there are many verses about mate tea in the classic poem "Martin Fierro". The hardships and difficulties of life have not obliterated Gaucho people's pursuit of a better life. We seem to see Gauchos galloping across the vast Pampas grassland on horseback, drinking mate tea, playing the six-stringed harp, and telling people about their past life. [7]

In the context of globalization, the cross-cultural communication of mate tea and Chinese tea not only faces opportunities, but also challenges. On the one hand, with the increase of people's pursuit of healthy lifestyle, tea as a healthy drink is favored by more and more people, and the market demand continues to grow; On the other hand, issues such as cultural differences, consumption habits and market access also need to be effectively addressed in order to better promote the international spread

of cultural products. For the two tea cultures, they not only need to actively explore the international market while maintaining their own uniqueness, but also need to deepen people's knowledge and understanding of local tea culture through education and cultural exchanges. Only when people truly understand and appreciate the culture and value behind tea can the cross-cultural communication make substantial progress.

In a word, both mate tea and Chinese tea are precious heritages in the treasure house of human culture. In today's globalized world, strengthening the international dissemination of these cultural symbols can not only enrich global cultural diversity, but also promote exchanges and understanding among different cultures, contributing to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

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