Advances in Humanities Research Vol.12 Issue 6 EWA Publishing
Available Online: 23 September 2025 DOI: 10.54254/2753-7080/2025.27005

Tea-cultural practices and spiritual connotations among Jin-Dynasty literati

Shizhao Liu

School of the Chinese National Community, North Minzu University, Yinchuan, China

1374150260@qq.com

Abstract. The flourishing of tea-related activities among Jin-dynasty men of letters was rooted in the circulation of material goods and the continuity of techniques between the Song and Jin. Through the movement of tea, the use of tea wares, and diversified practices of tea drinking, tea culture among Jin literati transcended mere material enjoyment to become a key symbol bearing refined taste, sustaining social relations, and conveying emotion. Tea affairs were not only a cultural practice through which Han scholar-officials upheld tradition, but also an important pathway by which Jurchen aristocratic literati adapted to—and were transformed by—Sinicization. An analysis of tea culture thus reveals the reconstruction of identity against the backdrop of cultural hybridity in the Jin and enriches our understanding of Jin-dynasty culture.

Keywords: Jin dynasty, tea culture, literati, identity

1. Introduction

As an integral component of Chinese culture, tea culture possesses profound connotations that cut across regions and ethnic groups, exerting a deep influence on social life and the realm of the spirit. Current scholarship on tea culture in the Jin dynasty has largely concentrated on the tea trade, imagery of tea utensils, and poems on tea, while giving comparatively less attention to the relationship between Jin literati and tea culture. As a period ruled by a multiethnic regime, the Jin saw a literati class whose reception, practice, and re-creation of tea culture offer a distinctive vantage point for exploring identity and spiritual pursuits. In the Jin, tea activities were more than material pleasures; they functioned as cultural practices that carried spiritual sustenance and identity affirmation. By means of tea affairs, Jin literati both continued the tea-cultural traditions of the Central Plains and integrated their own cultural innovations and emotional expression, thereby constructing a distinctive cultural space that exhibits cultural steadfastness and identity reconfiguration amid a milieu of multicultural convergence. This article undertakes an in-depth analysis of tea-related activities among Jin-dynasty literati, examining the place and role of tea culture in their spiritual world and its cultural significance in identity construction, with a view to enriching our understanding of Jin culture and offering a new perspective on the historical evolution of Chinese tea culture.

2. The material foundations and daily practices of tea activities among Jin-Dynasty literati

The prosperity of tea-related activities among Jin literati rested upon a dual foundation: the trans-regional flow of goods across political regimes and the continuation of local technological traditions. Within the political landscape of confrontation between the Song and the Jin, tea from the south was continuously transported northward through a tension-filled network that combined official frontier trade with clandestine smuggling. This circulation overcame geographic blockades and nourished the tea culture within the Jin realm. At the same time, ceramic kilns in the Central Plains, inheriting the legacy of Song porcelain production, ensured the social supply of tea utensils through a dual-track mechanism. Once these material conditions were secured, tea activities flourished in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from social intercourse to functional uses.

2.1. Sources and circulation of tea

The tea culture of Jin literati was materially grounded in the steady northward flow of tea from the Southern Song. This supply was primarily secured through two complementary channels: the official frontier trade system (quechang 榷场) and clandestine networks of overland and waterborne smuggling. As one source records, "Tea, apart from the annual tribute presented by the

Song, was entirely traded at the frontier markets along the Song border" [1], showing that these regulated trade posts were the principal means by which the Jin acquired official tea. The Song-Jin borderlands, "the eastern and western circuits south of the Huai … with fertile soil and the profits of tea, salt, silk, and cloth" [2], provided the basis for such trade. The Song court maintained strict control over tea, as seen in the fourth year of Shaoxing (1134), when "Jianzhou annually contributed more than 200,000 jin of compressed tea … merchants were summoned to carry it north of the Huai" [3]. Tea produced in the south could not be traded directly with the Jin; instead, it had to be brought to designated frontier markets for official exchange. In Shaoxing twelve (1142), it was ordered that "southern merchants bringing coarse powdered tea to the Xuyi frontier market may only exchange with the market officials; southern and northern traders were not permitted to meet and barter tea for goods" [4]. The Jin received and distributed such officially transferred tea, for example, "the Suizhou market annually delivered a thousand loads of fresh tea" [1].

Alongside the official channel, smuggling formed another highly dynamic chain of supply. Even before certain frontier markets were formally opened, "merchants from Sichuan had already secretly brought money drafts and engaged in clandestine trade with Shaanxi; once Shaanxi was reached, the Sichuan-Shaanxi route became open, attracting travelers and merchants in great numbers, trading in cloth, silk, tea, and medicine" [3]. Owing to alternating warfare and peace between the Song and Jin, numerous smuggling centers developed along the frontier. Records describe: "In the north of Chuzhou at Shen Town and Yang Family Stockade, at Mopán in Huaiyin County, Shuizhai in Anli Command, Feng Family Crossing in Huoqiu County, Qimao Town in Xin Command, as well as Hua and Zaoyang, there were formerly innumerable locations for frontier trade. Among them, the greatest harm, known throughout the realm and most frequented by merchants, was at Zhengzhuang west of Jiangzhou … annually the quantity of smuggled tea was no fewer than tens of thousands of jin" [4]. Such sources reveal the considerable volume of privately smuggled tea overland. The Song authorities attempted to suppress this by stationing patrol boats along rivers, lakes, and coasts: "Along the Yangzi, rivers, Huai, and the sea, patrol inspectors were assigned to capture smugglers; there were also stationed units to catch thieves, along with horse relays, river patrols, and officials specifically tasked with seizing illicit tea and salt" [4]. In Shaoxing twenty-seven (1157), an edict stipulated: "Merchants transporting long-draft tea in Huainan must first register with weighing officials, who will ask their intended place of sale and require endorsements with the date and name before allowing passage; without such certification, if private tea is released it shall be punished on par with major tea offenses. Since tea transferred from the frontier into the enemy territory yielded immense profit, clandestine crossings of the Huai were strictly prohibited; yet people continued to risk severe punishment undeterred" [5]. Although enforcement was strict, smuggling persisted unabated. Together, the official and unofficial channels ensured a continuous influx of southern tea into the Jin, not only alleviating the shortage that might otherwise have hampered the tea-drinking practices of Jin literati, but also providing the essential material foundation for the elite's continuation of Song-style tea culture.

2.2. The production and use of tea utensils

The development of tea activities among Jin literati relied heavily on the supply system of tea utensils built upon the flourishing ceramic industry in northern China. During the Song-Jin period, a large-scale belt of kilns had already formed along the eastern and western foothills of the Taihang Mountains, with kiln sites densely distributed across central, western, and northern Henan, southern Hebei, as well as central and southwestern Shanxi [6]. This geographic concentration laid the foundation for the widespread social use of tea utensils. These kilns, drawing upon the accumulated porcelain-making techniques of the Song dynasty, developed a stratified production structure. At the basic level, they mass-produced common wares such as coarse ceramics and black-glazed bowls to meet daily tea-drinking needs. At the refined level, high-quality products, particularly tribute porcelains, were incorporated into the state tax system. For example, "white porcelain bowls" were offered annually as tribute by Xinde Prefecture of Hebei Circuit [2], while Yaoxian in Yongxing Command submitted "ceramics" as tribute [2]. Such tea bowls, characterized by regulated forms and lustrous glazes, directly catered to the aesthetic tastes of the official class. This dual-track mechanism ensured that different social groups—from ordinary townspeople to cultural elites—could obtain tea utensils suited to their economic capacity and cultural preferences. Although political power shifted with the rise of the Jin, the dynasty comprehensively inherited the kiln industry legacy and skilled craftspeople of the Northern Song in north China. Consequently, northern kilns continued to supply the material foundation that supported refined tea practices such as whisked tea (diancha) and boiled tea (jiancha) among the scholar-official class, thereby embedding and spreading the fashion of tea drinking in Jin elite circles.

2.3. Methods and contexts of tea drinking

Tea drinking among Jin literati was primarily expressed through two mainstream methods, reflecting both their absorption of Central Plains tea culture and their local adaptations. The first was the whisked-tea method (diancha), prized for its refined technique and aesthetic charm. Ying Liu's poem *Painting of a Recluse in Mount Pan* contains the lines: "Ice strings sound the heavenly harmony, while tea cups brim with floating cloud-fat" [7]. Here, the froth produced in whisked tea is compared to

"cloud-fat", vividly evoking the visual beauty and poetic atmosphere of literary gatherings. Similarly, Bingwen Zhao's poem *Summer Solstice* includes: "Waking in the jade hall, I long bitterly for tea; in a separate court, a bronze wheel grinds dewy buds. The red sun turns the steps as curtain-shadows thin; a pair of butterflies alight upon the sunflowers" [7]. The "bronze wheel grinding dewy buds" depicts the process of grinding tea leaves into fine powder, whether personally or by attendants, a necessary preparation for whisked tea. Such descriptions clearly illustrate the popularity and practice of this method within Jin literati circles.

The second was the more common and everyday method of boiling tea (jiancha). Ying Liu's Journey through Huai'an states: "The folk custom here delights in conviviality, learning from southerners the way of boiling tea to drink" [7], directly pointing out this simple method of tossing leaves or powdered tea into water for boiling—adopted from the south and absorbed into daily life as the mainstream habit. Notably, Jin literati often displayed great inventiveness in boiling tea, adding various ingredients to enhance flavor or align with seasonal health practices. Yin Liu's Summer Day reads: "By my bed books are piled high with hemp-sand; sick in bed for days I have not boiled tea. To counter summer's oppressive heat, I devise a plan—finely simmering mountain honey to dissolve pine pollen" [7], describing the addition of wild honey during the brewing process. Songnian Cai's preface to *Shizhou Slow Tune* records: "Zemin Mao, on the Double Ninth, due to slight illness, did not drink wine, but only boiled small tuancha, offering chrysanthemum leaves with it. He composed a Tea Music piece, ending with the lines, 'A cup of chrysanthemum-leaf tuancha, my eyes full of evening pines and bamboo.' … On an earlier day, when his left eye suddenly ailed, he refrained from wine, sitting in dull boredom, reflecting on life with no means of diversion. Thus, following Zemin's example, I too boiled tea with chrysanthemums, setting my feelings to verse in the Shizhou mode" [8]. Such practices—enhancing tea with honey, pine pollen, or chrysanthemum—enriched both flavor and medicinal value, while also embodying the literati's pursuit of individuality and refined taste in the art of daily tea.

Tea activities among Jin literati, depending on their purpose and atmosphere, may be broadly divided into social occasions and functional occasions, together forming a rich tableau of daily tea life. In social contexts, tea served as a key medium for literary gatherings and exchanges, often held in serene settings such as mountains or monasteries. Zhiyuan Liu's *On Master Zhao of Dongxi Offering Tea* reads: "With jade cup and divine water whisking spiritual sand, skilled hands conjure auspicious snowy blossoms. In ancient times Lu Tong once savored this taste; today I wholly perceive it in yellow buds" [9]. The "snowy blossoms" metaphor praises the whiteness and abundance of tea froth, while lauding Zhao's exquisite tea-making skill, showing tea's central role in cultivating friendship and artistic appreciation. Junmin Li's *Painting of Scholar Tao Brewing Tea* portrays another intimate social scene: "In a narrow chamber, cold weather with cream-servant; snow cauldron and wind stove among bamboo. The endeavors of bookmen are truly laughable; yet they say coarse men know nothing of such joys" [10]. Here, the "narrow chamber" underscores privacy, while "cream-servant" and "snow cauldron, wind stove" vividly depict the elegance and leisure of friends boiling tea together in winter.

In functional contexts, tea primarily played a practical role in refreshing the mind and assisting affairs. Siwen Zhao's *To Colleagues Cui Banshan and Li Shunzhi in the Examination Hall* declares: "Pressed by urgent documents, wholly abstaining from wine; my eyes, blurred and weary, can only be aided by tea" [7]. The poem illustrates how, under heavy workloads, tea replaced wine as the indispensable stimulant. Yu Ma's poem *Tea* elaborates on this effect: "Supreme in quality, rightly famed, its power to dispel drowsiness is immeasurable. Confucius dreams no longer of Duke Zhou; Master Shantong laughs at Chen Tuan's sleep. Seven bowls of Lu Tong, the Chan cue of Zhaozhou—these tastes all return to the unsurpassed. If Zaiyu were given but a cup, he would never nap at noon, his spirit clear and bright" [11]. The poem begins by praising tea as a "supreme product," its chief virtue lying in its limitless ability to dispel sleep. By invoking a series of anecdotes—from Confucius, Chen Tuan, and Lu Tong, to the Chan monk Zhaozhou—it culminates with the famous example of Zaiyu's noonday naps, using it as a counterpoint to underscore tea's capacity to refresh and sharpen the mind. This highlights the indispensable role of tea for literati, whether burdened with bureaucratic labor or engaged in ascetic self-cultivation.

3. The spiritual connotations of tea culture in the world of Jin literati

In the mental and cultural landscape of Jin literati, tea activities had already transcended the material dimension of everyday food and drink. They evolved into cultural symbols embodying refined taste, maintaining social networks, and transmitting sentiments and aspirations. Through the interplay of tea with poetry, calligraphy, painting, and other arts; its ritualized presentation in elegant gatherings and philosophical dialogues; and its role as a spiritual anchor during turbulent times, tea acquired multiple layers of meaning. It became not only an artistic medium of aesthetic life, but also a cultural bond of identity, and even a philosophical vessel for inner repose. This section explores tea's significance in the literati's spiritual world across three dimensions: as a symbol of refined taste, as a medium of sociality, and as a conduit of emotion.

3.1. Tea as a symbol of refined taste

For Jin literati, tea activities were far from mere material enjoyment; they served as central vehicles for cultivating elegance and aestheticizing daily life. A typical expression of this was the intimate intertwining of tea with lofty pursuits such as poetry, qin music, chess, and incense burning, together shaping an aestheticized everyday existence for the scholarly class. Among these, the symbiotic interplay of tea and poetry was particularly prominent. Tea not only inspired poetic imagination, but the act of tea drinking itself was frequently imbued with poetic resonance, becoming a key setting for both collective gatherings and personal expression. In Zhuo Liu's *Two Lighthearted Poems Written upon Receiving Fresh Tea and Green Oranges from Bojian*, we read: "Suddenly I hear pine winds stirring crab-eyes, as though spring snow were falling on a cold river" [7]. Here, the shared tasting of fresh tea during a riverside gathering becomes the medium through which sensory perception is sublimated into artistic creation, highlighting tea's role as both a catalyst for poetry and a bond of refined life. Ang Zhou's *Casual Lines* reveals an even deeper symbolic meaning of tea in the literati's spiritual world: "The shaded tree that never fades all year; the fine flavor lingering still in recent tea. My poetic endeavor has not waned, the seed remains; worldly ties are exhausted, and before my eyes no flowers remain" [7]. The opening metaphor likens the poet to an evergreen tree in perpetual shade, suggesting resilience amid political frustration or personal adversity. The phrase "the fine flavor lingering still in recent tea" carries a deliberate double meaning: on the surface it describes the lingering sweetness of re-steeped tea, but symbolically it conveys the poet's enduring devotion to poetry and his deepened life insight despite worldly vicissitudes. The final couplet makes this transcendence explicit, declaring a heart where "poetic resolve has not waned" and worldly burdens gradually fall away. In this way, tea is elevated beyond its practical function of refreshment, becoming a symbol of inner contemplation, poetic perseverance, and the aftertaste of life's spiritual reflections. Its "lingering flavor" resonates with the "undiminished" poetic spirit and the "fading" of worldly illusions, creating a subtle spiritual correspondence that exemplifies how Jin literati transformed daily tea practices into philosophically and aesthetically charged art.

Beyond poetry, the integration of tea with qin and chess gatherings further shaped the classic paradigm of artisticized life among Jin literati. The inscription on *the Circular Pavilion of Bozhulu in Yexian* by Yi Fan records: "I rose to the rank of third-grade official, passed seventy years of age, was enfeoffed as a founding marquis with a fief of a thousand households. My merits were second only to Wei and Huo; my wealth nearly rivaled that of Jin and Zhang. My body remained sound, though my years advanced. Could I still crave rank and not think of leisure in old age? Thus I repeatedly petitioned for retirement, settled in Donglai, sought land and house, and found this beautiful retreat. I restored and embellished it as a place to cultivate my spirit and nourish my vastness. Each day I joined Daoist recluses, monks, poets, and eccentrics—playing chess, drinking wine, touching the qin, sharing tea—wandering in carefree joy, harmonizing with Heaven, at peace and at ease" [8]. Here, "touching the qin" signifies the pursuit of ancient, refined music—its clear tones mirroring inner purity—while "sharing tea" refers specifically to whisking tea powder into fine froth and distributing it among companions. The very act of preparing and sharing tea thus became a multisensory performance, combining sight, sound, and taste into a unified art. This passage not only documents a high-ranking official's conscious retreat into cultivated leisure, but also crystallizes the essence of literati gatherings in the formula: "playing chess, drinking wine, touching the qin, sharing tea."

Finally, the pairing of tea with incense created a sensory and spiritual symphony that further elevated the literati's refined life into a domain of ritualized aesthetics. Junmin Li's *Record of the Renovation of Wuzhen Monastery* concisely depicts: "Daily with recluses beyond the world, playing the qin and discoursing on the Dao, burning incense and boiling tea" [8]. Here, incense and tea appear not as incidental details but as ritual companions, cultivating a serene and transcendent atmosphere—satisfying both olfactory and gustatory refinement—as a prelude to philosophical dialogue and music. Similarly, Ruoxu Wang's *Record of the Mingji Pavilion at Longxing Monastery in Fuzhou* states plainly: "Sitting in banquet and pure conversation, burning incense and boiling tea" [8]. The imagery of curling incense smoke and rising tea steam fuses into a multisensory rite that clears distractions and sharpens spiritual focus, lifting "banquet and pure conversation" into a state of transcendent dialogue. These records clearly indicate that "burning incense and boiling tea" had become a fixed combination in the Jin literati's gatherings at Daoist and Buddhist sites. It was more than mere physical enjoyment: it constituted a multisensory spiritual ritual—synthesizing smell, taste, sight, and sound—with the central aim of crafting an atmosphere of detachment, purifying the mind, and deepening intellectual exchange. Thus, the everyday act of tea drinking was thoroughly ritualized and aestheticized, becoming a hallmark of literati life in pursuit of inner transcendence and refined existence.

3.2. Tea as a medium of social interaction

Tea played a central mediating role in the construction and maintenance of social networks among Jin literati. Its function as a means of "making friends through tea" was vividly expressed in diverse settings, from elegant gatherings and refined conversations to interactions with Daoist recluses and broader circles of acquaintance. Haowen Yuan's *Preface to the Poems and Prose of Ruan* records: "Huishu Wang… when discussing the brushwork of the Two Wangs or expounding the scholarly tradition of cursive script, his profound insights were worth recording even in fragments. He would pawn his clothes to provide wine, and

sometimes would not let guests leave the whole day. With incense on the brazier and tea bowls at hand, or a cup of orange-honey, one could still discern the old manners of the Wang household in times of peace" [8]. Here, tea and incense jointly shape a sensory environment that both accommodates aesthetic appreciation and scholarly debate, while at the same time evoking the "old manners of the Wang household" — the refined cultural traditions and aristocratic rituals of the Northern Song, perpetuated as markers of identity among Jin literati elites. In such a context, tea transcends its role as a beverage to become a social ritual that sustains friendship, signals taste, and consolidates cultural belonging. Zhe Wang, in *Tea-Houses: Tea Has No Supreme Grade but Pure Authenticity*, asserts: "Tea has no absolute grade; authenticity is paramount. Thus it is the natural bond for inviting and receiving honored guests. Cups are warmed, kettles boil, and as the water seethes it resembles cloud and snow waves. With light sipping, the spirit feels refreshed. Like Lu Tong's seven bowls, one drinks to exhilaration. One recalls the savor, like the Chan master Zhaozhou. New verses are chanted, and together Wang Haifeng joins in song. In the bright moonlight, four friends share in joyous recitation" [11]. The opening statement highlights that the essence of tea lies in "authenticity"—the genuineness of taste and sincerity of feeling—making it a natural medium for gathering esteemed companions. The closing scene, "four friends sharing verse beneath the bright moon," reinforces the role of tea as a social bond that constructs and sustains literati networks in the Jin dynasty. Zijun Feng's *Tune: Yulou chun* further illustrates tea's role in shaping literati social space: "The long plain stretches where a lone elk lies; the faint wilderness meets the river's edge. Grass deep as green clouds bears our steps, flowers scatter like crimson rain. In the high pavilion we first test the fire for boiling blossoms, jeweled cups clamor as spring fills the seats. Let the cups circulate without restraint, let the game of chance turn swiftly; the festival passes like a flying bird" [7]. The first stanza sets the scene with imagery of an expansive wilderness and tranquil elk, evoking the secluded elegance of a chosen site for gathering. Phrases such as "grass like green clouds" and "flowers scattering like red rain" weave literati amusements into the natural setting, preparing for the unfolding tea banquet in the pavilion. The second stanza then fuses together multiple dimensions: the visual artistry of "testing the fire for boiling blossoms" (a refined description of tea preparation), the sensory delight of "jeweled cups clamoring as spring fills the seats," the social circulation of cups, and the playful entertainment of dice games. Together, they vividly reconstruct how Jin literati used tea banquets to create social spaces at once elegant and joyous. In these diverse accounts, tea emerges as a vital social medium: it ritualizes interaction, anchors cultural continuity, and harmonizes intellectual exchange with sensory pleasure.

3.3. Tea as a conduit of emotion

Within the expressive system of Jin literati, tea emerged as a poetic medium through which emotions were conveyed and spiritual affinities sustained. It functioned as a vehicle for articulating longing amid wartime displacement, for offering solace in solitude, and for embodying aspirations of reclusion and transcendence. First, tea frequently served as a vessel of longing for absent friends. Wo Wang's *To a Friend* laments: "Ten years of iron cavalry in the capital, a wanderer drifting, making a home wherever he goes… Old friends must surely think of me, yet none come to compose linked verse as we once did, boiling tea through the night" [7]. Here, the image of "night-boiled tea" carries profound emotional resonance. It recalls past nights of companionship and shared verse, while simultaneously expressing the poet's yearning for solace amid loneliness and exile. Similarly, Ang Zhou's *To the Old Man of Jinshan* writes: "The twin cypresses in my courtyard mark our parting as at morning. Letters travel with streamside tea, my words fall like tides of the sea. Clouds over the ridge may still amuse, but the frontier moon only deepens sorrow. Meeting again, I fear, will be in another lifetime; wind and sand have already withered my temples" [7]. By juxtaposing "streamside tea" with "letters", Zhou transforms tea leaves into a tangible medium of remembrance, pairing material gift and written word as dual channels of emotional expression.

Second, tea appears as a source of solace amid hardship. Jian Zhu's *In Response to Chang Zuming* declares: "Writing books wins no fame, my eyes blur with lines of flyspeck script. No need for Zhang Han's wine; rather I require seven bowls of Master Yu-chuan's tea" [7]. Through the contrast of wine and tea, and the learned allusion to Lu Tong's "seven bowls," the poet signals his conscious embrace of austerity, intellectual devotion, and spiritual self-sufficiency. The invocation of "seven bowls of Yu-chuan's tea" is at once literal—refreshing the mind and banishing fatigue—and symbolic, a declaration of contentment in poverty, commitment to scholarship, and elevation of spirit. Tea here becomes an emblem of self-cultivation and resilience.

Finally, tea articulates ideals of reclusion and transcendence. Shanyuan Hou's *Tune: Xijiang yue* depicts: "In a tranquil hut, carefree and pure, peaks lock the drifting clouds. Outside the eastern veranda, one branch leans in the morning sun. Guests are met with plain tea and quiet talk. Sitting in silence, all is clean, untouched by worldly dust. My heart on its ice-platform is like a white lotus, forever beneath the moon over the western river" [11]. Through imagery of serene surroundings and pure heart, tea is integrated into an ascetic ideal of Daoist reclusion: untainted, transcendent, in harmony with the eternal. Ang Zhou's *Clear Release* similarly asserts: "All my life I have despised the vulgar; who needs cap and girdle to bind the self? With one bowl of tea and a full meal I am content; lying down, I listen to pine winds, gazing up at my roof" [7]. Here, the simple act of "a bowl of tea and a full meal" is not deprivation but chosen sufficiency, marking tea as the centerpiece of a voluntary return to simplicity and spiritual ease. Ji Wang's *Drunken Recklessness (Zuiluopo)* expresses a similar stance of transcendence: "A hundred years of grinding cycles—why let them crease the brow? Fame is but painted bread deceiving me. The cold and warmth of human ties, all contained within these. Fine jade withstands the furnace, lotus flowers never truly tainted by mire. Now I smile at life's broken

illusion. On the Chan couch with tea smoke, I pass my days as they come" [11]. Rejecting the vanity of official career and the fickleness of human relations, Wang likens himself to jade and lotus—tested, yet incorruptible. The closing image of "Chan couch with tea smoke" crystallizes tea as both literal solace and symbolic expression of reclusion: an emblem of equanimity after insight into life's impermanence. Across these texts, tea becomes a profound emotional medium: carrying remembrance across distance, providing solace in solitude, and embodying ideals of purity and transcendence. It is through such poetic inflections that Jin literati endowed tea with enduring affective significance.

4. Tea culture and literati identity in the Jin dynasty

Within the politically plural landscape of the Jin dynasty, tea culture became a crucial arena for negotiating cultural identity between Han literati and Jurchen aristocratic elites. For Han literati, tea practices embodied a conscious defense of Song cultural lineage and a means of memorializing the lost dynasty. For Jurchen elites, the adoption and transformation of Song tea rituals provided both a pathway of cultural accommodation and a symbolic assertion of dynastic legitimacy. Through these overlapping practices, tea articulated the complex entanglement of cultural belonging and political identity in Jin society.

4.1. Han literati: the persistence of tradition

In the dynastic transition, the Han Chinese scholar-officials of the Jin dynasty faced a profound dilemma of cultural identity, and tea-related practices often became a form of spiritual resistance—a way to assert cultural roots and preserve the memory of the fallen Song. The case of Songnian Cai is particularly representative. *The History of Jin (Jinshi)* records his early experience: "Cai Songnian, style name Bojian. His father, Jing, served as prefect of Yanshan at the end of the Xuanhe reign (Northern Song). Songnian accompanied his father, overseeing documents in the bureau of military affairs. When the Jurchen general Zongwang's army reached the Bai River and Guo Yaoshi was defeated, Jing surrendered Yanshan Prefecture, and the Marshal's Office appointed Songnian as clerk-messenger [1]." This record reveals the predicament of his background. As the son of a Song loyalist commander who surrendered to the Jin, Cai's career at the Jin court was overshadowed by the political stigma of being a"twice-serving minister"(erchen). The rupture of such an identity compelled him to transform tea imagery into a symbol of cultural resistance. In his poem"Returning to Qi in the Seventh Month", he writes:"I return from the front of battle, my longing heart startled like a flying swan… The pale moon shines above the western hills, night tea boiling with the sound of pine winds [7]." The juxtaposition of"from the front of battle"with"my longing heart startled like a flying swan"directly reflects his condition of spiritual displacement. The"sound of pine winds"(songfeng) refers literally to the roaring of boiling water in the tea kettle, but more profoundly it echoes the Song literati's aesthetic of tea. Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song in his *Treatise on Tea (Daguan Chalun)* emphasized that the art of tea"cannot be known by the vulgar or the child" [12], while Yu Lu's *Classic of Tea (Chajing)* declared that tea"is most suited to those of pure conduct and frugal virtue" [13]. By evoking"pine winds"as he brewed tea, Cai consciously positioned himself within this lineage of Song literati tea aesthetics. Moreover,"pine"in Chinese culture symbolized integrity; here it intimates Cai's will to resist assimilation into Jin political culture, while also expressing nostalgia for the soil and traditions of the fallen Song. Tea practice thus became the locus where bodily submission and spiritual fidelity were held in precarious balance. This form of cultural perseverance extended even into his imagination of the afterlife. In his ci lyric *"To the Tune of Manjianghong: Written for Bo Ping, a Gentleman Returning Joyfully to the West"*, he writes:"In advancing age, dreams of home circle the thatched hut among white clouds. Where might one find congenial friends to comfort the heart and eyes? … Laughing at these years of dalliance, I entrust myself to wine and song. Wealth and fame are inescapably known to others, yet in the clear summer of my homeland, I take respite. As evening cools—the mat of wind, the gleam of tea smoke, slumber amidst bamboo groves [11]." The phrase "dreams of home circle the thatched hut among white clouds" voices his nostalgic longing as a cultural exile. The line "I entrust myself to wine and song" carries a double meaning: on the surface it describes intoxication, yet the word qu ("song"/"tune") alludes to his own moral compromise in serving the Jin, with an undertone of shame. The closing image—"the mat of wind, the gleam of tea smoke, slumber amidst bamboo groves"—depicts a retreat into the quintessential Song literati landscape, where tea smoke signals not just domestic repose but a spiritual anchoring in Han-Song culture.

4.2. Jurchen aristocrats: accommodation and transformation

The transformation of tea-drinking customs among the Jurchen aristocracy clearly reflected the ruling elite's gradual acceptance and active reconstruction of Han Chinese culture. Zhe Su of the Northern Song in his poem *"Harmonizing with Zizhan on Boiling Tea"* recorded: "Do you not see, in Fujian the quality of tea is the finest under Heaven? Men exhaust themselves for tea without weariness. Do you not see, in the northern countryside every rustic has tea to drink, Boasting of salt, cheese, pepper, and ginger brimming in the mouth? I, weary of wandering, long for my native land; I will learn neither the southern nor the northern way [14]." This passage reflects that prior to the conquest of the Liao, the early Jurchen retained a rugged tea-drinking tradition

of boiling tea with dairy products, salt grains, and pungent spices. After establishing rule over the Central Plains, however, tea culture became a key element in their process of Sinicization. The Jin elite actively studied and assimilated Chinese literati practices, and tea-drinking methods gradually changed. For instance, Emperor Xizong of Jin "was instructed by the Yan native Fang Han and other Confucian scholars of China. Later he became capable of composing poetry and wielding the brush, wore Confucian robes, shared whisked tea and incense, and played xiangqi—all his former Jurchen habits entirely disappeared [15]." The practices of "sharing whisked tea"(fencha) and "burning incense" were central rituals in Song literati studios. Similarly, Emperor Hailing "spoke Chinese fluently and resembled a Han child in appearance. He enjoyed reading, learning xiangqi and tea whisking, and he invited Confucian scholars, discoursing with them as a cultivated gentleman [15]." His tea practices were inseparable from his policy of attracting Confucian literati, jointly serving to fashion the Jin into a Central Plains-style dynasty. Such tea-related activities from the top down were far more than mere imitation of lifestyle customs. Rather, they reveal how the Jurchen elite internalized the Song literati aesthetics of tea and transformed tea-drinking into a symbolic act of dissolving ethnic boundaries and proclaiming dynastic orthodoxy. In this way, tea marked the transition of the Jin regime from a frontier tribal polity to a Chinese legitimate dynasty.

5. Conclusion

Through a close examination of tea-related practices among Jin dynasty literati, this study has revealed the unique role and profound significance of tea culture in their spiritual world and identity formation. For the literati of the Jin, tea was not merely a material enjoyment in daily life but was elevated into a cultural practice that carried spiritual meaning and articulated cultural belonging. From the circulation of tea leaves and the use of specialized utensils, to the diversification of drinking methods and the multilayered symbolism of tea in the spiritual realm, Jin literati constructed a distinctive cultural space through their tea practices—one that simultaneously embodied fidelity to Central Plain traditions and expressed new forms of identity under conditions of cultural hybridity. In the literati world, tea was more than an emblem of refined taste; it also functioned as a medium of social interaction and a vehicle of emotional expression. Through the interweaving of tea with poetry, calligraphy, and painting, and through the ritualized enactment of gatherings and elegant conversation, tea was transformed into an artistic medium of aesthetic life. At the same time, tea played a pivotal role in processes of identity construction. Han literati used tea practices to affirm their Song cultural heritage and to declare their moral resolve, while Jurchen elites appropriated the essence of Song tea aesthetics to advance their own cultural transformation, turning tea into a symbolic marker of dynastic legitimacy.

The study of tea culture in the Jin dynasty not only enriches our understanding of Jin cultural history but also offers new perspectives on the evolution of Chinese tea culture across different historical contexts. As a carrier of both spiritual values and identity expressions, tea activities exemplify the intricate interplay between cultural inheritance and identity construction. Future research may further investigate the evolution of tea culture in other multiethnic dynastic contexts, as well as its processes of adaptation and innovation under varying cultural conditions, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of tea culture's role in the cultural interactions of premodern China.

References

[1] Tuo, T. (Yuan). (1975). *Jin shi [History of Jin]*. Zhonghua Book Company.
[2] Tuo, T. (Yuan). (1985). *Song shi [History of Song]*. Zhonghua Book Company.
[3] Li, X. (Song). (1988). *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu [Chronological Records Since the Jianyan Era].* Zhonghua Book Company.
[4] Xu, S. (Qing), & Liu, L. (Eds.). (2014). *Song huiyao jigao [Draft Collection of Institutional Documents of the Song Dynasty].* Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.
[5] Ma, D. (Yuan). (2011). *Wenxian tongkao [Comprehensive Examination of Literature].* Zhonghua Book Company.
[6] Chinese Ceramic Society (Ed.). (1982). *Zhongguo taoci shi [History of Chinese Ceramics]*. Cultural Relics Publishing House.
[7] Yuan, H. (Jin), & Zhang, J. (Ed. & Annot.). (2018). *Zhongzhou ji jiaozhu [Annotated Collection of Zhongzhou]*. Zhonghua Book Company.
[8] Zhang, J. (Qing). (2020). *Jin wen zui [Essence of Jin Writings].* Zhonghua Book Company.
[9] Yan, F., & Kang, J. (1999). *Quan Liao Jin shi [Complete Poetry of Liao and Jin].* Shanxi Ancient Books Publishing House.
[10] Xue, Z. (2021). *Xinbian quan Jin shi [New Edition of Complete Jin Poetry]*. Zhonghua Book Company.
[11] Tang, G. (1979). *Quan Jin Yuan ci [Complete Ci Poetry of Jin and Yuan].* Zhonghua Book Company.
[12] Zhao, J. (Song), Zhao, D., & Li, J. (2013). *Daguan cha lun (wai er zhong) [Treatise on Tea in the Daguan Era (with Two Additional Works)].* Zhonghua Book Company.
[13] Lu, Y. (Tang), & Shen, D. (Annot.). (2021). *Chajing jiaozhu [Annotated Classic of Tea].* Zhonghua Book Company.
[14] Su, Z. (Song), Chen, H., & Gao, X. (Eds.). (1990). *Su Zhe ji [Collected Works of Su Zhe]*. Zhonghua Book Company.
[15] Yuwen, M. (Song), & Cui, W. (Annot.). (1986). *Dajin guo zhi jiaozheng [Collated Records of the Great Jin State].* Zhonghua Book Company.