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期末考试试卷

课程名称 中国文化概要

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Please write an essay about 500-800 words in English, explaining a cultural phenomenon in China. A comparative perspective is encouraged.

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日语口译

第一课堂

The Reasons for the Spread of Tea Culture in the Tang Dynasty

The culture of tea got considerably widespread in the Tang dynasty^[1]. *The Classic of Tea*, which was written by Lu Yu in the Tang dynasty is the first monograph on tea in the world. At the same time, the first taxation on tea in China also started. The aim of this essay is to discuss the factors that promoted the spread of tea culture in the Tang dynasty and compare them with the developments in Japan in the 9th century.

Several studies suggest that Buddhism monks had strongly influenced the spread of tea culture in China^{[4][5]}. It is said that monks used to drink tea to shake off sleepiness during meditation^[5]. In the Tang dynasty, Xuanzang's translations of Indian Buddhist texts initiated the development of Buddhism in China. With considerable support from emperors such as Emperor Gaozong of Tang and Wu Zetian, more and more people got to know Buddhism and tea drinking customs as well^[2].

Emperor Daizong of Tang was also a proponent of Buddhism. During his reign, Tea was designated as tribute, which stimulated the production of tea and made tea more accessible^[2].

Another popular theory is that the prohibition of alcohol after the An Lushan Rebellion helped increase the consumption of tea, for people started to drink tea instead of alcohol at banquets. Although there isn't concrete evidence showing the relation between the prohibition and the consumption of tea, the number of poems about tea did increase rapidly after the prohibition was instituted^[2].

Besides, the recommendations of Chinese ceramics used in the drinking of tea were

mentioned in Lu Yu's *The Classic of Tea*. It is possible to hypothesise that significant development of Chinese ceramics in the Tang dynasty also played a vital role in the spread of tea culture.

Tea was introduced into Japan in the 9th century by Japanese missions. However it did not get spread so widely as it did in China at first. It is considered that tea culture became popular in the 13th century^[1]. Xu(2011) lists some reasons why tea culture didn't get popular in the 9th century, which are: a) Japan stopped sending missions to China in the middle of the 9th century, while there was not enough time and import volume helping promote the spread of tea culture; b) tea was treated as medicine or luxurious drink which could be only tasted at formal bouquets or religious ceremonies, therefore it rarely appeared in people's daily life^[1]. While in the 12th century, tea plants and seeds were brought to Japan by Eisai, a Buddhist monk. He also promoted tea for health purposes and connected tea culture with Zen Buddhism. Because of the increase of tea production in Japan and monks' efforts, tea became more accessible and became a part of Japanese culture later^[3].

From the comparison, we can know that there are clear differences between the spread of tea culture in the Tang dynasty and it in Japan in the 9th century. Firstly, the production of tea is an important factor. Because tea was supplied in large quantities in the Tang dynasty, people could buy and enjoy tea easily. Secondly, the relations with local culture are also crucial. When tea was first introduced into Japan, it was just treated as a foreign culture, so the practice of drinking tea naturally declined when people lost interest in Tang Chinese culture. While in the Tang dynasty, Chinese unique cultural phenomenons such as the great presence of Buddhism, the prohibition of alcohol and the development of Chinese ceramics, helped tea get easily accepted by local people, which made tea culture widespread rapidly.

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