

Chinese Tea Exports via Taiwan by VOC (1641-1660): A Prelude to European Tea Consumption in 18th Century*

Wei-chung Cheng**

ABSTRACT

Tea, an exotic drink from China, was first introduced to the Europeans in the 16th century, but its consumption became more widespread only after mid-18th century. Scholars have attributed the sudden surge in tea consumption to urbanization and rise of the middle class in early-modern Europe. While Dutch, English and Portuguese residents in Asia had become very accustomed to drinking tea throughout the 17th century, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and English East India Company (EIC) carried it as a profitable commodity and imported regular supplies to the homeland only after the 1680s. In mid-17th century, tea gradually began to appear on cargo manifests of VOC and EIC ships, but it was for sale to India and Persia, especially Surat (west coast of India). Consequent to the downfall of Ming dynasty and rise of Qing rule between 1644 and 1683, which disrupted the tea trade route on China's western borders, Persians who used to purchase tea from Mongolian traders in Central Asia sought alternative supplies by sea route. The VOC, which then occupied Taiwan and built close ties with Chinese traders in Fujian, responded rapidly to this call until it lost Taiwan in 1662.

This article examines the Taiwan-India tea trade from c. 1641 to 1660, in particular the ways tea was prepared and consumed by Chinese, Indians, Persians and Europeans on the maritime tea route, before the sudden upsurge in tea-drinking in Europe. The author argues that their daily engagement in tea-drinking parties on official and private occasions in cross-cultural settlements in Tayouan, Batavia, Bantam, Ayutthaya (central Thailand), and Surat, enabled

* The draft was partially presented at the 18th World Economic History Congress, on 3rd Aug. 2018, Boston, United States, in the panel "the Interplay of Trade, Religion, and Technology in China and Europe in the 16th-19th Centuries", organized by Prof. Lilian Pérez and Chuan-hui Mau. More completed version later was presented at the third International Symposium on Taiwan Commercial Tradition: Maritime Connectivity and Taiwanese Commerce and Annual Meeting of the Lim Pen-Yuan Cultural and Educational Foundation, on 17th Sept. 2020, Taipei, Taiwan. It was partially sponsored by the research project "Taiwan-India in the 17th Century and Early 18th Century: The Cotton Textile and Herbs (1640-1720)" (108-2410-H-001-MY4).

** Associate Research Fellow, Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan
來稿日期：2020年12月16日；通過刊登：2021年3月8日。

VOC and EIC personnel to develop a tea-drinking habit, especially a taste for sugared tea. Such might have arisen from cross-cultural encounters along the maritime tea route. Although sugared tea was served only on special festive occasions in Fujian, Muslim communities in Southeast Asia, India and Persia were accustomed to taking tea with sweets or preserves. While tea-drinking habit could have spread via diverse channels, Euro-Asian cities, such as Tayouan or Zeelandia town, on the maritime tea route were likely to have contributed to the Dutch adaption to such habit with their roles as tea-provider and cross-cultural middle ground.

Keywords: Tea Drinking Habit, VOC, Taiwan (Tayouan), Zeelandia Town, Surat