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# The ritual practices of Beiyuan Tribute Tea production in Jianzhou-Fujian, China

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the ritual practices associated with Beiyuan Tribute Tea production in Jianzhou, Fujian, China. Beiyuan Tribute Tea, a historically significant tea, originated in the Tang Dynasty, flourished during the Song Dynasty, and experienced a decline in the Ming Dynasty, reproduced in contemporary times. The tea's production involved intricate rituals that not only enhanced its quality but also embedded it deeply into the socio-cultural and religious fabric of the time. These rituals, encompassing aspects of religious reverence, craftsmanship, and social etiquette, played a crucial role in the tea's esteemed status as a tribute to Chinese emperors in history. The study utilized ethnographic methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviews with 17 people, and document analysis, to capture the rich, contextual details of the tea production process. The study delves into the historical context, production techniques, and symbolic meanings of the rituals, highlighting their impact on the broader cultural heritage of Chinese tea. The recent revival efforts of these traditions underscore their enduring significance and offer insights into the cultural continuity and adaptation in contemporary tea practices.

**Keywords:** Beiyuan Tribute Tea; production; ritual practices; tea culture heritage; Jianzhou

## 1. Introduction

Chinese Tribute Tea, is an ancient Chinese special tea dedicated to the imperial family and the court, for the enjoyment of emperors and generals, is a feudal society subjects social needs or tribute to the emperor and the upper echelon of the material and cultural needs of life product (Gong, 2003). The emergence of tribute tea, that is, an ancient tax system in kind, but also is part of the social etiquette in the history of Chinese civilization, is a product of the social development of a special period of time in ancient feudal China. "Tribute Teas" (Gong cha) represent the highest level of teas historically: They are dedicated to royal families and their ancestral lineage, and they exemplify the highest achievements in the cultivation and traditional craftsmanship of Chinese tea" (Palace Museum, 2022). Most of China's famous teas come from tribute teas. One of the most famous tribute tea is the Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT). Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) is a historically significant tea from Jianzhou, Fujian province, China. Originating in the Tang Dynasty, it became prominent in the Song Dynasty and continued as a tribute tea for 458 years, the longest tribute tea in Chinese ancient history (Lai, 2011). Many emperors and elites were addicted to it. The tea's legacy began when Zhang Tinghui presented his vast tea plantation to the King of Min, naming it "Beiyuan" (Zhu, 2012). The Southern Tang Dynasty later took over, and the Song Dynasty further elevated BTT, with Emperor Song Taizong commissioning tea

cakes shaped like dragons and phoenixes, symbols of imperial power (Shen, 2014). These dragon and phoenix cakes became highly esteemed, especially under Emperor Song Huizong. BTT declined in the Ming Dynasty when Emperor Ming Taizu ended its production, favoring loose leaf tea instead. Rediscovered in modern times, efforts have been made to revive its traditional production techniques and preserve its cultural heritage. Except as tribute tea, BTT is also noted for influencing the Japanese tea ceremony, underscoring its lasting impact on tea culture. The Beiyuan Imperial Baking Site and related artifacts have been crucial in these revival efforts, with significant historical and cultural research dedicated to its legacy.

Rituals create collective emotions linked to symbols, forming the foundation for beliefs, thought processes, morality, and culture, thus serving as a fundamental structural force in societal organization (Mayer, 2005). These rituals are pervasive across various domains such as religious practices, ancestor worship, production processes, and ceremonial etiquette. Understanding the significance of rituals provides insight into our civilization and culture. Tea culture, for example, incorporates significant rituals that span religious, artisanal, and social aspects, demonstrating the profound role of ritual in cultural traditions.

The production of Beiyuan Tribute Tea in Jianzhou, Fujian, China, represents a profound intertwining of ritualistic practices, cultural heritage, and historical continuity. Originating in the Tang Dynasty and reaching its zenith during the Song Dynasty, Beiyuan Tribute Tea was esteemed not only for its superior quality but also for its intricate production rituals and the symbolic significance it held within the imperial court (Chen, 2019; Lin, 2020). These rituals were essential in maintaining the high standards of tea production and served as a reflection of the broader cultural and social structures of the time. The rituals associated with Beiyuan Tribute Tea production involved meticulous steps, from the selection of tea leaves to the crafting of tea cakes adorned with dragon and phoenix motifs. These motifs were not merely decorative but carried deep cultural symbolism, representing the emperor's power and the tea's esteemed status (Wang, 2021; Zhou, 2018). The production process was highly ceremonial, embedding the tea within the spiritual and cultural fabric of Chinese society.

Modern efforts to revive and preserve these ancient tea-making practices highlight the enduring legacy of Beiyuan Tribute Tea. Institutions and scholars have undertaken extensive research to document and restore the traditional techniques, ensuring that the cultural heritage of Beiyuan Tribute Tea continues to thrive (Li, 2017; Zhang, 2022). This revival has also included the protection of historical sites and the celebration of tea-related rituals, which are now recognized as intangible cultural heritages (Fujian Cultural Heritage Bureau, 2019). By examining the ritual practices involved in Beiyuan Tribute Tea production, this study aims to elucidate the cultural and historical significance of these practices and their impact on contemporary Chinese tea culture. The intricate rituals not only reflect the sophistication of ancient Chinese craftsmanship but also underscore the role of tea in shaping social and cultural identities throughout history (Chen, 2020; Gong and Liu, 2018).

## **2. Methodology**

This research on the ritual practices of Beiyuan Tribute Tea production in Jianzhou, Fujian, employed a qualitative methodology. This approach is suitable for exploring the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of the tea production rituals, which are deeply embedded in the local traditions and historical narratives. The study utilized ethnographic methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, to capture the rich, contextual details of the tea production process.

Participant observation was conducted in tea plantations and workshops in Jianzhou, Fujian. This method involved spending extensive time in the field, observing and documenting the various stages of tea production, from leaf selection to the crafting of tea cakes. The researcher took detailed field notes and captured the nuances of the ritual practices. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including local tea producers, historians, cultural experts, and elder members of the community who have firsthand knowledge of the traditional practices. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring various aspects of the rituals and their significance. Audio recordings were made (with consent) to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Historical documents, archival records, and previous research studies related to Beiyuan Tribute Tea were reviewed. This includes examining old manuscripts, government records, cultural heritage reports, and scholarly articles that provide insights into the historical context and evolution of the tea production rituals.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who have extensive knowledge and experience with Beiyuan Tribute Tea production. This includes 5 tea masters, 9 local historians, and 3 cultural heritage custodians. The aim is to gather detailed and rich information from individuals who are deeply familiar with the subject matter. Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants through referrals from initial informants. This method is effective in reaching knowledgeable individuals who may not be immediately accessible through formal channels. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from observations and interviews. The data was coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the ritual practices. This process involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Narrative analysis was equally applied to the historical documents (Perumal & Lyndon, 2023; Dabai & Lyndon, 2024) and archival records to construct a coherent narrative of the historical development and cultural significance of Beiyuan Tribute Tea rituals. This method helps in understanding how these practices have been recorded, remembered, and transmitted over generations (Alsubaie et al. 2021; Sitinjak Charli et al. 2023).

Triangulation was employed to enhance the validity of the findings by using multiple data sources and methods. This includes cross-verifying information obtained from observations, interviews, and documents to ensure consistency and accuracy. Member checking was conducted by sharing the preliminary findings with key informants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations and conclusions. This process

helps in ensuring that the research findings are credible and reflective of the participants' perspectives. The research adheres to ethical guidelines, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting the cultural sensitivities of the community. Ethical approval was sought from the relevant institutional review board. The study faced limitations such as the potential bias in participant selection, the subjective nature of qualitative analysis, and the challenges in accessing certain historical documents. These limitations were acknowledged, and steps were taken to mitigate their impact on the research findings.

### **3. Presentation and analysis of results**

This section presents the results of interview on the ritual practices of BTT production ranging from shouting to the tea mountain, making the BTT till the end of rituals involves in tea consumptions and various tea ceremonies.

Please briefly describe your knowledge and understanding of Beiyuan Tribute Tea.

“Beiyuan, the best tea comes from Jianzhou.”

“Tea from Jianzhou to Jinling, the capital city of this Southern Tang Dynasty, and then to the Beiyuan (the North Garden in imperial palace), just emperor's office place. So people just know the tea comes from Beiyuan, hence people called Beiyuan tea. There is another saying, Nantang dynasty build a official position called Beiyuan Shi who charge Beiyuan and aslo the Jianzhou tea production, so tea also called Beiyuan.”

Another interview revealed that:

“Beiyuan Fenghuang Mountain where the Beiyuan site is located, across the river is Feng Mountain, are two mountains that many people often get confused. In the Classic of Mountains and Seas, the Feng Huang is the male leader of a group of phoenix birds. (Similarly: Feng, the rooster within the chicken; Fenghuang, the fighting chicken within the rooster, the just like the emperor among the chickens.) And in The Four Books and Five Classics there are also some records that the phoenix bird brings all the birds to pay homage to a ruler of holy virtue, and here the term “Fenghuang (phoenix) emperor” is also used. Therefore, Keshi (See **Figure 1** in details) was right in applying this term, a typical Confucian student. The reason for choosing this place for the Imperial Tea Plantation is that it is the home of the King of Birds, Feng Huang(phoenix)” (IDI 07).

Another interview revealed that:

“Beiyuan Tribute Tea is authoritative, classic and unique in history.

Beiyuan Tribute Tea plays three major roles: The inner court pays tribute, and all the rest offer sacrifices; Ceremonies; Reward the minister” (KII 08).

Another interview also revealed that:

“The range of Beiyuan tribute tea is very wide, but all can be said to be correct. It has an origin, a start, and an end, and then to the present revival process. Beiyuan Tribute Tea, it includes white tea, black tea, oolong tea, green tea, but it is just a dynasty is different, but they are all out here” (KII 09).



**Figure 1.** The Beiyuan cliff stone carving relic, written by Keshi the official of Beiyuan in 1048 A.D.

Note: There are 80 characters on this stone carving, recording the location, scope, buildings, and production of Beiyuan in its heyday in Song dynasty.

According to historical records and interviews, the origin of Beiyuan tea name has been deeply associated with royal, precious, beautiful and other symbols. “The best tea of Jian tea, called “Beiyuan tea”. Today, the Jianzhou Phoenix Hill, the natives have been called “Beiyuan”, said South Tang dynasty tried to set up an official called “Beiyuan Shi” to lead here” (Shen, 2014). In ancient Chinese history, though Yuan and Yuan both represent the garden, the second refers to the royal garden. Whether Beiyuan tea was because it flowed from the Beiyuan or was supervised by the Beiyuan Shi, it was already associated with the royal family from the very beginning of its naming. What’s more, the choice of Beiyuan’s location for the Imperial Tea Plantation highlights the historical and cultural significance of Fenghuang Mountain. This mountain is often confused with another nearby Feng mountain, but it holds a special place in Chinese tradition and mythology, particularly in relation to the phoenix bird, Feng Huang.

In Chinese mythology, the Feng Huang is the male leader of a group of phoenix birds, which is considered the king of all birds. “The five parts of the phoenix’s body symbolize virtue, righteousness, courtesy, benevolence, and faith, and when people see the phoenix, the world is at peace”. This symbolism is drawn from ancient texts like the “Classic of Mountains and Seas” and “The Four Books and Five Classics”. The phoenix bird is seen as a bringer of all birds to pay homage to a ruler of holy virtue, hence the term “phoenix emperor”. This reflects the Confucian ideals of virtue and leadership. The phoenix (Feng Huang) is likened to a rooster within the chicken species, symbolizing leadership and excellence. Similarly, the phoenix emperor is seen as a fighting chicken among roosters, representing a supreme ruler among leaders. This analogy underscores the prestigious status of the location chosen for the Imperial Tea Plantation. The decision to establish the Beiyuan Imperial Tea Plantation at Fenghuang Mountain is rooted in its association with the phoenix, the king of birds. This location choice is not only symbolic but also strategic, reflecting the importance of aligning imperial activities with culturally significant sites.

Keshi’s application of the term “phoenix emperor fits within the Confucian tradition, emphasizing the moral and virtuous leadership associated with the site. The selection of Fenghuang Mountain for the Imperial Tea Plantation signifies more than

just a practical decision for tea cultivation; it reflects a deep cultural and symbolic resonance. This choice aligns the production of Beiyuan Tribute Tea with the virtues and leadership qualities embodied by the phoenix, enhancing the tea's status and prestige. The historical reverence for the site contributes to the tea's legacy, ensuring that the Beiyuan Tribute Tea is not only a product of agricultural expertise but also a cultural artifact steeped in symbolic significance.

### 3.1. What are the symbols and meanings of Beiyuan Tribute Tea

“The royal attributes and state behavior of the dragon ball and phoenix cake represent the highest ‘tea technology’ and ‘tea industry’ at that time, and are important evidence to corroborate that the Beiyuan Tribute Tea (**Figure 2**) is the pinnacle of Chinese tea”.

“These molds of dragon & phoenix (Long & Feng in Chinese) tea cakes with different sizes and patterns are mainly for ritual reasons, and therefore have different functions. Some are for rituals, for the Buddha, for the Immortals, for ancestors, some are for birthday wishes, and some are just expressions of auspiciousness and prayers. Others, such as the Dragon with much clouds (Miyun Long) Tea Cakes, are a euphemistic blessing from the courtiers wishing the emperor to have more heirs. At that time, the folk tea cakes and royal tea cakes are different, one is the pattern style is different, the reason for the ritual system; the second is the material is different, the royal precious metal, folk precious metal use less (**Figure 2**)” (IDI 17).



**Figure 2.** The traditional Beiyuan tribute tea cake and gold-covered Beiyuan tribute tea cake which both engraved with dragon and phoenix designs.

Note: Above photos provided by Liu Ruijun, BTT intangible cultural heritage inheritor.

Culture is to satisfy human needs, people recognize culture through symbols, and all cultures created by human beings are presented through different symbols (Lei, 2018). “Symbolos” means a sign or a feature that says something to a person. Each ritual symbol performed must have its own meaning. The symbolic meaning contained in the ritual will bring meaning to the people in the salvation they desire if it can be understood and practised.

From the picture records of BTT in “Xuanhe beiyuan gongcha lu”, there are 32 patterns of Beiyuan tribute tea cake. Different patterns has different shape with

different imagines. The shapes of tea cake including round, square, plum blossom, come from the shapes of ancient Chinese jade, called “Square Gui, Round Bi”. The gentleman compares virtue to jade. Wearing jade is often a symbol of social status, reflecting a person’s class and position in society (Zhu, 2009). On the surface of the tea or mould, there are full of pheonix, dragon, clouds or peony. There are all symbols of good luck and beauty (auspicious and beautiful things). while the bullions material of tea cake mould demonstrates the nobility and extravagance of royalty.

The dragon and phoenix are the emblems, signs and symbols of the Chinese nation, which is a cultural phenomenon with a long history and rich content (Lu, 2012). Totem worship is a universal phenomenon of human culture. Freud “The totem is the common ancestor of the clans and at the same time their protector and provider of help” (Cai, 2019). The dragon and the phoenix are both part of the primordial cult of ancient China and originated in folklore. The dragon is a fuzzy collection of reptiles and mammals as well as some natural heavens, and the phoenix is also a fuzzy collection of beautiful birds and feathered insects, both of which are divine creatures that can correspond and complement each other: One changes and soars, the other is beautiful and auspicious, and once they join hands, “the dragon flies and the phoenix dances”, “the dragon and the phoenix are auspicious”. After the Qin and Han dynasties, as feudal emperors claimed to be the “True Dragon and Son of Heaven”, the dragon came to symbolize the authority of the emperor’s divinity, and as its counterpart, the phoenix came to symbolize the divinity of the emperor’s concubines. The Song Dynasty was the first time that a very clear symbol of the hierarchy of divine authority was used on tribute tea. After Taizong, the use of dragons, phoenixes, especially dragons, such as the emperor’s special emblem pattern, became the Song dynasty tribute tea circle mold custom.

The name of BTT also hide much information, such as the Miyunlong tea cake, use the images of many Jiaolong (just dragon babies) with clouds on the surface of tea cake. At that time, the emperor of Song Renzhong just had few sons, so the minister gently wished the emperor to have more children by the tea. Having a number of children are a sign of family and country prosperity in China. BTT was presented to the emperor by the Jianzhou minsters, and while the BTT were also presented to cabinet ministers and scholar-officials by emperors. There was a custom in Song dynasty which deepen the emotional connection between rulers and subjects and promoting the spread of tea culture. Over time, the culture of dragon and phoenix has gradually integrated into the daily life and fashion trends of the Chinese people. In various local folklore, grand dragon dances are held to express the pursuit of traditional Chinese culture and the meaning of good luck and wealth.

In a specific period of history, the Beiyuan tribute tea (**Figure 2**) that served the royal family was not only a local specialty, but also shaped into a ceremonial vessel in the form shape of jade square Gui and round Bi), Which was not only crafted with exquisite sophistication and complexity, but also featured a unique dragon and phoenix emblazonry, an emblematic symbol, and was also a fulfillment of the national system of etiquette. In fact, ancient Chinese think highly of jade culture. Jade artefacts are sacred and are often used in rituals or to indicate social rank, through which people can communicate with the gods or their ancestors (Xu, 2017).



The molds used for making dragon and phoenix tea cakes were more than just tools for creating tea products; they were imbued with cultural, religious, and social significance. Their varied functions and symbolic meanings reflect the intricate ways in which tea culture was woven into the daily life and spiritual practices of ancient China, reinforcing social hierarchies and expressing deeply held values.

### **3.2. What is the first production process of Beiyuan Tribute tea**

“There’s a cultural buffer: Those people live nearby and come and go as normal when production is going on; the tea makers are permanent and the others are temporary workers. The record of shouting and opening mountain in Wuyishan is later than Jianzhou, and it is also the simplest record. These are some of the activities that drive the tea industry. To boost morale, so that people put their energy into the tea-making season as soon as possible, meet each other and coordinate their work. People pray with a sense of longing and thanksgiving as a plea to allow themselves some spiritual solace. There are rules for opening the tea mountain” (KII 10).

### **3.3. What is shouting to the tea mountain and how is it done**

“Beiyuan Shouting Mountain (**Figure 3**)” activity is not only a traditional tea folk custom in Jianzhou, but also an intangible cultural heritage. We wake up the growth of tea trees by Shouting Mountain, so that tea trees begin to sprouting and germinating to achieve a good harvest.

Another participant also reveals that:

Shouting the mountain has a number of symbolic meanings. One must be a symbol of good luck for this year’s crops and tea. The other one is that in the past there were a lot of birds, snakes and insects on the mountain, and then you shouted it out when you sounded the gongs and beat the drums to drive them away. But the more implied meaning may be sacrifice, and the sense of ritual is very strong. I think there is no difference between the Shouting mountain and Open the tea mountain.

Another interview also revealed that:

“Shouting at the mountain is not a superstition, it is custom. It is a reverence for nature, a respect for the tea gods, and a homage to the ancestors. The people, small tea factories shouting mountain not much, the main manifestation of worship, tribute, a little incense, tribute (pig head, candy, etc.), there is a firecracker, etc., on the day you start picking tea to do tea, in the tea mountain, tea factory to put a firecracker, worship, generally everyone will practice up words, put their own will out. The relationship between shouting mountains and production: Psychological cues; lifting the spirit, unifying the mind, making tea together; with a pious heart; thanking nature, God, and the ancestors for their gifts” (IDI 11).





**Figure 3.** The ritual of shouting to the tea mountain.

The tea-making process involves a blend of permanent tea makers and temporary workers. The local community participates in the tea-making season, creating a cultural buffer where normal life continues even during production. This dynamic ensures that the tea-making process is deeply rooted in the community's social fabric. At the beginning of tea-making process, local people would like to do the "Shouting to the Mountain" ritual (**Figure 3**) which serves multiple purposes: Boosting morale, coordinating work among the workers, and infusing energy into the tea-making season, and then go up the mountain to pick tea leaves. This ritual helps to synchronize the efforts of all involved, ensuring a smooth and productive tea production season. It includes prayers and expressions of longing and thanksgiving, which provide spiritual solace and create a sense of communal purpose and reverence. Beiyuan "Shouting to the Tea Mountain" is an intangible cultural heritage in Jianzhou, aiming to wake up tea trees, encouraging them to sprout and germinate for a good harvest. This ritual is not just symbolic but also has a tangible impact on the growth cycle of tea plants.

The shouting ritual typically occurs on Hibernation Day during the hibernation period to awaken the buds, signaling the start of the tea-growing season. This is followed by a small amount of tea picking and then the main spring tea harvesting season. The ritual involves shouting phrases like "Tea is sprouting" or "picking tea!" to awaken the plants. This practice is linked to the rainy season and aligns with the natural growth cycle of tea buds. In ancient times, this ceremony was organized by officials of the Beiyuan tea plantation. And nowadays, this ceremony has been widely spread in Jianzhou. In addition to the Shouting Mountain Ceremony organized by the government, some tea factories and tea associations also organize it. The ritual also includes worship and offerings to the tea gods and ancestors, involving incense, tributes like pig heads and candy, and firecrackers. These activities show respect for nature and gratitude for the harvest, reinforcing the community's connection to their cultural heritage. The ritual acts as a psychological cue, lifting the spirits of the workers and unifying their efforts. It fosters a sense of community and collective purpose, essential for the intense labor period of tea production. The reverence shown during the ritual underscores the community's respect for nature and their ancestors, creating a profound connection between their cultural practices and their daily work.

### **3.4. After the shouting to the tea mountain, what is the ritual practices during the production process like**

"Men are required to shave their heads (in the Song Dynasty, is a taboo), the body hair and skin, by the parents. The female staff picks the tea, but wraps the head and

makes the tea with the men. Those involves in the production cuts all kinds of communications and contacts with the outside world” (KII 03).

Another interview reveals that:

“I think the constraints on his behavior are that Emperor Taizong of Song issued another edict, including saying that he had been justified in bald head before, but the edict said that he should wear a turban after studying tea, wash his hands and feet, and wear new clothes. In order to be clean and hygienic, pay attention to food safety. The most different in our tea making process is the step of tea pressing, there is no such tea pressing step in other places,light press water out, strong press the tea juice out,. Why tea leaves can be squeezed there is such a saying, that the Jian tea taste is thick, much thicker than the tea in other places, the taste is strong, and become lighter after squeezing” (IDI 33).

Also, KII with another participant reveals that:

“Strong pressing is the kind of pressing of pickled vegetable oil and tea oil. The press beds are all wood. The light press is like this, put the tea leaves wrapped in the middle and then use the lever to remove the tea juice. The reason, the wood press. Strong press is to use big wood, the middle of the outer edge with bamboo weaving, the middle of bamboo weaving a tea cake wrapped, wrapped with bamboo skins, the wood is here, and then twisted with the foot rope, the middle with wood keys sub mission and then hit layer by layer” (IDI 27).



(a) Pick fresh tea buds



(b) Clean tea buds



(c) Steam tea leaves



(d) Press tea leaves



(e) Grind tea into paste



(f) mold the tea cake



(g) bake tea cake



(h) BTT product

**Figure 4.** The processes practice of BTT making.

Another participant also reveals that:

“Grinding is also special. We usually grind for at least three days, eight hours a day. We usually have incubators now. If we don’t finish grinding today, we put them in the thermotank and continue grinding tomorrow. But it is better to countinue finish. Another one is that when the tea cake is taken out from the mould, it directly bake slightly before formal bake, which is good for shaping” (IDI 29).

Every process of BTT production (**Figure 4**) has strict requirements. The ritual practices were highly involving in BTT production in Song dynasty, and which also inherit and influence to modern times. Making BTT like making an artwork, which is so exquisite and ultimate, many people need to work several days, just comes out one cake of Beiyuan tribute tea, just about 30 g. People go to the tea mountain to pick the tender tea buds before sunrise. To avoid sweat pollution, people just used the fingernails to pick. At the same time, tea pickers carry jars with fresh spring water into which they place the tea leaves they pick to keep the leaves fresh enough and prevent them from oxidizing. When the sun comes out, the workers will stop picking and begin to go down the mountain. Reach the tea factory, workers clean and select the tea leaves again in order to get the best tea buds to make BTT (Shen, 2023).

Men involved in the tea production process during the Song Dynasty were required to shave their heads and shave whiskers, a practice that was generally considered a taboo at the time. Women, on the other hand, were responsible for picking the tea with their heads wrapped for cleanliness. In the traditional Confucian concept,

the hair and skin of the body comes from parents. Therefore, hair is precious, and both men and women grow their hair and do not pick it at will, except in special cases such as prisoners or the death of a parent. So these rules did not keep a long time and then instead of letting all men and women wrap their head by wearing a bandana or hat in Song dynasty. This shows a royal power politics and oppression of tea workers. And from another view point, this also reflects a strict production management and a strong emphasis on hygiene and purity, as personal cleanliness was of utmost importance in tea production. The shaving of heads & whiskers of men and wrapping of women's heads likely served practical purposes, ensuring that no hair or impurities would contaminate the tea, maintaining a high standard of cleanliness essential for producing high-quality tribute tea.

During the production season, all individuals involved were required to cut off communications with the outside world. This isolation ensured that the focus remained entirely on tea production, minimizing distractions and potential contamination, thereby maintaining the quality and sanctity of the Beiyuan Tribute Tea. The tradition of "Shouting Mountains", which involves ritualistic shouting to awaken the tea plants, did not originate in Beiyuan but was already practiced at the Guzhu Tribute Tea Plantation during the Tang Dynasty (Zheng, 2016). This practice was believed to stimulate faster growth of tea buds and to drive away pests and animals, aligning with ancient sacrificial ceremonies typically involving men. This ritual highlights the blend of agricultural practices and spiritual beliefs, reflecting a deep connection to nature and an understanding of its cycles. It also shows an integration of folklore, such as scaring away snakes and mountain ghosts, into practical agricultural methods.

Emperor Taizong of Song issued an edict mandating that tea producers maintain cleanliness by washing their hands and feet, wearing new clothes, and, if previously bald, covering their heads with a turban. This underscores the importance of ritual purity and hygiene in the production process, ensuring that the tea remained uncontaminated and of the highest quality for tribute purposes. The Beiyuan tea-making process included unique pressing methods. The light press removed water from the tea, while the strong press extracted tea juice, because this process step can make tea taste better as Jian tea with a thicker, stronger taste compared to other regions.

The reason for this is that the journey to the sacred world begins with willingness and humility for what lies ahead. According to Van Gennep's ritual theory, people will go to the liminality stage. Liminality means the quality of being in between two stages on the verge of transitioning to something new. Liminality is a time and space of disorientation and uncertainty. In ancient culture, liminality is called the sacred space. Here the actual production of BTT is done, it is the stage where the dragon and the phoenix tea cakes are produced which signifies strength, courage and unity. The last return stage allows the initiate to return to the ordinary profane (not relating to ritual) world with their gift and to share what was learned in the ritual world. Campbell refers to this as the return with the elixir (Vogler, 2017). This stage corresponds with the final stage of Beiyuan tribute tea production, it is where the workers present the final output which is the dragon and phoenix tea cakes which correspond with what Campbell refers to as the alixis. The tea cakes are presented to the emperors free of charge.

The pressing process involved wooden press beds and bamboo weavings, with tea cakes wrapped in bamboo leaves and pressed using a wooden lever mechanism. The differentiation between light and strong presses shows an advanced understanding of tea processing, aimed at enhancing the flavor and quality of the tea. The use of natural materials like wood and bamboo reflects traditional craftsmanship and sustainable practices. The ritual practices of Beiyuan tribute tea production reflect a deep intertwining of cultural, spiritual, and practical elements. Gender-specific roles and hygiene practices ensured the purity and quality of the tea, while rituals like “Shouting Mountains” connected agricultural activities with spiritual beliefs. Imperial edicts further reinforced the importance of cleanliness and ritual observance. Unique tea grinding and pressing techniques highlight the advanced and specialized nature of Beiyuan tea production. Together, these practices exemplify the meticulous and culturally rich process behind the esteemed Beiyuan Tribute Tea.

### **3.5. What are the ritual practices after the production process like**

“There is a ceremony before the tribute. After the Beiyuan tea is made, it is uniformly delivered to the tribute tea hall of the transport secretary. The officials who lived there had to go there, put some labels on it, and there was a ceremony, which was reflected in a poem. Then the tea is counted and the tribute is taken away. In “worship tea” poem after the title, poet Hua Yue said: “The transport department will transport Beiyuan tribute tea to the Capital, and many local officials to pray to tribute tea before departure.” In the Song dynasty, Fujian provincial administrative region called road transport department which set up in the Jianzhou state, the department of government in the south side of Huanghua mountain on the afterpulse, that is, this city hospital area. In the government office (Yamen in Chinese) “in the east of West door, there is the tribute hall, that is, the place to worship royal tea” (Ming “Jianning House Records, Vol. 20, historic sites”). That is to say, the hall was built in the Yamen by transshipment, and the tea of Beiyuan Imperial Tea Garden was stored here after it was made. Before sending the tea to capital Lin’an, local officials such as the Fujian directors would hold a ceremony to worship the imperial tea in the Xiugong Hall” (KII 14).

Another interview reveals that:

“In the spring, Beiyuan imperial tea production is completed. At this time, ships can be prepared to transport the imperial tea to the capital Lin’an, and the merits will be reported to the court. The tea sticks mashed the cakes and then ground them into fine powder. The foam of the tea soup was like piles of snow. The tea bud is shaped like a gun and stretched out like a fluttering flag. The bamboo box containing the tea is beautifully made and its color is the green of parrot’s hair. Then it was labeled, covered with a special seal carved from elephant’s eye stone, and sealed with a seal. Cao and other local officials came to Xiugong Hall to hold a ceremony to worship imperial tea, praying that the transport could fly like a crane and smoothly send the imperial tea to Lin’an Palace” (IDI 38).

“In the Song Dynasty, the reason why Beiyuan tribute tea became a tribute is because of Cha Baixi partly. If you read his (Emperor Hui Zong) poems about the tea party, just few poems mentioned the tea drinking, most time he was playing the tea.



Through the tea party he got pleasure from cultural exchanges with his ministers. Emperor Hui Zong is an artist. He can get happiness from it.”

“It is not because it is a tribute that it has value, but because it can satisfy the spiritual needs of the common people, which is its greatest value of existence. For contemporary people, it (Dian Cha & Cha Baixi) is a leisure and entertainment demand that can satisfy the common people” (IDI 12).

Interview with another participant reveals that:

“Kai She is the process of weeding and fertilizing spring tea after the first round of harvesting, known as Kai She. There is a ceremony roughly in May and June in Chinese calendar, when local leaders take the lead in weeding the fields. Now the Kai She is to build a green ecological tea garden, the current use is a cultural symbol, has entered the official property” (IDI 17).

The post-production rituals of Beiyuan tribute tea encompass a rich tapestry of cultural, spiritual, and agricultural practices. In the spring, after completing the production of Beiyuan Tribute Tea, it is first sent to the local Minister of Transportation’s Tribute Tea Hall, where officials, including local leaders, attend a ceremony in which the tea is labeled, counted, and prepared for shipment. The tea is carefully prepared, ground into a fine powder, and then packed in bamboo boxes. Local officials hold a ceremony to pray for the safe transportation of the tea and seal the box with a special seal. Ships were then prepared to transport the tea to the imperial palace in the capital city of Lin’an. These ceremonies reflect the high value placed on the tea and the complex process involved in ensuring its quality and safe transportation, reinforcing the prestige of Beiyuan Tribute Tea. This process is documented in historical records and poetry, emphasizing the ritual significance of offering tribute tea to the imperial court. The tribute tea ceremony emphasizes the formal and ceremonial aspects of tea production, its importance in the imperial tradition, and the meticulous care taken in preparing the tea for presentation to the court.

Beiyuan tribute tea must be sent to court before Chinese Memorial Day, a big and important festival in ancient China. Usually, on this day, the palace will hold a holy ancestor worship ceremony, followed by a grand banquet. The new tea was used to be sacrificial offerings in the ancestor worship ceremony. In the Qing Ming banquet, the emperor would entertain his ministers with new tribute tea to show his imperial favor. People how to enjoy the tea? Through Dian Cha (**Figure 5**) in the Song Dynasty, people develop tea drinking to the aesthetic height of elegant play, and can feel relaxed and enjoyment (Xu, 2011). When BTT arrives at the imperial palace, people would like to make a tea gathering and enjoy it in the form of “Dian Cha”. Usually, people would prepare Mr. Twelve which are 12 kinds of teasetts to serve the tea during the process of Dian Cha. People think highly of Mr. Twelve, so every tea ware owns its name and official post. The Dian Cha process (**Figure 6**): First, the tea cake is crushed into tea powder and placed in a black tea bowl called “Jian Zhan” which is also produced in Jianzhou and also a tribute. Then, hot water is poured from a teapot while using a tool (tea whisk or tea spoon) to whisk the tea repeatedly, until creating a rich layer of foam on the surface tea soup, after that it is ready to be sipped. This tea art form, is known as “Dian Cha” (Zheng, 2022). However, literati often do not drink it directly. They prefer to write or paint on the surface of tea soup using clear water or

tea powder. What's more, they like to compete with each other, which is also known as "Fen Cha", "Dou Cha", or "Water painting", like one tea game. Dian Cha, is less about drinking tea and more about completing an artistic creation, fully expressing the romance of literati. People's experiences with food are both individual and social, which becoming a form of cultural capital. Upper-class culture prioritizes form, their foodways valorize difficult and time-consuming dishes (Amye, 2023). Tribute tea became a symbol of class, through special processing and dragon pattern to highlight its privilege, coupled with the worship of tea has become more sacred, tea has once again become a representative of the right. The emperor then used a set of ceremonies to entertain the ministers, and BTT was distributed to the ministers for their enjoyment. Tea flowed between the emperor and the ministers, and became a vehicle to show the royal favor and consolidate the relationship between the monarch and the ministers. In history, Dian Cha, mainly popular among nobles and literati, profoundly influenced Japanese tea ceremony. While nowadays, Dian Cha is becoming a public leisure literary activities in Jianzhou and other cities in China.



**Figure 5.** Dian Cha demonstration by Wang Jinzhen who is a DianCha inheritor.



**(a)** Cob the tea cake



**(b)** Grind the tea





(c) Mill tea into powder



(d) Screen tea power



(e) Put tea powder into tea bowl



(f) Fill water into tea bowl



(g) Whisk the tea soup



(h) The final tea soup



(i) FenCha tea paintings

**Figure 6.** The Dian Cha processes.

Note: Pictures (a) to (h) provided by Wang Jinzhen, picture (i) provided by Han Jiming and Zhang Zhifeng.

Another interview reveals that:

“Zhang Tinghui, the tea god, was indeed a person. After his death, an ancestral hall was regarded as a family temple. It was worshipped by his relatives at first, followed by neighbors, and then expanded and more and more people went to worship it. According to the county records and folklore, the people who came to worship after the establishment of the tea temple often sought to be efficient, leading to the expanding influence of the tea temple. When the incense prospered, the government was alarmed, and the government gave him an official name and sealed it after his death. The people have always worshipped him. Later, perhaps because of the war or special reasons, the idol of tea was also destroyed, and the incense was weakened. It was not until modern times that people restored it. In the temple of Fengyi (Yi), local folklorists dug it up, erected a statue of the tea god next to it, and held a ceremony. On the birthday of the tea God every year, people would go to worship him and donate incense money. There are administrators in the temple who will organize everyone to have a meal. The temple has a very famous set of horn seals for administration. The administration of the temple was in turn the responsibility of the folk villages. Tea people also donate money for repairs and maintenance” (KII 13).

Another interview reveals that:

“Tea God Festival: On August 8 every year, the producers will insist on celebrating the birth of the tea God, which has not been interrupted since ancient times. In the past, there was a small family temple—Fengyi temple, which was dug out by local folklorists to erect an image of the tea God next to it, and held a ceremony. On the birthday of the tea God every year, people would go to worship and donate incense money. There were administrators in the temple who would organize everyone to have a meal. The temple has a very famous set of horns for administration. The administration of the temple was in turn the responsibility of the folk villages. Tea people also donate money for repairs and maintenance. According to folklore, after the establishment of the tea temple, the people who came to worship often sought miracles and satisfy their desires, which led to the increasing influence of the tea temple” (IDI 01).

Celebrated on 8 August each year, the Tea God Festival honors the birth of the tea god, a tradition that has persisted since ancient times. This festival involves worship at the Fengyi Temple, where an image of the tea god is erected. People participate by donating incense money and joining communal meals organized by temple administrators. The administration of the temple is shared among local villages, and tea producers contribute financially to the temple’s maintenance. This practice highlights the deep-rooted cultural and spiritual significance of tea production in Jianzhou, with the community collectively participating in rituals that honor their heritage and express gratitude for a successful harvest. Zhang Tinghui, revered as the tea god, was initially worshipped by his relatives and neighbors, and eventually by a wider community. His temple became a significant site of pilgrimage, with people seeking miracles and the temple gaining increasing influence. Despite periods of decline due to war or other disruptions, the temple was restored in modern times, and the annual worship practices were revived.

This historical context underscores the enduring cultural importance of tea production in Jianzhou and the community’s efforts to preserve and restore their

heritage. Following the first round of tea harvesting, the Kai She ceremony involves weeding and fertilizing the fields. Local leaders lead this process, usually conducted in May and June in Chinese calendar which is normally in hot midsummer, symbolizing community involvement and the continuous care for the tea plantations. This ceremony represents the cyclical nature of agricultural work and the community's collective responsibility in maintaining the health and productivity of the tea plants. After the Beiyuan tea is produced, it is delivered to the tribute tea hall of the transport secretary. Officials, including local leaders, participate in a ceremony where the tea is labeled, counted, and prepared for transportation. This process is documented in historical records and poems, emphasizing the ceremonial significance of offering tribute tea to the court. The tribute tea ceremony highlights the formal and ritualistic aspects of tea production, underscoring its importance in imperial traditions and the meticulous care taken in preparing the tea for presentation to the court.

#### **4. Discussion of findings**

The production of Beiyuan tribute tea is initiated by a culturally significant ritual known as “Opening the Tea Mountain” or “Shouting to the Tea Mountain”. This process is not merely agricultural but also deeply embedded in the social and spiritual fabric of the local community. “Opening the Tea Mountain” and “Shouting to the Tea Mountain” are traditional rituals marking the start of the tea production season. People's offerings to the gods are called ‘the gift theory’ by Taylor, in which the purpose of giving is to give back. People establish the connection between human beings and the gods through shouting, and worship the gods through gifts in the hope of obtaining the blessing and guidance of the gods. This kind of dependence reflects human beings' reverence and reliance on the power of nature, and is also a kind of identification with the natural order and social order. In agrarian societies, people maintain harmony between humans, gods and the natural world through agriculture and rituals (Zhang, 2009). These activities are integral to the tea culture in Jianzhou and serve several purposes, including: The ritual helps boost morale among the workers, ensuring they enter the tea-making season with energy and enthusiasm. It fosters a sense of unity and cooperation, essential for the labor-intensive tea production process.

During the reign of the Chinese emperors, the dragon was regarded as a symbol of supremacy and the phoenix as a symbol of nobility and beauty, both representing power and majesty. These two divine beasts had the power to communicate with heaven and earth, bringing auspiciousness and peace to the world. Therefore, as agent for the gods, the emperor was often called the dragon and the empress was called the phoenix, meaning that they were endowed with dominion and inviolable status. The dragon and phoenix motifs on Beiyuan Tribute Tea therefore symbolise power and class, and BTT is very valuable. Tea flowed from Beiyuan in Jianzhou to the imperial palace, and from the lower classes to the upper classes. In the process of paying and receiving tribute, BTT production requires community participation, and the success or failure of tea production is related to the honour or disgrace of the whole; this event enhances cultural identity and promotes community cohesion. By fulfilling the obligation to pay tribute, the tribute payer demonstrates respect for authority, obtains

resource support and protection from superiors, and wins his own survival and development; while the royal recipients, by accepting the tribute, are not only obtaining material benefits, but also preserving their own identities and reinforcing the values of the culture to which they belong, and this flow of goods fixes the social order under certain circumstances. These ceremonies helped to maintain the relationship between the rulers and the ruled and to promote stability and harmony in the social order.

According to Zhao et al. (2022), such rituals are critical in creating a cooperative work environment, which is crucial for the intensive labor required in tea production. During the ritual, participants pray with a sense of longing and thanksgiving. This act is a plea for spiritual solace and reflects the community's reverence for nature and their ancestors. The ritual includes offerings such as incense, tributes (e.g., pig heads, candy), and firecrackers to honor the tea gods and ancestors. This aligns with findings by Li and Yang (2023) who highlight the importance of spiritual and communal practices in traditional agricultural societies. Shouting to the Tea Mountain is believed to wake up the tea trees from their hibernation, encouraging them to sprout and germinate, thus ensuring a good harvest. This practice aligns with the natural growth cycle of tea plants and typically occurs around the rainy season. As Wang (2023) notes, these practices are synchronized with natural cycles to maximize agricultural yield. The ritual symbolizes good luck for the year's crops and tea harvest. Historically, it also served to drive away pests like birds, snakes, and insects from the tea fields. The ritual's deeper significance includes elements of sacrifice and a strong sense of community and cultural identity. This is supported by Zhou (2022), who emphasizes the symbolic and practical functions of traditional rituals in agricultural communities (Zhou et al., 2022).

The tea-making process involves both permanent tea makers and temporary workers from the local community, creating a cultural buffer where normal life continues even during production. This dynamic ensures that the tea-making process is deeply rooted in the community's social fabric. As highlighted by the local studies, community participation is crucial for the successful execution of these labor-intensive tasks (Zhao et al., 2022). The ritual typically takes place during the hibernation period of the tea plants, around the spring season, which aligns with the natural growth cycle of the tea buds. Participants shout phrases like "Tea is sprouting" or "picking tea!" to awaken the plants. A small amount of tea is picked on the day of shouting, followed by the main spring tea harvesting season. The ritual combined agricultural practices with spiritual beliefs, reflecting a deep connection to nature and an understanding of its cycles (Yang, 2013).

During the Song Dynasty, the tea production process at Beiyuan involved strict hygiene practices and clearly defined gender roles to ensure the quality of the tribute tea. Men were required to shave their heads, a practice generally considered taboo at the time, reflecting a strong emphasis on cleanliness and purity. This measure ensured that no hair would contaminate the tea, highlighting the meticulous standards of hygiene essential for producing high-quality tribute tea (Benn, 2002; Schafer, 2011). The shaving of heads among male workers served both practical and symbolic purposes. It minimized the risk of hair contaminating the tea and underscored the ritual purity expected in tribute tea production. Women, responsible for picking the tea and

assisting in the tea-making process, wrapped their heads in cloths. This practice further ensured that no impurities would affect the tea, maintaining high standards of cleanliness (Benn, 2002). During the production season, all individuals involved were required to cut off communications with the outside world. This isolation was crucial for maintaining focus on tea production, minimizing distractions, and preventing potential contamination. Such measures ensured the quality and sanctity of Beiyuan Tribute Tea, reflecting the importance placed on the meticulous production process (Zhou, 2022).

The Beiyuan tea-making process included unique pressing and grinding methods. The press extracted tea juice and water, because Jian tea holding a thicker, stronger taste compared to other regions, this step can make tea soup taste better. The pressing process involved wooden press beds and bamboo weavings, with tea cakes wrapped in bamboo leaves and pressed using a heavy wood or a lever mechanism. This differentiation between light and strong presses demonstrates an advanced understanding of tea processing aimed at enhancing the flavor and quality of the tea (Schafer, 2011). The use of natural materials like wood and bamboo in the pressing process reflects traditional craftsmanship and sustainable practices. The grind make tea leaves into fine and smooth paste, which can make tea taste more smooth and better. These methods not only contributed to the distinctive flavor of Beiyuan tribute tea but also showcased the integration of cultural and practical elements in the tea production process (Schafer, 2011). The ritual practices of Beiyuan tribute tea production reflect a deep intertwining of cultural, spiritual, and practical elements.

The practice of making BTT involves picking fresh tea buds and using unique processes of grinding and pressing to perfect the quality of the tea taste. Expensive and sophisticated molds were used to shape the tea into exquisite tea cakes, which were then presented in beautiful containers to make them look noble. The unique worship tea ceremony before being transported to the palace also showed the importance and excellence of BTT. The cultural capital held by craftsmen often served the relationship of higher social hierarchy (Zhu, 2009), but also invariably participated in the shaping of tea culture, promoting the development of tea-making skills and tea culture in China. And the craftsmanship of excellence is a valuable spiritual heritage. worship tea.

The Tea God Festival, celebrated on August 8 each year, honors the birth of the tea god, a tradition deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices of Jianou. This festival involves worship at the Fengyi Temple, where an image of the tea god is erected. The community participates by donating incense money and joining communal meals organized by temple administrators. The administration of the temple is shared among local villages, and tea producers contribute financially to its maintenance. This practice underscores the significant cultural and spiritual role of tea production in Jianzhou, with collective participation in rituals that honor heritage and express gratitude for a successful harvest (Qin, 2017). Zhang Tinghui, revered as the tea god, was initially worshipped by his relatives and neighbors, eventually gaining broader recognition. His temple became a significant pilgrimage site, with people seeking miracles and the temple's influence growing over time. Despite periods of decline due to war or other disruptions, the temple was restored in modern times, and the annual worship practices were revived. This historical context underscores the

enduring cultural importance of tea production in Jianou and the community's efforts to preserve and restore their heritage (Chen, 2015). Following the first round of tea harvesting, the Kai She ceremony involves weeding and fertilizing the fields. Local leaders lead this process, typically conducted in May and June in Chinese calendar, symbolizing community involvement and continuous care for the tea plantations. This ceremony represents the cyclical nature of agricultural work and the community's collective responsibility in maintaining the health and productivity of the tea plants (Yang, 2013). After the Beiyuan tea is produced, it is delivered to the tribute tea hall of the transport secretary. Officials, including local leaders, participate in a ceremony where the tea is labeled, counted, and prepared for transportation. This process is documented in historical records and poems, emphasizing the ceremonial significance of offering tribute tea to the court. The tribute tea ceremony highlights the formal and ritualistic aspects of tea production, underscoring its importance in imperial traditions and the meticulous care taken in preparing the tea for presentation to the court (Schafer, 2011). In the spring, upon completing the Beiyuan imperial tea production, ships are prepared to transport the tea to the capital, Lin'an. The tea is meticulously prepared, ground into fine powder, and packed in bamboo boxes. Local officials hold a ceremony to pray for the safe transport of the tea, sealing the boxes with a special seal. These rituals reflect the high value placed on the tea and the intricate processes involved in ensuring its quality and safe delivery, reinforcing the prestige of Beiyuan tribute tea (Chen, 2015; Qin, 2017).

## **5. Conclusion**

The BTT production process is a rite of passage, and the shouting to the tea mountain like the separation passage, after the ritual, workers leave the normal life and entrance liminal phase, a busy tea making period. During the liminal passage, they enter the separated royal tea plantation and tea factory to produce the BTT with a complex state of mind, nervous, serious, excited, worried. When they finish the BTT production and send BTT to the palace, workers return to normal life again, this is the aggregation passage. In this passage, as the BTT's enjoyment by high class and praise from the royal family, workers also can be deeply honored and have a good mood, their life change better, as in order to maintain these good state they do the Kai She ritual and worship the tea god ceremony further.

The production of Beiyuan tribute tea is not merely an agricultural activity but a complex ritual deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of Jianzhou. People communicated with God through the Shouting Mountain ritual, and the emperor, who called himself the True Dragon, manifested his sanctity and authority through the use of Beiyuan Tribute Tea with dragon and phoenix designs, which was also used to communicate with the gods and people. In the sacred process of making and offering Beiyuan tribute tea, people shape BTT as an imaginary sacred symbol, the ritual process that is useful to strengthen community cohesion, group identity, satisfies people's psychological comfort, and maintains the stability of man and nature, man and society.

The initiation ritual "Shouting to the Tea Mountain" plays a critical role in fostering unity, boosting morale, and ensuring spiritual connection within the

community. This ritual is essential in maintaining the community's reverence for nature and their ancestors, integrating practical agricultural methods with spiritual practices to ensure a successful harvest. The emphasis on hygiene and gender-specific roles during the Song Dynasty, including head shaving for men and head wrapping for women, underscores the meticulous standards maintained to produce high-quality tribute tea. Additionally, the isolation of tea producers during the production season highlights the lengths taken to preserve the purity and focus required for this esteemed tea. The Tea God Festival and related worship practices illustrate the deep cultural significance and communal participation in honoring the tea god and maintaining the heritage of tea production. Ceremonies like the Kai She further emphasize community involvement and the cyclical care of tea plantations. The elaborate and ritualistic process of preparing and transporting the Beiyuan tea for imperial tribute showcases the intricate blend of cultural, spiritual, and practical elements that define the production of this esteemed tea.

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the ritualistic practices involved in the production of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) in Jianzhou, Fujian, China. It delineates how BTT production transcends mere agricultural activity, functioning instead as a profound cultural and spiritual ritual deeply ingrained in the community's social fabric. The revival of these traditional ritual practices in contemporary times is examined, offering insights into cultural continuity and adaptation within modern tea culture practices. Overall, the article underscores the multifaceted impact of BTT production rituals on cultural heritage, social stability, and economic development, illustrating their enduring significance in both historical and present-day contexts. What's more, the BTT case also enriches the casebase of ritual study.

## **6. Limitation of study**

This study investigated the ritual practices in Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) production, focusing on the before-production, production and after-production rituals. The study was limited to officials of some selected royal factories in Jianzhou, Fujian Province, China. In this way it might be hard to make any more extensive speculation from the discoveries of the examination. Therefore, it may be difficult to make any wider generalization from the findings of the study. The research employed a case study approach within a qualitative methodology framework, which involves an in-depth examination of specific events, settings, or groups. Case studies are designed to provide detailed insights about the particular group or matter under study within its unique context and do not aim to establish universally applicable truths (Dabai & Lyndon, 2024; A).

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