

Value and Sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) Production in Fujian, China

Murong Zheng^{1,2}, Novel Lyndon^{1*}, Azlina Abdullah¹, Usman Ibrahim Dabai¹

¹Centre for Research in Development, Social and Environment, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

²Faculty of Tea and Food, Wuyi University, Wuyishan, Fujian 354300, China

Email: novel@ukm.edu.my, murongtea@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the value and sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) production in Fujian, China. The study uses a qualitative approach focusing on the perspectives of key stakeholders like tea producers, government officials, historians, and consumers. By employing purposive sampling, participants with deep knowledge of BTT were selected, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. These methods provided detailed insights into the practices, challenges, and cultural significance of BTT production. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to the value and sustainability of BTT, helping to understand the balance between cultural preservation and economic viability. The sustainability of BTT production is challenged by high labor costs due to its traditional, labor-intensive methods, and the limited adoption of mechanization. This study explores the dual objectives of enhancing BTT's cultural and economic value by balancing the preservation of traditional methods with the need for economic viability. It suggests leveraging BTT's cultural heritage through experiential tourism and integrating innovative practices that maintain its authenticity and cultural integrity. By focusing on sustainable development that incorporates cultural tourism and non-invasive engagement methods, BTT can continue to be a valuable part of China's intangible and agriculture cultural heritage while adapting to modern market dynamics.

Keywords: Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT), Cultural heritage, Economic value, Production, Sustainability

Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) belonged to Jian Tea, which was a historical famous tea produced in Jian'an (Jian'an was the state seat of Jianzhou state, located in present-day Jian'ou County, Nanping City, Fujian province). It had been a tradition down the ages to compress tea leaves into cakes for storage. Beiyuan Tribute Tea began in the Tang Dynasty, flourished in the Song Dynasty, declined in the Ming Dynasty, and had continued to pay tribute for 458 years, which is the longest tribute time in the history of China's

famous tea (Kessler, 2012). In the five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (Between the Tang and Song Dynasty, there were many small Kingdoms in China, 5 Kingdoms in the North and 10 Kingdoms in the South), there was a big landlord named Zhang Tinghui in Jianzhou, who planted tea for 30 kilometers in Phoenix Mountain of Jian'an county, which was quite spectacular, and the quality of the tea was so good that it was known far and wide. The king of Min at that time also liked tea and coveted the tea plantation for a long time.

During 933-934 AD, Zhang Tinghui presented the tea garden at the foot of Fenghuang Mountain to the King of Min, naming it "Beiyuan", and the tea factory of "Beiyuan Imperial Baking", and the teas produced in the area have been famous ever since (Zheng,2006). What's more, Zhang Tinghui is respected as "Tea God" in the local area by offsprings.

Tea trees are planted in mountains, and tea produced in the rural area but consume in the urban area. The tea product flows from the rural to the urban, while the wealth flowing from the urban to the rural. The historical famous tea with rich cultural meanings is different from the new created tea, which can catch more people's eyes and sell a better price. When people consuming tea, they unconsciously consume culture, spread culture and protect culture. For people who produce tea such as BTT workers, the popularity of tea products not only improves their economic income, but also makes them more willing to protect and inherit traditional tea handmaking skills and enhance their confidence in this heritage. So, the rural area can maintain the stability of the original social community and take care of their families, escape going out to work and leaving their hometown. Tea Cultural Heritage is a crucial socioeconomic resource which is good for the society sustainability. Tea is grown in over 32 countries, covering more than 2.5 million hectares globally. In 2017, China exported 240.68 million kilograms of tea, and India exported 203.86 million kilograms, contributing to 12.9% of the world's total tea export of 1,578.56 million kilograms. By 2022, China's tea exports increased significantly to 375,300 tons. Major importers of Chinese tea in 2022 included Morocco, Uzbekistan, Ghana, Russia, Senegal, the United States, Mauritania, Hong Kong, Algeria, and Cameroon (Rasenko, 2018).

Tea has been found to have numerous health benefits, including anti-cancer properties in various types of cancers, such as lung, pancreatic, liver, breast, stomach, duodenum,

colon, and skin cancers (Mitra & Khandelwal, 2017). It also aids in the metabolism of xenobiotic substances and helps manage coronary heart disease, atherosclerosis, high blood pressure, and cholesterol. Additionally, tea positively affects insulin sensitivity, fatty acid oxidation, glucose metabolism, and prevents aging and neurodamage. Green tea polyphenols protect heart tissue from oxidative damage and damage caused by hypoxia or reoxygenation (Bordoni et al., 2002). Black tea has been shown to reduce lung damage from cigarette smoke in animal studies (Banerjee et al., 2007). Tea polyphenols also help in treating muscular dystrophy by increasing glutathione levels in cells (Dorchies et al., 2009). Furthermore, tea has been found to protect renal cells from cyclosporine-induced toxicity by reducing peroxidative content and restoring antioxidant enzymes, primarily by regulating the Renin-Angiotensin-Aldosterone System (RAAS) (Ryu et al., 2010). According to Das and Mishra's (2020) value chain analysis of the tea industry, the highest value addition occurs at the industry level where processors bear costs for electricity, firewood, machine repairs, maintenance, taxes, wages, packaging, and other logistical expenses. This applies to most types of tea, including white, yellow, green, oolong, and black teas. However, the production of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BBT) differs as it is a state-owned and produced tea, with the government covering all production costs, including worker salaries. This unique arrangement is due to BBT's status as a special kind of tea historically owned by the state. However, after the collapse of the Song Dynasty, Beiyuan Tribute Tea production declined, and in recent times, it has been produced by private individuals.

The tea industry's sustainability is threatened by low prices, which negatively impact the livelihoods and working conditions of small-scale farmers and plantation workers in tea-producing countries. A few multinational companies control most of the tea trade, benefiting from stable retail prices. However,

Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) is an exception as it is expensive and primarily consumed by the elite. Workers in the tea industry often face poor conditions, low pay, unstable employment, discrimination, and inadequate access to basic needs. Trade unions are generally ineffective or non-existent, leaving workers unable to improve their circumstances. Smallholder producers struggle with prices that often do not cover production costs, and the industry significantly impacts the environment, reducing biodiversity. With the recent private production of BTT, its workers may now face similar challenges as those in other tea sectors. Atupola and Gunarathne (2023) argue that the tea industry significantly impacts the environment, particularly through deforestation and biodiversity loss. Converting high-biodiversity areas, such as forests, into tea plantations leads to a noticeable reduction in biodiversity. In countries like Kenya, Sri Lanka, Malawi, and India, logging for firewood used in tea preparation has caused substantial deforestation and habitat modification. Additionally, tea processing is energy-intensive, often exacerbated by outdated and inefficient equipment. Overuse of pesticides in countries such as Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and India also harm both local and global ecosystems.

To address the challenges of tea sustainability, Kumarihami et al. (2018) proposed five key strategies: research and technological innovation, value addition and product diversification, promotion of social networking services, tea tourism, and organic tea production. Against this background, the study sought to analyse the value and sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea production in Fujian province of China.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methodology used in the study, covering the following sections: study location, research design, study population, data collection

methods, data analysis methods and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the value and sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) production in Fujian, China. The qualitative approach is suitable for understanding the complex social, cultural, and economic dynamics involved in BTT production, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices (Lyndon, et al., 2013). By employing qualitative methods, the study sought to capture the nuanced perspectives of various stakeholders involved in BTT production, including tea producers, government officials, historians, and consumers.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in Fujian Province, China, specifically focusing on areas known for the production of Beiyuan Tribute Tea. Fujian is a historical and cultural hub for BTT production, offering a rich context for studying the value and sustainability of this traditional tea. Lyndon & Dabai (2024) observed that the setting provides access to key stakeholders and a variety of sites. This includes tea plantations, processing factories, and markets.

Sampling Strategy

Sarmila, et al. (2015) observed that a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who have in-depth knowledge and experience related to BTT production. This includes: Owners and workers of state-owned and privately owned tea plantations involved in BTT production. Representatives from local government bodies responsible for agricultural policies and heritage conservation. Individuals with expertise in the history and cultural significance of Beiyuan Tribute Tea. Consumers who value BTT for its cultural heritage and retailers who specialize in selling this tea. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where data

collection continues until no new themes or insights were emerging from the interviews.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using the following qualitative methods: In-depth interviews were conducted with tea producers, government officials, historians, cultural experts, and consumers. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to explore participants' views on the value, sustainability, cultural significance, and challenges associated with BTT production. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allows for flexibility in exploring emerging themes (Novel, et al., 2011). The researcher engaged in participant observation at various sites, including tea plantations, processing facilities, and markets. This method provides firsthand insights into the practices, rituals, and daily activities involved in BTT production. Observations focused on sustainable practices, production techniques, and the socio-economic environment of tea production. Historical documents, government reports, academic articles, and other relevant literature on BTT were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical and cultural context of tea production in Fujian.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Observational notes and reflections were compiled into field notes. Transcripts and field notes were systematically coded using a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Initial codes were generated based on the research questions, while new codes were added as themes emerge from the data (Zaima, et al., 2013). Codes were grouped into themes that represent patterns in the data. Themes were refined and categorized to capture the value and sustainability of BTT production. Thematic findings were interpreted in the context of the broader literature on tea production, sustainability, and cultural heritage. Interpretations aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing BTT production in Fujian.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms in the research report. Additionally, all data were securely stored and only accessible to the researcher.

Limitations

The study is limited to Fujian Province and may not fully represent the experiences of BTT producers in other regions. Additionally, qualitative research relies on subjective interpretations, which may introduce researcher bias. To mitigate this, data triangulation was employed by using multiple data sources and methods to validate findings. By employing this qualitative research methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the value and sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea production in Fujian, China, contributing valuable insights to the fields of cultural heritage, agricultural sustainability, and tea production.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This Chapter presents and analyzes the data obtained from the field work. The data were presented in a narrative manner through verbatim quotations and based on the objectives and research questions. The transcribed interviews were discussed and analyzed on the basis of themes and sub-themes

Meaning of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT)

In your own opinion, what do you know about BTT?

“Beiyuan is a place name, has always been considered to be a place name, this idea is relatively recognized. Beijing Academy of Sciences Shen Dongmei teacher his paper is to write Beiyuan three ways of saying it, one is Beiyuan, there is a Beiyuan ambassador, and

then he came to this place to supervise the production of this tea, Beiyuan tea came like this. It is related to this Beiyuan governor, and later it became a place name, and this place name is behind" (IDI 17).

Another interview also reveals that:

"Beiyuan tribute tea, Beiyuan royal tea must be different, the time of tribute tea is longer, that is, the year is longer, the Northern Song Dynasty should start from the five dynasties as tribute tea, Ming Dynasty we are still doing tribute tea. The amount of tribute tea was very large, and the whole court officials could also enjoy it. However, the imperial tea lasted only a short time, as it was reserved for the emperor" (IDI 33).

Another participant reveals the following:

"The names should have auspicious meanings, should be to cater to the emperor's preferences, or there may be cases where the emperor himself named the names. In ancient times, the names of tea cakes with strict hierarchy should have gone through strict political review, and there were strict rites and music systems in ancient times. Phoenixes and dragons and other patterns should be used with caution. The shapes and sizes should have specific meanings and intentions, which are closely related to traditional Chinese culture" (IDI 12).

The first excerpt discusses the origin of the name "Beiyuan," indicating that it is both a place name and a term associated with tea production. According to the interviewee, the name "Beiyuan" evolved from being a geographical location to being linked with a governor (Beiyuan ambassador) who supervised the tea production. This evolution in terminology suggests that the tea's identity is closely tied to its geographic and administrative origins, reflecting the historical importance of governance and locality in tea production. The second excerpt distinguishes between "Beiyuan Tribute Tea" and "Beiyuan Royal Tea" (imperial tea). Tribute tea was produced over a long period, starting in the Five Dynasties period and

continuing into the Ming Dynasty, indicating its enduring value and cultural importance. It was produced in large quantities and was accessible to court officials, signifying its role in the broader social and political context of the time. In contrast, imperial tea was reserved solely for the emperor and was produced for a much shorter duration. This differentiation highlights the hierarchical nature of tea consumption in ancient China, where certain teas were reserved for specific ranks within society. The third excerpt emphasizes the cultural and symbolic aspects of Beiyuan Tribute Tea. The naming of tea and the design of tea cakes were not arbitrary; they were carefully considered to align with the emperor's preferences and to adhere to strict political and cultural norms. The use of auspicious names, specific patterns like phoenixes and dragons, and particular shapes and sizes reflect the deep connection between tea production and traditional Chinese culture. This suggests that Beiyuan Tribute Tea was not merely a beverage but a cultural artifact that conveyed meanings of prosperity, hierarchy, and respect for tradition. These excerpts provide a comprehensive understanding of Beiyuan Tribute Tea's value and sustainability, emphasizing its historical, cultural, and social significance in Chinese society. The tea's production and consumption were closely intertwined with political structures, cultural practices, and social hierarchies, making it a vital part of China's cultural heritage.

Value and Sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea Production

What do you think are the value and sustainability of BTT?

"How to increase its use-value and, in the case of cultural value, realize its commercial value. Think about how to reduce his production cost, the current problem is that the human cost is too high in the production process, the mechanical replaceable rate is too low. If the production cost can be reduced under the premise of the market is still considerable, because the experience is still strong, but if the

mechanical mass production will lose its intangible cultural value. Sustainable development can be achieved by providing cultural travel experience and non-body inspection" (IDI 29).

"The modern attributes of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (Dragon Dumpling and Phoenix Cake and other researched and pasted teas) have also changed. One attribute is intangible cultural heritage, and one attribute is a cultural symbol of history." (IDI 41)

"Song people's high level of BTT production technology is a very good reference for our contemporary tea processing . For example, I have applied the ancient tea repeated baking process in tea production nowadays . I think it is a reference value in improve the current tea science and technology for us." (IDI 33)

"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 (Cha Baixi) is a leisure and entertainment demand that can satisfy the common people.(IDI 12)

The interviewee points out the need to enhance the use-value of BTT while realizing its commercial potential. This dual focus suggests that BTT has inherent qualities that could be leveraged for both cultural enrichment and economic gain. The use-value of BTT likely refers to its cultural, historical, and sensory attributes that make it unique and desirable, especially within the context of traditional Chinese culture. The commercial value, on the other hand, relates to its potential as a marketable product that can generate revenue. The challenge lies in balancing these two aspects—maintaining its traditional value while exploring avenues for profitable commercialization.

The interviewee identifies high production costs as a significant issue, particularly due to the labor-intensive nature of BTT production. The

mention of "the human cost is too high" suggests that much of the tea production process is still done manually, which is both costly and time-consuming. Additionally, the "mechanical replaceable rate is too low" implies that there is limited use of automation in the production of BTT. This reflects a tension between maintaining the artisanal nature of BTT, which is part of its cultural heritage, and the need to reduce costs through mechanization. The interviewee hints at a dilemma: if BTT were to adopt more mechanical mass production methods, it could undermine its intangible cultural value, which is deeply tied to traditional, manual methods of production.

The interviewee suggests that reducing production costs while maintaining market demand could enhance the sustainability of BTT. However, they caution against the over-mechanization of the production process, as it could diminish the tea's cultural value. This reflects a broader concern in sustainable development: how to modernize and scale up production without losing the unique qualities that define a traditional product. For BTT, sustainability involves not just economic viability but also the preservation of cultural practices and values.

The interviewee proposes that one way to achieve sustainable development for BTT is through cultural tourism and "non-body inspection," which likely refers to non-invasive methods of showcasing or experiencing cultural heritage. By integrating BTT production into a cultural travel experience, producers can offer consumers a unique and immersive way to engage with the tea's rich history and cultural significance. This approach not only preserves the traditional methods of production but also adds value through experiential tourism. It suggests a model of sustainability that leverages cultural heritage as a key asset, turning it into a resource for education and tourism rather than just a product for consumption. The interview highlights several key aspects of the value and sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea. The

primary value of BTT lies in its cultural and historical significance, which needs to be balanced with efforts to reduce production costs and enhance commercial viability. The sustainability of BTT depends on finding ways to modernize production without losing its traditional essence, possibly through cultural tourism and preserving its intangible cultural heritage. This analysis underscores the complexity of sustaining traditional products like BTT in a modern market, where economic, cultural, and historical values must all be carefully balanced.

What can you say about the value and sustainability of BTT?

"Mountain field is the foundation of tea, mountains of nowadays are not like in the past, therefore, cannot completely produce good tea. This is because nowadays, technology is involved. The same grade of tea cannot be achieved because different people at different times are involve" (IDI 10).

Another participant reveals:

"Now there is no place to learn (the technology of BTT), now you only have to learn from the tea master, if the master can accept, you follow. If the master is an evil party, you should follow the evil Party; if the master is a right Party, you must follow the Right Party" (IDI 18).

Also, another interview reveals that:

"This price is also very complicated, the price of some tea-making masters is indeed very high, but the quality does not match it. That will eventually affect the industry, will have a certain impact on the business, so do tea should have a sense of urgency, the price should be rational" (IDI 04).

another interview reveals that:

"Tea price, tea quality, tea safety is a hot issue that consumers care about. Only set up a sense of integrity, always stand in the position of consumers to consider, to provide consumers with high-quality and assured tea commodities, our Jianou's tea industry can stand on our feet and seek faster development."

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The first interviewee notes that the traditional mountain fields, once ideal for tea cultivation, have changed due to modernization and technology. This has impacted the quality of tea that can be produced. Historically, the unique mountain conditions were integral to the quality of BTT, but with modern influences, it's challenging to achieve the same grade of tea. This shift highlights a significant challenge for economic sustainability: adapting traditional practices to current conditions without compromising quality. The reliance on modern technology and changes in environmental conditions may affect the consistency and authenticity of BTT, potentially impacting its market value. The second participant's comment points to issues in the transmission of traditional knowledge. If learning about BTT production is limited to following a master, the quality and authenticity of the tea are subject to the master's expertise and integrity. The quality of BTT may suffer if masters are not well-regarded or if there is a lack of standardized training and knowledge transfer. This reliance on individual masters can create variability in tea quality and hinder economic sustainability due to inconsistent product offerings. The third interviewee highlights a disconnect between the high price of BTT and its quality. This disparity can lead to consumer dissatisfaction and impact the overall reputation of the tea. If the perceived value does not match the actual quality, it could lead to reduced consumer trust and affect sales. The need for a "rational" pricing strategy is emphasized, suggesting that aligning price with quality is crucial for maintaining economic sustainability. If prices are set too high relative

to the quality delivered, it can lead to market instability and diminished business viability.

The transition from traditional to modern practices has affected the quality of BTT. Ensuring that modernization does not degrade tea quality is essential for economic sustainability. The reliance on individual masters for learning and producing BTT may lead to inconsistencies in quality. Establishing standardized training and knowledge-sharing mechanisms could improve sustainability. A mismatch between the high price and the perceived quality of BTT can undermine consumer confidence and affect market performance. Implementing a rational pricing strategy that reflects the actual quality of the tea is crucial. Overall, the economic sustainability of BTT hinges on maintaining high-quality production despite modern challenges, improving the consistency of knowledge transfer, and aligning pricing with the true value of the tea. Addressing these issues is vital for ensuring the long-term viability and success of BTT in the market.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The origin of the name "Beiyuan" as both a geographical location and a term associated with tea production is indicative of the deep intertwining of geography and administrative governance in the identity of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT). According to historical texts, such as those found in (Twitchett & Fairbank, 1978), the region known as Beiyuan was historically significant due to its fertile lands and favorable climate for tea cultivation. This geographical advantage led to the establishment of tea production as a major economic activity in the area. The evolution of the term "Beiyuan" from a place name to a title associated with a governor or ambassador overseeing tea production illustrates how the tea's identity became closely linked to both its geographical origins and the administrative figures responsible for its production. This reflects the historical

importance of governance in the management and regulation of tea production, which was often tied to political and economic strategies of the ruling dynasties (Liu, 2011). The distinction between Beiyuan Tribute Tea and Beiyuan Royal Tea highlights the hierarchical nature of tea consumption in ancient China. Beiyuan Tribute Tea, which was produced over a long period from the Five Dynasties through the Ming Dynasty, was an essential component of tribute offerings to the imperial court. This tea was produced in large quantities and distributed among court officials, reflecting its role in the broader social and political context of the time (Zhao, 2014). In contrast, Beiyuan Royal Tea, or imperial tea, was exclusively reserved for the emperor and was produced for a much shorter duration. This distinction underlines the social stratification inherent in tea consumption practices, where certain types of tea were accessible to different social ranks, with the highest quality reserved for the emperor himself. Such practices were not only reflective of the quality and rarity of the tea but also served as a symbol of imperial authority and privilege (Sun, 2012).

The cultural and symbolic significance of Beiyuan Tribute Tea extends beyond its role as a beverage. The meticulous attention to the naming of tea and the design of tea cakes, as described in the historical analysis by Li (2016), highlights the importance of aligning these elements with the emperor's preferences and the strict cultural norms of the time. The use of auspicious names, such as those invoking prosperity and longevity, along with patterns like phoenixes and dragons, reflects the deep connection between tea production and traditional Chinese culture. The design elements and symbolic aspects of Beiyuan Tribute Tea suggest that it was regarded not merely as a commodity but as a cultural artifact. It conveyed meanings associated with prosperity, hierarchy, and respect for tradition, aligning with the broader Confucian values of the time (Wang, 2017). This alignment with cultural and political

symbolism underscores the tea's role in reinforcing social norms and hierarchical structures, making it a vital part of China's cultural heritage. These excerpts provide a comprehensive understanding of the value and sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea, emphasizing its historical, cultural, and social significance in Chinese society. The tea's production and consumption were closely intertwined with political structures, cultural practices, and social hierarchies, making it not just a product but a symbol of China's rich cultural legacy (Chen & Jiang, 2018). The sustainability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea is also linked to its ability to maintain these cultural traditions while adapting to changing social and economic conditions. As noted in the literature, the revival of interest in traditional Chinese teas and the growing market for culturally significant products present opportunities for the sustainable development of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (Xu & Zhang, 2020). By focusing on preserving the traditional methods of production and the cultural symbolism associated with the tea, producers can ensure its continued relevance and appeal in modern markets. This approach not only sustains the economic viability of Beiyuan Tribute Tea but also helps to preserve an important aspect of China's intangible and agricultural cultural heritage.

The interviewee's focus on enhancing the use-value of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) while also realizing its commercial potential highlights a dual objective: leveraging the tea's intrinsic qualities for cultural enrichment and economic gain. Beiyuan Tribute Tea, with its deep historical roots and cultural significance, embodies more than just a commodity; it represents a part of China's intangible and agricultural cultural heritage. Scholars like Wang and Liu (2015) have noted that the cultural value of traditional Chinese teas, including BTT, is deeply tied to historical narratives and sensory attributes, which are celebrated in Chinese tea culture. These attributes contribute to the tea's use-value, making it a unique and desirable

product for cultural enrichment. From a commercial perspective, the interviewee's reference to realizing BTT's commercial potential aligns with discussions in economic literature on the commodification of cultural products. As highlighted by Chen and Zhang (2018), there is a growing market for cultural goods that offer unique heritage experiences, and BTT's distinct historical and cultural background could be capitalized upon to attract niche markets. However, the challenge lies in balancing cultural preservation with commercialization, as over-commercialization risks diminishing the authenticity and traditional value that make BTT unique (Xu, 2019).

The interviewee identifies high production costs, particularly due to the labor-intensive nature of BTT production, as a significant challenge. The reference to "the human cost is too high" underscores the reliance on manual labor, which is a characteristic feature of traditional tea production methods. This aligns with the findings of Gao and Yu (2020), who explain that the artisanal production methods of traditional teas, such as hand-picking and manual processing, are essential to maintaining the unique qualities and cultural heritage of these products. However, these methods are also costly and time-consuming, creating economic pressures for producers. Moreover, the "mechanical replaceable rate is too low," as mentioned by the interviewee, suggests a limited adoption of automation in BTT production. This reflects a broader tension between modernizing production processes to reduce costs and preserving the traditional, manual methods that are integral to the tea's cultural value. According to a study by Zhang et al. (2017), the introduction of mechanization in traditional tea production has often led to debates about the loss of quality and authenticity, as the mechanical processes can alter the traditional craftsmanship that defines the product.

The interviewee's discussion about reducing production costs while maintaining market demand speaks to a key concern in the

sustainable development of cultural products: how to achieve economic viability without compromising cultural integrity. The concern about "over-mechanization" reflects fears that increasing automation could undermine BTT's intangible cultural value, which is closely tied to its traditional production methods. As per Huang (2016), traditional tea production in China is not just about economic output but also about preserving a way of life and cultural identity. This dilemma is echoed in sustainable development literature, where the modernization of traditional practices often risks eroding the cultural elements that define them. As noted by Li and Chen (2017), sustainable development in the context of traditional products like BTT involves more than just economic sustainability; it requires the preservation of cultural heritage and practices. This entails finding innovative ways to modernize without losing the essence of what makes the product unique and valuable from a cultural perspective.

The interviewee's suggestion to achieve sustainable development for BTT through cultural tourism and "non-body inspection" offers a creative approach to preserving both the economic and cultural value of the tea. This idea aligns with the concept of "experiential tourism," where visitors engage with cultural heritage through immersive experiences, rather than passive consumption (Wang & Wu, 2018). By incorporating BTT production into a cultural travel experience, producers can offer a deeper understanding and appreciation of the tea's history, production methods, and cultural significance, which adds value beyond the product itself. Studies on cultural heritage tourism, such as those by Yang and Lin (2019), have demonstrated that tourists are increasingly seeking authentic cultural experiences. By leveraging BTT's historical and cultural significance as a central theme in tourism, producers can create a sustainable model that enhances both the economic and cultural value of the tea. This approach not only preserves traditional methods but also educates consumers

and fosters a deeper appreciation of the tea's cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The historical and cultural significance of Beiyuan Tribute Tea (BTT) is deeply rooted in its geographic origins and the administrative governance that managed its production. The name "Beiyuan" itself reflects this connection, evolving from a geographical location to an administrative term associated with the governance of tea production. This intertwining of geography, governance, and tea production underscores the role of BTT in the socio-political landscape of ancient China, where it served as a symbol of imperial authority and social stratification. The sustainability of BTT lies in its ability to balance economic viability with the preservation of its cultural heritage. The high production costs, due to the labor-intensive nature of traditional methods, present a significant challenge. However, there is potential for leveraging BTT's cultural value through avenues such as cultural tourism and experiential engagement, which can enhance its commercial appeal while preserving its traditional essence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop high quality organic tea is a strategy. (BTT is high quality tea in history, nowadays, we still should follow the high quality, including the excellent tea garden ecological environment, planting mode, strict tea making technology, high quality and safe tea products, delicious tea soup is still need in nowadays production)

Promote Cultural Tourism:

Developing cultural tourism centered around BTT production can create a sustainable economic model that leverages the tea's historical and cultural significance. Producers should focus on creating immersive experiences that educate visitors about the tea's history, production methods, and cultural importance. This approach not only preserves traditional

methods but also enhances the tea's value by turning it into an educational and cultural experience.

Preserve Traditional Production Methods:

While modernizing production to reduce costs is important, it is crucial to maintain traditional methods that contribute to the tea's cultural and historical value. Efforts should be made to strike a balance between mechanization and manual craftsmanship, ensuring that any modernization does not compromise the authenticity and intangible cultural heritage of BTT.

Develop Niche Markets for Culturally Significant Products:

There is an opportunity to target niche markets that value cultural heritage and authenticity. Marketing strategies should emphasize BTT's unique historical background, cultural significance, and traditional production methods. By positioning BTT as a premium cultural product, producers can attract

consumers who are willing to pay a premium for authentic cultural experiences.

Integrate Modern Technologies with Traditional Practices:

Consider incorporating modern technologies in a way that complements traditional practices. For instance, selective mechanization can be employed in less culturally significant aspects of production to reduce costs, while preserving manual methods for key processes that contribute to the tea's unique qualities and cultural heritage.

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