The Dynamics of Horses and Tea in Ancient China

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Abstract

Horses and tea played significant roles in China's cultural and national development. Horses were important resources in transportation, trade, and warfare in ancient China, while tea was a treasured drink and one of the most cherished aspects of Chinese culture. This study explores the dynamics of horses and tea in China from ancient times until the Qing dynasty. The study used the historical method to analyze data from primary sources. The findings reveal that horses played a crucial role in China since the pre-historic period. The Chinese began using horses for military and political purposes during the Shang dynasty. Horses remained important until the Qing dynasty, when they were displaced by advances in technology and the building of railways. As for tea, in Chinese culture, the use of tea reportedly existed long before the pre-historic period. From the Three Kingdoms period to the Northern and Southern dynasties, the tea culture of scholars was perceived to reflect a simple and serene lifestyle. Tea was also included in China's tributary system. During the Tang dynasty, tea culture spread widely throughout the country, as well as to neighboring empires and tribes. Tea and horses were related to each other as they were exchanged between the empire, which needed more horses, and neighboring areas that demanded tea from the empire. With the arrival of modern technology, the role of horses started to decline, while tea still remained important in China. Finally, the relationship between horses and tea came to an end.

Keywords: ancient China, horse politics, "tea-for-horse" trade

Introduction

In China's ancient times, horses were extremely important in goods delivery and military use. The importance of horses was narrated in an old saying, "The kingdom's top priorities are sacrifice and military force, and for military force, horses are the most important" (Zuo, 2007: 127). Many empires, seeing the importance of horses, established a system known as horse administration (*mazheng* 馬政) to provide horses for military and political uses.

China is famous for being the origin of tea culture. It was the first country to discover tea and use it for medical purposes. Later, tea became a daily drink for commoners as it spread to people living on the plateaus and grasslands. Once tea culture reached these people, the demand for it became strong. At the same time, the dynasty needed more horses from these areas to strengthen its military force. Consequently, a "tea-for-horse" trade was established, which led to the creation of a culture that had never existed before.

Studies by Chinese researchers can be divided into three groups. The first group includes the studies of horse policy and administration in China's ancient times by Tang (2003), and by Wang and Song (2004). The second group consists of research into the cultural development of tea in the present time and the spread of tea culture by Hao (2017) and Jing (2012). The last group is about the historical context of the ancient tea-horse road and culture and its changes, by Shen (1994) and Chen (2004). However, the origin and the evolution of the culture of tea and horses, dating from ancient times to the Qing dynasty, has not yet been studied.

This article aims to fill this research gap. It focuses on the dynamics of horses and tea in Chinese culture from the early periods to the Qing dynasty. The historical method was used to collect data from ancient documents, such as the Records of the Grand Historian or "*Shih Chi*" written during the Han dynasty, the Historical Book of Tang or "*Tang Shu*" written during the Song dynasty, as well as from research conducted in China. The article is organized into four parts. The first is

about the beginning of horse administration and Chinese tea culture (the pre-Tang dynasty or before 618 AD). The second concerns the establishment of the relationship of the tea-horse trade from the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) to the Song dynasty (960-1279). The third presents the period when the tea-horse trade began to lose its significance, starting from the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) to the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). The final period concerns the end of the tea-horse trade in the Qing dynasty after the Opium War (1840-1912).

The Beginning of Horse Administration and Chinese Tea Culture (pre-Tang Dynasty 618 AD)

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Chinese were using horses and tea in the pre-historic period. Evidence showing the importance of horses to the Chinese was found at the Long Shan ruins (龙山遗址) in Guangdong province. The bones of humans and horses discovered at the ruins reflect the culture of burying the dead with their horses during the New Stone Age. During the Shang dynasty, people started to use horses for military purposes, but some Chinese still followed the tradition of burying them alongside the dead (Liang, 1934: 91).

Tea is believed to have been discovered and first used around the New Stone Age. According to legends, Shen Nong (神农), a tribal leader, was the first to establish tea plantations. After having experienced sickness from toxins in various herbs he used, he drank tea to get rid of the toxins. Thus, Shen Nong is credited with being the first Chinese to discover the advantages of tea (Lu, 2010: 5). The increasing use of tea and horses eventually led to their becoming part of the Chinese political and cultural system, as will be discussed below.

The early historical period extended from the Xia dynasty (2100-1600 BC) to the Western Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). This period was characterized by disorder and political instability. The dynasty realized the importance of horses in warfare and used them to strengthen its armed forces. During the Shang dynasty, the position called *Ma Xiao Chen* (马小臣) (horse commander) was established and

was the beginning of horse administration. The breeding of horses (Dong, 2000: 2) was crucial to every subsequent dynasty.

The Shang dynasty is considered a time of war. In this period, horses and chariots served as symbols of power. The legendary horse specialist, Sun Yang (孙阳), described all aspects of horses, including breeds, sizes, shapes, and methods of selecting good horses in the book, *Xiang Ma Jing* (相马经). This was the first book to educate people about equine physiognomy, the way to judge a horse's qualities from its appearance (Xie, 1991: 36).

During the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC), horses gained increasing importance as more people were in charge of horse affairs, such as breeding, equine medicine, and horse worship. Horses were part of its strict system of social hierarchy. There were two kinds of horses, the stud or *Zhong Ma* (种马) and the war horse or *Rong Ma* (戎马) that could be owned only by the emperor. The number of horses one owned was perceived as an indicator of social status. For example, for a chariot, the emperor used six horses; the prince under the emperor or *Zhu Hou* (诸侯) and nobleman or *Qing* (卿) used four; *Da Fu* (大夫), whose rank was lower than *Qing*, used three; *Shi* (士), whose rank was lower than *Da Fu,* used two; and a commoner was allowed only one horse (Zhou, 2009: 53).

In 221 BC, the Qin dynasty was established from the nomadic tribes that specialized in horse breeding and great attention was paid to raising horses. The position of *Tai Pu* (太仆), chief of horse affairs, was established. Other positions were also created to manage and control horse breeding in the administrative areas and borders. The existence of these positions paved the way for the establishment of the horse administration system that was used in successive dynasties.

Table 1 The horse administration system from the Qin dynasty to the Sui dynasty

Dynasty	Position	Duty
Qin	*Tai Pu* (太仆)	Manage horses for general use
	Gong Jiu Ling (宫厩令)	Manage horses used within the palace
	Mu Shi Lin (牧师令)	Manage horse breeding at the borders
	Yuan Se Fu (苑啬夫)	Manage horse breeding in the administrative areas
Han	*Tai Pu* (太仆)	Manage horses used within the palace
	Yuan Jian (苑监)	Manage horse breeding at the northwestern, northern, and western borders
	Ma Cheng (马丞)	Manage horse breeding in the administrative areas
	Ling Shi (令史), *Yuan Jian* (苑监)	Manage horse breeding at *Yi Jan* or horse stations
Wei (the Three Kingdoms period)	*Tai Pu* (太仆)	Manage horses for the imperial family
	Dian Yu Du Wei (典虞都尉)	Manage horses for agriculture and hunting
	Mu Guan Du Wei (牧官都尉)	Manage horse breeding at the borders
	Che Fu Ling (车府令)	Arrange horse-drawn carriages for excursions
Jin, North, and South	*Tai Pu Qing* (太仆卿)	Manage horses for the imperial family
Sui	*Tai Pu Si* (太仆寺)	Manage horse breeding, training, and veterinary medicine
	Jia Bu (驾部)	Arrange horse-drawn carriages for the imperial family and noblemen
	Shang Cheng Ju (尚乘局)	Train horses and provide pastures for them
	Xian Jiu Shi (闲厩使)	Look after unused stables

Sources: Chen (2008: 154); Sima (1982: 1417); Ban (1962: 150); Wei (1997: 52-61); Ning (2005: 109)

From the table above, we can see that almost every dynasty continued to inherit the horse administration system. Some adjustments were made according to each dynasty's preference; for instance, the Han dynasty established horse stations or *Yi Jan* in many areas. As a result, horse keepers were recruited. The Qin and the Northern dynasties were militarily weak, so the role of *Tai Pu Si* (horse keeper) was only to prepare horses for rituals (Fang, 1996: 57). However, during the flourishing Sui dynasty, which was militarily strong, a number of positions involving horses were created such as carriage caretakers, horse trainers, and stable maintenance staff.

As grasslands for raising horses were limited in the east and central parts of the country which were agricultural areas, residences, and governing centers for many dynasties, importation of horses from outside was necessary. Horses were brought mainly from the nomadic tribes living in the north and the northeast of the country, such as the Mongolian grasslands in Gansu and Qinghai, which were vast and the least inhabited. There were only a small number of people from the southwest tribes living there. Each dynasty normally received horses from many tribes through the tributary system and horse buying. The government also encouraged people in those areas to raise horses and use them to pay taxes. The imperial horse farm was also established at that time (Wei, 1997: 16, 64; Fan, 2000: 25; Wang and Song, 2004: 50).

The Role of Tea Culture

Tea culture has a long history. During the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC), the vassal leaders of Bashu were promoted to the rank of *Zhu Hou* (诸侯) (duke or prince) under the emperor. The *Zhu Hou* were required to offer tribute to the Chinese dynasty. Bashu, in what is now Sichuan province, and surrounding areas had tea leaves as their special product and presented them to the Zhou dynasty annually. This practice marked the beginning of tea tribute in Chinese history (Chang, 2010: 78).

During the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC), the tea culture of Bashu spread to different regions. The *Guang Ya* (广雅), a historical dictionary written during the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), mentions the making

of compressed tea blocks or round tea discs during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). The record described the (green) tea collectors in the Jing Ba area (covering Hubei, Sichuan, and surrounding areas) who made tea into thin, round layers and applied rice milk on them for preservation (Zhang, 1992: 1002). For drinking, the compressed tea needed to be roasted until they turned red and then crushed into powder. After that, hot water was poured onto the tea powder.

The people believed that tea could help cure a hangover and keep them awake. Quite a number of records and documents indicate that tea was first used to keep people alert (Lu, 2010: 12). Since the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), Chinese scholars viewed tea drinking as an elegant cultural practice as tea helped to refresh them and clear their heads, thereby enabling them to practice mindfulness (Xu and Wang, 2003: 42). During the Jin dynasty and the Northern and Southern dynasties, tea became the major ingredient for the Taoist elixir of immortality. In Buddhism, drinking tea helped in meditation practices. Thus, tea gained spiritual meaning and become a crucial part of Chinese culture (Hu, 2006: 210). However, the relationship between horses and tea was not created until the Tang dynasty.

The Beginning of the Tea-horse Relationship from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to the Song Dynasty (960-1279)

From the Tang dynasty (618-907) to the Song dynasty (960-1279), society remained politically stable and culturally flourishing. The spread of tea culture to many tribes led to trade relationships with the Chinese empire.

During the early part of the Tang dynasty there was a threat from the Tu Jue tribe (突厥), but later, the power of the Tang dynasty expanded widely to other areas. During the Song dynasty (960-1279), the amount of land under its control was reduced and threatened by the Liao dynasty (辽), the Jin dynasty (金) and the Mongol empire (Tuo and Tu 1985: 2251). Thus, a large number of horses was needed for protection during both the Tang and the Song dynasties and horse

administration gradually developed and became a more complete system, as illustrated below.

Table 2 The horse administration system from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty

Dynasty	Position	Duty
Tang	*Tai Pu Si* (太仆寺)	Manage horses for the imperial family
	Ma Jian (马监)	Manage horse breeding in each area
	Shang Cheng Ju (尚乘局)	Manage horses for the honor guards
	Cheng Huang Shu (乘黄署)	Train horses for the emperor
	Dian Xie (典廨)	Provide food for the horses
	Jia Bu (驾部/)	Manage horse chariots
	Xian Jiu Shi (闲厩使)	Manage horse farms
Song	*Tai Pu Si* (太仆寺)	Manage horses for the emperor and the nobles
	Qun Mu Si (群牧司)	Manage horses for the imperial family
	Qi Ji Yuan (骐骥院)	Manage horses for military use
	Jia Bu Institute (驾部)	Manage horses for delivering and receiving news and orders

Source: Song and Ou Yang (2000: 78)

According to the table, it is clear that there was a minor adjustment to the position of *Tai Pu Si* (from *Tai Pu* in the pre-Tang dynasty). The *Tai Pu Si* was appointed to manage the breeding of horses and establish a system for their general and military use. In addition, the *Tai Pu Si* trained horses for the honor guard troops. Horses were imported mostly from neighboring kingdoms and nomadic tribes in areas like Hubei, Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet, Xinjiang, the Mongolian grasslands, and Central Asia through the northwestern routes. When the Song dynasty was established, grasslands and deserts in the north and northwest were occupied by the Liao and the Xi Xia kingdoms (西夏). Not having enough land on which to raise horses, the Song dynasty brought them in from the neighboring tribes and

kingdoms, especially from Tibet, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi, where tribal people still used traditional methods of raising horses.

As for tea culture, it gained popularity in the Tang dynasty (618-907), when the government issued a policy prohibiting the manufacture of liquor in order to save rice for food (Song and Ou Yang, 2000: 102). For that reason, tea became popular and its status changed from that of a medicine to a drink. At the same time scholars endeavored to develop a more elegant way of drinking tea. Moreover, during the Tang dynasty, Buddhism flourished and when people observed that Buddhist monks often drank tea, they wanted to drink it as well. As a result, tea culture spread to other areas (Feng, 2005: 42). This culture continued to thrive until the Song dynasty. Tea became the daily drink of commoners (Sun, 2016: 16) and there were many tea houses in each city (Meng, 1982: 44).

Tea became prominent as it was included in the tributary system during the Tang dynasty (Feng, 2005: 39). This system was passed on to the Song dynasty. During the Tang dynasty, land for growing high quality tea was chosen methodically and the areas selected had to offer their tea products to the Empire. The Gong Cha Yuan Institute (贡茶院) was established to produce tea collected from the provinces in the tributary system, which included Sichuan, Yunnan, Fujian, and seven others (Ouyang, 1975: 75). For the Song dynasty, its Gong Cha Yuan Institute (贡茶院) was located at Feng Huang Shan Mountain (凤凰山) in Jian An (建安), which is now in Fujian province. The story of tea was recorded in over 90 history books, with numerous varieties, such as Zhangzhou's Yang Xian tea (currently in Jiangsu province), Anhui's Long Ya, Yunnan's Oogua and Pu-erh tea, etc. The array of varieties reflected the popularity of tea culture during these two dynasties.

Because of the Tang dynasty's prosperity, its trading and political systems as well as its tea culture reached other regions and tribes. As the demand for tea increased and the Tang and the Song were in short supply of horses, the tea-for-horse trading system came into existence. Trades were made among the dynasties, tribes, and the neighboring kingdoms, such as the Hui Hu (回鶻), ancestors of the

Uygurs in Xinjiang and Gansu (Feng, 2005: 45) and the Nanzhao (Ouyang, 1975: 63). The most important trading partner was the Tu Bo kingdom (Tibet) (Ou Yang, 1975: 327). The trades were done through the tea-horse route in the northwest from Tibet to Chang'an, the capital city of the Tang dynasty.

During the Song dynasty, the Tea and Horse Agency, *Cha Ma Si* (茶马司), was established to manage the trade of horses and tea. In the seventh year of the Xi Ning reign, the Song occupied the Tu Bo kingdom's An Duo area (in Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, etc.). An Duo was a resident Tibetan area outside of Tibet and was known for its large, sturdy Qing Tang horses that were suitable for military use. The city was also famous for *Ji Mi* (羁縻) horses, which were comparatively small but could be used for military support (Li, 1992: 437). The Song dynasty started its own market in An Duo and passed a law for monopolistic tea trade by the government. Tea markets were also expanded to Mingzan of Ya Zhou, Yong Kang of Suzhou, and Chong Zhou (all in Sichuan). In addition to tea markets, there was a horse market in Qin Feng Lu (秦凤璐). The market covered most of the northwestern region as well as Xi He Lu (熙河路), which is now Gansu and Qinghai (Xu, 2014: 143).

Subsequently, An Duo and the central area were invaded and occupied by the Jin dynasty (金), resulting in a short supply of horses. Therefore, the dynasty had to change the trade route to the south. They created a market at Si Chuan, located along the border (Xu, 2014: 155). The route was later also known as the ancient Tea Horse Road that facilitated trade with Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet.

The Decrease in Tea-horse Trade from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

The Yuan and the Qing dynasties controlled a vast area of horse breeding. While the demand for horses declined, the demand for tea increased. The situation contributed significantly to the monopolistic trade of horses and tea, which however, ended during the Qing dynasty,

and allowed for an increase in the tea trade from others. The resulting decrease in horses and tea are discussed below.

The Yuan dynasty was established by the Mongols. Its land area was relatively large, with many horses. The dynasty inherited the horse system from the previous dynasties and improved it. In addition to breeding horses, they also bought horses from the private sector and invested in land for raising horses. During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the northern region was ruled by the Mongol empire. Fearful of its enemy, the Ming gave priority to horses because they played a significant role in defending against the Mongols. The Qing dynasty, founded by the Manchurians, took control over the Tibetan plateau, the Mongolian grasslands, and the Yunnan plateau. These lands were geographically ideal for horse breeding. However, most livestock farms were abolished to relieve the stress between the ruling class and the peasants, causing the development of agriculture and horse breeding at the same time.

Table 3 The horse administration system from the Yuan dynasty to the Qing dynasty

Dynasty	Position	Duty
Yuan	*Shang Cheng Si* (尚乘寺)	Prepare horses and carriages for the Emperor
	Du Zhi Jian (度支监)	Provide pastures for horses
	Jing Zheng Jian (经正监)	Prepare horses and camping sites for the emperor's patrols
	Nei Zheng Si (内正司)	Deal with horse farming and breeding
	Fu Zheng Si (府正司)	Deal with harnessing and equipment related to horses and archery
	Dian Mu Jian (典牧监)	Improve quality of horse breed and breeding system
Ming	*Tai Pu Si* (太仆寺)	Issue a decree on horse farming
	Xin Tai Pu Si (行太仆寺)	Provide horses for military use
	Yuan Ma Si (苑马寺)	Provide horses for general use
Qing	*Tai Pu Si* (太仆寺)	Manage the imperial horses
	Shang Si Yuan (上驷院)	Manage horse farming and provide horses for the imperial family

Source: Zhang, 1974: 2270; Tuo and Tu, 1985: 134

The table above indicates that from the Yuan dynasty to the Qing dynasty, the *Tai Pu Si* was assigned to manage horse farming. Even though there were a large number of horses in its vast land, the demand for horses started to decrease. However, some still saw the importance of having horse farming.

As for the tea tributary system, the Yuan still continued the tradition and established a tea production institution called *Yu Cha Yuan* (御茶园), which means the empire's tea garden, in Wu Yi (武夷), Fujian province. The province was home to the famous *Shi Ru* tea (石乳) (Wang, 2011: 19). As the demand for horses declined, the empire needed to look for other ways to collect revenue. One way was to monopolize the tea trade. During the first year of Zhi Yuan's reign (至元) (1264), Kublai Khan ordered his men to collect tea, salt, and liquor as military provisions from Sichuan province. During the fifth year of the Zhi Yuan reign (1268), the Yuan government monopolized Sichuan's tea and sold it at Jing Zhao (京兆) (now in Shaanxi province) and Gong Chang (巩昌) (now in Shaanxi province). In the sixth year (1269), an institute was formed to manage the monopolistic tea trade in Sichuan province (Song and Wang, 1976: 50). Merchants who wished to trade tea were required to obtain a trading permit or *Cha Yin* (茶引) from the government and they had to buy tea from the government before distributing it to other areas (Ya, 2007: 16). The Yuan dynasty followed the Song dynasty's practice of using the trade route that connected the empire with Sichuan, Yunnan, and Tibet.

The tea tributary system remained in place until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). However, to ease people's burdens in tea making, the government decided to terminate the production of the tea blocks because of the complicated steps involved. People were asked to send tea leaves instead (Zhao, 2007: 64). This period is considered the turning point in China's tea-making history. Moreover, after the reign of Ming Cheng Zu (明成祖) (1402-1424), Zheng He, the empire's diplomat and explorer, was assigned to travel to many places. Everywhere he visited he would present tea as gifts to the rulers, and he traded it as well, which allowed tea to spread quickly throughout the country (Guan, 1999: 117).

Regarding the trade of horses and tea, the Ming dynasty strictly followed the tradition of the monopolistic system. Some policies were modified slightly so that the private sector had to pay taxes prior to receiving a trade permit or *Cha Yin* (茶引), similar to the policy used during the Yuan dynasty. The tea plantation had a *Cha Ke Si* (茶课司), an institute responsible for the government's tea trade and taxes. There was also a *Cha Ma Si* (茶马司) to manage the tea-horse trade (Zhang, 1974: 45).

Most of the tea came from Sichuan, while the An Duo area (安多地区) in Gansu and Qinghai served as horse training centers. Therefore, the main hubs for tea and horse trades were in Sichuan, Shanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai. Later, the ancient road connecting the trades of tea, Yunnan horses, and Tibet was developed.

In the early period of the Qing dynasty, the monopolized tea trade initiated by the Ming dynasty was still active. It included tea tribute and a tea trade permit. All of the provinces were asked to present tea as tribute. Tea was originally cultivated in Yunnan, Sichuan, and Fujian. Later, tea plantations were extended to Hubei, Zhejiang, Guizhou, etc. In the middle of the Qing dynasty, Red and Wulong tea were developed to be sold to western countries (Chen, 2008: 48).

The monopolized tea trading system finally came to an end, enabling the private sector to produce and trade more tea. There was a rise in tea-making factories and special markets. Many private companies opened their own factories in Jian Ou (建瓯) (now in Fujian province). Eventually, Jian Ou became home to over 1,000 tea factories, both large and small. Basically, small factories used 10 workers and large factories used around 100. It was reported that in the reign of the Emperor Qian Long (乾隆) (1736-1795), He Kou (河口) recruited over 30,000 workers and there were over 48 tea companies (Chen, 2008: 53).

In the 18th year of the Shun Zhi reign (顺治) (1661), the market known as Sheng Zhou (胜州) was built (now Yong Sheng in Yunnan). After that, the tea-horse market was relocated to Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet in order for the Qing dynasty to take control over tea and salt taxes. After the Kang Xi era (康熙) (1622-1722), horse-for-tea trade

began to lose its importance. However, the demand for tea from Tibet increased continually. The Qing dynasty, thus, encouraged tea makers in the central region to sell their products in Tibet.

The End of the Tea-horse Trade during the Qing Dynasty after the Opium Wars (1840-1912)

After the Qing dynasty, tea played a leading role in China's history as it ignited the Opium War (Li, 1998: 4). Britain's import of tea and other products directly contributed to its severe trade deficit. To solve the problem, the British dealers started selling opium to the Chinese (Zhou and Tai, 2012: 77). However, the opium trade did not go well as there were strong resistance movements against it. The conflicts eventually led to the first Opium War (1840-1842). Furthermore, there were attempts by the British government to sell Indian tea in Tibet, causing China's Sichuan tea to lose its share of the market. To protect their business, the Chinese improved their logistic system to make tea delivery faster (Zhou and Tai, 2012: 102).

After the Opium Wars, Chinese culture became more widespread throughout the country. However, the culture of the horse and tea trade continued to wane as China entered the era of semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism. It was a time of diverse cultures and industries. Modern vehicles such as motorcycles, cars, and trains were introduced to China. Ports and maritime trade routes in China were controlled mainly by westerners. The establishment of the first steam navigation company helped to expand shipping routes between China and foreign countries. In 1876, the British built the Wu Song railway (吴淞铁路), a 14.5 km passenger line operating from Shanghai to Wu Song. The railway marked the beginning of train travel in China. Moreover, bicycles were introduced to the Chinese in the late 19th century (Zhen, 1992: 21). Thus, horses were no longer used for military purposes or for transportation in big cities, but only in the rural mountainous areas where the people did not have access to modern technology. Nowadays horses are mainly viewed as a source of

entertainment and pleasure, usually raised as a pastime or for the entertainment business.

Conclusion

This study of the dynamics of horses and tea in ancient China, starting from the early periods to the Qing dynasty, aimed to fill the knowledge gap on this topic. The research found that each dynasty since the pre-historic period used horses to strengthen its military system. The Shang dynasty established a system of horse breeding and management with the *Ma Siao Chin* in charge**.** Later, the Qin dynasty created a complete system of horse administration which became a model for successive dynasties with some modifications based on the conditions of each. At the end of the Qing dynasty after the Opium Wars, vehicles and modern transport systems were introduced to the Chinese, making horses less significant. Finally, the horse system came to an end.

As for tea, its history dates back to the pre-historic period. While first used as medicine, from the Zhou dynasty to the Song dynasty tea was developed as an article of tribute. Tea became a popular drink for the Chinese in the Tang dynasty as it was included in the tributary system and certain plantations were chosen to produce tea for the Empire. Tea culture became more popular as it successfully reached the neighboring kingdoms and the tribes outside the ruling areas. Thus, tea has been one of the most important products until the present time.

The relationship between horses and tea began in the Tang dynasty. As tea culture spread, the demand for tea from people living in other areas, especially horse-breeding ethnic groups like the Hui, Hu and Tu Bo, increased. Thus the exchange of horses and tea took place, leading to the development of markets and the ancient Tea-Horse Road from the Tang dynasty to the Qing dynasty. After the Opium Wars, the Chinese traditional tribute system collapsed and the role of horses decreased sharply. However, tea culture has continued to prosper even until today.

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