

# Analysis of Tea Culture in Myanmar Society: Practices of Tea Consumption in Upper Myanmar

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## Abstract

Tea leaves, in many forms, are an important part of Myanmar society. Apart from being a favorite food, they possess metaphorical and symbolic value in the spiritual, social and religious parts of Myanmar daily life. There are many types of tea leaves in Myanmar. They are black tea, dried tea and fermented tea. Black tea is mostly used to make tea at tea shops. Dried tea is drunk plain with hot water. Fermented tea is considered a delicacy and is offered as gifts to the Buddha and the Sangha during religious donations and events and is used as offerings to *Nat* (spirits) as well. Fermented tea salad is widely consumed all around Myanmar. The main purpose of this paper is to analyze how tea is involved in Myanmar society. The objectives of the research are to identify the daily use of tea as a human utility, to analyze the effects in Myanmar society and the perceived benefits of the Myanmar tea leaf in the social, economic and religious aspects of Myanmar society. The methodology will be a qualitative approach based upon direct observations, in-depth interviews, and key-informant interviews. According to the findings of the research, tea is used daily in Myanmar society, in its beliefs, traditions, ceremonies and festivals. Tea is an inanimate substance for humans, but it is used by living organisms faithfully. Because of the long adhered tea-consuming traditions, tea has become associated with improving friendships, trust building and conflict resolution. Therefore, we examined the process through which peace, victory and collaboration among the people of Myanmar is conveyed through the consumption of tea leaves.

Keywords-Myanmar society, black tea, drinking tea, fermented tea

## 1. Introduction

Tea has long been a favorite food and drink of Myanmar society. As the old Myanmar saying goes, “Pork is the best meat, mango is the best fruit and tea is the best leaf.” Tea is prepared and drunk in many ways in Myanmar. There is sweetened tea prepared with sugar, and hot milk, and plain tea which is served free everywhere from home to the teashop. Plain tea has many names across Myanmar’s different regions. Some call it “*yay nway jann*” others call it “*akhar yay jann*”. Similarly, it is used in fermented tea leaf salads. This custom of drinking tea is an integral part of Myanmar everyday life. In the Dictionary of English-Myanmar, the Burmese word for tea, ‘*laphet*’ is defined as tea plants, pickled tea leaves, or pickled tea leaves mixed with other ingredients and served as a delicacy. In U Pone-Nya’s ‘*Mittar Sar*’, tea is described as a valuable gift from the spirit (*Nat*) lords, blessed with pungent aroma and strong taste. Demonstrating the people’s belief of this, tea leaf is called ‘the leaf of the *nats*’. Tea leaves are used in varieties of ways in Myanmar: there is the sweeter dried black tea variety, the common dried green tea leaf, and fermented tea leaf.

Black tea is served mostly in local teashops that are abundant all over the country. Fermented tea leaf is used as religious offering and gifts to the Buddha and the spirits. It is also mixed with other ingredients to make a delicious salad which is eaten widely all over Myanmar.

The majority of tea consumed in Myanmar is cultivated in the Shan State areas. There are three main tea products: fermented tea leaves, dried tea leaves and dried, sweet tea leaves.

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The taste of the tea leaves varies from region to region, each producing its own distinct flavor of tea. Similarly, tea leaves are called slightly different names from place to place. Out of the three different species of tea leaves cultivated in Myanmar, the Shwephi dried tea leaves are the best. Supporting this claim, there is an excerpt from U Pone-Nya's *Mittar Sar* where he explains that this certain kind of tea leaf was loved by Myanmar royals.

*"In the days of King Sithu, when the summer days are a coming, the leaves and buds of the Thandar tree abundantly, gracefully emerge, as a monk rising from long meditation. The Shwephi tea leaves, the jewel of all nine sides, blossoming before the first rains is prepared in gold teacups to serve the golden kings every year."*

In the last Myanmar dynasty, the Konbaung Era, tea leaf was part of the royal diet as both drink and delicacy as can be seen in the poem written by U Pone-Nya,

*"...by the blessing of the Nats, upon a golden cup of gold and silver thread, Shwephi tea leaves, untouched by rain, the leaf of the Nats, are presented for the meal of the king."*

Tea is mostly cultivated in the northern and southern parts of Shan State. In the north, Kyaukme Township and Namsan Township are the main producers of tea. In the south, Pinlaung is the township with the most tea cultivation. (Socialist Party, 1960, Page 114) The tea cultivated in Myanmar has been grown organically for ages. Tea belongs to the genus *Camellia*, the species *thea* and is of the family *theaceae*. It best thrives in warm, humid environments. There are over 1000 different types of tea all over the world. However there are three major tea varieties that are mainly produced. They are the *Camellia sinensis*, (Chinese) the *Camellia assamica* (from Assam) and the subspecies of *Camellia assamica* known as *lasciocalyx* (Indochina/Cambo type). The tea in Myanmar is *Camellia sinensis*, (Chinese) which has the strongest resistance to cold climate conditions (Aung Chain Bwar, 2014).

In Myanmar, over 120,000 acres of tea is grown in the Shan State (North) at Lashio, Muse, Kyaukme, Kwanlon and Laukkai Region, over 50,000 acres in the Southern Shan State in Loilin and Linkhei Region, about 7178 acres in the Homalin Township, Sagaing Region. Also in Eastern regions of Thanlwin, in the Thandaung, Kayin State, in Southern Northern Chin State, tea is grown a lot. Myanmar tea differs in quality according to the cultivation and processing. Myanmar products of Tea plants are "*laphet*", green tea, milk tea, and fermented pickle tea, also known as "*laphet*" in Myanmar is directly consumed by Myanmar People. It is a well-known traditional Myanmar food used as an appetizer. Myanmar pickled tea is produced from that of common tea plants.

### **Research Aim**

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze how tea is involved in Myanmar society.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the research are to identify the daily use of tea as a human utility, to analyze the effects in Myanmar society and the perceived benefits of the Myanmar tea leaf in the social, economic and religious aspects of Myanmar society.

### **Research Questions:**

- 1) What are the daily practices of tea consumption in Myanmar Society?
- 2) How did the effects of the Myanmar tea leaf in the social, economic, and religious aspects of Myanmar society?

## 2. Methods

Qualitative approach was used in this paper. In this research, to get available information was collected by using library research, and field research. The qualitative method; key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews (IDI) were applied to collect data. Consequently, sometime we observed the Tea Shop for research information. The researcher himself used the participant observation method. Besides, this research was conducted in-depth interviews with two men and five women; they practiced green tea or tea leaf in their daily activities. In some villages, women were asked for the key informant interview method to collect data. The daily practice and value of tea or tea leaf is observed as a symbol of Myanmar society. In particular, tea or tea leaf is used not only in social work but also in religious beliefs. Therefore, it became known as a culturally interactive symbolic in the community.

## 3. Literature Review

According to Jessica Knight (2011), her paper “examines the ceremonies and rituals that emerged around the taking of afternoon tea in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Drawing on recent historiography of manners and social relationships, it explores how afternoon tea infiltrated many aspects of daily life and helped define boundaries between genders, public and private, rural and urban, work and leisure.” She suggests that it “contributes to the small body of research on tea drinking and domestic life in Australia.”

However, Xiang Su and other (2011) pointed out that "the development of ambient social applications brings challenges to aggregate information from heterogeneous sources, like users, physical environments, and available services. They propose a framework for aggregating information from different sources, and utilize a novel representation, Entity Notation (EN), as a starting point of connecting all information to knowledge-based systems, which offers good possibilities to support ambient social intelligence". According to the above mentioned that, people are created to obtain information in the physical environment. The research different point of view from the above mentioned: the study was conducted on tea consumption in tea shops for the development of mental environment of physical environment.

According to Silvia C.King and other (2004), they mentioned "that consumer acceptance of food and beverage was measured after modifying four key factors or 'context effects' in five consumer central location tests: its function as a metal component, social interaction during consumption, the physical environment in which the food is selected and consumed, and food choice. One or two flavor variations each of salad, pizza and iced tea were served. Acceptance ratings and self-reported food intake were obtained from consumers. These results suggest that context variables do affect product acceptance, but that the relationship between context effect and consumer acceptance may not be consistent within and across metal components". According to the above article, green tea and black tea indicates the importance of nutrition. Researchers studied the interaction of people in drinking of black tea and green tea in people.

Furthermore, Barbara Lynne Rowland Mori (1991) mentioned and analyzed "the role Japanese women play in the traditional art of the tea ceremony (chado) and its meaning for their lives. This paper explores the impact of women's participation as professionals and students on the organizational structure and activities of the school". This paper point out at the impact of women's participation on the school's structure and activities as students and professionals. Therefore, the tea leaves the Myanmar people in their search for life. This study examined that the importance of social work or social interactive.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### Tea Story

Many stories on the origin of tea drinking can be found. According to Chinese legend, the first Chinese Emperor Shen Nung went for a walk into the forest. He decided to rest near a tea tree and began boiling a pot of hot water for his repose. He dozed off without covering the pot. When he awoke, he noticed an amazing fragrance coming out of his boiling pot. A tea leaf had fallen into his pot while he was sleeping. He took a sip and a delicious flavor like nothing else he had ever tasted filled his mouth. From then on, the tradition of tea drinking was started. Many such stories suggest tea drinking started in this type of way—sitting under a tea-tree, leaving a tea leaf in the teapot, and then noticing the unique taste of the tea. Since then, some of the books have mentioned that the practice of tea drinking in hot water began. One of these stories about India's tea is that it was learned that a monk, who was practicing meditation, began to sleep when he was meditating and then slipped on a nearby leaf to relieve his sleep and began to try to practice the law. It is not known exactly when tea cultivation and tea consumption in Myanmar were started, but it is written about in the writings of U Pon Nya. In examining what is being used in tea daily in Myanmar, King Manisithu made the "the seed of leaf" bequeathed to the Palaung people as a gift as the tea tree received a single hand as the tea tree was reduced to a year. After a long time, we came to what is called a tea leaf. According to legend, every monk in the Bagan era traveled to Nam Hseng Township in Nansan Township, Palaung Township, and gave them a tea plant to cultivate. He transformed a hunter into a tea-keeper with a single hand. According to these documents, tea cultivation began to grow in the late Pagan period.

### Tea Culture and Myanmar Society

Tea has a big influencing role in many parts of Myanmar culture. Tea production in Myanmar can be divided into two items, fermented and dry tea leaves. Dried tea leaves are mostly used in drinking green tea (*Yay-Nway-Gyan*). Tea used to be essential requirement as a royal appurtenance and it included as a culture in the celebration of royal ceremonies at the time of the Myanmar Kings. It is true to say that tea culture is one of Myanmar's old traditional cultures. According to this study, the consumption of tea in Myanmar is not just for ceremonial use but for nutrition as well.

The production of tea leaves in Myanmar includes fermented tea leaves and dried tea leaves. Dried tea leaf is used in the drinking of boiled drinking water (*Yay-nway-gyan*). At the time of ancient Myanmar kings, tea leaf was an essential requirement in the royal appurtenance, and it was included as a part of the culture of the royal ceremonies of the kings. This tea culture was one of the ancient traditional cultures of Myanmar. This study explored how the tea leaf, which is liked by most of Myanmar nationals, is a useful food at the ceremonies by the traditional custom and they always consume it as nutrition.

### Black Tea (*Laphet-yay*) Culture

Among three types of tea in Myanmar, the best quality tea is dried tea that one can get only by mixing the leaves very well and good sun-drying. The leaves that cannot make dried tea are again used as the black tea or fermented tea. In the process of making dried black tea, the raw tea leaves firstly have to go through the process of grinding in the grinding machine or mortar (*Maung-Sone*). After the grinding process, the raw tea leaves are squeezing and air-drying. When the leaves are a bit dry, the process continues by sieving them using the sieve (large and small). After the sieving process, the fine tea leaves are dried again using the charcoal firing or commercial dryer. The tea leaves that are dried through the process above are used as black tea. Black tea was not only produced by using orthodox method such as mixing-

rolling technique, cooling, fermenting and drying but also using Indian CTC (Crush, Tear and Curl) method.

Myanmar is a country that uses the tea not only for eating but also drinking as green tea (*Akharyay*). As the Myanmar saying goes “Tea is the best leaf”, tea is the most favored food in Myanmar. Black tea is an essential requirement to get the good taste of Myanmar milk tea (*Latphet-yay*). Moreover, condensed milk and fresh milk are also needed in making the tea to have a better taste. The dried black tea leaves are simmered in a hot water kettle. This tenderizes the tea leaves and creates a thick dark tea called *aphan yay*: which is the base of all varieties of milk tea prepared. The time it takes to simmer the tea leaves to make *aphan yay* is from 15 minutes to 30 minutes long. This process depends on the preference of the consumers. If consumers want strong tea, the tea leaves are left in the simmering water for an hour to create a stronger *aphan yay*.

According to the historical sources, tea culture began in BC 2737 in China's countryside. But, the taste of tea which is consumed in Myanmar is similar to the taste of Indian style tea. Myanmar tea can divide the many tastes as deep *Cho-seint*, *Paut-seint*, *Pawt-kya*, and *Kya-seint*, etc (see figure-1).



**Figure-1** Milk Tea makers in Tea Shop

In Myanmar society, tea drinking is a long-living custom. It is normal for Myanmar men go to tea shops, gather around small square tables sitting on foot stools. When they're ready to order, customers would hail the waiters (who are usually young boys) by making a sharp, quick kissing sound. After a while, their steaming cups of tea (Myanmar sweet tea composed of *aphan yay*, sugar, condensed milk and/or fresh milk) are served (see figure-2). Myanmar men can sit for very long periods of time in this position, sipping tea and chatting about many topics. Tea drinking in Myanmar is one of the main ways in which Myanmar people (especially men) socialize. Debates and conversations range from the latest English Premier League Results to local and national politics (see figure-3).



**Figure-2** Milk Tea on the table



**Figure-3** They usually make the debates

From the crowded pavements of the large city to the remote areas, Myanmar tea culture has long been a big part of Myanmar social life.

According to a 35 years old man, the “tea shop is not just a place which is only intending to get good taste and cheap foods”. He continued “We spending time at the tea shop not because we don’t have anything to do. For us, a cup of tea is an opportunity for us to sit down and discuss: to share knowledge amongst old friends and new.” Teashops are places where people of many different walks of life meet to sit down and enjoy a cup of tea.

For people in Myanmar, a cup of tea is a call to conversation and socializing with one another. Teashops in Myanmar have historically been venues for conversation, debate and reconciliation.

### **Drinking Tea Culture (*Laphet-yay-kyan* Culture)**

Myanmar tea culture kicked-off around 1855 or the Myanmar year of 1217, in the era of King Mindon. In that year, the English Commissioner of India Division sent Arthur Pharyre as head of a delegation to the Myanmar palace. There, they presented gifts including: a silver tea pot, and other silverware for drinking English tea. It was also mentioned that they introduced the custom of tea drinking to the court, hence first introducing tea drinking into the country.

Tea is second only to water when it comes to being the most consumed drink in Myanmar. From north to south, plain tea drinking is served by everyone in every village, monastery, city, state and region regardless of ethnicity. Every typical household in Myanmar has a tea pot and tea cups for welcoming guests and to be enjoyed daily by family members.

From the times of Myanmar kings, fermented tea and plain tea was served to royalty. In the palace, there were important and prestigious servants called *laphet-yay-daw* who was responsible for preparing and serving tea to the king. Within this category of royal servants, there were also, the *lahpet-yay-oh-kine* who specifically were given the duty of handling the royal tea pots. In royal events, special tea sets were set for the use of kings and other members of the royal family. From the lowly farmer, up to merchants, traders, courtesans and the king himself, everyone consumed tea.

The earliest notions of tea drinking can be found in records that date back to the time of King Alaungsitthu of Paukkan. Since the era of Myanmar kings, tea drinking has had an important place in Myanmar food and drink customs. There is evidence from that era already of the placing of official tea servers, the *laphet-yay-daw*, along with royal teacups. Additionally, U Pone Nya the writer of *Laphet Mittarsar* was a senior royal tea bearer or *lahpet-yay-daw-kaing ayashi* himself.

Whether in the city or village, *yay-nway-jan-wine* or *laphet-yay-jan-wine* or tea drinking meetups are places of both serious conversation and chitchat. Local community issues, business and their children are main topics in such meetups. It is a place where close friends open up to each other.

Such plain tea meetups is a common custom that can be found across the rural and urban divide, regardless of social status. Traditionally, teashops offer free plain tea refills whenever a table runs out of plain tea. It is a social norm of Myanmar society. Plain tea meetups are good in that they do not present any health hazards, nor are they too costly.

Tea drinking is a common custom of Myanmar society. Whether it is called *yay-nway-kyan-wine* or *laphet-yay-kyan-wine*, rural or urban, tea drinking is a social activity where people meet and chat. In Myanmar society, it is a place where people meet and establish mutual respect with each other while discussing personal matters such as children, and business. As they are mostly close friends, tea meetups are a way of opening up on personal feelings securely as they mutually trusts each other. *Laphet-yay-kyan-wine* is a common culture that can be seen everywhere in Myanmar, both in cities and in villages. It is typical for teashops to serve their customers with free flow plain tea (see Figure 4 and 5).



**Figure-4** *Laphet-yay-kyan-wine*



**Figure-5** *Yay-nway-kyan-wine*

In Myanmar society, although the culture of Myanmar *Laphet-yay-kyan-wine* is the same and there is no discrimination among the people, the plain tea that is drunk is called a few different names from region to region. It is called *Laphet-yay-kyan* in Mandalay. But it is called *Ah-khar-yay* in Innlay region and Shan regions. In Yangon, it is usually called as *Yay-nway-kyan*. Some regions called it "*Laphet-yay-kyan-aphan*".

However they called it, the applying custom is the same in Myanmar society. Although the name of the tea leaf means-slightly acrid or astringent in taste or slightly bitter and rough, the taste is actually soft and sweet. Myanmar *Laphet-yay-kyan-wine* helps create friendships among people and encourages knowledge sharing. By joining friends for a cup of tea, people can hear news from all sides.

When a person from Myanmar hears the word *laphet yay wine*, it will immediately present in their mind an image of friends gathered around a round table filled with tea cups and a tea pot. Tea is the favorite drink for many people in Myanmar both in cities and villages. It is also the main refreshment served to guests. In donations to the Sangha, tea is essential as well. In conclusion, tea drinking is one of the favorite pastimes of the Myanmar people regardless of location, occupation and social status. It is a way in which people relax and establish collaboration, familiarity and unity. Although this culture of *Laphet-yay-gyan-wine* differs slightly depending on the region, (see figure-6). It can be said that in essence, it is the same.



**Figure-6** Culture of *Laphet-yay-gyan-wine*

The way in which tea is served in Myanmar is not complicated. Gone are the days of the kings when there was specific tea ware such as the royal tea pot and royal tea cup. But the tradition has continued on till modern times as a tradition of the common folk that can be followed with a few cups and a kettle on a single tray. All that is required is a clean tea pot, a few tea cups or bowls and a tray.

The “tea cups and kettle” are placed nationwide in all teashops, coffee shops, and snack shops. As the tradition goes, this (the plain tea) is served free of charge to all customers. This is a part of the bigger Myanmar food culture that values the encouragement of togetherness. In the words of a Burmese saying, “bring a kettle of plain tea, have merry conversation and a village is born” we can see that tea drinking symbolizes unity, and freedom of speech in Myanmar culture.

Currently, hot Myanmar plain tea is prepared and sold to big teashops in Mandalay such as Min Thiha, Pan Thakin, Shwe Pyi Moe, Shadow, Thannthayar and others in an attempt to promote and develop Myanmar *yay-nway-jan* culture.

### **Fermented Tea (*laphet-so*) Culture**

Fermented tea is made by first steaming fresh tea leaves; second grinding them between rollers and then packing them into bags for an extended period of time till them ferment. The tea leaves are not mixed with any other condiments but are prepared naturally. Such fermented tea is an integral part of Myanmar people’s daily lives. It is used during *nat* worship, festivals, events, and during auspicious ceremonies and donations.

### **Fermented Tea: A means of settling disputes**

In the past, fermented tea was used in settling legal disputes. Before the court announced its verdict, both the accuser and the accused had to eat fermented tea from the same plate (*laphet let lhann sar*). This symbolized the settlement of the case (MRTV, 19 May, 2019) and meant that both parties accepted the verdict (*amhu pyee sone chin*). From then on, further complaints were disallowed. This indicates the symbolic power of tea within Myanmar society. There is a saying which translates to ‘*when people don’t know what to do, they bring out the tea.*’ which indicates that traditionally, fermented tea is served when serious matters need further discussion or negotiation. (Thinkhar, 1966) Additionally, tea is traditionally served during discussions concerning legal matters, marital disputes and financial disputes. In this way, fermented tea helps pave the way for smooth conversation concerning serious matters. As the saying goes, ‘*a spoonful of fermented tea is worth a hundred words*’ (see figure-7).



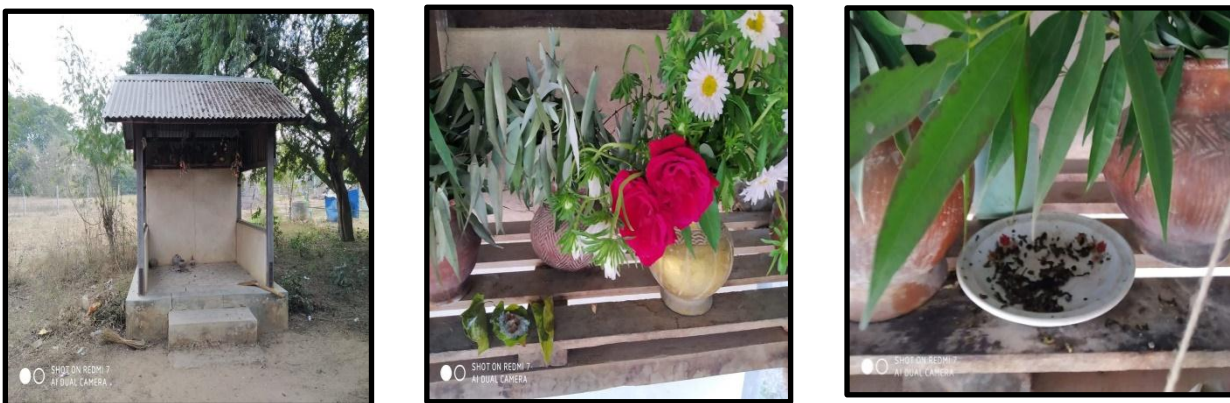


**Figure-7** *Laphet So*

### Fermented Tea: Religion

For Myanmar people, tea functions in many ways. It is a part of cuisine, a part of social life, and a religious gift. In religious customs, both dried and fermented tea is used. It is used as offering to the Buddha and the Sangha as well. Spirit or *nat* worship also utilizes tea as offering. Fermented tea is offered to patrilineal and matrilineal *nats*. For example, the *Komyoshin nat* or nat of the nine townships is offered fermented tea that is prepared in nine equal portions and garnished with oil, salt, fried garlic and sesame seeds. Dried tea is prepared in hot water and offered as a drink. *Nats* that must be offered hot plain tea are *Panbe Maungtinte*, *Bo Min Khaung*, and *Aung Min Khaung*.

In the village of Khabaung of Tantsi Township, Sagaing Region, fermented tea is used as an offering to all the 37 *Nats* of Myanmar. Mixed with oil, salt and curry sweetener, the fermented tea is presented to them in a large circular reed tray called a *daung lan gyi*. After this offering is made to the pantheon of 37 spirits, the shrine to the local *nat Bodawgyi* is gifted with fresh tea leaves packed in banana leaves. In this way, tea is part of the long standing tradition of honoring the spirits (see figure-8).



**Figure-8** Paying the promise to their traditional spirits

### Fermented Tea: Wedding Ceremony

Fermented tea was used in wedding ceremonies in the past in Myanmar society. Invitations to the event (the marriage donation ceremony) were sent in the form of tea leaves. This shows the extensive use and significance of tea in Myanmar society. Tea was also used

within the wedding ceremony itself. The wedding planner also known as the *aunghwel* or go-between person would pack tea leaves or place them within a 18 inch long bamboo container for both sides of the couple-to-be before proceeding to plan the wedding. This symbolized the promise from both sides of the family to smoothly cooperate and successfully carry out the wedding plans. When the proposal at the bride's house was finished, the family would open up the bamboo container and share the fermented tea with all guests including the groom's family. Thus, the custom of using tea in the engagement and wedding ceremony existed in Myanmar society's past. In Nyaung Pin Zin village of Sagaing Region, there is a custom in which tea leaves are offered at the Nat shrines before weddings. It is prepared as follows: first it is washed in water and then mixed with a bit of oil, water and sweetener. Packed in banana leaves, two packs are offered to all the village Nat shrines: one each for the bride and the groom. In this context, tea is used to make vows in front of the local Nats (see figure-9).



**Figure-9** The mutual promise to each other between the man and woman

There is a similar custom in Myin Mhway Village of Sagaing Region. In this village, fermented tea is mixed well with oil, salt, and sweetener and packed inside banyan leaves or banana leaves by the armful. Then, every house in the village is sent two of these packs. This is sent as a means of inviting everyone to the wedding (see figure-10)



**Figure-10** inviting everyone to the wedding

Again in Khabaung Kyaing Village which is also in Sagaing Region, fermented tea is used when the two families meet for an engagement. Locally, the engagement day is called

*sagarr jaung pwe*. On the day of the engagement, the bride's family and seven of their nearby neighbors are served with fermented tea leaves mixed together with other ingredients similar to the earlier cases. The servers (the groom's side) will feed them saying, "Please enjoy this gift of fermented tea which is for the *sagarr jaung pwe*". The seven neighboring families are also invited as witnesses to the engagement.

Traditionally, in Myanmar, farmers would carry out the wedding ceremony by giving each other a bamboo pole of fermented tea and a casket of betel quid. This is done to signify the vows that both sides have made for each other and indicates the deep meaning and importance of tea in Myanmar society. (MRTV, 19 May, 2019)

Tea continues to have significance in other local customs such as the ear-piercing ceremony (a rite of passage for girls reaching of age), in name giving ceremonies and other auspicious donative ceremonies that are important life events in Myanmar people's lives. In these ceremonies, tea is packed and served to guests, and is used as invitational gifts. It is the custom that once the tea packet has arrived to the doorstep, the residents cannot decline the invitation. Accepting the tea packet is promising to attend the wedding. If the receiver is unable to attend the wedding, the tea packet should be given back on the spot.

### **Fermented Tea Salad (*laphet thoke*) Culture**

As one of Myanmar's traditional favorite food, fermented tea has been developed into many different dishes with different preparing methods. Among these, fermented tea salad or *laphet thoke* is one of the favorite dishes. The ingredients added to the fermented tea salad vary from one locality to another. Fundamentally, the dish is prepared by firstly washing the tea fermenting it, salting it, and the leaving it to sit well in a gracious amount of oil. A pinch of lime is added for taste. Before it is eaten, sesame seeds are sprinkled on top. For a more wholesome dish, Myanmar people add freshly thin sliced tomatoes, dried prawns, green chilies and lime juice. This is eaten with hot rice, or leftovers. It is a traditionally guaranteed to cure the munchies. It is usually eaten for breakfast or as afternoon snack. And because of that, fermented tea is a food in every Myanmar household (see figure-11).

In Myanmar tradition, betel, cheroot and tea are the three indispensable treats that are served to guests. There is hardly anyone who does not like fermented tea. Even if they have to avoid fermented tea for health reasons, when people see it, they can't help but steal at least a bite. There are different variants of fermented tea salad found across Myanmar. There are the *Aboe Kyi Laphet thoke* or 'old man's fermented tea salad', the spicy and sour *chinsat lappet thoke* the *danyhin thee laphet that* where the fermented tea is stored together with Jenkol peas, the *pyaungphoo be-ou laphet thoke* which means it is mixed together with corn and duck eggs. Another variant is called the *pyomay doh kyike de laphet thoke* or ladies' fermented tea salad, and of course the combination of Myanmar's two favorite foods, *laphet htamin* or fermented tea rice.

Although fermented tea is one of the most popular foods in Myanmar, traditionally, it is rarely used in the funeral ceremony. Instead it is served to guests and mourners in the form of hot plain tea, fermented tea salad along with cheroots and sunflower seeds. Although fermented tea leaves are rarely used in the ceremony, it can still be seen being served to guests.



**Figure-11** *Laphetthoke*

### **Social Interactive Value of Tea**

Upon examination, tea has an extensive function within Myanmar society. Regardless of area, the use of tea is the same all over Myanmar; as is the value which people place on tea in its many forms. Being a food, it is true that tea is consumed to nourish the body. Yet apart from this, tea possesses a certain power behind it which might not be evident at first glance. This power manifests itself in the aromatic pull it has towards our taste buds and noses, the way in which it brings together people, and how it benefits its cultivators with prosperity. In traditional religious activities, tea is used to reinforce feelings of belief and instills strength into the believer's hearts. In disputes, it serves as a contract of respect, a bridge to help settle things fairly. It is a way to convey trust and reliance on one another and encourages amity between people.

Thus, the power that tea has within our society shows the way in which an interrelationship can occur between the animate and inanimate. The symbolic power of tea within Myanmar society can be seen in the historical records which show how tea was of symbolic importance in the royal palace, in courts, and other important decision making areas of Myanmar society.

Additionally, tea emphasizes the beauty and deliciousness of unity. Although it is tasty by itself, further ingredients can be added to improve the taste. It is fully capable on its own but when combined with others, it does not overpower at all but blends in to enhance and improve the taste of the overall dish. It exists as an example for Myanmar people to be able to stand on their own feet while helping others to create a better society.

### **Conclusion**

Tea has changed very little and still continues on as a favorite drink of Myanmar nationalities. In time, teashops however have changed in form and design. Tea on the contrary remains a staple for Myanmar people, especially the men who often sit at these teashops. Teashop culture is a part of everyday Myanmar life.

Plain hot tea culture has changed but continues to thrive in Myanmar. The custom of plain tea drinking hasn't changed although the way in which it is set with cups, trays and bowls has changed. As Myanmar has a hot climate, hot plain tea is drunk to get rid of the heat. This is especially true in the central regions of Myanmar where it is hottest.

Yet, in changing, modernizing times, teashop businesses are losing ground to beer pubs and stations. In the past, it was the custom to cool oneself with a cup of hot plain tea. But now, that is being replaced by a cold mug of beer. Beer drinking is negative in the Myanmar traditional sense as it can lead to fights, and the breaking of the five precepts which are fundamental to Myanmar/Buddhist belief. It is more expensive and is unhealthy when done on a regular basis. On the other hand, tea is the second most consumed drink in the world. It is proposed that tea drinking, which is already a traditional culture of Myanmar society should be preserved and promoted. With its cooling, slightly bitter taste, tea creates peaceful, calm conversations about business, family, and news. It clears the mind and is an irreplaceable part of Myanmar social life, drunk by many people villages, cities and towns all over the country. Therefore tea is an important part of Myanmar society.

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