

The Way of Tea

茶
道

A Journey through the Global Trail of Japanese Organic Tea.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, tea is the second most popular drink in the world. Japan is one of the first countries to produce tea with more than 55 different sorts of tea leaves. Today the plants are grown in 35 countries, while they are consumed everywhere (Van der Wal, 2008, p. 7). The tea-market provides huge employment numbers and plays a big role in the global economy (Van der Wal, 2008, p. 7). The object of this global biography will thus be, Japanese Organic Tea. The interest for this subject arose in a Dutch tea specialty shop in Leiden “Moers, Thee & Meer”. But before it ends up in the cupboards of this shop in this small town in the Netherlands, the tea passes through various stages. The ‘Way of Tea’ is used in Japan to describe the Japanese tea ceremony, in this paper, it is meant in quite the literal sense seeing the global trail of the product will be explored. This trail is divided into (i) the production process, (ii) the distribution process, (iii) the organizational and institutional process, and (iv) the consumption process. This paper will begin by defining globalization, from which the journey of Japanese Organic Tea will be linked to the concept of a ‘world culture’, ‘neoliberalism’, and ‘social media’. The main research question this paper seeks to answer is: To which extent is there a global culture in relation to Japanese Organic Tea?

Globalization includes global processes of being symbolically closer together and attaining knowledge about geographically distant aspects of human life. Our analysis will focus especially on the four definitions of globalization described by Guillen (2001) that are also examined by Lechner and Boli (2008). A summary of the globalization perspectives leads the authors to examine the *cross-border flows* in terms of a ‘world culture’ that is in the making. Lechner and Boli (2008) give four definitions for this ‘world culture’, which will be discussed during the course of this paper; (i) world system theory, (ii) world polity theory (iii) intensification of consciousness and (iv) deterritorialization.

First, we examine how the production process (*phase 1*) of Japanese Tea is linked to the concept of Neoliberalism by focussing on the working conditions in Japan, in the context of Lechner and Boli’s *world system theory*. Second, the role of distribution processes and organizational processes (*phase 2 and 3*) in the tea market are examined and linked to the Lechner and Boli’s (2008) *world polity theory* that defines a ‘world culture’. Third, we examine how the consumption process of tea (*phase 4*) is linked to Lechner and Boli’s *Intensification of consciousness* and *Deterritorialization* theories.

PHASE 1: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Following the viewpoint of the world system theory described by Lechner and Boli (2008), the main question is how did Japan become a part of the core of the world system? And what impact does that have on the working conditions of employers?

The world system theory described by Lechner and Boli (2008) defines the world as a system in which the underlying force is economic interest. Following the idea of neoliberalism, the world has developed into a system ruled by a capitalist ideology. Central to this viewpoint is that the 'Western' countries have the means of production in possession, and thus form the 'core' of the system. Other – mostly non-Western – countries form the 'periphery'. Transfers of surplus go from the periphery to the core, which means that the core of the system is the place where capital is accumulated (Lechner & Boli, 2008, p. 38). Interesting in the case of Japan is that Japan, geographically speaking, is not a Western country, but in terms of for example technological lead, economic domination or welfare, it is. In various sorts of industries, they form the 'core' of the world system. How did this come about?

Until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan has due to 'isolation' never been in much contact with other countries. From this moment on, Japan took over the developments of Western countries by studying and adopting Western political, military, technological, economic, and social forms (Columbia University, 2009). The fact that Japan took over Western ideas and grew along Western development, meant that Japan steadily owned the means of production, and slowly became part of the core. This is reflected in the way working conditions are regulated. As shown by a study of Van Der Wal (2008), in peripheral countries such as India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, the working conditions on tea farms are often very poor, with low wages, little to none job security and so on. This is different in Japan.

As will be shown later in this paper, Japanese tea has a niche that serves a relatively high-class consumer. The tea specialty shop 'Moers, Thee & Meer' is for instance a shop which serves these types of consumers. From a global perspective this is interesting, because this is reflected in the working conditions. Importers (such as J-Port, which will be discussed in the next section) focus on tea farms which produce unique teas and take quality of the product and good environmental circumstances in consideration.

Thereby, Japan has various institutions which regulate the working conditions of employees. Japan has a working week of forty hours (JILPT, 2016, p. 99). Next to that, they have a Minimum Wage Act - which is relatively high (JILPT, 2016, p 171). Japan has an insurance system which regulates protection against for instance injury, illness and disability (JILPT, 2016, p. 174). The technological advantage of Japan can take care of secure machines, and a healthy and safe work environment. Regulators employed by the government are monitoring employers to ensure appropriate working conditions on farms¹. Finally, Japan is bounded to

¹Japan Times (2016)

various international institutions, which take the working conditions in consideration when regulating the export of tea.

In conclusion, the powerful position in the world system is reflected in export prices as well. In Sri Lanka, the price of a kilogram tea is €2,-, in India it is €2,20. In comparison, Japan has various teas with an export price of €4 per *100 gram*. In the next section we will dive deeper into various aspects that deal with the export, the distribution process.

PHASE 2: DISTRIBUTION PROCESS

Having examined how the tea is produced, our tea-product travels on and meets various institutions that deal with the distribution processes. National and international organizations play a crucial role in influencing the *cross-border-flows* of tea products. This part deals with the question: How can the institutional structures in which tea distribution processes are embedded be explained with the help of the ‘world polity theory’?

The authors conceive a ‘world polity theory’, which states that certain ontologies (especially Western/European-based political models) serve as templates for the application of local governments, as in this case Japan. The ‘world polity theory’ shows how similar economic, political models are not copied because of efficiency, but because they are legitimized by the dominant ‘world culture’ (Lechner & Boli, 2008). According to the ‘world polity theory’ it can be argued that globalization has led to convergence in the organizational structure of the tea market (Guillen, 2001). This is reflected in the distribution process of tea products which includes blending, packaging and marketing processes determined by the requirements of multinational organizations and “controlled by a handful of multinational tea packers and brokers” (Van der Wal, 2008, p. 9, 25). Crude tea markets in producing-countries such as Japan sell unrefined tea to international private or corporate actors. One of Guillen’s definitions of globalization describes how *cross-border flows* have led to the spread of goods, services, people, money, information and culture (Guillen, 2001, 236). But not only products, also ideas and *ontologies* are spread around the world and are either legitimized or illegitimized. The globalized tea-market has led to competition between exporting countries on a global scale and between farmers, packers, brokers and sellers on various local scales. In line with the ‘world polity theory’, it seems that on all levels social actors compete for recognition and legitimization. These are indicated by certificates and awards. One example is the ‘organic’ certificate.

According to the owner of the shop, and visible on the outside of the tea box, the tea is certified as ‘organic’ by the Control Union (Moers, Thee & Meer, 2019). Organic products imported into the EU must be certified by the Control Union’s ‘Certificate of Inspection’, which serves to legitimize companies in 70 countries around the world (Control Union, 2019). Our Japanese quality tea importer J-PORT, which supplies Moers, Thee & Meer with green tea from Japan, carries the ‘organic’ certificate. It illustrated how the Japanese tea

market adapts to a ‘world culture’ in order to be competitive in the global tea market. Controlled by *the West*, Japanese tea-production processes adapt to a ontology of a ‘world culture’ based on human rights and natural conservation in order to obtain the certifications that give legitimacy on the global market. Japan is a member of international organizations such as the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), both are western-based organizations that have the power to indicate whether the economic conditions of Japanese tea-market agree with the models of ‘world culture’ and thus have the power to legitimize.

J-PORT tries to rehabilitate the traditional way of smallholder tea in various regions in Japan, that have undergone major changes with the global increase in tea consumption as a result of globalization and industrialization processes which we have pointed out before (van der Wal, 2008, p. 24, 50; MAFF, 2017, p. 1). Their tea suppliers are family businesses who are in personal contact with J-PORTS owner Renée Pompen; the contact person between the Japanese tea farmers and the Dutch distribution center. When harvested, the crude tea leaves are processed and packed in the growing area so that farmers themselves can control the quality of their final product. A double check is executed by the Control Union and the working conditions are controlled by the GATT and the WTO (Control Union, 2019). The refined, controlled, and certified tea is then flown to Haarlem, The Netherlands, where the J-PORT distribution center only stores small quantities in cool and dry places in airtight containers to keep the tea fresh. What we see here is that this tea-distribution has found a niche with the Dutch market based on fairness, quality and specialty that serves a relatively high-class consumer who is capable of investing time and money in the tea-product. In line with the world polity theory, the global tea markets developed systems all around the world that have undergo isomorphic processes and thus one can speak of convergence.

PHASE 3: CONSUMPTION PROCESS

Tea is continuously undergoing a metamorphosis. While traditional tea fashions and customs are maintained as ritual enjoyment, new arising fashions and blends of tea create a new platform for tea consumption. In this last phase of the Japanese Tea Trial, the consumption phase, the two remaining perspectives on world culture can be identified (Lechner & Boli, 2008). First, the ‘intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole’ will be used to analyze the Japanese tea consumption in Europe, in particular in The Netherlands. Second, the ‘deterritorialization’ of the Japanese tea in The Netherlands will be analyzed.

The intensification of consciousness

To understand the initial tea consumption and make a comparison with the new customs, we must turn to the history. Tea was introduced to Japan from Korea in the early 9th century. Although there are debates on where and when tea drinking first started, it is a general accepted belief that the tea drinking originated in China and was disseminated to other regions (such as Korea), through trade via the Silk Road and marine routes and also by

military movements (2007, Jolliffe, p. 25). Widespread tea-drinking behavior in China was as a result of the popularization of Buddhism, as well as large-scale commercial plantations which made tea-drinking a more popular hobby instead of an elite one (2007, Jolliffe, p. 24). However, focusing more on Japan, tea lost and gained its popularity simultaneously with peaks and lows of the Sino-Japanese Trade agreements. Tea drinking in Japan eventually evolved, influenced heavily by Zen Buddhism, into a very sophisticated ceremony concentrating on the ideas of harmony, respect, purity and tranquility (Cox, 2013). Nowadays, these principles still form the base for the Japanese tea ceremony.

Guillen borrows a perspective on world culture from Robertson's globalization theory (2001). In this theory Robertson argues that globalization has led to a focus on the world as a whole (1992, p. 2). It is because of globalization that an increasing acceleration in both concrete interdependence and consciousness of the global whole has taken place since the twentieth century (1992, p. 8). According to Robertson's theory, globalization is not just an objective process of connecting people and places, it acquires meaning through the way people make sense of it. World culture is then not considered as something apart from globalization, rather it is considered as a dimension of the process, the part in which the world gets symbolically constructed (Lechner & Boli, 2008, p. 51). The ways in which people around the world express that they are conscious of the world as a whole or the various ways in which individuals relate to the world as a whole is according to Robertson what defines 'world culture': the different manners people use to express their global consciousness.

When it comes to Japanese tea, and in specific that of Moers, Thee & Meer this notion of an 'intensification of consciousness' can be identified in multiple ways. The shop promotes various events that are centered around the unique experience of an actual Japanese tea ceremony. This perspective fits the increasing consciousness very well. The shop and the customers are in an unknown position to these other customs and thus are willing to learn and be a part of the 'true' Japanese experience. They relate to the Japanese tea culture as experience consumers and those who are willing to learn more about 'other' cultures.

A second example is one that is less directly related to the Moers, Thee & Meer shop. However, the arising of 'matcha bars' in the Netherlands, selling matcha teas and food products infused with matcha, the Japanese green tea which is mainly sold in powdered form, is a manner that people use to point out their position towards the rest of the world as a whole. With quotes like, "Our menu is inspired by the Japanese Culture", these matcha bars are examples of how consumers are drawn to 'unknown' culture. Going to places like these, adds to one's 'awareness' and understanding of cultures outside the nation. Show owners promote by selling authenticity and 'original' goods in the perspective of the consumers.

Deterritorialization

The last account on world culture given by Lechner and Boli, is the more anthropological perspective of deterritorialization. This perspective states that world culture creates diversity

because the international flows of cultural goods get adjusted to the local context (Lechner & Boli, 2008, pp. 36-38). As people and groups change due to the expansion of cultural elements, the ideas, actions and expectations in these groups will as well constantly be changing. A cultural element that has a certain meaning in one culture, can have a different meaning in another culture (Lechner & Boli, 2008, pp. 52-55). According to Watson, who studied this phenomenon for McDonalds all over the world, these transnational cultures are changed by the local people, into a cultural good that works for them. This is done by changing the original purpose of the product, as well as the way in which a company produces this product, without changing the product completely. (Lechner & Boli, 2008, pp. 52-55). By examining the different way in which tea is consumed (originally) in Japan, and how it is nowadays consumed in The Netherlands, the deterritorialization of tea can be identified.

The Way of Tea in Japan, the tea ceremony, is originally mostly about aesthetics and connecting with the guests on a spiritual level (World Green Tea Association). The Way of Tea, also known as 'chadō', consists of three aspects: the philosophy; the academic content; and the practice (Anderson, 1991, pp. 1-9). The form of the tea ceremony depends on the time of the year and the type of event. Special tea ceremonies, such as *chanoyu* require weeks of preparation in order to get the details perfect (World Green Tea Association). Although it can be argued that this way of drinking tea, is not the only form anymore in which tea is consumed in Japan, the ceremony shows the original intention of Japanese tea.

The 'same' commodity is consumed differently in The Netherlands, then it originally was intended in Japan. The way in which it is consumed changes constantly, because of change in taste and in technologies (Watson/ Lechner & Boli, 2008, pp. 52-55). The taste perspective can be seen in the arising attention of the health benefits of green tea in The Netherlands: according to certain websites, it would help to lower the risk of cancer because of antioxidants, it would make you smarter, it lowers risks of Alzheimer and Parkinson and so on (Gunnars, 2018). This growing attention on healthy food is a way in which people change in their ideas and discourses. Since 2014, Japan was one of the fastest-growing tea exporters, up 89.1 percentage of the import for the U.S and Europe came from Japan. This could possibly be explained by the growing interest in the health benefits of green tea which has led to an increased consumption of green tea in Western culture (World Green Tea Association). This change in ideas leads to a change in the use of the globalized product Japanese tea. It can be seen in the rise of special tea bars, where 'matcha tea' can be bought, and in other ways in which the original use of the product is differently used in The Netherlands.

Three examples of deterritorialization can be discovered in the tea store Moers, Thee & Meer. Here, special 'Cheese and tea' workshops are held (see figure 1). Originally, cheese is not something the Japanese would eat along with their tea. In The Netherlands on the other hand, eating cheese while drinking tea, might not be considered as strange. Explanation would be that the Japanese tea is changed in order to fit the product in a way that works for Dutch

people. A different example is the use of 'Haikus' (see figure 2 and 3). These are originally Japanese poems, expressing an experience of one moment, strongly inspired by a certain form of Buddhism. On the website of Moers, Thee & Meer, these Haikus are written in Dutch and refer to modern concepts such as 'likes' on social media. As Buddhism is originally not linked to social media, it can be stated that the use of Haikus is adapted to the Dutch, modern context. Still, as Lechner & Boli describe as well, the initial rules of the product remain: the Haikus still consist of three sentences and the right amount of syllables. A last way in which the tea can be linked to this concept of world culture, is in 'tea to go' (See figure 4). Dutch people do not take as much time for drinking tea as the Japanese do during a tea ceremony. In The Netherlands, the tea can be drunk in cardboard cups using a tea bag instead of fresh tea. Here again, deterritorialization is present in two ways. On the one hand, the original purpose of the product is changed, it is not about connecting on a spiritual level anymore when it is drunk without company. On the other hand, the way in which the product is produced by the Moers, Thee & Meer is changed as well.

CONCLUSION

We have examined how globalization has changed the culture of Japanese Tea in various ways. With a smaller world that is defined by its neoliberal accumulation society, the demand for tea increased worldwide and processes of industrialization and informalization supported the growth of the global tea sector. Embedded in international and national institutions, the production and distribution processes of tea products became more and more similar. Nowadays recognizable certificates show that the tea product is 'real', is legitimized and its production follows particular rules and norms. The rules and norms of a 'world culture' which is reflected not only in production and distribution processes but also in the consumption processes that changed with globalization. The promotion of tea as a foreign and authentic product that is available in the Netherlands but actually puts you in a different culture when consuming it, represents how a 'world culture' is in the making that recognizes the availability of the variety of cultures on earth. In another form, Japanese tea is adapted to the Dutch habits and the evolvement of phenomena such as 'Tea and Cheese'-workshops represents the way people make the varieties of cultures their own and apply the 'world culture' - aspects to the local circumstances. All in all, we can conclude that the extent to which global culture in relation to Japanese Organic Tea is in the making is two-folded. We can speak of a global culture of Japanese Organic Tea in terms of its institutional embeddedness and its consumer-practices that exists both in a search for authenticity or in search for local adaptations of the global product.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: 'Cheese and Tea' workshop in the Dutch teastore.

Workshops

za 8 sept	Thee & Kaas
za 8 sept	Japanse theeceremonie Besloten
ma 24 sept	Japanse theeceremonie Besloten
za 6 okt	Theebereiding Chinese stijl
zo 28 okt	Japanse theeceremonie

moerstheemeer • Volgen
Leiden, Netherlands

moerstheemeer Ons workshopseizoen gaat weer van start... Houd jij van thee én van kaas? Dan is de eerste workshop op 8 september zeker wat voor jou! Nieuwsgierig? Bekijk onze agenda via de link in bio! •

-

#workshop #workshops #thee #kaas #teaparing #leiden #moerstheemeer #japanse #theeceremonie #theebereiding #chinese #stijl #biologic #enjoying

36 w.

buurderijleiden Zowel de thee als de workshop kun je aanbieden bij #buurderijleiden 😊

29 vind-ik-leuks
22 AUGUSTUS 2018

Een reactie toevoegen... Plaatsen

Figure 2: Originally Japanese 'Haikus' are adapted to the Dutch context.

Als een hagedis
Houd ik je vast en kus je
Warme stenen wand

HAIKU'S

De **haiku** (meervoud: haiku of haiku's) is een vorm van Japanse dichtkunst, geschreven in drie regels, waarvan de eerste regel 5 lettergrepen telt, de tweede regel 7 en de derde regel weer 5. De klassieke haiku drukt een ervaring op één moment uit, soms gelinkt aan en geïnspireerd door zen.

Moers Thee & Meer nodigt je uit om je eigen haiku te schrijven en op **Facebook** met ons te delen of naar ons te **mailen**. Aan het eind van elke maand kiezen we uit alle inzendingen de mooiste haiku uit. Het motto hierbij is dat er over goede smaak altijd te praten valt – of het nu over thee gaat of over poëzie. De winnende haiku komt in print in de winkel te hangen, en de maker mv mag een thee naar keuze bij ons komen uitzoeken.

Benieuwd naar de eerdere haiku's? Ga naar onze **Instagram**.

Let's do the haiku.

Figure 3: An example of how original Japanese 'Haikus' are adapted to the Dutch context.



Figure 4: Tea to go



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