

Major Studio Final Paper

Let's Tea Together!

Elizabeth Ho (Lisa)

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In this digital age where the Internet makes communication and information accessible anywhere, people seem to have delved deeper into more efficient systems such as artificial intelligence and the use of algorithms to satisfy needs even faster. Are these conveniences making our lives better or stripping us away from our own local values that make our cultures unique? As generations become more preoccupied with our computers, AI, and novel devices, the alienation of this digital culture is driving us further away from our cultural traditions. Traditions build strong family ties between generations and establish a sense of belonging to everyone. Often, traditions have a value that is different from socializing through new forms of media. The Chinese Tea Ceremony, for example, has been one of the most important and long-established traditions in the Chinese culture. It is not only a ritual that represents significant values of its society but also brings people together to enjoy one another's company while having tea. If important traditions such as the Chinese Tea Ceremony is fading away due to modernization, how can I use technology to preserve and remind people, especially for the younger generations, the meaning of traditions?

The history of Chinese Tea Drinking goes back to ancient China 5000 years ago. It was first discovered by Emperor Shen Nung when leaves from a wild tree accidentally blew into his pot of hot boiling water. From the 4th throughout the 8th century, tea in China grew in popularity and was not only used for its medicinal properties, but it also became valued for everyday drinking pleasure and refreshment. My grandparents used to brew tea all the time in the afternoon. Now my dad brews it only on the weekend and sometimes even drinks Starbucks coffee instead. Not only so, from my own observation, the Chinese Tea Culture tradition has been slowly wearing away as cultural globalization becomes ubiquitous in our lives. Cultural globalization refers to the phenomenon by which the experience of everyday life, as influenced by the diffusion of commodities and ideas, reflects a standardization of cultural expressions around the world.

It is not to say that there are no positive effects of culture globalization which includes efficiencies in manufacturing, business management, and global communications. And many would argue that the positive effects of globalization have far outweighed the negative ones, I argue that cultural globalization, along with the conveniences it brings, will have dire consequences of our cultural diversity in the world. If we are not fully aware, traditional values such as Chinese Tea Culture might be replaced by global culture values.

In order to try to preserve this important tea ceremony tradition, we must also understand the meaning of the Chinese Tea Ceremony and tea drinking in the Chinese Culture. One of the most important circumstances in which people prepare tea in the Chinese Culture is to show a sign of respect and courtesy. In the traditional Chinese society, younger adults would serve tea to the older generation to show respect just as a person of a lower social rank would serve tea to somebody higher in rank. However, the meaning and rule of tea drinking have been blurred now as the Chinese society becomes open and accepting of new ideas. Now parents have tea with their children to show care or to spend quality time to chat about life. Even bosses in the company will offer tea to subordinates to ensure better relationships. Having tea at family gatherings is also a tradition because when sons and daughters leave home for work or family, getting together as a family becomes harder than before. One of the other most vital meaning of tea is serving tea in traditional Chinese weddings. The tea ceremony is a symbolic way for the bride and the groom to show respect and gratitude to their parents for all the love, time and care they've spent in bringing them up. In turn, the parents will also give blessings to the newlyweds as they are all about to start a new extended family together.

In Eastern Asia, there are numerous kinds of tea ceremonies, often segmented into different branches of teachings. However, the most well-known of the tea ceremonies are the Japanese Tea Ceremony and Gong-Fu Tea Ceremony. Gong-Fu Tea Ceremony or Ku-Fu Tea Ceremony is based on the tea preparations from the Fujian and Chaoshan area of Western Guangdong which spread across Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Guangdong area. Gong-Fu Tea literally means making tea with skill and the tea is usually made by a tea master with a 6-step preparation with certain tea equipment, strict temperature standards, and special water quality checks. Japanese Tea Ceremony, on the other hand,

may seem very similar to Chinese Tea Ceremony but is actually very different in its intent and goal. Both have very ritualized preparation and focuses on the idea of the reconnection with nature, however, Japanese Tea Ceremony's core concept focuses on the concept of "zen" in Buddhism which is the idea of leaving the earthly world to cultivate oneself of the truth. It is often a long-term process. The Japanese Tea Ceremony was actually founded by a Buddhist monk from China in the 9th century who founded its core four aspects: harmony, respect, purity, and loneliness. On the contrary, the Chinese Tea Ceremony is mainly concerned with the lifestyle relating to the people. The most important ideas concerning the ceremony are the environment, aesthetics, the quality and smell of the teas, the people, and quality time spent together with one another in a slower lifestyle.

The Chinese Tea Ceremony is one that centers around the quality time spent with family and friends in a slower paced lifestyle. However, people are forgetting about the important meaning of tea drinking. Therefore, my objective is to remind people the importance of traditions, specifically tea drinking in Chinese Culture, that taking time with one another, whether it is just having a cup of tea or chatting about trivial things, is so important and should be done more. In this digital age where you mask yourself to impress and to be liked on the web or enjoy the accessibility of news and services online, we find so much belonging, attention, recognition, and conveniences on the Internet that we should instead find in our own cultural traditions, in who we are as a community. We should spend more time with family and with one another and the Chinese tea drinking has given us a reason to do that.

As a result, I'm creating an interactive screen on a tea ceremony board that displays a collection of blurred pictures that show a gradual increase in the clarity of those pictures as one drinks tea and puts it down on the board. The pictures will demonstrate various situations of when to have tea in the Chinese Culture and the meaning behind it. This is especially suitable for the younger generation who are experienced with technology but may not know certain traditions and the meaning behind them but can also potentially exist in homes acting as a reminder of the meaning and stories behind the tea drinking tradition. As one sips his cup of tea and puts it down on the board, the picture becomes clearer. The more tea you drink and put your cup on the board, the clearer the picture becomes. This also then creates a chance to spend more time to talk

about and reminisce those pictures from the tea board with another. Life sometimes isn't always dramatic or fast/convenient but are those that happen daily and repetitively, such as the times you spend together with your friends and family drinking tea. And I hope to achieve this goal with my interactive tea ceremony board.

To achieve the desired concept of my project, the technical part of my project is done with iPad, Processing and along with a software called duet which enables me to project my code onto the iPad. The four pictures I will be displaying on my interactive tea ceremony board are the illustrations I drew of the situations people would have tea in the Chinese culture. The four situations include drinking tea at family gatherings, with friends, serving tea at weddings, and to somebody of a higher rank. To trigger the clarity of the pictures on the screen, I will be using a teacup that I taped with conductive tape on the bottom of the cup to achieve this result.

In coming up with my concept, I referred to two inspirations that helped develop my concept. The first is the idea of tea stains you leave on the wooden table or on your tea ceremony board when you have tea. It is very common when you perform a tea ceremony that you warm up your cups before you drink tea, so your cups are most likely wet. Every time when you have tea and finish by placing your cup on the table, you would leave a tea stain on the table. This is like your own mark or experience of that particular tea experience. Over time, you have a collection of different tea stains that tell your own story of tea drinking. My second inspiration is an installation from teamLab called "Flowers bloom in an Infinite Universe" where a flower is projected in a teacup and various movements of the petals were created. This installation gave me the idea to project my illustrations onto another screen.

My first iteration of my illustration layering was successful when displayed on the screen of my computer using Processing. However, after some feedback, I realized the illustration layerings do not quite achieve the effects that I want to achieve and instead presents just an effect similar to a simple animation. After discussion and some thought, I decided to utilize the transparency of pictures on my interactive board and came up with the final version of my concept mention in the previous paragraphs. When you drink your tea and put it down on the board, a low-transparency picture will appear. As you drink more tea and each time you put your tea down on the board, the blurred

picture will become clearer and clearer until you reach complete clarity. Once you can see a picture clearly, the next blurred picture will appear and so on. After getting the coding in processing to work, I then tested it out projecting my pictures onto my the screen (Ipad) and used conductive tape to tape underneath the teacup for the screen to be able to sense the teacup. As the technical part of my project all worked out good, I began to start polishing and coloring up all the illustrations I want to put on my interactive screen.

The hypothesized results of my interactive tea board screen are hoping that people will experience and understand the tradition such as tea drinking in Chinese culture's importance in bringing and unite people together. It's more than a tradition; behind the meaning of Chinese Tea Ceremony is a reminder itself for the constant love and care with one another that every human needs. In reality, my prototype worked out well. The teacup could be placed on the screen which would trigger a blurred picture that would become clearer each time the teacup is put down. However, in reflection, my concept of being able to really encourage people to drink tea more with pictures getting clearer on the screen can be quite weak and could potentially fail in effect.

While my final prototype worked out technically, there are many further steps that could be extended to my concept. First of all, the content of my pictures and how I display them can be further refined and thought out. How will I be able to use images or layers of pictures to achieve the effect of encouraging people to drink tea and spending more time with one another? This, I think, is one of the crucial questions and further brainstorm is needed to be done to extend this concept further. Another possible iteration is combining my previous domains of "memories" into the interactive board where this could be turned into a personal customization tea/drink board. It would deviate from my domain of traditions but could be another new concept of how I could utilize this interactive board to prompt people to spend more time together with one another rather than on the computer screen. Finally, my last further iteration of my concept is to do a refinement of how would my interactive screen actually work existing in homes and what other functions it might need. More research and studies including rapid prototyping would need to be done. I'm imagining the screen to be in disguise and not look like one unless one actually put his cup on the tea board.

In conclusion, my initial goal of this project was to be able to remind and encourage people about the importance of tradition, specifically the Chinese Tea Ceremony Tradition. Whether it turned out to achieve my goal or not, I hope that people come away to remember that the importance of traditions and who we are as a community and do not forget that because that's what makes every culture so unique.

Citations

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