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Title of Research Paper: The Contemplative Temporality of Tea in Lu Tong's *Seven Bowls of Tea* and Ling Yi's *Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan*

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Abstract

Ancient Chinese poetry and Japanese haiku exquisitely transform the mundane into moments of contemplation, where ordinary experience acquires a heightened temporal and perceptual depth. Through the everyday ritual of tea and simple yet captivating floral imagery, Chinese and Japanese poetry respectively depict how seemingly mundane experiences can create a meditative space that awakens the mind and deepens intellectual awareness. Poets employ tea, attention and poetic pause to invite participatory contemplation while temporarily suspending immediate worldly concerns. Through these devices, the poems transfigure still moments into reflective intervals. To demonstrate how ordinary time is brewed into contemplative time, this paper examines two Chinese poems: Lu Tong's *Seven Bowls of Tea* and Ling Yi's *Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan*.The paper undertakes a comparative close-reading approach to analyze the imagery, the sensory details and the poetic pauses that help in creating a contemplative space. Additionally, the concept of Chan aesthetic is employed where relevant to provide a deeper analysis.

Keywords: Chinese Tea Poetry, Lu Tong, Ling Yi, Contemplative Time, Chan Aesthetics

Introduction:

Tea occupies an important place within Chinese culture and literature. Drinking tea is a practice often associated with connecting individuals to nature and their inner selves through the awakening of the senses. This practice has developed into an ritual, known as Gongfu Cha. The art of making tea extends beyond simply enjoying a beverage or the passing of time. Tea becomes more than a beloved beverage, it transforms into a practice of contemplation. The transformation of tea from a medicinal drink to a beverage for spiritual reflection became popular during the Tang and Song Dynasties; as a result tea poetry flourished during the time.

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Chinese tea poetry celebrated the beverage while also depicting it as a profound metaphor for reflection and emotional escape. Poets presented tea as a medium of active meditation, connecting tea with Zen or enlightenment. *"Cha Chan Yi Wei"* or "the taste of tea and Chan (Zen) are one" became a popular phrase that equated the practice of drinking tea to mindfulness and being present in the moment. Tea helped to create a space of stillness and attentiveness while allowing the drinker to temporarily withdraw from worldly concerns.

This contemplative temporality of tea or the relationship between tea and contemplation can be seen in two renowned classical Chinese poems; Lu Tong's Seven Bowls of Tea and Ling Yi's Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan. Although both poem explore the creation of contemplative time through tea, Lu Tong presents the transformative effects of tea on the body and mind while Ling Yi portrays contemplation brought about by tea and by being connected with one's surroundings. The seven bowls of tea encourages the former to leave behind the anxious worlds of mortals and fly to the world of immortals while the stillness of the Green Mountain Pool creates attentiveness to the present moment for the latter.

This paper examines how tea functions as a means of creating contemplative time in both the poems. It argues that while Lu Tong presents contemplation created by tea and imagination, Ling Yi develops it through the union between tea, the individual and the surrounding. While existing scholarship examines the cultural, philosophical and spiritual dimension of tea, this paper focuses on the manner in which contemplative time is created through tea. It further examines how Chan aesthetics can help interpret these poetic experiences.

By employing a qualitative, interpretative approach, this paper closely reads the two poems, "Seven Bowls of Tea" and "Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan". A textual analysis of the imagery and sensory details is used to understand the creation of contemplative experience. Chan aesthetics and the theory of *Yijing* are applied. The objective of the paper then is to examine the relationship between tea and contemplative time by analysing how attention, sensory experience and imagination work to create a contemplative space.

I. Lu Tong's *Seven Bowls of Tea*

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The first poem taken into consideration for the purpose of this study is "Seven Bowls of Tea" by Lu Tong, a celebrated Tang-dynasty poem. It serves as a striking exemplification of the transformative power of tea presenting it as a medium that can awaken the senses and lead the poet to create a space of contemplative time. Written through the conceit of seven successive bowls, the poem moves from bodily sensation towards intellectual awakening, making it particularly significant to examine how an ordinary act of drinking tea can generate a more contemplative experience of time.

The progression that Lu Tong associates with each bowl of tea that moves gradually from the moistening of the lips and throat, to restoring memory and to ultimately, experiencing the "mountain of immortals" (Lu Tong, line 9) could be seen as the incremental transformation of ordinary time into contemplative time. This transformation is not dramatic; it slowly and softly unfolds with each bowl showcasing how the simple ritual of tea could lead to such enlightenment that inspires one to leave behind worldly troubles and "fly" into a realm of sharp awareness and detachment.

The first bowl of tea provides physical healing to the parched mouth and throat, the second emotionally uplifts the poet as his loneliness and melancholy are shattered. The third is associated with cognitive effects as it helps the poet to recall the information of "five thousand scrolls". The fourth bowl encourages the poet to let go of past worries and worldly anxieties. The fifth cleanses the body and mind entirely after the self has healed physically and has learnt to detach. Having been healed and learnt to let go of worries, the poet imagines that he has risen above the world of mere mortals and flown into "Penglai" (Lu Tong, line 9), the realm of immortals with the sixth bowl of tea. Finally, having mentally ascended, he experiences an inexplicable joy.

This progression can be read as a parallel to the gradual movement into contemplative time. It begins with the first cup imploring the poet's attention and by the seventh bowl the poet has successfully been able to create a contemplative space for himself. With each bowl of tea, the poet's concentration deepens. What begins with a simple act of consuming a beverage escalates into an experience in which ordinary time loses its urgency, allowing the poet to inhabit a more expansive and contemplative time. Tea becomes the means through which the poet's perception of the world changes. In that moment he seems to be liberated from the demands of a monotonous existence and instead is transported to an imaginary land that seems distant at the same time deeply connected to the moment of drinking tea.

Lu Tong explores the creation of contemplative time by presenting the effects of tea particularly on attention, memory and imagination. Attention plays an important role in Lu Tong's experience of tea. As he drinks each bowl, his awareness gradually moves beyond the physical act of drinking. The taste and

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effects of tea draw his attention towards his body and mind, allowing him to experience changes that he might otherwise overlook. The progression from one bowl to another shows how tea deepens his awareness and separates him from the disturbances of everyday life. In this way, tea creates a moment in which the speaker becomes more attentive to his inner experience. Unlike ordinary drinking, the act becomes a gradual process of observation and contemplation.

Memory can also be understood through the speaker's movement away from his immediate surroundings. As the effects of tea develop, he moves beyond ordinary experiences and enters a world shaped by imagination and recollection. The poem suggests that tea allows the speaker to distance himself from present worldly concerns and experience a different mental space. Rather than remaining limited to the immediate moment, his thoughts move towards a larger and more imaginative world. Tea therefore becomes a means through which the speaker's awareness extends beyond the present, connecting his experience of drinking with a deeper movement of the mind.

Imagination becomes most visible in the later stages of the poem, when Lu Tong moves beyond the ordinary world and imagines flying towards the land of immortals. The effects of tea are no longer limited to the body but extend into the speaker's mental and imaginative experience. This movement suggests that tea allows him to escape the limitations of everyday life, at least temporarily. His imagination transforms the simple act of drinking tea into an extraordinary experience. In this sense, contemplative time in Lu Tong's poem is not only a moment of stillness but also a movement towards imaginative freedom.

The philosophy of Chan Aesthetics that finds beauty in the ordinary and the mundane instead of the sublime can be applied to Seven Bowls of Tea. The phrase "Cha Chan Yi Wei" seems to strongly function here as Lu Tong presents an extraordinary experience of contemplation brought about by an ordinary act of drinking tea. The experience of tea and Chan or Zen then becomes similar as the poet experiences mindfulness while sipping tea. A simple act of drinking tea alone in a quiet space reveals the beauty of the ordinary which is not rushed or ostentatious. It clears the poet's mind and helps him to appreciate simplicity while experiencing something more complex.

Thus, Lu Tong's renowned Seven Bowls of Tea becomes a fine example of the portrayal of tea as a portal into contemplative time. The meticulous description of the effect of each cup of tea and the use of the poet's vivid imagination beautifully articulate the contemplative experience of the poet. The ordinary ritual of tea becomes an extraordinary experience, where the poet is enlightened and temporarily relieved from worldly concerns.

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II. Ling Yi's *Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan*

While Lu Tong highlights the physical and cognitive effects of tea, Ling Yi speaks of the tranquillity that the warm beverage can bring about eventually contributing in creating a contemplative space. By painting a peaceful pastoral picture, Yi depicts the manner in which contemplative time emerges not from something dramatic but instead from a quiet landscape and through stillness similar to Lu Tong's gradual unfolding. The stillness of the landscape accompanied by the poet's close attention to simple details lead to a temporal withdrawal from worldly anxieties and allow the tea drinking moment to unfold at a slower pace. The poem then can also be analysed through the lens of Chan aesthetics as the poet focuses on a deep connection with Nature while using minimalism and simple language. Chan aesthetics is employed not as a religious framework but as an aesthetic sensibility that values stillness and immediacy.

The setting in "Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan" becomes important as Ling Yi transports readers to a space of pastoral bliss. He presents a picturesque image, where the speaker enjoys his "fragrant tea" (Ling Yi, line 3) on a beautiful green mountain as he soaks in the landscape surrounding him. He states that below the cliff there is a boat that seems reluctant to depart resembling his own feelings. This almost Wordsworthian description and expression establishes a space away from the chaos of everyday life. The secluded landscape creates a spatial separation from the routines and demands of everyday existence.

In Seven Bowls of Tea, the tea acts as the sole vehicle that deeps the poet's attention. Here, Ling Yi's setting accompanied by fragrant tea help create a moment of stillness. The opening lines: "The sound of wild springs and the delicate drift of smoke blend in the white clouds" (Ling Yi, line 1) reflect the poet's awareness of his surroundings and his deepening concentration. The setting also helps in drawing a connection between time and space, the natural space that the poet inhabits leads to Contemplative Time.

The tranquillity of the Green Mountain Pool is the first thing that draws the poet's as well as the reader's attention. The tranquil landscape that the poet hesitates to leave behind resembles the Wordsworthian understanding of nature as a space of psychological retreat. In poems like "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth speaks of how “the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lightened” (Wordsworth, lines 41-42) through the contemplative experience of nature. However, memory becomes an important factor for Wordsworth as it helps him experience the restorative power of Nature. When the poet is overwhelmed by the chaos of city life, he remembers the serene natural landscape that he had experienced in the past, and that memory revitalizes him. This is what differentiates Wordsworth from Ling Yi. The latter focuses on immediacy instead of memory. In

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"Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan" , it is not a memory that is being cherished or relived, the poet is experiencing Nature in that very moment. Sipping tea while admiring the Green Mountain Pool compels him to temporarily disassociate from worldly anxieties and live in the moment as his attention is redirected to the sensory details of his surroundings. Similar to the bowls of tea that encourage Lu Tong to briefly leave behind the external world.

Ling Yi's attentive engagement with his surroundings is reflected in the poem's opening imagery as the poet mentions the distinct wild sound and the manner in which smoke blends with the white clouds. The blending of the smoke with the clouds resembles a harmonious interconnectedness. Not only is Nature connected in itself but the poet also becomes connected with Nature in his observation and experience. As he keenly observes the natural elements, he participates in its existence and becomes a part of it rather than being a distant observer. The ordinary ritual of drinking tea then transforms into contemplative time as the landscape encourages the poet to stay in the moment and changes his sensory perception.

Besides, the opening imagery, the image of the boat that is "reluctant to depart" (Ling Yi, line 5) becomes important within the landscape as it externalizes Ling Yi's internal landscape, in turn connecting the landscape and the speaker's emotional state. Just as the boat appears to remain drawn towards the Green Mountain Pool, the speaker also seems deeply attached to the tranquillity of the place. This image suggests that the experience of drinking tea and being surrounded by nature has created a sense of comfort, making departure difficult. The boat, therefore, becomes more than a part of the landscape; it reflects the speaker's desire to remain in a space free from the disturbances of everyday life. This also brings about stillness. The pace and the focus of the poem mirror one another. The focus is on enjoying the stillness of the surroundings as the pace is slow, even still.

The stillness of the landscape makes it seem as if time has suspended similar to Lu Tong's Seven Bowls of Tea. The speaker is not concerned with the outside world, he is absorbed in his peaceful surroundings. In both the poems, the external world or the everyday routine appears to cease temporarily as both poets enjoy their tea. However, the manner in which contemplative time is created differs slightly in both the poems. Lu Tong's contemplative time is created through the effects of tea. Although Ling Yi enjoys his "fragrant tea" it is not just the warm beverage that leads to the transformation of ordinary time into contemplative time, the serene surrounding plays a major role in calming the poet and connecting him with his inner most feelings and external world.

On one hand, tea helps Lu Tong leave behind the external world and fly to the land of immortals by accelerating his imagination and on the other, it helps Ling Yi remain rooted in the present moment by

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deepening his awareness of the still landscape. In both poems, tea allows the speakers to move away from the demands of everyday life. Lu Tong's transformation is more inward while Ling Yi's experience develops through his connection with the natural surroundings.

Finally, the stillness within the landscape that leads to contemplative time can be analysed through Chan aesthetics. Empty mountains and streams in Chan aesthetics symbolize stillness that transforms the ordinary into a meditative state. The theory of *Yijing* or poetic state also becomes prominent in Ling Yi's poem. Yangfang Tang in his paper, "Translating across Cultures: Yi Jing and Understanding Chinese Poetry" refers to Wang Changling's "Principles of Poetry" and states Changling's emphasis on the "harmonious interaction and cross-reference between the subjective mind (xin) and the objective reality (jing)".Here, Yi Jing is understood as an artistic space where the poet's thoughts and emotions combine with the scene being depicted. In Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan, the poet's thoughts and emotions are united with the objectives reality, which is the serene landscape that surrounds him. The theory of Yijing then can be applied to the poem.

Chan aesthetics can also be applied to the stylistic quality of the poem. Minimalism is an important aspect of this aesthetic, where a few words are used to express deeper meanings. Ling Yi uses simple language and a few carefully chosen images to convey a sense of peace and contemplation. The sounds of the springs, the drifting smoke and the white clouds create a peaceful scene without lengthy description. In this way, the poem shows how deeper emotions and ideas can be expressed through simple images and words.

Hence, Ling Yi's poem depicts the manner in which tea and nature combine or unite to create contemplative time. The warm beverage and the natural surrounding that the poet enjoys along with a companion eases his mind and takes away worldly worries. Instead of escaping the world of mortals as Lu Tong does, Ling Yi connects with it. The speaker finds contemplation in the quiet surroundings of the Green Mountain Pool. Tea, in both the poems, then becomes the portal or a means to experiencing stillness and contemplation.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Lu Tong's Seven Bowls of Tea and Ling Yi's Drinking Tea in the Green Mountain Pool with Yuan depict the contemplative temporality of tea, as it becomes more than a mere warm beverage. In both these classical Chinese poems, tea becomes a catalyst through which ordinary time is transformed

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into contemplative time. It creates a temporary space for the poet away from worldly chaos, where his inner emotions and thoughts become clearer. This contemplative experience is presented through physical and imaginative transformation by Lu Tong and by an attentive presence by Ling Yi. The former temporarily disassociates from his surroundings while the latter becomes more aware and finds stillness in his tranquil surroundings. Although different, the role of tea in creating a space of reflection remains the same. Through their simple yet rich imagery, Lu Tong and Ling Yi present contemplative time brought about by tea in classical Chinese poetry.

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