

# Review of a Recipe Book by Jiang Dezhi “Tea for Women: a Path to Health with Herbs and Flowers”

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## Abstract

This work reviews a recipe book by Jiang Dezhi and other authors “Tea for women: a path to health with herbs and flowers”. Beijing: The Publishing house for Chemistry Industry. Volume: 180 pages. Illustrations: 90 by Wang Jianqiang. Date of publication: July, 2011. ISBN: 978-7122116307. Soft cover. Language: Chinese.<sup>1</sup>

## Keywords

Chinese Cuisine; Recipes; Tea; Female Health; Flowers; Herbs; Chinese Medicine; Sympathetic Magic



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## Обзор кулинарной книги Цзян Дэчжи «Чай для женщин: к здоровью с травами и цветами»

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### Аннотация

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В статье приводится обзор кулинарной книги Цзян Дэчжи и других авторов «Чай для женщин: к здоровью с травами и цветами». Пекин: издательство Химическая Промышленность. Объем: 180 с. Иллюстрации: 90, автор иллюстраций Ван Цзянцян. Дата публикации: июль 2011 г. ISBN: 978-7122116307. Мягкая обложка. Язык публикации: китайский.

### Ключевые слова

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китайская кухня; рецепты; чай для женщин; травы; цветы; китайская медицина; симпатическая магия



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China is believed to have discovered tea and used it for centuries for medicinal, and nutritional and ritual purposes. Moreover, in China tea is used in this capacity up until now. Chinese tea ceremony is an ancient art popular even nowadays, it boasts its own experts and professionals. A representative of the classical school of Chinese tea culture called Chaozhou Gongfu says: “Chinese tea ceremony embodies the essence of Chinese culture and is our national intangible cultural heritage” (Five Thousand Years, 2010, p. 35). The Japanese and Taiwanese tea ceremonies originated also from China, supposedly from Guangdong province.



**Fig. 1. A Chinese tea-set**

The Chinese tea culture has a long history and is broad and profound. It includes not only the material culture but also the spiritual, even religious component. One thinks, for instance, about the Tea Sutra (茶经) composed by a Tang Dynasty saint Lu Yu. Tea Sutra summarizes the experience of tea production and drinking in the Tang Dynasty. Tea Sutra, translated otherwise into English as “The Classic of Tea” describes how tea plants are grown, how the leaves are processed, how tea is prepared as a drink. According to Lu Yu, tea is cold in nature. It cures body heat, quenches thirst, heals dry eyes, weak limbs and aching joints. However, if the tea leaves are not picked up at the right time or processed unskillfully then drinking tea will lead to illness (Lu Yu, 2012).

Chinese scholars and literati such as Lu Yu and Jiao Ran attached great importance to the spiritual enjoyment and moral norms of tea, paying attention to the art of drinking with proper tea utensils. The art of tea drinking absorbed elements from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism philosophies. Since Tang dynasty the culture of tea and tea drinking permeated the court and society and penetrated into Chinese poetry, painting, calligraphy, religion and medicine. For example, in the famous volume “Poems of the Tang Dynasty”, more than 400 poems deal with tea. Summing it up in its long five-thousand-years history China has accumulated not only rich material culture related to consumption and production of tea, but also a bulk of tea-related cultural masterpieces.



Fig. 2. Chinese herbal tea

When Chinese people drink tea the word “tasting” is essential. “Tasting tea” means not only to identify qualities of tea, but also contemplating and deeply feeling the process of tea drinking. The typical recommendation one can find about tea is like this: “In the busy time make a pot of strong tea, choose the place of elegance and quietness and then drink your tea to eliminate fatigue, to stimulate your spirit. If you sip your tea slowly you will achieve the enjoyment of beauty, you will feel the spiritual world sublimated to noble artistic realm” (Five Thousand Years, 2010, p. 51). The proper environment for Chinese tea ceremony generally consists of proper buildings, gardens, furnishings, tea sets and other factors. Drinking tea

requires the atmosphere of quiet, freshness, comfort and cleanness. Usually it's held in gardens or against a natural landscape, with wooden pavilions, wooden benches and furniture.

The tea ceremony of Chaozhou Gongfu is the most representative tea ceremony of the Chinese traditional tea drinking. This is not only because tea is believed to play a health-preserving role, but also because tea has the artistic conception of "being a gentleman, being pure". Many people in and outside China enjoy Chinese tea and Chinese-style tea drinking. They not only love the taste of tea, but also enjoy the tea making process. I think tea ceremony is so popular because, among other factors, it has a mind-relaxing effect. It is said that people can forget all their troubles while making and drinking tea. Many people like to share their tea with others, tea therefore renders an opportunity to experience the comfort of being with others.

There are many sorts of tea in China: Chaozhou Phoenix Tea, Taihu Tea of Fragrant Beans, Suzhou Fragrant Tea, Hunan Ginger Salt Tea, Chengdu Guiquan Tea, Taiwan Frozen Top Tea, Hangzhou Dragon-well Tea, Fujian Black Dragon Tea. The main varieties are green tea, black tea, oolong (black dragon) tea, white tea, yellow tea, black tea.

The tea that Jiang Dezhi describes in her book is various sorts of herbal and flower tea recommended specifically for women, for female beauty and female health. The author begins her book by underlying that herbal teas are known as a "natural health drink". Nowadays, people pay attention to green and environmental protection, and health preservation. Herbal tea, absorbing the aura of heaven and earth has become a good drink for people to "return to nature and enjoy health" (Jiang Dezhi, 2011, p.7).

The structure of the book is the following: the author first introduces one main ingredient of a tea recipe, usually a flower or a plant, speaks about its value from the point of view of traditional Chinese medicine. Then the western medicine will be referred to that sustains the healing effect of the discussed plant. Then the author tells an anecdote how this or that famous female character from Chinese history or folklore drank tea made of this ingredient and what success she achieved through that. Finally comes a recipe of tea with recommendation how to drink it and what benefits for health and appearance can be achieved by drinking this sort of tea.

For example, we can learn about osmanthus that it is a perennial evergreen plant with luxuriant foliage and autumn flowers. In China, osmanthus has a long history of cultivation. Because in the Chinese language the words "osmanthus" (guì 桂) and "expensive" (guì 贵) are homophones, people also called osmanthus "the rich tree". In the ancient courtyards osmanthus trees were generally planted in pairs, giving the metaphorical meaning "double wealth". In the vicinity of academies and private schools people also plant osmanthus trees wishing the students the academic success. Osmanthus has a high ornamental value, and is also good for nutritional and medicinal purposes. Since ancient times, people have used osman-



thus flowers to make various candies and cakes, and to brew wine. Traditional Chinese medicine believes that osmanthus is warm, connected with Yang element, and should be used to cure the cold, asthma and common cough, dizziness, cold in the limbs, toothache, abdominal pain etc. Modern western medicine believes that the essential oil in osmanthus contains celerene, neroli alcohol, linalool. It also contains vinegar, including lauric acid, myristic acid, palmitic acid, and stearic acid. This hymn to osmanthus the author concludes with exclamation: "Osmanthus flowers are rich flowers, health care flowers!" (Jiang Dezhi, 2011, p. 54)

Next comes a story about a female of old who invented (or used a lot of) corresponding tea. About osmanthus tea we learn that there was a widow who sold mountain wine. The wine she brewed was mellow and sweet, so she was called the fairy wine lady. One day in winter she opened her gate and saw a frozen beggar lying outside. She found that the beggar was still breathing, so she carried him inside on her back and fed him with hot soup. The beggar thanked her for saving his life and asked her to take him in for a few more days. She pitied him and let him stay till recovery, but it gave rise to gossip and evil rumour about her chastity. People blamed her and stopped buying her wine. One day, the beggar suddenly disappeared leaving behind a bag of seeds and a note saying that he was a Taoist immortal Wu Gang and the seed of a new plant was the reward for her kindness. As soon as the news spread, people came to her from far and near to ask for osmanthus seeds. Fairy wine lady shared osmanthus with people, and the seeds soon grew into osmanthus trees, out of which fragrant wine and delicious tea was made. People praised the widow who won the favors of the immortal and planted osmanthus everywhere.

When speaking about tea with roses the author would tell that during the Tang Dynasty, roses were favored by the royal court and nobles. The famous beauty Yang Guifei not only insisted on drinking rose tea every day, but also ordered to put rose petals in the tube where she took her bath. Because she drank rose tea everyday and often took bath with rose petals her skin was always soft and young. Princess Taiping, the favorite daughter of Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty, had a skin as smooth as snow, because she preferred peach blossom tea to any other drink. She not only drank the tea, but also invented a special beauty recipe made of peach blossom. On the third day of the third month of the lunar calendar Princess Taiping had her maids dry peach blossoms dry in the shade, grind them and mix them with chicken blood -she used the mixture to paint the face and wipe the body.

When speaking about lotus the author remarks that according to the traditional Chinese medicine, the lotus flower is bitter, cool, can be used for detoxification, has anti-inflammatory and antibacterial usage, is good for the treatment of acute and chronic inflammation, acute otitis media, acute tympanitis, acute conjunctivitis, acute lymphangitis and inflammation of the urinary system. Modern western medicine believes that golden lotus is rich in alkaloids and

flavonoids. Lotus extract can effectively inhibit gram-positive and gram-negative bacilli, as well as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, pneumococcus and staphylococcus aureus. Regular drinking can expand lung capacity, enhance the body's ability to take oxygen, can fight fatigue. In addition, golden lotus tea is rich in vitamins, carotene and other trace elements, can effectively supplement the nutrition of human cells, and can be used for blood nourishment.

Then comes a usual anecdote about a lotus-tea drinker. During the Liao and Jin dynasties, the famous Empress Dowager Xiao took bathes of lotus water, so even though she wasn't young, her skin was still white and beautiful.



**Fig. 3. Ingredients for a flower tea recipe**

Jasmine was introduced into China during the Han Dynasty, it was brought from southwest Asia and has a history of more than 1,600 years. Jasmine is a pure, fragrant flower with a sweet and long-lasting fragrance. Exquisite and charming, in Chinese culture it represents loyalty, respect, purity, simplicity. In many places it is regarded as the flower of love, so lovers send each other jasmine flowers to express their feelings. It is also the flower of friendship. People used to put jasmine wreath on the neck of a guest and let it hang down to the chest to show respect and friendliness. The flowers, leaves and roots of jasmine can be used

as medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine believes that jasmine has the role of clearing away heat and detoxifying, moistening, regulating the qi energy, cure dysentery and abdominal pain, the eye swelling and has a strong tonic effect. Modern western medicine thinks that jasmine contains benzyl alcohol, linalool, benzoic acid, so it can fight bacteria and diminish inflammation.

Jasmine flowers can be soaked in water instead of boiling as tea. Regular drinking of jasmine tea can clear the liver and generate bodily fluids and quench thirst, dispel phlegm and treat dysentery. It can also improve strength, lower blood pressure, prevent radiation damage, and fight cancer.

Now comes the jasmine-related story, this time though it has nothing to do with tea-drinking. During the Tang Dynasty, there lived in Suzhou a famous courtesan named Zhenniang. Born originally born in a scholarly family, she was smart and beautiful, could sing and dance, was good at music, chess, painting and calligraphy. During the Rebellion of An Shi, she fled south with her parents. Unfortunately, she was separated from her family and had to put up in Suzhou. She was lured to a brothel, where her talents and beauty soon became famous. A rich young man named Wang fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. But she had been betrothed by her parents to another person and wanted to keep her parents' promise, so she refused him. The young man insisted and pressed her so hard that to escape his advances Zhenniang committed suicide by hanging. The suitor, full of remorse, buried her and carved a monument on her grave to commemorate her. He also planted a jasmine tree on her grave, and vowed never to marry again. Since then, every literati passing by made tribute to the beautiful courtesan leaving poems on her grave, something like this: "Before her death, jasmine flowers had no fragrance. After her death her spirit attached to the flowers, and now jasmine flowers have a strong aroma". Because of this story people also call the jasmine flower "fragrant soul".

The recipes that the author offers are pretty easy and go like this:

"Weight loss fruit has the function of relieving heat and thirst, improving liquids and eyesight. Long-term consumption can reduce cholesterol and improve blood viscosity and density. This tea can reduce fat and help lose weight, is also recommended for hypertension, arteriosclerosis, coronary heart disease, sore throat, acute and chronic hepatitis has a certain effect.

#### **How to make tea:**

1-2 spoonfuls of tea leaves;  
1 fat-reducing fruit.

Put the fruit into the cup, add boiling water, cover the cup lid and brew the tea. After about 15 minutes the tea can be drunk. You can add more water to have a new helping. After each addition, you need to soak the fruit and tea leaves for about ten minutes". before drinking (Jiang Dezhi, 2011, p. 60).

The book thus collects many facts about both Chinese legends and the beneficial properties of various plants used as flavors for tea. Nevertheless, in all these



references to traditional Chinese and Western medicine (without real quotations and book references) there is nothing to show that these tea drinks or these plants are good specifically for female health. Why then the book positions itself as “Tea for women”? What have all these receipts and plant description to do with women? The only thing in common is, I believe, the idea that a woman who wants to be beautiful as a flower, should eat flowers, drink flowers, bathe in flowers and watch flowers – ancient sympathetic magic (Bonewits, 1989). The very same logic prompts modern Chinese girls to eat pork lard so that their skin would become smooth as lard, or make modern Hainanese females eat a lot of papaya because the shape of this fruit resembles a female breast – therefore it is good for breasts! While reading the recipe book by Jiang Dezhi it is difficult to get rid of the feeling that the book promotes old gender stereotypes, reducing all the needs of a woman exclusively to her beauty. It is not without reason that the author tells us about almost every plant that it makes the skin white and tender. In addition, we see in these recipes a manifestation of sympathetic magic: to be beautiful as a flower, you need to use beautiful flowers.

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