**Linguocultural characteristics of the concept «tea» and «чай»**

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The words “tea” (English) and “чай” (Russian) represent the concept that has been formed by historical and social processes, and geographical aspects. The linguistic divergence between these words reflects the historical trade routes and Chinese dialects. The word *"чай"* derives from the northern Chinese dialects (Mandarin). The term was pronounced [cha - 茶]. This pronunciation was used over trade route "Tea Road" connecting northern China (e.g., Beijing) and Russia through Central Asia in the XVII th century. Russian merchants imported tea through Kyakhta, Irkutsk, and Moscow, adopting the northern variant of pronunciation.

In contrast, the English term *"tea"* originated from the southern Chinese Min Nan dialect [t’e - 茶], which was spoken in Fujian Province, Southeast China. Dutch traders, who dominated maritime trade in the XVII th century, exported tea from the port of Amoy (modern Xiamen) to Europe. The Min Nan word "*t’e*" was integrated into European languages as "*thee*" (Dutch), "*tea*" (English), and "*thé*" (French). This pattern reflects the influence of maritime trade networks [2]. Thus, the duality of "*cha*" and "*te*" in global terminology comes from China’s regional linguistic diversity and the geopolitical division of trade routes: maritime interactions shaped the European term, while the Silk Road impacted Slavic and Asian languages.

As the concept of "tea" and "чай" evolved, it influenced cultural practices, idioms, and sociolinguistic divergences within tea-related traditions both in Russia and Great Britain. In English, phrases like "*not my cup of tea*" (denoting personal preference) and "*storm in a teacup*" (trivial issue) reflect tea’s role as a social and metaphorical symbols. The ritual of afternoon tea, established in Victorian England, underscores its cultural embeddedness [5].

Russian idioms such as "*гонять чаи*" (“to idle over tea”) and "*дать на чай*" ("to tip," lit. "give for tea”), on the other hand emphasize tea’s association with leisure, hospitality and communal bonds. Literary works, like Alexander Pushkin’s depictions of tea gatherings in "Eugene Onegin", further cemented “чай” as a marker of communal identity in Russian culture [3]:

*To order Olga tea, and later*

*A supper follows, say good night,*

*The guest are leaving satisfied..*

*It’s getting dark; on table shining*

*The evening samovar made hiss.*

*<...>The fragrant tea by dark jet streaming*

*Poured by the Olga’s hand was filling*

*Placed on the table china cups;*

*A boy served creamer; there’s no fuss;*

The British ritual of afternoon tea, established in the mid-19th century by Anna, Duchess of Bedford, emerged as a response to the long gap between lunch and dinner in aristocratic circles. This practice evolved beyond mere consumption into a performative act of social distinction. Its components – delicate porcelain, tiered stands with finger sandwiches, scones with clotted cream, and strict etiquette (e.g., stirring tea without clinking) – reinforced social hierarchy. The working-class counterpart, "*high tea*" served as a hearty evening meal with bread, meat and tea, satisfying regular needs rather than reflecting leisure. Tea's association with punctuality was embedded in phrases like "*tea time*", denoting a scheduled daily ritual. The British Empire's colonial trade, particularly through the East India Company, intertwined tea with national identity. However, its consumption remained stratified: imported Chinese tea initially symbolized elite status while later Indian and Ceylon varieties became accessible to the masses [5].

In Russia, tea-drinking became a cornerstone of daily routine. The center of it was the "*samovar*" - a metal urn that symbolizes hearth and unity. Introduced in the 18th century, its design, which keeps water hot for hours, facilitates prolonged gatherings spanning multiple rounds of tea drinking. Unlike the British emphasis on precision, the Russian strong tea concentrate "*заварка*" can be adjusted in strength according to personal preference by adding hot water, highlighting adaptability within a collective context [1]. Russian tea culture is informal; guests are greeted with the phrase "*Садись, чай пить*!" ("Sit down, have tea"), emphasizing tea's role as a social lubricant. Accompanying dishes like "блины" (pancakes), "*варенье*" (jam), and "пряники" (gingerbread) showcase regional diversity while symbolizing universal generosity.

British tea rituals emphasize individuality (e.g., my cup of tea) and temporal boundaries, mirroring a culture that values privacy and schedules. In contrast, Russian practices prioritize open-ended interaction, reflecting ideals of hospitality *(“гостеприимство”)* and communality (*“соборность”)* [4]. Material culture differences illustrate this contrast: British teacups have handles for personal use, while Russian decorative glass holders *(“подстаканники”)* historically allowed shared sipping from a single glass [2].

Thus, the linguistic and cultural trajectories of "*tea*" and "*чай*" reflect historical trade networks, colonial influence, and societal norms. While English idioms emphasize ritualized consumption, Russian phrases highlight tea's integration into everyday life and moral values. These contrasts demonstrate how a single product can evolve into distinct cultural symbols shaped by geography and history.

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