

Exploring the Linguistics Landscape of Pu'er Tea: A Case Study of Bulang Tea Tradition in Laoman'e Village

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Abstract

This study presents Pu'er tea's range while shedding light on its identity and classifications, which are directly related to Yunnan province's growth. The previous scholarship had widely neglected this topic and failed to examine the diversity of Pu'er tea. However, for this research work, fills the research gaps of the four primary objectives: identifying and highlighting ancient and king Pu'er teas; assessing the economic standing of the Bulang Buddhist community; differentiating between these two varieties of Pu'er tea; and exploring the historical context of Chinese tea culture. The study revealed four main findings such as the first finding suggests that tea traders promoted the phrase "Pu'er tea" to integrate and assess all Pu'er area tea varieties in order to enhance sales. The second finding, based on Chinese tea history, demonstrates the significance of ancient and King Pu'er teas for the Bulang Buddhist community. The third finding indicates a total of eight varieties of Pu'er tea, and the fourth finding shows the significant important of ancient and king tea of Buang Buddhist community in the Laoman'e village. This study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research data, and analyzing data constantly. Therefore, the author conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-two study participants and carried out fieldwork in the Laoman'e hamlet in Xishuangbanna, in the Chinese province of Yunnan. This study was significant for the Bulang Buddhist ethnic group of Laoman'e village, which relies mostly on ancient and king pu'er tea sales in the mountainous region of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China.

Keywords: Ancient tea, Bulang Buddhist community, King tea, Pu'er tea, Laoman'e village, Xishuangbanna

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Introduction

The author dedicated a significant amount of time to understanding the significance of pu'er teas grown in hilly, mountainous areas, particularly in Laoman'e village. This research study contributes to the Bulang ethnic tribe, which mostly relies on their traditional ancient and king pu'er tea farming in the mountainous region of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China. After conducting a series of research fieldwork and reviewing related literature on Yunnan's Pu'er tea varieties, the author concluded that "Pu'er tea" is one of the most misinterpreted terms in use today. Because tea scholars have not provided a comprehensive description of pu'er tea and its history in previous scholarship, so most people have misunderstood the term in relation to tea. As a result, many people have already come to believe that Yunnan Province, produces pu'er tea, a unique, high-quality form of tea, which is called "**Pu're tea.**" However, the results of this study suggest that Pu'er tea should not always be considered a high-quality Pu'er tea. Because the region boasts a multitude of Pu'er tea varieties. The study underscores that pu'er tea, regardless of its quality, refers to any type of tea that thrives in the Pu'er area, with the area name "Pu'er" in Yunnan Province serving as its eponym. The region harbors numerous unique tea varieties, such as green tea, black tea, white tea, xiaoshu cha (young tea), Qiaomu tea (middle age tea), dashu cha (old age tea), gushu cha (ancient tea), and cha wang (king tea), all referred to as Pu'er tea.

Literature Review

1. Historical Background of the King Tea

Southwest China's Yunnan is home to the oldest tea trees, estimated to be 2700 years old tea trees are still available over there (Li, and et al, 2023). The first tea consumption and its discovery now became a subject to debate when and how tea was first discovered in mainland China. However, Chinese oral history suggest that mainland China may have consumed tea for the first time as early as 5,000 BCE. Unfortunately, there is no reliable evidence to support the theory that the region specifically discovered and consumed tea. Furthermore, Chinese tea scholars argue that tea consumption may have begun much later than previously thought, at approximately 4,000 BCE (Li et al, 2014). However, the majority of Chinese people believe that the mythical King Shennong (2737–2697 BCE) made the initial discovery of tea in Southwest China. Therefore, nnumerous popular oral histories and myths, both Chinese and indigenous, believe and bolster the notion that the legendary king Shennong made the initial discovery of wild tea. The legend goes like while he was boiling water under a tree, a dead leaf from a tea tree bush dropped into his kettle. Thus, he noticed that the water's colour had gradually changed to a dark green colour, and after tasting it, he felt a pleasant sensation, marking the beginning of Chinese tea drink culture (Pдам et al, 2018).

According to theories, this marked the inception of tea consumption in China's tea cultural history. Since then, tea has undergone significant transformations in the diverse Chinese tea cultures of today. Figure-I (see below) depicts the concept of tea discovery, with the legendary king Shennong being the first to discover tea. According to earlier literature, China's culture of drinking tea later moved from the southeast to the north (Yan, 2023). On the other hand, some

academics contend that tea was already present in China during the Zhou dynasty (1100–771 BCE) and rose to prominence during that time, ranking among the most popular drinks among affluent Chinese society. However, in the beginning, people only used tea as medicine to stop the spread of diseases and as a religious offering to the gods and goddesses. Later, Buddhist monks received tea to help them relax during their meditation retreats at temples or in forest (Han, 2007). As early as 547–490 BCE, Chinese Buddhist monks carried on the tea culture with them wherever they travelled from one place to another. Following that, the transmission of tea culture from one generation to the next resulted in a rapid expansion of the influence of tea drinking customs within China's multiethnic communities in China (Gilbert, 2008).

Figure 1

An Art Photograph of King Shennong's First Discovery of Tea Sitting Under the Tea Bush



Note. Accessed January 27, <https://twitter.com/LadyTeapots/status/1382711125339426818>

Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the Han dynasty (207–189 CE) and possibly even 476 BCE were the times when tea-drinking culture was most likely deeply ingrained in China (Ma, 2018). The research data suggests that when Qin founded and conquered Sichuan in the 316th century BCE, Buddhist missionary monks brought tea culture from India. Constantly, tea became one of the most popular soft drinks among the Chinese elite class and meditation monks, according to written records and documents that strongly imply tea drinking culture had already gained significant traction in Chinese elite society in 59 BCE (Li et al, 2014). Buddhist monks used to plant young tea trees around their monastery grounds, pickle the fresh tea leaves, and then consume them with boiling water. As a result, two thousand old Bulang King tea trees are a vivid testament to China's ancient tea culture nowadays. Many ancient tea trees, believed to be more than two thousand years old, which are still seen in Laoman'e village. The local Bulang community believe that these ancient and king tea trees are currently blessed them contributing significantly to the region's economic growth in the region. In fact, during the early days, the development of the tea-drinking system and quality-controlled management system was in its infancy. As a result, the bitter taste of tea only piqued the interest of a small number of people, who resorted to using it as a natural herbal remedy for unexpected illnesses due to its undeveloped flavour.

For instance, tea was not as popular as today, but when tea gained widespread popularity then people adopted tea exchange policy with their desired goods. The data also strongly indicates that the tea trade began during the Tang Dynasty (618–907) as a commodity or commercial product to exchange goods surrounding Yunnan and other parts of China. Later, Yunnan's Pu'er area gained widespread recognition for its traditional tea production. As a result, Pu'er area is commonly known as best tea brand name (Pu'er tea) in Yunnan province, China. Nowadays Laoman's village of Bulang Buddhists is the only place in the province of Yunnan—possibly even in all of China—that still produces the best quality of pu'er tea, because the oldest tea trees are only available in there, so tea culture deeply rooted to the Bulang Buddhist community. King tea is comparatively expensive and widely consumed around the world due to its oldest age of tea trees and 100% organic (Li et al, 2014). As a result, the price of ancient and king tea has increased rapidly in the tea beverage market from 2013 onward, giving the Bulang Buddhist community a fortunate break and removing the financial crisis that the community formally faced in the past. Now that ancient and king teas are considered the golden crops of the Bulang people, and they are able to support Buddhism within their community in the region and sustain their means of subsistence.

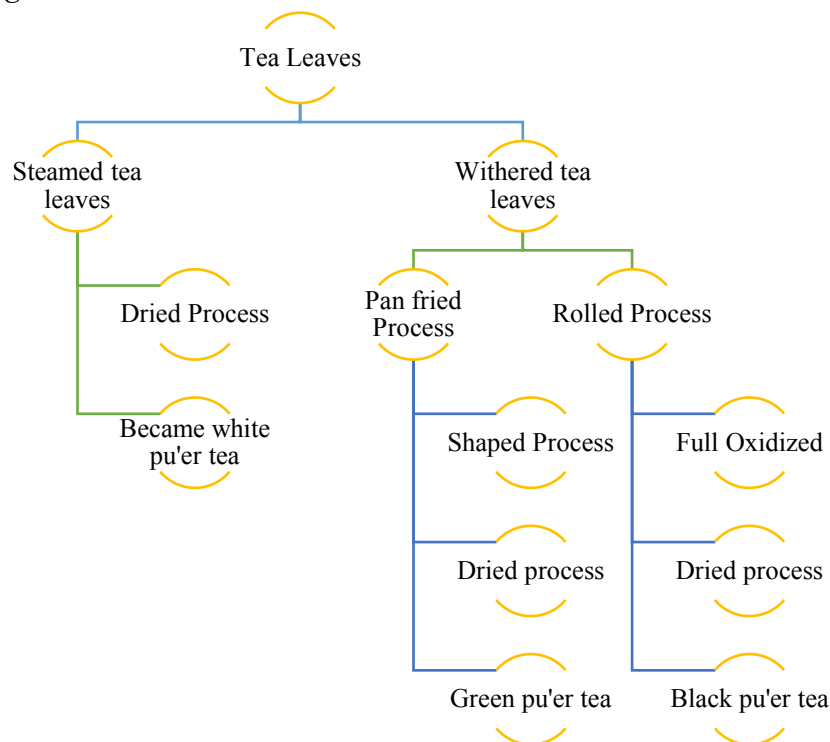
2. The Variety of Pu'er Tea

This study identifies two main categories of pu'er teas that exist in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, the People's Republic of China. In the first category, there are five distinct varieties of pu'er tea: (1) *Xiaoshu pu'er cha* (young pu'er tea); (2) *Qiaomu pu'er cha* (middle-aged pu'er tea); (3) *Dashu pu'er cha* (old-aged pu'er tea); (4) *Gushu pu'er cha* (ancient pu'er tea); and (5) *Pu'er cha wang* (king pu'er tea), respectively. The second category categorizes three distinct varieties of pu'er tea: (1) *Green pu'er tea*; (2) *Black pu'er tea*; and (3) *White pu'er tea*, respectively. The quality of pu'er teas in the first category above is entirely dependent on the age of the tea trees rather than any unique production methods for producing high-quality pu'er tea. For instance, the age range for *Xiaoshu cha* tea trees is 1–50 years; for *Qiaomu cha* tea trees, it is 50–100 years; for *Dashu cha* tea trees, it is 100–500 years; for *Gushu cha* tea trees, it is 500–1000 years; and for *Cha wang* tea trees, it is 1000–2000 years or more.

As a result, each of these pu'er tea varieties in the first category has unique and significant values. However, the production process or method, which uses *Camellia sinensis* shrubs from small-young tea trees, may determine the quality of the Pu'er teas in the second category of tea varieties, and the stages and duration of the production process also influence the precise quantity as well as a drawn-out production process for creating a suitable tea. For instance, gathering tea leaves or buds from young tea trees or gardens is the first step in the tea-making process. Next, farmers gather the collected young tea leaves or buds in a storage place before scattering them on the ground to dry and evaporate the water. They make the various Pu'er tea varieties from *Camellia sinensis*, a shrub of small, young tea trees, using specific production and processing steps for white Pu'er tea, black Pu'er tea, and green Pu'er tea, which have less value in the Chinese or global tea beverage markets. The following diagram illustrates the process of creating these pu'er teas, which aligns with the production and storage procedures for various pu'er teas.

Figure 2

Diagram of Young Tea Trees' Leaves or Buds Production Process



3. Analysis of Diagram

This diagram illustrates how tea leaves are required in the initial stage and then go through two distinct processes, such as *steaming* and *withering*. Additionally, Laoman'e village of Xishuanbanna observes three primary harvest seasons for the collection of Bulang ancient and king tea varieties. The best time of year to collect pu'er tea leaves is thought to be during the spring season, which begins from April to June. The second tea harvest season runs from July to October in summer, and the third season runs from November to January in autumn. White pu'er tea is made through two primary steps. However, two distinct processes separate the withered tea leaves into two different types, such as black tea and green tea. There are four main steps involved in making green pu'er tea: The first step involves withering the tea leaves, followed by their frying in a large pan on a fire oven. After shaping and frying, it can dry the fried tea leaves in the sun for a few days before packaging and selling them as green pu'er tea. On the other hand, the withered tea leaves must roll down, then fully oxidize and dry in the sun for a few days before packaging and sale. After this analysis, it clarifies the procedures for the next two varieties of pu'er tea.

4. Ancient and King Teas of Laoman'e Village

Within the first category of pu'er tea discussed above, people consider ancient tea and king tea to be the finest, superior-quality pu'er tea varieties. These kinds of ancient and king tea tree records, as a tribute from the Yunnan to the Qing court, have endowed Pu'er town with an aura of organisms, antiquity, nostalgia, and exoticism (Fang, 2001; Hung, 2015; Li, 2011; Lin, 2008; Ma, 2018; Yu, 2016a; Zhang, 2014). It is one of the oldest beverage crops grown in China, and

it is thought to be an ecosystem agricultural method that dates back more than 5000 years. In addition, tea is also a significant sociocultural phenomenon in China that is always associated with the hospitality of guests, friendliness, and health benefits in Chinese tea culture (Li et al, 2023). In China, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korean, many Buddhists monks drink tea to refresh and restore strong mindfulness during meditation retreats with a cup of tea, as it is considered a vital mental refreshment during meditation practice to release depression and anxiety. In particular, drinking tea is a common custom and culture among Zen Buddhist monks who practice tranquil meditation at temples and in forests. Bulang tea farmers use a traditional harvest system to preserve the organic Pu'er tea production method's purity. As a result, Bulang ancient and King teas are considered to be world-class Pu'er teas. These Bulang teas are the ideal choice for many tea lovers seeking mental refreshment and a unique insight into the mind. The art photos' diagram below illustrates the entire production process from the beginning to the end, demonstrating how simple it is to produce Bulang ancient and King Pu'er tea.

Figure 3

Processing of Ancient and King Tea



1. Picking the tea leaves



2. withering to evaporate water about 3-5 hours



3. Firing on fire by pan for 35 minutes



4. Rolling the fried leaves for 5-10 minutes



5. Drying in sun light



6. Measurement for different packaging size



7. Packaging tea cake



8. Drying king tea cake



9. Packaging tea bag

Figure 3 (Continued)



9. A opened king tea cake



10. Laoman'e village
ancient tea cake package



11. The Author making
and drinking king tea

5. Analysis of the Diagram and Arts Images

The Bulang ancient and King tea production processing method shows how to make ready-made tea from the beginning to the end, as depicted in the diagram and art images above. The first image depicts farmers pickling tea leaves from tea trees, while the second image shows them scattering the leaves in a storeroom to allow the water to evaporate. The third image illustrates the process of frying tea leaves over a fire using large pans, containing up to 20 kg of tea leaves at a time, before moving on to the fourth stage of production. In the fifth image illustrated how the tea leaves are dried in the sun again after frying. The sixth art image depicts the process of measuring and weighing tea leaves to prepare them for different packing sizes. The seventh image shows how to press the tea leaves together to make tea cake, and the eighth image shows drying tea cake in the sun again. The ninth image shows a ready-made tea cake how looks like, and the tenth image shows a ready-made tea package with the author's name. The eleventh image shows the author making tea and drinking tea at Laoman'e village temple. Ancient and king teas use these processes to create various-sized Bulang King tea cakes, which are then ready for consumption or for sale.

Figure 4

A Landscape Photograph of Laoman'e Village's Sky View Captured by the Author on December 18, 2023



6. Area of Tea and King Tea

According to the locals, the Xishuangbanna of Yunnan province consists of six hill regions—Bulang Mountain, Yiwu Mountain, Jingmai Mountain, Nannuo Mountain, Bada Mountain, and Mengsong Mountain—are currently the best places to produce pu'er tea. Laoman'e village is located on a sky-touching mountain range in Menghai, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, province. According to a stone inscription, the Bulang village is more than 1,880-year-old, and it is one of the oldest villages in the region. At present, there are a total of 300 families, with more than 1200 populations that have lived harmoniously and peacefully there for many centuries (Yan, 2023). With a thousand-year-old ancient and king tea trees and a deep green reserve forest surrounding it, Laoman'e village is particularly charming and alluring to tourists, making it one of the top tourist destinations in Xishuangbanna. Research subjects believe that Bulang ancient and king pu'er teas, produced in the Laoman'e village of Bulang Mountains, are the best pu'er tea. Tea is the major income source for the Laoman'e villagers, which has brought about lifestyle changes since the price of tea has increased in the tea beverage market. Many generations have protected these thousand-year-old tea trees, passing them down from one generation to the next for centuries. Consequently, these king tea tree gardens have become a source of blessings for the villagers, transforming their livelihood into great fortune.

7. The Important to Ancient and King tea for Bulangs

Since there is no other alternative source of family income in the mountainous areas, the tea trade has had a significant impact on the livelihoods and social welfare of the Bulang Buddhist community. This has led to a deep attachment to ancient tea and king tea trade. Therefore, the Bulang Buddhist community of Laoman'e village heavily relies on ancient tea and king tea farming and tea production. From October 2023 to February 14, 2024, the author conducted two round of research fieldwork with 22 research participants in the Laoman'e village. During fieldwork, numerous Bulang research participants shared their personal experiences both before and after ancient and king tea's price increases in the beverage market in China. Prior to ancient and king tea's price increase, a key informant describes their family's lifestyle how they experienced the hardship life in the previous decades. For instance, he stated the following:

"My parents could not afford to buy food when I was a child, so sometimes we would only have one meal a day. As a result, we did not have enough food to eat. In our Laoman'e village, the majority of families face similar challenges and rely primarily on forest vegetables for sustenance. Even though it was extremely cold in Xishuangbanna during the cold season, we are unable to make an effort to purchase clothing. If we are fortunate, however, our parents may purchase one dress for us during Chinese New Year once a year, as no one else purchases ancient and king teas during that period, despite the fact that they were extremely inexpensive. Because my parents could not afford the costs of my education, I was unable to attend school in the city. The price of tea only began to rise gradually in 2013, and now, all of a sudden, our village's way of life has drastically changed from that of a poor family to that of a medium family. Since ancient and king tea are expensive, we can now sell tea, which has significantly improved our village's residents' quality of life. Thus, tea holds great significance for us, and we consider ancient tea and King Tea to be a precious and divine commodity."

Figure 5

A Landscape Photograph of Laoman'e Village Temple Captured by the Author on December 18, 2023



This is how a participant described his personal experiences and understanding of the hardships people faced prior to the price increases of ancient and king teas in the tea beverage market. Additionally, many research participants related similar accounts of their experiences; some even surmised that they might remain in the same impoverished state, which is uncertain for their means of subsistence, if they did not have access to ancient and king tea. Therefore, on February 8, 2024, a research participant from Laoman'e village described his experiences with low family income and the treatment they received from other majority ethnic groups due to their poor financial status, as follows:

"We had a very low social status because of the terrible economic conditions we were in, and other mainstream ethnic groups would regularly look down on and discriminate against us. I still vividly remember how we were threatened by the elite class ethnic group in the Xishuangbanna. Even eating together at the same tables, locations, or dishes at the same time was not permitted to share seats or objects. We had to sit in a separate area, and anywhere we might have touched or sat had to be cleaned up right away. I still get really sad when I think back to the last few decades when we were threatened. For our Bulang Buddhist people, we owe a debt of gratitude to our ancestors and the mother nature, who bestowed upon us such exquisitely valuable ancient and king tea. Without ancient tea and king tea trees, I really could not imagine what our way of life would be like today."

At the Laoman'e village temple on February 9, 2024, the author had a chance to engage in a group discussion with three Bulang monastic orders. It was, of course, a part of this research

study who eagerly shared their experiences and opinions of how ancient and king teas are important and changed the life style of Laoman'e villagers. Since they have direct knowledge of the disparities in the livelihood conditions and financial standing of the Bulang people in the Laoman'e village before increasing the ancient and king tea price in the vegetable market. They illustrated that the Bulang people of Laoman'e village now have a better livelihood compared to previous decades. And they now have a beautiful, rich Buddhist temple with the decoration of beautiful arts and crafts in the Laoman'e village.

The monk research participants also mentioned that the wealthy Bulang families in Laoman'e village are used to fund scholarships for deserving students to pursue higher education, and the villagers assist in building houses for low-income families who are unable to effort for education. They underlined that the price of ancient and King tea has steadily increased since 2013. Furthermore, compared to earlier decades, the Laoman'e village is now among the most developed modern villages, and its residents lead beautiful lives. When tea prices were relatively low, most Bulang people in Laoman'e village have experience of hardship because no one was interested in purchasing tea at that time, so they remained vulnerable about their financial status. On February 11, 2024, the author interviewed a Bulang Buddhist monk, he explained his melancholy life experience prior to the ancient and king tea's price increases. The author is a native of Laoman'e Village and belongs to the Bulang ethnic group, so the author has firsthand knowledge of the terrible circumstances that existed fifteen years ago.

“My childhood was not good because I grew up with my family in poor economic condition, and my parents could not make an effort to buy our daily necessities. I still clearly remember living in poor condition and without access to clothing, food, and basic needs when I was twelve years old. Of course, I had a piece of tear cloth to cover only the secret part of my body when I went outside. I was unable to attend school to obtain a basic education, so I just simply followed my mother and assisted her with her farming in the mountains. At that time, the majority of Bulang people were accustomed to shifting cultivation, which involved clearing forests through the slash and burn method and then cultivating paddy and other essential crops in the mountainous areas. Nevertheless, at the age of thirteen, I later went to the temple and was ordained as a novice. I constantly began learning monastic education about Buddhism and Pali literature in the Dai language at temple. I eventually passed high school and middle high school in Buddhism. However, now our family is quite okay with their financial status, and they have enough money to support themselves because of ancient and king tea. Moreover, ancient and king teas are undeniably important for the Bulang Buddhist community of Laoman'e village in Xishuangbanna. And tea culture is now deeply rooted in our Bulang society, which is why we are trying to promote our ancient and king teas with the religious line around the globe for the benefits of the community and Buddhism.”

This is how many research subjects expressed their opinions of how ancient and king teas are important for their livelihoods. As a legacy of their illustrious forefathers, the ancient and king teas are considered a golden crop of Bulang people. These kinds of ancient and king tea trees have been handed down from generation to generation for a long time, and they have been maintaining tradition with great care. In addition, ancient and king tea trees in Xishuangbanna,

Yunnan province, are also considered as the gods of tea trees. As a result, the Bulang people celebrate an exquisite tea festival each year on April 9, just before tea leaves are harvested.

Research Objectives

1. To explore and highlight the ancient tea and king tea of the Bulang Buddhist community in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China
2. To investigate the Bulang people's economic situation by illustrating the exceptional rare ancient tea and king tea in the beverage markets around the world
3. To explore the ancient tea and king tea from the rest of the pu'er teas in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China
4. To investigate the linguistics landscape of Chinese tea and Pu'er tea in Xishuangbanna

Research Questions

1. What is Pu'er tea and its varieties in Yunnan Province?
2. Why are ancient king Pu'er teas important for the many hill tribes, including the Bulang ethnic group in the region?
3. What is the historical background of Chinese Tea culture and what is the root of Pu'er tea in the region?

Methodology

This study uses mixed-method research combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in social science of Buddhist Studies. This research approach, on the other hand, consists of a depth interview with 22 research participants, combined interview data, and textual analysis to provide a clear image of this research area. The author conducted two rounds of research fieldwork from October 2023 to February 14, 2024, in Laoman'e village, Yunnan Province, China. In the first-round fieldwork, the author interviewed only seven research participants; however, the second-round fieldwork covered all the rest of the research subjects interviewing them and observed the phenomena of the culture of the Bulang community in Laoman'e village. The author selected 11 male, 8 female laymen, and 3 Buddhist monks, aged 35–60, as research participants from the Bulang Buddhist community.

The author used a paper notebook and a cell phone as research tools to note down and record data from research participants during fieldwork. The interview work took place in two separate sections: group and individual interviews, to maintain and protect the privacy of the research participants according to research ethics. A quantitative research approach involves finding secondary data bases from both online and offline sources such as official records, manuscripts, books, articles, magazines, and so on. Therefore, Timans, Paul Wouters, and Johan Helibron (2019) described that mixed-method research usually aims to gain important findings and gives a clear framework for triangulation, combining, and using more than one strategy (Timans, 2019). With the unique feature of methodological pluralism, the mixed method integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to help researchers in the

disciplines of sociology, psychology, education, history, business, religion, and social science studies comprehend the answers to the research questions.

Azorin and Roslyn Cameron (2010) illustrated that the mixed research approach gives a more comprehensive viewpoint, a clear research methodological design for the study, and an improved comprehension of the complicated phenomena and research difficulties (Azorin, 2010). On the other hand, McKim Courtney (2017) holds the opinion that because mixed-method research gives researchers a greater knowledge of phenomena, this study uses this mixed method in a social science study to strengthen the validity of the data generated from both primary and secondary sources (Mckim, 2017). Therefore, Molin-Azorin and Roslyn Cameron (2010) test the method with a variety of data sources in the study's field that are available when employing this mixed technique (Molina-Azorin, 2011). However, since this is the only way to quickly locate and analyse primary and secondary materials for a deeper understanding of the study field and its problems, it aids in the integration of the components and produces trustworthy results for this research study (Coyle & Williams, 2000; Sieber, 1973).

Results

There were total of four findings that emerged from the study; the first finding showed that tea traders popularized the term “Pu’er tea” in order to evaluate all tea varieties of the Pu'er region for the purpose of good sales. Pu'er was a small region in Yunnan Province during the Qing dynasty (1666–1911) and the early Republican era (1911–1949), and it was popular for tea production and supply centres. Of course, it is still called Pu’er now a days but tea production became less and rubber plantation has been replaced instead. Therefore, Pu’er tea gained a wide spread of popularity across mainland China, so many people still believe that all types of Pu’er tea are unique and high-quality. Once, Pu’er was a center of tea supply, and the best-quality teas were produced in the area due to good environment for tea growth in the high mountain regions. The Pu’er region shares tringle borders with Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos. This finding is lined with Wanlin Li's (2023) study of “Traditional Management of Ancient Pu’er Teagardens in Jingmai Mountain in Yunnan, China: A Designated Globally Imported Agricultural Heritatge System Site. *The Pu'er* is a name of a particular area in the province of Yunnan. Therefore, Pu'er tea refers to any type of tea that grows in that region, regardless of the age or quality of the tea trees. Pu’er was only one tea production area at that time and the tea Murchents traded tea to neighboring areas, so, Pu’er tea gained significant popularity across the country. As a result, the Chinese began referring to Pu’er regional tea as Pu'er Cha (Li et al, 2023).” This term has constantly gained widespread popularity in the tea beverage markets since long before, and people still use this term in their tea brands to market low-quality tea with high values.

The second finding was based on Chinese tea history, which relies entirely on documentary research and textual analyses. Most research participants, therefore, lack of knowledge about the history of tea and its precise discovery in mainland China, but some research subjects, of course, provided narrative, myths, and legends abot tea discovery. According to Chinese oral

history, a mythical Chinese king, Shennong, was boiling water under a tree in the forest when suddenly a dead leaf from a tree bush dropped into the kettle. Hence, he noticed that the water's color had changed to a dark green, and he drank it. Since then, it believed that tea was first discovered by King Shennong and that he was the first tea consumer as well. This finding is consistent with Vasilisa Pedan's (2018) study that points a mythical king Shennong (2737–2697 BCE) made the initial discovery of tea in Southwest China (Pedan et al, 2018).

The third finding identified eight distinct varieties of Pu'er teas currently produced in Xishuanbanna. For instance, this study classifies these varieties of pu'er teas into two main categories, such as, in the first category: (1) *xiaoshu pu'er cha* (young pu'er tea); (2) *Qiaomu pu'er cha* (middle aged pu'er tea); (3) *dashu pu'er cha* (old aged pu'er tea); (4) *gushu pu'er cha* (ancient pu'er tea); and (5) *pu'er cha wang* (king pu'er tea), respectively. In the second category, a total of three different varieties of pu'er tea are classified: (1) *green pu'er tea*; (2) *black pu'er tea*; and (3) *white pu'er tea*, respectively. The second category produces Pu'er teas from *Camellia sinensis* shrubs of small-young tea trees, with the precise quantity used based solely on the stages and duration of the production process. As a result, each of these three pu'er tea varieties in the first category has a unique, drawn-out production process that goes into making a suitable tea. For instance, gathering tea leaves or buds from young tea trees or gardens is the first step in the tea-making process.

The fourth finding strongly indicated that tea is significantly important for the Bulang Buddhist tribe's livelihoods and community development, including sociology, economics, education, and business. Therefore, the Bulang Buddhist community of Laoman'e village heavily relies on ancient tea and king tea trade production. Data also suggest that the Bulang ethnic people of Laoman village were relatively backward in economics and education before the prices of ancient and king teas in the tea beverage market increased. As a result, Bulang Buddhist people were victims of social discrimination from other ethnic groups due to their poor financial status. Eventually, ancient and king tea prices have gradually increased in the tea beverage market since 2013, and many tea farmers have benefited from it and have improved their livelihoods. When ancient and king tea prices gradually increased in the tea beverage market, tea became a major family income source for most of the Bulang people in the Laoman'e village. As a result, they could make an effort to buy food, accommodations, medical care, education, and community development in the village. Since the Bulang people started the gradual development of their livelihood, lifestyle, social, economic, and community developments, other ethnic groups began to respect the Bulang community. So, the study puts a strong emphasis on the importance of ancient and king teas for the Bulang people in the mountain region of Laoman'e village in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, Yunnan.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research shows that Pu'er is actually just the name of a region in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, which has historically been a center for tea supply. However, Chinese people refer to all teas that originate in the Pu'er region as "**Pu'er Cha**," or **Pu'er tea**. Therefore, in comparison to ancient and king teas, pu'er tea is nothing special because it refers to varieties

of Pu'er regional teas regardless of their quality. The term “pu'er tea” is one of the most misunderstood concepts among many tea consumers around the world. The study revealed that the highest-quality pu'er tea varieties are ancient tea (Gushu cha) and king tea (Cha wang), with tea trees estimated to be more than 500–2000 years old. While the leaves or buds of other young tea trees require a special production process to produce high-quality tea, ancient and king pu'er teas do not require any special methods to produce high-quality tea. Because the ancient and king teas are already the highest quality pu'er teas due to their old age tea trees, the Bulang tea farmers strictly maintain a 100% organic ancient and king tea production process without touching any heavy modern mechanism from harvesting to packaging and then supply it to the tea beverage markets.

On the other hand, ancient and king tea trees maintain China's environmentally sound agricultural system, which has enriched and graced the ecological system of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. Data suggest that tea was discovered in China approximately 5000 years ago; this finding is in line with Ruan's work (Ruan, 1995). Therefore, Chinese tea scholars argue that tea consumption in China may have begun much later than previously thought, perhaps as late as 4,000 BCE (Qiong et al., 2014; Gilbert, 2008). Indeed, this study strongly suggests that ancient and king teas are important for the many Bulang families of Laoman'e village to support their livelihoods. The study additionally delineates the obstacles and crises encountered by the Bulang Buddhist community of Laoman'e village during the period when the cost of ancient and king tea was comparatively low.

Because of their low socioeconomic status, the elite class in the local community subjected the majority of Bulang Buddhist families to social discrimination due to poor financial status. However, since 2013, the market for tea beverages has seen a rise in the price of ancient and king tea, and many Bulang Buddhist families have seen significant changes in their lives—from subsistence to affluent lifestyles—as well as in the village's overall reputation. For this reason, the Bulangs of Laoman'e village worship the ancient and king tea trees and consider ancient and king tea trees to be the gods of their prosperity. Therefore, the Bulang people of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, hold an annual tea festival in April, which is in line with the previous study of this author (Yan, 2023). Since tea has become a significant source of income for their families, the Bulang Buddhist community wishes to spread awareness about the reputation of ancient and king pu'er teas, as well as their markets worldwide.

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