

Finger tapping

# Finger tapping

By : Tea Gypsy

In November, 2012 I spent a month travelling across China to learn more about the Chinese Teahouse culture. The experience inspired six short stories, which are currently circulating in a single-box book. This is one of my reflections.

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During the Qing Dynasty in China, one of the Emperors would frequently travel throughout the country dressed in plain clothes as he enjoyed observing unsuspecting commoners. One of the places he would often visit on his outings included local teahouses.

On one specific occasion while travelling with his servant, the Emperor entered a teahouse known for its unique style of service. His eyes lit up as he watched the creative, almost acrobatic way in which the owner served tea. Noticing the admiration, and unaware of his true identity, the owner asked the Emperor to serve tea.

The Emperor was happy to oblige, however as custom if an Emperor displayed any form of kindness, it would have to be reciprocated with a bow. As the Emperor was in disguise, a bow would threaten to reveal his true identity.

Thinking quickly, the Emperor's servant tapped his middle, index and ring finger on the table. The middle finger was to represent the servant's head, while the two other fingers were his body. As a whole, the three-finger tap represented a bow, and the tradition is used to this day as a way of saying "thank you" for tea service.

## Author's message to you:

*This is one of six short based on my research about the Chinese teahouse culture. A lover of tea, and curious about culture, I spent a month visiting and participating in teahouse rituals across 4 Chinese cities. My goal was to understand and describe whether learning about teahouse culture could help tourists like me better understand and appreciate the Chinese culture. I chose to present my research in six (a lucky number in China) non-linear stories, which I found to be in line with the fluid nature of the Chinese culture.*

*I would very much appreciate your opinion on the following, or any other thoughts that come to mind:*

*- How (if at all) does the above story change/expand your understanding/appreciation about the Chinese culture?*

*- Do you have any personal tea experiences/stories that have helped you know a different culture more intimately?*

*- What are your thoughts about tea and the Chinese culture? Did this story change any ideas you previously held?*

*- Is your "culture" represented through any tea practices/rituals?*

*-Next time you sit down to enjoy a cup of tea, make note of the colour, texture, taste, aftertaste and feel of the tea as it slides down your throat. Does it change your perception of the drink?*

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