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Tong, Lingyun

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REVIEW ARTICLE

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# Cultural motives affecting tea purchase behavior under two usage situations in China: a study of *renqing*, *mianzi*, collectivism, and *man-nature unity* culture

Lingyun Tong<sup>1</sup>, Anne Toppinen<sup>1</sup> and Lei Wang<sup>2\*</sup>

## Abstract

Tea should be perceived more as a cultural product than a fast-moving consumer good with its roots deep in different cultures across nations. Nevertheless, consumer demands on tea have not been explored sufficiently from a cultural perspective. This research aims to examine motives that are driving Chinese tea consumption on two usage occasions, under the influence of the Chinese *renqing*, *mianzi*, collectivism, and man-nature unity culture. Linkage was established between Chinese culture and consumer motives. The factor analysis on 280 respondents identified five consumer psychological motives. Further logistic regression analysis suggested consumer motives and usage situations were related. The contribution of the findings is summarized. On one hand, this study adds to the limited understandings on consumer motives of tea in an emerging country from the cultural aspect. On the other hand, deep understandings of brand chasing, sustainability, and pragmatism motives should businesses to better serve consumers.

**Keywords:** Tea, Culture, Purchase behavior, Usage situations

## Introduction

Usage situation (or consumption situation) suggests the anticipated usage and product attributes for one product [1]. For instance, people may choose an unusual brand of coffee for their dinner guests. It is a critical element of the situational factor in the marketing context that can influence purchase decisions and choice of products [1, 2]. While the usage situation, arguably the most influential in predicting consumer behavior, has strong implications for the market segmentation and niche markets identification, it has received limited attentions in consumer studies [1, 2]. Besides, issues concerning the expansibility of results remain to be answered, because most studies concerning usage situations have not been examined outside of Western culture (e.g., [1]),

while culture difference is critical for marketing strategy. Consumer orientation has long been neglected in less-developed countries [3], even when some of these less-developed countries have shown strong market potentials. Hence, the first intention of this research is to explore the usage situation outside of Western culture.

Tea is consumed by a much wider population in the world now. While tea is sometimes perceived as a ready-to-drink product with lower value added [4], it has rich social and culture values. As a non-timber forest product, tea is of great importance to the livelihood of rural tea farmers especially in large tea export countries, including Sri Lanka, Kenya, China, and India (*ibid*). More importantly, the tea-drinking behavior discloses cultural and social characteristics rather than just for quenching thirst [5]. In fact, in the presence of tea bags or loose tea leaves, tea is more than an industrial product, because it has constituted part of the culture in many countries [6, 7]. Therefore, the marketing of it should also have the

\* Correspondence: [wanglei@zafu.edu.cn](mailto:wanglei@zafu.edu.cn)

<sup>2</sup>College of Economics and Management, Zhejiang A&F University, Hangzhou, China

Full list of author information is available at the end of the article



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right understandings of its value [8]. Yet, only a handful of researches exploring consumer behavior of tea, with many focusing on tea's functional value [9–11] and consumers' social demographic characteristics [12–14]. Seldom has consumption culture of tea been mentioned. The marketing strategy of tea should be seen from a rich cultural background, different from that of industrial products.

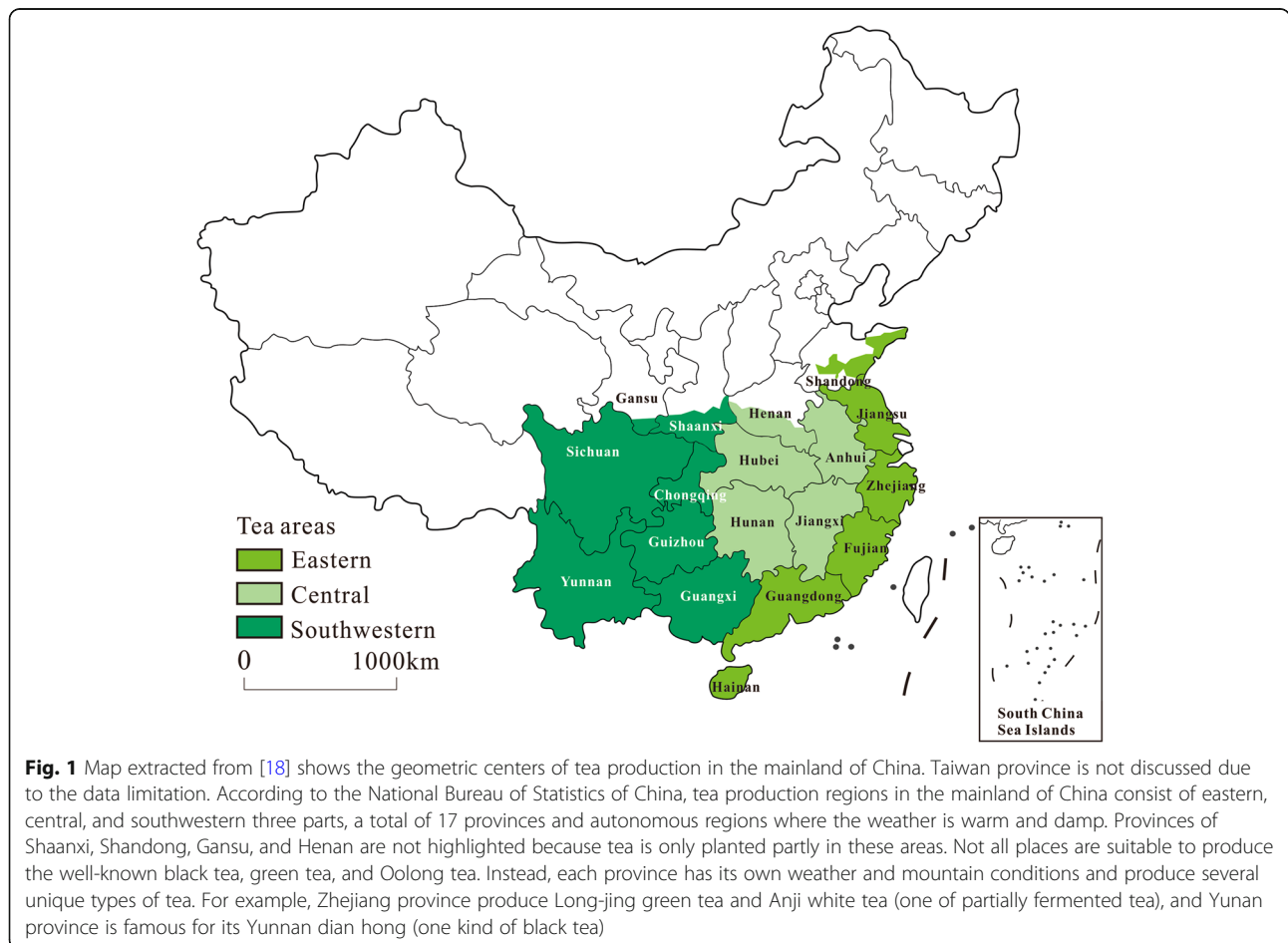
Of all tea consumption nations, China, where tea originated [15], is an interesting tea market to examine. Despite its long tea history which can date back to the time of Shen Nung (2737 BC) [16], the consumption of tea per capita in China is much lower than that in many other nations, such as Turkey and the UK. It is interesting to examine the tea consumers and their purchase behavior under this circumstance. More importantly, to understand the growth of tea consumption in a culture-rich market, it is not enough to ask what people purchase and who are purchasing (demographic variables), but rather why people purchase and when (for example, usage situations). Hence, the second motivation is to understand the cultural aspects that motivate individuals to consume tea in China.

Overall, the purpose of this research is to examine the motives that drive Chinese consumer purchase decisions under two usage situations, under the influence of the Chinese *mianzi*, *renqing*, collectivism, and man-nature unity culture. The whole discussion is organized as follows. Firstly, a careful examination of consumer motives derived from Chinese tea background and Chinese culture is introduced. Secondly, this article will present the research framework and hypotheses. Then, data collection and interview design will be explained before factor analysis and regression analysis. In the end, results and the implications of results are manifested.

### Literature review

#### History and culture of Chinese tea

Chinese tea is of various categories subject to classification standards. Differentiated by production methods, there are three major types of tea, the fully fermented black tea, the partially fermented Oolong tea, and the unfermented green tea [17]. Distinguished by the product features, there are over 1000 types of tea from tea-



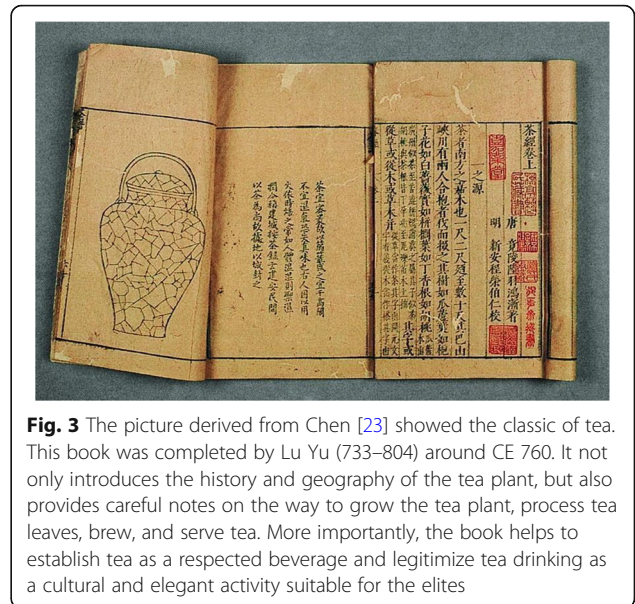
producing provinces across China’s mainland (Fig. 1), identified as unique and well-recognized famous tea by the encyclopedia of famous Chinese tea [18, 19].

The history of tea in China is long. It is widely believed that tea was initially discovered by Chinese emperor Shen Nung (Divine Husbandman) in 2737 BC (Fig. 2) [17], while the physical evidence of tea suggests that tea was consumed as early as the second century BC by emperor Han Jing (died in 141 BC) [20]. Initially documented as a medicine collected from the wild, tea gradually became a tasty drink among the nobility in the Han dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) and the Three Kingdoms periods (220–280) [21]. During that time, tea of high quality was sent as a tribute from localities to the court annually to show respect to the emperor [22]. Such high-end gift tea is named Gongcha (ibid). Also, the court would send back tea as a special gift to the nomadic people to maintain relationships and its political power [6]. It was not until the Tang dynasty (618–907), during which period, Lu Yu’s monograph “The Classic of Tea (Fig. 3)” published and the Buddhism prevailed that tea culture brought a profound social change in Chinese elite culture and that tea became a daily necessity for the Han people [15, 24]. Geographically, tea production and trade first developed from the hilly regions in southern China but later took root in other areas inhabited by Han people, such as Zhejiang province, during Tang and Song dynasties [21, 24].

With its widespread fame across people and countries since the medieval period, tea has gradually been given much political and commercial importance [24]. Along with silk and porcelain, tea is traded as valuable commodities in exchange for horses along the borders of China in Tang and Song (S). The ancient Tea Horse Road, which was developed to the Silk Road later, was



**Fig. 2** The portrait of Shen Nung in a fashionable manner as a “wild man” by Guo Xu [6]. Shen Nung is a legendary emperor credited with inventing medicine and discovering tea. The legend says when Shen Nung was boiling water, a few leaves from a wild tree fell into the bowl. Because tea tasted refreshing and cleared his mind, it was first documented as a herbal medicine beverage. The story also suggests that tea has a simple form, the green tea, in the first place



**Fig. 3** The picture derived from Chen [23] showed the classic of tea. This book was completed by Lu Yu (733–804) around CE 760. It not only introduces the history and geography of the tea plant, but also provides careful notes on the way to grow the tea plant, process tea leaves, brew, and serve tea. More importantly, the book helps to establish tea as a respected beverage and legitimize tea drinking as a cultural and elegant activity suitable for the elites

created, and the Chinese dynastic government established an official “Tea and Horse Bureau” (*Chamasi*) in charge of the tea trade [6, 24]. Gradually through trade, the tea-drinking customs spread over European countries and many other areas in the world and largely enriched the world civilization [24].

In fact, tea consumption has been closely related to social religions and trends [24]. Under Chinese ancient Daoism, the emphasis for tea drinking is on the inner peace of oneself and the sequestered but human-nature harmonized lifestyle [25, 26]. For Tang Buddhism, tea serves more as a construct towards Zen (deep meditation or one’s inner peace) [22, 25]. Confucianism, on the other hand, has developed tea culture further to add positivism (engaging oneself into social and even political life) and *Zhongyong* (the golden mean of the Confucian school) into tea consumption spirit [22]. Interestingly, as tea connoisseurship became more sophisticated since post-Tang, tea also served to honor one’s social identity. Through the sophisticated tea rituals and the use of famous tea as gifts, a man could manifest a superior form of manhood and win respect from others and elevate his social standing [22, 27]

**Consumer motives**

Consumer motives refer to consumer’s needs and wants for a product in this article. Needs are inner states aroused by the discomfort of a person’s psychological and physical conditions [28]. Wants on the other hand are product-oriented desire which takes a person’s current psychological and physical condition beyond the minimal comfort level (ibid). Despite their differences, they together create demands, and such demands are to be met by products. It is argued a product serves as an



extension of consumers' personalities, and the symbolic meaning of a product may matter more than its functions [29]. Hence, consumer motives are the very targets marketing mixes constructed to respond to and are the base for product position and market segmentation.

Efforts have been made to identify what constitutes consumer motives from different angles. Belk et al. [30], in general, described consumer desires as interpersonal, positive, and cyclic in three countries with different cultural heritage. From a microperspective, with the assumption that consumers own various personalities and mindsets, consumer decision-making styles identify several consumer-style inventories (CSI) [31, 32]. Studies have tested the applicability of CSI in the Chinese environment but did not reach an agreement. For instance, Noel et al. [33] identified brand, novelty and uniqueness chasing, perfectionism, and recreational consciousness in China, while Li et al. [34] assert that confused by over choice, fashion, and impulsive and perfect consciousness are motives for Chinese peasant consumers. Neither has there been CSI literature on Chinese consumers bringing traditional Chinese culture into account.

#### **Consumer motives from Chinese culture**

Hofstede [35] argues for the importance of taking culture into account when examining consumer behaviors in different nations. Therefore, it is essential to involve Chinese culture, namely the traditional values and thoughts, to better understand Chinese consumer motives. In the past, researcher has found influences of culture on consumer motives mixed [36, 37]. Under this section, consumer motives to be examined are concentrated on *renqing* and *mianzi*, collectivism, and man-nature unity three components.

#### ***Motives from reqing and mianzi***

*Renqing* and *mianzi* are two important elements coming from social interactions in Chinese culture [38]. *Renqing*, a synonym for *guanxi* (relationship), indicates a set of social obligations that require maintaining contact with people in their social network and participating in exchanging gifts in the form of goods, services, money, or information [39]. It suggests the perceived importance of reciprocity among the Chinese. *Mianzi* refers to an individual's perception of their public image, which is earned by performing their social role and recognized by others [40]. It is the manhood that individuals claim for themselves through their networks at their social position. The degree to which they receive judgment is based on the adequacy and acceptability of their conduct as perceived by others [41].

Although the notion of face may seem similar to the Western concept of dignity [40], *renqing* and *mianzi* are much more influential socially among Confucian societies,

as Chinese consumers are more likely to chase higher brands with high visibility to save face on social occasions [38]. The motive to enhance one's social hierarchy and power or to signal self-prestige and status is named chasing brand and prestige motive here. In fact, this motive is found prevalent in luxury goods purchase context, describe as face consumption or conspicuous consumption (e.g., [42–44]). On the contrary, consumer motives to pursue more quality and value over price are classified as pragmatism in this study. Studies also identify such motive, called chasing value in money or rational buyer, among modern Chinese consumers [33, 45].

#### ***Motives from collectivism and individualism***

While the people in the West are more individualistic, Chinese has been found to be collectivistic [35, 46]. Collectivism is a critical trait of Confucianism which focuses on social order and hierarchy [22]. Collectivists tend to have a strong desire for recognition in their network via conforming to the social order and common practice [35, 47]. For collectivists, they think highly of public perceptions and rely on evaluations from others and group norms. As a result, individuals often seek views of leaders and tradition norms and sacrifice personal independence. Such motive is named the conformity here, while other studies label it with opinion seeker [43, 45].

On the contrary, individualism focuses on oneself as an autonomous person and inspires people to make decisions based on their own thinking [35]. As a consequence of China economic reforms and modernization, the old Confucian ideology and collectivism have been challenged with individualism. It is argued that Chinese consumers, especially the younger generations, have become more self-aware and seek fun and unique experience [48]. As a typical aspect of individualism, novelty and uniqueness chasing motive is introduced here to exhibit the paradoxical consumer behavior motives. In fact, this motive has been confirmed among Chinese consumers [33, 34].

#### ***Motives from the unity of man and nature***

Sustainability awareness exists when consumers exhibit ecological concern, understand the importance of environmental protection, and try to replace high-impact goods with environmentally benign products [49]. For the purpose of this study, it is defined as a motive pursuing healthy lifestyle and active in achieving environmental sustainability. The modern idea of the sustainable use of natural resources and environment protection can be found in the tea culture under the influence of Sinitic Daoism (since 142 CE) and Confucianism [50]. They assert that man should respect the intrinsic means of nature (*ziran*), respect the boundaries of nature, and avoid exploiting the nature resources [50, 51]. Ancient Daoist

Zhuangzi put forward the “trinity of heaven, man, and earth” or the unity of nature and man (*tianren heyi*), suggesting that the heaven and the earth are a single body and the world is one family (*ibid*). Confucians also respected appropriate boundaries and limits of nature and considered man harmonizing with nature [51].

When it comes to tea, one is expected to drink with his inner peace and to live a human-nature harmonized life [25, 26]. It is believed that tea drinkers’ moral quality, tea’s quality [, and the external environment should harmonize [16, 17]. Such relation with the environment was more a harmony “trinity of heaven, man, and earth” rather than a competition [52], which is in line with the modern concept of sustainability [53, 54]. Although the man and nature unity in Sinitic philosophy did not prevent China from environmental deterioration [51], religion, and other core values still serve as an autonomous motive embedded into Chinese daily life [55].

**Theoretical framework: effects of consumer motives on purchase purpose**

**Effects of brand, prestige chasing, and pragmatic motives**

Social behavior, including gift giving in China, is arguably influenced by brand and prestige chasing motive as a result of *renqing* and *mianzi* [39, 56]. For example, gifts on social occasions not only symbolize the intentions and images of givers, but also symbolize respect felt for receivers, especially when they turn into an instrument to save and maintain face [40, 43]. The amount paid, the brand, and the importance attached to the products are particularly different [57]. Willingness to

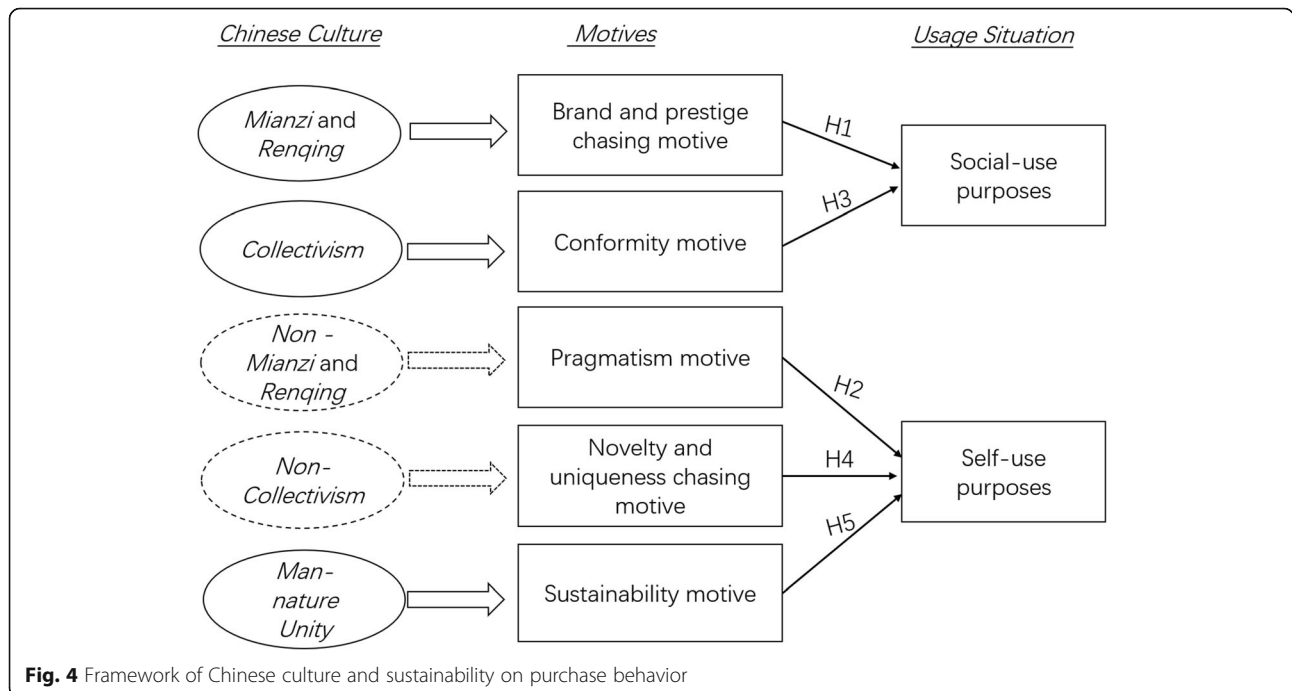
pay for an item can be higher in such circumstances than the ordinary self-use level to save one’s own *mianzi* and to care for others’ feelings and faces. On the opposite, tea purchase for self-use purposes appears more related to value at price. Hence, we hypothesize the following (as Fig. 4 shows):

- 1) Tea purchase for social use purposes is positively affected by brand and prestige chasing motives.
- 2) Tea purchase for self-use purposes is positively affected by pragmatism motive.

**Effects of confirmatory, novelty, and uniqueness chasing motives**

Conformity motive, driven by collectivism, can arguably influence people’s social behaviors. In social situations, conformity is likely to exert more impacts on Chinese consumer behaviors, since the purchase choice Chinese consumers make is ethically bounded to meet the social standards [47]. Friends and parents are argued to be important references in one’s social purpose-driven consumption behavior [58]. On the contrary, the novelty and uniqueness chasing motive, as a typical individualistic characteristic, can influence Chinese’s self-consumption products, when people are less bounded to choose a product to meet others’ requirement [48]. Hence, we hypothesize the following (as Fig. 4 shows):

- 1) Tea purchase for social use purposes is positively affected by conformity motive.



- 2) Tea purchase for self-use purposes is positively affected by novelty and uniqueness chasing motives.

### Effects of sustainable motives

Research has found that sustainability awareness is provoked by personal feelings, associated with self-image expression and emotional value, and certain Chinese are emotionally attached to environmental issues and consider green purchasing their moral responsibility [59]. Some Chinese experience positive feelings from safe-guarding the environment and doing good for the society [60]. Tai [45] and Wan and Toppinen [61] also denotes that sustainable awareness exists at individual levels as they prefer a healthy lifestyle. Hence, we hypothesize that (as Fig. 4 shows) tea purchase for self-use purposes is positively affected by sustainable motive.

## Methodology

### Research design

To test the proposed hypothesis, we collected data from face-to-face structured interviews. We first explored the dimensionality of the proposed tea consumer motives. Factor analysis was performed using Varimax rotation with eigenvalues greater than 1. Second, to identify the determinants of the tea purchasing behavior under two usage conditions (self-use and social use), log-binomial regression analysis was adopted. The goal of regression analysis was to test the proposed hypothesis by identifying whether motives ( $X_i$ ) were statistically significant to the purchase behavior for either self-use or social-use purposes. The nature of the log-binomial model would suggest the likelihood of the occurrence of either tea purchase for self-consumption or tea purchase for social purposes.

$$\ln \frac{p}{1-p} = \text{Logit}(P) = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \dots + b_iX_i + e, \text{ for } i = 1..5 \quad (1)$$

where  $p$  is usage situation for self-use, and  $1 - p$  is usage situation for social use.

### Interview design

The questionnaire first asked consumers to recall their most recent purchase situation of loose leaf tea or bagged tea, whether the purchase was for social use or for self-use. Each of the proposed motive attributes was presented with several (at least three) attribute-related questions. All attributes were measured by a 5-point Likert scale to investigate the interviewees' level of agreement or disagreement. Back translation was adopted when preparing the questionnaires, in which three bilingual individuals translated items from Chinese to English and then back into Chinese. Five Chinese students and two professors reviewed the translations, so as

to minimize colloquial and idiomatic wording issues. In addition, demographic variables were added into the last section of the interview, including gender, place of birth, age, ethnic group, education background, occupation, and household monthly income.

### Data collection

Zhejiang province was chosen for the interview because of its fame as the major tea production region, its large and growing population base, rapid economic growth, and increasing consumer purchasing power in the past few decades [62]. Three cities (Hangzhou, Jiaxing, and Ningbo) presenting major economic positions in Zhejiang were selected for data collection. Particularly, the capital city of Zhejiang, Hangzhou, famous for its Xihu Longjing tea, is perceived as a rapidly developing city with increasing consumer purchasing power, therefore serving as a good indicator for future consumer purchasing patterns in China at large. We interviewed Chinese consumers in shopping centers and in tea houses, focusing on adults (over 18-year-olds) to mirror the true tea consumer population. A total of 319 filled out questionnaires were sent out and finished by interviews, of which 280 were finally retained with careful examination. A summary of the socio-demographic characteristics of these 280 respondents is presented in Table 1.

## Results

The reliability of the factor analysis on consumer motives is shown reliable, as Table 2 shows Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (0.726), KMO (0.808), eigenvalues exceeding 1, Bartlett's test giving a significant result ( $P$  value  $< 0.05$ ). Factor analysis suggests that a solution with five key motive dimensions is reckoned to be most logical, that is sustainable, brand and prestige chasing, social confirmatory, novelty and uniqueness chasing, and pragmatic motives. This solution captures 60.7% of the total variance associated with the dependent variable (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.602$ , Cox and Snell  $R^2 = 0.450$ ). The Ominibus tests show that the entire logistic model is significant at the 0.0001 level.

As shown in Table 3, the results of logistic regression reveal that three out of five motives are significant at 0.05 significant level. Motives of sustainability ( $p = 0.039$ ) and pragmatism ( $p = 0.000$ ) are proved positively associated with the purchase for self-use purposes, while motive of brand and prestige chasing ( $p = 0.000$ ) positively associated with the purchase for social use purposes. The motive of novelty and uniqueness ( $p = 0.0509$ ) is also positively associated with the purchase for self-use purposes at close to 95% confidence interval. With a larger sample size, this relation is more likely to be more significant. Lastly, the motive of conformity is also shown to be positively associated with the

**Table 1** Demographic profile of the respondents ( $N = 280$ )

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	136	48.6
Female	144	51.4
Place of birth		
Northern China	46	16.4
Eastern China	98	35.0
Southern China	106	37.9
Western China	5	1.8
Central China	25	8.9
Age		
18–24	56	20.0
25–34	91	32.5
35–44	94	33.6
45–54	26	9.3
55–64	9	3.2
65+	4	1.4
Ethnic group		
Han	266	95.0
Minority group	14	5.0
Education background		
Below high school graduate	70	25.0
High school degree	8	2.9
Bachelor's degree	148	52.9
Master's degree	43	15.4
Ph.D. and above	11	3.9
Occupation		
Civil servants and diplomats	23	8.2
Professional (educator, engineering, IT, doctor, nurse, lawyer, consultant, athletes)	98	35.0
General business clerk	76	27.1
Corporate management	32	11.4
Artists (e.g., producer, actor, director, designer)	7	2.5
Self-employed	2	0.7
Farmer	1	0.4
Others	41	14.6
Household monthly income (RMB)		
Up to 3499	26	9.3
3500–7499	102	36.4
7500–12499	82	29.3
12500–16499	39	13.9
More than 16500	31	11.1

purchase for self-use situation ( $p = 0.77$ ), but the association is not statistically significant at 0.05 significance level. Hence, the empirical results of this study give strong supports to  $H1$ ,  $H2$ , and  $H5$  and render preliminary substantiate to the direction of the relationship in  $H3$ .  $H4$  is not statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level.

## Discussion

### General discussion of results

Results of brand and prestige chasing motives ( $\beta = 6.74$ ) described a positive relationship with the purchase for social-use purposes. The odds of purchasing for social and gift purposes of consumers motivated by brand and prestige chasing is 6.74 times greater than that for the self-use situation. While previous literatures connect brand and prestige chasing motives with Chinese luxury consumption and out-shopping (such as [44]), the results of this study show that brand and prestige chasing motive also has effects on ordinary goods consumption, such as tea, for Chinese or possibly people under Confucian's *mianzi* and *renqing* influence during social situations. This finding is in line with the results of Wang et al. [44] that the Chinese choose branded tea as gifts to save faces for both givers and receivers. This motive is not the same in the Western culture, where brand choice serves more as a way of self-expression [63]. On the other hand, the results of pragmatic motive ( $\beta = 0.24$ ) suggested a positive relationship between pragmatism with the purchase for self-use purposes. That is, the Chinese tend to be practical for self-usage products, focusing on value in price, regardless of brand names.

This study further reveals that sustainability has been an important motive for tea purchase. The sustainability consciousness ( $\beta = -0.36$ ) has shown a positive relationship with tea purchases for self-consumption purpose. It suggests that the Sinitic man-nature harmony philosophy still lasts in people's mind in Zhejiang province if not all provinces in China, in spite of the assertion that Chinese industrialization and modernization processes have excelled the nature protection [50]. This is consistent with the arguments of Chan and Lau [51].

On top of that, the novelty and uniqueness chasing motives show a minor positive influence on self-usage purchase occasions ( $p = 0.0509$ ). This minor effect may due to the insufficient sample size and limited region being studied, as the Zhejiang market is relatively more liberalized. Further studies can expand the region of research and increase the volume of surveys to check again this result. The conformity motive is far from being significantly associated with the self-usage situation at a 0.05 significance level. One possible explanation is that consumers do not need more references during tea



**Table 2** Factor analysis of consumer tea purchase

Factor	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Accum. variance explained (%)
<b>Factor 1: sustainability (SUS)</b>		4.4	21.8
Prefer biodegradable and reusable products	0.690		
Prefer organic food and minimum food additives	0.699		
Prefer products with FSC, MSC certification	0.737		
Try to reduce carbon footprint during consumption	0.716		
Try not to waste nature resources during consumption	0.662		
Prefer eco-friendly and sustainable consumption	0.685		
<b>Factor 2: brand and prestige chasing (BP)</b>		3.6	39.5
Prefer branded products despite of limited income	0.824		
Prefer prestigious and high-end products	0.789		
Desire to show social status through brands	0.824		
Prefer brand name than practical value	0.758		
<b>Factor 3: pragmatism (PRG)</b>		1.7	47.8
Always choose what is most needed	0.689		
Consider affordability	0.674		
Compare carefully the quality, performance, and value of products before purchase	0.716		
Prefer high practical and affordable products	0.748		
<b>Factor 4: novelty and uniqueness chasing (NU)</b>		1.4	54.8
Prefer distinguished products	0.800		
Prefer goods with special appearances	0.751		
Enjoy the novelty and being different	0.678		
<b>Factor 5: social conformity (SC)</b>		1.2	60.7
Follow recommendations from friends and colleagues	0.770		
Prefer similar products possessed by peers	0.813		
Follow trends and recommendations from mass media	0.613		

Note: (a) Model—Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.726$ , KMO = .808, chi-square = 1899.67, Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p < .000$ . (b) Factor degree: 1 = absolutely disagree, 5 = absolutely agree

shopping when high-end tea brands suitable for social use in Zhejiang, such as Longjing green tea, seem already well-known. Brand and prestige chasing motives may be more dominant during social use occasions.

**Table 3** Summary of regression analysis

	Coefficient ( $\lambda$ )	OR ( $\beta$ )	S.E.	Significance
Constant	-0.35	0.70	0.17	0.043
SUS	-0.36	0.70	0.18	0.039
BP	1.91	6.74	0.24	0.000
PRG	-1.42	0.24	0.21	0.000
NU	-0.13	0.88	0.19	0.509
SC	-0.06	0.95	0.19	0.770

### Implications

The implications of research results two folded. First, this study suggests that consumer motives derived from the local culture and usage situations are related in China, enriching the research of usage situations outside of Western culture [1, 2]. The study of consumer psychology from a culture perspective would also enrich the limited understandings of tea consumers in one of the biggest tea consumption countries. At the practical level, marketers would benefit from their clear understandings of the culture value of tea when developing a marketing strategy in China. Details and delicacy of products will express their concerns for consumers in different usage occasions. Social use and self-use product lines should be distinguished clearly with different semi-brand names, especially when *renqing* and *mianzi* still play a major role in Chinese social use occasions.

Second, the increase in sustainability awareness among consumers, especially householders, should be noted. It will help advance the green revolution [64], as Grunert [65] explained that 30 to 40% of environmental degradation resulted from private households' consumption. Responsible tea producers should convey their eco-friendly products to consumers efficiently. Although such sustainability seems to play a minor role during social use occasions, it can be addressed when combined with high-end brands used in a social situation. Thus, a high degree of ecological concerns among individual consumers is channeled to corresponding sustainable and green purchases.

## Conclusions

This research has studied usage situations from a proactive point of view under the Chinese *renqing*, *mianzi*, collectivism, and *man-nature unity* culture. The results of the factor analysis confirmed 5 categories of motives derived from Chinese culture. The regression analysis gives strong supports to *H1*, *H2*, and *H5*, and renders preliminary substantiate to the direction of the relationship in *H3*. The motives of brand and prestige chasing are positively related to the social situation, while motives of sustainability, pragmatism and chasing novelty and uniqueness are positively related to consumer purchase under self-use situation. The implications are elaborated. As consumer motives derived from the local culture and usage situations are related, this study suggested that culture value should be addressed by marketers. This study also emphasized the importance of consumer sustainability motives during self-use conditions. Policymakers and markers should make wise decisions to channel these motives to corresponding sustainable consumption behaviors.

Nevertheless, the data set does not prove enough significance of conformity motives under two usage situations, with data collected in Zhejiang province. As a province famous for tea production and consumption with 90% of interviewees were Han Chinese, it may not represent the whole Chinese population. Hence, further studies can expand the region of research and involve more minority ethnic groups to provide better grounds for research results.

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## Authors' contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work. TL and WL were responsible for the acquisition of the data and conducting the analysis. TL and AT conducted the interpretation of the data. AT and WL helped to write and edit the manuscript. All authors have drafted the final version of the work with substantial revisions and have approved the submitted version.

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## Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available via [https://osf.io/c8zxa/?view\\_only=f55c709f8661478e87b4820335d54043](https://osf.io/c8zxa/?view_only=f55c709f8661478e87b4820335d54043) at DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/C8ZXA.

## Declarations

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### Author details

<sup>1</sup>Department of Forest Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland.

<sup>2</sup>College of Economics and Management, Zhejiang A&F University, Hangzhou, China.

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