

*Tea identities: How tea drinking taste shapes identities
among tea professionals and enthusiasts.*

An interview-based study on the ways of tea in 2020's Helsinki.

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Tea came to Finland almost 400 years ago, but the historical pathways towards the situation of tea in the country in recent years were not straightforward. Finland is still a country of coffee drinkers, one of the biggest per-capita consumers of coffee globally. In that light the consumption of relatively luxurious tea qualities is something significant worth studying sociologically. The aims of this study are to see what kind of meanings tea has in tea enthusiasts' narratives and to analyze the larger themes that are derived from the data gathered. The research questions in this study are: How do tea professionals and enthusiasts narrate their identities in relation to tea? What kind of meanings do tea professionals and tea enthusiasts in the Helsinki tea scene give to tea drinking?

The methodological approach to the research was designed to allow gathered drive the developing theory. I interviewed eight central people in the Helsinki tea scene, all of them tea-related and some of them tea shop owners. The research process was inductive, meaning that theory is driven from the data and the phenomenological aspects of tea were the main focus of the study. The data showed that tea is first and foremost a sensorial pleasure for these interviewees. Semi-structured interviews were my main method of data-collection. The interviews were ethnographical, as many of them were collected in the field. Narrative analysis was to bring out the significance of the data.

The main finding of this study was that spirituality is strongly linked to tea drinking. The motives to drink tea were explained through embodied rituals that have the capacity to carry the everyday-life. The rituals of tea drinking are important because tea is a whole culture with individual meanings that might have been passed on in childhood or learned in adulthood. Another significant observation is the perceived elitism surrounding tea drinkers and how taste differences were downplayed by interviewees to seem open and tolerant towards all tastes. The narratives also implied that there is hierarchy among tea drinkers and that image is upheld by both tea people and coffee drinkers.



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Tee tuli Suomeen melkein 400 vuotta sitten, mutta sen historiallinen polku on ollut kaikkea muuta kuin suora. Suomi on edelleen vahvasti kahvinjuojien maa ja yksi maailman suurimmista kahvinkuluttajista. Tässä valossa suhteellisen ylellisten teelaatujen kulutus on merkittävä aihe tutkimuksellisesti. Pyrkimyksenä on tutkia mitä merkityksiä tee saa teeharrastajien ja teemmattilaisten narratiiveissa ja analysoida mitä teemoja aineistosta nousee. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat: Miten teeharrastajat ja teemmattilaiset kertomuksellistavat identiteettiään suhteessa teehen? Mitä merkityksiä teelle annetaan Helsingin teemmattilaisten kontekstissa?

Metodologinen lähestymistapa tutkimukseen oli antaa datan ohjata kehittyvää teoriaa. Haastattelin kahdeksaa keskeistä henkilöä, jotka työskentelevät Helsingin teehuoneissa ja kaupoissa. Tutkimusprosessi oli induktiivinen: teoria on datalähtöistä ja teen fenomenologinen ulottuvuus nähdään keskeisenä tutkimuskohteena: tee on ennen kaikkea sensorinen nautinto. Käytin puolistrukturoitua haastattelua aineiston keräämiseen ja haastattelut ovat etnografisia, analysoin tarinoita narratiivisten kehysten kautta.

Aineisto ja kerrotut tarinat olivat rikkaita ja tutkimuksen keskeiset löydöt kertovat henkisyyden ja teen vahvasta yhteydestä. Teen juomisen motiivit kerrottiin ruumiillistuneiden rituaalien kautta, joilla on kapasiteettia kantaa arkielämää. Juomisen rituaalit ovat tärkeitä, koska tee on kokonainen kulttuuri, joka on täynnä yksilöllisiä merkityksiä lapsuudesta tai aikuisuudesta. Toinen merkittävä löytö liittyi koettuun elitismiin, mikä liitetään teen juojiin usein ulkopuolelta, lisäksi teen makukulttuurien eroja vähäteltiin, jotta teekulttuuri nähtäisiin avoimena ja hyväksyttävänä. Tarinoissa oli näkyviä hierarkioita teen juojien kesken ja tätä mielikuvaa pitävät yllä sekä teen- että kahvinjuojat.

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1. Introduction

It is such a joy to be alive in this era, where quality tea is sold in many tea shops in Helsinki.

This was the main message of satisfied tea drinkers, who took part in this research. It was not always so, as tea started to gain more interest in the early 2000s, when the first tea shops in Helsinki started to sell quality tea to tea hungry customers. The tea professionals have educated people on how to brew good tea, and the work continues still.

In the process knowledge of tea cultures and the traditions have travelled too, and there is something for everybody as the tea shops and tea rooms are quite unique in reflecting the cultural orientations; there are Russian, Continental, Chinese, Japanese, European traditions represented in the scene to mention few. My own tea journey in Helsinki tea scene started in 2013, when I started to work in one of the shops. It was fascinating to become aware of all the culture tied to tea. The sensual experiences from those years are incomparable, as I got to taste the first flushes and the fresh pickings of green Chinese delicacy among the first ones to have that opportunity. The tastes linger to this day, as I measure the years passing by what teas are available and freshest to the season. I was swept away to the world of tea and the best education for this thesis was the daily work that accumulated observations on the meanings attached to tea.

Tea came to Finland almost 400 years ago (Ranta, 2020, 25–26), but the historical pathways to recent years were not straightforward, and tea culture was almost lost in one point of history, when coffee gained popularity, and the mass-marketing of tea bags marginalized leaf tea. Finland is still a country of coffee-drinkers, one of the biggest consumers of coffee globally. In that light the consumption of relatively luxurious tea qualities is something significant worth studying. The aim is to see what kind of meanings tea receive in tea enthusiasts' narratives and analyze the larger themes that are derived from the data gathered. The research process was inductive, meaning that theory is driven from the data and the phenomenological aspects of tea was the main focus of the study: tea is first and foremost a sensorial pleasure, tea is to be enjoyed and the world of gustatory delights is waiting to be explored.

The main concepts for understanding how people relate themselves to tea is *embodiment, rituals and everyday*. Embodiment means the internalized culture from childhood, which can be seen in the ways people brew tea. On the other hand, embodiment can also happen in practicing tea. Rituals are the visualization of embodiment, as the rituals could be seen as markers for what we want to cherish in our lives. Everyday is the context where embodied rituals happen. The rituals might be mundane

or highly spiritual, or both. Tea is something that elevates the experience of everyday life: a soft reminder of time, memories or emotions carried through in the habit.

Chapters two and three concentrate on the history, culture and consumption of tea. The emphasis is in the Chinese culture, where tea is originated from. In chapter three the focus is on tea in Finland. In chapter four I will explain the phenomenological scholarship deeper and introduce the literature used to broaden the themes found in the data. In chapter five the methodologies and methods, in this case interviews and narrative analysis and how they were used. I will also consider ethical questions and the researcher's position.

Chapter six presents and analyzes the dynamics of tea drinking and snobbism both from outsider's viewpoint and inside tea community. The seventh chapter is dedicated to the spiritual aspects connected to tea drinking, both mundane routines and ceremonial contexts are considered. The last empirical chapter, chapter eight, delves into the conversion stories, where tea drinking has worked as a catalyst for holistic life change. After that I will try to put my findings together in conclusions. In the words of Vannini, Lopez, Waskul & Gottschalk (2010) "We shall savor the flavor of tea in the good company of others, and we invite you to come drink deeply with us."

2. Tea Culture: its origins and early history

Tea is the second most consumed drink in the world after water (Nihtinen, 2015, 9). The roots of tea are intertwined with Chinese cultural history, and the drink was known for thousand years before it spread to its neighboring countries, and two thousand years before the sweetness of the leaf tea reached European lips. The history of tea is understatedly Chinese history long before it travelled to countries far away and got its new cultural meanings and characteristics. Pekka Nihtinen (2015) has written a book on Chinese tea, and he highlights the thousands of years of culture in comparison to Europe's four hundred years (2015, 10). China, rather, province of Yunnan in southern China is the cradle of tea, where the history and culture of tea has believed to begin (Nihtinen, 2015, 13; Jolliffe, 2007, 20–29).

But the theories of the origins of tea are fascinatingly mystical. Indian mythology has it that tea originated in northern India and was then transplanted to Sichuan Province of China. The Chinese counterpart for the story goes back 5000 years, when tea was discovered by mythical Emperor Shen Nung (2737-2697). Theories cannot be confirmed, but the mythical value of the leaf grows as the stories loom large. (Jolliffe, 2007, 21.) Nihtinen (2015) accentuates that the mythical emperors

(who were three) created civilization and taught the essential lessons for humans, including poisonous and edible plants (2015, 20). Another tea legend is Emperor Shennong who got the seeds for tea plant from the creator of earth and skies, Yao Bai, for consolation (Nihtinen, 2015, 19).

Tea drinking probably started with chewing the tea leaves from a *Camellia Sinensis* tree. The leaves are bitter, but the effects are stimulating, this was maybe the starting point of tea's journey as Nihtinen (2015) puts it. Tea was considered an edible herb as well as medicinal at first before it became popular in social gatherings. Tea leaves were used together with other ingredients to make a meal: tea leaves were first processed into a cake, and then the cake was boiled together with rice, ginger, salt, orange peels, spices, milk and onions. This method has obtained in Mongolia to this day. (Jolliffe, 2007, 9; Nihtinen, 2015, 18–19.) Curiosity fact: Jolliffe (2007) traces the Russian tea with lemon slices back to the tradition of boiling tea into a soup, as trade routes to Eurasia spread the drink (2015, 9).

Tea became a mundane and delicate treat at the same time, enjoyed in all societal levels (Nihtinen, 2015, 14). Tea received various names of Tou, Tseh, Chung, Kha, Ming, and it had a reputation for releasing fatigue, delighting the soul, strengthening the will, and even repairing the eyesight (Jolliffe, 2007, 9). With time, tea drinking developed a whole cultural body of meanings where poetry, ceramics and art became integral part of consuming tea. Jolliffe (2007) categorizes the evolution of tea into three categories, the first being boiled tea, second the whipped tea and thirdly the steeped tea, and he argues that the methods of appreciating the beverage are indicative of the spirit of the age. In the Sung dynasty whipped tea was combined with self-realization and spirituality (2007, 11):

The Taoist conception that immortality lay in the eternal change permeated all their modes of thought. It was the process, not the deed, which was interesting. It was the completing, not the completion, which was really vital. Man came thus at once face to face with nature. A new meaning grew into the art of life. The tea began to be not a poetical pastime, but one of the methods of self-realization.

Taoist philosophy is naturalistic; giving in and activity without action were salient principles, and the *way* is a mode in which the universe operates (Nihtinen, 2015, 43). Moreover, popularized Buddhism helped to spread the tea drinking habits in China. But for the elite (until the Jin Dynasty AD 265–420) tea represented lavish and luxurious culture, where social status was determined with the symbolic value given to tea. The competition of best collection of teas was real, and elite gatherings based on tea evaluations were important social gatherings of Sung Dynasty (Jolliffe,

2007, 28). Lu Yu (733–804) wanted to create very different aesthetics for tea drinking, which could be portrayed with modesty, poverty and simplicity in contrast of luxurious consumption. Yu Lu's publication made a critical observation on the social status and the values of tea drinking. Tea has represented both mundane and posh culture in the history of the drink in China and most certainly in global context as well, but tea culture is still evolving as it traveled to new locations where the existing cultures modified the drink to their own needs. Tea drinking and consumption as well as production deserves a small peek in the next chapter. After that I will explore the journey of the leaf to Europe.

2.2 Snapshot of tea's journey to Europe

The story of tea's journey to Europe shares characteristics with how tea came to Finland (see chapter 3) in how tea was received as luxury item gaining mass popularity later when the cultivation of tea industrialized. According to Saberi (2010) the Dutch were the first to bring Chinese and Japanese tea to Amsterdam in 1610, and Javanese tea too according to Jolliffe (2007, 25). Tea started as an expensive novelty and it was embraced by aristocracy, who could afford the precious tea-set to drink it, tea became popular to all who could afford it (2010, 86–87).

During that same period tea drinking was spreading to other European countries, arriving in Russia in 1618 as a gift from China to Tsar Alexis (Jolliffe, 2007, 25). In Ranta's (2020) book the year was 1638, so the information on this is incoherent (2020, 33). Aristocracy in France got their hands on tea in the mid-seventeenth century, Germany got their share of tea around 1640. In 1709 Germans finally discovered how to manufacture porcelain, so it was not necessary to import it from China anymore. In that time proper tea ware was mandatory to enjoy the leaf and the manufacturing of porcelain had impact on spreading tea culture in Europe (Saberi, 2010, 87–88.)

Lot of the history of tea in Europe has conflicting facts in the literature: The first tea to arrive to England was in 1645 (Saberi, 2010, 91), but the first document of tea was in 1658 (Jolliffe 2007, 26). It is not conclusive which date is correct, but it is fascinating to see how history is perhaps received differently in the sources. Women had a leading role in receiving tea and making it popular in English context. The first leader of her time was Portuguese Catharine of Braganza, who married Charles II in 1662 and thanks to her devotion on tea, the popularity of the drink was spread in the court. By the middle of the eighteenth-century tea became a common pleasure among middle-classes and it had replaced alcoholic drinks, such as ale and gin for breakfast. The decline of coffee started at the same time, and the speculations on why is that tea was easier to brew. Coffee required

processing, roasting and grinding, which was hard to do in home settings, if one did not have a coffee house nearby. (Saber, 2010, 102).

The gender division of home and public life started two different tea cultures; coffee houses were for gentlemen, and they soon became disreputable places. As women were not allowed to enter these establishments, they took the expensive beverage to the comforts of home, where tea was kept in boudoir or drawing rooms (Saber, 2010, 99). In 1800s another aristocratic influencer of her time, Duchess of Bedford started the tradition of afternoon tea to fill the huge gap between luncheon and dinner, which was served rather late in that time. She took a pot of tea with light refreshments to her room and soon started to invite guests into the boudoir. The afternoon tea is part of English tea culture, and the tradition has gained some popularity in Finland too, as part of tea cultures adopted to our ways.

How does tea production and consumption look alike today? China is rightfully the biggest producer of tea nowadays. The amount of tea produced is breathtaking 2,8 million metric tons in the year 2019 (Statista.com). China started to develop foreign trade during Zhou Dynasty (1100-771 BC) with the help of famous silk trade route, tea and horse trade route and through the route to the Gulf of Persia. The state-owned trade lasted for 1000 years (Jolliffe, 2007, 22).

The second largest producer today is India (farrerscoffee.co.uk). During the colonial era Britain planted tea in India and Sri Lanka quite successfully, and many areas in India are still producing famous qualities such as Darjeeling and Assam, as well as mass-produced tea for large companies. It was in 1849 when commercial plantations were established in India. Sri Lanka (Ceylon) was included in 1870 consequently for failing coffee crops. The early pioneers of cultivating tea were James Taylor and Thomas Lipton, who founded the industry in India and Sri Lanka. (Jolliffe, 2010, 23.) Third place for producing is Kenya, but the amount (305,000 metric tons) will not surpass China's numbers any day soon (farrerscoffee.co.uk).

The popularity of tea is assumed to rise in the following years: in 2020 the global consumption amounted to 6,3 billion kilograms and in 2025 the amount is estimated to be 7,4 billion kilograms. (Statista.com.) It was hard to find up-to-date information on tea consumption, the latest list was from 2016. Turkey, Ireland and Iran are the top three consumers of tea. Finland is 34th in the listing with the amount per capita being only 0,24 kilograms compared to Turkey's 3,16 kilograms. (Statista.com.) Turkey being the largest consumer of tea in the world, I will review the national customs, history, and the importance tea has on civic culture in Turkey.

Turkey's tea culture started with Balkan immigrants, who brought teahouses with them in 1800s. Turkey was shifting from coffee to tea, as importing coffee from Brazil became too expensive. Ataturk's vision for modern Turkey was greater self-reliance and tea plantations were established, and coffee consumption was replaced by tea. Another modernization program concerned the creation of public space: parks and tea gardens became major civic sites, where both men and women could enjoy public space and refreshments. (Wohl, 2017). Tea has unique and similar meanings shared by Turkey and the interviews in the data. The quote from Wohl's (2017) article summarizes the tea culture's poetic nature beautifully:

The gardens act as a specific locality where memory and narrative are gathered in a space with shared cultural allusions to the sacred. The gardens serve as repositories of shared customs, collective beliefs, and historic memories—including those real, imagined, and mythic in substance.

Lastly, the main difference in tea production is the quality. Mass-production of tea quenches the thirst for most parts of the world, but small farms have one trick on their sleeve: to compete with the quality of production and sell tea to small businesses who will then introduce the quality to customers. At least in Finland the trend for tea drinking is slowly turning from mass-produced teas to small batches imported straight from the source. Tea was originally leaf tea, but the mass-production of tea bags after World War II the tea culture almost disappeared. Now, it seems, Finland is coming back to her roots with tea selection that can easily be compared to the larger tea countries in Europe. In the next chapter I will dive into Finland's tea history with Sirkka-Liisa Ranta, who wrote a very accomplished book on the subject in 2020.

3. Tea in Finland

"We can encounter past and present, east and west in a teacup." Kyllikki Villa

Finnish writer Kyllikki Villa (1984) knew that the history of tea is full of cultural meanings. There is also other kind of wisdom in her quote: tea originally came to Finland from both east and west. There is very little if any studies done on tea in Finland. Only in recent years has the field of study gained strength to describe the tea in qualitative ways in addition to looking at the retail and consuming volumes. Tea history has been written from Chinese perspective by Pekka Nihtinen (2004) and some books are published with more personal grasp to mention few (Arstila, 2011; Villa, 1984; Petäistö 2008).

To my fortune, Sirkka-Liisa Ranta (2020) has written a book on tea in Finland starting from the end of the 1600s. In the lack of literature on tea in Finland, I will use Ranta's (2020) book exclusively to describe the history of tea, the ways tea was consumed, and how the customs have changed throughout the history I will trace the earliest history in the next chapter and proceed chronologically to nowadays Helsinki. I will also look at separate historical aspects related to tea in Finland.

3.1 How tea came to Finland

Tea originally came to Finland from both western and eastern routes for historical reasons: Finland was part of Sweden until the war of Finland in 1809, when Finland became part of Russian Empire. Influences traveled from Paris through Stockholm, and from Russian empire through Vyborg, which was on an important trade route during 1700s. Overall, eastern parts of Finland have been under the influence of Russian empire and western coastal towns traded goods with Sweden. But the history is trickier than it sounds, and we must look at tea in Sweden and tea in Russia before we can grasp how tea came to Finland. Trade and culture were influenced both during Swedish and Russian eras. In 1700s estates of the realm dictated the fashion in drinking customs and common folk adapted their ways whenever financial situation allowed. The estates of the realm got their influences mainly from France, diluted through Stockholm. Freight traffic took the common folks to east, and St. Petersburg and they used to bring all kinds of haberdasheries back home, including tea. Karelia and Vyborg -district were part of St. Petersburg market area all the way until Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917. (Ranta, 2020, 24–30.)

In Sweden, tea was sold in apothecaries in late 1600s, and it was used by people in the court. In the 1700s tea was already known. Sweden established their own Swedish East-Indian trade company, *Svenska Ostindiska Companiet* in 1731 to strengthen tea trade in Sweden. The company sold tea to west-Finnish towns including Turku, Kokkola and Oulu. Ranta (2020) assumes that the tea usage and culture were the same in Sweden and in Finland's coastal towns among wealthier estates. First mentions of tea was from 1707 in Helsinki during time when Turku was the capital of Finland. Ranta (2020) recons in the light of her research that tea came to Finland in the beginning of 1700s, at the same time as coffee. Tea was four times more popular drink than coffee during 1700s, but both were well known midway through the century. The Russian Tsar encountered tea for the first time in 1638 and tea became familiar in Russia during 1660s, at the same time as in Sweden. Russia

made a deal with the Chinese on tea deliveries in 1670s and only the noble folk in Moscow got to try this Chinese herb first and it became fashionable status drink very quickly. (2020, 33.)

When Finland was attached to Russia in 1809, St. Petersburg was all the rage and Stockholm had lost its shine. Helsinki became Finland's capital in 1812 and Russian influences shaped the new capital as the militia brought their language and cultural customs with them. The trade history in Finland is linked therefore to both Sweden and Russia, but tea trade started to bloom through Russia. Tea was shipped from St. Petersburg to Turku and Helsinki. Tea to inner parts of Finland traveled through Vyborg where many wealthy merchants practiced trade, among others were Sergejeff and Lallukka and co. (Ranta, 2020, 54.)

Tea became the symbol of hospitality as early as 1700s and this practice continued thereon. Chinese porcelain was in vogue during that period, and that ensured to make tea very popular drink for socializing. This tradition runs strong in Karelia, where every guest was welcomed with tea. Every (wealthier) household used to have nicer teacups for celebratory use. Coffee- and tea-breaks were important routines to household people, both servants and gentlefolk. Coffee was seen as everyday and mundane, but tea was for special occasions, or the main drink alongside coffee. Tea remained expensive to the end of 1800s and the price affected on how the masses could assimilate the drink to their daily habits. As the naval routes and colonial farming improved, the prices slumped and the use of this commodity expanded (Ranta, 2020, 34).

It could be supposed that class differences also dictated distinction between coffee drinking and tea drinking: In Ranta's (2020) example in one household in Häme-region servants were more used to drink coffee, where gentlefolk of the house drank tea. Tea drinking habits were regional inside Finland as well (2020, 142). Ranta describes that Sámi people (kolttasámi) were keen tea drinkers and they drank tea from samovar six times a day (2020, 144).

Thomas Lipton's tea started to sell in Finland in the end of 1800s and it became popular through mass marketing and advertising. Especially after Russian revolution, Lipton's Ceylon- tea's share rose in Finnish marketplace, since the contacts to London were established earlier (Ranta, 2020, 66–68). Tea drinking started to gradually lose its popularity during 1900s. Definitive information of that is not available, but according to Ranta (2020), the first signs of declining were seen on 1920's, and after the second world war tea drinking was already replaced by coffee. (Ranta, 2020, 147.)

3.2 Samovar tea: tea immemorial

Samovar was part of Finnish tea drinking culture in the 1700s and 1800s according to Ranta (2020, 76–85). These “tea makers” were manufactured in Turku by hand, until industrial manufacturing supplanted hand made products. Samovar comes from Russian words *samo* and *var* and that means “self-boiling” to the letter (2020, 77). In the device the water is poured into the tank, and it is heated by a tube in the middle. As the samovar heated, it notified by sound on how hot the water is. At first it would hum, after which it would start to sing and finally the water would roil. The most suitable temperature was the singing phase (Ranta, 2020, 85). In Russia, the samovar was only used by tsars and aristocracy in the beginning. The boiler was absorbed by eastern-Finnish aristocracy in the 1700s when samovar was assessed more valuable than coffee pots in estates. Later samovar was assimilated by the bourgeois and ordinary people. (Ranta, 2020, 80–81.)

It usually took 40–50 minutes to warm the water in samovar. In fancier households, there was a special servant, whose responsibility was to take care of the tea boiler. Samovar boiled the water, but it meant more to people: it was the symbol of home, friendship, and hospitality. Tea drinking and samovar became inseparable according to Ranta (2020). It was also a symbol of wealth, especially in Karelia where everyone who could afford one had the boiler in the most valuable place in the house sizzling and steaming away. (2020, 82–85.)

Tea was drunk from porcelain cups and tea glasses in Russian style after tea culture had a steady footing in Finnish drinking culture. The most interesting drinking style was from Karelia, where tea glasses were called *takana*. Many thought the porcelain cups to be too feminine. In Ranta’s (2020) book, in one memory hot tea was drunk from the saucer. Peasants also used this method as tea was “boiling hot for the lips and sweaty for the forehead”. The glass, *takana*, was usually poured to the brim, so that life would be fuller. Blowing tea to cool it was considered uncivilized (2020, 98). When electricity became available many samovars were modified to work on electricity, or they were replaced with other kinds of boilers, pots, and cups. (2020, 82–85.)

3.3 What happened to tea drinking after World War II

Tea substitutes were common during wartime, and tea was not among regulated food items as coffee and many everyday food items were. But tea shortage was dire, it was “lucky to have a packet of tea” during continuation war (Ranta, 2020, 156). Even if real tea was rare commodity during wartime in Finland, tea (or substitutes) was still a way to socialize and bring routine to

everyday activities. Karelian refugees were forced to move to mainland Finland, because Russia had claimed the area to themselves. Their drinking habits remained wherever they moved. They were the tea drinkers of Finnish villages where they re-settled as coffee had taken place from tea. Interestingly, the term *saijunjuonti* (tea drinking) was used with other older Karelian people, and with others they used standard language and talked about “teen juonti”. The samovar and tea drinking traditions were common among refugee Karelians. (2020, 158–159.) Tea companies also had to move away from Karelia after the war, among them was Sergejeff and they re-opened in Helsinki in 1940. The quality of tea was poor because of the war, but soon enough they found a way to bring tea through Germany.

The dispersing of Karelian people had a huge impact on tea culture in Finland according to Ranta (2020). The other major impact was the launch of bag tea. (2020, 158–159.) Tea bags diminished the selection of loose-leaf tea in few decades. Tea bags were considered a milestone for a new and efficient era of building welfare society. Among others were the Finnish company Paulig, which introduced tea bags in the early 1950s. Lipton’s tea was already familiar to many Finns. In the 1960s tea brewing habits started to change due to tea bags. It was only required to boil the water and then pour it on the tea bag in a cup. This was convenient and quick, and this changed tea culture profoundly, but not all were excited about this novelty and some people said that “tea bags are only for coffee drinking people” (2020, 162). Tea bags were used several times and the last drop was squeezed out from the bag with the help of a spoon. (2020, 166–167.) The sales of tea bags surpassed loose leaf tea in 1977, when the shares of bag tea was 66% of all tea sold, even if loose leaf would have been cheaper in kilo price (2020, 164).

Even after wars Finnish tea consumption was all about Indian and Ceylon teas. The best qualities were unavailable because the consumption remained small. After war the largest market share was divided among Lipton’s, Paulig, Horniman’s, Twining’s and Princess Tea. The popular tea in 1970s was Lipton’s Earl Grey, English and Irish Breakfast. The production of Chinese tea qualities improved in the 1980s and soon Chinese tea was also available. According to Ranta (2020), smoky black tea Lapsang Souchong was introduced in the late 1970’s (2020, 173).

3.4 Tea, coffee, and alcohol

Tea was a sign of hospitality and wealth in Karelia, but in Ostrobothnia serving tea for guests was considered offensive (Ranta, 2020, 195). Tea was just warm water or badly steeped brown water. Whether the reason for this was bad quality of tea in 1960s or lack of stature for the drink, tea and

coffee have always competed in Finnish culture. They are each other's opposite, in reality when many drinks both. But why did coffee become our national drink and not tea? Ranta (2020) turns this question around and asks why to drink tea. It is a hard question to answer, but somebody suggested in *Uusi Kuvalehti Magazine* in 1895 that as both are stimulants, they have different effects on the "functions of the soul". (2020, 196.) Coffee and tea were originally acquainted as fashion drinks from France, both were also medicinal uses in addition to enjoyment. The public discourse has been for and against both during history, and they both have been regulated as luxury items by the state in some points of history.

Tea and coffee have their benefits and downsides, but tea was considered a healthy option, as coffee was known for stomach irritation. One reason for low tea consumption was the reputation of tea as forged foodstuff. It has also been speculated that coffee found solid support before Russian Empire, because the import tax was cheaper to North-Europe. The last speculation on low tea consumption is that no-one knew how to brew it properly. Coffee brewing instructions were found in every magazine, but tea brewing was not mentioned, tea was just advertised as such. (Ranta, 2020, 197–200.) In Vyborg coffee drinking became regular quite late, in the end of 1800s. When coffee and tea found equal footing, tea remained as evening drink, but coffee was drunk during daytime. Coffee came to East from West and reached Vyborg as last remaining cities in Finland. (2020, 198.)

It was also customary to drink alcoholic drinks with tea. Usually there was punch and liqueurs that were served alongside tea or coffee for guests. On the other hand, tea was fortified with rum, and it was called *tuutinki*. In Russia this sort of mix was named *gilded* (Ranta, 2020, 148–149). After Prohibition law was enforced in Finland 1919–1932, tea houses served "hard tea", which was a blend of moonshine and tea, *silver tea* was also served (hot water, moonshine, milk, and sugar). The prohibition law ceased all alcohol manufacturing, importing, and selling, but alcohol smuggling became popular way to overtake the laws. Speakeasies served regular tea to those customers, who could then add the alcohol from their own bottle (2020, 149).

3.5 Tea today in Finland

In the early 2000s domestic tea chains rose in the marketplace. They sell and import tea and select teas themselves. They have a lot to say where the tea has grown, is it organic or mass produced, how the teas are scented/flavored and packed, and the tea is mainly loose-leaf tea. Tea is kept in bags or containers and customers can choose how much they want to purchase. Tea is then packed in small bags and sealed. (2020, 166–171.)

Tea was trending in 1960–70s when tea bags made a breakthrough. The new trend according to Ranta (2020) started in the early 2000s. Tea consumption per person is 300 grams per year, coffee is 10 kilograms per year (2020, 180). Finland is a coffee drinking nation, but tea drinking and consumption is at all-time high. Instead of tea bags, many are now investing in loose-leaf teas, which is more economical in the long run.

Tea preparation and brewing in cafes and restaurants was for the most part bleak experience in the 1980–90s. Tea water tasted like coffee, water was too hot or tepid and tea was served in dark colored cups. It was usual to get one cup of questionable water and a tea bag. The assumption is that everyone drinks coffee, and therefore good tea was under a rock. In the beginning of the new century, the focus shifted, and tea culture started to gain more value. Tea preparation and tea history started to interest more people and books on tea started to show up. As tea culture soared, so did the new tea houses and shops. Reporter Pirkko Arstila founded Teen Ystävät ry (Friends of Tea Society) in 2003, and the aim was to make tea culture visible and making good tea everybody's business. The Society brings about knowledge of tea and the preparation of good tea; it aims for better service in restaurants and cafes and bringing the joy and enjoyment of tea closer to people. (2020, p. 180– 184.)

Health-perspective of tea drinking has endured for many decades in Finnish discourse, whether black or green tea is healthier and how to get all the benefits of tea. In many cases that has supported the instrumental role of tea and enjoyment and joy has had less limelight in discussions. The brewing of tea has also suffered, as people associate bitterness with healthiness. The dislike for green tea “because it is so bitter” has probably originated from brewing tea leaves with boiling water and leaving it to brew for too long. In my experience as tea professional, when people taste correctly brewed green tea, they are amazed of its sweet and soft flavor.

Current discourse focuses on the sensory pleasures of tea drinking. It does not matter what kind of tea one drinks if it is enjoyable. During this decade of tea trending (Ranta, 2020) tea awareness and the work of tea professionals and Friends of Tea Society has changed tea culture. No tea drinker will accept tepid water and tea bags in cafes anymore, at least in Helsinki. Tea people know to ask for more, so they get better tea and service. On the other hand not all cafes and restaurants follow suit, but situation is getting slowly better.

Traditional tea habits and drinking like in Russia, England, China, or Japan does not suit to Finnish manners naturally according to Ranta (2020). But some traces of these are absorbed in Finnish tea culture, like Russian family-and friendship -orientation, sociable Englishness, Chinese nature -

orientation and Japanese silence (2020, 214–215). There is no right or wrong way of tea drinking according to Ranta (2020). Orthodoxy has no place in this world, and it is an enemy of tea drinking. Tea is associated with myriad experiences and sensory memories, and to others it is the drink of old gentlefolk for socializing (2020, 217).

4. Theoretical framework and literature review

The most significant themes in the study were data-driven, findings from the field. *Rituals, embodiment, and everyday* were the salient terms to describe the body of work. The aim was to immerse myself in the world of tea and see what kind of themes rise. No big theory on consumption or spirituality would serve the study as an outline that draws its marks on every theme.

Consequently, the work is inductive study on how tea people relate to the drink and what kind of meanings are given to tea. This way the results are more intuitive and relatable, even if the sensuality and sensory world can be hard to navigate for “commoners” in the tea connoisseur’s arena. Tea is to be enjoyed and its sensory aspects are too important to hide under massive sociological theory, which does not too often address the sensory world in its vividness and tactileness. I will describe the theoretical framework for inductive and phenomenological studies with Vannini et al. (2010) work where sensuous is the starting point of ethnographic interest.

Vannini et al. (2010) have studied wine drinking standpoint of *sensuous scholarship*; in other words, it could be portrayed as “tasty scholarship” that can open new and much neglected dimension of life, which is the realm of human sensations. The main work referenced this field of study is Paul Stoller, who wrote “The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses of Anthropology” (1989). Vannini et al. (2010) describes how Stoller was quite fed up with flavorless ethnographic writings, which did not capture *the field* in the sensuous plurality. Stoller’s solution was to make ethnographic fieldwork appetizing and flavorsome. If ethnographic work would catch the sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and sights in line with Stoller, it would “render our accounts of others more faithful to the realities of the field—accounts which will then be more, rather than less scientific”. (Vannini et al. 2010.)

The position of the researcher in “tasty scholarship” is to be immersed in the sensual world with the participants studied. The meanings given to tea were researched often with a pot of tea, sipping, and sharing the world of gustatory pleasures. The aim of this study is to invite the reader to tea drinking; the sounds, tastes and feelings are present in the descriptions of the interviews, making the tea

drinkers world holistic and perhaps easier to grasp by avoiding overly analytic, overly theoretical, formal, and unimaginative scholarship (Vannini et al., 2010).

Another account on the change in consumption studies has been the rising role of consumption research in mundane and unglamorous activities. Warde (2015) explains that the emphasis has shifted from thinking to doing; material over symbolic, embodied competence over virtuosity in the presentation of self (2015). The phenomenal philosophy studies the ideas of humans and the knowledge related to experiences. Phenomenologists think that the human relationship to the world is intentional; everything we experience has a meaning to us, and meanings build experiences. (Aaltola & Valli, 2015, 29.)

In order to understand the central themes, I have taken specific studies related to snobbism, taste, rituals and routines, ceremonial drinking and religious conversion stories. These studies do not represent a theoretical framework but illuminate the themes in a certain light to bring a fuller understanding of how studies have framed the phenomenological, embodied and unconscious. Sarah Pink (2011) has written about phenomenological anthropology in a critical manner. To really understand phenomenological aspects of human life, we should not lean to the five senses as separate categories, but as interrelated categories. The western five senses-system is exclusive to other sensory experiences, such as audition, balance, kinesthesia and synesthesia (Pink, 2011). In my study sensuality derives from senses interacting and building a whole in the environment they are in. In many cases certain kinds of teas bring up certain emotions that could be described synesthetic. Pink (2011) argues that the senses are not just interconnected, but a part of a system in which they are not so easily distinguishable.

Snobbism and elite taste cultures are the core of sociological study. I will draw some framework from Bourdieu (1986), Purhonen et al. (2014), and Jarness & Friedman (2017) who have studied snobbism in Nordic countries. Fromer (2008) studied tea in the Victorian England and her observations on tea culture are also valuable to understand the cultural context of tea drinking habits. Tea drinking is an arena for social distinctions. The main idea of Bourdieu's taste studies was that the battle for status happens in cultural sphere with the help of distinctions (Purhonen et al., 2014, 11). Social status is presented symbolically in different ways and in my data the distinctions were embodied and partially unconscious.

Bourdieu (1986) talks how taste is part of individuals embodied social structure, taste is therefore social orientation and a feeling of one's place in the world (1986, 466) and the knowledge of social world is internalized in cognitive structures (1986, 466–468). The simple example of distinctions

could be a thought of “what I am, what I am not” The presentation of status in symbolic ways means lifestyle-choices and consumption, which goes hand in hand with that in modern society (Purhonen et al., 2014, 13.) Of course, the measurements for high status are changeable culturally and historically. Therefore studying Helsinki’s tea scene at this point of time was fruitful, the markers of high status might change after tea has become mainstream and the dynamics change.

Bourdieu separates three categories of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalized capital. In this context the embodied and objectified capital are most useful tools for my analysis: embodied capital ties the capital to its carrier; body language, speech, dialect, language skills and clothing habits are part of embodied cultural capital, as is taste preferences. Objectified cultural capital consists of material items, cultural commodities and the appropriate use and appreciation demand embodied capital, for example tea culture materials: art collection, tea library, and vintage tea. (Purhonen et al., 2014, 18.)

The meanings given to cultural capital are not necessarily agreed in advance. It is important to know what makes the substance in cultural capital in each context before the effects can be studied. The consumption of wine can be an example of “high status signal”. The elements of cultural capital are (Purhonen et al., 2014, 19):

- way of thinking, it is important to know what is good wine (attitude)
- knowledge on how to consume and appreciate wine (formal knowledge)
- making brave choices, not following masses (attitude and preferences)
- making the conspicuous consumption tasteful (behavior and attitude)
- having a personal wine cellar (owning commodities)

Wine drinking must be labeled as a high-status signal, and the signals gain high status through shared meanings. It was very useful to apply this theory on status signals for finding the narratives in the material. The other way to pinpoint the snobbish stories was to see what kind of strategies interviewees used for explaining their habits of drinking and consuming. Jarness & Friedman (2017) have studied class boundaries and downplaying of difference with upper-middle class UK and Norway citizens. The strong symbolic boundaries on taste and lifestyle are not explicitly narrated but marshalled in interview settings by a “strong moral imperative to appear open, tolerant and respectful of others” (Jarness, & Friedman, 2017).

The distinctions in my data were also presented between the lines, by categorizing people and categorizing the social path a tea drinker is supposed to follow from mass-produced tea bags up to better qualities. The openness and tolerance in tea drinker community has developed over time:

Friends of Tea Society had a preference of not sweetening the tea with sugar and honey in the beginning, but the different ways of enjoying tea have been accepted and included later. The main strategy for appearing too snobbish for others was to downplay the differences and laugh consciously that they might be depicted as snobs, and this was the main finding in the study of middle-class citizens in Jarness & Friedman's study (2017). The participants in their study oscillated between spontaneous and scripted selves: such reflexive monitoring of self-presentation, allows the privileged to both benefit publicly from adherence to culturally dominant norms of openness, while continuing to privately harbor private feelings of snobbery (Jarness & Friedman, 2017).

The downplaying might suggest then, that there actually are differences between classes. The honorable narrative might then help to secure the legitimacy of cultural distinction and class-boundaries (Jarness & Friedman, 2017), which in my case means classifying tea people by how hi-fi they go in the enthusiasm. The same strategy is used by coffee-drinking majority, who label the tea drinkers snobs, if they do not follow the social script of a tea drinker, which – in Finland – seems to be tea bag in a mug. The strategies that condemn tea drinkers from outside are assimilated inside the tea community to label the real snobs of the scene.

Fromer's (2008) work suggests a Victorian ideal that tea was the unifying symbol of Englishness which brought together all socio-economic classes. The middle classness was the lifestyle-ideal in the Victorian era, and the influence and fashions of aristocracy diminished. Middle-class values such as moderation and morality created an identity that embodied good taste for luxuries tempered by household economy and efficiency. (2008, 69.) The luxury of tea was something that a poor should have access to, but also made them look respectable and English in the eyes of middle-class (2008, 79). The notion of affordable luxury puts tea in the categories of necessity and luxury at the same time, and the oscillation in between creates tension felt by tea drinkers, as they might feel that the drink is indeed a necessity that they cannot live without. This explanation will fall short if the tea drinker does not follow the social script mentioned earlier. In tea drinkers' community tea is unifying, bringing people together under the umbrella of shared meanings, much like in the ideal of tea as unifying symbol of Englishness (Fromer, 2008, 69). If we look at the national picture, tea is a marginal product, quality tea even more so. The dichotomies made on tea in a nation, which ranks high on lists of biggest consumers of coffee, are narrow. In this sense the picture of Victorian era tea culture does not apply to modern Finland but gives the phenomenon a framework to understand the socio-cultural differences between tea drinking nation and coffee drinking nation.

The literature on rituals and routines of everyday were studies on foodstuff and how food can serve as embodied knowledge carried from generation to other (Janowski, 2012; Hauck-Lawson, 1998; De Guzman, 2021; Ray 2004). Sutton (2014) studied the relation of food and everyday among Greek people. Simpson's (2008) and Featherstone's (2007) work knitted together consumerism, lifestyle and postmodernism. Hamilton & Wagner (2014) argued that the sense of nostalgia could be commercialized in tea shops as tea holds notions of world gone by.

Embodied routines and the everyday ritual of making tea is a reminder of safety, a marker of passage of days milestones, tea also evokes a sense of home (De Guzman, 2021). In De Guzman's work Filipino residents chose to migrate to Hong Kong in pursuit of a better life. As they started families there, the identities of the children grew significantly different from their parents. The ways to strengthen Filipino consciousness in the children were speaking Filipino, visiting parents' homeland frequently and cook Filipino foods (2021). The main finding that was reinforced is the link between identity and food. Similar thoughts were presented in Janowski (2012) and Hauck-Lawson (1998), who came up with the idea of "food-voice". It is the layers of the identities, that are mirrored in the foodstuff that we consume and cook, past and present. As some interviewees in my data concluded the ways tea was made in their childhood homes still form one layer in their identity and makes their food-voice express the meanings that are picked up as we grow up (1998). Janowski (2012) agrees with Hauck-Lawson's (1998) findings, as food is maybe more important in constructing identities than thought in earlier anthropological studies.

The migrant identity is present in Janowski's (2012) work. Food and drink fortify kinship, social and cultural ties, as well as building new ones. "Marker" foods are brought from homeland, but they might be very different from what they were back home. Food was encoded or embodied in the homeland but is then decoded in the new home. In this case, the emotions are at work, remembering and recurring, in Janowski's (2012) words:

Because of its sensuous and emotional strength, it has a particularly powerful ability to recall the past; and when introduced into the construction of the future it has a potent ability to manipulate feelings and behavior. Because of its complex meaning and complex sensory status, food has great potential for reflecting—and generating—change.

Much in the same vein Sutton (2014) wrote about the Greek everyday practices with food. Interestingly both men and women had strong food identities, whereas Hauck-Lawson (1998) argues that women do have stronger ties to foodstuff. Identities were indeed narrated through tea drinking in my data. Men had more ceremonial attunements to tea, whereas women had embodied

tea routines. All of the interviewees had a strong lifestyle related to tea, and I used both Simpson (2008) and Featherstone (2007) to clarify the meaning of lifestyle (also with ceremonial context) and its postmodern implications. To Featherstone lifestyle is related to identity-construction, that can resemble making life a work of art through aestheticization of everyday life. In “postmodern” culture this process points to “the expansion and extension of commodity production in the big cities which has thrown up new buildings, department stores, arcades, malls and so on, and which has produced an endless array of goods to fill the shops and clothe and cater for those who pass through them.” (Featherstone, 2007.) The culture is densified and in constant flux in cities, and the aestheticization of everyday life could be interpreted as a coping mechanism in the competition of *becoming*, but also a reaction to the plethora of choices in lifestyles available. This is not to be mixed with the aesthetics presented in tea culture, but as something that combines Bourdieu’s (1986) taste preferences in an era where taste differences are not necessarily mediated through class and social standing, but in the willingness of submitting oneself to the constant change and ambiguity of life, where tea could serve a means to achieve this ideal or maintaining a safe harbor from the rapid changes. In the data the routines could be interpreted as a safe space, where the gaze could be turned to yesteryear and the perceived slower pace of life.

Hamilton & Wagner (2014) wrote about commercializing nostalgia especially in tea rooms and tea shops in English context of Afternoon tea. They wanted to articulate the transformation of a mundane activity to a special experience linking nostalgia to the context of afternoon tea. In the UK the everyday consumption of tea needs the help from traditions and memories to jog national and personal identities (2014). The props of tea consumption are significant to the meanings ascribed to tea and identity. Emotions can transport the drinker to nostalgic journey if the aesthetics are just right. Even a sip of milk tea from childhood can evoke the right atmosphere of emotions and personal memories, even if the tea does not resonate with evolved taste preferences. Ceremonial tea is another kind of journey loaded with cultural history, philosophies and doctrines. The spiritual side of tea drinking is up next.

Much of the work in this theme reflected the phenomenological side of research (Surak 2017; Collins 2014; Xiao 2017). Another angle was given with the cultural history, philosophies, and aesthetics linked to tea culture (Kondo 1985; Handa 2013; Isao & McMillan 2002). I will start with the hard knowledge of cultural history and move on to the ways it has been studied.

In Kondo’s (1985) work tea ceremony’s aesthetic sensibilities trace its roots to Zen Buddhism, to Chinese Ch’an Buddhism and Taoism. Tea ceremony holds meanings from aesthetics, religion, and philosophical ideas that are tied together with the ‘way’ of tea. The Zen enlightenment is mu-

emptiness, or nothingness. Kondo (1985) adds that the ideal includes such qualities as *mushin*, selflessness or detachment, and *munen*, freedom from all ideas and thoughts. Kondo continues: “Efforts to master the intricate discipline of tea or another Zen art constitute a process of self-realization, whereby one so thoroughly incorporates the form that it or other worldly concerns, such as the desire to perform well no longer requires one's conscious attention. This is the state of emptiness.” (1985.) Handa (2013) scrutinizes Rikyu’s ethics on tea. The term *wabi* which means “incomplete”, “imperfect” or “impoverished” describes the aesthetics to provide instruction in finding meaning in our existence in a simple act of sustenance, such as tea (2013). The aesthetics of *wabi* combines quality of material, work and artistic eye to the principles of incomplete. Finding worth and meaning in ordinary and everyday provided an antidote to the rational view of life, where everything seemed banal and commonplace (2013).

In this vein Rikyu wanted to demonstrate how everydayness might better the ordinary life and orientate the tea participants to ontological contemplation of the world and themselves (Handa, 2013). The meditative and ceremonial drinking styles in this study did resonate with *wabi*-philosophy. The ethical side was pronounced in the data in stories where the participants narrated specifically how they like to meditate, lead their life, concentrate on the simple things and bring harmony in everyday. Tea has many meanings, but in this sense, *tea is the meaning*, which branches to other areas of life as the serious tea drinking sweeps away.

Isao & McMillan (2002) criticize the *wabi* tea for making tea a synonym to aesthetics in their article. In their argument, viewing tea exclusively in terms of *wabi* associates the whole with art. That leads to the implication that tea would not be possible without the artistic world outside tearoom. As this is not true to Isao & McMillan (2002), the antidote is to recognize the vast history of tea, and the different meanings given to it. Tea is therefore more than contemplations on beauty and aesthetics. I was interested especially in the critical view of the article to examine if the narrations held only aesthetic aspects of tea as the central meaning for drinking, but the meanings given to tea went in all directions. I would claim that aesthetics are more important to tea rooms and tea shops to allure customers to a certain atmosphere, as was concluded in Hamilton & Wagner (2014). The embodied knowledge from tea cultures and philosophies were central. The ethical approach to meaningful life (Handa, 2013) was something that many interviewee participants practiced. Tea was either the central motive, or on the side of spirituality. Either way the ripples started to touch other parts of life too, making changes in how interviewees perceived themselves and the world. In China the embodied practice with tea is vital in processing the leaves, as Xiao’s

(2017) article shows. Her study is a phenomenological take on cultivating, processing and consuming rock tea in China:

On one hand, soil, sunshine, orientation, temperature, humidity, density and rain together determine the quality of tea leaves. On the other hand, it is human skill and techniques which work within this ecology and turn fresh leaves into tea, the result of close human–environmental interaction.

This philosophy of extending the way of life to consider how one is in this world, was popular in the narratives. Chinese and Japanese philosophies, such as Rikyu’s wabi (Handa, 2013) are perhaps trending among serious tea drinkers, who have studied the essential writings and art related to tea.

Now we are closing the theme of conversion, but first we look at the position of a beginner, or a novice in tea. When one delves into the world of tea for the first time, or even in such an unfamiliar domain as the tea ceremony, the rupture of rhythm is palpable. Surak (2017) has studied amateur tea students in participant observations to gather phenomenological information on anatomical and sensory awareness. This work is partly methodological on how the researcher must also create a sense of herself for attuning to the cadence of the tea ritual: “to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been *grasped* by it” (Surak, 2017). In such exceptional spaces the awareness and sense perception are sharpened, and the rules cannot be taken for granted. Rhythm is the cadence of the space; rupture is the absence of familiarity. I was very familiar with the world of tea as I entered the field. Part of the process was immersion in the sensual and phenomenology of tea, as it is necessary to understand the perspective of a novice. The other use was to make sense of how routines mattered in interviewees’ stories when they went missing in unfamiliar places. This was the moment when unconscious and embodied habits surfaced, and the building blocks of identity became visible.

The last article on spiritual tea drinking was on tobacco rituals (Collins, 2014), which showed light on how stimulants have accumulated similarities in how and when they are used, and what meanings the stimulant gets. There are three main tobacco rituals: the first is for relaxation and withdrawal, the second is carousing ritual, which is sociable and enhances excitement and enjoyment. The third one is elegance ritual that “conveys aesthetic impression of the actor as a categorical identity within the status hierarchy” (2014, 306). Each ritual organizes different forms of social stratification that express emotional tones differently. The main idea is that the kind of social ritual determines the quality attributed to the tobacco. The same approach of sensuality was

aboard in Vannini et al. (2010) as they described wine festivals in western coast of Canada and USA. The last theme to be tackled is the conversion stories.

The conversion narrative was most useful framing the interviewees that presented the ceremonial drinking habits and those who combined rituals and ceremonial styles. The central meaning of conversion is *change* (Rambo, 1993). In Rambo's (1993) book on conversion the concept is comprehended in the frame of religious and institutionalized religions, but it can be useful framework to understand the narratives in my data, as the conversion in itself can be applied to other types of narratives. He binds religious change with institutionalism and spiritual change as personal and believes that spiritual change can describe the experience of conversion better than religious, or institutional change (1993, 1). Change is something we all share, as we are connected through the socio-cultural world.

Religion as a concept is hard to define. It could be understood as a social system or phenomenon that has the central focus on transcending otherness (Curtis et al. 2013, 215). It does in its simplicity give meaning and form to life, as is emphasized in the interviews. Spirituality, and spiritual philosophies do share common traits with religion, but the tether to doctrine is looser. In fact, individual choice, and freedom to modify *the path* were the key elements in the data. Conversion then, happen in the logic of religious change, but God is missing.

The salience of understanding conversion is linked to cultural, social, personal, and religious aspects (Rambo, 1993, 9). They hold varying weight in each story told, but I will focus mainly on the personal ("spiritual") narratives and take a look at how cultural and social world affect the undercurrents in the stories. The conversion motif that affects my analysis is *intellectual conversion* (Rambo, 1993, 14). The change means knowledge searching quest, where anything read, heard, and seen is absorbed to make a synthesis of bettered life. The main theme is to seek out and explore alternatives. According to Rambo (1993), belief has already happened before the person becomes socially active in rituals and organizations.

This is true to the interviewees, who narrated a story of change. In some stories life had changed totally when tea came along. In the classical study of conversion, it is preceded by "anguish, turmoil, despair, conflict and guilt" (Rambo, 1993, 8), but psychological studies consider transformation, consciousness, and experience. As none of the interviewees recognized the emotions of classical studies, they did admit that certain aspects of their life had changed for the better. Rambo (1993) has developed a heuristic model to understand the stages of conversion in a framework that integrates the research of disciplines to understand the conversion in a holistic

manner. This stage motif is useful to conversions that happened over time, but some back-and-forth oscillating occurs during the process. (1993, 16–17). The stages of conversion are Context, Crisis, Quest, Encounter, Interaction, Commitment and Consequences (Rambo 1993, 16–17). It carries many aspects that are analogical with Kakuan's (1100–1200) pictures of the ten bulls (Reps & Sensaki, 2007). The ten bulls represent sequent steps in the realization of one's true nature. This story is a figurative to searching enlightenment as it is described in the canon of Zen-Buddhism. The stages, or pictures describe a story of taming a bull. First the bull is not even found and in the end after rigorous taming and domesticating, the bull, and self are set free. After the self is transcended, one can find the mystical source and abandon the lessons learned and the quest to tame one's true nature. After that comes the last picture, where one is in the world, dust-laden, barefoot, and blissful (2007, 107–126).

The stages are as following: “searching for the bull”, “discovering its footprints”, “perceiving of the bull”, “catching the bull”, “taming the bull”, “riding the bull home”, “the bull transcended”, “both bull and self-transcended”, “reaching the source”, and “in the world”. I will examine the stories through Rambo's (1993) stage motif and Kakuan's (Reps & Sensaki, 2007) pictures of the bulls. Many of the spiritual tea drinkers are at least inspired by Zen-Buddhism, but traces of other east-Asian philosophies can be found. The stories are viewed in the limelight of Rambo's (1993) stages of conversion, which gives the form, and Zen-Buddhist enlightenment-koan, which describes the meanings and contents of conversion better.

5. Data and methods

The research done on tea is vast: the history, cultures and how tea shaped the world is quite well written. However, tea tastes and embodiment of tea culture and tea rituals related to everyday was lacking research. At the same time Helsinki tea scene was blooming and the not so well-known drink started to get way in a coffee-drinking nation. I was interested on why tea was on everybody's lips: good quality leaf tea was never this attainable in 2000s. The interviewees on this study were all pleased to see that even the rarest qualities can be bought in Helsinki. I was interested to see what tea drinkers think of tea and tea culture, as it is seen posh from the position of coffee-drinkers. My approach depends on well-specified, if rather general, research questions. The research questions are consequently as follows:

1. How do tea professionals and enthusiasts narrate their identities in relation to tea?
2. What kind of meanings do tea professionals and tea enthusiasts in Helsinki tea scene give to tea drinking?

5.1 Methodology and methods: Phenomenology and interviews in qualitative research

The main themes are embodiment of cultural knowledge through tea pot and rituals of everyday. I was interested to get detailed information of how tea people drink tea (casual vs. ceremonial) and how important tea is to their identity, and life overall. The research was carried out using qualitative methods inductively. The methodological approach to tea was not theory-driven but based its roots on phenomenological tradition (Vannini et al. 2010; Pink 2011). Phenomenological in this study is the idea that the individuals are made in relation to the world, and they also make the world in this intertwined process. The world then is perceived from the perspective of the individual and how they relate to the world. In phenomenological studies we are bound into the expressions of the lived life, lived world and self in that world. (Aaltola & Valli, 2015, 30.) The relation to tea is lived and experienced and carries meanings. The perspective of the individual is in the focus, but the societal dimension is taken to account as well (2015, 32).

The interest was on social phenomena that are related to everyday life. The meaning for the tea is narrated as part of their biography (Kaasila et al. 2008, 22). The experiences of tea drinking had built over time and the meanings added to tea were in direct interplay with identity and life-history. It can be assumed that experiences carry meanings over time, as individuals interact with social environment and share knowledge with others. As experiences are shaped in constant interaction, they develop biographic basis for the information they have learned in the process. (Kaasila et al. 2008, 22.) The study was not biographical in nature, but the way people told stories was a story of how I became me. I call them tea-biographies. Next, I will take a closer look at the methods used.

I used semi-structured interviews as my main method. The interviews were ethnographical, as many of them were collected in the field, observing the tea people in their “natural habitat” in tea shops and tea rooms. Some of them were working at the same time, serving customers, and packing tea. The landscape of tea shops can re-present the continuum of the identity in an expressive way, and therefore have an effect on the whole interview in both negative and positive ways. The interview was structured in a way that people could freely associate from one subject to another, but the

themes of the interview were told beforehand to inform of the dispositions (see Appendix 1). The themes started from personal tea history and moved on to tea as lifestyle. The last part addressed their position in the tea scene and the professional work in the tea business. The interviews were often characterized as fun since many of the interviewees were keen to talk about tea. Semi-structured interview also give space to associate and tell stories in a free manner. Moreover, the semi-structured interview is not rigid and generates reciprocal interaction with the participants, which was important in this case to create rapport. My intention was to tell my experiences and feelings about tea drinking during interview, as both interviewer and interviewees are tea enthusiasts. The reciprocity of the study continues as I do visit in Helsinki's tea shops. So occasionally, I showed my face and told how the tea-research is going, but during Covid-19 the access was limited.

I was already known by many tea people through my work in one tea shop in Helsinki, but not all interviewees knew me beforehand, nor were the interviews done during observations, so in that sense the interviews resemble more like conventional interviews. But in many cases I observed a tea workshop, or tea walk and the people from those gatherings later got interviewed as they got interested in my topics, this was also a strategy to gain acceptance and to break the ice (Gobo & Molle, 2017, 181). During those observations I was a participant observer in all happenings, and in one workshop I was not in the role of a researcher, so in that case I will not present any data from that gathering. Tea walk was the main observing case in this research, as it was restricted to access the tea shops and tea rooms during covid-19. Attaching this observing to my interviews is what makes the field of study ethnographic, as the (some) interviewees could then get to know me before the actual interviews, which in some cases defines ethnography as a method (Gobo & Molle, 2017, 181). this – that

On the other hand, ethnography is the idea of how to conduct research and it involves a close relationship to theory according to Skeggs (1995, 192-193). The never-ending questions of how, where and who to study, how to make sense of the research, and especially how to write about it are the background musings across the process of research, which in time will form the methodology (192–193). The meaning of the interviews was to reveal cultural meanings used by actors for me to make sense of the culture that I already knew little about (Gobo & Molle, 2017). In this sense my position was inside the tea drinkers' community through my years of work with tea, and that probably gave the interviews a feeling that they can go deeper in their stories and thoughts. This way I got rich data to work out what do the rituals and behaviors they described. My interview-structure also mirrored the standing point where I was with my understanding of tea culture at that

point. I had noticed the different meanings people had given to tea and so had the interviewees. But as Gobo and Molle (2017) reminds, interviews are not substitutes to actual behaviors and habits: there is a well-documented gap between attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. (2017, 7). In this study, the interviews are analyzed as stories and narrations, and in that context, they are viewed as such: subjective and personal, interviewees had the authority to tell and not to tell, and that is noted in the research. Tea stories tend to “fly” among tea lovers anyway, as I discovered.

The methodological approach to the research was to let the data gathered drive the developing theory, and so the theory changed the deeper I got into the analysis of the interviews. I interviewed 8 central people in Helsinki tea scene, all of them professionals, some of them tea shop owners. I used the snowball technique to get volunteers, so I sent an e-mail to all tea shops and tea rooms asking for interviews. I got more volunteers than I needed in the end, so I had to pick the first ones to let them know of their interest. I will examine the narrative analysis next as the main analysis tool for the stories told in the data.

5.2 Narrative analysis as tool

The main content of narrative analysis is *a story*. Stories are full of meanings, feelings, and values. The rhythm of a story is neither coincidental, the stories are woven into a mesh of reasons and causes (Aaltola, & Valli, 2015, 170). In this study the story is the main subject for analysis. The second focus was on how the story was told, what is accomplished by telling the story and what means are being used in telling the story. The main tools for analysis were positioning and schematic stories.

Positioning parses the roles taken by the narrator and the roles they want to mediate to others. The sociological meaning comes from power-and-interaction -related positions and compositions. I was interested in the classifications and categories of tea drinking inside the tea community.

Classifications usually came from outside as well: coffee is the mainstream drink of choice in Finland, and tea has connotations of snobbism and poshness because it is in favor in minority.

The schematic stories are repeated stories inside culture, and they hold conventional positions that imposes actants and their qualities. The model story in the data was the story of a tea drinkers evolving taste: it is a staircase model, where the bottom level can be described with tea bags, especially Lipton´s Yellow Label. After that is flavored teas, then unflavored leaf teas the pinnacle being ceremonial quality teas from single estate farms. The individuals´ values also change in the

staircase process. In many stories the positioning co-occurred with schematic story so in order to make the analysis clearer, I chose only one tool to interpret the stories.

The third analytical instrument was the actant model. In the analysis the focus is on the carrying powers of the story, actants (Aaltola, & Valli, 2015, 178). Actants are actor-positions within individual or other actors in the story. By using this method, it is simpler to understand the narrative ways to create a story and therefore locate the positions and the conventions of the community. Narrative analysis is good for unveiling meanings, positions and classifications in the staircase-model. The model for cultivating taste was never pointed out as something worth aiming for, but it was implied that the scale of poshness grows with every step. The themes raised from data guided the structure of the thesis, but other ways of arranging are used in narrative analysis. This was the most reasonable frame for the data, as the richness of the stories opened so many possibilities.

5.3 Process story, ethical considerations and researcher's position

The research started only two months before the lockdown of Covid-19 and its affects were considerable to my study. The original idea was to do participant observations in several tea rooms in Helsinki, but as the lockdown continued to summer 2020, I had to shift the focus of my work to interviews and find the new research questions from there. I conducted the interviews during summer 2020 and at that time I was in the belief that the observations would happen in 2021, but the risks were still too high, and many of the tea rooms had closed their drinking side, so it was impossible to observe and know when they were open, if at all. People were also in voluntary quarantine, so there was nothing to observe. The main data then is the 8 interviews and tea walk in August 2020. The thesis was delayed considerably due to pandemic and the focus was shifted from researching mainly tea rooms to tea people's interviews. I had to view the literature in a new light as well and find new sources to discuss with the new topics. I found the theoretical framework – phenomenology and inductive research – too late because I was trying to fit the theory of the previous research questions with the new ones. Beverly Skeggs (1995) argues that we are continually positioned and position ourselves to the theory and I found myself doing this throughout the research process: waxing and waning on theory suggested to me or me trying to fit into too small, or too large boots. Ethnography's value is that the researcher is continually exposed to change: it is the process, not the facts that need to be explained, as the literature might work on one day and another it does not make sense to what I need and want to research (Skeggs, 1995, 196).

The interview questions were constructed from the knowledge I had as a tea professional observing the tea scene for six years. I had grasped that tea and spirituality had similarities, both in mundane and ceremonial ways. Tea evoked emotions and memories, it sparked the noses and taste receptors with customers and colleagues. It was something else than drinking coffee (of course high-end coffee is another story). I was interested in how tea people narrated the self through tea.

The interviews were also distributed by tea professionals on social media which was not my original method for getting interviewees and that did yield one interviewee. All of the interviewees did get informed consent in Finnish or English before the interview agreeing that the participation is voluntary, and the agreement can be withdrawn at any time. I also stated that the anonymity of the participants will be guaranteed, and the information will be in my possession only. No further studies can be made with the data. I kept the personal information and interview data in my computer and external memory storage. The material was secured with password.

The next phase was transcribing the interviews and observations from tea walk. The first themes started to conceptualize, and the data was scrutinized multiple times to ensure the findings prominence before analyzing. During this process it was clear that the research is data-driven and inductive, as it was not reasonable to add rigid and – in the end – fruitless to add theory behind the data.

My position as researcher had to be considered in the field as I already had background knowledge from the tea scene in Helsinki and interviewees were also recruited from my previous workplace in one tearoom. I had to maintain a professional distance to the interviewees to ensure the quality of the study as well as remember to respect the rapport that I gained in the community. I did make new friends among the tea drinkers I interviewed, and I had to consider how that might affect my interpretations in the analysis. I had to make sure that the informal role would not mix with the formal researcher's role, but that is hard distinction to make.

Another ethical consideration had to be taken to make sure that the anonymity of the participants is secured. The stories told in the data could be recognized by someone who also heard the same stories, but that is unlikely to happen. The stories, as personal as they were, had no content that could be described sensitive and vulnerable. I used pseudonyms for the interviewees and muffled the professionality types; the difference between employees and other professionals are not made, because I was worried it would compromise anonymity. Tea shop owners are the other category used in the study, but the locations and shops cannot be traced. It could be that inside the community people could recognize others from the quotes, and that has also been an ethical

consideration of the study to make the quotes anonymous enough without ruining the substance of the narrations.

The unlikelihood of harm is secured with deliberative actions in reviewing my own position as insider of the community: to look at the information given of each person in a light that might suggest to certain directions only the members of the tea community understand. The information could be anonymous to a layperson, but the tea community is tightly woven and certain personal stories might be recognized.

The hazards of narrative research are also considered. The first consideration is over-interpretation, which can happen when the material is rich, and the imagination of the researcher fills the gaps in the story. The interviews in this study were considered rewarding to the participants and only informed consent does not give free hands to the researcher to work with the material. The interview can “carry away” and it is up to the researcher to protect the vulnerability of the participant and the information revealed. The interpretations of the researcher and the act of interpretation can make the participant feel offended, especially if the story is recognizable after the anonymizing process. (Aaltola, & Valli, 2015, 181.) Qualitative research does also receive criticism for not justifying its assertions. This has led to skepticism about researchers’ engagement in theorizing thin evidence (Gioia et al. 2013). It was hard to analyze the data as I was immersed in the scene before I entered the field and overinterpretation was a real threat in this case. As for the ethical considerations on observations during tea walk, the important part was to inform the participants of my role in the group as researcher. This was the procedure on tea walk, but not on the other tea-related happenings I attended. No material is used from other happenings.

The main concern was to be sensitive to the power-relations and representation of the people I studied (Skeggs, 1995, 194). I gained trust for people to be quite open with their tea-life and I needed to pay close attention to not to abuse that trust and present the people in a respectable light, even if some findings might rouse emotions, the chapter on snobbism for example. It was guilt-inducing to write about elitism and tea, but on the other hand I was also writing about myself as part of this community. All the themes found in the data do have things in common and no-one was described solely in mutually exclusive categories. The idea was to shed light on the many sides that are included in the tea scene.

5.4 Limitations of the study

The study was limited in size, only 8 interviews is not enough to draw larger conclusions on the themes discovered in the data. Observations were also isolated to one time only and so the interpretations on the data are insufficient. Many observation occasions would be needed to grasp the themes decisively. On the other hand, the phenomenological research is interested on the uniqueness and one-of-a-kindness of the experiences and stories told. The researcher is limited in the capacity to ask questions, interpreting, and understanding the phenomenon she is researching. The interpretations can fall short, and aspects of the stories could be misunderstood in the analyzing process.

6. “Tea drinkers are insufferable snobs” – The dynamics of tea drinking

Tea drinking in Finland has not been in vogue for larger masses since coffee drinking became more popular in the 1800s (Ranta, 2020). The cultural history of tea in Finland has been forgotten and all that remains are the distant memories of steaming samovars and delicate porcelain tea ware, and the mass marketing of tea bags after World War II (2020, 162). Older generations have memories of childhood homes where tea was the main drink in the house and coffee was served alongside, as one tea shop owner remembered:

Old, retired lady looked inside [the shop] and suddenly she came in and she asked if I have Qi men tea - - she told her family history - - there was always a big pot of tea - -.” (Leevi, tea shop owner 3)

But the generations which grew up with Lipton’s Yellow Label tea bags might have opposite mental images of tea culture. Tea culture in Finland has been saturated with tea bags for so long, that the baseline for tea culture is a tea bag in a mug. As this is slowly shifting towards better quality leaf teas at least in bigger cities, some people might ask why this minority will not be satisfied with tea bags that live in the dark corner of kitchen cupboard (in case one might come for a surprise visit). Tea is an afterthought on many domestic celebrations today, and that is why tea remains invisible to others. Tea has a long way to go to be served alongside coffee.

In the last decade or two, the status of tea has however changed for the better thanks to various tea shops and the professionals that educate people and keep tea in limelight of media. Another actor in the tea scene is Friends of Tea Society, which was founded in 2003. Many of the tea shops in Helsinki collaborate to make tea-image accessible and inclusive to all tastes. Friends of Tea Society

arrange tea walks and it is arranged regularly in Helsinki's Tea District. A map of Helsinki's tea shops and tea rooms are provided to locals and tourists. Tea District is the heart of tea culture, where one can get any kind of tea of their hearts desire. Although some tea destinations are outside of the district, they remain a vital part of the cultural map. As welcoming as these tea shops are, the image of tea remains slightly snobbish and uppity to those who are new to tea, as one tea shop owner put it:

I hope this is easy to approach. Because I noticed in the beginning that there were few customers, and they came in apologizingly saying they don't know anything about tea. So, in my opinion we should not be tea terrorists, more like those who are tolerant about tea, so that everyone can drink the tea as they want to - -. (Johanna, Tea shop owner 1)

Tea drinkers can be defined as snobs inside coffee drinking majority, but also in the inner dynamics of tea community itself and the subtle cultural values, which mirror the minority -status tea drinkers have. Tea snobs might look different from coffee drinking-position than from tea-drinking position. For a coffee drinker leaf tea in a pot might look posh enough, but for a tea drinker a person who has a very spiritual relationship to tea and who drinks very niche qualities might come across as tea snob, or a tea nerd. The authorities in serious tea drinking do represent this ideal of an individual on her way to enlightenment, but other styles and cultures, which emphasize the social side and pleasure of tea have influence too in Helsinki tea scene. These inner dynamics of tea community as well as the coffee drinker -point of view are present in the data.

Next, I will analyze and discuss the snobbism-stories found in the data and divide the narrations to the two points of views: how does tea drinking look alike from coffee-drinking majority and what kind of inner hierarchies there are inside tea drinking community.

6.1 Stereotypical tea drinker from coffee drinking nation's point of view

The theme of snobbism was narrated in all eight interviews. Tea professionals expressed the prejudice – from what is assumed to be coffee drinking majority – in stories when they were asked about how they prepare tea for others, maybe guests or family. The tea brewing stories told a lot about the reputation of tea in Finland. The many narratives on snobbism showed different strategies for explaining the relation of snobbism and tea. Most common strategy was *downplaying* (Jarness, & Friedman, 2017) tea drinking habits (“good tea is not snobbish”), *distinctions* (“ceremonial tea is more snobbish than casual tea drinking”), *positioning* (“serious tea drinkers can take it as seriously

as they want, whereas I will drink like this”) and *comparison* to coffee drinkers and other tea drinkers. These stories are mostly in interviews to downplay tea drinking habits, make distinctions about taste, position oneself on the tea world arena, and compare different tastes as a result. In this interview a teashop owner located her role as tea professional in a very dual position. Tea culture is still very marginal and therefore the interviewee started to defend tea brewing habits and her position as a tea drinker in her story:

Maybe there is that, because I am a tea shop owner [laughing] people expect me to make good tea. And I have noticed when I visit someone, they tell me that maybe I want to make my own tea [laugh], so. Even though I am totally not, in that way like that, I drink almost any tea, people don't have to be uppity about it, but they feel the pressure because I'm tea shop owner that they may not know how to make good tea. (Johanna, Tea shop owner 1)

The average way of tea in Finland is probably still a tea bag in a mug regardless of improved quality and access to leaf tea, as stated before. Everything else might be considered posh and unconventional, even if this focus is shifting towards good quality tea at least in Helsinki and other bigger cities in Finland. Because the shop owner is a tea professional, other people see her as a tea snob. Others might even suggest to her that she should prepare her own tea when visiting friends. Her professional position is dual in nature in the light of the expectations others have for a tea drinker: she on the other hand would like to drink any tea, but she often feels the pressure to make “fancy” tea and be arrogant and fussy about tea brewing. The main finding here is how others see tea drinkers is in odd dynamics with how tea people see themselves. Tea people's tea habits are brought under close observation in situations like these, and the interviewee feels like she must defend herself and the tea community. Either way she feels misunderstood. In a nutshell her tea drinking can be seen as non-Finnish and unconventional. She is a minority inside a minority.

There is a cultural norm in Finland to not to make a fuss about anything in the fear of standing out of the crowd. In this story, the tea shop owner tries to alleviate the inner hierarchy of tea community by accepting any tea served to her, and to show coffee-drinking friends that her habits are not snobbish. When asked how she prepares tea at home, she feels embarrassed to admit that her tea routine is very simple.

Well, I do it very simply, I'm almost embarrassed to admit as tea shop owner [laughter] so I don't watch the clock there, I look at the color. I do very short infusions. - - I don't measure, I put everything approximately - - I'm not at all exact at home. I do have a big strainer - - and I might

drink from the same leaves from next day, so that has stayed with me [from Karelian roots].

(Johanna, tea shop owner 1)

The invisibility around tea is sometimes internalized as a norm that tea drinkers must keep up when in public, with others or in a café and while travels. One tea enthusiast in the data emphasized the tactfulness of tea drinking during travelling. He pointed out that *I want to be inconspicuous with that*. He has his own bowl and tea leaves with him and needs only hot water to brew tea. Tea drinkers, especially those of us who like to drink better than tea bags, might feel the need to stay under radar or seem as unobstructive as possible. On the other hand, making the conspicuous consumption tasteful is one aspect of cultural capital (Purhonen et al., 2014, 19). Does a tea drinker have to act nonchalant, modest, and invisible around people? Tea drinkers might want to give the impression that they are just that, but to others it might look like they are positioning themselves higher by being modest and tactful, tolerant, and respectful of others (Jarness, & Friedman, 2017).

But every tea drinker has the same problem, one can't get really proper tea or others wonder about your tea pots and some people say that when they make tea in a pot, their friends consider them snobbish, so it is like this. (Petri, tea professional 5)

The battle between coffee and tea was pronounced in interview, where opposing personality traits were linked to drinking habits by Sakari, a tea shop owner: *Tea is the kind of drink that suits my personality - - I'm anyway calm type so that coffee might suit more, it feels often that it suits better to someone piquant, fast type, but tea suits restful types like me*. Coffee is for outgoing people, whereas tea drinkers are daydreamer -type; their gaze is turned inwards away from the world. It is not about being a tea drinker, but what kind of tea drinker, and that position is set out by the milieu and the people in the picture.

Coffee making has many steps, even if one uses the most common method, the coffee maker. One must measure the fresh water in the container (and never use the coffeepot itself to do this), measure the coffee ground with coffee spoon and wait for the machine to make it's magic. Tea making has almost the same steps: Measure fresh water in a pot and wait until hot, place tea leaves in a cup or pot with a teaspoon or by hand, pour hot water on leaves and wait for the drink to brew. Yet only tea has a notorious reputation as being difficult and hard to make. Tea professionals pronounce this in their efforts to educate people with tea preparation. Anything above this is personal preference, but the baseline for good leaf tea is very simple.

And then there is that many who have not drank a lot of tea, only tea bag tea, I feel like many have this idea that loose leaf tea is somehow trickier and more demanding and you should get "hi-fi", in

some way I want to give, in a way, the understanding that it is not so much harder than steeping the bag - - so that it doesn't require hi-fi -attitude and everything doesn't need to be measured with thermometer, and that, the easiness and how fun it is. (Minttu, tea professional 1)

This narrative style downplays the image of tea drinkers as fussy and demanding with their favorite beverage. Tea is a stimulant and to be enjoyed, no matter what kind of methods one uses:

- - I always say that if it tastes good, it is most important thing, no need to think what should be and in what order, it could be easier form, like brewing tea in a Moomin -mug... So. (Maija, tea professional 2)

My override -philosophy in this is that the best cup of tea is the one that you like. (Aku, tea professional 3)

The data shows that this narrative of downplaying is directed to coffee-drinkers and those tea drinkers who use tea bags. This is perhaps due to the frustration of tea culture in Finland. All interviewees highlighted that it is almost impossible to get good tea from coffee shops and restaurants, even if the quality is good in tea-oriented shops. Even if the tea itself is leaf tea, preparation and duration of the steeping requires much work in most regular cafes:

I have sometimes said to myself that there is no reason to drink green tea, when there is no proper water. (Petri, tea professional 5)

In some places if I know that the tea is very likely bad, I take hot chocolate, I don't necessarily take tea. (Minttu, tea professional 1)

I drink what they have to offer. If there is nothing, I take coffee. - - It is often that coffee is better. (Leevi, tea shop owner 3)

Tea room décor has a role to play too, when thinking about approachability and inclusiveness that tea community wants to express. All Helsinki's tea rooms are unique, there is everything for everyone, as one interviewee put it. Different tea cultures and tea tastes are well represented in tea shops and tea rooms, but no tea shop owner wanted their business to scare possible customers. This is the reality of tea business, as well as downplay of tea culture appearing too snobbish.

- - but I always wanted to keep it, so that it would be as down to earth as possible, so that it would remind of these old general stores where you could get tea and coffee and such, yes. - - So that the threshold is lower, it's not like design or like that, it's not a décor shop. (Leevi, tea shop owner 3)

I hope this is easy to approach. Because I noticed in the beginning that there were few customers, and they came in apologizingly saying they don't know anything about tea. So, in my opinion we should not be tea terrorists, more like those who are tolerant about tea, so that everyone can drink the tea as they want to. Put in the sugar, whatever. It is everyone's own business and tea is for pleasure, firstly and it is important that you like the tea and make the moment the kind that suits you. - - In some perspectives this could be hi-fi, and I understand that, but this is a specialty shop, one must have top [teas] and understand how to make it and so on. - - But you don't have to be any hi-fi. (Johanna, tea shop owner 1)

Tea community's efforts to make leaf tea a standard has yielded satisfied customers, and in many cases, interviewees considered Helsinki's tea selection to be above European standard.

Collaboration of tea professionals and Friends of Tea -Society has made quality teas more standard than before. This is still the beginning of enlivening of tea culture in Finland and many stereotypes and prejudices still seem to have control of tea discourse. In the next chapter I will discuss the inner dynamics of the tea community: how snobbism and inner hierarchies produce distinctions and comparisons inside the tea community and how that builds a tea drinking-identity.

6.2 Inner dynamics and identities inside tea community

Everyday habits are reviewed in Fromer's (2008) work on tea during Victorian era England. Familiarity of everyday habits gave meaning to people's lives and the tradition of tea drinking carries forward the whole tea drinking culture, previous and present (2008, 22). Repeated daily activities construct identity from within and the sense of self is confirmed in each act. But the reminding of the past, envisioning the future and connecting all that in daily habits are based on social norms and ideals, which occur within social spheres (Fromer, 2008, 23). At least in England the shared culture of tea drinking has mediated tensions between social categories and ideological positionings, but at the same time made distinctions visible by marking the distinctions in the first place. Tea drinking brought all socio-economic classes together, but the small distinctions in tea preparations and consumption had everything to do with class status and moral position in society (2008, 26 –27.) The fantastical and idealistic moment that Fromer (2008) describes of everyone joining the community of tea drinkers is ever so present in all interviews: "Representations of tea in English culture carry the resonances of a unique moment of creating an ideal community that crosses multiple boundaries of identity, fusing complex categories of self into a single moment of *communitas*" (Fromer, 2008, 32). As I will explore this further, the inner dynamics in tea

community resemble Victorian era's habits where tea is the binding matter of society, but distinctions and positions are taken and given in the totality of relations among people, the material world, and the environment (Vannini et al. 2010). The meanings given to these relations between people, material culture, and environment are negotiated in interpersonal relationships, whether that might be family or workplace, or tea community.

My dad drinks, and I heard that my little sister has started to drink Twinning's Earl Grey and I wondered where it went wrong - -. (Minttu, tea professional 1)

As much as Bourdieusian viewpoint on is necessary to understand taste and embodied cultural capital, the complexities of taste and the inner dynamics of tea community needs another layer of analysis to attain comprehensiveness, that being the affective and somatic register of sensations and emotions related to tea (Vannini et al, 2010).

The conversion story of a tea drinker usually starts with tea bags and milk tea. From there one goes to flavored leaf teas. When that path is explored, unflavored teas become palatable and after a while enjoyable as one finds different origins and mouthfeels, colors, and textures of the drink. The most prestigious tea stage is ceremonial tea; wild, pure, uncontaminated with pesticides and fertilizers and it is drunk in calm way, concentrating on the tea and the different feelings it gives. Of course, this is simplified and stereotypical story of tea journey, but similarities with this ideal are found in many stories of taste. Inside the tea community the discussions may get heated on what is good and what is better, but this is the unspoken "rule" that many tea drinkers are familiar with.

The range of commodities vary from luxuries in the first end and necessity in the other (Fromer 2008, 60). Tea has historically been maintained as luxury commodity, but the cultural context in many tea drinking countries suggests that tea is necessary, not only to be drunk regularly, but as a cultural and national building block (2008, 62). Tea might represent notions of necessity and luxury at the same time, which makes the taste cultures ambiguous to define even for tea drinkers themselves. One way to valorize the vague tastes is a distinction between mass produced tea and posh tea: coming from a culture of tea bags is a necessity and enjoying niche tea is then luxury.

Tea drinkers in the data who started from tea bags, would not go back in their path of taste, since tastebuds have developed more delicate and sense of the nuances and even the energies of tea become more important factors, the sensuality of the drink gain importance. Loose leaf might be the starting point of good quality, but hierarchies of tea drinking are more complex. For a tea enthusiast ceremony-quality and uniqueness of tea is highest principle if influences are taken from Chinese and Japanese cultures. Continental tea drinkers might emphasize different qualities, that are no less

spiritual in nature, but differently coded as rituals of comfort, familiarity and nostalgia that pace the day's work. I will look at the dynamics of tea journey more closely in chapter 8, which focuses on conversion stories, but the themes in this chapter do share common ground with conversion stories in many ways.

Tea habits and culture are carried from generation to the next in a tea pot. Some interviewees had very vivid memories from childhood where one central parent had a tea routine. Tea was part of the day's cadence and it was always available. Some interviewees had their roots in Karelia and Ingria, where tea has historically held its place as the main drink of the household (see chapter 3). Tea has always been present in their life. Additionally, there were interviewees who became familiar with tea later in life, through employment, friends, or experiences from travels. In this sense tea holds different meanings to people and the background – tea history – has had an influence on how it is prepared and consumed to this day. In the next story the interviewee told me that his mother originated from Karelia, where loose leaf tea has maintained its stature, in this case tea bags are not even considered since there was no example for that in his childhood. He is from a family where good tea was always loose leaf.

That was not for me, the loose leaf was for me, so that must come from there [childhood home] that I never even thought of drinking tea bags and like even today I don't prefer tea bags, but it must come from there that I have gotten used to leaf tea and learned its value or felt it. (Petri, tea professional 5)

My mother was from Ingria and father from Karelia, so we have always drunk tea - - we had morning tea, afternoon tea and evening tea - - mother always had tea ready, she always prepared tea for us and then we drank and talked how the school day had gone.” (Johanna, tea shop owner 1)

I call this relationship to tea *everyday*, and it gathers its meanings from the past and continues to the present. Distinctions and downplay are still present in their narratives but having tea history shapes the tea journey and makes the relationship more mundane and open to change. One interviewee whose roots were in Karelia, compared his tea habits to others and claimed simplicity as using as little tea gadgets or utensils as possible.

Yeah, no, there is all kinds of with the deeper kind of tea drinkers, it must be something, but for me, there needs to be nothing, like more simplicity, that the tea leaves are in the bowl. (Petri, tea professional 5)

Tea drinkers do include all drinking “methods” and habits in tea community. There was no story in my data that would exclude any tastes in tea, although it is more nuanced when looking at the bigger picture. The data shows more comments on the bad quality tea in mainstream coffee shops, so it seems to be an issue of recognition of change in brewing and serving rather than excluding better drinking styles from bad ones. On the other hand, no-one would admit that drinking flavored teas with milk would give a tea drinker lower status than choosing ceremonial-quality niche teas for everyday tea consumption. In the stories people told about their tea tastes evolution, it was implied that tastes in tea should evolve appropriately from flavored to unflavored and onwards to ceremonial quality tea. Using sugar and milk is a signal of lower status tea drinking even if the tea community as whole encourages you to think that the best cup of tea is the one you like. We had a vivid discussion on flavored teas with Aku, who works with tea. He made a distinction between traditionally flavored teas and modern flavored teas.

Interviewer: What is modern flavored tea to you?

Tea enthusiast: [laughing] Any tea that does not have over two hundred years of history. As like Earl Grey is traditional, jasmine tea is traditional and lapsang [smoked black tea] and water lily is like and...

Interviewer: Chrysanthemum?

Tea professional: Chrysanthemum is traditional. And lychee is traditional.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Tea professional: Moderns are so often like, there are like eighteen different flavors.

Other interviewees confirmed the story of “upgrading” tea tastes along the journey, making flavored teas and tea with sugar or milk lower status tea. Sometimes they still come back to old favorites for nostalgic reasons. I asked how the taste for tea has changed.

I could say that a lot. Not that, I still drink the same teas that I used to drink years ago, for example one of my favorite teas before I started working in a tea shop, my favorite was peach flavored black tea with milk, and I get nostalgic when I drink it with milk [laughter]. And then I used to drink a lot of flavored teas - - except the Japanese green, almost only flavored greens and black, whereas now I could say I drink more unflavored... And I have learnt a lot, my taste has evolved like the ones I didn't get in the beginning, like fancy oolongs that tasted like hot water in the beginning, they are so good, so that my taste has changed a lot I could say. (Minttu, tea professional 1)

When I asked what was the first ever tea she had, she told this.

Tea professional: - - I think it was some basic black tea in tea bag, either Twining's Earl Grey or Lipton's Yellow.

Interviewer: Do you ever drink that still?

Tea professional: Umm, well no [laughter] unless during a trip or somewhere, where there is nothing else available. - - But I don't count that as tea, I think it is like a warm drink. (Minttu, tea professional 1)

The inner distinctions and positioning in tea community valorize the dynamics of tea drinking and the ideals people have or have yet to accomplish. Drinking flavored and scented teas has a slightly embarrassing stamp among the “serious” tea drinkers. One interviewee, who self-identified as ceremonial tea drinker narrated the model story of tea drinker's journey, as if tea drinking should lead to higher spheres. This could be compared with the story of social climbing. The understanding here is still that the journey is not an end to itself, but tea seems to have that effect on some of the interviewees: as you get more information and experiences, the deeper you want to get.

Yeah, so during the first half year I drank this basic flavored tea. - - They [flavored teas] have this certain saturation point and the point where the spectrum of experiences ceases and it comes very quickly and so I started to drink unflavored leaf tea, and teas that had been flavored or scented naturally - - like jasmine tea, or smoked tea or herbs that give flavor. Well, lately, the kinds that I voluntarily drink, not for work, have been ceremony -quality teas, in the way I understand it, or my tea circle understands it is wild or as purely as possibly grown tea, which has not received fertilizers or pesticides and it has been cultivated with a specific appreciative way - -. - - I have noticed that some mass-produced teas, if taken meditatively, make me feel bad or sad on emotional level, I can't explain it in any other way - -. Yes, it sounds dopey when I start to explain these - - [laughter]. (Väinö, tea professional 4)

Tea shops selections in both tea and utensils also brought up cultural differences between owners, customers, and employees. One tea shop owner stated that his limits on flavored teas are exceeded when a customer asks for tea with yoghurt-flavor. Another one is bugged that western-oriented tea culture dominates the selection on utensils, and how people see tea leaves as disposable after one brewing.

Tea professional: - - I would want that there would be more gong fu -sets and those for sale, when it now is awfully Western- and British -oriented the supply selection that is there. It bugs me now and then especially when I don't like the Western style of brewing tea.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, with pot and strainer?

Tea professional: Those indeed, because people are in habit of making one brewing and tossing the leaves away. In my opinion it is almost shaming the tea leaves, when you can get more flavor and better flavor with multiple brewing. (Aku, tea professional 3)

The stories on distinction inside tea community revealed a hidden hierarchy between tastes and cultural backgrounds. The interviewees who had started tea drinking later in life and those who were from the younger end of the data spectrum, were more black-and-white in their stories and in their distinctions between tea cultures. Their niche represented the “serious” end of the tea drinking linear, but they did not exclude people, only habits and customs that did not resonate with personal values. They kept personal roles and their role as tea professional separate even when the values clashed in the stories. As Jarness and Friedman (2017) concluded in their study on snobbism, the interviewees were strikingly aware that others might perceive them as elitist and the main strategy for that was the downplay of difference. Perhaps in egalitarian Nordic countries being a snob is embarrassing, as the cultural norm for equality is a strong value in these societies.

One more point to make here is that tea drinkers have adopted the terms that are used to describe tea drinkers from outside. The data showed blunt awareness of these discourses, and tea people use those terms on one another and themselves, as we saw earlier in a quote where tea employee described his meditative styles as “dope”. In one interview tea shop owner called another tea drinker a snob: *So that he is a real snob on sencha, I mean absolutely infinite snob.* Using this strategy ameliorates the status of tea drinkers, and the use of these terms makes them less powerful inside the tea community, as they are used ironically. It is also a strategy to laugh off the “class stress” that tea drinkers might feel in situations where their habits are compromised or embarrassing. The awareness of tea stereotypes influences the inner dynamics of the tea community, as the hard end of “serious drinking spectrum” follows the idea of moving up the ladder, which is a social norm in our society (Käyhkö, 2011). Strong symbolic boundaries based on taste and lifestyle were not expressed in the interviews, the quote above is an exception in the rule. Taste was leveled throughout the data as something personal that cannot be disputed on, as Purhonen et al. (2014) also noticed in their study on Finnish taste cultures. The discussion on taste might be culturally sensitive to be admitted more than indirectly.

7. How tea and spirituality are intertwined

The spiritual aspects of tea were apparent in the interviews in two ways. Tea *routines* were unconscious, embodied, intrinsic and mundane, and usually the embodied information became visible when narrated. Four interviewees identified tea routines as part of their daily life as something that gives comfort. Many of them had tea as part of their childhood and the re-creation of routines contained cultural knowledge from personal tea histories. The other way to express the spirituality in tea was *ceremonial*, and conscious. Rules are internalized and knowledge of tea and meditative approach to it comes from other cultures. There were several interviewees who had absorbed ceremonial aspects to their routines later in life as their tea taste evolved, and individuals who had a purely ceremonial approach to tea. Those interviewees who did not have strong relationship to tea in their childhood absorbed cultural influence from other tea cultures, especially those which have strong link between tea and meditation. One interviewee said that the spiritual side of tea started to speak to him after a while of tea enthusiasm. This division between unconscious drinking and conscious drinking could be worded analogously as casual drinking and meditative drinking, as some interviewees worded the differences.

Tea can be a solution to any discomfort, and it offers safe and predictable routines and structure that bring homeliness in day-to-day life. It brings back comforting memories from childhood or adolescence. Hauck-Lawson (1998) has studied the meanings individuals give to foodstuff, identities are evidently linked to food and drink. The act of preparing tea upholds family tea habits to this day as part of the identity of the individual. In other cases, tea might serve as deliberate practice: mindfulness and ceremonial aspects of tea are derived from Chinese and Japanese cultural history and philosophical writings (Handa, 2013). Stepping back from the rushed everyday life to a calm and peaceful space where time or tea consumed is not measured, is metaphorical journey into a Japanese tearoom in a tea garden. In some cases in the data, the types of spirituality were combined, as others were clean examples of either or. I will look at both types of spirituality through narrations of tea routines and what kind of meanings people give to tea drinking.

7.1 Rituals of everyday – embodied practices of tea

Perhaps tea is so woven into the stomach linings of the British that they cannot view it in either a scholarly or an aesthetic manner. It is a fact of British life, like breathing. (Anthony Burgess)

When all alone or away from home, sudden craving for tea makes a funny story from teenage years in one tea shop owner's interview. Her story demonstrates how essential childhood tea culture can be in identity making process, it is like breathing. In this story the interviewee had traveled as a young person. The story is twofold, the first is about a journey in a Finnish city, and the second is travels abroad in a location where tea grows. She told "an embarrassing" story from when she was 15-16 -years old and traveling with a friend. She found herself short of money on the first day of the trip, and in the evening, she realized in her hotel room that she had to have her evening tea, as she would have had it at home with her parents. She took used tea bags from other hotel customers to brew the delicious drink, reminding her of safe routines.

We spent our money on everything else of course and the evening was coming, and we saw from our hotel room a pool and a family. They had ordered tea and when they left and there were used tea bags left - - so we went to get the used tea bags and made tea to ourselves in the room. (Johanna, tea shop owner 1)

She added a moral to the story: other teenagers her age would have been after liquor, but her yearning was directed to tea, making her an exception to the rule. Additionally, tea routine was visible to her only when she traveled away from home, where tea has been an integral part of everyday since she was child. In a sense tea was the answer to home-yearning, and in the absence of physical home is when the internalized values become materialized. Tea offers comfort. The most interesting aspect of this story is how tea is spiritual in a mundane way. It is not about elaborate ceremonies, but in the repeatedness of the routine that makes it spiritual, and thus comforting marker of time. I shall call this unconscious need for spirituality, whereas the ceremonial form of spirituality is materialized in action, rules, and rituals that gravitate towards the conscious spiritual experience that tea can deliver.

The second story she told was a story of rite of passage. The interviewee was eager to travel alone for the first time to a place where there were tea plantations, but she learned that when she was already at the location. She was miserable as the food was awful. When she realized she could visit a plantation, the whole journey's ambience shifted. She got to drink fresh tea and the sensory experience lingers to this day vividly, even if the rest of the trip was bad. Olfactory memories were strong and articulated in the interviews.

Tea and sensuality go hand in hand and build identities around those experiences, they are key moments in life where you find out aspects about yourself that were still hidden. She chose to tell stories about the time of life when her identity was still shaping. Clearly tea culture has had an

impact on her, even if the experiences remained dormant to her for many years to come. Even the story of how she became a teashop owner - during her later years on a whim - is narrated almost as if her conscious mind had very little to do with it, it was serendipity to her and that makes her story a grand story of how I became me, and tea has everything to do with it. Tea is a must for her, or she might just not function without it. In this story I asked the interviewee how and when does she like to drink tea. Her relationship with tea comes from her childhood, she describes tea as a safe place.

Interviewer: Well, where and when do you like to drink tea? Do you have routine at work or at home or when you are somewhere else?

Tea shop owner: Well, it is the morning tea and evening tea that are must. So even now before I go to bed, I drink black tea and to me it has clearly something to do with being safe to childhood and too such as calming down. So, for me the caffeine does not have an effect, the other way around, I can't sleep if I don't get my cup of tea [laugh]. And the ritual in it maybe, that you brew the tea and day's work is done, and it is. Then during afternoon, I drink so that there is no accurate time, the tea shop affects that, so when I have time then I easily take a cup of tea.

Interviewer: Yes, right. So how do you prepare your tea at home? Could you describe it to me?

Tea shop owner: Well, I make it very simply, it is almost embarrassing to say as tea shop owner [laugh], in other words I don't look at the time, but I look at the color. I make very short brewing, at home, usually at home if there are no guests or more people than usual, me and my husband drink tea but we have very different tastes in tea. So, he drinks other kind so that we brew straight to the cup, so it is very simple, but I always make with loose-leaf tea, I don't measure but use my eye, but use intuition so that I'm not at all precise at home. I put the leaves; I have a big, good strainer - - it should be big enough to be a good strainer. I might drink from the same leaves the next day, so that has stayed with me [from childhood]. So, I just put the leaves in another cup and use them the next morning. (Johanna, tea shop owner 1)

The main thing for her is that wherever she might find herself she has her morning- and evening tea. Routines and repetition, as stated earlier, make this story spiritual, yet mundane description of how tea fosters deeper undercurrents than are visible. Her family originates from Karelia and her drinking habits have in her own words been inherited from that world: cultural knowledge has passed on in a tea kettle. Following De Guzman's (2021) notion on food and identity among migrants, tea making routines evoke a sense of 'home'. The sense of home is therefore imagined, remembered, and reconstructed within her morning and evening tea making. The continuity of her identity and her roots are instilled in the homely routines of a warm cup. Furthermore, certain foods

and drinks can function as marker foods to evoke home(land) (Janowski, 2012). Even if she is not a migrant, her food voice, which is the “social and symbolic dimension of food” (De Guzman, 2021: Hauck-Lawson) is strong and goes hand in hand with her mother’s Karelian culture.

Hauck-Lawson (1998) suggests that food is a channel for expressing meaning. Nostalgia and reminiscence of good tea and tea preparing in childhood has left the tea shop owner to continue this routine, even if the original tea is no longer available. She uses, in her own words, plain black tea to reconstruct this embodied memory of safety and comfort. In her article Hauck-Lawson (1998) suggests that the link between identity and food is stronger with women (ibid). In the data this connection with food and identity was indeed stronger with women, as all of the female interviewees had tea in their everyday life in childhood homes. Men were more often those who had developed tea tastes in adulthood, but this was not conclusive.

One male participant, Leevi, likes to drink tea all day long and he chooses his tea intuitively to fit each moment and feeling. His favorite tea is fermented tea, and that was his first glimpse of tea worlds when he was teenager. He said that he always goes back to fermented teas after experimenting with something else: *So that it has become like comfort food, comfort tea. That’s why I always go back.* It is interestingly the first tea that people have tasted that becomes the yardstick for any other teas if the tea can be traced back to childhood. Tea brewing has everything to do with intuition, finding one’s own methods, picking and forming styles that work individually. The interviewee has tea for every mood and never seems to decide beforehand what to drink but listens to what might work for this moment. This could be described as intuitiveness. The gaze is turned inwards and if nothing else works, he goes for the tea from his earliest memories. Furthermore, the ritual of drinking seems to be the point for him. He seeks a spiritual experience and tea brings it out, but it is not necessarily worded like that by themselves. Another male participant described his tea history as a chain of generations. The story is a memory from decades ago. Both routine -based and ceremonial tea drinking are important to this interviewee. The influences for tea came from Karelian tea culture in his reminiscences.

Grandparents are from Karelia, I don’t remember ever seeing a samovar, but my mother - - she drank coffee a lot but also tea, the tea was in a small half liter pot, but it was very strong. She popped it full of leaves and poured water in, then she left it and when she drank, she took it samovar-way, she drank as long as there was flavor - -. (Petri, tea professional 5)

He remembers when he moved away from childhood home for the first time, the mother’s way of making tea was embodied to his tea preparing habits too. Later he found new ways to make tea, but

the memories of these safe routines still spark. He elaborated that tea habits, as ceremonial as they might be today, give him comfort. He feels safe and soothed. The inner migration continues in these stories, the similarities with immigrant stories on homeland food are striking: the nostalgia and yearning and repeating routines do form a circle that looks alike mental immigration back to Karelia and the habits of generations now passed. The word nostalgia is from a Greek word of nostos, which means homeward journey. (Ray, 2004, 136.) Nostalgia has both cognitive as well as affective dimensions. The cognitive dimension holds the memories of the past and affect the emotions that the memories rouse (Hamilton & Wagner, 2013.) Nostalgia as part of reminiscence created a picturesque image in tea shop owner's story from the years she was in school:

She [mother] did some household work at the same time [with tea drinking] - - the sense of comfort has stayed with me from that time. - - Before we went to sleep, we always had black tea and I still have that habit. (Johanna, tea shop owner 1)

Sutton (2001) has studied food and memories among the Greeks of Kalymnos. In his studies, both women and men connected food with personal and collective memory. Food, or tea in this case, allows us to remember the past and connect with it. In line with Sutton's (2001) work, tea pot can be seen as a form of portable culture and the stories and memories as links to heart's homeland. Janowski (2012) states that "foodways" are now recognized as important components in social sciences in understanding the ways in which people construct their ideas of who they are. One interviewee told that tea was always present in her childhood in Japan. Tea was very mundane; her mother and grandmother were the central people in her memories. When she entered high school, her mother started to educate her how to make good sencha. After she moved to Finland, she became interested in the Japanese cultural history related to tea and started to practice *chado* "tea way". Interestingly, the embodied cultural knowledge did not suffice anymore in Finland as she became tea professional. She had to educate herself further on Japanese tea. Tea culture revealed itself when she left homeland and the mundane foodways in Japan sparked curiosity for her heritage.

Interviewer: Was it like that then that tea was available wherever you were [in Japan]?

Interviewee: Yes, yes. At someone's home or restaurant, hotels, and lay-by -places beside motorways, everywhere, tea was served. (Maija, tea professional 2)

De Guzman's (2021) article discusses on how parents can instill Filipino identity in their children as migrants, but in this context, it's the adults who instill the continuity of their identity through tea drinking in the context of homeland. As only one of my interviewees has migrated from Japan -

another - maybe more mental migration, and sense of home could explain the similarities with foodways as De Guzman (2021) writes. Tea serves as an indexical or marker for connecting with the mental or family homeland, or sense of belonging (Janowski, 2012). Food voice is “social, symbolic dimension of food” (Hauck-Lawson, 1998) and therefore the meanings given to tea are encoded in memories, family members, places, and occurrences that have made people who they are. Coming back to the building blocks, or even key events of childhood and teenage years sustains that identity rooted to “homeland”. The tea professional originated from Japan remembered the olfactory scene of Kyoto and memories from grandmother’s home in southern Japan.

In Kyoto they roast the tea in the shops - - the smell of roasted - - in all restaurants where I worked, they offer hoji -tea [roasted green tea] after food. - - always when I visited grandmother, they had sencha or tea fields and whenever we had to walk to the shop, we crossed the field - - It was so fresh. (Maija, tea professional 2)

One interviewee said that tea has almost everything to do with her life. She realized this as she was describing her life events during an interview. Her way of drinking tea is intuitive; she decides in the moment what she wishes, but tea is nevertheless always at her side at home or elsewhere. When abroad and the tea served in hotels is not very good, she makes milk tea, the tea she used to drink as a child. The tea is not to her taste but might remind her of tea routines. Another example of tea routines was told by a tea shop owner. He told that his first tea was pu’er -tea and that this is his “all-time favorite quality”, where he turns back to. He explains further and discusses the way that tea can bring routines and feelings of safety. Sometimes he drinks for the sake of drinking, keeping the habit of ritual going. Another interviewee keeps the utensils for making good gongfu-tea in his backpack for whenever he wants to sip. Tea is everyday, consumed in various places, but always so intertwined with habits that it is almost inseparable from daily life:

I think that the last two decades I have drunk so much steeped tea that it has somehow become everyday life. (Sakari, tea shop owner 2)

And all of that might offer comfort and escape from daily tasks, away from the bustle and hustle of human life. Many of the tearoom owners stated that they want tea rooms to have calming and inviting atmosphere, where one can enjoy tea in solitude or chatting with friends. Tea in Finnish context has also developed a relationship to silence and calm, as the formal tearooms with gardens that prepare the quests to peace their minds before entering the hut. This leads us to the next chapter, which will dive deeper into how tea and ceremonial drinking was narrated in the interviews.

7.1 Ceremony of tea drinking – conscious act of mindfulness

Entering a tearoom can be overwhelming sensation (Surak, 2017). In Surak's article one tea ceremony student, Tomiko Imori described her feeling in when entering the door:

Opening the sliding papered door to the washitsu reveals a world different to everyday life. When I go to lessons, I can feel within my body that the world is different to the one I normally inhabit.

Tea room, whether physical or mental, is a rupture to everyday life in a rhythm of its own. Surak's (2017) article investigates how people make sense of ruptures in the flow of everyday life as they enter new, perhaps even experimental domains. In this case *routine(s)* is the counter thesis to rupture, as it is unconscious and habitual. Routines are visible to us only when something unexpected happens. Much like in the story of a tea shop owner, who noticed her craving for missing routines during travels. In Surak's words "dysruptures" makes us aware of ourselves and the routines we carry out in everyday life. In this sense, when we enter a space where commonplace variants are missing, and new routines are in place, awareness and sense perception is sharpened (Surak, 2017). Nothing can be taken for granted. On the other hand, Surak (2017) argues that nation has arrived once it can be taken for granted. This is the case with tea professional, who migrated from Japan to Finland to see her culture for the first time and she started to study Japanese tea ceremony to learn more from her culture and history. Tea room is perhaps not an escape in itself, but in many narratives the rituals and ceremonial attuning to tea becomes one in the way the drinking is organized. I will look at the ways people organize their ceremonial tea drinking and compare the narratives to Japanese tea ceremony and its history.

One tea professional started her serious tea practices with Japanese tea ceremony, but *chado* is better translated as "tea way" or *way of tea*. Her ambition was to learn more about the tea culture where she came from. She hated matcha (whisked tea) in the beginning but now she drinks it daily. Her coffee break is translated to matcha break. The relationship to practicing ceremonial tea is twofold: she said that she hates the hierarchies in chado but learning about tea walks hand in hand with tea way. It is a whole world, cultural history which remains in the modern world and that makes it fascinating to her.

When I arrange events, matcha related, I feel I need to share something else than the preparing, not the technique but the history behind, culture; it is a whole world. (Maija, tea professional 2)

Tea way, or *way of tea* can be described as a lifestyle with some interviewees, as their devotion in learning and experimenting with tea is uncanny. Tea may open a new world of conscious living and

being in tune with inner self. It is a spiritual experience to drink tea ceremonially and see what it might bring up. It is also a way to share a world with other devoted people, talk, assess, and exchange information. Tea people have ways to find each other and connect through tea. In some cases, tea seemed to teach how to live mindfully and broaden that mindfulness to other aspects of life. It is also pure enjoyment, to be consumed carefully. Lu Tong (795-835) who lived in Tang Dynasty in China might have encapsulated the essence of ceremonial drinking in his famous quote that was written on one tearoom wall: “After a cup of tea, stomach says to the brain: well then, wake up now and show your power! Be eloquent, thoughtful and kind; look closely to nature and life.” In this thought is the simplicity and complexity of becoming aware of oneself and the relationship one has with the changing milieu. As the change – or metamorphosis – has happened, it is wise to ask how tea led to the spiritual path:

I have drunk a shitload of tea on behalf of my work [laughing] so that it was not as silent and concentrated, but I moved to my own flat - - and there I could drink tea in peace and somehow it started to call me a lot and I noticed how much that activity has to offer. (Väinö, tea professional 4)

Väinö continued to explain elaborateness of his ceremonial tea setting (chasi) is. He has a separate wooden table with a seasonal small tablecloth, tea ware for excess water, tea pot for gong fu - brewing, a plate for the pot for basting it with hot water, a jug for the tea to be poured from the pot, cups, a cup for the tea leaves and a wooden tea stick to move around the tea leaves in the pot. Among that there are practical things such as kettleholder and baking plate for not to have to fetch the water from kitchen.

Oh yeah and then I have a candle. It, it feels kinda essential in ceremonies, it is a figurative to keep the flame up there, so that all elements combine, because rarely these days water is warmed on real fire or coals, so that's why the candle is good there. (Väinö, tea professional 4)

When I asked what happens when ceremonial tea is served, he told me that he concentrates and simply exists, is being there: *It has become a thing. Tea is tea also time-spatially [laughter].*

Identity construction involves being aware of who you are and who you are not. Featherstone (2007, 64–81) discusses the aestheticization of everyday life is like turning life into a work of art. The ideal is to enlarge oneself, seek tastes and sensations, to explore the myriad possibilities. He links the process of aestheticization to postmodernity and its endless *processes of becoming* (2007, 64–81.) Aesthetics is one key element in ceremonial drinking, and the ideals are filtered from Japanese and Chinese cultures. The pots and cups are purchased to suit certain moods or feelings that go well with the tea, seasonal changes, and changes within affect the tone that tea pots and cups

are hoped to express. Handcrafted, coarse clay cups with wild fermented tea, or maybe translucent Chinese porcelain cups for delicate spring tea? On the other hand, Isao & McMillan (2002) have critiqued the academic community uncritically focusing on aesthetics as a central meaning of tea. It is to be reminded that tea has a long history and tea has had many meanings that are interpreted through present assumptions (2002).

Tea ceremony aims to change the state in the actor's thought and feeling (Kondo, 1985). The arriving in classical tea gardens in Japanese tea ceremony can be metaphorical to the path of enlightenment, hence nothingness. The state of emptiness or expecting nothing while practicing tea is a common and shared characteristic in the data. Similar embodied and unconscious technique is used when processing tea leaves to 'making-green' (Xiao, 2017). The tea master processes the leaves with mindful hands. Body posture, hand position and movement are essential to master the aroma appropriate to each stage and securing final fragrance for tea leaves (2017). Narrations of meditative tea drinking enclose the idea of nothingness. Enlightenment as an end result was not narrated, it could be decoded morally suspicious, since nothingness, and wanting nothing is the code of honor.

Meditation ritual is an important daily routine for a tea professional. I asked if he drinks after meditation, but he likes to sip tea while sitting. It is not absolute to do it every morning, but it is a part of keeping the gaze inwards and see where it might lead. Tea has not always been part of meditation, but he has experienced that it adds something else to the whole.

Meditation is the thing; gaze inward and I don't search for help from tea but it brings different... It is like that, it might steer someplace. - - Yeah, so I don't seek for answers, I seek for that moment [laughter] - - Meditation, I don't seek for anything, I have nothing, I have everything. (Petri, tea professional 5)

His approach towards meditation, tea and spirituality is narrated through simplicity and humbleness. Sitting and breathing is the point, feeling the body and then forgetting it is the thing for him. He drinks his tea from a bowl, tea leaves are steeped freely in hot water, and he calls this *grandpa style*: it is popular way to drink tea in China, where hot water is added on the leaves as long as tea leaves bring taste. He likes to avoid the feeling of performing during morning meditation and somehow this routine in its plainness communicates that performing and tea do not mingle well. There is at least one area of life which is free from society's norms of being useful and productive especially in work life. On the other hand one could also practice tea meditation in order to be more productive and this is another angle to look at the phenomenon of tea and spirituality. Could tea and meditation

hold connotations to what is deemed ideal in today's society and who is the ideal individual in a world, where characteristics of a person can be evaluated in the marketplace of capitalism? Spirituality could be a safe harbor from social norms that emphasize individuals' capacity, productivity, and availability around the clock – or – spiritual practices could help to assimilate the self to the dominant values in society. Spirituality that comes along with serious tea drinking can also act as a catalyst of detachment from societal values, which do not serve the individual. Petri talked about tea experiences during meditation. Each meditation is different, and the same tea might work differently today and tomorrow.

Yes, in those old pu'er teas - - have this different energy. - - Well then in fresh green teas have their own energies, I don't know how to put value on [different tea qualities]. - - And one [tea] feels sometimes and sometimes not - - every moment is its own. So that - - if one [tea] has good grounding energies, it does not work similarly each time. If my energies are different every time, that equation doesn't work in a way. (Petri, tea professional 5)

Vannini et al. (2010) have studied wine tasters' attunements for drinking. One type focuses on the indexical properties of the wine and its effects on the body. It is an interplay between emotions in that moment, finding the suitable palette to reflect that emotion and transform that current feeling to something else, while observing this process. Antoine Hennion (2007) talks about taste not being an attribute of a thing, it is an activity where the object (tea) and the context (meditation) makes the taste appear in a through contact: "to taste is to make feel, and to make oneself feel, and also, by the sensations of the body, to feel oneself doing." (2007.)

The same statement of how teas work differently each time was made by another professional, who likes to invest in ceremonial quality teas. "The feelings" are different with mass-produced tea. It is too coarse, or swallowing is harder and emotions drift to "bad or sad". Bodily awareness and mind-body -relationship seem therefore a strong motive to drink mindfully and unite tea and meditation together. The history for that is centuries long. Japan's relationship to tea goes back to eight century when the imperial court sent missions to China to bring back cultural artifacts and practices (Handa, 2013). The medicinal use of tea among Zen monks spread in twelfth century to fight drowsiness during meditation. The story goes that a governing warlord overcame a hangover "following a Zen monk's suggestion that he drink tea and proclaimed tea as "this world's healthful divine medicine" and drinking tea as a "special art of extending man's life span." (Handa, 2013.)

Another tea professional has two moods for tea drinking. He is both a casual and ceremonial drinker. Casual drinking happens while reading or gaming and he chooses a "not so good tea" for he

pays little attention to it. It is a habit. Ceremonial mode is on with friends and all his friends know that he will serve tea and focus on it. He says that his friends also enjoy the meditative and mindfulness state that tea ceremony can bring. I asked him what brings him back to tea day after day. He tried to articulate his unarticulated philosophy.

It is the kind of thing where I can relax best, and it interests me and of which I want a career to myself. - - It is a good mindfulness, relaxing, and meditative thing. (Aku, tea professional 3)

He thinks that this approach to tea is very common. Tea drinking carries many meanings: it can shape the state of mind, create an alternative view on life through introversion. Individualism and choosing and picking from different tea philosophies is also common, but the angle was not religious in the interviews, the focus was on spirituality and finding meaning through practice: one's own path and values brings a moral dimension to tea drinking. Sen no Rikyu¹ (1522–1591) was a tea master that synthesized *wabi* tea into ethics and aesthetics (Handa, 2013, 229).

The conduct of everyday life was in his philosophical focus in two ways: the first is rejection of exclusivity, so that the practice of tea could be reachable to the common people in the society. The second focus is keeping the practice of tea elevated with sophisticated ethics and aesthetics. With the use of *wabi*, he accomplished the appreciation of everyday. (Handa, 2013, 232.) The ideas of ceremonial tea drinking resonate with Sen no Rikyu¹ and his philosophy and the glamorous and exaggerative are its opposites. Tea as a way of life might steer the aesthetic choices people make, but it also sets ethical boundaries that I will discuss later in connection with conversion stories. The last part of this chapter discusses the way tea was presented in one tea walk in 2020. What kind of information was shared; how did the participants view tea culture? How does one tea professional describe the community of tea walks?

7.2 Observations on a Tea Walk

I will give a snapshot on a tea walk where I was observing and learning in August 2020 in Helsinki's tea district. I will discuss how one tea professional describes the atmosphere at tea walks and the people taking the short crash course to tea by shop-hopping and finishing in traditional afternoon tea in Salutorget -restaurant. Performing tea transforms personal sensations of taste into communal qualities according to Vannini et al. (2010). Those sensations are then shared with other tea walk rookies and professionals, who possess the same language, rituals, and discourse of shared

meaning (Vannini et al. 2010). This is the glue for making a community of shared experiences, to which one tea professional refers to later in this chapter.

The unfamiliar space and rupture (Surak, 2017) is present on tea walks are inspired by Teen Ystävät ry (Friends of Tea Society). The first ever tea walks were organized on 1.2. which is the day of tea in Finland. Tea is a Finnish name, and the day of tea was creatively branded together with the name. The excerpts and quotes are from my field notes.

It was a hot day in mid-August, and we were five of us who were willing to sip hot tea all afternoon. The leader of the walk starts by talking about tea and keeps up the conversation. The participants were quite new to tea and the most common comparison to make sense of tea was wine and coffee.

In one tearoom wine and tea are discussed with similar terms: first flush is compared to early Beaujolais and Cognac is brought up with stronger qualities. Someone asks if the drink should be gulped or enjoyed. “Tea can be slurped; it is considered even polite”. Tea instructor talks about how tea can be brewed several times. Someone adds that coffee would become mud in the second brewing. People laugh. When we talk of the mouthfeel of different qualities, sencha is thick and dry, oolong is long and powerful, or oily as the tea instructor adds. Matcha is stimulating, like espresso of tea world. I eavesdrop on someone saying, “I need to learn, the taste seems unfamiliar”.

Teas were introduced to the tea walkers in a structured and thoughtful setting, where the teas tasted would resonance with the hot weather and season. First flush Darjeeling was still fresh and cold tea drinks were also included in the tasting ritual. The tasters were guided and introduced into the world of tea by the people who talk the sensual language of tea, and they shared the language, drinking techniques, emotional attunements, and the terms with the newbies (Vannini et al, 2010).

Tea and meditation, or mindfulness was discussed as well in connection to routines, but how to choose tea utensils, cups, and the way to warm up the water.

Preparing tea can also be considered a meditation. That is why the tea instructor does not use water boiler but follows the movements of tea water in a pot; focuses on this moment and avoids thinking “million things at the same time”. Tea water boiler can take up a lot of space in the kitchen, someone adds. It is a question of practicality. “There are many tricks, whatever suits you”, tea walk leader concludes.

Choosing a cup is a personal choice, an important one. It is part of identity and self-knowledge. What cup suits my vibes today? What cup suits to what tea? Handcrafted cups are valued, it is a “small thing with the tea”.

It seems that tea walks educate people of the many nuances of tea culture, little bit of the spiritual aspects are sprinkled here and there. Many participants seem not to recognize or familiarize with the spirituality of tea, as it cannot be compared to anything in Finnish culture.

Many seem to have no courage to enter tea shops. Two shop owners tell when many of them finally gather their spirit to enter, they tell how many times they passed the shop. Why is tea experienced to be secretive and hard to approach?

The leader told that in the early stages of Friends of Tea Society sweetening tea with honey and sugar was frowned upon. Nowadays this is also part of tea culture. Tea culture educators and visible actors around tea maybe had to accept the varying ways to enjoy tea to keep developing culture and the shops alive, but the undercurrent idea of keeping tea “pure” (unflavored, unsweetened) is a social norm inside tea enthusiasts’ community.

When we arrived at Afternoon tea at Salutorget, we told stories of tea and talked about the mythical past of tea. It is full of different versions of history. The leader of the group states: *Tea culture is full of stories, it does not matter so much if they are true.* As the tea walk came to its end I asked if people felt any different.

“Yes, somehow it feels different”, many of them replied. I was drunk from all the tea myself.

The tea professional, who took part of the interview had also been a tea walk leader. He described the “vibes” followingly:

There is a big crowd of unfamiliar people and there is always a good vibe, and it was easy to get into it and lead the group. I trusted that we had at least one thing in common. It is bigger than coffee drinking, since everyone drinks coffee. - - Something that brings us together, and tea is the thing - - and you get contacts. - - Tea drinkers are some kinds of minority as well, as being Finnish Swede, not a minority in a sense, but that there is something in common. (Petri, tea professional 5)

The performance of tea walks could be seen in the same light as tea ceremony. Flow of the rhythm carries the participants. In the end of the walk there is a pleasurable state of union (Surak, 2017). In this quote the idea of community is idealized within one factor, tea. Tea brings people together, we share the collective meanings given to tea people by others, but also the meanings we give to tea. Tea community could be seen as a way of life (Simpson, 2008), which is associated with (more or

less) stable communities that share norms, rituals, and patterns of social order. This is how tea community is displayed by themselves to outsiders: a way of life, that is shared collectively (2008). Inside tea community the rules are narrated as lifestyle-choices. Lifestyle is organized around consumption and individuality, self-expression, and self-consciousness (Simpson, 2008). Lifestyle and spirituality share the rules of individuality, self-expression, and self-consciousness in relation to consumption choices. De Guzman (2021) cites Bourdieu when discussing taste cultures. Establishing membership in taste culture groups demands the cultivation of preferences. This cultivation is integral for denoting authenticity inside the taste group (2021).

Collins (2014) has done research on tobacco rituals. In that vein it could be interpreted so, that different taste cultures give different meanings to tea, and so the rituals involved vary likewise. The common factor is the community, a way of life, that holds all these diverse ways of drinking tea under its wings. Next, I will discuss what kind of influence a global network of tea drinkers (Global Tea Hut) have on tea and meditation in Finnish tea scene.

7.2 Global Tea Hut as an authority with tea and meditation

Another theme that was important in interviews was the global community of tea drinkers. Three interviewees out of eight brought up a specific online and live-community in relation to their tea-networks, that seems to raise opinions for and against. All three are ceremonially attuned to tea and are involved with or members of the community. Global Tea Hut (I will refer now on as GTH) is a monthly magazine with monthly sample tea. GTH has a vast online tea shop and tea training center in Taiwan. The tea sensei Wu De is leader of the whole organization, and he is an expert on “all matters of tea” as one interviewee described. The stories revealed thoughts on inner schisms and frustration on the strict morals of the community. GTH has also evoked religious orientations in the members to the point where two interviewees compare the community as a cult. How do the tea professionals narrate the feelings they have about GTH and how do they position themselves in the community?

The first encounter with GTH was with a tea professional who is keen on ceremonial tea. He knows quite a lot of tea enthusiasts and through them he also joined GTH a few years ago. He explained that the social tea circle and gatherings were in the spirit of GTH. What does that mean?

That group is mainly the readers of the magazine, the members of the community. They made tea ceremonially after GTH's customs. (Aku, tea professional 3)

He thinks the community and the magazine do have authority on tea drinking habits, and that the whole community is ceremonially and spiritually serious. The rituals are an unparalleled way to understand social groups. Rituals reveal the values of the communities in the profoundest level: the values become visible in the rituals performed. (Aro & Jokivuori, 2015, 201.) The main ritual of the community is the tea ceremony. GTH has formulated their own rules and customs, which are to some degree rejected by interviewees, however influences are taken to individual practices.

Interviewees are members of the community, but not entirely: they might not agree with everything, or they distance themselves from the tradition they think GTH represents. GTH is driven by the leader Wu De, who has also synthesized the practice by combining serious Asian tea cultures. The philosophy could be described as holistic and spiritual in its views of tea cultivating, preparing, and serving. GTH was partially critiqued in this interview.

Well, they have their own rules and there is Wu De who is huge, almost a god and they follow a tradition. I study curiously and I have interest in the matters, but how I do it, combining tea and meditation, is different. (Petri, tea professional 5)

People are interested in spiritual aspects, but not in an organized way like in the major religions (Aro & Jokivuori, 2015, 179). The alienation from GTH might source from feeling that the community has reached institutional points, that could be compared to organized religions. He sees the whole organization in an ambivalent light: he is interested in the topics, but the course of the community has worsened over the years. He also stated that the community is cultish, but he remains in as long as the monthly fee is decent, and he gets his share of tea samples and knowledge. He also mentions that other members can take the GTH as seriously as they want, but he does not feel like taking it too seriously. Sometimes he questions his membership nonetheless, the frustrations are aimed at the members, but he examines Wu De in not so flattering light as well.

I think about resigning from time to time. Wu De is a Yankee who takes the money away from fools. He is an old reporter and such, and there is some kind of cult deal going on, that bothers me. Some people take it very seriously: because Wu De said so. He [Wu De] likes to talk a lot, he is such a Yankee - - he has YouTube -videos and podcasts and everything, I can't listen... He is... talks too much. - - He poses to be modest, but he is after all... master [laugh]. - - They have a large store [online] and some years ago I went there, there were maybe five different teas, but now they have dozens. So that it is a big business. (Petri, tea professional 5)

The values that GTH is given in the interviews are spiritual and holistic worldview, cultivation of the self, community, and sustainability, of which all can indeed be illustrated with positive and

harmonious meanings. On the other hand the vagueness of values can open a new window for individuals to fill in the gaps and smudge the ideals with black-and-white thinking. This tea professional follows Global Tea Hut in social media platforms and talked how the tea tastes inside the GTH's followers are quite strict.

So, we can discuss the articles in this magazine, but if I question something Wu De - - says, well then it is like now you go behind the sauna [execution without trial]. - - I get the feeling that if I speak of something like warming water the wrong way, if I warm it in a electric kettle then that is all wrong, because water should be warmed on coals, because Wu De says so. (Aku, tea professional 3)

I asked him if he considered Wu De to be harsh about the good and better ways and he replied: "he is very openminded, his followers are not quite that openminded in these things." He calls the followers of GTH a cult. He is aware that the followers do not like that term but uses it anyway. The term cult raises questions of the community's capability to foster diversity within the group. Refusing all but one way that is highly unattainable, like warming tea water on coals, makes the values of the community hard to accomplish. Durkheim (in Aro & Jokivuori, 2014) states that refusal and restriction are part of systematic ascetism, which is in part essential for religious life. By refusing and restriction the person can rise above others and gain a certain kind of holiness. The community can aspire to the same by complying with the rules; by complying with the rules the person is not the same as before (2014, 190). One interviewee wanted to express how the puritanical rules of the community leave no space for individual wishes. He talked about how he would do tea ceremony instead.

So, that there is no rules. It is like meditation and breathing and being present - - GTH also serves tea with meditation, but one sits here in front and all the rest sit here [in front of the leader]. And everyone is stalking what he does there - - the atmosphere is like that there is the master and student in the circle. My idea is that - - people can sit wherever they want, there is no need to follow a protocol or do right or wrong, and all can sit however they want - - I'm not the master there, I am the assistant - -. (Petri, tea professional 5)

It seems that GTH has taken a religious role for serious tea ceremony practices. The practice could be interpreted as holy, since changes are not tolerated, or at least the narrations gave no clues about that. GTH is not religious establishment but has taken the role of one up to a point. Furthermore, the interviewees position themselves in the community but place themselves in the outer circle observing and evaluating the practices and the overall ambience of the association. The modus

operandi is to pick and choose the aspects which are individually suitable without identifying with the community or the leader too strongly.

8. Spirituality of tea and conversion stories

As reported in Lewis Rambo's book (1993) on understanding conversion, it is very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant, wholesale transformation that is now and forever (1993, 1). In the narrations, the conversion story might begin slowly, gaining meaning and change through time. Many of the stories are placed in teenage-years or early adulthood. Tea might have been in their lives as something that did not evoke any positive feelings, or tea was equal to Lipton's Yellow Label bags. The context (Rambo, 1993) of conversion is important, but in this next interview the moment of conversion was a eureka-moment rather than the classical crisis that catalyst the process. It must be added that the interpretations of conversion are my own, participants did not word their life transition in those words, but transitions like these do have effect on how people see themselves in relation to their past selves and society.

For me, tea enthusiasm started in high-school, when I joined a literature circle and before that I never liked tea, - - and there was a crowd who liked tea very much, to the me of that time - - they knew of leaf tea and they gave me leaf tea, it was so much better than nothing I had ever drunk, so from there it started little by little. - - The literature group organized a role play - - and there I had my first time unflavored, good black and green teas. They were quite exceptional. (Aku, tea professional 3)

This experience led him to find a job in the tea business, where he wants to pursue further. His leading idea for tea enthusiasm is to know what he does not yet know, and his attunement is very *intellectual* (Rambo, 1993) to the way of tea. In the ten bulls by Kakuo (Reps & Senzaki, 2007) the phase of searching and finding the bull is when the change is apparent, self-realization and pursuing further into the world of tea is the way to find meaningfulness and joy. In another story tea has been a long passion for a tea professional, who has deepened her enthusiasm by joining among others likeminded in a tea shop. Her choice to ditch coffee and start drinking tea was on the other hand a practical choice at first.

My family has drunk coffee, especially espresso, they both like it and at some point, in my teenage-years, I tried it - - but I stated that - - the taste is okay, but for me, I got heart palpitations and got restless, so I ended up in tea. (Minttu, tea professional 1)

She has visited Japan several times and those trips have changed her tea taste, coming back to Finnish selection of teas was disappointing. Her quest for better tea started from that point on. She has even spread tea enthusiasm in her family: “my mom, I have taught her well and - - she has been drinking pu’er -tea a lot, I heard that she had two half liter pots of pu’er yesterday”. She got a job in a tea shop and has started to see the many sides of tea culture that come along with drinking. Her philosophy as tea professional is to spread her enthusiasm to others and spark interest and inspire people to drink tea. Tea drinkers bring a sense of community, “unusual to us Finns in my opinion”.

The next story is a model story of conversion: the beginning was narrated as desperate, and the stages of conversion seemed absolute (Rambo, 1993). The interviewee works with tea but is also active with tea related hobbies during his free time. He told me a story of how he started to drink tea and it had a very interesting narrative: he had been eating unhealthy foods for a long time.

- -when I was twenty-five, I was in the habit of eating chocolate, like Fazer’s blue every day, like one big slab- - and then at least one and half liters of Coke a day- - “(Väinö, tea professional 4)

Then he discovered one day that he was out of his usual foods and found Pirkka-lemon tea bags from the cupboard. He had his first good cup of tea after he read how he should brew this drink and that put a domino-effect in motion in his words: “I started to read more and more, and I found loose leaf tea which was very exotic to me at that time.” In just a couple of months he discovered the tea shops in Finland and became a regular in one. After a while he was hired. When he started working, his tea hobby was “boosted” by the teas that were now available to him. He could taste anything and talk with customers. The conversion happened fast, and the phase was quite intensive.

Well, I had no interest in tea or coffee until I was about twenty-four or twenty-five. (Väinö, tea professional 4)

His story resembles the model story for conversion, starting from tea bags and going all the way to ceremonial qualities. Going to the source (Reps & Senzaki, 2007) of life and finding the meaning, hence emptiness seems to inspire his journey.

So, I stopped using soft drinks during the same time as I started to drink tea and that was a very good decision for me. - - About one year ago I went almost alcohol free, I don’t drink coffee. (Väinö, tea professional 4)

I asked him how was that a good decision and he replied that,

It has to do with the meditative, spiritual and mental path of development: I started to see what alcohol does to the mind. - - Even days after having alcohol the kind of peaceful with oneself and sensing and exploring the inner world becomes very difficult. (Väinö, tea professional 4)

He also stated that serious tea enthusiasts usually get stuck with unflavored, east-Asian tea qualities. *There is no escaping that [laughter].*

8.1 There and back again: Stories of conversing back to casual tea

Conversion could happen in the way Väinö had experienced it but return to earlier “stages” is also possible. In the Judeo-Christian scriptures, and the Hebrew and Greek words equated with conversion can mean *to turn*, or *return* (Rambo, 1993, 3). Conversion back from too dogmatic philosophies or high-brow tea making processes is to return to the basic, embodied stage, that was before. Leevi, a tea shop owner started to drink tea in his teenage years. He has since elaborated his taste preferences and at some point, he got deeper in tea enthusiasm.

As a shopkeeper, when I started, I got immersed a lot. And I got a bit hi-fi with tea. But the longer I have been a shopkeeper and tea drinker, I strive to keep it simple. No measurements, counting time, like such, keeping the approach simple. So it was like, before I made tea, I weighed precisely how many grams and then the temperature, how many minutes and seconds, but nowadays it is a lot more intuitive and it is my own style, suitable for me, so that there is that... How to say it, so that it would not get too scientific, so that you try to get everything out of the tea. I saw this tea drinking a bit too scientific, the hi-fi -end of drinking goes too scientific.

Interviewer: So, what changed that you did not feel like “hi-fi” with tea?

Tea professional: Partially because the time that it took, I mean all the preparations and I got the feeling that I don't enjoy this tea, I'm trying somehow so that it would be... so that you try to get the maximal benefits out of something, so that it is not relaxing anymore but a job. (Leevi, tea shop owner 3)

He says that this scientific approach to tea brewing was all the rage when he was a beginner in the tea business. His favorite way of brewing currently is a strainer in a cup and that's it. He might use gong fu -method (short infusions with larger amount of tea) for brewing the tea but makes no fuss about time monitoring and water temperature but chooses to rely on his intuition instead.

He explains that the British culture is the most dominant tea culture in Helsinki. He adds that some cultures from the east, including Russia. But he tries to understand differing orientations to tea: “So they want something more functional, and then the tea is chosen - - is different.” Tea is part of lifestyle, and many people still drink tea because it is considered healthy.

Petri, who has also seen the serious side of tea drinking, likes to get to the deep end of what tea and meditation has to offer, but has his feet on the ground. He does not enjoy the doctrine-approach to spiritual life and has made his own rules on how he wants to drink. He seems to enjoy both the social and spiritual sides of tea and makes room for both. In his visions of a perfect tearoom, the different tastes in tea and spirituality would co-exist.

So, it would absolutely be two-part: there is the tearoom, sort of like café, where you can get something to eat and there it is allowed to make noise, people talking, but then there is this curtain, behind is a backroom and there it must be peaceful. Respecting neighboring customers, and if there is chatting, it would be calm. (Petri, tea professional 5)

The vision is a metamorphosis of the seemingly opposing tea drinking styles that has been observable in the data: the ones who like the social and *casual* side of tea, and them who prefer the silence and *ceremonial* moods. Maybe there is room for both ways of enjoying tea when one has seen the good and the bad of both sides. Return to embodied ways is felt intuitive and calming. In one instance during my employment in a tea shop one customer had an overriding philosophy for those who had dived carelessly into the deep end: “It is time to go fishing and drink beer”.

9. Conclusions

The aim of the study was to see the meanings tea has among tea professionals in Helsinki to understand better how tea is building identities and lifestyle-choices, the research question being how tea drinking tastes shape identities among tea professionals.

The data and the stories did prove to be rich and the main finding in this study was that spirituality is strongly liked to tea drinking. The motives to drink were explained through embodied rituals that have the capacity to carry the everyday life. The rituals of drinking are important, because tea is not just tea, it is a whole culture with individual meanings that might have been passed on in childhood or learned in adulthood.

The world of tea is much like the Japanese Torii-gate to alternate world where the path of tea leads to becoming aware of oneself, much like in Kakuan's ten bulls, (Reps & Senzaki, 2007) or in the conversion stories (Rambo, 1993). Tea is a metaphor for life and the path to finding meaning in life (Handa, 2013). Tea world in Helsinki is inspired by Zen-Buddhism, Taoism and other philosophies, that guide the steps into the imagined tea garden inside us.

On the other hand, tea is the connection to the past, memories and generations before us. It is a marker food of cultural knowledge and embodied habits that spark people to maintain connect to "home". The home is in this case abstract and could be described as the roots that bind us in the chain of generations, who have practiced daily tea drinking and passed their meanings to the next age. In most cases tea memories were significant in identity construction process because the meanings attached to daily routines had positive effect: the feelings of being safe and sound are the embodied memories of received care and attention. Tea pot carries cultural connotations, but emotional and multisensorial memories that are made again each time a cup of tea is enjoyed. So, the food voice (Hauck-Lawson, 1998) is strong and meaningful connection to the past (De Guzman, 2021; Janowski 2012).

Another significant observation is the perceived elitism around tea drinkers and how the taste differences were downplayed to seem open and tolerant to all tastes. The narratives did imply that there is hierarchy among tea drinkers and that image is upheld by both tea people and coffee drinkers. Tea drinkers are painfully aware of their position as minority, but the notions of snobbism are in fact taken from the coffee drinkers. The conclusion for this came from the way tea people positioned each other and themselves (often sarcastically) as snobs. The snob is always the all-knowing connoisseur, who enjoys exclusive qualities and is devoted to the spiritual path.

There is a contradiction on the scale of snobbery: to coffee drinkers a tea snob could be anyone who prefers leaf tea and brings her own tea with her. This is not considered snobbish in the tea community, but as a rather mundane act, which secures the quality of the drink wherever one is. This might pressure the tea drinkers to reflect their position within the tea community, but also through the judgmental eyes of coffee-consumers. As stated before, it is cultural norm in Finland not to appear unusual. *The assumed usual* in relation to tea is the consumption of tea bags and brew the drink in a mug. So, there is a strange dynamic of how tea drinkers' position in the hierarchy is determined, the rules are not spoken out, but assumed.

In summary, the research questions on how the identity is shaped in relation to tea and the meanings given to tea were answered in agreement with the literature. The results were parallel to the studies

regarding home, foodstuff and migrants, embodiment and spirituality as well as readings on taste cultures and how consumption creates distinctions and symbolic status value.

The results could be more reliable with larger number of participants from all over Finland to see the stratification between embodiment-styles and taste-cultures. Participant observations and modified interviews there could be more to discover in the world of tea. The amount of knowledge affects the researchers' position, so it is also necessary to be reflected more than was possible here, perhaps in autoethnographic or further phenomenological studies done with multiple researchers. As there was no research done on this subject, the knowledge gained in this study can benefit the future research on tea in Finnish context.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview questions

Personal history seen through tea

- what kind of memories do you have about tea?
- when did you start to drink tea? (Did you try coffee as well?)
- what kind of tea was your first tea? (Do you still drink it? What memories do you have?)
- have the tastes for tea evolved during your lifetime? (Your favorite tea/teas today?)
- when and where do you like to have tea? (I would like to know to what kind of routines or emotions does tea attach to, or if it has notions of social or being on ones´ own)
- would you describe to me how you make tea when home/at summer cottage/abroad/at work/on vacation?
- does how you make a cup of tea for yourself differ from how you make it for others?
- do you consume other drinks, such as: soft drinks, coffee, other caffeinated drinks, alcoholic drinks?

Tea rooms and lifestyle

- do you have a particular tearoom or café you visit regularly in Helsinki? (How did it become your staple?)
- what do you think of the tearoom options in Helsinki? (Have you visited other tearooms? Do you have a favorite and how did it become so? are there some interesting places you have not yet been to?)
- what are the qualities of a good tearoom to you?
- when you go to a tearoom, what kind of tea do you prefer? (Do you prefer going alone or to meet with someone?)
- Do you have tearoom experiences in other cities, other countries, other cultures? How does Helsinki compare?

Tea rooms and lifestyle: the next questions are particular to owners and employees

- what is that you want offer to your customers with your business? (Do you feel you get something back as well?)
- what was the key moment in your life when you decided to start a business?
- where did you derive from when you designed the interiors of your tearoom? (Was it your idea or did others help?)
- how did you get hold of employees with enthusiasm to tea? (Is it hard to find know-how and how do you train the people?)
- what do you think that your tearoom brings to Helsinki people? (What do you want to bring to people with your tearoom?)
- what are the best parts of the job?
- what are the challenges of running a tea business in Helsinki? (Would it be easier/harder somewhere else and how do you deal with the challenges?)
- what sort of social networks are there for you in Helsinki, in Finland and in other countries?
- if you think about your tea drinking, what would you say to a person who has not tried tea to encourage them to try?