

## Exploring the Diversity and Unpredictability of Luxury Items in Ethnic Cultures

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### Summary

Huge numbers of people across the globe indulge in the so-called four major luxury items - alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and green or black tea. However, there are subtle regional differences in the traditions surrounding their use. For instance, there is almost no long-standing custom of tea-drinking in neighboring South Korea. The modes of consumption of alcohol and tobacco too, are different from those in Japan.

But this is not the end of the story. Examination of ethnic cultures shows that apart from the four major luxury food and beverages, people actually indulge in a wide variety of luxuries or "luxury-like items". Examples of these, that I will omit from this discussion, include the practice of chewing betel nut that spread from Southeast Asia to India, the khat (chat) that is consumed in huge amounts in Yemen and Ethiopia, and the kola nut that plays an important role in social intercourse in West Africa, and coca, not mentioned in this article, in the Andes region.

In a similar vein, marijuana and opium, which are strictly prohibited in Japan and the West, are used legally and regularly in the Bengal region of India. The example of the pygmy tribes who enjoy honey and salt as a kind of luxury item is also very interesting. There is also the case of Pakistan, in which the new sweet drink Rooh Afza, developed to reduce the reliance on foreign currency required to import tea leaves, has become the national beverage.

Meanwhile, abuse of the consumption or mode of use of luxury items such as alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine, can frequently result in harm to the human body or society. To enjoy the full benefit of their positive aspects alone, the traditional culture in each region probably fostered a "set of rules of decorum with a level of formality" as typified by diverse rituals.

In this work, I wish to explore these aspects and the diversity and unpredictability of luxury items within various ethnic cultures.