
On The GreatWall

5 Minute Chinese

Why Is HEYTEA Cheese Tea So Popular?



PandaWu: Hello, this is 5 Minute Chinese from On The GreatWall. I'm PandaWu.

Emma: And I'm Emma.

Emma: Okay, I need to complain. I waited almost an hour yesterday just to get one cup of HEYTEA. One hour! And it was worth it. But who makes people wait that long for tea?

PandaWu: An hour? For a popular HEYTEA store, that can still happen. When a new branch opens, the queue can feel more like a sneaker drop than a tea shop.

Emma: Wow, I was mad about one hour and now I feel lucky. So why is HEYTEA popular here all of a sudden? To me it just looks like fancy bubble tea.

PandaWu: That is the part many people get wrong. HEYTEA is not really the same thing as the bubble tea most people already know.

Emma: So it belongs to a different wave of tea?

PandaWu: Exactly. First, there was the Taiwan milk tea craze, with pearls and sweet milk. Then came China's new-style tea brands, like HEYTEA, Nayuki, and Chagee. They made tea feel fresher, more visual, and more seasonal.

Emma: So it went from sweet milk with pearls to actual tea that's cold and pretty.

PandaWu: Exactly, and that is why HEYTEA Chinese tea brand became the face of it. New-style tea drinks, or 新式茶饮, turned Chinese tea drinks into something seasonal. Every few months there's a new Chinese fruit tea with real fruit and a fresh tea base. That is a big reason why is HEYTEA popular: it always feels new.

Emma: That explains my cup. The one I waited an hour for was a cheese tea. Bright, a little fruity, with a thick salty-sweet cream on top. Nothing like a normal milk tea.

PandaWu: Right, that cream is the heart of it. What is cheese tea, really? It is not melted cheese in hot tea. Chinese cheese tea is usually tea or fruit tea topped with a creamy foam called cheese foam tea, or salted cheese foam tea. In Chinese, that foam is 奶盖, the milk cap.

Emma: 奶盖. So it's a milk cap, not cheese chunks. That makes sense.

PandaWu: And the drink is 芝士茶. 芝士 means cheese, 茶 means tea, so 芝士茶 literally means cheese tea. At HEYTEA it points to tea with that foam, not hot tea with cheese pieces in it.

Emma: Okay, that's the cup I had. Bright, creamy, and the aftertaste wasn't just sweet. It kind of came back sweet, even after I swallowed.

PandaWu: You're describing something very Chinese. The phrase is 回甘.

PandaWu: 回甘 is the gentle sweetness that returns after the first sip. It comes from real tea leaves, 真茶, not just sugar. You can taste that idea in Guangzhou's herbal tea tradition, where the tea itself is the point.

Emma: So the foam got me in the door, but the tea underneath is why I'd wait an hour again.

PandaWu: Yes. And the useful Chinese phrase today is:

PandaWu: 喜茶

Emma: 喜茶

PandaWu: That is HEYTEA, the Chinese tea brand behind all of this. The cheese tea we keep talking about, 芝士茶, is the drink that made this brand travel.

Emma: So 喜茶 is the name, 芝士茶 is the famous cup, and 回甘 is why I liked it. Got it.

PandaWu: Perfect. Now, one fun thing before we go. I've seen this pattern online. In China, some guys used to feel that carrying a pretty fruit tea or cheese tea looked too delicate, almost girly.

Emma: Wait, really? Holding tea makes a guy look girly?

PandaWu: A little, yes. But here's the funny part. I've scrolled TikTok and seen videos of a guy who orders, says it's for his girlfriend, then the camera cuts and he's in the car drinking most of it himself.

Emma: (laughs) Okay, that's hilarious. So the girlfriend was... him.

PandaWu: Basically. The comments are all "same." And the word for that is 真香.

Emma: 真香? Doesn't that just mean "really fragrant"?

PandaWu: It can, but online it's a joke. It means you swore you'd never like something, then got caught loving it. These guys said tea was too girly, then 真香, they finish the cup.

Emma: I love that. Masculinity survives the milk cap.

PandaWu: That's also why people are willing to queue for HEYTEA, the rich, layered taste, and the fresh feeling that comes from new drinks launching every season. Once more branches open up and people stop all crowding in at once, there won't be any queues.

Emma: That would be great. I really don't like queuing.

Emma: Once again, our five minutes are up, but if you'd like to hear more authentic stories about Chinese food, history and culture, you can head to our topic page on our website, onthegreatwall.com. See you again soon. But for now, it's goodbye.

Useful Examples

喜茶

Xǐ chá

HEYTEA, the Chinese tea brand

回甘

Huí gān

the pleasant sweet aftertaste that returns after drinking tea

真香

Zhēn xiāng

(slang) saying you'd never like something, then secretly loving it and getting caught