

THE IN-TÈ ASSOCIATION-GBTIMES PARTNERSHIP

The challenge of «designer» Chinese tea begins in Bologna

A brand of excellence to distribute prestigious tea blends to the European market

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Chinese tea, which is considered to be the most precious tea in the world, is currently preparing to take over the European market thanks to an unprecedented alliance between Italy and China signed in Bologna. To achieve this breakthrough a new ad hoc brand has been created that will become a byword for the excellence not only of a "designer" product, but also of a unique style in terms of service and locations that will be accompanied by tea festivals twinned with China, competitions organized between Chinese producers, a training academy and pilot stores in fashion capitals (like Milan and London).

These are the ingredients of the partnership formed between the Bologna-based In-Tè Association, which has pioneered the mass market distribution in Italy of the best international blends of *camelia sinensis* through the first ever Italian Tea Festival featuring only top range teas, and Gbtimes, the Chinese government-controlled media company with its European head offices in Finland that was founded in 1994 with the mission of connecting China and the West in order to bring international business to Chinese and Chinese companies around the world.

«We met Gbtimes for the first time last spring and since then the project has moved forward very quickly. Our Chinese partners want us to "think big" and have therefore given us a blank cheque in terms of budget, while insisting on tight operating deadlines. The challenge we face is to combine the supreme quality of Chinese tea (that is relatively unknown in Europe) and the style, image and excellence of Italian culinary art by working together with prestigious names in the catering sector and our universities,» explains Liana Bertolazzi, the media manager and soul of the In-Tè Association, founded in 2016 to spread tea culture and business in Italy. The alliance will debut in Italy in 2020, at the next Tea Festival in Bologna, in November.

A GROWING MARKET

+6-7%

Annual tea consumption

Tea consumption in Italy is predicted to grow by 6-7% between now and 2022 (source Euromonitor) and already 4 out of 10 Italians (38%) drink tea or herbal tea every day. The Chinese Government plans to double its production between now and 2026, based partly on a strong export drive.

«Before that, in May, at the Jiujiang Tea Festival in the Jiangxi province, we will present the new brand, which should be official by January, in order to transmit the brand identity of a top quality Chinese product marketed with Italian style,» adds Bertolazzi. «China is the world's leading tea producer, but it doesn't export very much. Whereas, in Italy, despite the fact that it is traditionally a coffee-drinking nation, tea consumption is growing rapidly. I was lucky enough to meet the In Tè Association at the trade fair we organise in Jiujiang and we found that we had a common interest in developing this completely new business. In terms of quality, Chinese tea is unrivalled and Italy is a symbol of culinary excellence and therefore an extremely important partner for us in Europe. We intend to use Italy as a springboard to reach the whole of Europe,» confirms Lancy Jia, Chief Administration Officer of Gbtimes that is based in Tampere, Finland.

The Chinese Government plans to double its production between now and 2026 based partly on a strong export drive, because the drink is becoming increasingly popular, not only amongst young Asians, but also with consumers the world over, who are on the lookout for prestigious, authentic, single-origin teas thanks to the orientalisation and globalisation of consumption and lifestyles. Tea consumption in Italy is also predicted to grow by 6-7% between this year and 2022 (source Euromonitor) and already 4 out of 10 Italians (38%) drink tea or herbal tea every day. «A Chinese proverb says that it is easier to count the stars in the sky than all the different types of tea, and China certainly produces a huge range of black, green, yellow, white and red teas with an infinite number of potential blends that can open the horizons of this partnership to encompass the entire world of the Horeca and high-class catering sectors,» comments Paola Congedo, one of the very few Italian tea blenders and the Association's strategy marketing manager. This has nothing to do with supermarket tea bags, as the leaves from the best plantations in Jiujiang have an entry level price of 300 euros per 100g (Da Hong Pao, the "tea of the Ming emperors" even reaches prices of 1,300 euros per gram), but the Italian and Chinese partnership is studying a line specifically for European mass distribution that will transform "designer camelia" tea into a luxury that everyone can enjoy.

