

AMERICA'S BABY-BOOMERS ARE EMBRACING TEA FOR ITS HEALTH BENEFITS – The Economist print Edition

Although tea production in America is minuscule, consumption is booming. Sales have more than tripled in the past 15 years, exceeding \$6 billion last year. Some 85% of the tea drunk in America is served iced – for easy sipping on sleeping summer days. Lately, sales of “ready to drink” bottled teas have been growing particularly fast. Mike Harney of Harney & Sons, a tea firm based in New York, calls the United States “the most dynamic tea market in the world”.

Americans’ growing enthusiasm for tea can be explained in large part by its health benefits. Tea contains less caffeine than coffee, and the industry touts studies that suggest it can help with heart problems, blood pressure and even cancer. This explains tea’s particular appeal to the ageing baby-boom generation, suggests Brian Keating of Sage Group, a market-research firm, in a recent report on the industry. Green tea is perceived to be especially healthy, though white teas, which have undergone minimal processing, are also popular, says Karen Dunlap, a “tea sommelier” based in New York. Tea-based soft drinks are doing well, too.

Tea still trails far behind coffee, of course. The Sage Group estimates that tea sales in America will reach at most one-third the level of coffee sales by 2010.

Yet the relationship between the two drinks is oddly collaborative. Starbucks, the dominant coffee chain, bought Tazo, a fast-growing brand of speciality tea, in 1999. Just last week the chain rolled out tangerine and pomegranate frappuccino juice blends, which mix Tazo tea with other fruity flavours. Also on sale, since the spring, has been Starbucks’s blackberry green-tea frappuccino. Other chains have also turned to tea-based drinks. Jamba Juice, known for its smoothies, offers a “Matcha Green Tea Blast”, with green-tea powder, Soya milk, sorbet and frozen yogurt. That may not be how they drink tea in traditional China or staid English drawing rooms. But in the land of the Boston Tea Party, the drink has a certain unconventional history to live up to.