



Happiness
IS A
CUP OF TEA



History of Tea

Tea drinking in China has its earliest references in connection to the mythical emperor Shennong, who is regarded as the father of

Chinese medicine and agriculture. Shennong is said to have tasted hundreds of wild herbs, including tea leaves, to ascertain

their medicinal value. According to this legend, the discovery of tea dates back to around 2700 B.C., the era in which Shennong is said to have lived.

During the late Western Han dynasty (1st century B.C.), The Divine Farmer's Herb-Root Classic, a book attributed to Shennong, includes a reference about tea.

This suggests that even at this early point in history much knowledge about tea had already been accumulated. In 59 B.C., Wang Bao, of Sichuan Province, wrote the first known book providing instructions on buying and preparing tea - entitled A Contract with a Servant - establishing that

tea was not only an important part of diet but that it was a commonly traded commodity at this time.

This book is said to be the first written reference to tea utensils. At the time, tea drinking was still a luxury enjoyed by the elite classes of Chinese society.

During the Tang dynasty (around 760), writer Lu Yu wrote Cha Jing (The Classic of Tea), an early work on the subject. The book's opening passage is about tea's origins in the south,



showing that this has been a long-held theory.

In the early Heian Period, Emperor Saga is said to have encouraged the drinking and cultivation of tea in Japan. Tea drinking was first referred to in Japanese literature in 815 in the *Nihon Koki* (Later Chronicles of Japan), recording that Eichu invited Emperor Saga to Bonshakuji temple, where he was served tea. At this time, tea was extremely valuable and only drunk by imperial court nobles and Buddhist monks.

In 1191, in the early Kamakura Period (1185-1333), Eisai, founder of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, brought back a new type of tea seeds to Kyoto

from Sung-dynasty China. In 1214, Eisai wrote the first book specifically about tea in Japan, *Kissa Yojoki* (How to Stay Healthy by Drinking Tea). According to the medieval chronicle *Azumakagami*, Eisai learned that the Shogun, Minamoto no Sanetomo, was afflicted by alcoholism, and sent his book as a gift to the Shogun.

Tea Growing

Although there is a theory that Sancha (mountain tea) originally grew wild in remote areas of Japan's mountains and that this tea was consumed, the first tea grown in Japan is said to have been planted in Seburisan, Saga Prefecture,



from seeds brought from China by Eisai. Later, Eisai gave tea seeds to Myoe Shonin in Kyoto. These seeds are said to have become the basis for Uji tea after being sowed at Togano in Kyoto. Tea growing soon spread throughout Japan. At this time, tea was steamed and dried without being pressed (Tencha), and became a part of the social intercourse of Samurai culture.

In writings of the Nanboku-cho Period, the tea-growing regions of the

time are recorded. In several parts of Kyoto as well as in Yamato, Iga, Ise, Suruga and Musashi, tea came to be grown at temples and on temple estates. In the 14th century, tea growing began in Okukuji, Ibaraki, which is said to be at the northern limit for tea growing.

Emergence of Tea Ceremony Culture

Eisai's book *Kissa Yojo-ki* played a major role in spreading tea culture in Japan. In the late Kamakura Period, the practice of *Tocha* (tea competitions), which originated in Southern Song-dynasty China, became popular among the Samurai class and tea

gatherings were common. The tea ceremony rapidly spread, including Chakabuki.

From the late 15th century to the late 16th century, tea masters such as Murata Shuko, Takeno Joo and Sen no Rikyu developed a new tea ceremony, referred to as Wabicha. This style of tea ceremony gained a strong following among Samurai and is the origin of the tea ceremony practiced today.

Tea Export

The first export of tea from Japan was in 1610 by the Dutch East India Company from Hirado, Nagasaki. The shipment of Japanese tea (pot-roasted tea, such as Ureshino) was sent to

Europe.

In 1858, the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Japan, and this was rapidly followed by similar treaties with The Netherlands, Russia, Great Britain and France. In 1859, when the ports of Nagasaki, Yokohama and Hakodate were opened to foreign trade, tea became one of Japan's main export commodities, along with raw silk thread. In that year, 181 tons of tea were exported. Kei Oura, a woman merchant in Nagasaki, exported six tons of tea to Great Britain in 1859.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the export of tea

expanded under the support of the government, particularly focusing on the United States. Accompanying this, the steaming method of tea processing spread throughout Japan based on the popular “Uji method” of tea production.

The Modern Tea Industry

Until the end of the Edo Period, tea was grown in Japan’s mountainous regions, however, from the early Meiji Period, owing to opportunities presented by various measures instituted by the new government, including its program to assist the economic reintegration of

former Samurai, expansive areas of flat land, such as Makinohara Upland, were formed into large groups of tea plantations. However, the former Samurai families who had opened up the tea plantations gradually dispersed and the plantations were taken over by farmers.





The reasons the former Samurai left included a significant slump in tea export prices and the large costs incurred in establishing the tea plantations. In recent years, thanks to such technology as sensors and computer control, even novices are able to grow tea. Nowadays, hand rolling is mainly preserved as a cul-

tural artifact and shown at tourist attractions.

Tea is now used in a myriad of ways, which are not limited to just beverages. Applications include catechin dyeing technology, Chahaigo board and supplement products, which utilize the active components of tea.