

# The Origin of Tea

Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) is an evergreen tree plant, belong to *Camellia* genus in *Theaceae* family. *Camellia* species spread in more than 90 species from Nepal to Taiwan and Japan in the East Asia. Among these species, "Tea" is the most widely distributed one. Its wild type is distributed in 2400 km width (from east to west) and 2000 km length (from north to south)

Sealy (1958) listed 82 recognized species within the genus *Camellia* and 16 other imperfectly known species whose status was not decided. The recognized species were arranged as 12 sections. The tea plant came under the *Thea* section along with four other species (*C. irrawadiensis*, *C. taliensis*, *C. gracilipes*, *C. pubicosta*) All "Tea" plants were categorized as one species, *C. sinensis*. *C. sinensis* has two varieties, *sinensis* and *assamica*. *C. sinensis* var. *sinensis* is called chinese type, has small leaves and bush type tree. Variety *Assamica* is called assame type, tall tree with big leaves. In spite of differences in this species, the number of chromosomes of varieties is the same ( $2n=30$ ) and there is no big difference between nuclear types (karyotype) of the chromosome. In this species, cross between varieties resulting in seeds can be easily achieved.

The origin place of tea plant was estimated to be around Chinese Yunnan district by Sealy (1958) but it is not confirmed yet. A wild type of the variety *Assamica* in *C. sinensis* was discovered in India at 1835 and thereafter also in Thailand and Burma.

The story of tea began in ancient China over 5,000 years ago, before the Christian era. Shen Nong (神農) was an early emperor, scholar, herbalist and the Agriculture of God in posterior. According to the legend, Shen Nong was sitting beneath a tree while his servant boiled the drinking water for the evening meal in summer day. Some of the leaves from a tree fell into the water vessel and colored it brown. The emperor was interested in the new liquid and drank



Big tea plant in Northern Vietnam (about 8 m in height)

some. He found it very refreshing, and in this manner, tea was created. This knowledge was imparted from person to person.

On the other hand, India legend tells that Buddha was the first man drank the tea. During seven years sleepless contemplation, Buddha plucked a few leaves from a nearby bush, clicked them and dispelled his tiredness, when he began to feel drowsy. The bush was a wild tea plant.

The first book about the serving of tea "DOOYAKU (僮約)" has been written in Emperor Ser (宣帝) period (59 BC) of former Kar (前漢) era.

The first reference to tea is written by Kien Lung (王褒) in the fourth century, who described the medicinal effect of the tea plant and its preparation.

Until the Tang Dynasty (618 ~ 907 A.D.) era, tea did not become China's national drink. In this era, Lu Yu (陸羽) wrote the first definitive book about tea, "Tea sutra: Cha-Kyou(茶經)". Lu Yu, who lived in the Tang (唐) era, discussed the history of tea in China, the method of manufacture, the utensils of manufacture, and the method of preparation and of drinking of tea.

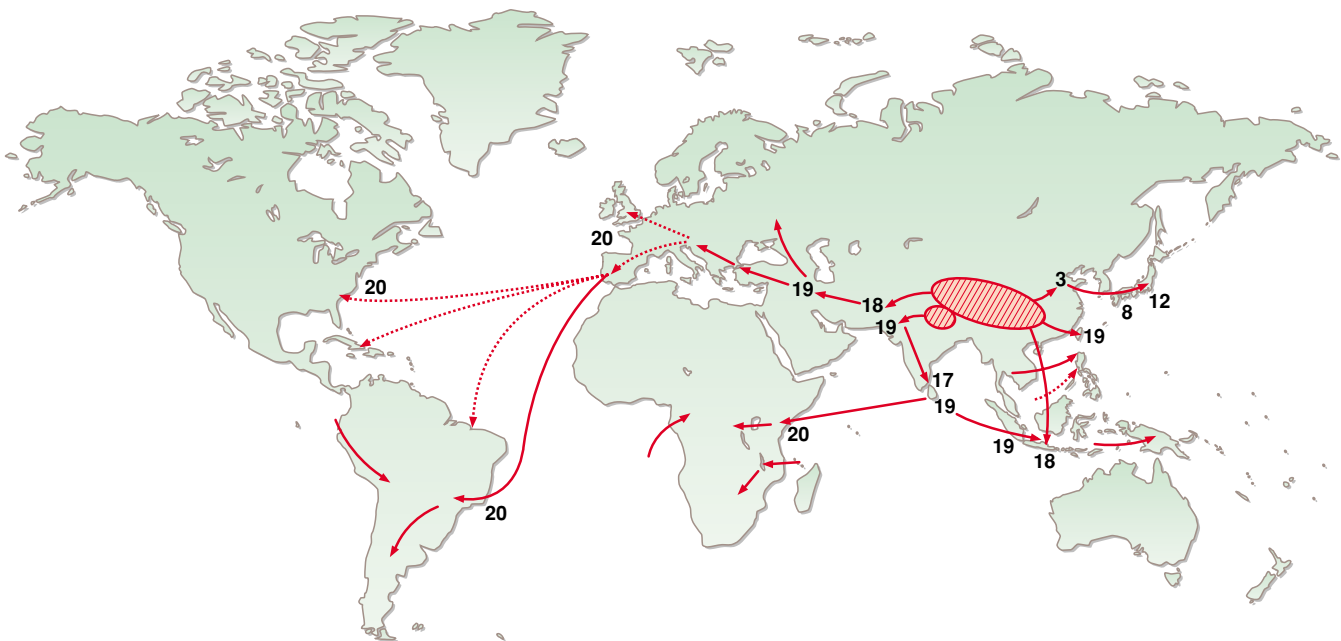
Thereafter, tea was introduced not only to Japan by the Buddhist, but also to the European countries by merchant. And now, tea is drank all over the world as the most favorite beverage. Recently, green tea is paid the attention, since its healthy power of tea has been scientifically examined .



*C. sinensis*

The origin and spread of tea plants(Hoshikawa, 1978)

Arabic numerals in figure showed the century number



*C. chrysantha*



*C. oleifera*



*C. japonica*