



The Land of Tea

瑞草之国

王旭烽 著

陈 秀 冯 锦 赵 爽 柳 菁 译



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Preface

Tea plant, one of paleontological species, has a history of more than ten thousand years and is first discovered by Chinese people. The earliest record about tea dates back to four or five thousand years ago. Speaking of tea culture, it is peculiar to the Chinese nation and it has made great contribution to the whole human civilization with its long history. This marvelous plant can be used in many ways: Its leaves can be made into various tea products to meet consumers' demands; its seeds can be made into oil for daily use and for industrial needs. More importantly, it can be used for disease treatment, helping to prolong one's life. In daily life, a cup of tea may refresh us and cultivate our mind, bringing the enjoyment of comfort and pleasure. In addition to the daily use, the supreme treasure—tea, serves as a bridge for establishing and maintaining public relations. Thus there is a saying in Chinese history: Taste tea, taste life. Tea deserves our compliments because of the above mentioned functions obtained from the accretion of long history

Wang Xufeng, a young writer from Zhejiang, at first worked in the reference room of China National Tea Museum where she collected and read a large number of materials about tea and its culture, which aroused her love of tea. In recent two years, Ms Wang has conducted field study in tea gardens and made friends with the staff there. Based on her previous study, she finished this book with great efforts, which gives a comprehensive introduction to tea culture. Being practical, informative and entertaining, it is a popular edition of tea culture for young people and those who are interested in tea.

It is worth high praise for a young writer to produce such a valuable book about



中央电视台 1995 年春拍摄《话说茶文化》现场，右一为著名主持人陈铎，右二为庄晚芳先生，左一蹲者为本书作者。

The site to shoot *On Tea Culture* by CCTV in 1995—the first on the right is a well-known host Chen Duo, the second on the right is Zhuang Wanfang, the first on the left is the author of this book.

tea culture. Young people like her who know how to cherish today can bring about a bright future and make contribution to our motherland. Therefore this book is highly commendable and it is my pleasure to give the preface for it.

Zhuang Wanfang¹

June, 1992

¹ Zhuang Wanfang (1908—1996) was born in Fujian Province, China. As a famous scholar for tea study in Zhejiang University, he is the founder of “Tea Cultivation” (a branch of tea study) and is regarded as a giant in tea study in China.

The Homeland of Tea

In the outskirts of my hometown Hangzhou, an ancient city with its attractive scenery in the south of China, there grows an auspicious shrub called Longjing tea. This plant is highly regarded by the people there because it is believed that the tea will bring good luck to people who consume it. Premier Zhou Enlai presented it as a national gift to Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, when he visited China in 1971. It was said that more than half of this precious gift was shared by his entourage on the return flight to America, while the rest half was given to President Nixon. Then Kissinger received this aromatic tea again in his second visit to China and this time it was sent back to America by a special plane as a top-secret cargo. The story prevails that from that time on, Hangzhou people send Longjing tea to him annually to express their gratitude for his contribution to Chinese-American friendship.

The exceedingly fine plants were first discovered in the remote, pathless mountain regions, shrouded in clouds and blankets of mists before its wider cultivation. As a plain but mysterious and perseverant plant, it can be taken as a symbol of Chinese spirit from many perspectives. This analogy is understandable because China is the homeland of tea.

In the 8th century A.D., Lu Yu, the tea sage, who was born in the Tang Dynasty, wrote a classic work about tea—*The Tea Classic*. In Chapter 6, it says: Birds, beasts and human beings in the world can't live without food and drink. How significant the drink is for life! People drink water to quench thirst, alcohol to relieve sorrow, tea to regain refreshment. In this sense, tea comes into the world especially for human beings.

According to Chinese scientists, tea is believed to have originated in China and is considered to be derived from a species of *Camellia* plants (a member of the family *Theaceae*) and it has a history of no less than one million years. At the very beginning of its history, it grows in mountain areas in ancient Bashu, the hinterland of southwest

China and it spends its childhood in the sub-tropical forest which covers Sichuan (the land of abundance), Yunnan (multi-ethnic area with warm climate) and Guizhou (a mysterious region with fantastic Karst caves).

Tea trees were ever giants and even today quite a few wild tea trees whose height reaches tens of meters can still be found in ancient forests in Yunnan Province. These special trees have always attracted admirers and purists of tea. Japanese tea scholars often take the trouble of traveling a long distance to visit the site in order to worship the birth land of tea and consecrate this kind of tree as “the King of tea trees”.

How tea was discovered and used in life is really an oriental legend.

In China, there is an ancient book named *Shennong¹ Materia Medica*, which is said to be the first book about *materia medica* in the world. According to this book, Shennong tasted hundreds of plants in his life and was poisoned by a large number of toxic plants. Fortunately, he was saved after he took a plant called “Tu” (荼) which is “Tea” (茶) today.

Shennong (also called Yan Emperor) is presented with a depiction as an ox-headed man without an incisor, who is a tribal leader four or five thousand years ago. He is honored as “God of Farming” for teaching people to farm, to cultivate crops, mulberries and hemsps. He seems to be a suffering hero like Prometheus in ancient Greek and Danco in Russia. In order to heal the sick, Shennong tasted



神农氏

Shennong (Yan Emperor)



《神农本草》

Shennong Materia Medica

¹ Shennong: refers to a legendary figure in ancient China. He is described as a tribal leader, god of ancient farming and herbal drugs.

various herbals in person, but unfortunately he was poisoned and fell down one day. Luckily enough, he was saved by drops from a tea tree. However, he could not escape death from poisonous herbals finally. It was said that he died when he was unable to find an antidotal herbal tea after testing the poisonous plant "*Gelsemium elegans*"—a plant which is now known for its fatal toxicity.

To some extent, there is truth in the legend handed down from generation to generation. Equally popular with Yellow Emperor, the Chinese first ancestor, Shennong is not only the father of China's agriculture and medicine five thousand years ago, but also the first discoverer and the user of tea.

Just as a refined and elegant person has some gracious names, tea also has different names in history, such as Tu (荼), Chuan (荈), Cha (诧), Jia (𣎵), She (葭) and Ming (茗). These names have different pronunciations in different dialects. TEA in English and THE in French come from a transliteration of TAY (Hokkien dialect of tea) through sea route, while pronunciations in West Asia and Eastern Europe are from inland CHA through land route, like CHAI in Russian and CHAY in Turkish. The above mentioned pronunciations of "tea" in different countries may more or less indicate a fact that tea was disseminated from China to afar.

Before becoming a popular beverage, tea had been used widely in human life for a long period of time. It was used as a medicine, a supplementary food or seasoning with various methods of production beyond our imagination.

Ancient Chinese tea culture can be learned from Jino people in Yunnan Province since they still retain the custom of making tea a delicious course by mixing fresh tea leaves, chili, salt and pepper.

In a well-known restaurant "Louwailou"¹ in Hangzhou City, there is a specialty called Longjing prawns, which is cooked with prawns and Longjing tea.

In the past, in spring time, farmers from Songjiang in Shanghai used to pick some bamboo shoots in their backyards and cook them with spring tea to serve guests.

In Hunan Province, tea is either consumed as a course for a meal or as a beverage. Tea can be made into a tasty dish after being stir-fried with oil and mixed with peanut,

¹ Louwailou: a well known restaurant near the West Lake in Hangzhou.

soybean, sesame and corn paste. A beverage can be made with tea leaves and other food.

Finally, tea became a popular beverage in the end of the Western Han Dynasty.

Tea was precious and regarded as a tribute to the emperor in ancient China. At that time, when traffic was poor, it was sent to the capital after tea harvest time each year from the place of production which was often far away from the capital. The first chronicles in China, *Huayang Local Chronicles*, put it that as early as two thousand years ago, tea was planted and sent as a tribute to King Zhou Wu-wang in the Western Zhou Dynasty. According to *Rites of Zhou*¹, as many as twenty-four persons were needed for different tasks in tea service because at that time tea was an indispensable oblation in the ceremony of sacrifice to gods and ancestors in the country and it was related to state affairs.

However, the peaceful world of tea was broken by wars two thousand years ago in the Spring and Autumn Period, when the Kingdom of Qin conquered ancient Bashu which covers range upon range of mountains in southwest China. Stout soldiers were amazed to discover the edible green leaves (tea) there and carried them on their horseback from undulating mountains in ancient Bashu to places they went on campaigns.

Who was the first man to cultivate tea? It seems that he was submerged in history forever and could not be known to the world like many others who used to make great contributions to mankind.

The first recorded celebrity to cultivate tea in China is Wu Lizhen who lived in ancient Bashu in the Western Han Dynasty and was addressed “the founder of sweet dew”². His story of tea cultivation was mythologized in the re-narration from one



1 Rites of Zhou: one of three ancient ritual classics (The Three Rites). It is about how to make proper power administration.

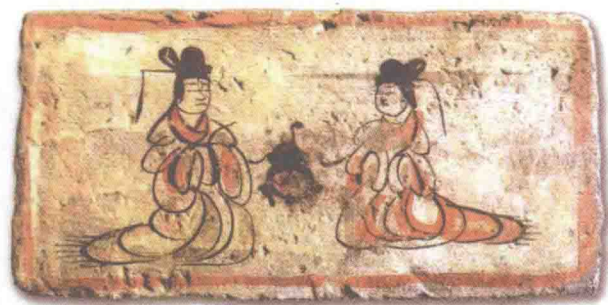
2 The founder of sweet dew: another name of tea, implying people's love to tea.



generation to another. It was said that the tea seeds were given by a fairy maiden and the tea she picked in harvest time was fairy tea. According to *Sichuan Chronicles*, in Sichuan Province, on the top of Mengshan Mountain, which is located between Mingshan County and Ya'an County, an auspicious tea called Bazhu fairy tea could be found and it was cultivated by Mr. Wu. Here is a folk song about the fairy tea:

Immortal is Bazhu the fairy tea,
Fairy will you be after sucking the tea.

This fairy tea always found favour in ancient emperors' eyes who were seeking after being immortal. In early spring, senior officials were accredited to Mengshan Mountain to oversee tea picking during which monks were required to chant sutras day and night. With the small amount of the production, it was necessary to pick other less valuable tea to foreground the fairy tea just as the case that an emperor always needs several officials. Wrapped in silk, it was sent to the emperor without any delay



高台魏晋墓彩绘砖《进食图》
a scene of having meals on colored
drawing brick unearthed from tomb in
the Wei and Jin Dynasty

when the tea was made despite difficulties of the long journey, which reminds me of a poem depicting what great troubles were taken to send fresh litchi to an emperor's favorite concubine from the south to the north in the Tang Dynasty. Alas! The similar occurrence prevailed when fresh tea became emperors' favorite beverage. In addition, a story was fabricated to cut off the same desire of the mass for the fairy tea. The story went like this: A bluish white tiger was sent to guard the fairy tea from heaven. Thus those who dared to pick the fairy tea without permission would be eaten by the faithful guardian.

Perhaps it is the above fictitious stories that make the name of the first tea cultivator be handed down till now. On account of the legend from the Tang Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, Mengshan tea has always enjoyed great popularity.

Tea culture was very popular in the Eastern Han Dynasty and tea began to circulate as a commodity in the market. As a matter of fact, earlier than that period, in *Regulations for Servants* by Wang Bao¹, descriptions about tea could be found such as: "making tea with clean tea sets", "buying tea from Wuyang tea market". People in Bashan Gorges began to drink tea and sing high praise for it. Since then, tea was related to spiritual world and this stage may be regarded as the outset of Chinese tea culture.

During the 600 years from 200 BC—500 AD, tea was a popular theme for men of letters in the Han Dynasty and the Jin Dynasty. Du Yu, a literary writer in the Jin Dynasty, composed a verse titled *Ode to Tea* which is considered as the first eulogistic piece about tea. From then on, tea was hooked on words and became one of the favorite topics for literary men.

¹ Wang Bao: a famous writer in the Western Han Dynasty.

Afterwards tea came on the market, in banquets and in rituals, which was depicted in an ancient poem "When the guest came in on cold night, to serve tea shows a better taste than wine". Here is a story on how tea began to take the place of wine as a means of hospitality.

In the Three Kingdoms period, the final king of the Wu kingdom was Sun Hao who was the grandson of Sun Quan, the founder of the Wu kingdom. He was very cruel and set a regulation that in dinner parties every participant was required to consume seven liters of wine. Otherwise his head would be cut off! But this was a problem for a particular mandarin of the court, Wei Yao who was not capable of drinking so much with the maximum of only three liters. He would be killed according to the regulation! But since he was the king's favorite minister, certainly he mustn't be killed in this case. How to deal with it? The king secretly bestowed tea as a substitute on him. This could be the earliest record of tea substitute for wine. Though it was not for the later purpose of frugality, it was a case to show that tea was favored by high rank officials at that time.

However, Wei Yao was still killed by Sun Hao, which meant that peaceful tea could not compete against the ferocious wine of the king.

At the very beginning, the way of drinking tea varied greatly compared with that of today. For example, in the Three Kingdoms period, inhabitants in Hubei and Sichuan stirred tea and congee till tea cakes were made. Before being put into the boiling water, a tea cake was required to be roasted till it became crimson and pounded into powder. Flavorings such as green onion, ginger and orange peel are needed as well to make a rich tea. This way of tea drinking can still be found in some places. If there are some stages for tea drinking, it must be the initial stage.

Tea was spread in wider areas when it was brought from Bashan Gorges to the middle and lower Yangtze River.

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