

ANCIENT CHINESE INVENTIONS



Tasting tea.

ordered the local vassals to send lacquer, honey and tea as tributes. In the Qin Dynasty, tea plants spread to Shaanxi, Gansu and Henan, but tea remained a precious product not available to ordinary people. In the Eastern Han Dynasty Buddhism was introduced to China. The consumption of tea gradually increased, for the refreshing beverage was good for monks who sat all day long reading Buddhist scriptures and the surroundings around Buddhist temples in mountains were good for the growth of tea plants. Tea plantations were opened in the Tiantai and Emei mountains near Buddhist temples, and with increasing tea output the beverage gradually spread among ordinary people.

In the 500 years between the Eastern Han and the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (420–589), tea plants were introduced to the Huaihe valley, the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, and areas south of the Five Ridges, where conditions were ideal for the growth of tea plants. By the Tang Dynasty, tea had become a popular beverage. Two writers write in their essays, “Near the capital there are many tea shops



in cities, where customers pay money and get the beverage themselves;" and even in the north "people can do without food for several days but not for a single day without tea." By then tea was produced in 50 states and prefectures, roughly equivalent to fifteen provinces in central, east, south and southwest China today. During the reign of Emperor Dezong of the Tang Dynasty, tax on tea amounted to 400,000 *min* a year, and the output value of tea production was about 4 million *min* (one *min* equals to 1,000 copper coins).

Ancient tea farmers accumulated rich experience in tea production, including the selection of the sites for tea plantations, speeding the buds, irrigation, fertilization, and shading for tea trees. They also exchanged tea for animal products from nomad people. Attracted by the flavors of the beverage, men of letters developed a tea culture. From the Tang to the Yuan and Ming dynasties, tea farmers developed various methods for processing tea leaves and buds in different localities. Classification of teas



Preparing Tea Drink, painted by Ren Xiong of the Qing Dynasty.





Wood sculptured statue of Lu Yu, the Deity of Tea in the Chinese Tea Museum in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province.

by the manufacturing process results in the three categories of fermented (black), unfermented (green), and semifermented (oolong or pouchong) teas. The prevalence of the beverage also led to the development of tea service. Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, tea has been a major export from China.

Lu Yu, the tea expert of the Tang Dynasty, wrote *Classic of Tea*, the world's earliest special work on tea culture. He discussed the origin of tea, growing of the plant, picking of tea leaves, processing, preparing

of the beverage, the quality of water, and tea sets, as well as anecdotes about tea. The encyclopedic work was so impressive that people praised its author as the Sage of Tea.

Tea was introduced to other Asian countries in the 5th century, and to European and American countries in the 17th century. The beverage gradually prevailed throughout the world. China not only exported tea products, but also provided tea plants and seeds for other countries. Nowadays tea plants are grown in many countries, including Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Russia. The Japanese even developed *sado*, a tea ceremony, on the basis of Chinese tea culture.



Savoring tea is a lasting tradition in Chinese culture.



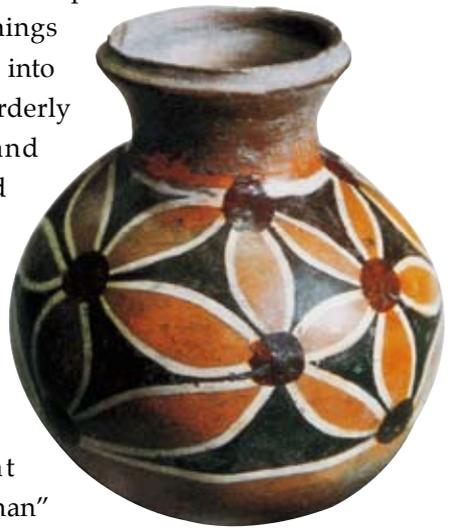
Other Major Inventions (II)



Star Catalogue and Star Atlas

Astronomy emerged quite early in ancient China. On some relics from the Neolithic period there were astronomical signs and symbols. Sima Qian (c. 145 or 135 BC–?), the great historian of the Western Han Dynasty, writes in his *Shi Ji* (Historical Records): The Yellow Emperor made observations of stars and worked out a calendar. He established the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth, and understood their correlations, and he solved the problems of leap months and leap days in the calendar. He divided all things on earth under the heaven and the God into five groups, and brought about their orderly operations, free from disturbances and confusion. Therefore the people believed in his rule, and the God praised his wisdom. He showed high respect to the people and the God, though they were quite different. As a result the people had the blessing of the heaven, and enjoyed an affluent life.

This sowed the seed of the great concept of “integration of nature and man” and formed the ideological basis for astronomical undertakings. Soon after Yellow Emperor, a post of *Huozheng* was established by imperial court to take charge of astronomical and calendrical affairs, who was to make close observations of the Mars, so as to direct farming activities according to the positions of the planet. The duties of ancient officials in charge of astronomical affairs were to observe the movements of the sun, the moon and stars, forecast solar and lunar eclipses, determine the times of the solar terms,



Pottery vase with patterns of the sun from a site of the Dawenkou Culture (6,000 years ago).

