A Bowl for a Coin

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Between 1300 and 1600, Japanese society underwent a thoroughgoing transformation. The population of the archipelago nearly trebled to seventeen million or more. To support greater numbers, agriculture stabilized and intensified, farmers became much more productive, and rural life took place in compact villages where peasants made their own rules about water and commons rights and the policing of crime. As cultivation of rice and other crops became more productive, many people dwelling in large cities chose other occupations as merchants or artisans. In a word, the economy became much more specialized and Japanese society more complex.

In politics, warriors battled their way to become the dominant elite, overwhelming civil aristocrats and religious institutions. Samurai took control of the polity during two prolonged but sporadic periods of conflict: the Wars of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, lasting from 1333 to 1392; and the Warring States Era, covering over a century of bloodshed from 1467 to 1590. From 1560 to 1600, three powerful leaders—Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu—helped to bring a greater degree of peace and unity to the archipelago than it had ever known.

The Iberians with their muskets and Catholicism arrived from Europe and remained for about a century, from 1543 to 1639. Naturally, they became involved in politics and the wars, but their most lasting impact may have been as commentators on Japanese culture and society. The Dutch came and were allowed to stay, serving as a window on European and world affairs. In matters of culture, the appeal of China waned after a while. Buddhist worship and artistic representation began to adopt more
native forms, expressed in oral war tales, Noh drama, the tea ceremony, and gigantic castles.

Tea played its own role in and was profoundly affected by this three-hundred-year transformation. Cultivation of the plant not only continued its geographical diffusion but was increasingly practiced by peasants seeking to pay their taxes or trade for a profit. Once commoners began to deal with tea in these ways, they also became ready customers for a swig of the caffeinated beverage. As tea spread downward through the social pyramid and outward geographically, changes in cultivation and processing methods inevitably ensued. As those innovations took place, aesthetes from old and new elites found the improved beverage to be the proper object of new literary and art forms, symbolized most readily by the tea ceremony (chanoyu). By 1600, Japan could be described as having a true tea industry, and the islands were well on their way to becoming a major center of tea production and consumption in East Asia and the world.

**THE TRANSITION FROM A BITTER MEDICINE TO A HABIT-FORMING BEVERAGE DURING THE 1300s**

In 1219, the shogunal Minamoto line that had done so much to support Yōsai in his advocacy of tea died out. The Kyoto court under Retired Emperor GoToba challenged the right of Kamakura to govern and attempted to destroy the shogunate during the Jōkyū War of 1221. Under the able leadership of Yoritomo’s widow’s family, however, the armies of Kamakura vanquished GoToba’s motley force and emerged from the conflict even stronger. The new leadership of the shogunate (the Hōjō) managed to secure an imperial prince to serve as its titular head while they held the real power as regents in Kamakura. The Hōjō replaced recalcitrant samurai on the land with their own men, simultaneously increasing warriors’ incomes and security of tenure as on-site landlords. Most important for the story of tea, the Hōjō also opened a new office at Rokuhara in Kyoto to keep an eye on the wily courtiers.

For most of the thirteenth century, Kyoto and Kamakura ruled the archipelago jointly as a dyarchy, with the court dominant in western Japan and the shogunate ruling over eastern and northern Honshu. Beginning with the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, however, political power shifted dramatically to the warriors. Kyoto remained a cultural, economic, and social center, but Kamakura also grew to be a large metropolis of seventy thousand or so. Its warriors, now guaranteed a job and an income that they constantly fought to raise, began to covet the finer things in life, including tea. The story of Son’ei and his shipments of tea from Nara to
Kamakura, described in chapter 1, is a good example of the growing popularity of tea in the warrior capital by the 1250s.

Like many warrior families of the Kamakura age, the Hōjō split into contending branches, one of which was later called the Kanezawa Hōjō.¹ In 1285, the leader of the Kanezawa Hōjō (Akitoki) was implicated in a struggle for power within the shogunate, and because his faction was destroyed, Akitoki took the tonsure and retired from politics to the safety of lands the Kanezawa Hōjō held in Shimōsa Province near Kamakura. Eight years later, in 1293, Akitoki was reinstated and served in various important posts in the samurai government until his death in 1301. His family also returned to prominence, with one son receiving ordination at Onjōji in Kyoto and the others learning the Confucian classics at the family school located near modern Yokohama and named, appropriately enough, the Kanezawa Library (Kanezawa bunko). The family temple, called Shōmyōji, was also on the library grounds, having been founded in 1267 as a Ritsu center. The Ritsu sect dated back to the 700s, and Shōmyōji’s affiliation immediately gave it strong connections to the old capital at Nara and, in particular, a temple there (Saidaiji).

The heir to the Kanezawa lands and status was named Sadaaki, born in 1278. As his father returned to politics, Sadaaki acceded to largely ceremonial posts at the Kyoto court, as befitted his bloodline. In 1296, he reached the coveted Fifth Court Rank, symbolic of aristocratic standing, and continued to occupy court positions such as Captain of the Right and then Left Imperial Guards. In 1302, just a year after his father’s death and his own assumption of family leadership, Sadaaki took up residence in Kyoto while serving as a high official in the Rokuhara Office. His tenure there was to last until 1308 and he was reappointed during 1310–1314. Sadaaki was a capable administrator and also produced several offspring, one of whom, Sadayuki, served in the Rokuhara Office from 1324 to 1330 while his father was still alive and active in politics. In 1333, Sadaaki and the rest of the Hōjō were annihilated during the collapse of the Kamakura shogunate.

Not simply literate but also highly learned, Sadaaki brushed numerous letters and other documents during his lifetime. His missives, along with those of many other warriors and clerics, were then preserved after his death in the family library at Kanezawa. Fortunately for historians of tea, Sadaaki was a habitual consumer of the beverage and frequently wrote about his experiences with the drink in his 642 extant letters. The entire collection of about seven thousand documents comprises one of the most fascinating and illuminating sources on tea for any era.² Most important, these letters and other records chronicle the history of tea just as it was
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undergoing the critical transformation from a bitter medicine utilized in political and religious ceremonies to a more palatable beverage, an object of business and pleasure to be enjoyed by many more individuals.

The Kanezawa compilation tells historians about numerous aspects of tea production, processing, exchange, and consumption during the first third of the fourteenth century. Essentially, the Kanezawa collection mentions three types of tea: leaf tea (hacha), brick tea (kokeicha), and tea ground from leaves or bricks (matcha). A letter from the monk Tan’ei notes the loan of three small bags (tsutsumi) of leaf tea; another letter from another cleric states that he “wishes to send one bag of ground tea (suricha)” to each of two samurai officials. Brick tea appears less frequently, but in another letter a monk describes what could only have been brick tea being transported by a warrior.

Although most of the correspondents were consumers, the Kanezawa collection adds much to the sketchy picture of tea cultivation heretofore available. At least on the tea fields within the precincts of Shōmyō-ji, the Kanezawa family temple, monks seem to have done both their own planting and picking. Harvests varied considerably from year to year; the best tea was new or “early tea,” picked in the third month (early April). The weather did not always cooperate during the cold thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, however, leading one monk to comment on the tardiness of the tea harvest in one particular year. A Shōmyō-ji monk warns that in one year “new tea was plentiful here and there” and that the temple should “investigate its profits” before selling. Naturally, new tea also fetched the highest price.

In the best years, tea lasted until the winter. The collection records a present of tea given during the tenth month. In especially plentiful seasons, cultivators were able to “pluck all the way up to the fifth picking” (gobancha). One record states that yields were four kin (2,400 grams) for the first picking (ichibancha), two kin (1,200 grams) for the second (nibancha), one kin (600 grams) for the third (sanbancha), and one kin for the lowest grade (hikutsu). Not all harvests were so successful, however, as the documents also speak of tea to be thrown away (sutecha), and tea with a bad color. Consumers considered both the color and the odor of the tea to be of prime importance in their evaluation of the leaves before drinking.

Generally speaking, tea fields were small, usually less than .3 of an acre. In one document, the fence around a tea patch needed repair, and Shōmyō-ji may have employed as many as twenty-eight workers to get the job done. Shōmyō-ji’s reputation for growing delicious tea must have been great, because a cleric requested a “few seeds” from Sadaaki to farm
tea on a mountain in Kamakura. The same monk planted and cultivated Kamakura tea as far away as Kumidadera in Izumi Province.

In fact, the impression that these documents give is of the continuous spread of tea cultivation throughout the Kanto and beyond. One common type of tea was “country tea” (inaka cha), easily available but of low quality. Such a term implies that numerous rural areas grew and consumed their own tea. The words “mountain tea” appear frequently, too, and suggest the diffusion of the plant to new areas. In one letter, for example, the aforementioned Tan’ei presented some of this tea to a samurai. Sadaaki also gave mountain tea as gifts. The patches of “mountain tea” likely went in and out of cultivation rather often, as they were tended in a swidden style, if at all. “Mountain tea” also referred to plots that had come into being as tended fields reproduced naturally, and the seeds were spread to new regions.

Once the tea had been harvested, it needed to be processed. In its basic steps, processing was about the same as it was described by Yōsai in Drink Tea and Prolong Your Life. In other words, the plucked tea leaves were steamed, dried, and then ground. The tea bowl of choice was the black Chinese tenmoku; Shōmyōji had lots of these utensils. There were also scoops (hiishaku) and tubular containers made of bamboo.

A crucial change that was to have long-term consequences took place in the grinding of the leaves and bricks during the second half of the thirteenth century, however. Stone tea grinders (chausu), invented in China in the late eleventh century, were imported into Japan and replaced the druggist’s wheel as the utensil of choice (figure 2). The result was a much finer granule of tea that tasted sweeter. Kanezawa Sadaaki helped to finance at least three trade missions to China; in 1307, he dispatched a Shōmyōji monk to China, where he bought one of the new tea grinders. Once the monks at Shōmyōji had a model of the new grinder from China, they began to carve some on their own. By 1309 or 1310, Sadaaki was sending his family’s tea to Shōmyōji to have it ground there, as requested in the following letter from Sadaaki to Shōmyōji’s head monk Ken’ā:

I (Sadaaki) present the three bags (tsutsumi) of leaf tea (cha no ha) that I received from [a monk]... If you would grind these so that I could consume the tea, I would be very happy.

From Sadaaki Respectfully to the Head of Shōmyōji 3/29

The Kanezawa collection is filled with such requests from warriors and others to have their tea ground at Shōmyōji.

The improvement that came with the advent of the stone grinder from China around 1250 constitutes a major turning point in the history of tea.
Ground tea no longer looked brown, but the more familiar bright-green. The taste became sweeter, and tea became a beverage for enjoyment as much as for good health. The tea parties of this era are unthinkable without the advance heralded by the arrival of the tea grinders. Grinders were also used for noodles, and so tea parties came to include a light snack of boiled fare. Eventually, the stone grinder would lay the foundation for tea to become an art form during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Along with the new, improved grinder came a second advance: the tea whisk. Also a Chinese invention, it probably dated to the Song period and was imported into Japan at the same time as the grinder. Sadaaki requested a tea whisk from Ken’ a at Shōmyōji:

Tomorrow if [a messenger] could bring one tea whisk, I would be so very happy.

From Sadaaki To the Head [Ken’a] 2/26
The use of the whisk also turned out to enhance the color, odor, and taste of tea. Taken together, the stone tea grinder and the bamboo whisk marked a new stage in the processing of tea as it moved from bitter medicine to a sweeter, party beverage.

Once processed, the tea had to be preserved for future use. Most newly processed tea or tea sent as presents was encased in bags (tsutsumi), also an innovation. These bags held only a little tea and in turn were often placed inside tea boxes (chabako), as in the following example: “I present one box (hako) containing twenty tea bags for tax purposes (shotō).”

The term “box” appears frequently in the Kanezawa collection, signaling the growing role of tea taxes in Shōmyōji’s economy. When tea was sent from afar, the operative unit was also the tea box, counted with the Japanese term go. Finally, some tea was preserved in jars (tsubo). Tea was also wrapped in paper and sent in buckets, but the preservative power of these containers is very much in doubt.

The transformation of tea into a tasty beverage was the most important change for the future history of Japanese tea. Appropriately enough for a commodity now in greater demand, it is on the topic of tea exchange that the Kanezawa documents may be most informative. Both Sadaaki and his family temple, Shōmyōji, found themselves at the intersection of a maze of tea flows. As for the tea that Sadaaki and his family consumed, none came from Kanezawa landholdings; apparently they did not produce tea. The family’s consumption included tea that the Kanezawa household expended in ceremonies, parties, and everyday drinking, a percentage that was given as gifts, and a portion that was sent to Shōmyōji from other places. The tea that the Kanezawa received included that collected from the tea fields of Shōmyōji and its branch temples, tea received as gifts from others, and tea delivered to the family from Kyoto.

A few generalizations about this maze of flows seem apparent. The tea that went back and forth between the Kanezawa family and its temple was of considerable volume, but because each side delivered its tea only as it was needed, overall there was little difference in the total amount exchanged. Then too, the Kanezawa family was a powerful member of Kamakura society and therefore undoubtedly gave many more presents than they received. Even with the ceremonial, party, and daily uses, Sadaaki and his family were responsible for a much greater overall movement of tea in one direction or another than they actually consumed. Finally, because Sadaaki could always send to Shōmyōji for more tea leaves, the family never seems to have run short.

Teasing out these tea flows in detail requires quite a bit of detective work. To begin with, there was the annual flow of tea to Shōmyōji from its
properties and branch temples. One of the properties, located in Musashi Province, was called Segasaki in Mutsuura Estate, where many fields sent tea to the temple. 31 The temple also received tea as a tax from Akaiwa, a low-lying swampy area situated in Shimo Kawabe Estate in Shimōsa Province. 32 Branch temples in the Kanto also sent tea to Shōmyōji, including Tōzenji at Tsuchihashi and Eikōji at Migatani, both places in Shimōsa. 33

As residents of a major temple in the Kanto, it is not surprising that the clerics of Shōmyōji collected tea from lands located there. What is most intriguing is the flow of tea connecting the temple and the Kanezawa to the Kinai. As a member of the Ritsu sect, Shōmyōji had a close relationship with Saidaiji in Nara. Saidaiji possessed many tea fields, and it would not be surprising if some of that tea found its way to the Kanto. 34 Ninshō (1217–1303), a Saidaiji cleric, is reputed to have planted hundreds of tea seeds when he founded Gokurakuji, another Ritsu temple in Kamakura. 35

Yet Kyoto was the main external source for Shōmyōji’s and the Kanezawa’s tea. Early on, Sadaaki commented in a letter that the beverage was “becoming more and more popular” in the city. 36 For example, while Sadaaki was serving in the Rokuhara Office in Kyoto, he wrote to Ken’ a at Shōmyōji that he was sending one “bucket” to the monk. 37 No one knows how Sadaaki came by this tea in Kyoto, but on another occasion the tea came to Kamakura via a Kanezawa holy place in Kyoto called the Taishi dō. 38 Moreover, because one of Sadaaki’s sons was serving there, the temple Ninnaji—long a producer of fine tea—sent a large amount of its product to the Kanto. 39 Sadaaki was even able to get his hands on a box of tea (chabako) from distant Iga Province. 40

The most prized tea “brand” at this time came from Toganoo, where Myōe had rejuvenated the fields of Közanji around 1200. When Shōmyōji conducted a ritual reading of the Lotus Sutra, Sadaaki sent especially fine tea from Toganoo. Undoubtedly his political connections helped him secure this brand of tea. In fact, Toganoo tea was transported to Kamakura on more than one occasion. 41 Toganoo is mentioned twelve times in the Kanezawa collection; it was so popular that warriors serving in Kyoto often found that there was not enough to go around. 42 There were many housemen and guards serving under Sadaaki (and later his son Sadayuki) in Kyoto, and they seemed to have been used to ferry the tea from the Kinai to Kamakura. 43

Why was the Toganoo brand so highly prized? A visit to the region helps provide an insight. Közanji is situated deep in the mountain recesses north of Kyoto, and today a canopy of trees shelters the fields. These trees provide protection against the sun and retard the process of photosynthesis. Tea produced in these shady areas such as Toganoo tends
to be sweeter and less bitter. Taken together with the use of the stone grinder and the bamboo whisk, the natural roof for the Toganoo tea fields made for a truly delicious beverage. The tree canopy presaged another advance that would occur two centuries later: the roof-over method of cultivation, described later. Toganoo tea was preferred for a reason, and again the trend was toward a sweeter, more delectable form of the beverage. In 1326, the tea from Toganoo was mentioned as one of several “brand names” (shōgan).44

Besides taxation and trade, gift giving was still a common form of exchange. For example, when Sadaaki assumed a high position in the shogun’s residence in 1330, he gave out many gifts, including tea.45 It was customary for Sadaaki to give gifts of tea at the end of the year.46 The most common time of the year to make presents of tea, however, was during the third month, when the new tea had just been picked and processed.47 In 1332, Sadaaki gave a box (hako) and three different types of tea to the monks of Shōmyōji through Ken’a, his most faithful correspondent.48 The monks of Shōmyōji also participated in the gift-giving network, as when the temple gave leaf tea to an important official.49

Consumption of tea took three basic forms: as a medicine, in ceremonies, and in parties. In line with the new popularity gained by tea due to its improved texture and taste, tea is mentioned only rarely as a medicine. In one case, a cleric recommends that a fellow monk who is taking the waters to heal an ailment drink tea too.50 In another, an unnamed cleric asks for “tea as a medicine” to help in a battle with boils.51

In keeping with a long tradition, the ceremonial use of tea was common. When there was a birth in the Kanezawa family or on the third anniversary of his father Akitoki’s death, tea was consumed.52 One document describes a variety of tea utensils employed in the coming of age ceremony for Hōjō Takatoki in 1309.53 The Kanezawa also frequently provided tea to Shōmyōji and other Buddhist institutions for ceremonial purposes. The reading of the Lotus Sutra has already been noted as a ritual requiring tea; Sadaaki gave Ken’a three bags of tea for use in a great tea bowl (dai chawan) for the summer ritual when the ancestors were venerated (urabon).54 Rites honoring Buddhist patriarchs such as Kūkai could not have proceeded without the necessary amount of tea.55

The Kanezawa collection reveals that Shōmyōji was a major consumer of the beverage, essentially in four ways.56 First, Ken’a, the chief monk throughout most of Sadaaki’s active life, used the beverage for a variety of events befitting his position. These would include some of the rituals already mentioned. Second, he also gave presents to the branch temple Gokurakuji in Kamakura and to the Kanezawa family, although he received more presents
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than he gave. Third, the many monks who dwelt within the precincts of Shōmyōji also drank tea daily. Finally, tea was utilized to provide financial support to the temple both through its production and in other business dealings. In a document dated to 1317, an individual asks for the purchase of five kin (3,000 grams) of tea, three kin at one price and two at another.\(^57\) This type of transaction undoubtedly helped to fill Shōmyōji’s coffers.

Tea gatherings were the newest form of consumption, coming on the scene as the quality of tea improved in step with technological breakthroughs. Sadaaki was a main figure in the tea parties of the early fourteenth century, whether they were held in Kyoto or Kamakura. No one knows how Sadaaki came by his affinity for tea, but it is likely that he began imbibing the drink at an early age. Even before he was appointed to the Rokuhara Office in 1302, Sadaaki had ample opportunity to consume tea at his homes in the Kanto. One was located in Kamakura near the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine and was for official business, and the second was situated on the Kanezane ancestral lands, to which Sadaaki retired. In Kamakura, his home included a room (kaisho) for greeting and entertaining guests. Tea was served there. In Kanezawa, Sadaaki apparently held frequent tea gatherings (chakai): “If I could receive even a little of the best new tea (shincha) from the temple, I would be happy. Because people who like tea come and enter [into our house], I must always prepare for them.”\(^58\) This particular record dates from 1317, after Sadaaki had returned from his appointments in Kyoto, but it is likely that his wealthy and politically powerful family prepared for tea gatherings often. The documents even refer to a storehouse for charcoal for use in tea parties.

Moreover, it is clear that “the temple” to which Sadaaki was referring was Shōmyōji, just over the mountains from his ancestral Kanezawa estate and lands. As noted earlier, this temple had tea fields within its precincts and produced the herb from several of its proprietary lands, so there is every reason to believe that Sadaaki was exposed to tea at a young age, even while still a resident of the Kanto. On another occasion, Sadaaki mentioned wisteria viewing, for which he requested “two or three kinds of new tea” from Shōmyōji.\(^59\)

The tea parties as revealed in the Kanezawa collection suggest themes apparent in gatherings of later times. At the typical party, friends such as Ken’a prepared not only tea but also noodles, Chinese dumplings, or teacakes for a light snack. Chinese poems were written and exchanged among the guests. The room had its full complement of Chinese goods (karamono), brought from China in one of the ships traveling there under Sadaaki’s auspices. Sources imply that Ken’a, an avid Zen monk, had enjoyed these parties with Sadaaki’s father and some of his housemen.
Sadaaki refrained from writing Chinese poetry; he mostly enjoyed the tea and ceremonial activities.  

Tea parties such as those noted symbolize the transformation that tea was just beginning to undergo at the end of the Kamakura period. Acquired through trade and taxation as well as gift giving, tea had become an object of individual pleasure seeking, although it still retained its medicinal purposes. As stone tea grinders and bamboo whisks became more common, they had made this newest function for the beverage possible. The cultivation methods at Toganoo also spread to new areas. As more care was taken in the farming of tea, Toganoo became Japan’s first brand name for the beverage. This transformation in the taste and ultimately in the function of tea would hasten its spread to other social classes, who cultivated, processed, and consumed tea in an increasingly mass market.

THE GRADUAL EXPANSION OF THE TEA MARKET DURING THE MID- AND LATE 1300s

With the destruction of the Kamakura shogunate in 1333, Japan entered a long era of sporadic civil strife and disunity. After a brief period of rule in the Kenmu Restoration of 1333–1336, Ex-emperor GoDaigo squared off against the Ashikaga family in internecine combat engulfing Kyoto between 1336 and 1338. GoDaigo established his headquarters in Yoshino, south of Kyoto in Yamato Province, and Ashikaga Takauji captured another branch of the imperial family to create the Muromachi shogunate seated in Kyoto. From 1339 through 1350, hostilities became regionalized in eastern Honshu, Kyushu, and Yamato. Then widespread violence erupted again within the leadership of the Ashikaga family during 1350–1355. After 1355, the two courts fought mostly in western Honshu, Kyushu, and Yamato. Warfare decreased noticeably after 1363, but violence erupted now and again until 1394, by which time the Ashikaga had managed to unify the imperial line under their control.

The effect of these wars and campaigns was to accelerate the trend toward political and economic regionalism. The new Muromachi shogunate reigned in conjunction with about thirty-seven local leaders known as constable lords (shugo daimyo), each of whom controlled about one to three provinces in a rather tenuous grasp. Usually these daimyo were the most powerful family within their bailiwick, but there were other samurai bands and religious institutions that held considerable properties and economic interests within the daimyo’s jurisdiction. During the fourteenth century, with violence widespread, Japan became a mosaic of political and economic blocs.
The habit-forming beverage, now sweeter and tastier than ever, prospered within this decentralized context. Beginning around 1350, a budding tea industry began to emerge. Different regions of Japan competed against each other with their own unique brands of tea:

Of the famous tea mountains of our dynasty, Toganoo is the best. Ninnaji, Daigoji, Uji, Hamuro [in Yamato], Hannyaji [in Yamato], and Kannōji [in Tanba]: these are next. In addition, Muroo in Yamato, Yashima in Iga, Kawai in Ise, Kiyomi in Suruga, and Kawagoe in Musashi—all these are specially mentioned throughout the realm. The famous places at Ninnaji and Yamato and Iga compare to the tea fields here and there just like agate to trash. Then, too, Toganoo compares to Ninnaji and Daigoji like gold to lead.61

This quotation, taken from a source completed during the mid-fourteenth century, lists the most famous tea production centers in Japan. While the most delicious tea apparently still came from Yamato and Yamashiro, it is notable that tea drinkers could also find the tasty beverage in Tanba, Iga, Ise, Suruga, and Musashi.

These named places may have been the best, but tea patches were also located “here and there” throughout the realm. Other records dating to the period 1340–1400 describe fields in Saïdaiji and Hamuro in Yamato, Yamashina (2), Uji (2), and Saga in Yamashiro, Kii (3), Settsu (3), Tanba (3), Izumi (2), Mino and Shimōsa (3).62 By the 1350s, tea was being cultivated, processed, and consumed widely throughout the Kinai, central Honshu, and the Kanto plain. As one writer of the 1300s put it, “new tea flows unexpectedly throughout the world.”63 Outstanding brand-name centers of tea had multiplied with the shift to a more regional political and economic structure, and would become an essential ingredient in the rise of a consumer society much later.

With many different brands competing against one another, tea was on its way to becoming big business, as is implied in this incident dated to the first half of the fourteenth century:

Every year we collect ten kin [6,000 grams] of your Akaiwa tea, don’t we? This year, too, we collected ten kin, and according to various rumors at this time, mysterious “evil bands” (akutō) rose up on the roads. We took great precautions and found a guide. Because of this, we did not lose a great deal [of tea]. In the end, the road guide desired two kin [about 1,200 grams], and since we said that we would give up that much, we have been grievously admonished in various ways. Despite this, because we have brought [the tea] with no incident, we present to you eight kin [about 4,800 grams].64
This tea was probably due to Shōmyō-ji annually as a tax, but during the period of violence accompanying the fall of Kamakura and the wars between GoDaigo and the Ashikaga, outlaws on the road made transporting the valuable cargo dangerous. In this case, the brigands lost out when the carriers engaged a guide who knew the value of the cargo that he was bringing to the temple. What he did with his portion of the tea is not known, but his ready acceptance of one-fifth of this freight as payment for delivery suggests that tea was a valuable market commodity. The temple’s admonition of the haulers also shows that tea was an irreplaceable item for the clergy.

There are other indications of the increasing value being assigned to tea. During the wars between the Northern and Southern Dynasties, tea from Tōzenji in Migatani is listed right along with rice provisions, implying that the beverage was procured for troops. Perhaps troops carrying tea provisions spread the beverage to new areas. Most notably, tea fields increasingly appear in land documents, particularly deeds of commendation to temples and other Buddhist institutions in memory of a believer. The very first describes a donation to Mount Kōya in 1341; later sacral gifts include a Hamuro field (18 x 33 meters) in Yamato to Rinsenji in 1354; two Settsu patches to Tada Shrine in 1363 and again in 1366; a Tanba field given to the provincial Gokurakuji in 1368; a Saga patch donated to Rinsenji in 1368; an inheritance of a tea plot in Kumano, enacted in 1382; two fields listed near Kyoto in 1389 and 1391; another commendation of .1 acre to Tada Shrine in 1393; and finally, two gifts to Kumidadera in Izumi Province in 1393 and 1394. Usually these gifts include information about other dry fields in the vicinity; the local landscape seems to have been a mixture of small farming patches used for various purposes. The growing value attached to these fields undoubtedly implies improving cultivation methods for tea patches, a trend evident in other types of dry and irrigated agriculture at this time too. Just as clearly as tea itself was now a marketable commodity with a cash value, the lands that produced the bush had acquired considerable economic value for their owners.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the first prices for tea become available. In a tax document dated to 1382 for Akaiwa in Shimo Kawabe Estate, property of Shōmyō-ji, one kin (600 grams) is listed as bringing 300 copper coins. Altogether, between 1355 and 1402, prices for tea appear twelve times—five for Kyoto, thrice for Kanezawa, and once each for Kamakura, Ninnaji, and Harima. Because the amount of tea sold is not always specified, it is possible to make only a few generalizations from these prices, except that Kyoto tea was for sale for between 28.5 and 32 copper coins per kin, while tea in Kamakura cost 172.2 coins. One batch of
what must have been especially fine tea from Ninnaji cost 300 coins per kin in 1384. Therefore, tea seems to have been plentiful and cheap in and around the Muromachi capital, while the beverage came at a much dearer price in areas farther away from the city. Still, it is significant that by the late 1300s a market for tea extended from Kyoto to Kamakura.

All kinds of individuals and institutions were involved in the fourteenth-century tea market. Historians have uncovered a more detailed picture of the major role that tea continued to play in the economy of Buddhist temples, especially the aforementioned Shōmyōji. During one year in the 1340s, tea fetched more than thirteen strings of cash, and Shōmyōji utilized the proceeds to buy rice, beans, and perilla oil.\(^69\) A document from about the same period states that the tea harvest from a previous year was worth 6.8 strings of cash, and that after the temple paid tea gatherers 3.45 strings for their work, the remainder was to be allotted toward the expenses of the institution.\(^70\) In 1354, Shōmyōji paid out at least 900 copper coins to tea pickers on some of its far-flung lands.\(^71\) References to tea workers suggest that the industry was moving toward a higher level of complexity and organization, as the population increased, laborers were more plentiful and thus cheaper, agronomic techniques grew more productive, social units turned more numerous and cohesive, and commercial relations became more monetized and efficient.

Specifically, overcoming the labor bottleneck was an important improvement for tea, with the large workforce required for plucking and processing. Unsurprisingly, tea dealers provide the first information about the condition of their employees beginning in the mid-fourteenth century.\(^72\) Such workers as pickers and roasters must have been in demand, because in 1350 the head of Gion Shrine quarreled with Enryakuji on Mount Hiei about some “borrowed” tea pickers from the shrine. The shrine wanted Enryakuji to grant the laborers freedom from their normal obligation to work fields in Yamashiro producing for Kōrakuji, a temple located in the Kyoto vicinity. Perhaps there was some confusion on the matter, because, in a letter dated to 3/29, another lower Gion official lamented that laborers had not yet even begun to pick the tea for Kōrakuji. He applied to begin plucking on 4/1, probably to receive Gion’s workers back in a hurry. He also recorded the gift of one bag of tea from Enryakuji, possibly from the fields of Kōrakuji. The shrine head, however, sent a letter on 3/29 expressing his pleasure at learning that his workers had indeed been freed from their labors because the leaves had not yet sprouted in great quantity at Kōrakuji. On the same day, Gion Shrine noted that it had received two more bags of tea—three in total—all from the fields of Kōrakuji controlled by Enryakuji.
On 2/23/1352, correspondence from Gion Shrine reveals more about the nature of the workforce. It mentions a tea patch apparently at issue during 3/6 and 3/7/1352. To be more specific, lowly shrine workers called *rincha* were scheduled to begin processing tea on 3/6, even as other female laborers known as *miyagomori* were busy plucking leaves. Two roasters produced two *kin* (1,200 grams), or about twenty bags of what was probably powdered tea on that day. On 3/7/1352, both types of workers continued the tea picking and used one roaster to make thirty *ryō* of tea, a smaller amount. Thus at Gion Shrine, the plucking and roasting of the tea leaves fell to lowly female attendants, even though they did not produce too much of the beverage. On 4/28, the Head of Gion Shrine made a present of low-quality leftover tea leaves, “even though the shape [of the leaves] was poor.”

Three years later on 12/20/1355, Suda Hachiman Shrine in Kii Province tried to prohibit abuse of its workforce. A record of three articles was sent from a locally powerful warrior also serving as the shrine head to six shrine attendants, prohibiting certain behaviors. In the first article, attendants overseeing tea picking are accused of forcing the laborers (*waranbe*) to do the tea plucking without pay, a practice the head condemned. In the second, attendants were warned against having the workers pick, not only the attendants’ own tea, but also that of their sons-in-law. In the third article, the head of the shrine writes that because the attendants were not providing much remuneration to the tea gatherers, they were going hungry. Moreover, when the attendants did not need workers they took collateral from them anyway, a breach of conduct roundly disapproved. It is difficult to determine how widespread these labor abuses may have been at other centers such as the aforementioned Gion Shrine, but this record certainly emphasizes the lowly status accorded to tea workers. Those laborers toiled in poor conditions during the Tokugawa and modern eras in Japan too, and today often make great exertions in such circumstances in India and Sri Lanka.

During the latter half of the fourteenth century in Japan, tea appears to have been rapidly becoming a commercial commodity. Multiple brand names were well known, even as improved cultivation spread to new areas. Tea was so valuable to Buddhist clerics that the commodity played a significant role in financing their institutions’ activities. Lands producing the plant gained in value until tea patches appeared in numerous kinds of economic transactions. What prices are available for the beverage indicate that a tea-trading network encompassed the region from Kyoto to Kamakura. The first information on tea organizations show the widespread employment of tea gatherers and processing agents, individuals of lowly status.
sometimes suffering abuse. All these facts point to the distant future of the delicious beverage for a modern industrial and consumer society. That modernity, however, was a long, long way off in the 1300s.

TRADITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FOURTEENTH-CENTURY TEA

Even during this transitional epoch, tea retained many of its more conservative aspects. Gift giving was a most common means of exchanging tea leaves. Not all tea suddenly became the green powdered variety; in fact, beverage types multiplied as the knowledge of tea processing became more widespread. Court functionaries resisted buying and selling tea on the market and instead did preparations on their own, or had their servants do them. Most important, for the leading intellectuals of the period tea retained its associations with China and Buddhism as an exotic and foreign drink.

For example, on 12/1/1343, the head (shamu shikkō) of the very same Gion Shrine that had its own labor force to pick tea expressed gratitude for a gift of one bag (tsutsumi) from distant Mino Province. He then stated that next year there would be a tea picking at the imperial palace (gosho), suggesting that those patches originating in the Heian period were still productive. In the lean year of 1350, Gion bought some leaves from the Yamashina district of Kyoto. In 1351, Gion Shrine purchased more “fresh leaves” from the same place.

No one knows for sure what the officials at Gion Shrine did with the tea leaves they had accumulated. On 3/23/1350, however, an attendant at Gion put to work two tea roasters (hoiro; figure 3) and dried 1.65 koku of oxidized black tea (kuronicha) and 1.42 kin of toasted tea (aburicha), possibly for sale. What types of tea were kuronicha and aburicha? Although it is clear that these two products were not powdered green tea, it is difficult to tell exactly what they may have been. The former appears to have been some type of oxidized black tea, perhaps akin to what is known in Japan today as batabatacha. The latter is still consumed in China today; tea leaves are roasted but not ground and then placed in hot water for drinking. It may well have been what later came to be known as stir-roasted tea (kamairicha). The exact process remains unclear, but it is important to note that residents of the Japanese islands consumed an increasing variety of teas. Matcha hardly took the islands by storm.

The diary of Nakahara Moromori, a low-level legal expert employed by the court, reveals that some people resisted the commodification of their favorite drink. During the wars that beset the region, minor officials
such as Nakahara probably suffered a decline in income. Rather than buying tea in the Kyoto market, they continued their age-old practice of gift giving by searching out tea plots within the city and doing the work of picking and processing themselves.

In entries ranging from 1339 through 1367, Nakahara jotted down his experiences with tea.  

On 8/1/1339, a ceremonial day (hassaku) when gifts were exchanged, Nakahara gave and received several types of tea from acquaintances in the bureaucracy.

On 5/11/1340, Nakahara processed tea from a patch at Ume no kōji, located within Kyoto.  

There were probably several places within urban Kyoto where tea bushes flourished. On 4/6/1345, Nakahara processed tea from a place known as the “granary” (gokusōin), situated in the western part of the city, and gave the product as a gift to an official in the retired emperor’s household.  

Given the date, the tea must have been the first of the season. Later on 4/3/1365, after processing tea leaves, Nakahara reported that the group had just over four kin (2,400 grams), which they entrusted to their servants to bring home.  

Occasionally, Nakahara dispatched some underlings (aozamurai; kabu) to do the plucking, but an official usually processed the leaves. On 4/24/1367, Nakahara accepted nine bags (tsutsumi) from faraway Iga Province.  

Even in Kyoto, the market for tea was limited at this time.

Finally, consider the cultural image of tea in the 1300s. Zen clerics were, of course, the leading intellectuals of their time. As early as the late
Tea Becomes a Beverage for a Wider Market, 1300–1600

In the thirteenth century, Zen Buddhism began flourishing in Japan and tea played a critical role in the life of Zen monasteries. Many Zen institutions adopted rules governing the drinking of tea. Called the Pure Precepts of the Great Mirror (Daikan shingi), these principles were based on Chinese models and governed all aspects of the behavior of Zen monks. For example, when one entered a Zen temple for the purpose of religious practice, rules dictated that the visitor be given a bowl of powdered tea by four monks, all seated in Chinese fashion around a low table (yotsugashira charei). Tea was also served during various ceremonies throughout the year (such as Yōsai’s birthday at Kyoto’s Kenninji). Pure Precepts also outlined the care of tea utensils, as they were used for meals as well. Zen monks even took tea with their baths in the summertime.

Zen clergy produced a voluminous literature revealing some of the associations that the beverage had for them. In particular, the so-called Five Mountains Poetry composed during the late Kamakura and Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties frequently refers to tea:

“In Gratitude for the Blessings of Tea”

Visiting snowdrifts in the early spring,
I plan a marvelous meal.
I crush the golden powder in a grinder (usu).
I boil brownish-red fowl and beast in a pot.
Gathering spring waters, I use Lu Yu as my master.
Holding a small bowl, I recall Lu-tong.
The Wuyi flavor tried once,
How can it be as good as this one pouch [of tea]?

“My Feelings on Planting Tea”

I regret every day my black karma and every year it becomes heavier.
Taking up a hoe alone by myself, I walk across the garden in spring.
If I do not plant tea in the mountains, all will remain like this.
After my life, will there be some way that my name can be known?

“The Pavilion for Collecting Pure Water”

In the sky under the pavilion, the snow on the river has half cleared.
For boiling tea, first I try to collect deep clear water.
If Lu Yu tried this flavor,
Would he change his mind and make Lian and Quan the most famous places?

Originating from such renowned Zen temples as Nanzenji, Kenchōji, Engakuji, Manjūji, Tōfukuji, Jufukuji, and Shōkokuji, the poems show that, at least for these religious intellectuals, tea still had strong associations with the exotic and foreign. The poetry was written in Chinese, and references to adepts like Lu Yu and Lu Tong, such scenic spots in China as
Mount Wuyi, and the springs at Lian and Quan suggest that tea reminded its fourteenth-century Zen drinkers very much of the land of its origin. Buddhism is another theme particularly apparent in the second poem; all three poems evoke a sense of reclusiveness and being alone with one’s thoughts. Even after 650 years in Japan, tea was often a foreign—even mysterious—thing, to be cherished for its ability to inspire poetry, aloofness, and visions of the distant Middle Kingdom.

THE DRAMATIC GROWTH OF A GREEN-TEA INDUSTRY, 1400–1550: CULTIVATION

During this century and a half, a synergy of the general demographic and agricultural trends noted previously encouraged tea production to grow by leaps and bounds. Historians suspect this because references to the amounts of tea to be consumed increase by ten or even one hundred times. For instance, in a document from 1400 listing expenses for a pagoda, tea was given in nineteen bags for the first plucking and eighteen for the second. A diary entry for 1405 mentions twenty bags carried to Kyoto from Kii Province, and the next year an estate produced seventy bags. Amounts ranging from thirty to fifty bags were common during the early fifteenth century. Then, beginning in the 1430s, the amounts of tea given as gifts or produced on farms rose yet again, to the hundreds of kin (over 60 kilograms). According to the Kanmon gyoki, a diary kept by an imperial offspring, in 1431 the diarist received over 200 kin (120 kgs) of special tea (racha); then, in the next year, the amount was 300 kin (180 kgs). The year 1432 must have seen an unusually rich harvest, because another document states that Yoshioka Estate in Inaba Province produced 100 kin (60 kgs) in the fourth month alone. In 1441, an estate in Tōtōmi Province yielded 300 bags, while in 1442 an estate in Settsu produced 120 kin (72 kg). Although, of course, small amounts still appear, in general references to tea are in amounts of 30 bags or more.

The diffusion of tea cultivation to virtually all the regions suited climatically for the plant is a second measure of the growth of the industry. Altogether, historians can pinpoint the location of about ninety tea fields for the era dating from Emperor Saga’s order to plant in the Kinai in 815 until the end of the medieval period in 1600. Of those ninety tea patches, exactly half date from 1397 to the end of medieval times. Another thirty-two are found in historical materials originating from the preceding period discussed above (1341–1396). Clearly, the fourteenth century was a time of expansion for tea growing, and the ensuing two hundred years continued the trend to its natural limits. What is more, scholars have not
yet finished culling sources for references to tea fields, and so it is likely that many fields have gone unnoted.94

It is not simply that there are so many more references to tea patches during the closing centuries of the medieval era. Those forty-five tea fields show a geographical distribution throughout western, central, and eastern Japan where the soil and climatic conditions are the most appropriate for the tea bush to grow. As might be expected, the Kinai and its nearby provinces garner the most references, with Yamashiro having eleven, Yamato eight, Ōmi four, Kii three, and Settsu, Wakasa, Kawachi, and Tanba one each. Proceeding outward from the capital region, western Honshu has one allusion each for Harima and Inaba, while central Honshu includes data for Mino (3), Tōtōmi (2), Iga (1), Ise (1), and Echizen (1). There is one reference each for Sanuki in Shikoku, Shimōsa in the Kanto, and for northern (Buzen) and southern Kyushu (Satsuma). Clearly, tea production had become an enterprise that flourished within many provinces south of cold northeastern Honshu. The scholar who drew up these statistics believes that many unnamed Zen temples also took up cultivation during the Muromachi period (1333–1573), especially in Kyushu.95 Tea was so popular that merchants found profit in marketing the beverage to northeastern Honshu.96 There is even indirect evidence that farmers were cropping tea, imported through China, to the far south in the independent kingdom of Okinawa.97

The increase in tea production proceeded as part of a more general social and economic transformation beginning to sweep Japan from the late thirteenth century.98 In particular, population expansion yielded larger numbers of cheaper labor, a bottleneck that had discouraged most enterprises, especially tea production, before 1300. The improved flavor, habit-forming character, close ties to Zen, and possible use for military provisions also comprised factors particularly related to rising demand for the herb. Another specific reason for the wider diffusion of tea was the importation of a new strain from southern China.99 As noted in chapter 1, tea seeds were first introduced to Japan and Korea from China during the middle or late eighth century, a relatively long pistil being their distinguishing feature. For Japan, scientists have also noted only the widespread diffusion of a second tea plant with a short pistil and a flower shaped differently from that of the earlier strain. Analysis puts the date of its importation into Japan at some time during the middle Muromachi age, likely the fifteenth century. This second tea variety probably came from Hangzhou in southern China, where numerous Zen temples were located. One theory would have it that when the Muromachi shogunate and the Ming dynasty initiated the tally trade in the late 1300s, Zen monks and other travelers brought seeds and perhaps even plants back from this region in
southern China. This second, fifteenth-century strain of tea plant spread rapidly throughout Japan, possibly because it was hardier or tasted better. Under these circumstances, it is little wonder that tea cultivation spread quickly and widely in Japan during this era.

Tea could also be grown in small, marginal areas where other crops could not, and the leaves were harvested in the spring before rice was transplanted. Careful study has allowed scholars to develop a typology for the various tea fields of this era. First, there were those true tea fields (honbatake) planted as unirrigated dry fields. Bushes were located in one spot and measured in the same units (chōtanbu) utilized for rice paddies, although they seem to have covered only a small area. Often pine trees were dispersed among the tea bushes to provide cover from the sun and produce a sweeter tea. Because these were dry fields, it was not unusual for peasants to crop wheat, soybeans, and even untaxed products such as chestnuts or persimmons among the tea plants too. In modern agronomy, scholars distinguish between those often rather sizable fields devoted exclusively to tea cultivation and those where other crops are mixed in, but during the medieval period such a distinction did not exist.

Second, there were those tea patches farmed in the mountains (yamacha). It is important to remember that the first tea grown in Japan was associated with temples such as Enryakuji and Shōmyōji, and that these temples were situated in the mountains. Toganoo was also a mountainous, tree-filled location. Examples of these hilly tea fields have appeared throughout this narrative, especially in the section concerning the Kanezawa Hōjō. As later examples, in 1451 Mount Happō in Yamato Province produced tea, and in 1508 Mount Daigo near Kyoto was recorded as the source of mountain tea. Among the mountain fields, many must have been cropped in swidden style. Mountain tea patches were also mixed with groves and commons near villages. Even today, farmers in Yamanashi prefecture grow tea bushes intermingled with trees and prepare the beverage for consumption there in the wooded mountains.

Third, cultivators tended tea bushes in their household plots. As tea increasingly became a tax item from estates (shōen), on-site landlords grew tea fields near the offices of the estate. Two examples exist for the fourteenth century: in 1354 at Sumida Estate in Kii Province, and in 1382 for land controlled by an official of Ise Shrine. Later, in 1553, a local magnate of Suruga Province possessed near his residence a tea field allotted exclusively for his own use.

The fourth type of tea patch was perhaps the most noteworthy, as it was located on the raised boundaries (aze; kuro; mama) between rice paddies (keihan chaen). As rice farming spread and became more stable after 1300,
cultivators looked for second crops to grow on the raised dividers between wet-rice paddies, including beans and tea. As one may imagine, often rice paddies were situated on the flat extensions molded from mountains; the boundaries among the paddies might be steep and curved. Apparently, these paths were well suited to tea cultivation. The scholar who has described this type of tea patch in greatest detail has found examples from 1397, 1425, 1539, 1559, and 1575.102

Such cases reveal much about tea cultivation and the land rights associated with them at this time. In 1397, a document of commendation indicates that a tea field was included along with eight tan of rice paddy; a subunit of Tōdaiji simply farmed and harvested the tea without regard for the entity collecting the rice tax. In 1425, a document of commendation indicates that tea bushes occupied the long, slim raised dividers between rice paddies in Ōmi Province. According to the record, the tea patch was small but located on the southern exposure of the house where it would receive more sunlight.

At first, the paddy and tea field were considered a unit, but as tea bushes began to produce more, the tea and rice lands fell under differing jurisdictions. In 1547, this complex set of rights led to a dispute (sōron) about the tea field’s status as a set with the rice paddy, with one side asserting their oneness and another protesting that they were separate. In the outcome, the Muromachi shogunate decided that the two were indeed different lands under separate jurisdictions, implying the increasing productivity and value of tea patches.

Because of the complexity of tax and land tenure arrangements, all sorts of agreements were written. In 1539, Upper Kamo Shrine loaned the product from tea bushes situated on twenty-four paddy boundaries in Yamashiro Province to an aristocrat for ten years. In this manner, the unnamed civil aristocrat undoubtedly came into possession of tea for both drinking and gift giving. In 1559, a peasant associated with Ise Shrine sold one of these “boundary tea fields” together with other dry fields, but in other cases the two might be auctioned off to different owners. In 1575, a “boundary tea patch” shown in maps for Yamashiro Province was among the lands commended to a minor local Buddhist temple by the Mibu family, a middle-ranked aristocratic family. The agreement allowed the temple to cultivate and harvest the tea in return for 10 coins paid to the Mibu family annually. The beverage was then used during a reading of the Lotus Sutra for the funeral services of farmers in a nearby village. The “boundary tea field” played a crucial role in the spread of tea cultivation throughout the southwestern two-thirds of the archipelago and was part of the transformation in agriculture that took place during the latter half of the medieval age.
Early on, landlords directly managed, cultivated, and harvested the tea in most patches, no matter what kind they might have been. In 1450, on Mount Happō the tea bushes were regularly cleaned with more than fifty laborers, and in the fourth month Kōfukuji used twenty-seven people to pluck tea leaves. The Mibu family had servants pluck and process their tea in 1478. Another aristocratic family called the Konoe allotted 200 coins to maintain a tea field in Yamashiro Province, while the aristocratic Yamashina family planted tea bushes in 1480.

Tea fields located within estates were usually associated with a small temple (jian) that served the residents. These small temples might also be located within the estate official compound. Apparently, all the equipment for tea processing—a stone tea grinder, a roaster (hoiro)—was available on these tea farms, and historical materials typically show that cleaning of the estate tea patches commenced in the second month. Tea picking then followed during the third and fourth months, utilizing as many as fifty workers. Thereafter processing took place, much as it had since the mid-thirteenth century.

Also during the 1400s, however, some peasants living in communal settlements (sō) began taking control of their own tea fields. At Suganoura and Imabori Villages in Ōmi Province, for example, the members controlled and managed their own tea fields. The same also held true for the bushes already noted in the 1575 example, while in Ise Province peasants bought and sold dry fields that included tea bushes. During the 1500s, many peasant communities took over direct management of tea fields in return for paying rent or taxes. At Wachi Estate in Tanba Province, for instance, the landlord collected 400 coins per year from numerous small tea fields. By the Warring States period (1467–1590), small but stable tea fields had spread to innumerable peasant villages, with the tea being collected as a tax or sold on the market. Tea production had reached a new high by 1550, thanks to more intensive cultivation methods that engaged many sectors of the population.

THE CONTINUING MATURATION OF A MEDIEVAL TEA INDUSTRY, 1400–1550: EXCHANGE, MARKETING, AND CONSUMPTION

With production at an all-time high, more and more tea changed hands. Three modes predominated: gift giving, land taxation, and buying and selling on the market. Even during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gift giving still represented an important form of exchange; over a third of the references to tea shipments in one compendium of sources portray
the commodity as a gift. Of these references, almost all involve donations to civil aristocrats; apparently these customs continued despite the straitened circumstances in which many families found themselves during these centuries. Presents to Buddhist institutions occur occasionally, but most temples either grew their own bushes or found other ways to obtain the tea that they needed. The rest of the time warriors were the donors or recipients of tea gifts. The Muromachi shogunate maintained its own tea patches for the purpose of donating tea to various persons and groups. Gifts were doled out as thank offerings, funeral presents, seasonal gifts, and congratulations upon the assumption of an important governmental post. The elites also gave tea gifts for an audience (especially with the emperor), and for the safe delivery of a child. Usually the gifts were in small quantities of a few bags or so. Toganoo tea was popular as a gift denoting special respect or meaning: “[T]he annual tea from Toganoo has arrived. Please convey my thanks and happiness. Hirohashi Morimitsu”

A prominent civil aristocrat, Hirohashi was clearly pleased with the regular gift from the “sweet fields” of Toganoo.

These gifts were so frequent among the elites because tea continued to play a multifaceted ritualistic function. Among warriors, there were rites involving tea for the shogun Ashikaga Yoshinori (1394–1441) on several occasions. The Muromachi shogunate utilized large amounts of tea for ceremonies conducted on 2/24 of each year. The Irobe, a samurai family living in Echigo Province during the Warring States period, conducted New Year’s rituals during 1/8–1/15 in which they doled out the herb in large amounts. This samurai family also used tea for other festivals and possessed tea shops. In overseas relations, Muromachi emissaries to Korea expected and received tea for their visits during the 1400s.

In 1420, Korean ambassador to the Muromachi shogunate Song Hui-gyŏng spent half a day at the Zen temple Myōrakuji, admiring the green grass and imbibing stir-roasted steeped tea (kamairicha; tōcha) popular by that time in both Ming China and Chosŏn Korea. Civil aristocrats and Buddhist clerics continued to drink and make offerings of tea in rituals, as described throughout this book.

It is symbolic of the age and the increasing productivity of tea fields that most references in which the plant changed hands between 1396 and 1514 encompassed taxation from estates. About 40 percent of the time exchanges during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries involved a tax item. With the exception of an estate in Tōtōmi Province in 1441 that provided 300 kin (180 kgs) to a temple, all the tea-producing estates were located in the Kinai or nearby provinces. Most recipients were temples, including Kōfukuji, Tōji, Enryakuji, and Tōdaiji. Civil aristocrats also
received small amounts of tax tea from local farms. In only one case was a warrior (shugo daimyo) the beneficiary, and then apparently for his help in collecting the tax.

The tea tax was usually collected in kind and shipped to the big cities of Nara and Kyoto. By the 1400s, some peasant villages had a freestanding teahouse (chaya) where merchants or other estate representatives gathered the tea tax for shipment to the city. Amounts were usually small, especially payments to civil aristocrats. Examples include the Yamashiro estate that delivered 30 kin to Kōfukuji and an Echizen farm that sent twenty bags of tea to Nara. Large amounts ranging from 60 to 180 kgs also appear however. Some tax collectors preferred cash to the commodity.

As one might expect from the collection of the tea tax in cash, buying and selling the beverage on the market was a growing method for obtaining tea. Altogether there are nine references to the marketing of this item between 1405 and 1506, about 22 percent of the total number of tea exchanges. With one exception for Kōfukuji, these exchanges involved civil aristocrats buying or selling tea on the market. For example, a civil aristocrat sold 3.5 kin of tea in 1405 to pay his workers. When Kōfukuji bought in Nara, it bought in quantity (35 kin), at prices varying from 12 coins per unit to 80 coins per kin.

The Yamashina family of civil aristocrats appears in over half the references to the buying and selling of tea. In fact, the diary of the Yamashina family provides an excellent example of the ways in which the typical aristocratic household might expect to come by its tea. One entry for 1468 reads:

Point: [On 5/7] there were four kin from Noguchi. The Otowa hut produced 50 bags. Thus Noguchi Hyōe's fee for serving as a middleman [in this tax] is secretly calculated as 100 hiki 6 coins.
Point: [On 5/10] Noguchi Hyōe's purchase of tea in the amount of five kin arrived. We allotted 150 coins per unit.
Point: [On 5/13] Noguchi's tea was two kin at 120 coins per unit. Also, one kin of tea tax came.
Point: [On 5/14] two bags of Fushimi tea were sent.

According to this short passage, the Yamashina received tea as a gift (from Fushimi), as a tax item (from Otowa hut and elsewhere), and through buying on the market. So one family took advantage of all three methods to obtain its tea, a mixture of methods likely employed by civil aristocrats, temples, shrines, and warrior families alike.

Finally, sources on the price of tea for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are much more plentiful and informative than ever before.
1413 and 1567 there were 178 records of transactions in which prices were listed, far more than during the fourteenth century. Of these deals, over one hundred took place in Kyoto. It is not always possible to determine the unit price for the transaction, but apparently tea commonly sold for as little as 2–6 coins for a drink, although Uji tea fetched a far higher price (500 coins). Other centers of the tea business included Nara, with over twenty transactions, and Kanezawa, Hyōgo/Nishinomiya, and Kama-kura with eight each. Although scholars cannot be certain about all these markets, the price of the beverage did not vary nearly as much from place to place as it had during the 1300s. In Nara, it was possible to buy tea for as little as 11 coins; in Kanezawa, 15 coins was the going price. Notably, transactions also apparently took place at tea-producing estates; both Niimi Estate in Bitchū Province and Kuze Estate in Yamashiro were scenes of market activity. Altogether, these data suggest that tea production had expanded greatly ever since the early 1300s and that the result was a vigorous market in tea that enveloped much of the archipelago.

There are other signs that tea was a growing business. Between 1408 and 1530, the transfer, donation, and sale of tea fields occurred eighteen times, at least according to one list of sources. Most strikingly, this total includes only two transfers, two commendations, one dispute over a tea patch, and one use of a tea field as collateral. In other words, two-thirds of the references are to the sale of tea plots. For example, in 1455, one Tarōbō sold a tea patch located within the precincts of Kumano Shrine in Kii Province:

On the sale of a tea field:

Concerning the above, out of necessity, I sell the above place for one string of cash. From next year through the year of the rat, for the next twelve years only, I sell [the tea field]. When the twelve years are over, it should be returned in its original state. Thus the sale is attested to as in this deed. Kyōtoku 4/4/23 (1455)

In this particular case, the sale was only temporary, but usually the patches were permanently alienated. Particularly between 1449 and 1530, documents in which tea plots are bought or sold predominate, and over half the cases involve tea fields at Uji. Notably, in 1524 and 1530, the Kanbayashi, a family that came to control the production in Uji during the Edo period, was beginning to accumulate parcels in Uji as the reputation of Uji tea soared during the sixteenth century.

Although much of the buying and selling of tea was free on the market, there are indications that some institutions where the demand for tea was especially high created their own merchant organizations (chaza).
In particular, Kōfukuji sponsored its own association of tea merchants to operate in Nara. In return for this monopoly privilege, the merchants promised to pay a fee and keep the temple well supplied with its favorite beverage. In 1459, for example, an aristocratic diary attests to a dispute that erupted between the head of the temple and one of its constituent clerical groups known as the roppō shū. The dispute was over the imposition of a tax (kuji) on shipments of tea within Nara, but the document reveals neither how the dispute was resolved nor anything about the composition of the merchant organization. In 1488, the same source again mentions the tea traders when the head of the organization donated the profits for that year for a festival.

Kōfukuji’s tea business in Nara ran into a problem in 1513 in the form of a recalcitrant samurai. Apparently, under normal circumstances the temple collected a tax (shibachairi kuji) on merchants selling tea in Nara. In 1513, however, the warrior Hashimoto Kanbenosuke “without reason” held up the shipments and then collected the tax normally due to the temple. According to the complaint, Kōfukuji usually sent permits to these businesspersons at the entrances to Nara and allowed them to trade. Despite that, the warrior robbed the merchants of their permits to do business in Nara and tried to force his own permits on the traders. For instance, the temple complained that the merchants Shōjirōmaru and Yashichi had fees imposed on them as high as 500 coins for their tea shops (chaya). According to one scholar, this “Shibacha” was an inferior grade of tea produced locally and then collected at the village level, where a designated merchant then transported the commodity to Nara. In Nara at least, greedy warriors wanted their slice of the increasingly lucrative tea trade.

By the early 1400s at the latest, merchants also made a living by running tea shops throughout Kyoto and Nara. To explain, during the second half of the thirteenth century, clerics set up “hospitality stations” (settai sho) at road intersections. Originally affiliated with religious institutions, these hospitality stations served free food and drink to prelates making pilgrimages to sacred sites. Usually, the operators were residents of the local temples or shrines; Zen institutions were especially prominent. Because they were designed to give comfort to and bolster the health of wayfaring monks and pilgrims, running these hospitality stations was considered a proper function of the temples and shrines, and they set aside the harvest from certain fields to maintain them. At first, the stations served food and beverages other than tea. According to the Jizō bosatsu reigenki-e, a pictorial source produced during the mid-fourteenth century, however, local monks began serving tea along the roads in western Japan at around 1350. In this scroll there are shelves and a stone tea grinder in the back
of the shop, along with a whisk, black-lacquered round teacups, a *tenmoku* tea bowl, and green-and-white porcelain tea bowls. The male server is dressed as a monk. Tea maintains its Buddhist meaning, but in this instance, there is little connotation of the foreign or exotic. The beverage is well on its way to becoming native to the archipelago.

By the late fourteenth century, these "hospitality stations" had become for-profit tea shops aiming to attract the general populace. Records from as early as 1380 indicate that a merchant had established a tea shop near Kenninji, while one from 1395 suggests a going concern related to Gion Shrine. Kitano Shrine had a tea shop as well. The best-known example hails from Tōji in 1403:

I respectfully request:

The following points as a salesperson of tea: one cup for one copper in front of the Southern Great Gate [of Tōji]

Point: As originally stipulated, I will be allowed to dwell along the southern bank of the river, and even though it is only for a short time, I should not live near the foundation stones under the Gate.

Point: I will never place my tea-making implements in the rooms of temple servants (*miya no tsukai*) of Chinju Hachiman Shrine for even a short time.

Point: I will never take fire into the buildings of the temple.

Point: I will never collect water from the well on the premises.

Concerning these points, if I vary from even one of them, I should be expelled right away from the temple precincts. Respectfully submitted.

[Signatures] Ōei 10/4 (1403)

Tōji’s fears about the fire used to brew the tea turned out to be well-founded, as the very next year, in 1404, the tea seller was tempted by the crowds gathering around the temple and started a fire on the grounds of Tōji. As a result, the temple banned all tea shops from its premises. A law of 1411 repeats many of these points, but also proscribes the “assembling of women for selling tea.” Apparently, the use of young beauties to lure customers into the tea shops began well before the Edo period.

Despite such setbacks, tea shops apparently continued to spring up around Kyoto and Nara, and even in the countryside throughout the 1400s. In 1443, Sin Suk-ju served as an ambassador to Muromachi Kyoto: “People are happy when they drink tea. Some set up tea shops (*chajōm*) along the roads and sell tea. A wayfarer pays out a coin and drinks a bowl.” Historians know much about these tea shops because they are portrayed so frequently in pictorial sources of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Tea scenes are set in common Japanese surroundings.
According to these scrolls and screens, tea shops were of two kinds. First, there were small huts built temporarily on the premises of shrines and temples for pilgrims and festival goers. Second, there were more permanent shops that had a roof of thatch or shingles and an earthen floor with the boiler in a corner and a table where the tea was served. Merchants who had their own more or less permanent shops might belong to an organization such as those of Kōfukuji (zauri) or might be independent (miseuri). Those who worked out of temporary huts often carried their tea-making implements on their backs as peddlers (furiuri; figure 4). As they made their rounds, they shouted to passersby to try a bowl, as is attested to in a poem written in 1380 by a Zen monk:

Opening the window, I hear it:
A voice selling tea.137

There is no mistaking the religious meaning of many of these tea shops especially the temporary ones.138 They are portrayed at the festivals of Gion Shrine, at good-fortune rites (setsubun kai), at ceremonies to ward off hungry ghosts (segaki), and at gatherings where living things were
released into the wild (hōjō-e). Tea shops also operated during fund-raising campaigns (kanjin) and pilgrimages. Apparently doling out a swig of tea was related to the health benefits of the beverage, as it was intended to guard the wellness of the various participants. Even though tea shops aided in all these religious functions, as they did business for cash, the shrine or temple in question usually collected dues from the tea merchants. Low-level shrine residents, such as those mentioned in connection with the processing of tea at Gion Shrine (rincha and miyagomori) or those noted in the 1403 document (miya no tsukai), often pitched in to brew and dole out the tea. According to the Jesuit Luis Frois, many workers were female. Most traders could not afford a stone grinder, and so the religious institution allowed them to use theirs.

For the most part, the tea provided to the general populace is assumed to have been powdered tea (matcha), as may be inferred from the use of a stone grinder. Evidence from short comedic skits (kyōgen), however, suggests that the tea was of low quality (hikusu). Then, too, there were peddlers selling a variety of “steeped” tea (senjicha) with dried ginger or persimmon seeds added as a medicine. The operator simply boiled up the concoction consisting of processed tea leaves and the additives and laddled it into cups. The comedic skit “Something Steeped” (senjimono) portrays just this sort of merchant saying, “Every year I have a seat at the Gion Festival for my tea shop and sell this kind of steeped stuff (senjimono).” Some tea was probably simply steeped tea of a common variety (bancha) that included twigs and stalks, while there was also whipped tea, made by boiling the leaves of the tea and then stirring them into froth with a whisk. Because the leaves were often dried in the sun, some degree of oxidation may have taken place.

Although the saying “a bowl for a coin” has made its way into history books and was mentioned in the 1403 document cited above, the actual price of a bowl of this common tea is a matter of some debate. Based upon documents of practice, one authority believes price to have ranged from three to thirteen coins. Evidence from the Korean envoy cited as well as a comedic skit suggest that a bowl of low-grade tea cost indeed only one coin. In any case, such a low price for a bowl of tea reinforces the idea that a new tea strain entered Japan from China and helped lead to the spread of cultivation and tea sales.

For the commoner population that imbibed tea at these shops, however, the peddlers and sellers must have put on quite a show. Usually the merchants are portrayed with an inferior-grade Chinese porcelain in the palm of the left hand and a tea whisk poised to whip the liquid in the right. For most commoners, it must have been a rare treat to see a
porcelain bowl from China. Tea procedures (temae) for the later “Way of Tea” may have got their start from these traders, who arranged the utensils in a rational way in a small space and prepared the tea with great acumen before a group of drinkers, only to receive the bowl back and clean it for the next guest. Cleanliness, skill, artistry, and hospitality were the watchwords to attract more clients and help them pass the time quickly. The role of these merchants and peddlers in naturalizing the Chinese import for a populace resident in the Japanese archipelago cannot be overstated.

Urban tea shops prospered so long as the Muromachi shogunate (1333–1573) was able to guarantee peace in Kyoto. In the Ōnin War (1467–1477) that so devastated the city, however, many of the tea shops there were destroyed by fire. A 1495 shogunate source, for example, condemns an evil band (akutō) for pillaging the tea shop at Gion Shrine during the night. During the general mayhem of the Warring States period (1467–1590), many tea shops became havens for criminals, and gambling and other illegal activities took place there. Yet even then tea shops flourished in certain areas of the burned-out city. According to the pictorial source the Uesugi bon rakuchū rakugai zu byōbu, these houses continued to serve tea in front of the Southern Gate of Gion Shrine and the entrances to Kiyomizu-dera, Kitano Shrine, and some other places. Even Tōji gave another permit for a tea shop during the Ōnin War.

Finally, although the most detailed written and pictorial sources concern cities such as Nara and Kyoto, there are indications that, beginning in the 1400s, tea shops developed in some peasant villages too. The most well-known example is Imabori Village in Ōmi Province. Such tea shops not only served the local populace but also functioned as a collection point for the tea tax headed to Kyoto. The case of the “Shiba cha” produced for Kōfukuji and already noted also suggests the consumption of tea by villagers around Nara. A collection from 1518 (the Kankinshū) contains the following songs that suggest tea production and consumption at the local level:

I’m late gathering the water for tea. Please let me go . . .
Like the young leaves of new tea, I pluck and am plucked . . .
That young girl is like a tea jar.

The villages that produced and consumed tea usually did so in connection with religious rites, as well as employing tea during negotiations with the lord of an estate or a marauding band of warriors. Some of these rites included festivals surrounding the start and the end of the year, various shrine festivals, and the rite for the return of dead (obon). A song for a
dance (obon odori) from 1539 shows that the consumption of tea was popular among the residents of Kyoto:

Since the shop owner is absent,  
Let us call together those nearby  
And have a big laugh  
As people talk and drink lots of tea.149

The wealthiest peasants may even have possessed a stone grinder to make powdered tea.150

The drink appeared in daily life at all levels of society. Documents show, for example, that the peasants at Tara Estate in Wakasa Province possessed numerous vessels for tea.151 At Kusado Sengen, the site of a medieval town excavated by archaeologists, one wooden tablet spoke of tea contests conducted by the locals, suggesting that the custom filtered down to merchants in areas rather distant from Kyoto.152 Tea and its various implements appeared commonly among the possessions of the small temple located at Imabori Village for use in assemblies of the members of this corporate settlement.153 Ethnographic and some historical studies suggest that tea was consumed by common folk during all the important occasions in life—in birth rituals, by newlyweds, and especially by bereaved folks when a close relative passed away.154 By the Warring States period, commoners also learned to combine the pleasures of a bath with tea.155

Other points suggest that the production and exchange of tea had reached levels never attained in Japan before, and that the maturation of the tea industry during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to widespread popular consumption. First, as early as 1405, common workers received a dole of the beverage as part of their reimbursement.156 Second, in 1419, laborers who ferried goods to Tōji from the port of Hyōgo were also allotted tea to drink as part of their payment.157 Third, in 1446, the tea producer Uji Saburōemon doled out tea in the amount of forty coins to guests on a trip.158 Finally, according to the Daijōin jisha zōjiki, in 1485 the travelers aboard a ship to China also received thirty-days-worth of tea for their long journey.159 Taken together, these sources indicate that labor bosses, tea merchants, and ship captains all viewed the regular drinking of tea as part of everyday life.

As the numbers of consumers increased, there was a health advantage too. No matter how inferior the grade or exactly how the tea was prepared, merchants provided a major benefit by boiling the water. This action undoubtedly killed off parasites and bacteria in the water and helped to improve the well-being of the people who consumed it. It is little
wonder that the population level in Japan made significant gains from the time that tea became a drink consumed by so many.\textsuperscript{160}

The greatly expanded area cultivated in tea and the demand for more of the stimulative, habit-forming beverage were probably interrelated in complex ways. In the introduction, I raised the question of whether Japan had experienced an “industrious revolution.” In general, the term refers to gradual improvements in the labor force, as it became capable of harder, more prolonged, and more efficient labor. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3 and the conclusion, leisure time was reduced and producers began to focus on marketable goods. Although for Japan this idea has been most frequently applied to the ensuing Edo period (1600–1868), the transformation of the farming economy, the rise of the market, and the popularity of tea all predate 1600. Were the unintended health and physiological effects of a bowl of tea already responsible to some degree for the transformation sweeping Japan during 1300–1600?

Viewing the evidence for the period 1300 through 1600, I would argue that at least some regions in central and western Japan had already entered what economist Penelope Francks has called a “virtuous circle.”\textsuperscript{161} Francks distinguishes two economic linkages operating in the “virtuous circle,” one of which is demand-pull: namely, as people consume more and more of a processed good, it increases demand for production. Expanded production in turn may generate greater incomes that may be used to consume, if the tea was sold on the market. Assuming that some goodly proportion of the tea was marketed, then Francks’ “linkage” seems to explain quite well what happened to the tea industry, a type of commercialized agriculture, during the latter medieval age. A better-tasting stimulative drink created greater and greater demand, in turn encouraging peasants to produce more, whether for sale or home use. And properties of the beverage helped to give rise to harder and more efficient labor on the farm. I will expand on this argument in much greater detail in the next chapter.

During the period 1400–1550, the tea industry in Japan began to mature. Cultivators grew tea widely throughout all the regions on the archipelago where the plant could be farmed. It was still exchanged as a gift, but more and more as a tax item from peasant farms and on the market by hustling entrepreneurs. Tea shops promising a “cup for a coin” sprang up in Kyoto and Nara and in many peasant villages where cultivators consumed the tea left over after tax shipment. The drinking of tea marked important rites of passage, not simply for the elite as it had probably always done, but increasingly for a thirsty commoner population. There were still more advancements before the production of tea entered a new age.
URRESHINO AND UJI: IMPORTANT NEW DEVELOPMENTS OF THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

At the end of the medieval period during the 1500s, two important innovations in the production of tea arose in Japan from two different groups of farmers living at two very different locations: Ureshino and Uji. These changes had nothing to do with each other; one took place in a heretofore unremarkable area of northern Kyushu and the other at the age-old center of Uji. The first technological breakthrough came as a result of the efforts of immigrant Chinese, while the second was an innovation developed by Japanese tea farmers.

Consider first the developments in northern Kyushu at Ureshino. Earlier in chapter 1, I noted that in the twelfth century northern Kyushu had a large immigrant community of Chinese, who may have helped introduce the residents of the archipelago to Song-style powdered tea. To be sure, this community went through many fluctuations during the next several centuries as the Japanese court’s relations with those in charge of China first worsened with the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 and then improved when the Han Chinese Ming dynasty (1368–1644) opened tributary relations with the Muromachi bakufu during the late fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. Travel and trade among Muromachi Japan, Ming China, and Chosŏn Korea were brisk and their implications for tea have been noted at different points in this chapter.

During the mid-1400s, Ming Chinese potters emigrated to Ureshino and other spots in northern Kyushu, where they opened kilns. In Ming China, a type of stir-roasted tea (later called とちゃ, or “Tang tea” in Japan) was all the rage, and naturally the immigrants wanted to drink their favorite variety. They planted patches and processed their own brand, new to Japan. Later, between 1506 and 1511, Hong Lin-min, a Ming subject, moved to Ureshino from Nanjing, bringing with him a metallic cooking vessel (とがま) in which to stir-roast tea (figure 5). Later, the kilns declined and the immigrant Chinese scattered to other parts of Japan, but not before introducing the beverage for which Ureshino would eventually become famous. This Chinese-style tea was also called kamairicha, or stir-roasted tea.

This kind of tea processing was complex but yielded a cheap, steeped beverage. First, the producer took the pot, which was about 70 centimeters in diameter and about 40 centimeters deep, and tipped it at a forty-degree angle. Then, after a fire was lit under the pot, the processor stir-roasted about three or four kilograms of fresh tea leaves for about ten minutes until the bright-green color had faded. The product was then moved to a
rope mat and rolled (momu). This method of rolling or crumpling the good tea leaves was employed to make cracks on the surface of the leaves and allow their constituent juices to soak more readily into the drink. As the water began to come out of the leaves, they were once again put in the pot and stir-roasted. This step was repeated six or seven times for high-grade tea, but only three or four for inferior batches. Checking the degree of dryness, the processor then roasted superior teas over charcoal and dried inferior ones in the sun. Then both types were put in the shade and finally stir-roasted one last time in the pot. This whole process took ten hours, and one male could usually make about 9.4 kilograms of stir-roasted tea in a day. The product was then steeped (or boiled) to make “Tang tea” (tōcha), yielding a subdued yellow-gray to gray-white tea, with a fine fragrance minus the puckery, astringent taste.

Although at least one other similar method developed in south central Kyushu along the Higo-Hyūga border in the 1500s, soon the flat areas around Ureshino became home to tea fields and Japanese cultivators that specialized in this type of tea. It became popular throughout Kyushu, in much of Shikoku, and in sectors of western Honshu. Once again, a tea that was imbibed daily in China—this time Ming China—had crossed the ocean with immigrants and become part of the repertoire of teas available in Japan. Its popularity would increase greatly during the ensuing Tokugawa era, but at this juncture the story serves to remind us
that there are many varieties of delicious teas in the islands besides the much ballyhooed powdered green kind.

The second innovation at Uji initially involved the cultivation of what would become powdered green tea, but eventually it had implications far beyond that single variety. As noted earlier in this chapter, Toganoo had justly come to enjoy a reputation for producing the finest tea in the land. Monks, warriors, and civil aristocrats all enjoyed this tea from the time that Myōe had rejuvenated the bushes there around 1200. Famously, it had even been listed as the best in the realm around 1350. Presumably, it continued to be held in high regard for much of the Muromachi period. By 1383, however, Uji tea was ranked alone as the second-best tea in all of Japan, behind that of Toganoo. Around 1460, some elite tastes appeared to be changing again: “Uji [tea] during this age has recently been the favorite brand [of the shogun]. Even though it has been said that Toganoo [tea] has declined [in favor], just as in the saying, its reputation has not changed. Should it not also be highly regarded and not forgotten?” The shogun in question was Ashikaga Yoshimasa, who was a tea connoisseur of the first order. Beginning with Yoshimasa and his followers (dōbōshū), Uji tea had come to share the top spot with its more venerable rival, Toganoo tea.

After 1460, Uji took a long, complicated path to a new status as the place where the best powdered tea in all of Japan could be found. From the age of Yoshimasa (1460s), Uji tea appeared more frequently in the sources as a gift and in trade, as often as Toganoo. Another source suggests that the court sent messengers to both Toganoo and Uji to collect samples. Previously, these justly famous fields had sent tea to both warriors and courtiers. Even in 1493, Toganoo tea was expensive, fetching 500 coins per kin (600 grams). It was still used in rituals such as those at the Zen temple Daitokuji.

Three factors account for Uji’s eventual preeminence as a source of powdered tea in Japan. First, throughout the 1500s, a dispute over ownership of the tea fields erupted among the clerics at Közanji, the temple that managed the tea patches at Toganoo. Apparently, the monk in charge of the Toganoo fields loaned them to a cleric at Ninnaji, but then promptly died in 1517 without leaving any written records of the transaction. This failure to leave written notice of the loan led to a dispute between the two sides, resolved by the Muromachi shogunate. Once again in 1561, however, the dispute came to the fore, causing great confusion in the production and exchange of the famous tea. Toganoo fields never recovered the top spot.

While producers at Toganoo were struggling, those at Uji found increasing favor with the ruling elite of Japan over the late fifteenth and
sixteenth centuries. A second cause for Uji’s rise encompasses the interplay of several factors of consumption and production at the same time.\textsuperscript{168} Consumption famously derived from the development of tea as an art form in distant Kyoto and Sakai under luminaries such as Murata Jukō, Takeno Jōō, and Šen Rikyū. Elite demand for the best-tasting powdered tea increased greatly.

Production improved in Uji under several different wealthy families such as the Hori, the Mori, and eventually the Kanbayashi. These families were not simply collectors of adjoining tea patches and careful cultivators, but also involved themselves in moneylending and other local businesses. To condense the story to its essentials, in the competition among these families, the Kanbayashi, who had moved to Uji from Tanba, proved the most politically astute, as they chose affiliation with first Toyotomi Hideyoshi and then Tokugawa Ieyasu, the eventual victors of the Warring States period. By 1590, the reward for managing tea fields in Uji was four times as great for the Kanbayashi as for the Mori, partially because the Mori had received benefits from Hideyoshi’s rivals and incurred his ire. The Kanbayashi managed Uji for the Tokugawa shogunate until its collapse in 1868.

Third, once owners had control of adjoining fields, they developed better techniques for farming and processing tea. The most famous and effective new invention was called the “roof-over method” (ōishita saibai), in which enterprising planters built an all-encompassing roof made of grass, straw, or reeds to block out deleterious weather elements (figure 6). Of course, this technique limited damage due to insects or the mists or frosts of spring. An added advantage was that the “roof” (today often black plastic sheeting) blocked out the sun, thereby inhibiting photosynthesis and yielding a sweeter tea. Historians do not know exactly when the “roof-over” method was developed, but João Rodrigues, a Portuguese Jesuit visitor to Japan during the sixteenth century, wrote of it in 1587:

\begin{quote}
This famous and celebrated tea comes from a small tree or rather bush. . . . Its new leaves, which are used in the drink, are extremely soft, tender and delicate, and a slight frost may easily make them wither away. So much damage can be done in this way that in the town of Uji, where the best tea is grown, all the vineyards and fields in which tea is cultivated are covered over with wooden frames bearing mats made of corn stalks or rice straw. They are thus protected from damage by frost from February onwards until the end of March when the new leaf begins to bud.\textsuperscript{169}
\end{quote}

By the end of the 1500s, Uji tea “stood alone” (mujō) as the leading brand in all Japan. In fact, Uji tea was so popular that tea producers in other regions tried to copy Uji’s brand name, but apparently not its flavor.\textsuperscript{170}
Beginning in the late 1400s, tea reached the status of a high art under the three masters of the “cold and withered”—Murata Jukō, Takeno Jōō, and Sen Rikyū. Undoubtedly, a large degree of credit goes to these men for the creation of this art form, which symbolizes Japanese culture to many. It is well to remember, however, that the art was as much a product of the economic and technological developments that preceded these three savants. The invention and importation of the whisk and the stone grinder, and eventually the roof-over method of cultivation, were necessary preconditions for the creation of the “Way of Tea” (sadō). In other words, tea the commodity long preceded and made way for tea the art form.

The period from 1300 through 1600 witnessed a veritable transformation in the world of tea, as the industry began to “lift off” from its modest beginnings. Each of the three themes highlighted in the introduction—agricultural development, the rise of a consumer society, and the creation of an eager workforce—took its first major steps during these three centuries. Tea agriculture expanded to more and more new areas until the plant was being raised in numerous regions south of a line drawn through the northern Kanto, the natural climatic limit for tea growing in Japan. Productivity
must have increased appreciably, as indicated by the large amounts of tea marketed and consumed and the economic value associated with even the smallest tea plots. Farming intensified as the plant was cultivated in dry fields, household plots, mountain patches, and on the borders of other fields, especially rice paddies.

The circle of consumers expanded to include numerous commoners who either raised their own tea or bought on the market. Tea shops opened in major cities such as Kyoto and Nara, but also in several peasant settlements. There thirsty customers could buy a “bowl for a coin,” or perhaps a little more. To be sure, gift giving was still a major form of exchange, but the popularity of tea taxes and markets hinted at the growing commodification of the beverage. By 1600, new brands of tea were available for a populace with an increasingly discerning palate.

As commoners streamed to buy and consume their favorite nonalcoholic beverage, the health advantages inherent in a hot-water drink made themselves felt. The populace became healthier, and more “industrious.” The signs of this development are visible in the dramatic increase in population and economic activity. The changes occurring in agriculture, commerce, consumption, health, and labor were synergistic, and it is impossible to designate one ultimate cause.

At the same time, even in 1600, modernity was a long way off. Agriculture was much more intense, to be sure, but the ubiquity of mountain patches suggests that many plots were located in less than ideal places with poor soils. Commoners may have visited tea shops and consumed tea as never before, but the advent of even a nascent consumer society was still two hundred years away. The workforce may have been healthier and more easily stimulated, but life expectancy was as yet no higher than thirty. The ensuing Edo era would bring all three trends much nearer to fruition and place Japan on the doorstep of its modern transformation.