A Bowl for a Coin

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In 1603, Tokugawa Ieyasu climbed to the pinnacle of the political world as the first shogun of a new samurai government with its capital at Edo. Although the Tokugawa shogunate was the most powerful of all Japan’s central administrations to date, it was really a federation of lords ruling domains large and small, about 260 in all. For the next century until the early 1700s, Japanese society continued on the path of growth and recovery from the wars. The population reached about thirty-one million by the early eighteenth century; land under cultivation and overall farming productivity expanded immensely. Commerce and industry increased in a rapidly urbanizing Japan that included the world’s largest city, Edo. A laboring proletariat was employed through specialized agencies. Culture for the elite was Confucian, but most townspeople, including the sizable urbanized samurai class, enjoyed the pleasures of red-light districts aptly named “the floating world.” Art and literature took its inspiration from stories of the denizens of this urban area. Ensconced in Nagasaki harbor, the Dutch continued to trade some goods and teach willing scholars in Europe about Japan, and vice versa.

Beginning in the early 1700s, however, overall growth slowed and diversified in nature and geographical locale. Scholarly specialists seem divided as to what happened to the Japanese economy between 1710 and 1850, although all agree on many other points. The shogunate atrophied as it first tried old-fashioned reforms and then floated untethered. Overall population in Japan remained static, hovering around thirty million. Famine stalked the land, as of old. Ideologues railed against abortion and infanticide. By 1800, signs of political and social unrest were everywhere. Commoner riots multiplied and large cities shrank. Yet workers in both the agrarian and urban sectors applied greater inputs of labor, paying attention
to fine details as never before. Agriculture became increasingly commercialized and rural protoindustry appeared.

Beyond those generalizations, there is much disagreement over how much, where, and what kind of growth took place. As this admittedly nonspecialist sees it, one more venerable group believes that the Japanese economy had basically reached the limits possible under that economic and technological regime during these 150 years, just as the economy of Western Europe had during the thirteenth century before the Black Death reduced the human:land ratio there. Signs of ecological degradation and social stresses appeared widely between 1710 and 1850. Commodore Perry’s sudden unannounced appearance in 1853 eventually removed the shogunate and other barriers to growth and gave way to Japan’s European-style industrial revolution.

Another camp of scholars, beginning with Thomas Smith in 1959 and becoming even more dominant recently, stresses that growth, either greater or lesser depending on one’s perspective, continued unabated during 1710–1850 and provided Japan with its first native sources of industrialization through commercialized farming and rural protoindustry. As Japan’s population was static, the growth was per capita and thus “modern” in nature. In particular, industrial and commercial dynamism characteristic of urban Japan in the 1600s appeared increasingly in the countryside for a limited elite. The arrival of American ships in 1853 was essentially a political event; the economic ramifications were not felt until after 1900. The 1800s mostly show signs of continuity rather than a sudden break in the middle.

What can the story of tea contribute to this ongoing debate? In this chapter I shall argue, at a high level of generality to be sure, that three interrelated phenomena are apparent when one focuses on tea for the hothouse environment that was Tokugawa society, even during 1710–1850. First, farming intensified and improved much more as tea production spread to new areas in all of the islands outside of Hokkaido. Second, labor required for the farming and processing of tea became more efficient and meticulous as the effects of “industrious revolution”—launched around 1350—multiplied many times by the 1800s. Third, people from far and wide participated in a nascent consumer society by the early 1800s, to a large degree revolving around that age-old but ever-changing beverage called Japanese tea.

THE EXPANSION OF TEA INTO NORTHERN JAPAN

During the medieval era, tea production had spread to nearly all the areas in Japan that were geographically and climatically suited to it. This fact meant that the plant was likely not cultivated or processed north of an east–west
line running through the northern Kanto plain to modern Niigata. In other words, northeastern Japan was left out of the picture. As noted in chapter 2, one record indicates that traders from “the northern provinces” (kitakuni) were involved in some tea commerce, but in general there is very little evidence of this trade until the late 1500s.

The incorporation of northern Honshu into Japan’s tea-drinking world was one of the major accomplishments of the Edo age. This expansion of Japan’s tea culture occurred in two waves. During the 1600s, merchants shipped truly huge amounts of tea to the residents of the Tohoku, as northeastern Honshu was known. Apparently, northerners sampled the beverage and found it to their liking. Then, between the early 1700s and 1850, the same populace of northern Japan learned to grow their own tea, despite the hostile climate. In other words, natives of the Tohoku grew tired of trading their valuable goods for tea and carried out a form of import substitution. Just as the trade of the 1600s exemplified that booming era, the initiation and spread of tea farming in much of northeastern Japan symbolized the advances in rural industry during the “static” eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The widespread consumption of tea in northern Honshu started during the boom of the 1600s. The first tea trade centered on two ports on the Japan Sea: Tsuruga and Obama. In exchange for rice, soybeans, and other crops grown in the north, merchants in these two ports sent huge amounts of tea to the area. In fact, tea was the most common item shipped to the north through these two cities during the 1600s. The first record of a shipment dates to 1589 from Tsuruga, when Ise tea was moved northward. From the 1620s, Mino, Ōmi, and northern Ise tea was collected at Tsuruga to ship to points northward. By 1638 or so, Tsuruga had its own “tea town” (chamachi) with numerous merchant associations (cha ton’ya). Its population soon exceeded fifteen thousand.

How much tea flowed through Tsuruga to northern Japan in the 1600s? One document recorded the amount of tea and its value in silver from 1664 through 1675 (see table 1).

During these twelve years, the least amount was 32,321 hon per year and the most was 38,857 hon. Amounts in this column, however, include only the tea that was bought and sold in Tsuruga (uricha). In addition, for the years 1665 through 1667, large shipments of tea passed through (tōricha) the port, having been traded for elsewhere. This tea came from Mino, Wakasa, and Mandokoro in Ōmi, and two places in Ise. These are truly gargantuan amounts of tea, equivalent to several hundred thousand kilograms per year. Residents of northeastern Japan must have developed a thirst for the beverage during the medieval age, but had it completely
slaked only during the 1600s. Merchant associations profited handsomely from the trade, making usually over 3,000 kan of silver each year.

In 1660, there were twenty-five merchant associations handling tea (cha ton’ya) in Tsuruga, another twenty acting as middlemen (cha suai), and nine smaller dealers (cha kouri). Eventually, one middleman acted on behalf of the seller and another for the buyer. This system was established in an official document from 1664; it praised the middlemen for unifying the measures and weights used in sales in open negotiations. Typically, these middlemen on each side made .7 monme of silver for every one hundred in a deal, with two-thirds going to the domain government and one-third to the middlemen for their services (see table 2).

For example, in 1670 the middlemen’s cut was 48.592.04 kan, with 32.394.96 kan going to the domain and 16.197.08 divided among eight buying middlemen for their services. Originally, there were six such middlemen, but in 1666, two years after the establishment of the system, two more buying middlemen were added, testifying to the vibrancy of the tea trade in Tsuruga.³

Consider the merchant Nakashima Masahisa from Mino. In 1671, he bought cotton and vegetable oil in Osaka and sold them in the Kanto and Mutsu. Then he bought silk, hemp, and other items and sold them in Nagoya and Edo, while selling the tea leaves he had purchased at Tsuruga. Soon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amt. tea*</th>
<th>Amt. silver†</th>
<th>Transshipped tea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1664</td>
<td>36,896</td>
<td>3,568</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1665</td>
<td>33,249</td>
<td>3,171</td>
<td>17,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1666</td>
<td>33,403</td>
<td>3,332</td>
<td>18,681</td>
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<td>32,321</td>
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<tr>
<td>1675</td>
<td>34,439</td>
<td>3,053</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


*Counted in hon
†Counted in kan
he stopped doing business in Osaka and Edo, and in the next year of 1672 he sold steeped tea to Echigo, Dewa, and Mutsu, all provinces in northeastern Japan. He then bought rice and soybeans with his money and sold those items at Tsuruga. In 1674, he had lumber loaded onto boats at Tsugaru, Nanbu, and Matsumae domains up north and moved them to Osaka. He also sold Mino tea at Tsuruga and was responsible for transshipping tea to the north. With that money he then bought rice and beans and sold those items at Tsugaru.4

The “tea town” was a vibrant part of Tsuruga. By 1663, there were sixty-one buildings, including fifty homeowners, ten renters (kashiya), and one temple. Kaibara Ekken wrote of Tsuruga: “Because the north country is cold there is no tea and they bring lots of tea from the Kinai, Ōmi, Mino, and Owari and sell it here and send it north. When I returned home, many merchants were buying tea. The ‘tea town’ was large with lots of merchants and the city was prospering, with numerous merchants associations (cha ton’ya).”5

Even the satirist Ihara Saikaku wrote about the tea merchants of Tsuruga, so famous had they become:

On the outskirts of town lived a man named Kobashi Risuke. With no wife or children to support, his only care each day was to provide a living for himself. In his approach to this he displayed considerable ingenuity.
He had built a smart portable tea-server, and early every morning, before the town was astir, he put the contraption across his shoulders and set out for the market streets. His sleeves were strapped back with a bright ribbon, he wore formal divided skirts, tightly bound at each ankle—the picture of efficiency—and on his head he set a quaint eboshi cap. He might have passed for the god Ebisu himself. When he cried “Ebisu tea! A morning cup of Ebisu tea!” the superstitious merchants felt obliged to buy a drink for luck, even if they were not at all thirsty, and from force of habit they tossed him twelve coins for each cup. His luck never changed, day after day, and before long he had enough capital to open a retail tea shop and do business on a larger scale. Later he came to employ a great number of assistants, and he rose to be a leading merchant in the wholesale trade.6

As Kobashi’s tactics changed, however, he ran into trouble. He dispatched assistants to other northern provinces where they bought up used tea leaves, pretending that they were needed for Kyoto dyes. He then mixed them with fresh leaves. People could taste no difference; his sales yielded huge profits. For a time at least his household prospered greatly, but heaven did not approve. Risuke went stark mad, babbling of tea dregs wherever he went.7 Another of Saikaku’s millionaires reaped what he had sown from ill-gotten gains.

Obama in Wakasa was also a lively port during the seventeenth century. With a population of a little over ten thousand, Obama was a center of the tea trade heading northward. In fact, it was Obama’s largest export. In 1683, there were forty-five tea merchants and ten tea merchant associations (cha ton’ya) in the bustling city. Tea from Mino, Ise, Ōmi, Tanba, and Wakasa was shipped through the port. Mino tea was exchanged for lumber from the north in a new market established in Obama in 1670. In 1688 and again in 1698, middlemen organizations (cha suai) started operating for Mino and Tanba, respectively, suggesting a new level of the tea trade in Obama.8

The heyday of the tea trade through Tsuruga and Obama comprised the latter half of the seventeenth century. Then shippers discovered that it was easier and less costly to send the rice and soybeans of northeastern Japan by boat to Osaka or overland to Edo through Shinano Province, dealing a harsh blow to the tea trade from Mino, Ise, and Ōmi through Tsuruga and Obama. Both ports still did some business in tea, but it declined precipitously. In 1694, of 36,800 packhorses leaving from Tsuruga, 21,960 carried tea, but other cities such as Shiozu, Ōura, and Kaizu in the mountains were shipping almost as much. By 1709, things had gotten even worse, as tea bought and sold in Tsuruga amounted to 22,000 hon and tea transshipments netted 12,000.
The opening of new and more efficient avenues for the tea trade had an important unintended consequence: Tohoku peasants decided to grow and process their own tea, mostly for domestic consumption. Many northern provinces began to experiment with their own cultivation of the tea plant, spreading tea production to new areas not ideally suited to the industry. Early on, between 1691 and 1694, officials of Kaga domain listed five villages growing tea, producing nothing but a kind of steeped beverage.9 Echigo Province developed its own tea patches during the 1720s and 1730s, and they increased steadily thereafter. In Kaga domain, the Maeda daimyo family began its own tea industry.10 Soon other parts of northeastern Japan were following that example.

As an aid to the production of tea, various authors wrote highly detailed tracts concerning the special methods required for cultivation and processing of the plant in the cold north. For instance, in 1707, Tsuchiya Matasaburō wrote Cultivating in Spring and Autumn (Kōka shunjū), combining thirty years of Tsuchiya’s own experience with tea cultivation. Tsuchiya wrote that in two districts of Kaga “there were many tea fields, but few people to prepare or trade the product,” also complaining that in another two districts the tea was mainly bad but bought and sold. The author may have been referring to “black tea” (kokucha), perhaps partially oxidized.11

Tsuchiya detailed the special treatment necessary to cultivate the plant in the north: “The tea fields of Nomi district are . . . in the mountains. In the winter, tie up with string the branches laden with snow so that there will be no damage. Pluck tea in both the spring and autumn. In the spring take a little and in the autumn take much. . . . Also, when the tea bushes become large, dig around the outside and place a little horse dung or night soil there.”12 Note Tsuchiya’s concern for the cold temperatures and heavy snowfall of Kaga; his attention to detail is reminiscent of many writers of the Edo period. The laying of fertilizer seems new, although by the time Tsuchiya wrote it was in general use in the rest of Japan.

In 1709, western Kaga resident Kano Koshiro gave wide-ranging advice about tilling and processing in An Agricultural Testament (Nōji yuisho). One important point read: “Using a shovel take out all the grass and dig once around the roots until you can see them. Then bury the roots again with dry earth. There is nothing better than this.” Kano wanted tea farmers to remove all the grass and dig deeply around the roots, probably for protection against the harsh cold and snow. He also advocated plucking the first leaves early in the fifth month, undoubtedly because of the tardiness of spring in the north. Kano stated that if the
plucking took place later in the fifth month, those remnants should be thrown away. Then, just before or during the rice harvest, he advised that the bushes be plucked once again. “Even if it is late, there will be no damage to the bush. Even though [the product] is just cheap steeped tea (bancha) and when picked late the color [of the leaf] is red and the taste bad . . . , there will be no damage to the bush. But if you pick the tea after the middle of the seventh month, there will be great injury to the tea bushes. If you repeat this for four or five years running the bush will die.” In modern Akita prefecture, the northernmost area producing tea, the end of July is still the latest period for plucking tea.13

Kano’s writing suggests that tea was rapidly becoming ingrained in northern Japanese culture. “On the day of the funeral of your grandfather or grandmother and you prepare tea for the gods and buddhas, or when you are turning your hand to a superior or lord for hospitality, you should truly take care in a marvelous way. Never show hurried behavior in your face or roll the tea without washing your feet and hands or fail to inspect the mat [for drying the tea leaves] for filth.” Even for peasants from northeastern Japan in the early eighteenth century, tea retained its ceremonial aura. As a concluding remark, Kano advised planting tea seeds in the late tenth month in round holes, using manure, oils, or ash.14

Finally, Miyamoto Shōun, a resident of the northern province of Etchū, completed Discussions of Household Agriculture (Shikanōgyōdan) in 1789. While he referred to the standard works of Miyazaki Yasusada (see below), Miyamoto adapted the classic book to the conditions of Etchū Province and the far north. He was pointed in his concern for tea production in Etchū: “Near Toyama in this province there is . . . a region suitable for tea. The Lord of Toyama Domain . . . ordered that tea be planted there. Recently in the Zen temples of this land tea processing has been carried out and appreciated by people named ‘Hitomaro.’ It has become the brand of tea from this region.”

Miyamoto took special care with the cultivation techniques for Etchū. Again, his attention to detail is remarkable:

At the end of the tenth month, just before the first snowfall, sprinkle two or three inches (sun) of rice hulls around the roots [of the tea plant], or cover the roots with compost from dry fields . . . .

The trunk of the tea bush should never stick out to any height. When the trunk stands high, the nutrients are taken only by the branches and not by the tea leaves, and in addition, it is easy for the cold winds of a bad year to do damage . . . . When you make it [the shrub] round until you see that the trunk is like that of bowl-shaped wild azalea, then you can pluck the center as it spreads out to the sides. The branches will be beyond
counting and during the three months of winter even if much snow piles up the branches will not break. As they will be confined beneath the snow, the tea bush will pass the winter without damage or withering.\textsuperscript{15}

Such care was necessary in northeastern Honshu where the winters were long and snowfall great. In fact, it is amazing that the farmers of the northlands were able to devise any method at all that would work under such inhospitable conditions.

When it came to tea plucking and processing, Miyamoto advocated that the first picking begin about the eighth day of the fourth month, later than most of Japan. The author described using chopsticks to stir-roast tea. Next, Miyamoto turned his attention to what he called “miscellaneous tea” (\textit{zatcha}), consumed daily by the families of northeastern Honshu on their farms. First, he advised plucking at the height of summer. There followed four instructions: (1) wash tea leaves in a pot with water, a bamboo mat placed on top, and then have the whole concoction steamed; (2) dry after removal from the pot and, taking the hot water left in the pot and putting it in a flat-bottomed bucket, pour the water on the tea leaves and over and over again roll the leaves; (3); then loosen the leaves that have stuck together with your hand, spread them out on a mat, and let them dry in the shade; (4) when the leaves have generally dried, heat them in a stir-roaster pot.\textsuperscript{16}

The aforementioned agricultural writings speak to the issue of the Tokugawa “industrious revolution” in complex ways. Certainly, the attention to detail and the emphasis on meticulous labor may suggest that tea-drinking commoners of the Tohoku were working harder and more efficiently than ever before. Tohoku tea production betrays what several scholars have recognized as the “handicraft” character of so many Tokugawa enterprises. At the same time, it is unclear how much of this new tea production ever passed through the market. Miyamoto’s \textit{zatcha} is a good example of this point. If the end of tea production in the Tohoku was home consumption and import substitution was the rule, then Franck’s demand-pull “virtuous circle” would not have operated.\textsuperscript{17} It is prudent to note that, even in the 1930s, home production and consumption of tea were widespread.

Not all tea in the Tohoku, however, was bound for domestic use, as Miyamoto makes clear in the following passage:

No matter whether you are highborn or humble, rich or poor, you must drink tea after a meal morning and evening. Thus, beginning with Uji and Shigaraki, in Mino and Hida, or even from the villages of Echigo every year there is no limit to the expenses paid out to move tea. . . .
Old farmers should all the more put their heart into making tea fields and leave them to their descendants. After your death, during the funeral rites (tsuizen kuyō) the tea can be used for the expenses of a chapel.\textsuperscript{18}

At least some Tohoku tea production went to the market, thus encouraging the desired economic ripple effects.

The most that can be said of Miyamoto’s essay is that it served to promote tea production and consumption in northeastern Japan. He offered words of advice about the wonderful effects of tea and the religious purpose attached to tea production. Although Miyamoto may have described cultivation and processing methods unique to northeastern Japan, his belief in the health effects of the beverage and its religious significance struck chords that went deep into the past.\textsuperscript{19} By 1800, tea drinking had become a habit that northeastern Japanese peasants and city dwellers shared with the rest of the archipelago.

**CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING PRIOR TO THE RISE OF GENUINE STEEPED TEA (SENCHA) IN 1740: SHADES OF THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD**

During 1400–1600, many commoners came to drink tea for the first time in Japanese history. It is unclear how many consumers there were or exactly what kind of beverage they were imbibing. Sources such as comic skits (kyōgen) and scroll paintings indicate that the drink was “steeped” or boiled (senjimono; senjicha) and perhaps even crushed on a stone grinder. The concoction normally consisted of roasted tea leaves heated in water; peddlers often added orange peels, bits of gingerroot, and parts of persimmon to enhance the flavor of a liquid that may have been brownish-black in color. Some of the leaves may even have undergone partial oxidation as they dried in the sun.

The development of true steeped tea (sencha), familiar to modern tastes, was one of the critical innovations of the mid-eighteenth century. By tradition invented around 1740 in Uji, this steeped tea was green in color and tasted much sweeter, eventually acquiring a huge following in the archipelago. The beverage not only served to improve the general health of the populace by another notch and to multiply tea’s effects in the “industrious revolution” but also helped open the way to Japan’s first consumer society.

The invention of sencha is best understood in the context of the increasing diversity and sophistication of tea cultivation and processing that began during the expansionary times of the late 1600s. The story is a
complex one with much detail; to aid the reader, I will deal with the story of tea before 1740 in two parts. First, I will examine those writings that betray signs of tea’s medieval past; the main writing here is Hitomi Hitsudai’s *Food Mirror for This Dynasty*, composed in 1697. Second, I will address the work of Miyazaki Yasusada, whose tea descriptions bring the reader up to the world just before true steeped leaf tea was invented.

Tea production during the early and middle 1600s was not much different from the prior two centuries according to available sources. Two early agricultural treatises, *A Collection of Monthly Agrarian Instructions for a New People* (*Shinmin kangetsu shū*, compiled around 1650 in Iyo) and *A Peasant’s Life* (*Hyakushō denki*, written in 1680 in Totōmi), read more like medieval texts than later works. The first devotes little time to tea and is concerned almost exclusively with the labor requirements for planting seeds and making stir-roasted tea. Even though tea farming had likely been known in Iyo for some time, the efforts to conserve labor apparent in this work may suggest that tea production was not a major enterprise in the region.

*A Peasant’s Life* contains several familiar points concerning the cultivation of the herb:

*Tea is a useful thing for all people, low and high. It can be planted on the borders of dry fields, or as mountain dry fields (yamabatake), or in places where the soil is bad and cropping cannot be done, or within household yards, or in any open place (akichi).*

*Tea seeds should be properly planted during the second month. One should plant tea seeds in the amount of about twenty or thirty seeds by digging a hole eight or nine inches (sun) in diameter and about three or four around, and deeply. . . . On the sixth or seventh day water them and they will grow well. After planting one should take care in covering the seeds. . . .*

*If you fertilize them well, the plant will grow even better. Farmers, however, . . . often do not have enough for tea bushes. In winter, dig around the roots of the tea bush and put in pine needles; also place in compost and rubbish and replace the earth, and this will then become fertilizer. These are the secrets.*

Like the previous treatise, *A Peasant’s Life* is reminiscent of earlier centuries. First, the opening description of the diverse locations for tea patches could have come right out of late medieval times. Second, the method of planting (twenty to thirty seeds) probably harkened back to the same epoch. Because about 70–80 percent of the seeds could be expected to germinate, the author knew the value of planting large amounts together. Third, the lack of fertilizer, another holdover from the medieval
era, may also have been one reason that so many seeds were planted in one hole at a time. Finally, in a later passage that also recalls the medieval era, the author wrote that “stone is the best for a tea grinder because the tea will stick in the grooves of the grinder well. Such stone may be seen around the beach.” In sum, the early and mid-seventeenth century looks like a continuation of medieval trends insofar as tea cultivation is concerned.22

By the late seventeenth century that began to change somewhat. In 1697, samurai-turned-doctor Hitomi Hitsudai brushed *A Food Mirror for This Dynasty* (*Honchō shokkan*), modeled on a Ming Chinese book of the sixteenth century. *Food Mirror* was a major work and is thought to have included details portraying tea production, exchange, and consumption accurately for the late 1600s; this account shows, even in my abbreviated translations, the great attention to detail practiced by tea workers around this time. Overall, however, Hitomi’s work suggests some changes within a larger continuity linked to earlier practices. Accordingly, the author gave primacy to powdered green tea as the preferred beverage and depicted “steeped tea,” which he confusingly named *sencha*, as a highly popular but inferior brand.

After briefly describing tea as a plant, Hitomi authored a relatively long section on the virtues of powdered tea. He summarized the history of the tea ceremony from Ashikaga Yoshimasa through the early Edo period. Then, he pointed out that Uji tea was the best in the realm, as managed by the Kanbayashi family. He gave the brand name as “falcon claws,” a term also noted by European visitors to the archipelago. He stated that Uji tea was so good that it was paid as tribute to nobles and warriors, especially the Tokugawa house; it was also sold throughout the vicinity around both Kyoto and Edo. According to Hitomi, no other region besides Uji produced powdered tea any longer, but other regions grew and processed what he called steeped tea. (Hitomi’s word is *sencha* but is not to be confused with the modern drink invented after 1740.) These other regions producing inferior tea included the Kanto, Mandokoro in Ōmi, Kumano in Kii, Abe in Suruga, the previously noted Iyo, and the western provinces including western Honshu to central Kyushu.

Hitomi described the cultivation and processing for all types of tea together, but in his narrative his preference for powdered tea and relative disdain for his kind of “steeped tea” is apparent, first in this detailed examination of tea cultivation:

In tea, there is wild and the cultivated variety. If you move wild tea to good soil and fertilize it, you can pick the leaves, but the taste is not good.
For cultivating tea, gather good tea seeds, till a nice garden, and plant the seeds. The best land is sandy. During the ninth or tenth month, break up the soil into fine particles, make the soil level with pathways, set up a string, and plant the seeds. Plant two measures (ご) of tea seeds in one place. . . . In planting the seeds, . . . cover them with at least three inches of sandy dirt. Or, alternatively, you can plant them in the second month. . . . [Hitomi goes on to describe the other method.] In either case whittle some bamboo and shape it like a trap and set this up on all four sides. This is to protect against the pecking of wild birds.

When the seedlings are one foot high, for the first time fertilize the roots. For fertilizer, you may use summer grasses or horse dung. Open the soil around the roots and place the manure in there. After about one day replace the soil. When the stalks have become longer and three or four years have passed, one plucks the shoots, but when it is the year to pluck these stalks, use night soil as fertilizer. . . .

[There follows a discussion of tea grades, from best to worst: several types of powdered tea and lastly “steeped” tea.]

. . . In general, you should beware of spring frost or excessive cold in tea fields. For that purpose, you should weave together reeds or straw and make a blind. Weave them close together, and be careful not to allow the sun in. . . . [Instructions follow as to when to remove the roof.]

When it comes time to pluck the . . . shoots, . . . [f]irst pluck the smaller [ones], process and try them. If the taste is good, then gradually pluck [the rest].

This passage on tea cultivation is notable both for its overall portrayal of tea farming and for its distinctions among types of the beverage. Under general points, Hitomi showed care for the timing and placement for seed planting; the number of tea seeds was fewer than in *A Peasant’s Life*, possibly indicating an improvement in the efficiency of these Tokugawa farmers over their medieval counterparts. The stress placed on the frequent use of fertilizer certainly marked an advance over medieval times. This passage also describes the roof-over method adopted for preventing damage to the tea bush and for producing a tastier beverage.

For Hitomi, however, all teas were not created equal. For example, the author distinguished between “wild” and “cultivated” tea, suggesting that the former was not even drinkable. Some country folk probably consumed “wild” tea, but that did not fit the author’s agenda. Most important, Hitomi paid considerable attention to grades of tea, but note that the tea leaves for “steeped tea” (Hitomi’s *sencha*) were listed last, probably meaning that they were plucked from lower down on the plant where the leaves were tougher and more leathery. In this vein, the author also wrote: “Currently, people plant tea in the back gardens of their houses, they pluck and process it; alternatively, temples and shrines make tea in their own plots, but neither is good.”
There follows a passage in which Hitomi discusses the processing of tea, again worthy of citation at some length:

For storage of tea leaves, you can use an old porcelain. . . .

To process the tea leaves, first you pluck the shoots, spread them out on a board, and separate them into high and low qualities. The better is called *goku* (‘best’ or powdered) and the lesser is called steeped tea (*sencha*). You steam both in the same way. . . . Consequently, in families where they process tea, they keep a deep secret of how long they boil the shoots and do not casually convey this.

When you have finished steaming the tea shoots, spread out a wooden plate and gradually cool them with a fan. When the shoots are cool, prepare a roaster, place down paper, and without allowing the shoots to overlap roast them above the fire, turning them with your hands. . . . After doing this for a while, gather the shoots in one place in a basket, and carefully turn them with bamboo chopsticks. When the shoots have come out well, move them to the roaster above a simmering flame and gently turn them.

When the tea shoots have been roasted in this way, spread out a winnowing fan . . . , and taking only the good shoots, remove any bad shoots mixed in with the good ones using bamboo chopsticks. When you have finished separating the [bad] shoots, gradually divide the [remaining] shoots onto nine types of winnowing fans. . . . When you have finished winnowing the shoots in this way, once again get rid of the powder using a horse’s tail winnow, and choosing the shoots with a pheasant’s feather, group them into seven grades. [The names of the grades are then listed.]^{25}

This passage encompasses the most complete and detailed description of the processing of tea leaves for both powdered and steeped tea to 1697, but reduced to its essentials, it repeats a familiar procedure: pluck, steam, and roast. To be sure, there are many details as to the proper methods for keeping the flame at the right temperature, turning the roasting leaves with the hands and chopsticks, separating the different grades onto nine winnowing fans, and obtaining the right firewood, but the basic process was the same as it had been since 1200. Apparently, this conclusion holds true even for inferior grades drunk by commoners, such as low-grade steeped tea (*bancha*) and “stalk tea” (*kukicha*).^{26} Hitomi left no doubt, however, that powdered tea was the best and his “steeped tea” was a lesser brand. He then commented on tea marketing and consumption:

The steeped tea [Hitomi’s *sencha*] sold at markets in Edo comes from Suruga, Shinano, Kai, Shimōsa, and Mutsu. Recently, the custom in Edo is that people always drink several bowls of steeped tea (*sencha*) before the
morning meal and they call this morning tea (asacha). Wives and women drink it the most. The custom in Kyoto and western Japan is not like this. The custom in Nara is to boil some rice, stir-roast some soybeans and black or red beans and mix them in. From all directions people praise this practice and call it Nara tea.\(^{27}\)

According to Hitomi, steeped tea may have comprised a lesser brand, but commoners imbibed it as part of their daily routine. This passage constitutes anecdotal evidence that almost everyone was drinking tea by the late 1600s.

Being a doctor, Hitomi could not avoid promoting the health benefits of regular tea consumption. When a person had drunk too much rice wine, imbibing one or two bowls of thick powdered tea or two or three bowls of steeped tea would quickly cure any hangover and one’s innards would start to feel pleasant. As long as one did not drink too much tea, no damage to the kidneys would occur. If the elderly drank several bowls of steeped tea with a pinch of salt every morning, they would live long, and there would be no damage to either their kidneys or their stomachs. As a doctor working before the scientific revolution, he could not have given better advice.\(^{28}\)

Hitomi’s meticulous description of the world of tea at the end of the seventeenth century was generally accurate for its time, despite the author’s strong preference for powdered tea. Like the agrarian treatises written in the Tohoku, Hitomi’s work relates in a complex way to the hypothesis about an “industrious revolution” in Tokugawa Japan. To be sure, the author portrayed a workforce that undoubtedly consumed tea and labored with precise attention to timing and the smallest details. The reader can infer that tea drinking was enabling and even stimulating a labor force that worked harder, more efficiently, and for longer hours.

The issue is whether or not the tea produced with this more intensive labor was entering the market and engaging Penelope Francks’ demand-pull “virtuous circle.” Hitomi referred both to tea production for domestic use and that which was sold on the market. If the “industrious revolution” was to have economic effects that multiplied throughout society, then something more than just harder work was required. Therefore, my view is that tea contributed to the industrious revolution in 1697, but not to the full extent it might have.

In sum, Hitomi discussed at length the farming and processing of both powdered and “steeped tea.” His preference for the former is notable, even though most people consumed the latter. In other words, Hitomi was looking backward from the present. The appearance of what modern tea drinkers know as true steeped tea (sencha) was still a few steps away
from realization. When true *sencha* was invented, tea’s effects on consumption and the market reached a higher level.

**CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING PRIOR TO THE RISE OF GENUINE STEEPED TEA (*SENCHA*): LOOKING FORWARD WITH MIYAZAKI YASUSADA**

As fate would have it, the year 1697 was an important one for Japanese agriculture generally and tea specifically. Besides Hitomi’s *Food Mirror*, Miyazaki Yasusada published his *Complete Works on Agriculture*, the most well known of all agricultural treatises. He lived most of his life in Fukuoka in northern Kyushu, but traveled Japan from Kyushu to the Kanto plain, picking up tips as he went. *Complete Works* includes a chapter on tea as one of the four trees. Because the book repeats much of Hitomi’s description, I will concentrate on those parts of Miyazaki’s *Complete Works* that were new. Overall, Miyazaki portrayed an even more complex world of tea than Hitomi did, and the steeped tea that he depicted was a bit more advanced than his fellow author’s. Miyazaki also advocated tea growing as a means to add value to farming and enter the market for increased income.

Miyazaki began with advice about planting and cultivation. After briefly noting the appropriate times to collect and plant tea seeds, Miyazaki stressed that “the northern shadow was good” and that the “tea bush did not do well in direct sunlight.” He encouraged the use of fertilizer and opined that the “seed should be planted deeply.” When the plant began to sprout, the “branches should not grow up but out.” He also wrote that “the three fields in Yamashiro [meaning Uji, Daigo, and Toganoo] all have red dirt mixed with stones and are shaded grounds where the wind and frost are extreme.”

He followed the views of his fellow agricultural specialists in stating that tea could be planted in a patch by itself, along the paths of fields of other grains, or in plots mixed in with other cultivars. He advocated a “three-foot (*shaku*) distance” between the holes for seeds. Miyazaki also believed that the holes should be dug the previous year and fertilized well with compost and human waste to the depth of “seven or eight inches (*sun*) before putting in about twenty or thirty seeds. By the third year, the cultivator could pluck the longest shoots. “If there is drought that year, water well and put on wet manure or ash beneath the roots.” Miyazaki also felt that sloping fields with good drainage were essential.

Continuing with Miyazaki’s general observations about planting, one notes that the agrarian expert urged that “in the mountains where the
wind and cold were fierce” farmers should plant the bushes close to each other in double rows. In a passage reminiscent of Hitomi, the author seems to have shied away from wild mountain patches, instead stating that large “tea fields were the best” because they were easiest to harvest. In the cultivation of tea, Miyazaki also advocated that for every platter of seeds the cultivator planted in a circular way, after they had begun to sprout in a year, he should prune back the bush by keeping “seven or eight thick shoots and pulling the rest.” This represents the first known reference to pruning the young tea bush, a practice still followed today. Finally on cultivation, Miyazaki also suggested that “about thirty days before plucking, the planter should lightly fertilize around the roots and in twenty days the shoots would increase.” This idea has come down to tea farmers to this day.31

Miyazaki’s great improvement on Hitomi’s Food Mirror for This Dynasty was his division of processing into four distinct types.32 In other words, he did not concentrate mostly on the methods for powdered tea. Miyazaki’s four categories included: (1) a mode to make high-grade (powdered) tea (jōcha); (2) the processing of parboiled tea (yubikucha); (3) the steeped tea way (senjicha); and (4) a method for stir-roasted tea (tōcha). Of these four designations, the first was essentially the same as explained by Hitomi. The only real difference was that Hitomi advocated the turning of the leaves early in the process and then later with bamboo chopsticks. Miyazaki wrote instead that when the leaves are in the roaster (hoiro), “after a while, using an instrument called a nen—a piece of bamboo cut two fingers wide and three feet long, split in two on the tip about five or six inches, slightly bent and shaved and woven together with a string—take the broad end and, on the shaved portion, spread out the leaves so that they do not bend or break, and then turn them over.”33

The second method was for processing parboiled tea (yubiku cha), using slightly tough or thick leaves:

Pluck without leaving any shoots and boil water in a kettle. Place the leaves in two baskets with handles, half each. First place one in the boiling water. Mixing them above and below using chopsticks until the leaves are sticking to the chopsticks, raise the basket out of the boiling water and cool it by dunking it in a bucket of cool water.

When the leaves have dried somewhat, put them in a roaster, where the fire is stronger than in Method One. When the leaves are being parboiled, if you place straw ash or volcanic ash—just a little—the color will turn blue-green. . . . If the steam was not hot enough the tea is not good and the color is bad. When you are changing the two baskets, always count one-two-three in rhythm.34
The instructions concluded with advice about parboiling leaves of different ages. This method was popular in Suruga in the mid-nineteenth century, when the leaves may well have been slightly rolled by hand. Miyazaki had described the processing mode for yet another new, heretofore unmentioned kind of tea.

Third, Miyazaki addressed the method for producing what he called steeped tea (senjicha), probably the most widely consumed of all:

Pluck new and old leaves without distinction, and steaming them quickly in ash, also cool these leaves with water. When they have dried out well, spread them out on a mat and dry them more. When the juice has dried a little more, roll (momu) the leaves on the mat, or make a straw mat and crumble them somewhat there. After three times, when the leaves are good and dry, one may also place them on a sieve. It is even better to place the leaves in a roaster for one time. Afterwards, put them in a bag, . . .

In general, six kan [of this tea] is worth twenty monme of silver. One tea patch of one tan produces thirty bags, on average. Thus, thirty bags can yield 500–600 monme.

Miyazaki had probably seen many villages where farmers processed tea in this way, even mountain villages where much of the leaf drying was done in the sun. Note that he advocated rolling (momu) the tea leaves on mats. As such, Miyazaki’s description advanced one step closer to producing genuine sencha as it is known today. The economic calculations at the end suggest the value that this tea had in trade for Miyazaki. In this expert’s opinion, hard work yielded a product to be sold on the market, and in turn raised farm incomes. It is hard to imagine a better definition of the “industrious revolution.”

Method Four was, according to Miyazaki, stir-roasted tea. He wrote about the manner of processing in terms more explicit than any before employed:

Use a Chinese pot (tōgama) for processing. First, make a boiler (kamado) molded high in the back and stick paper on the surface of the sides. Put one or two shō of leaves in the pot depending upon its size, and being careful to keep the flame low, stir them with your hands. Just as you stir the tea leaves as they stick to the sides, when the leaves are withered take them out.

Then, using a mat from Kagoshima or Dejima or other mat, gently roll (momu) the tea leaves so that they do not break apart. When you have rolled them to a good point, put them back in the pot and, as before, stir the leaves without resting your hands so that they do not stick, and then after a while put them on a mat and roll again. Repeat this five or six times. Putting the leaves in the pot runs to seven or eight times.
Most importantly, because when you stir-roast in the pot [frequently] . . . the leaves will dry out and shred, rolling the leaves normally should cease at four or five times. When you stir-roast, keep the flame low and the leaves repeatedly stir-roasted will have a good smell, and when placed in hot water the tea will come out well. Also, if the flame is low the quantity of tea leaves will not decrease.37

Being a resident of Kyushu, Miyazaki undoubtedly had learned much about stir-roasting from the producers at Ureshino and his description is mindful of their methods. He concluded his remarks on stir-roasted tea by writing that “in well-fertilized plots where growth is good, the grade of tea is high, and when young shoots are plucked and processed, the taste and fragrance is especially fine.”38

Miyazaki rounded out his chapter by calling “Uji, Daigo, and Toganoo” of Yamashiro the three famous tea fields in Japan. Most notably, he served as an advocate for tea production, writing that “no matter whether city, country, or mountainside, if you have a small place that can be turned into a tea patch, you should without fail plant tea in any amount. . . . If you plant it once it will never die out no matter how many years pass. The wealthy will find comfort and the poor will find property.”39 Miyazaki’s advocacy of the economic benefits of tea production not only shows the continued advancement of agriculture but also suggests that peasants could enter the growing consumer market to their advantage. His work describes a hard-working peasant labor force willing to sell the tea that they had produced to thirsty consumers, characteristic of “industrious” commoners.

To sum up, Miyazaki’s main achievement was to discuss the plethora of teas available to residents of the islands in his day. What is more, he envisioned a peasant class that reaped economic benefits from the labor expended to produce the beverage. While he included “steeped” tea (senjicha) among his teas, however, the feat of producing true sencha was left for a somewhat later time and a different place. After Miyazaki, no one wrote so completely on tea for the next fifty years.40

THE INVENTION OF TRUE SENCHA AND ITS AFTERMATH

Despite the efforts of Hitomi and Miyazaki, the creation of a more delicious, steeped leaf-green tea (sencha) needed literally “a final twist.” By tradition, this accomplishment has been assigned to Nagatani Yoshihiro (or Sōen, 1681–1778), a native of Uji Tawara village in Tsutsuki district in Yamashiro. For his invention he has been called “the father of steeped tea (sencha).” Relatively little is known about this man who so profoundly influenced
the development of tea in Japan.\textsuperscript{41} Apparently, he was the descendant of a family that had moved to the area during the 1590s and famously opened new tea fields there and made a living processing tea for generations.

In 1738, at the age of forty, Nagatani conducted a long series of trials and experiments and developed an excellent brand of steamed, steeped leaf tea (\textit{sencha}). It was different from the Chinese stir-roasted variety that was then being produced in Ureshino and had been described by Miyazaki, and that, with the addition of those processed leaves to hot water, became a brand of “steeped” or boiled tea. Nor was it like any of the teas (\textit{senjicha}; \textit{senjimono}) that I have discussed thus far.

Nagatani’s innovation consisted of two parts. First, and unlike Hitomi, he refused to mix mostly the old and tough leaves but chose only the new, soft shoots used for powdered tea. These he steamed right away rather than following accepted procedure and soaking them before boiling. Second, he refined the former rough method of rolling the leaves with the feet and hands (implied in Miyazaki’s treatise) and perfected a method for crumpling the steamed leaves by hand (\textit{temomu}) to permit the constituent juices of the leaves to infuse the cup of tea later. Nagatani carried out his rolling on top of a roaster, an implement just like the one used for powdered tea. The roaster helped to dry the leaves as they were crumbled, yielding a sweeter beverage. Nagatani’s method of rolling the leaves while they were roasting was a significant improvement over older methods that used the sun or wind for drying the leaves. In sum, Nagatani helped perfect a method of steaming leaves used for steeped tea that earned it equal status with the formerly ascendant powdered tea. The invention of genuine steeped tea (\textit{sencha}) in the mid-1700s ranks as one of the greatest innovations in Japanese tea history and was destined to multiply the numbers of consumers many times.

By the time of Nagatani’s work, steeped tea was growing rapidly in popularity in Japan among the elite, because it came along with the latest in Chinese Confucian culture.\textsuperscript{42} As early as 1654, the Ming loyalist Yin Yuan (1592–1673) had fled to Japan, bringing with him the Ōbaku sect of Zen and the Ming custom of drinking steeped tea. His tea, however, appears to have been processed in the stir-roasted manner, even though he cultivated tea patches and made tea at his new home in Manpukuji in Kyoto. Ming literati undoubtedly provided cultural cachet for steeped tea, so long consumed in one form or another by commoners in Japan, but it was Nagatani who developed the new process. Eventually, Ōeda Ryūhō (died ca. 1756), author of \textit{Tea Chats on an Azure Bay} (\textit{Seiwan chawa}) could boldly write: “This book is solely for the purpose of boiled tea (meaning \textit{sencha}). I will not discuss powdered tea.”\textsuperscript{43}
The following story also suggests the impact of Nagatani’s work. In 1742, the Japanese Shibayama Kikusen, better known by his name of choice, Baisaō (1675–1763), and for his tireless advocacy of the “Way of Steeped Leaf Tea” (sencha), visited Nagatani and stayed the night. He is reported to have said to his host: “Old man Nagatani Sōen! You have put me up in a room and brought forth new tea from your own garden. How marvelous! How wonderful! Upon first trying it, it has a beautiful fresh fragrance and there can be nothing in the realm to compare to it!” Although there are claims that steamed, steeped leaf tea was invented earlier or in another place, at present Nagatani’s place as its inventor appears to be secure.

Nagatani’s innovations opened the way for steeped tea to acquire a large following. For instance, just after his meeting with Nagatani, Baisaō (also known as Köryūgai) wrote a book on steeped tea entitled The Lineage of Toganoo Teas (Baizan shucha furyaku). Born to a doctor’s family in northern Kyushu, Baisaō took vows as a Zen monk at age eleven. At thirty-three, he watched the Chinese of Nagasaki boiling steeped tea and took to the custom. In 1731, at fifty-seven, he went to Kyoto and started selling steeped tea throughout the city. It is unclear whether the steeped tea was steamed or stir-roasted. He authored his book in 1748 and clearly preferred the former, writing: “In the fifth month of this year, I was blessed with hand-made new tea from some important personage (inshu). For the first time I tasted the best brand from Toganoo. Its fragrance and subtle taste was better than all the others. I do not doubt that it is called the best brand in all Japan.” Apparently the Toganoo brand still retained some of its former reputation.

With writings like these stressing the advantages of steeped tea, demand for that kind of tea expanded throughout Japan, especially in Kyoto. A certain Kamisaka Seiichi (b. 1824) received permission from a steeped tea master–producer named Ogawa Kashin (1786–1855) to produce a type of sencha for daily use. Kamisaka was from Uji but sold his tea in the northerly provinces of Kaga, Noto, and Echigo. In 1834, Kamisaka plucked the finest new leaves and shoots from fields employing the roof-over method of cultivation and then processed the product according to Nagatani’s procedure. The fine fragrance led to widespread praise for the drink. The next year, in 1835, an Edo merchant named Yamamoto Kihei produced the same fine tea. According to tradition, the following year Sakamoto Tōkichi, from a village in Shizuoka, went to an Uji producer and learned Uji methods for steeped tea from a processor there. In 1840, he studied the methods for a special type of steeped tea called “jeweled dew” (gyokuro).
It probably does not matter which of these stories is true, but “jeweled dew” tea became the beverage of choice during the 1830s in various places in Japan. The process had pickers pluck the finest young shoots grown in the roof-over method and then roll them on a roaster and make steeped tea. While no single person can be given credit for “inventing” *gyokuro*, it clearly developed from improvements made in the methods of processing by many people in Uji Tawara. “Jeweled dew” tea eventually became the highest and most revered brand of tea in Japan.\(^{47}\)

David Howell provides an example of the effects of these new, improved teas on village life in late Tokugawa Japan. According to Ōtaka Zenbei, headman of Tomida village in Kazusa in 1860, “the number of tea merchants has increased steadily.” The appearance of these merchants had altered village life considerably. About a hundred years before, “all the farmers” planted tea plants on the raised boundaries between their fields. They drank much of the tea and sold the surplus. Then tea merchants came, selling high-grade tea. “Now the villagers buy the high-grade tea and will not grow their own. Tea plants have virtually disappeared from the levies.”\(^{48}\) In other words, high-grade teas like those discussed above discouraged raising tea for domestic use and enticed those with the extra income to buy their tea on the market. This scene was probably repeated over and over again as the new, improved *sencha* and *gyokuro* made their impact felt in many parts of the archipelago.

Soon others followed Nagatani, mixing and matching processes and brands as they pleased. Ueda Akinari (1734–1809), a scholar from Osaka, in 1794 published another book dealing with the process for making *sencha* entitled *Miscellaneous Comments on the Way of Pure Elegance* (*Seifū sagen*). This excerpt is a neat summary of methods available for making “steeped” tea at that time:

for tea, there is the method of steaming and roasting, stir-roasting, and drying in the sun. Roasting tea produces the best brand, stir-roasting the next, and tea dried in the sun is an inferior grade. Uji and Shigaraki do only steaming and roasting, while the tea of other regions is of various kinds. But I have heard that Kyushu and Shikoku do only stir-roasted tea. Roasted tea is good for boiling, while stir-roasting tea is good for steeping. These are the so-called types of steeped tea (*dashicha*, here meaning *sencha*). In both roasting and stir-roasting the leaves, these methods value the green color.\(^{49}\)

Ueda’s advocacy of steaming steeped tea as the most flavorful method is reminiscent of Nagatani. It stands in contrast to the Chinese preference for stir-roasting. Ueda also listed the brands of both powdered and
steeped teas and mentioned that there were “leaf teas and stalk and leaf teas” and mixtures of both. If the tea consisted of merely the leaf point, the taste was poor. He even discussed pear-apple tea (nashicha), but said that, contrary to word of mouth, the taste was bad. By 1800, there were more brands of tea than anyone could count.

Ueda also wrote of the best tea-producing areas. He said that steamed steeped tea from Shigaraki was the best. Also good were teas from Kawakami in Ise, Hatori in Iga, Murō in Yamato, Kōya in Kii, Utsutsu in Owari, Yōrō in Mino, Rokubo in Suruga, and Ureshino in Hizen. He had also heard of teas from Higo and Chikuzen. This list is important because it repeats place-names that had been known for fine tea since the 1300s. Teas from Tanba, Harima, and Hyūga were good with meals but lacked elegance. Ueda concluded his evaluation of teas by noting that “in recent years commercial ships brought tôcha [a brand of Chinese stir-roasted steeped tea] but that it was not good.”

Abe Masanobu wrote The Suruga Journal (Suruga zasshi) in 1843, adding his name to the chorus of writers waxing lyrical about the abundance of tea brands. He outlined three new methods that were really variations on earlier work by Miyazaki. In the first, called “green tea” (seicha), pickers plucked the tea leaves in the fourth month, parboiled it, squeezed it by wrapping it in a hemp cloth and using a stick, crumpled the product on a grass mat, roasted it dry, and then selected three grades of leaves and placed them on separate mats. In the second, named ibiricha, the processor washed the leaves and stir-roasted them while still damp. In the third method, simply dubbed coarse steeped tea (bancha), workers steamed the leaves and then dried them in the sun. They were then boiled in a pot. This process began in the middle of the fourth month and was commonly called “tea of the third picking” (sanbancha). In the first picking two leaves were taken, in the second three, while the third picking was simply bancha. A roaster could be used for the best leaves, but in other cases a pot was used. Methods two and three seem similar to stir-roasted tea, but as the leaves were washed, it was really a combination of stir-roasting and steaming methods.

Evidently, by the mid-nineteenth century Japan was awash in numerous types of tea as well as advanced expertise for farming and processing the plant. It should come as no surprise that people began to think of the tea industry as a commercial asset for producers and the archipelago-wide economy. The task of making this apparent fell to the final great tea expert of the Edo period, Ōkura Nagatsune, who authored A Consideration for Broadly Profiting the National Industry (Kōeki kokusan kō, 1844). This work was written in a period when tea had become part of a booming commercial
economy and mostly addressed methods of cultivation for special cultivars. Ōkura himself was born to a peasant home in northern Kyushu, pursued Dutch studies in the Osaka region, and traveled widely in the Kanto, western Honshu, and northern Japan to learn about farming there. In his view, “there were no families that did not use tea daily.” For those poor peasants who had “few dry fields or wet paddies, if they would just plant five to seven bushes within their household lots, it would be a great aid.” This passage surely denoted the raising of tea plants for domestic use.

Ōkura first addressed a simple manner of cultivation available to those who consumed coarse boiled tea (bancha), the beverage of the peasantry. He advocated tea processing for both home and market:

In Hyūga, they make lots of tea called bancha, use it morning and evening, and send it to Osaka. Then, too, in Ise they make lots of tea like Hyūga’s and ship it to Edo. The way of making this tea is unlike that of Uji. Just as with cultivating wheat and other dry field crops, stand on the border (aze) of a wet paddy and, as thickly as one scatters wheat seeds, plant tea seeds in the spring. In the autumn, thin out the places that have grown too thick and let them grow in places 1.4 or 1.5 inches (sun) and one foot (shaku) apart.

There followed instructions on fertilizing with dried fish, vegetable oils, or night soil, and ways to keep the plants warm in the winter. Ōkura also advised the cultivator to weed constantly. The author also states that “[i]f you do not grow the cultivar as you have planted it, unlike others its growth will be poor. Even for one bush, rather than replanting the seedlings, it is better to leave them where you have sown them.”

After discussing the best kind of soil for the tea bush, Ōkura suggested that the plant did the best in “dry fields in the mountains where the sun shines brightly.” Then the author indicated the need for a completely new procedure: “During the third or fourth month of the fourth year, cut down all the bushes with a sickle without leaving anything. During the autumn, the remains that have been cut down will sprout from the beginning. Then the next year you may pluck and produce steeped tea” (sencha). In other words, Ōkura was advocating cutting down the bush every fourth year for a fresh start. Advocacy of this procedure was Ōkura’s most enduring legacy for tea.

Most of the processes for making tea advanced by this author have already been discussed: parboiling and the half-steamed, half-stir-roasted methods. Ōkura, however, described stir-roasting as especially fine, perhaps to set it off from the coarse steeped tea (bancha) described above:
If you want to make good tea, pluck the shoots that have just barely started to appear during the third and early fourth month. Wash them quickly in water, place them in a flat-bottomed pot and stir-roast them. . . . When the leaves have become just like boiled vegetables, open up thin paper and cool them.

Then put them back in the pot and this time make the flame a bit weak from the beginning. With your hands change the shoots around from top to bottom so that they do not stick together and then again put them in thin paper and cool the shoots. Place them in a pot. This third time stir-roast them with an even weaker flame. Then open paper again and cool the shoots. During this third time the leaves will dry out and curl. . . . On the fifth time [of repeating this], the leaves’ shape will seem just like they came from Uji. But they will be a bit soft and appear as though they have been chewed with teeth. Taking this and stir-roasting the leaves a sixth time with a low flame, the leaves will be all crumpled up. Then it’s done!

This is the teaching of a previous Zen monk. This also appears to be “Chinese tea.” (tōcha). Even though it was stir-roasted tea and had been prepared in Japan for centuries, Ōkura denominated it a “Chinese” beverage. When comparing Miyazaki’s and Ōkura’s varying descriptions of method, note that in Miyazaki’s discussion of stir-roasted tea, the worker did not use paper and constantly rolled the tea leaves on a mat outside of the pot between roasts. For Ōkura, apparently, the crumpling took place during the actual routine of stir-roasting. Ōkura’s stir-roasted method had originated with an old Zen monk as “good tea,” he wrote, and he touted his brand of stir-roasted tea as the most economical and as good for sale on the market.

In the event, Ōkura’s tea-making processes were somewhat different from both Abe Masanobu’s and the Uji methods. Ōkura’s upbringing in northern Kyushu or his position as an adviser to two domains in Shizuoka may have had something to do with this. As a final note, Ōkura’s book contains pictures, one of which shows the workers transplanting seedlings. It was the first such reference to this method of farming tea in a Japanese work and may have stemmed from his work in Dutch studies.

By the mid-nineteenth century, residents of the archipelago were consuming a plethora of tea varieties cultivated in the most efficient and productive ways possible. Beverages were processed in so many different and meticulous ways that it is impossible to do justice to them all. To be sure, powdered tea still existed for a portion of the elite, but most of the populace drank steeped tea noted for its deep-green color and marvelous fragrance and taste. Beginning in 1800, Japan possessed a nascent
consumer society supplied by a hardworking, efficient workforce, and tea, especially *sencha*, was a big part of that development.

**ONE METHOD FOR ESTIMATING TEA CONSUMPTION: THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF THE INDUSTRY**

The wide number of tea brands and the multifarious, subtle methods for farming and processing the plant certainly leave an impression of nearly universal consumption of the caffeinated drink in Japan by as early as 1800. Even at that date, of course, Japan had no general statistical compilations to measure consumption; the historian must fall back on the available materials to draw an inference. In the following two sections, I am going to attempt to gauge tea consumption through the use of two types of materials: descriptive accounts of tea production and trade centers and the ubiquity of cultural references to tea in literature, art, and advertisements. This section will also provide additional examples of tea grown and processed for home use and for the market.

One way to track consumption is to describe briefly the geographical network of production and trade. Just as in the medieval age, certain places became famous for their special brands of tea. The litany of these regions shows the marked growth of tea production during the Tokugawa epoch. In fact, Japanese tea growers never produced, *in all of Japanese history*, so many brands of tea as they did during the Edo epoch. A summary of these regions and their various characteristics follows, beginning with the special place of what was considered by many to be Japan’s best tea, that of Uji. Then I shall describe some of the most famous Tokugawa-era teas, moving from western Japan eastward.59

Uji tea was clearly the brand against which all others were measured during the Tokugawa era.60 The process by which Uji tea eventually came to surpass that of Toganoo after the 1460s was discussed at the end of chapter 2. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, Uji became the place that maintained the “best practice” for tea production, as suggested by the work of Nagatani Yoshihiro. Perhaps as many as 170 roasters were in use during high season, and the managers at Uji might employ over one thousand workers in this processing. Another measure of the great value associated with Uji tea was its place in Tokugawa rituals of legitimacy.

To elaborate, the *bakufu* implemented laws regulating those who handled the elite’s tea and establishing a rite known as *chatsubo dochū* (the tea-jar journey). This political ritual accompanied the presentations of Uji tea to the imperial family, the shogun’s house, and various daimyo every year around the middle of the fourth month. It first took place in 1613, but was not institutionalized until the reign of the third shogun Iemitsu in 1633.
Every year during the fourth month, thirty to forty people walked the entire distance along the Eastern Sea Route (Tōkaidō) from Edo, filled special stoneware jars with Uji tea, and then returned to the shogun’s capital several days later. This display of political power took thirteen days one way. While this ritual had great political meaning for the various members of the elite, it was also the great ceremony that took place in Uji. There was a placard that stood alongside Uji bridge stating, “No sending out of new tea before dispatching of the ritual (mimono) tea.”

Under the Tokugawa, the Kanbayashi household became the local representative (daikan) of Uji. Using skills that they had learned tending tea in Tanba, they took charge of production for the Tokugawa ceremony. At first Uji supplied powdered tea only, but as demand for steeped tea grew, they became major producers of it too. The lands under Kanbayashi control spread throughout the basins of the Uji and Kizu Rivers.

This ceremony was essentially a Tokugawa shogunal affair. That family was the first to visit Uji, and all the others followed after them. Consider the case of Owari domain. Owari was a territory granted to one of the Tokugawa relatives fit to provide an heir should the position of shogun fall vacant. There are accounts of the Owari domain representatives that survive today and show how important the tea rite was for the legitimacy of the Tokugawa family.

The Owari representative was accustomed to arriving the day after the shoguns, so important was the domain in the political system. The shipping of the jars from Owari took place each year during the late fourth or early fifth month, and usually about twenty-six persons made the trip from Owari. These included the leader, several retainers, five to seven handlers for the jars, and about ten corvee laborers from all over Owari.

Jars sent from Owari were then entrusted to various tea producers on an alternating basis. The Owari leader made a ceremonial inspection of each jar after its arrival in Uji. Once this task was finished, the handlers and laborers moved to Fushimi near Kyoto, where the party stayed for the duration. In the meantime, tea producers held a banquet for the party’s leader and he stayed one night in Uji. The next day he too set off for Kyoto. The sealing of the jars took place several days after the party had arrived. The process of sealing occupied three days that involved a meeting with Owari officials and the eventual sealing of the jars by the Kanbayashi. According to finely worked-out precedent, the Owari jars were never sealed before the bakufu’s; sometimes this meant that the Owari leader had to wait for several days at his inn. At last, several days after the official sealing of the jars was completed, the jars were shipped to Owari.
On the day before shipment, there was another banquet for the party’s leader at the inn where he was staying. On the next day the party leader and the tea producers saw to the packaging of the jars in a palanquin-like parcel over which a curtain had been draped. The phrase “lasts a long time” (nagamochi) was also apparent. Following the packaging, the jars were sent back to Owari after a process that had taken about a month. This means that the Owari leader had waited about one month in inns in Uji and Kyoto. The ritual importance of Uji powdered tea only increased during the Edo period.

Uji was the leader, but as is evident from the following narrative, different brands of tea originated from almost every nook and cranny of the islands. In Kyushu, Fukuoka had a long tradition of tea cultivation stretching back to the eleventh century and the immigrant Chinese who brought their tea and methods with them. During the Tokugawa era, Fukuoka continued to be a major center of production. In the late sixteenth century, the Ōtomo family, rulers of northern Kyushu, received tea from their domain. Between 1750 and 1770, large amounts of tea were shipped to Kyoto and Osaka, while in the mid-nineteenth century Fukuoka supplied tea to Okinawa. After the American Commodore Perry arrived with his fleet in Japan in 1853, Nagasaki became a major port. Almost all of the tea produced in Fukuoka was of the stir-roasted variety.

Miyazaki, located in southeastern Kyushu, started producing tea during the 1600s. The ruling Shimazu household ordered tea from this part of their giant domain. By 1687, tea was being taxed. In 1757, Uji-style tea fields appeared in the area, and some of the beverage processed there was presented to the emperor. The Shimazu eventually took over these fields. Miyazaki had many mountain patches (yamacha) and they were taxed, but farmers there processed stir-roasted tea for local use, unlike the Uji-style production that took place on level lands.

Kagoshima in southern Kyushu was blessed with a climate and soil that made for some of the best tea in Japan. There were many mountain patches. The origin of tea from Kagoshima (Satsuma) harkens back to the mid-sixteenth century, and by 1617 the tea there was an object of the tax collector, the rate rising noticeably by 1644. Between 1644 and 1648, the ruling daimyo family ordered seeds from Uji and established tea fields, and added more in 1718. During the 1770s, there are many sources indicating the introduction of Uji methods. Around 1800, there are records of tea parties, and it is clear that the Shimazu family enjoyed the tea ceremony and possessed many fine tea bowls. For this purpose, naturally they used powdered tea processed in the Uji style. In 1866, a Satsuma native went to Uji and learned about gyokuro, the popular type of steeped
Tea Triumphs during the Edo Period, 1600–1868

Tea using the roof-over method. Yet the local tea was stir-roasted cheap steeped tea (bancha), dried in the sun.

Like Kyushu, Shikoku possessed numerous mountain patches and had its own traditions for growing and processing the beverage in all four provinces on the island. As early as 1587, the local daimyo family, the Chōsokabe, carried out cadastral surveys including tea patches. Tea was traded from Tosa during the medieval period and was also the object of taxation. Tosa had numerous local varieties of tea, all valued for their high quality. One author wrote in the early nineteenth century that “along the roads in western Honshu and all the small islands all the way to Kyushu, there is not a place that does not consume Tosa tea. Truly it is a famous brand produced in large quantity.” When the Yamauchi took over from the Chōsokabe in the early 1600s, they issued orders concerning tea gathering. Peasants were directed to collect tea from all the mountain patches in the province. Most of the processed tea was sent to the Kyoto-Osaka area. Like the Shimazu, the Yamauchi preferred Uji-style tea, bought by domain procurement. In 1843, 3,210 kin of steeped tea (sencha) cost from .45 to .86 monme per kin, but since the purchase was done by government procurement, the price was lower than would have prevailed on the open market.

Tosa supplied three types of tea: high-quality steeped tea (sencha); low-quality coarse, steeped tea (bancha); and an oxidized tea known as tarecha. By 1873, production figures are available (see table 3).

In the same newspaper that reported these figures, the author wrote: “Among the many products of Tosa . . . they are all of the greatest beauty. Tea especially is a product that grows naturally in the mountains, and there are places where the patches occupy over forty miles (ri). . . . Now we have employed seventy teachers of processing from Tanba and are learning to process tea in the Yamashiro (Uji) style, measuring heat and cold and the season. We have established processing plants north and

| Table 3 Tea produced in Tosa at the end of the Tokugawa period |
|-------------------|-----------------|
|                   | Amount*         | Price†          |
| Total tea production | 12,739,348      | 4,124,463.76    |
| Bancha             | 1,507,360        | 92,123.00       |
| Powdered tea       | 487,551          | 9,520.43        |

Source: Ōishi, Chagyo hattatsu shi, p. 297.
*Kin
†Yen
south in two grades.” Another oxidized tea (Awa cha) was also traded continuously throughout the Edo period.

Uji was indeed the most famous production center of tea in the Kyoto-Osaka region of Japan, in part for its early technological and economic advantages and in part because of its meaning in ritual politics. As is apparent from this narrative, however, many other places in central Japan produced teas of great variety. Tanba Province was also near Kyoto, a province first charged with supplying tea to Emperor Saga in the early ninth century. Tanba was also the home of the Kanbayashi, chief innovators at Uji. In 1614, a cadastral survey noted that there were more than 41.5 chō of tea fields yielding almost thirteen koku in tea taxes, mostly steamed and other types (yudecha). Tea farmers tended to be among the upper class of peasants, but by the 1700s mid-level cultivators also grew tea and traded it to Hyōgo and Osaka. In 1714, 35 percent of the productive value of Ōsawa village in Sasayama domain was counted in tea. By the early 1800s, the domain produced 100,000 kan of processed tea and tea acreage occupied 6.7 percent of all cultivated land. Mountain patches were also common both for local consumption and as a source of a commodity to be traded.

Nara encompassed a region that had perhaps the longest tradition of tea production and consumption in all Japan. Going by the cadastral survey of 1594, at least sixteen villages in the Nara area were suppliers of tea. In similar surveys of 1615 and 1639, villages that either paid taxes in tea or furnished labor for tea occupied every district (gun) in Nara. Two hundred and two villages furnished almost 12 koku in revenue. Again, according to cadastral surveys of the 1590s and 1670s, the acreage devoted to tea in Nishino village in southern Nara increased by more than twenty times to 10.5 chō, and Niizumi village (also in southern Nara) doubled to almost seven chō. Then there were places like Shinohara for which the survey simply stated: “This place has tea everywhere.”

Peasants had long experience with tea:

Tea does best in poor soil (yasechi). There’s no reason to tend the bushes; just leave them alone and they grow large. Villagers who live almost the whole year by slash-and-burn dry fields are well off. A long time ago the office of the local samurai (daikansho) carried out a cadastral survey using a six-foot pole. Places that yielded good tea were called “top dry fields” (jōbatake), and the fields were divided into three classes (also chūbatake and gebatake). We also bought some seeds from Uji.

Apparently, even farmers in the mountains of Nara respected the reputation of Uji tea.
By the 1730s, the Nara region had become famous for its steeped tea throughout Japan. By the late 1700s, food and roadside tea shops increased greatly along with the populations of such large cities as Edo and Osaka. Eateries in Edo served buckwheat noodles and hot rice bathed in tea called chazuke. One name for the tea-rice dish was Nara chazuke, as mentioned by Hitomi Hitsudai. It filled hungry customers’ stomachs. By 1824, in Edo there were sixty restaurants, twenty shops serving chazuke, eighty tea shops, forty bars, and forty tobacco stores. Shops serving tea and chazuke ranked together as the most popular centers.

As the narrative addresses places east of the capital region, Ise was another notable tea-producing area. Ise tea from at least four different places was sent to the northern provinces through Tsuruga in the 1600s. In 1736, Ise tea was shipped to Osaka, and then to Edo by 1818. Central Ise is quite mountainous, and there were many mountain tea patches (yamacha) there. Peasants competed to enter these mountains and pluck tea, in one day picking as much as ten to eighteen kilograms.

One place in southern Ise known as Kabata Valley was heavily forested and known for its tea. During the Edo period, it belonged to Kii domain and was near several production sites in Nara, and so tea spread there naturally. Every year farmers would cut the vegetation and burn the grasses so that the next year tea shoots would appear. In 1751, the daimyo of Kii domain placed a tax on tea bushes. Many farmers became angry and buried their tea bushes.

As for northern Ise, in 1598 the samurai official also placed a tax of three coins per bush on tea production. Producers suffered from this burdensome tax, so they gradually quit working and the fields fell into disuse. Inside the village, however, a person named Ōtani Genuemon feared the tea bushes would be abandoned and asked for, and received, a revenue reduction. He then suggested drying the tea in the sun naturally (rather than using a roaster), and thus the tea fields escaped destruction. In other words, the farmers made a go of it by reducing their costs.

Just over the mountains from Kyoto, Ōmi was a major center of tea production for the Tokugawa period. Through the Muromachi era, farmers probably managed the tea lands there through slash-and-burn agriculture. From a small village named Ogura, Mandokoro tea started in six wild patches. Gradually farmers learned to cultivate it, and later they even produced refined steeped tea (gyokuro). Tea from Mandokoro in Ōmi was sold far and wide by lumbermen. The renowned philosopher Motoori Norinaga noted a song from Mandokoro: “The tea plucked here—will it be whisked to a froth by Akita girls when it arrives there?” One possible source for the tea in Ōmi is in Sakamoto in front of Hiyoshi Shrine. About
Ōmi tea, Ueda Akinari wrote that “there are many types of tea in Shigaraki. Mountain villagers opened fields and processed the tea. Steeped tea [from Mandokoro] is without doubt the best in the realm.”

East of the capital region and Ise and Ōmi lay the famous “Tōkaidō” running from Mino to Shizuoka along the Pacific Ocean. In general, well-known centers of production included Kiyomi and Ashikubo in Suruga, Wachigai and Yōrō in Mino, and Utsutsu in Owari. In Mino, the valleys along the Ibi River were tea centers in olden days, holding many mountain patches (yamacha). The earliest notation of a tea field in the area refers to the temple Ryūtokuji in 1511 in Ikeda town. In 1601, a samurai placed a placard stating that “there should be no disturbance of trees or tea fields” at Tōkōji along the Ibi River. In 1793, a farmer from Ikeda town had two chō, and in 1818 he invited processors (chashi) from Uji to introduce their methods. A record from 1857 suggests that sales were brisk. Mikawa also possessed mountain patches throughout the province and was a famous center of production. In 1653 Mikawa farmers sent their tea to Shinano, and documents show that the Ina route was quite a bustling region for trade in tea and other items. In Kären Wigen’s insightful study of the Shimoina region in Shinano, in 1763 tea comprised almost 45 percent of the region’s imports measured by the number of packhorses (10,756).

Shizuoka was a major place producing tea and had been so since at least the fourteenth century. The region was renowned for its fine leaves of deep green. Moreover, along the Tenryū, Ōi, and Abe Rivers mountain patches were distributed widely, farmed in slash-and-burn style by the late 1500s. When Ieyasu became shogun in 1603, he often stayed in his ancestral castle at Sunpu, and large amounts of tea from Ashikubo and Ōi were sent to Edo especially for the shogun (goyōcha; see below). At Nakagawane village along the Ōi River records from 1602 and 1603 state that taxes were collected on tea at the rates of 1,366 coins for 25 kin and 46 kin, respectively. If one kin was equivalent to 160 monme, then it would have come to about 4 kan, or more than 1 ryō. In a record from 1738 from Abe district, tea production was worth 8 ryō; in one from Sukumodahara in 1784, Yoshioka village produced 24 ryō in tea (over 1,000 kan).

According to records from the district where Mount Fuji towered, that area had produced coarse steeped tea (bancha) for three hundred years by the 1600s and first sold both to nearby villages and as far away as Kai and Shinano Provinces. Beginning in 1716, the region had sent its tea to Edo, with trade at its most frequent in the mid-1700s. One village named Kageyama sent sixty packhorses carrying bancha to Edo during that time. As one packhorse carried four loads and one load contained eight kan, the shipments to Edo and elsewhere must have been truly gigantic.
Along the Tenryū River, a certain Tarōzaemon farmed over nine units of inferior-grade tea fields in 1677. Mountain patches were common along this river. Along the Ōta River in 1673, a survey shows tea fields of various grades under cultivation. They were said to date back to the late fifteenth century. Suruga tea, it will be recalled, appeared in *A Food Mirror for This Dynasty* (1697). In his piece of fiction entitled *Irozato mitokoro zetai* (Households from Three Places in the Red-Light District) dated to 1688, Ihara Saikaku portrayed a scene in which “four or five men in a household made rice in rotation and saw a peddler carrying Abe tea. He was one of several who had traveled from Suruga. Twenty-five or -six of them had red-flushed faces and wore loincloths.”

By the Tokugawa period, shipments from Shizuoka to Edo were so common that the region had its own commercial organizations (*kabu nakama*) in the shogun’s capital, as well as several more (*cha ton’ya*) in the regional capital, Sunpu. Local tea movers were also organized. The chief official (*bugyō*) in Sunpu gave government approval to the trade arrangements. Sunpu became such a center of the tea trade to Edo that a “tea town” (*chamachi*) developed there and in other localities. Tea shops were plentiful, too. As early as 1695 boat service “supplying lots of tea,” mostly to Edo, was in operation. In 1824, the Bunsei Tea Incident erupted when tea producers from 3,800 households in Shizuoka protested against unfair treatment by the merchant organizations (*ton’ya*) and other merchants in Sunpu. This incident is examined below.

As our narrative moves along to the Kanto region, there were two areas of great importance: Sayama and Ibaragi. Chapter 2 showed that tea production in the Kanto region dated back at least to 1300. The construction of the shogun’s capital at Edo gave the early development of tea production in the Kanto a giant boost. In 1696 tea was plucked from the temple Tafukuji and named Mitomi tea. Mountain patches were prevalent in Chichibu and Tama and farmed in swidden style. Sayama tea is well known today, but evidence regarding its origin is sparse. It may have started as early as 1802, but by 1813 there were fifty-four tea households possessing more than two hundred tea roasters (*hoiro*). In 1819, when Sayama established its own merchant organization (*cha ton’ya*) in Edo, the region was known for cultivating tea in the Uji style and was listed as a major producer of fine steeped tea too.

Ibaraki had at least two local varieties of tea, cultivation of which dated back to the 1660s. Producers shipped Ibaraki tea to Shinano, Kōzuke, and all over northeastern Honshu. During the early 1800s, the price of tea dropped and production in Ibaraki ground to a halt, but during the Tenpō famine of the 1830s, farmers were encouraged to plant
and sell tea to help their families survive. Local officials brought in Uji cultivation techniques, and in 1851, Sekiyado domain located in Shimōsa Province opened its own wholesale shop within the domain estate in Edo. In another case, farmers from Kuji in Hitachi Province imported seeds from Uji and spread them widely throughout the area. More recent inspection of the flowers and seeds from Kuji suggests that the tea dated back at least three hundred years and was botanically unlike the Uji plant. Ibaraki tea must be the oldest in the Kanto.70

The northernmost limit for tea cultivation is located on the northern tip of Honshu, but as noted previously, peasants of northeastern Japan experimented with, and were somewhat successful at, cultivation there. As of this writing, the northernmost tea tree stands at the temple Zenryūji in Hokkaido at a northern latitude of 43 degrees, 10 minutes, although it probably does not date from the Edo epoch. It was over sixty years old in the 1980s. There were a few bushes in Aomori that actually produced tea (40 degrees north, 35 minutes). In Akita in the eighteenth century the daimyo (Tagaya) brought in seeds from Uji and tried to sell tea as an aid to increasingly indebted samurai. There were apparently five chō there. The low temperature during the winter is -19 degrees C, but 60–80 centimeters of snowfall blankets the tea trunks and allows the tea to mature. In processing, the farmers of Akita followed the Uji method of steaming, roasting, and rolling the leaves, but unlike in Shizuoka, for example, the Uji method was not the most recent available at the time. The Satake daimyo family also used its connections with Kyoto to import Uji seeds and had many of their retainers plant tea. Even northerly Tsugaru domain cultivated small amounts of tea by 1700 and optimistically established a tea official (chabatake bugyō).

Along the Pacific Ocean, there is little snowfall and so there was practically no production north of the limit. One exceptional area is Yonezaki town near modern Takada, where there are some bushes attached to temple grounds. It is said that production there harks back before 1772. In the early years after the fall of the bakufu in 1868, Miyagi prefecture in northeastern Japan was the fourth-leading producer of tea, behind only Mie, Kyoto, and Shizuoka. There were also a couple of tea bushes in Iwate prefecture. According to one story, tea stopped coming to northeastern Japan during the Warring States period, and so locals tried to import seeds from Uji, and even planted them, but the bushes died. Later there was some success at Nanbu domain, and local legend attributes some tea fields to Ryūsenji near Miyako city in Iwate.

To summarize, during the Edo period, tea producers thrived from Kyushu to the Kanto and the southern part of northeastern Japan. Farmers
even tried to produce tea north of this line, but with limited success. Practically speaking, a line drawn through Ibaraki and Niigata prefectures marks off the northern limit of Tokugawa tea cultivation, with the tea fields around Kuji in Ibaraki covering about two hundred hectares and those around Murakami town in Niigata about forty hectares. As already noted, there was some production at Takada city in southern Iwate and also in Miyagi prefecture, but these places were exceptional. The growth in tea production witnessed during the Tokugawa period may truly be said to be the final stage in the expansion of tea production that had begun during the 1300s.

The nearly archipelago-wide production of large amounts of this beverage suggests that numerous residents—perhaps almost all—were also consumers as early as 1800. Many farmers both of rice and other grains in valleys and on plains, and mountain peoples utilizing slash-and-burn agriculture had their own small tea plots and supplied their own versions of the beverage to their households and villages. As the population grew rapidly and urbanization took place during the 1600s, tea consumption and commerce increased at a rapid rate. The reader has already seen the role played by the towns of Obama and Tsuruga in supplying tea to thirsty residents in northeastern Japan, where not much tea could be cultivated.

By the 1700s, the large cities of Kyoto-Osaka in the western part of Japan and Edo in the Kanto came to dominate trade. Generally speaking, tea from Kyushu, Shikoku, and western Honshu flowed through Osaka, while Edo merchants dealt in tea from Shizuoka, Shinano, Kai, the Kanto, and the southern reaches of northeastern Honshu. Tea towns sprang up in local cities such as Tsuruga and Sunpu. These various centers of the tea trade came to handle truly immense amounts of tea. For example, in 1714 Osaka managed 1,478,000 kin of tea worth more than 1,460 strings of cash, while Sunpu in 1856 transshipped about 196 tons of processed tea, netting 16,000 ryō in gold.71

For most of the Edo period, the three main trade routes were through Tsuruga and Obama to the northeast, from western Japan through Osaka and Kyoto, and from central and eastern Japan through Edo. The first route was operational mostly during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, until a safer and speedier way from central Japan through Osaka by boat to northeastern Japan was discovered around 1700. The second and third routes through Osaka and Edo, respectively, used mercantile organizations (kabu nakama and cha ton’ya) to control the tea trade most completely during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Eventually, however, producers from Kyushu to the Kanto became dissatisfied
with the monopolistic merchant groups and tried marketing tea directly to consumers where they lived.\textsuperscript{72} In the event, whether viewed from the perspective of production or of commercial value, tea seems to have been a crucial item consumed by almost all residents of the islands by 1800.

**A SECOND METHOD FOR MEASURING TEA CONSUMPTION: THROUGH A CULTURAL LENS**

The beginning of a consumer-oriented, leisure economy is one of the most well-documented developments of the Edo period. In large cities such as Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo, entertainment districts flourished, offering people chances to visit tea shops of numerous varieties, theaters, restaurants, and many other venues for personal enjoyment.\textsuperscript{73} Even in rural areas and smaller towns, the elite of the countryside engaged in all sorts of pursuits that indicated they had time on their hands and money to spend. This world has come down to modern readers through references in literature, drama, poetry, art, and even advertisements.

Tea of diverse brands played a central role in the incipient consumer society. Tea shops (chaya) specializing in everything from the beverage to prostitution could be found all over the islands, but most especially in the “floating world,” the colorful name given to red-light districts in the big cities. Haiku poets brushed an almost unending number of paeans to tea, and tea designs found their way onto family crests. There was even a female hairdo named “the tea whisk.” Artists producing wood-block prints left the modern world with representations of the world of tea at each stage from production to consumption. Advertisements ranked tea among the growing list of items for popular consumption. Gauged by these measures, tea was an integral part of everyday life and probably imbibed by almost all residents of the archipelago by the 1800s.

Tea shops comprised an almost unending variety.\textsuperscript{74} Of course, many evolved into restaurants (ryōri chaya) offering a wide variety (banji) of foods, including boiled fare, fresh fish, liquor, and so on. The best of these restaurants was concentrated in the three great cities, and their praises were endlessly sung by the mid-1800s. Tea rest stops (kake chaya; cha mise) were small and flimsily constructed; they could be found near the famous shrines of Kyoto, Osaka, and especially Edo. Related to the “hospitality stations” of the late medieval epoch, these tea shops numbered thirty or forty in Kyoto and twenty to thirty in Osaka. Young girls dressed in beautiful clothes sold tea cakes and other light foods to go along with tea. These tea shops also printed their names and locations on the sides of rectangular boxes.
Tea seemed to find its way into all corners of food consumption. Of course, there were many tea peddlers walking the streets of the big cities, selling tea poured over rice or other grains. Tea shops and peddlers specializing in a bowl of rice, soybean curd, and tea (narazuke) were also common. People ate tea gruel (chagayu) and preferred tea cakes (chagashi), with sugar being an important ingredient. The society participated in many festivals and holidays where tea was featured; on 7/10 festivalgoers were treated to steeped tea (sencha) at Sensōji in the Asakusa part of Edo. On New Year’s Day, many residents of Osaka and Kyoto consumed fukucha, tea that included a pickled plum and kelp.

Famously, tea and the tea shops acquired associations that had little to do with the beverage. In the early nineteenth century, an employee of the Dutch East India Company stationed in Nagasaki, Philip Franz von Siebold, wrote:

Sometimes the Dutchman and his whole party resort to a tea-house: a licensed place of entertainment, where there are drinking and music. These places are also made the scenes of the most abominable licentiousness.

The number of these tea-houses appears to be beyond all conception. The Dutch writers state that at Nagasaki, a town with a population of from sixty to seventy thousand souls, there are no less than 750; and that upon the road to [E]do the inns are almost invariably houses of this description, or have such attached to them. It is from these houses that the members of the Dutch factory obtain their female servants or companions.

In the red-light districts, sex shops (kago chaya and tenjin chaya) offered their services to the willing; according to one source from the mid-1800s, in Nakano-chō in Yoshiwara in Edo, there were at least 88 such enterprises. For those interested in a little privacy, there were “meeting tea shops” (deai chaya) catering especially to gay men. Tea shops even found their way on board river cruisers. In Osaka alone, there were over 47 theater tea shops by 1700, while Edo boasted 58 in 1714 and 142 by 1842.

In regard to theater, there was at least one famous kabuki play that focused on tea. Entitled Yari no Gonza kasane katabira (Pikeman Gonza), the plot revolved around the tea ceremony and competition to land a lucrative job in service. To summarize the plot, the main character, Gonza, became betrothed to Oyuki, who gave him her sash as a sign of the promise. Her brother, Bannojō, was a student of the tea master Asaka Ichinoshin, as was Gonza. At the time, Asaka was looking for someone to carry out the secretive ritual, and both men wanted the job.

Asaka’s wife, Osai, was alone in Edo with her daughters. When she met Gonza, she immediately wanted him as a husband for one of her
daughters. She agreed to teach Gonza the rituals if only he would assent to her proposal. Osai and Gonza had their meeting, but in the meantime Osai had found out about Gonza’s previous engagement and the gift sash from Oyuki. While Bannojō watched furtively, Osai flung first the gift sash and then her own at Gonza, suggestive of sexual impropriety on her part. As might be imagined, Gonza and Osai fled and ultimately met their deaths at the hands of her husband. Chikamatsu’s play suggests that the audience must have been familiar with what was by then a tea pastime engaged in by numerous adherents, including wealthy peasants and middling merchants and artisans.  

Poetry is another literary art form that frequently featured tea. Haiku, the seventeen-syllable verse popular during the Edo period, contained all sorts of references to both the plant and the beverage. To elaborate, over five hundred haiku masters brushed poems using tea. Matsuo Bashō, the most famous haiku poet, wrote fifty-seven. Poets took the tea flower as a subject 180 times, tea plucking 110, the tea roaster also 110, new tea 50, tea processing 30, and tea hospitality 24.  

For example, during his travels in Shizuoka, Bashō wrote:

Snoozing on a horse, remnants of a dream,
The moon is distant—
The smoke of roasting tea.

Another master wrote:

Going on a trip for a whole year!
If only I have tea along the way,

and yet another:

Plucking and plucking, a person appears.
Is this a tea patch?

Notably, the first two haiku were composed during leisurely travels, suggesting that tourism was an integral part of the incipient consumer society.

Although they had the most associations with tea, haiku were not the only poetical form to contain such allusions however. Consider these brief lyrics (senryū):

Too much tea-soaked rice (chahan)
Three helpings will be more than a bellyful!
Or:

The tea bowl on the edge of the well
Might fall!
The serving girl is drunk.  

Again:

Until the dried plum (*umeboshi*) appears,
The New Year’s tea (*fukucha*) will be imbibed with beans.

In particular, the author who compiled the last set of poems noted that the custom of “New Year’s tea” had mostly died out in the cities. The poem serves as a reminder that, even though they lived in rural Japan, country folk consumed tea too.

One-man comedic skits (*rakugo*) also featured tea, especially bawdy stories concerning tea shops. Some selected titles include “Parent and Child Tea Shop,” “Wasabi Tea Shop,” “Chinese Tea Shop,” “Teeth-pulling Tea Shop,” and “Drawing Tea.” In one story, the plot revolves around some yokels from Osaka who went sightseeing in Edo. Seeing that the price of tea was more than the two or three coins that they were prepared to pay, the leader of the band offered six or eight coins, using numbers in his comrades’ names as signals to the owner to indicate how much they could give. In the outcome, the tea-shop owner asks for “Mr. One Hundred” (one hundred coins), but of course the visitors have only “Mr. Thirty-two” (thirty-two coins). By the way, the comedian always had a bowl of tea to drink while he told his tale.

Visual artists were just as taken with the beverage and the plant. The use of the tea flower and seeds for family crests may seem like an unusual purpose for tea, but one source has listed at least forty-five different emblems for individuals or families that utilized part of the tea plant. Unfortunately, it is unclear exactly which families or individuals wore such emblems of distinction, but they were popular in the status-conscious society that was Tokugawa Japan. One might speculate that these crests could have designated tea shops, tea merchant houses, or even prostitutes.

As the acting in kabuki plays became a profession that attracted attention, printers composed advertisements and handbills that were distributed around the big cities. By the end of the Edo period, these advertisements (*mitate banzuke*) ranked not only famous members of acting troupes but also almost everything imaginable. Several included tea or dishes that included tea. In “Visual Evaluations All about Fish: First Installment,” dated to the 1860s, the bottom row features “famous
shops for *chazuke*”—fourteen from all over Japan (figure 7). In another entitled “A View of Numerous Products from the Provinces,” modeled after a sumo-wrestling ranking chart and dated to 1840, the top line under *maegashira* (senior champion) shows Uji tea, right after sugar and whale. If advertising is one measure of the vitality of a consumer society, Edo Japan was home to one of the world’s first and most competitive markets.

Wood-block prints (*ukiyo-e*) reveal just how deeply entrenched tea was among the archipelago’s residents. Hundreds of these images portray tea in all kinds of settings, showing tea peddlers, serving girls, tea workers, tea shops, tea imbibed on a journey, an actor drinking his tea after a performance, a bather imbibing the beverage, enthusiasts engaged in the tea ceremony, and more implements than one can name. Unfortunately, only a few can be described here. In the first print, a serving girl from a tea shop (*chaya*) offers up tea on a tray (figure 8). Pictured next is a scene representing tea plucking underneath far-off Fuji. In the final print, an actor rests with his bowl of tea after removing his make-up. As recorded in the medium of wood-block prints, tea seems to have been a common feature of everyday life in Tokugawa Japan.
To be honest, no one can compute what proportion of Japanese consumed tea routinely by the early 1800s. Statistics are simply not available. Then, too, real per capita consumption of commercial tea increased more than sixfold between 1890 and 1920, indicating that consumption had a way to go yet to attract everyone shopping in a market on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{93} Residents of the Japanese islands were still a fair distance from the heights of tea consumption reached during the first half of the twentieth century. Evidence about tea production and cultural norms suggests, however, that tea consumption for the last decades of the Edo epoch had attained a new high, extending to a large majority of Japan’s inhabitants.

As a final measure of tea consumption, the testimony of some members of the Dutch East India Company is instructive:

\begin{quote}
It is, nevertheless, the most useful among the plants inasmuch as the daily beverage consumed in homes and inns is boiled from its baked, rough leaves.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}
Because a traveler rarely drinks anything else, tea is served in all inns, taverns, roadside food stalls, and in many huts set up in the fields and mountains.\textsuperscript{95}

Tea is drunk throughout the whole country for the purpose of quenching thirst, for which reason they keep, in every house and more especially in every inn, a kettle upon the fire all day long, with boiling water and ground tea.\textsuperscript{96}

But the grand object of cultivation, next to rice, is the tea plant. . . . Its consumption now is almost unlimited. To supply this demand, in addition to the large plantations where it is grown and prepared for sale, every hedge on every farm is formed of the tea plant, and furnishes the drink of the farmer’s family and labourers.\textsuperscript{97}

Tea made in the ordinary way, that is, boiled in the teakettle, is drunk at all their meals, and, indeed, at all times in the day, by every class.\textsuperscript{98}

To be sure, these observers did not often escape their factory on Dejima, and their comments are subject to the usual doubts attached to cross-cultural misinterpretations. Made over two centuries, however, they undoubtedly contain no small portion of truth. By the early 1800s, Japan possessed a nascent consumer society in which a wide variety of tea brands produced by an efficient workforce was readily available.

**THE BUNSEI TEA INCIDENT OF 1824**

In 1824, 115 villages producing tea in a wide swath of mountainous districts in Shizuoka filed a lawsuit with the Edo bakufu (or shogunate) against merchant organizations (cha ton’ya) in Sunpu and other local traders (zaikata shōnin) charging unfair business tactics.\textsuperscript{99} Coming as it did toward the end of the Tokugawa period, the protest was one of many similar conflicts taking place throughout Japan at that time. This grievance was a long-drawn-out affair, not completely resolved until 1857 after Commodore Matthew Perry had pressured the shogunate to open Japanese ports to foreign commerce and in some sense forced the hand of the official (kanjō bugyō) dealing with the issue.

As the commodity involved was tea, however, the incident reveals many interesting aspects of its cultivation and trade during the late Edo period. An analysis of the so-called Bunsei Tea Incident lays bare not simply the inner workings of the bakufu but also the way in which conflicts between lowly producers and predatory merchants gave rise to frictions in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The shogunate collapsed, to some degree, because it was unable to negotiate a settlement that resolved the core problem.
As already noted, tea was a major product of Shizuoka. In fact, in the seventeenth century the village of Ashikubo was granted the high privilege of providing the Tokugawa household with the commodity (goyōcha). Shizuoka was bakufu domain (tenryō), and many villages paid their taxes to the shogunate in tea. Furthermore, as production increased during the Edo period, merchants specializing in tea rose to prominence and formed organizations (chaton’ya) in Sunpu and Edo. Eventually, peasants used proceeds from their tea sales to pay their taxes, and close relationships developed among local producers and the merchant organizations in Sunpu and Edo. Some wealthy peasants and landlords (zaikata shōnin) participated directly in trade to Edo and Kai Province too. Thus, there were various groups with economic stakes in the Shizuoka tea trade.

The lawsuit (ōryō deiri) of 1824 named fifteen commercial organizations in Sunpu and fifty-seven local peasant merchants for taking unfair advantages in trade. Plaintiffs included sixty-four villages near Ashikubo, thirty near Ieyama, fifteen near Uzuna, and six near Mizukami, all of which were under the jurisdiction of local samurai officials (daikan). Two landlords represented all these peasants in the suit.

The grievance began by describing the area where the tea producers lived in both Tōtōmi and Suruga Provinces. Tōtōmi was a mountainous thirty square miles (ri) including Akiba and Senzu mountains, while in Suruga petitioners hailed from the river valleys of the Ōi and Abe Rivers, altogether forty square miles marked by the great mountain Azaikawa. Villages were strewn amid valleys of this mountainous region, often separated by two miles or more. The grievance points out that there were few rice paddies in such terrain and that almost all plots were unirrigated dry fields. Even for these patches the harvest was often poor, as boars, deer, and monkeys did great damage to the crops.

Therefore, from olden times peasants considered tea cultivation their primary occupation. They paid not simply their taxes but also for their living necessities with the proceeds of the tea harvest. Traditionally, there were two ways of doing business. First, many local growers of appropriately wealthy means and resources sent shipments straight to tea markets in Edo. These more fortunate tea producers had the resources to bypass the Sunpu associations and deal directly in a major consumption center (Edo). Even these peasants, however, objected to the high-handed mercantile tactics described below.

Most tea producers in Shizuoka, however, lacked the wealth to take advantage of the first method. They handled their situation in one of two ways. Ideally, as the tea harvest was ready each year, producers would hand over the tea to one group of defendants named in the suit—the
Sunpu commercial organizations—and from there the products would be variously consumed or shipped to Edo. Producers would take what was due them according to the settled-upon price.

In reality, though, many tea producers were too poor to wait for the harvest in the spring and took an agreed-upon prepayment at the first of the year so that they could continue to meet their living expenses, and eventually, their taxes. The prevalence of such an arrangement—bound to benefit Sunpu mercantile associations—suggests the straitened conditions in which many farmers found themselves. In any case, the petition stressed that most farmers could not make ends meet without fair treatment by commercial interests.

Since 1813, however, circumstances had become particularly difficult for tea producers, as merchants cheated farmers in one of three ways. First, they often simply refused to ship the tea delivered to them. To elaborate, in 1813 Edo commercial organizations (chaton’ya) formed a new league of twenty shops, and they reported that they had to pay an added tax (myōgakin). This tax was widely collected on commercial organizations and meted out to the shogunate as “thank money” for being allowed to handle certain trade items exclusively. After 1813, when the tea producers of Shizuoka sent their shipments of the commodity directly to Edo, they were treated as “outside shipments” (sotoni) and simply left on the ground to rot. For example, shipments bound for Edo every year during the fifth or sixth months languished until the seventh or eighth month of the next year—or for even two or three years at a time. When Sunpu local merchants acting as middlemen paid out the final price for the tea, they tallied it at a special low rate and refused under any circumstances to bargain face-to-face. Because of this, in recent years there were no shipments from tea producers directly to Edo.

Instead, peasants had no choice but to send their tea indirectly through the merchant organizations in Sunpu. Sunpu traders took advantage of their monopolistic position to pay for the tea at prices below production costs, the second method of cheating the farmers. The price dropped continuously, so that compared to previous years the scandalously low price was not half of what it had been. Farmers had difficulty paying not only their taxes but even for food and provisions. Peasants surmised that the defendants (viz., the Sunpu merchant organizations) and the Edo chaton’ya had conspired to establish their own arbitrary rules for the monopolistic buying and selling of tea.

One method of calculating unfair prices was as follows. The farmers reasoned that they were preparing and handing over tea shipments of eight kan, 400 me at Sunpu, but that the defendants were lying, protesting
falsely that the Edo merchant associations were taking more than two kanme as handling fees, computing the shipment to Sunpu at only six kan 300, 400 me. This “recalculation” of the shipment to Sunpu amounted to a reduction of over 25 percent in the amount the Sunpu merchants paid local tea producers.

The grievance outlined a third dishonest commercial practice. Since 1813, when the Edo merchant associations had been formed, no matter what the grade of tea, or whether it was dubbed an “outside shipment” or not, Sunpu and Edo merchants conspired to take large amounts of silver for each package of tea (hon) and divide it among themselves. As was clear from commercial books of the various Sunpu merchant organizations, these middlemen were simply appropriating these large sums for their own profits. According to the Sunpu books, Sunpu middlemen dubbed these sums “handling fees” (kusen and kurashiki) and collected them at the rate of six monme per unit (hon). From these “handling fees” the Sunpu chaton’ya subtracted the fee due to the bakufu, the “thank money” (myōgakin), at the rate of one monme for each unit of tea (hon). The farmers went on to calculate that every year they sent more than 20,000 hon of tea to Sunpu and then Edo. Even if the thank money was one hundred ryō of silver, the total really collected was 330 ryō, or 230 ryō taken without reason as “handling fees” by the middlemen of Sunpu.

It was naturally difficult for farmers to do nothing when they heard about the avarice and misappropriation of their shipments. At first, cultivators raced over to the establishments of merchants living in the “tea town” (chamachi) of Sunpu. The Sunpu organizations would not even greet the peasants. The peasants then felt that they had no choice but to go to the shops of two merchants in Edo. Edo traders stated that, even though they had subtracted one kanme for each tea unit as handling charges, they knew nothing at all about the other fees.

On 11/25/1824, the bakufu official conducted a hearing among the quarreling parties. The decision satisfied no one and settled nothing. The responsible official (kanjō bugyō) decided that the suit “lacked proof” and fined both parties to the suit for their excesses. The shogunate had essentially evaded the suit brought before them; the root of the problem remained.

Various historians have looked at this first suit and, using the names of the defendants and plaintiffs, have reached different conclusions. The first analysis, completed in 1959, viewed the suit as the result of a conflict between average and poor peasants (the plaintiffs) and wealthy peasants (the defendants zaikata shōnin who had the resources to ship their tea directly to Edo; also known as gōnō). The Sunpu and Edo commercial organizations that were taking such exorbitant fees for doing so little
came in for less criticism. Then, in 1988, a scholar discovered that the wealthy peasants had communicated secretly with the plaintiffs, providing information from Sunpu and Edo that the plaintiffs could not possibly have known, such as the amount of myōgakin taken by the merchants.102

At present, historians have noted that, as the petition neared completion, many of the landlords and wealthier farmers were dropped from the suit as defendants. They have also shown that almost 95 percent of the population of the villages in Tōtōmi and almost 60 percent of the villagers in Suruga participated in the suit as plaintiffs. Current descriptions of this conflict view it almost exclusively as a protest initiated by the tea producers against the high-handed actions of the commercial organizations (chaton’ya) of Sunpu and, to a lesser extent, Edo. In other words, it was a geographical conflict between rural village dwellers and urban merchants in Sunpu and Edo who were colluding in illegal trade activities.103

The sequence of events following the 1824 nondecision supports this conclusion, too.

In 1841, reformers came to power in the Edo bakufu and, led by Mizuno Tadakuni (1794–1851), abolished all commercial organizations such as the chaton’ya that had lain at the root of the problem in Shizuoka. Traders of all sorts, including the tea producers of Shizuoka, anticipated being able to ship their goods to Edo and engage in “free trade.” To be sure, there was much resistance among the former organization members as they tried to protect themselves. In Sunpu, however, tea producers enjoyed open and free mercantile relations with the former members of the associations. Shipments of tea expanded as a result of the abolition of these chaton’ya.104

In 1845, however, Mizuno was driven from power and the economic policies of the Edo shogunate changed again. In 1851, the mercantile associations of Edo were reformulated, and in the next year those of Sunpu were re-created. Almost immediately trouble between the tea producers of Shizuoka and the Sunpu and Edo chaton’ya erupted again. The central issue was that, whereas the Edo associations and the producers had agreed to allow the Edo groups to collect handling fees that would be subtracted from the price of the tea delivered to Edo, the Sunpu associations now once again stepped in to take their percentage as “handling fees”—a double whammy! Unlike the previous suit, this time the defendants were all members of the objectionable Sunpu mercantile associations.

In the second month of 1853, about four months before the American Commodore Perry arrived in Edo seeking commercial and diplomatic relations with Japan, sixty-three villages in the Abe and Warashina regions
The tea producers repeated much of their argument of 1824, adding two new points. First, the plaintiffs outlined their traditional route for shipping tea. From of old many had transported the leaves to Sunpu and then had it sent on to the two ports of Shimizu and Yaizu for shipping to the Edo market. They argued that the distance from their homes in the mountains to Sunpu was eight to ten “miles” (ri) along treacherous paths. Farmers carried one or two bundles (hon) at a time to Sunpu, and shipped their tea cargo by oxen or horse to a port at Shimizu. Since the reorganization of the Sunpu mercantile organizations, however, the merchants had effectively cut off the road to Edo at Sunpu and demanded the two types of handling fees.

Second, the tea farmers then did what they had not done in 1824: they explained the history of their enterprise to the Edo bakufu court with supporting documents going back to the early seventeenth century. The plaintiffs showed that all throughout the past they had paid the tea tax without excessive “handling fees.” The plaintiffs then appended numerous types of supporting records. This time the tea farmers of Shizuoka were determined to win.

The protest was presented to both the main Sunpu official (bugyō) and the Edo government during the second month of 1853. Soon it would be time to pick tea, and the plaintiffs stated that they had no idea what sort of treatment they would face in Sunpu. They feared that there would be delays and once again their tea would sit in Sunpu and rot. For this reason, the peasants filed their grievance in both places.

The bakufu office that heard the case (kanjō bugyō), however, rebuffed the plaintiffs. A diary has survived that details the office’s dealings with the tea producers of Shizuoka. The first meeting between protesters and the shogunate’s official took place on 2/16, noting the reception of the grievance. Then the court stalled. Eventually, the true aim of the Edo office became apparent as Ōhara village began using the Sunpu associations and refused to pay for the lawsuit. All the delaying, requests for more documentation, and communication with the Sunpu office had resulted in a split in the ranks of the peasant plaintiffs. Then, on 6/3, the very day that Commodore Perry’s ships arrived in Tokyo Bay, the Shizuoka tea producers reported that all tea shipments bound for Shimizu and Yaizu, and eventually Edo, had been stopped and were being delayed by the Sunpu organizations. Peasant representations to Edo continued until 7/11, but it made no difference—they had lost again. The newly formed Sunpu mercantile associations, with the help of shogunate inefficiency,
had succeeded in blocking free access to the markets in Sunpu and Edo for the Shizuoka tea producers. Undoubtedly, in the great excitement caused by Perry’s arrival the case was doomed.

Angered by this defeat, on 3/1854 the peasants of the sixty-three villages party to the suit sent a document to the Sunpu official (*bugyod*), who tried to put a pretty face on an ugly situation. The peasants would have none of it, but said that they would no longer accept advances on the tea harvest from the Sunpu merchants. Instead, farmers established “gathering places” (*cha kaisho*) where they would assemble shipments to Shimizu or Yaizu and take care of delivery on their own. Tea producers were now going around the Sunpu *chaton’ya* and thus avoiding the handling fees and the monopoly on shipment through Sunpu that so threatened the farmers’ livelihood.

In the long run, however, Perry’s arrival had positive effects for the plaintiffs, because it delivered a harsh blow to the bakufu itself and all the mercantile associations that relied upon it and other governments to maintain their iron grip on trade. Undaunted, on 7/1854, the tea producers of Shizuoka filed a third suit. Plaintiffs included the tea producers and wealthier merchant-farmers of 122 villages, virtually the entire area from Mt. Fuji westward to Shida district in Suruga Province. The defendants were eighteen members of the Sunpu mercantile associations.

This time the petition essentially repeated themes stressed in 1824 and 1853. It even noted that tea farmers attempted to sell eighty *kan* of tea to cover their legal expenses, but could not get the tea through to port because the Sunpu merchants had held back shipment. The merchants had “locked hands,” not allowing free sales to merchants from other parts of Japan. As a consequence, sales had plummeted, and several tens of villages and thousands of farmers had slid into poverty. Most important, the peasants could neither pay their taxes nor pass along their enterprises to their descendants. Among peasants with smallholdings, their forests and dry fields had to be pawned one after another. Former farmers fled to other places and scattered everywhere in great numbers. They had lost their homes in the villages, and both poor and wealthy producers suffered great confusion in the hostile economic environment. Edo must act! For the next five years, the war of lawsuits continued.

At last, in 1857, the bakufu came to a decision on the tea producers’ long-standing grievance. The decision allowed the producers to ship their tea directly to Edo and freely at Sunpu, but the closing statement, written in 2/1859, was a vague document. The shogunate official (*kanjô bugyod*), the reform-minded Kawaji Toshiakira, stated that “the villages of Abe and Warashina districts could sell their tea freely in Edo as in the past,” and that the result would be that “sales items within the city would become
plentiful.” At the same time, however, Kawaji allowed the mercantile associations of Sunpu to remain in existence. Tea producers of Shizuoka called the decision “the ultimate victory,” but mercantile associations tried to cause more trouble thereafter.

The main reason the farmers eventually won out was their strong unity in the face of hostility from both commercial adversaries and governmental bureaucrats. For example, in 4/1857, peasants agreed to divide the costs of the lawsuit, including the lodging and food for their representatives in Edo, equally among themselves. This agreement recognized the fact that some farmers were too poor to keep paying their taxes as well as the added costs and made allowances for this problem. Instead of assessing the payments for the lawsuit costs by individual, the assessment was done according to village productivity, essentially making the wealthier producers pay on a sliding scale. The method of payment, along with such devices as the “gathering places” where tea shipments were assembled for transport to Edo, showed the strong group solidarity of the tea producers and their determination to win.

Despite their seeming victory in 1857, tea producers did not have an easy time of it. In 5/1862, peasants submitted the following sad request for assistance to the samurai official (daikan) responsible for overseeing these many villages. It is revealing of the hardships suffered by the plaintiffs to all these suits. Peasant representatives sent to Edo for the suit incurred large expenses and were forced to sell and pawn family possessions. All during the years of the suit there was never any rotation of the representatives. In 1857, even though the shogunate had recognized the validity of the peasants’ assertions and allowed them to send their shipments directly to Edo, tea sent to Kōfu and Mishima was still held up by the mercantile associations of Sunpu.

During these long-drawn-out suits, three or four of the representatives in Edo had died and there were no observances of New Year’s or the Rite for the Return of the Souls of the Dead (obon). Two or three years after the decision, the price of tea rose and the standard of living for the village tea producers began to improve. Therefore, the villages planned to take care of the souls (tsuizen kujo) of those who had lost their lives in Edo, give thanks to the various villages that had prayed for victory in the lawsuit, buy back the lands pawned to pay for the suit and other costs, and arrange a ceremony for the return of the status quo. There were numerous consultations about carrying out these activities, but they were postponed and had not been completed even as late as 1862.

As for the price of tea, while previously it had been one or two ryō for a parcel, now producers received five or six ryō and an observer would
expect that the economic conditions of the villages would be good. Indeed, the farmers who had relied on their legal representatives when this conflict flared were now blessed with a good economic life, but they had forgotten their duties and obligations. Plans to recompense the representatives’ families for their sacrifices remained unfinished. The wives and children, along with the parents of the former legal representatives who had died doing their duty, moaned sadly for assistance, but nothing was done.112

The tea producers had paid a heavy price for their victory in the lawsuit. As Engelbert Kaempfer, a representative of the Dutch East India Company, had written over a century earlier: “Tea-preparers complain mightily of the unhappiness of their profession, for nothing, they say, can be got cheaper in the Country than Tea, and yet no work is more tiresome and fatiguing.”113 Ever since tea had become an economic commodity in the 1300s, the status of tea laborers seems to have been low. They were often abused by their employers and tea merchants and ignored by government officials. It is important to realize that the creation of markets for a consumer society can have its disadvantages for producers too.

The Bunsei Tea Incident of 1824 and the ensuing events in the conflict between the tea producers of Shizuoka and the mercantile associations of Sunpu may admit of many different conclusions. Certainly, they tell us much about the everyday life of tea farmers in the late Edo period, as farmers often sold rights to their tea in advance to pay their taxes and obtain their living necessities. This way of doing business suggests the penetration of mercantile capital from Edo and Sunpu into the nearly inaccessible villages of Shizuoka. The Bunsei Tea Incident also shows the solidarity of the tea farmers of a wide region ranging from the foot of Mount Fuji to Abe and Shida districts in Suruga Province. In the face of hostility from merchants and the paralysis of the shogunate officials, peasants had to work together for thirty-three years to beat the odds against them. They shared costs, both monetary and otherwise, overcame the deaths of their legal representatives, and won “the ultimate victory.” Struggles like these were not in vain, because when the Tokugawa bakufu fell in 1868, the new regime headed by Emperor Meiji would have great use for these and other tea producers.

The Edo period constituted the high point of tea production, trade, and consumption before the arrival of modern techniques and markets to the islands after 1868. Tea had “seeped down” to all classes in Japan even more than it had during the late medieval era. As such, the Edo period, perhaps more than any other epoch, witnessed the development and maturation of the three social and economic trends stressed in the
introduction and mentioned throughout this book. Farming intensification and improvements, the “industrious revolution,” and the creation of an incipient consumer society comprised mutually reinforcing occurrences.

First, not even the late medieval epoch (1400–1600) comprised an era of more widespread and more meticulous agricultural development than the Tokugawa period. By 1700, agrarian experts were writing on many aspects of tea cultivation and processing; Hitomi Hitsudai epitomized this work as he raised tea farming to a high art of measurements and timing. At the same time, Miyazaki Yasusada had begun to recognize the bounty of tea types by narrating the details for his four processing methods. Nagatani Yoshihiro invented sencha, and more brands were to follow in the next century. It is generally known that Japanese farming was productive and well organized by 1850; tea cultivation provides a good example of the how and why of this favorable outcome.

Second, the growing consumption of tea overlapped with the “industrious revolution,” which was undoubtedly already under way by 1600. While intensified agrarian development was proceeding, it is well to remember that a large sector of the populace was drinking the beverage. Boiling water to imbibe a caffeinated concoction, peasants and townspeople alike achieved an unexpected health benefit that redounded to their economic advantage. Hitomi wrote that the women of Edo could not start their day without their morning bowls of tea; a century later Ōkura Nagatsune opined that “everybody consumed tea daily.” The herb played a subtle but meaningful role in Japan’s industrious revolution by stimulating workers—both agricultural and protoindustrial—to labor harder, more efficiently, and for more prolonged periods.

A caveat about tea’s role in the Edo-period industrious revolution is in order, however. Most of the writers on tea describe the beverage’s production for both domestic drinking and selling on the market. Though most of the populace undoubtedly consumed tea at some point, even in the 1800s a large percentage of tea was cultivated and processed for household use. Because perhaps as much as half of all tea was domestically consumed, it did not engage the market or Francks’ demand-pull “virtuous circle.” The full economic impact of tea would have to wait until after World War II. Yet consumption of tea was one of the factors that endowed the archipelago with a disciplined, efficient workforce for employment in the European-style industrial revolution occurring later.

Third, tea was a central commodity in Japan’s incipient consumer society. Bountiful agriculture and an “industrious” populace required some outlet for their products. This outlet became increasingly available
by 1800 in the form of a consumer society in which tea had a prominent position. No one will ever know how many tea drinkers inhabited Edo Japan at that date, but production indicates that the herb was available, either through the market, taxes, or domestically, from southern Kyushu to the northern tip of the Tohoku. Tea shops ranged throughout the archipelago, and poets, playwrights, and artists gave tea its rightful high profile in their cultural representations. Even Dutch observers commented on the widespread consumption of the herb, especially through shops.

As with the industrious revolution, however, one must not press this argument too far. Consumer societies require sellers and buyers. If as much as half the tea was grown and imbibed for household use and so never entered the market, then Japan's consumer society was not as large as it might have been. As adumbrated above, this trend toward consumerism took a long time to work itself out for Japan, probably not coming to fruition until after World War II. It is notable, though, that by 1800 another building block was in place for Japan's social and economic modernity.

Then, too, Japan's development of a modern tea industry was also beginning to redound, however slowly, to the world's benefit. Now that the country was producing so much delicious tea and was connected even tangentially to a worldwide market through the Dutch, it was only a matter of time before the commodity would make its way to Europe. In 1610, the Dutch shipped the very first boxes of Japanese tea to that continent. The first mention of Japanese tea being sent to England was in a letter of the English East India Company dated to 1615. In 1664 the same corporation sent tea to Charles II as a gift. Soon, though, the English gave up on Japan as a market, and references to Japanese tea in England disappear. Nonetheless, the modern era would bring Japanese tea to the whole world.