

Chapter One

The History of Tea Cultivation

1.1	THE TEA PLANT AND ITS ORIGIN.....	1
1.2	TEA PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION IN THE WORLD	1
1.3	TEA PRODUCTION IN VIET NAM	2

1.1 The tea plant and its origin

In its wild state the tea plant is a small tree or shrub. It was first named *Thea sinensis*, and is now known as *Camellia sinensis*. According to Nguyen Ngoc Kinh (1979) tea can be classified into the following four types:

- Chinese big leaf tea (*Camellia sinensis* var. *macrophylla*).
- Chinese small leaf tea (*Camellia sinensis* var. *bohea*)
- Shan tea (*Camellia sinensis* var. *Shan*)
- Indian tea (*Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica*)

According to Muraleedhara (1991) the tea plant originates from the triangle formed by Naga, Manipuri and Lushai along the border between Assam and Burma, stretching to China, and southeast to the hilly areas of Burma to Thailand and Viet Nam.

Djemukhatze (1976) did a survey on wild tea plants in a number of places in Viet Nam (Ha Giang, Nghia Lo, Lao Cai, and Tam Dao) and based on the biochemical evolution of the tea, he concluded that the tea was originates from Viet Nam.

In summary, the tea plant originally grew in mountainous forest areas, and then gradually moved to lower areas, where the ecological systems are different from its original sources, causing the changes in its growth and occurrence of pests and diseases.

1.2 Tea production and consumption in the world

The tea was first used in China as a medicinal drink, and later became a popular beverage. Nowadays, it has gained popularity worldwide.

Europe and America produce very little tea, but have a very high demand for it. Britain is a great consumer, in average an individual uses 4.4 kg of tea annually. The average annual per capita consumption in the world is 0.75 kg, but differences between countries are great. Average consumption is 0.35 kg in the United States, 2.7 kg in Australia, 2.4 kg in Iran, 1.45 kg in Sri Lanka, 0.52 kg in India, 0.3 kg in China, 0.94 kg in Japan, and 2.14 kg in Turkey.

Currently there are 30 tea growing countries, but only 12 countries are important producers, i.e. Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Russia (former Soviet Union), Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, and Argentina. According to Cheng Zongmao (1995) the tea production in 1994 was about 2,487 thousand tons, of which Asia produced 83.2% and Africa 14.4%. The three largest producers (India, China and Kenya) accounted for 71.4% of

the total world production. From 1980 – 1994, tea production in the world increased by 2.55% per year. The total area of stable yielding tea plantations in the last 15 years was 2.34 million ha, of which Asia accounted for 86.7%, while Africa only covered 8.64%.

1.3 Tea production in Viet Nam

Tea has a long history in Viet Nam. People, both in the rural areas and in the cities, have had the custom of drinking tea for a long time. The northern part of Viet Nam is part of the region where the tea plant has its origins. In this area there are still many places where tea grows "wild" and is harvested by the local people, for example the Shan tea variety. The main tea cultivation areas of Viet Nam are also located in this part of the country, where it has developed greatly since the 1930s.

After occupying Indochina (1882) the French immediately paid a lot of attention to growing tea. In 1885 the French made the first survey on the tea plant in Viet Nam and in the period 1850 – 1891 other surveys were carried out, especially along the Da and Mekong rivers. The first tea plantation was established in 1890, in Tinh Cuong, Phu Tho. To overcome initial problems with the tea cultivation a number of tea stations were established, of which the station of Phu Tho was the first, in 1918. Other stations were set up in Pleiku (1927) and in Bao Loc (1931), where tea developed strongly after 1925-1930 when French companies made large investments in tea plantations in the area. The northern part of the country, however, remained the largest tea production area.

According to Nguyen Ngoc Kinh, the history of tea production in Viet Nam can be divided into three stages:

- The period from 1890 to 1945: First tea plantations were set up, i.e. 60 ha in Tinh Cuong, Phu Tho; 250 ha in Duc Pho, Quang Nam. By 1938, the total area of tea production in Viet Nam was 13.405 ha, yielding 6.100 tons of dry tea. In 1839 (?), the yield reached 10.900 tons, making Viet Nam the 6th tea producing country in the world, after India, China, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Japan.
- The period from 1945 to 1954: Because of the war, most of the tea plantations were abandoned. And without a market, the production went down. In 1946 the overall production was only 300 ton of tea.
- The period from 1954 to now: This period saw a great development in export and domestic markets for tea: in 1958 Viet Nam had a total area of 30.000 ha under tea. In 1977 the total area increased to 44.330 ha, with a yield of 17.896 tons of dry tea. In 1985 the country had 52.047 ha of tea, with a yield of 25.391 tons of dry tea.

Nowadays, tea is grown in 30 provinces. The largest tea producing area is the north of the country, where 14 mountainous and midland provinces grow a total area of 42.273 ha, or 63,5% of the national total. The Central Highlands have 15.596 ha, or 23,4%; the Red River delta provinces 2.818 ha, or 4,2%; the North Central provinces 4.208 ha, or 6,3%; and the Central coastal provinces 1.675 ha, or 2,5%.

Tea production in Viet Nam has increased both in acreage and yields. It is expected that by 2001, the total tea area will be 75.000 ha, the average yield 4,5 tons of fresh tea/ha; and in 2010, the figures will be 90.000 ha and 6,5 tons of fresh tea/ha.