

Tea Culture of Korea

The history of tea culture in Korea is very long.

In the period of the Three Kingdoms (Koguryo founded in 277 BC, Paekje and Silla), tea trees were grown in many places. That the peoples of the three states drank tea is recorded in such historical books as *Samguksagi* (Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms).

They say the history of tea tree cultivation by men goes back 2 000 years. Therefore, the fact that Koreans drank tea in the period of the Three Kingdoms demonstrates how long the history of the Korean tea culture is.

Palhae and Later Silla developed the tea culture.

Much data on tea as a favoured refreshing drink is recorded in *Samguksagi* and *Samgukyusa* (History of the Three Kingdoms).

The tea culture was developed further in the period of Koryo (918-1392), the first unified state in the Korean history. It is said that a central government office was set up in this period to control the production, processing, transport, sales and consumption of tea.

Koreans preferred teas prepared by decocting fruits and medicinal plants rather than those prepared with tea tree leaves, because they contained many medicinal ingredients unlike those of other countries with stimulants as their key ingredients.

In Koryo an event of drinking teas was always held before a national ceremony started.

As the consumption of teas in Koryo was very large, so the tea-making units were large in scale.

What promoted the popularity of Koryo teas which had unique taste and aroma was the production and use of the world-famous Koryo celadon.

Koryo celadon varied in shape, kind and utility, but the many of them were related with tea.

Excellent teapots, containers for tea leaves and teacups contributed to the development of the tea culture of Koryo onto a high level.

The tea culture of Koryo was widely known to other countries.

Koreans compared the tea flowers to heroism and bravery since they survived even in the frost, and said that the white colour of the flowers represents the Korean nation which was called the White-Clad Nation and that the spirit represents man's constancy and woman's chastity.

A Korean tradition runs that on the wedding day a bride gives tea to her husband's family as a gift and the mother-in-law gives the bride the seeds of tea tree as a present in the hope that the bride would bring glory to their family by keeping constancy like the tea tree.

Still today, brides holding bunch of tea flowers to show their constancy are often seen at wedding ceremonies.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea not only preserves the traditional tea culture but also is developing it on a higher level as required by the present era.