

## The Original Home of the Tea Plant and its Utilization

### Satosi Matushita

Department of International Communication, Aichi University, Minamisakae, Toyohashi, Aichi, 441-8107

The original habitat of the tea plant (*Camellia sinensis*) was thought to be the mountains dividing the Chinese province of Yunnan and other southeast Asian countries. However, verifying this information was not possible as access to these areas was restricted for foreigners.

In 1980, the open-door policy of China made it possible to go to Yunnan and search. As a result of my investigations spread over nine visits to the region, I consider the mountains of Yunnan to be the natural habitat of the tea plant. However, the culture of processing tea leaves and tea drinking seems to have originated in Wolingshan, in a mountain area called the land of Bashu, at the north end of Yungui-Gaoyuan in the northern part of Yunnan.

At Wolingshan in the land of Bashu, the Chinese and Chinese culture come together with the tea plant and the culture surrounding tea seems to have had its genesis. The next group of Chinese people to start using tea were the Yaozu, who subsequently spread the use of tea to the rest of the country when they moved southwards from Yunnan to the south Asian mountain area.

It became clear in my investigations that the original habitat of the tea plant and the place where its use started are quite different.

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## An Attempt to Introduce New Kinds of Flowers for use in the Tea Ceremony

### Sigeru Yokouchi

Department of Botany, Meijo University, Siogarnaguchi 1-50 1, Tenpakuku, Nagoya-shi, Aichi 448-0073

The Tea Ceremony is an integral part of Japanese culture. It is carried out in a tea room, chasitu, and traditionally an alcove in the room is adorned with a flower arrangement. This arrangement is known as chabana (flowers for the tea ceremony), and the idea is that these flowers should look as natural as they would in the wild. This idea was handed down from the originators of the Tea Ceremony and fresh flowers collected from the wild are the most sought after.

Traditionally some 200 wild species have been used most often in the Tea Ceremony, along with *Camellia japonica*, *Hibiscus syriacus*, and *Prunus mume*. Some 20% of the plants included are endangered. Not all of them are collected in the wild, for obvious reasons it is no longer permitted to utilize wild plants for chabana when one fifth of these plants are endangered.

The purchase of flowers for chabana is the new trend. However, the use of nontraditional flowers such as roses and carnations does not have the same appeal to people taking part in the Tea Ceremony, but change would seem to be inevitable with the increasing difficulty of obtaining wild flowers forcing a change to the style of the Tea Ceremony.