**Lesson 1**

***Student Handout 1.4—Origins of Tea***

Tea is made of the dried leaves, buds, and flowers of the tea plant. It originated in Asia in what is now the border region between India and China. The first Chinese written reference to tea goes back to the first century BCE. By the fourth century BCE, tea was deliberately grown as a medicinal, religious, and popular drink. It first became the national beverage of China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 BCE).

**Introduction**

“Thank God for tea! What would the world do without tea? How did it exist?”

*Sydney Smith, British writer (1771-1845)*

These two quotes exemplify the power of tea in the two countries best known for tea. Not only did tea grow in demand from 1500 to 1800, but it also grew in profit for the Chinese. As tea became more popular, the British paid more and more silver to the Chinese in exchange for tea. In addition, tea had to be imported from China, and the Chinese tightly controlled the number of chests of tea leaves that left its docks. A Dutch ship brought the first shipment of tea to the Netherlands in 1610, and by the 1650s tea was known in England.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, almost no one drank tea. By the end of the century, enough tea was coming into Britain for everyone in the country to have a cup or two a day. What allowed for this rapid change? Tea became fashionable thanks to Charles II’s queen, Catherine of Braganza, a Portuguese princess who had grown up drinking tea. When she married Charles in 1662 and came to England, she made tea a fashionable drink in court and among aristocrats. Subsequently, a whole tea culture emerged, including the teashop, tea parties, tea gardens, and the marketing of tea to women, who had not been permitted in the men-only coffeehouses of London. The ultimate expression of this practice was “tea time,” where tea became the center of the afternoon meal. Sweetened with sugar produced by slaves in the Americas, tea became the favored drink of workers during the Industrial Revolution. It also stimulated mass production of products to hold tea, notably the complete tea set or tea service, which rich and middle class British consumers had to have.

Transporters such as the British East India Company (BEIC) brought tea to England. In fact, this company enjoyed a British monopoly on exports from the East Indies. Once the company established offices in trading at the port of Canton in China at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the volume of tea entering Britain soared, while prices fell. Therefore, common people, as well as the elite, could enjoy tea. By the early 1720s, tea was the number-one export from China. At the height of prosperity of the BEIC, more than 50 percent of its Asian export value was in tea! In 1773, Parliament passed the Tea Act, which eliminated the tax the BEIC had paid the British government for importing tea to Britain and its colonies in the Americas.

**British tea purchases from China**

1700-25-> 400,000 pounds

1760 -> 2,600,000 pounds

1800-> 23,300,000 pounds

1808-> 26,000,000 pounds

http://history.binghamton.edu/hist130/docs/teaopium.htm

**Value of Tea Exported from China to England**

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| --- | --- |
| 1781-1790  | 16.4 million ounces of silver  |
| 1800-1810  | 26 million ounces of silver  |

http://humanities.cqu.edu.au/history/52148/modules/imperial\_commoditiesA.html

**A Josiah Wedgwood Tea Set**

http://www.abcir.org/images/000175.jpg

a. Who is the producer of the tea? What does the producer get for trading or selling the tea?

b. Who is the mover of the tea? What do movers get for transporting the goods? c. Who is the consumer? What do consumers give in order to get the goods they want?

d. How did the tea trade benefit the people who produced the tea, transported it, and consumed it?