

# Tea Statistics: The Chinese Scenario

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## Introduction

Tea in China dates back to some five thousand years ago, when Emperor Shen Nung accidentally discovered “tea” in 2737 BC as some *Camellia* blossom/ leaves drifted into his cup of boiled drinking water. The inquisitive emperor drank the brew and found it refreshing. Thus, the legacy of drinking tea in China began. During the reign of Qin Dynasty (3rd century BC), tea was considered as a common drink that became widely popular during the Tang Dynasty. It was during this time when tea entered Korea and Japan. Subsequently, tea spread to other nations of the world. Today, China grows tea in more than ten thousand holdings, and has the largest variety of tea found in any other country. The Chinese also mastered the art of preparing different types of tea. Some of the notable types of Chinese tea include Green tea, White tea, Oolong tea, Black tea, Smoked Black tea (a type of green tea), etc. Tea growing areas in China are located mainly on the eastern part of the country (Shandong, Anhui, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hunan, Sichuan and Guangdong) and currently produce almost 1500 million kg of tea a annually.



Source: <http://en.radio86.com/chinese-food/eight-major-regional-cuisines-china>

## Area

There has been a substantial increase in the area under tea in China over the last two decades. At the beginning of the nineties, tea was cultivated in 1061 thousand hectares which increased to 1089 th. ha at the beginning of the twenty-first century with a compound growth rate of 6.72%. The area was found to increase from 1141 th. ha to 1970 th. ha during 2001–2010 (Figure 1).

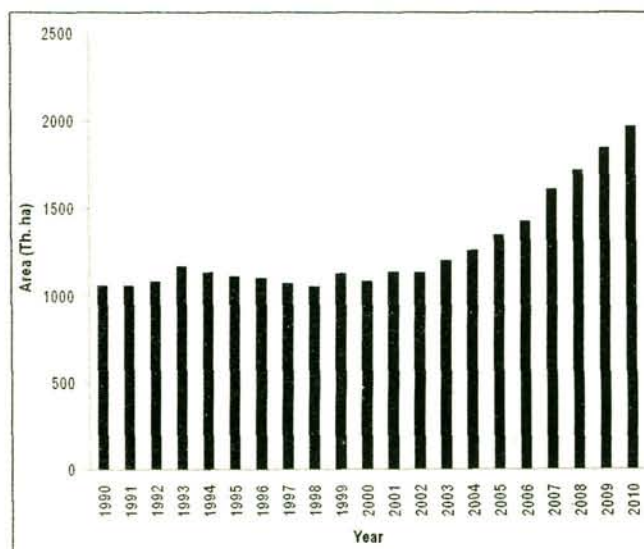
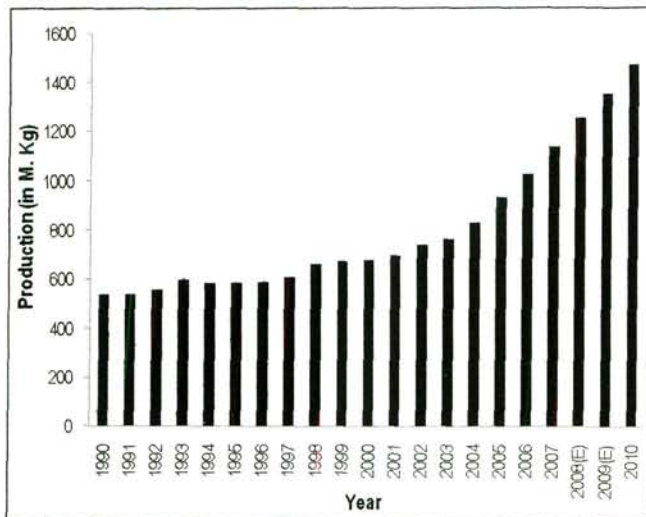


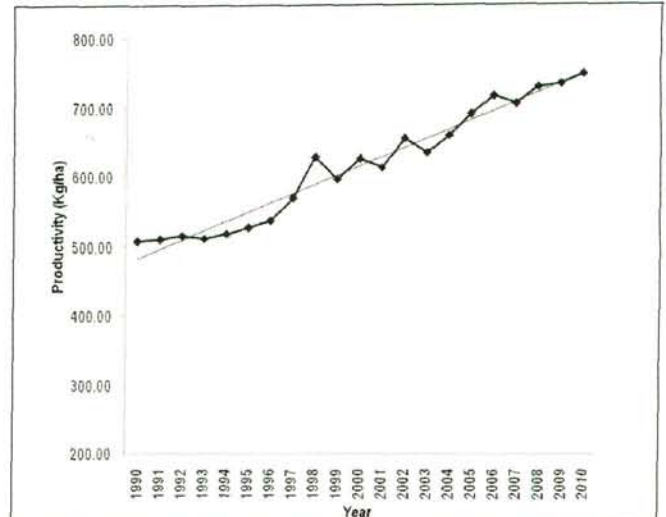
Figure 1. Area under tea in China during 1990–2010

## Production

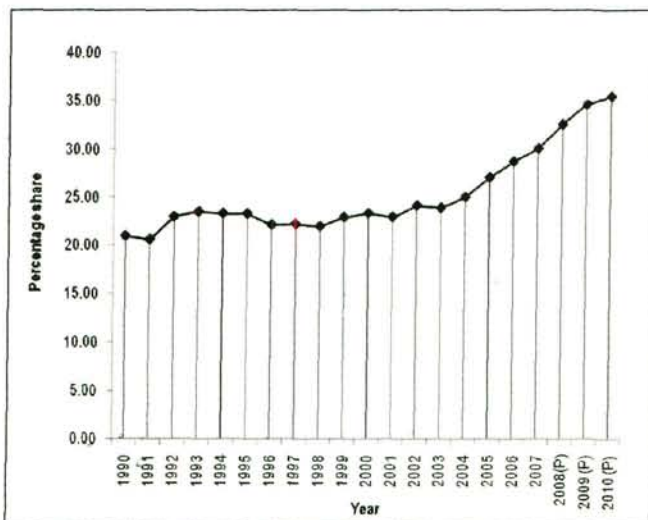
Presently, China is the largest tea producing country in the world. The production of tea during the nineties grew at a rate of 2.38% whereas the same during the period from 2001–2010 grew at the rate of 8%. This phenomenal growth reflected in the production from a mere 702 M kg in 2001 to 1475 M kg in 2010 (Figure 2). With nearly half the world’s total tea growing units, China continued to produce only about twenty three percent of the world’s tea output till 2003. However, from 2004 onwards this share has gone up to 35% in 2010 (Figure 3).



**Figure 2. Production of tea in China during 1990–2010**



**Figure 4. Productivity of tea in China during 1990–2010**



**Figure 3. Percentage share of China in world production of tea during 1990–2010**

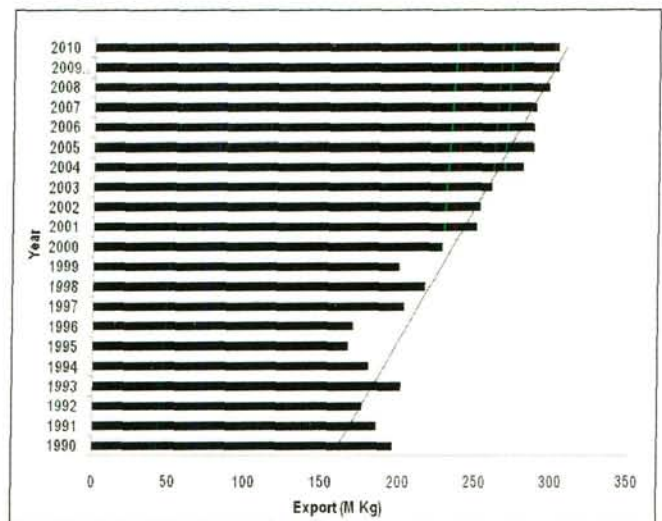
**Productivity**

In tune with both the area and production, productivity of Chinese tea has increased substantially in the last decade. China’s average yield of tea per hectare was 509 kg during 1990. This yield was quite low compared to other tea producing nations. From 1993, it started to increase although there was a period of flux during 1998–2003. Today it stands around 749 kg/ha (2010) (Figure 4).

**Export**

With the increase in the production level, China has gradually become an important player in the global tea market. During the nineties, a fluctuation in the export of tea was clearly visible that hovered within 180–200 M kg, Moreover during 2000–2010, a steady increase

in export was recorded. In 2010 export stood at 303 M kg (Figure 5). Thus, the compound growth rate which was only 1.58% during 1991–2000, increased to 2.88% during 2001–2010.



**Figure 5. Export of tea from China during 1990–2010**

However, the percentage share of Chinese tea in the global market remains between 15% and 18%, which is probably due to entrance of new global exporters like Kenya and Sri Lanka (Figure 6).

**Green Tea: The Chinese Dominance Continues Production**

When it comes to green tea, China is still the world leader in this front. The most famous green tea is the expensive “Dragon Well” tea, grown in the hillsides of Hangzhou. China has been producing more than 500 M kg of green tea since 2001, which increased to 1046 M kg in 2010.

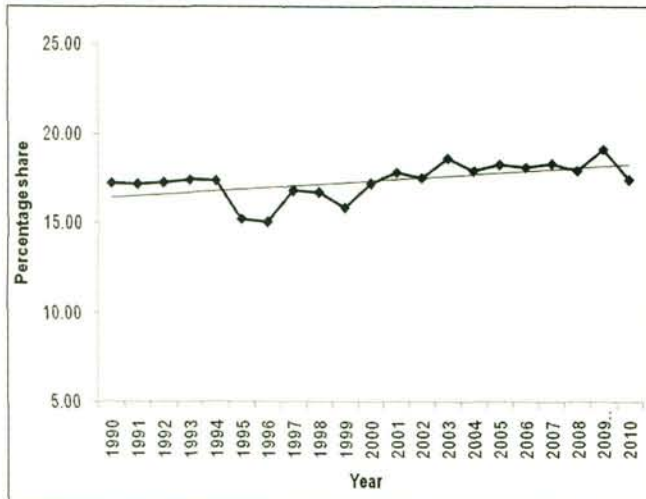


Figure 6. Share of Chinese tea in world market during 1990–2010

Similarly, the percentage share in the global production has increased steadily from around 73% to 82% during the last decade (Figure 7).

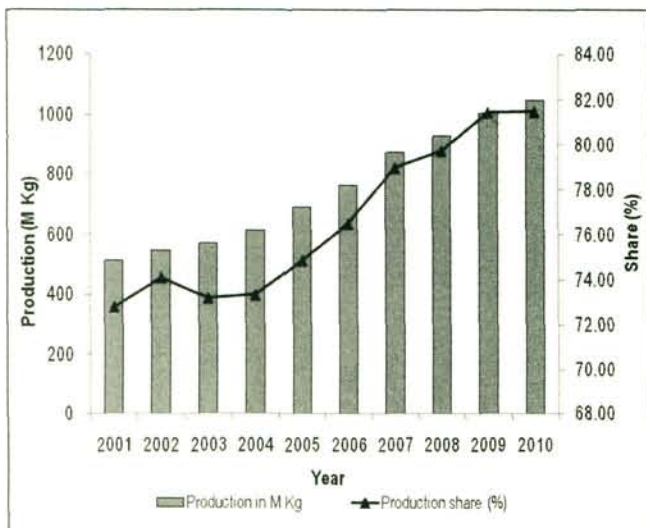


Figure 7. Chinese contribution in total production and share of green tea in world during 2001–2010

### Export

The increase in export of green tea from China has not been commensurate with production. During 2010, China exported 234 M kg of green tea as against 163 M kg in 2001. Interestingly, its share of export in the

global market has been found to fall from 87% to 78% between 2003 and 2007. However, in 2010, China contributed 79% of the total green tea exported worldwide (Figure 8).

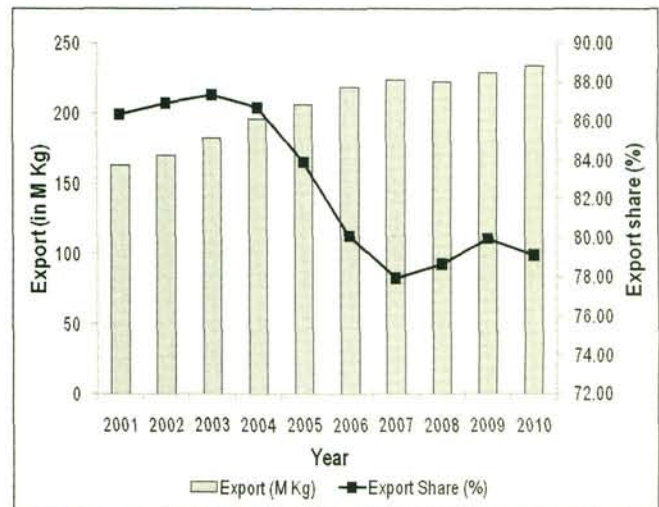


Figure 8. Export of green tea from China and its share in the global market during 2001–2010

### Conclusion

Tea is intricately associated with the Chinese culture since its discovery. Whether it's a family gathering or expressing thanks to the elders or on one's wedding day, tea is the most pious way to convey gratitude. Tea is also considered to be the best media to apologize for some serious offence! Drinking tea symbolizes health, energy and spirituality. Despite many alternatives available today as a consequence of globalization, tea continues to be China's primary beverage of choice and over the last decade, China has regained its tea culture.

However, like other tea growing countries, China is also facing new challenges on how to produce quality tea in the quantities needed to meet the international demand, besides catering to its own consumer base. Simultaneously, the issues of environmental safety and efforts for clean tea production are also of great concern. With its technological advancement and scientific research, China is heading towards a new era of tea production and it will continue to be an important player in the global tea arena in coming years.