

tea farm -

Methods unchanged for generations U ji-cha green tea is one of the most tea. Among this prestigious range, the blends grown by Kiyoharu Tsuji are known to stand head and shoulders above the rest. While only a small proportion of tea marketed as *Uji-cha* is actually produced in the Uji region,

Kiyoharu's tea plantation is located in Uji-Shirakawa, an area in the south of Kyoto where quality tea has been grown for hundreds of years. What's more, Tsuji adheres strictly to the traditional method of harvesting only the first crop of the year, and then only picking the tea leaves by hand. with a mere 0.0% of green tea on the Japanese

Another of the distinctive features of *Uji-cha* production is the copious use of fertilizer. By exposing the tea plants to plentiful amounts of nutrients, their leaves grow rich and fat beyond their normal size. This excess has the result of increasing the leaves' umami compo-Hand-picked tea is actually a rarity, nent, giving the tea a satisfying richness. Depriving the plants by restricting their market being picked in this way. Tsuji mainaccess to sunlight, while stuffing them full of tains a traditional method which has been fertilizer. It's an odd mix of restraint and maintained by a select group of Uji tea proindulgence which might be compared with the production of another delicacy, foie gras. in ducers for 300 years. His accolades attest to the superiority of his product; he is an which geese are deprived of sunlight and are eight-time recipient of the Special Prize from deliberately overfed to produce liver pate. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and

As far as fertilizer goes, tea bushes are Fisheries, the highest prize at the National particularly fond of ammonia nitrogen. If the plants are given ammonia nitrogen and So why does Uji have such a long histonitrate nitrogen simultaneously, they will ry of tea production, and why has the area take in the ammonia nitrogen first, and when continued to produce such high quality tea? that has been fully absorbed, they will turn Enjoy Kyoto visited the tea plantation to find their attention to the nitrate nitrogen. In out from the master tea grower himself. And other words, the plant is picky about its fertilwhat are the secrets of growing premium tea? zer. This is something that has only relative-According to Tsuji, it's all in the perfect ly recently come to light through scientific amount of indulgence and deprivation. testing. Surprisingly, the tea growers of Uji have known for hundreds of years that rapeseed oil meal, a source of ammonia nitrogen, Controlling the light is a key to growing exceptional tea.

Kiyoharu Tsuji's ultimate tea

iyoharu Tsuji is the fifth generation tea

grower at Tsujiki, an Uji tea concern Exposure to direct sunlight promotes the breakdown of theanine (the sweet component which was founded in 1900. He began his in tea), which in turn becomes astringent catecareer in tea cultivation in 1989 at the tender chin. In contrast, blocking sunlight prevents age of 20. Tsuji initially trained with a tea wholesaler after finishing high school. As he this phenomenon, and has the added benefit familiarized himself with a wide variety of of adding umami depth to the tea leaf. Understanding this mechanism is the key to grow green teas, Tsuji began to think more deeply ing tea with a delicious, balanced taste. about the tea his father was producing. This is "Shading is part of the traditional when he first thought about trying his hand at method of cultivation. When buds start to growing tea himself. It was time to get into the tea fields. He knocked on the doors of famous appear, we cover the bushes with woven hand-made reed screens called *uoshizu.* This is too plantations and asked questions. He received a simple answer. "Start by learning in the first covering. When the shoots reach a certain state, we then place an extra layer of mochi rice plant straw over the screens. This Taking this advice, Kiyoharu began his straw is rather thick and blocks the sunlight journey as a grower by planting some tea seedwell, so it works better than any other kind. lings in an empty plot of land happily provided by his father in the heart of a premium

tarving the tea leaves of sunlight

their surface area to try and gain more photo-

synthesis. This extra effort on the part of the

plant results in fine, vivid green tea leaves.

during growth causes them to expand

This is just one example of the wisdom passed down from our predecessors." tea-growing area. Tea plants take four years to reach maturity, so there was no immediate payoff. But it was a first step in his quest to grow the ultimate tea. Uninterested in profit and with his focus on winning an award, Tsuji tended his plants with utmost care, fertilizing them copiously and paying careful attention to shading. Four years later his first crop was harvested. The quality of the tea was extraordi-

Awash in nutrients

TSUIKI P16 UJI MAP 【Address】宇治市白川川上り谷52-1 【Phone】0774-21-2243 [Mail] info@tsujiki.jp tsujiki.jp Tsujiki's tea fields are closed to visitors during the peak picking seasor in May and June. Requests for tours should be made in advance via

*Bookings for tea picking experiences are not being accepted at present. nary. At the National Tea Fair, Tsuji's tea Ise-Shima G7 Summit. His tea he chose to fetched a remarkable price of 500,000 yen per serve to the world's leaders was King of Green

bottled in wine bottles. In fact, since tencha is spent four laborious years growing died. After a single crop, he was left with no choice but to not commonly available on the market, it's a start over spending another four years growtreat usually reserved for tea growers and a handful of wholesalers. If you are a true "It was a result of over-feeding with aficionado and want to sample the delights of nutrients and excessively thick shading. It was tencha, it can be purchased from Royal as if when making foie gras, if you overdid it Beauty or JA Yamashiro for the astonishing and the bird died before the foie gras was procured." It was a pointless endeavor if the tea field was going to die. And a single crop does not a profit make. However, Tsuji was

"But as a result, I was able to ascertain the tipping point that would kill the trees. If I could reduce nutrients to just under the tipping point, I could make the ultimate tea. I realized this only because I'd overdone it and killed the trees; I'd had this enormous failure that

kilo. But then the unthinkable happened.

Every one of the ten acres of tea bushes he'd

Handing the trowel to the next generation

nobody else had," reflects Tsuji with a laugh.

n the same way that he received a tea **I** field from his father, Kiyoharu this spring gave his son a field of his own to plant. After completing his studies Tsuji's son initially worked at a bank, but realized his heart lay in more agricultural pursuits. He chose of his own accord to take over the the family tea plantation, a decision which delighted Kivoharu no and It's an important If nobody grows any tea, there won't be any tea to drink. An approach to cultivation as extreme as

world. But this adherence to tradition is worth it. The taste of machine-picked, mass-produced tea pales in comparison to authentic leaves. Passing on the traditional, high-caliber tea of Uji to future generations is critical, Tsuji says. What a delight it will be to taste the tea produced by the family's sixth generation four years from now. 📭 suji's tea has also received lavish

that of *Uji-cha* is rare anywhere in the

praise from attendees of the 2016

price of 300,000 yen per bottle. Premium matcha is said to be now more expensive than silver, though someone with even a bit of specialist knowledge will understand why by looking at a tea field, explains Tsuji. He recently received a visit from a French patissier keen to question him on various aspect of tea production such as the type of soil and length of daylight hours. Tsuji adds that these days it's visitors from overseas who are the most enthusiastic to learn the ways of tea This is why believes that his establishment must take steps to actively promote itself more, and has added a form for customers to reserve tea for purchase to the plantation's website (Unfortunately, the tea cannot be shipped to addresses outside Japan.) The Gion-based French restaurant Mavo features Tsuji's highest grade teas Asahi and Samidori

Kiyoharu, a cold-brewed tencha (made from

matcha tea leaves before they are ground)

on its menu. "Just as it's now becoming common practice to select coffee based on geographic origin and variety, so it will be with green tea in the future." Tsuji foresees next generation in this way, and is striving to adapt to it. But son's sake. He strongly believes that what will most benefit this next generation is for Tsuji himself to continue to produce tea of a standard that gives his son something to aspire to. With a potent rival now coming up in his sights, the eyes of the tea world are on Kiyoharu Tsu-

ji's tea like never

November 18, 2016 | Diane in Kyoto

本物の宇治抹茶は"畑のフォアグラ"



Jii-cha (

ィーラテ(抹茶ラテ)」は世界中で人気だし、ハリウッド映画の中でも抹茶そのものを 飲むシーンが登場するようになった。「Begin Again (邦題:はじまりのうた)」 (2014) では、主要登場人物の一人デイビッドが、ニューヨークのスタジオで"That's maccha tea. Gotta like 4 million antioxidants in it. I like it. Samurai used to drink it before they went out to battle."と言って、コーヒーの代わりに抹茶を抹茶用 のお椀で飲む。パリでも日本のお茶屋さんが進出に成功し、紅茶文化のロンドンでさえ も抹茶は人気だ。今日、アジアではもちろん、世界的に抹茶そのものの認知は確立され たといえるだろう。むしろ、その味や品質について吟味される時代に突入したといえ 一方、抹茶にも高品質なものから下級品まであり、抹茶と呼ばれていても抹茶とはいい

抹茶は今や海外でも意識の高い人々に愛飲されている。スターバックスの「グリーンテ

がたい代物も多く出回っている。日本茶葉100%の純粋な抹茶はどこででも手に入るわ けではない。ましてや、その茶葉が特別な土地で栽培され、その栽培方法も手間暇かけ た特殊なプロセスであった場合、年間生産量は限られ、めったに味わえるものではない 希少な商品になる。 そのような特殊で貴重な抹茶を生産しているのが京都の宇治市だ。宇治といえば、日本

人なら誰でも「お茶の産地」ということは知っている。しかし、茶畑には、煎茶と玉露 と碾茶の3種類があるということはあまり知られていない。また、抹茶が碾茶と呼ばれ る茶葉から作られることも日本人はあまり知らない。抹茶は碾茶を丁寧に加工し、粉砕 したパウダーだ。高品質の抹茶は当然緑の色も鮮やかで、いかにも生きた葉っぱのよう な色をしている。

宇治で茶農家を営む辻喜代治さんは、宇治でも 最高品質の碾茶を生産している茶葉づくりの匠 だ。明治時代に先祖がこの土地に移り住んで以 来、茶葉づくりを続けており、辻さんは5代目に あたる。様々な創意工夫と努力が評価され、 2016年、全国茶品評会 碾茶の部で第一位の農林 水産大臣賞を受賞した。辻さんの育てた碾茶が日 本一の品質であることが認められたわけだ。





では、何が辻さんの茶葉を最高級にしているのか? よい茶 葉づくりは、天候と土づくりに大きく影響される。不可抗 力の部分も多いが、辻さんの土づくりや栽培方法は、サイ エンスといえるほど実験と挑戦の連続である。データを取 りそれに基づき予測を立て、最後は経験で得た観を働かせ て気象条件に対応していく。

「就農27年になりますが、毎年1年生です。なぜなら毎

年、気象状況は違うからです」と辻さんは言う。「遠隔地からもお茶栽培を教えてほし いという方が来られるんですが、実のところお教えできないんです。毎年やることが変 わりますし、私の方法でやってみても土壌が変わると通用しないからです。答えはない んですよ」と。

辻さんのお茶を最高級品にしている要素は数多くあるが、まずはすべての新芽を手で摘 んでいる点だ。手摘みは機械刈りと比べて効率は悪い。しかし、辻さんが手摘みにこだ わるのには理由がある。機械で刈ると切断面が刃物で切ったように広がり、酸化が激し くなる。手摘みだと丁寧に摘むため断面積は少なく、その分酸化を促進しない。抗酸化 効果が高いといわれる緑茶は、酸化を止めてこそ緑茶。だからあくまで手摘みにこだわ る。もう一つの理由は、含有栄養分だ。機械で刈ると新芽以外の葉の部分も収穫時に混 じってしまうが、手摘みであれば一切新芽以外の物を混じらせない。すると茶葉になっ たとき、純粋な栄養分の濃度が保たれるのだ。



接すると酸性度を上げ、アンモニアを大量に発生させる。お茶はアンモニアを吸収する とおいしくなる。このメカニズムはここ10年でやっと解明されたのだが、実は100年以 上前から宇治茶の肥料はいつも菜種油だった。「お茶は『畑のフォアグラ』といえるで しょう。肥料を与えれば与えるほど吸収するんです。どんどん食べさせては胃薬を飲ま せるという連続です。木としては耐えがたい苦痛ですが、それがうま味に変わります。 肥料を吸えば吸うほどお茶の味はよくなるんです」と辻さんは言う。まろやかなお茶を 作るためには、渋みの成分であるカテキンを抑制する必要がある。カテキンは、お茶の 中にあるアミノ酸が日光に当たることで発生する。「宇治茶は雑味や渋みがないまろや かな味が特徴ですから、どんどん菜種油を肥料として与え、遮光して栽培します」と。 宇治のお茶農家では遮光は通常80%程度だ。しかし、辻さんの農園では、他の農家の2.

倍の肥料を与え、95%の遮光を行う。遮光は味や栄養分の濃度を高めるための育成抑 制でもあるので、おのずと収穫量は減る。だから収穫量は、一般的なお茶農家の6割く らいにまで減る。この「多肥高遮光」という方法は「究極のお茶」を作るための辻さん 独自の方法なのだが、一つ間違えると大損害をもたらしてしまう。



探求心と野心に満ちた就農3年目の当時、辻さんはおいし いお茶を作りたくて多肥高遮光をぎりぎりまで試してみ た。ところが、限界を超えてしまい、10aすべての木を枯 らしてしまった。新芽は幸いにも収穫できたが、おおもと の木をすべて枯らしてしまったのだ。お茶は木を植えてか ら5年目でやっと新芽が取れる。5年間その10aからは何も 収穫できなかった。



「しかし、枯らしてしまったおかげで限界が分かったんで す。若いころにこの痛い経験をさせてもらったことがとて もよかったんです」と辻さんは言う。 木がフォアグラみたいに栄養を詰め込まれて疲れて、生き

残れるぎりぎりのところまで追いつめて、「もう枯れる」 という直前に摘んだ新芽が究極の碾茶となる。それが今年 日本一になった作品だった。 宇治川という大きな河川が近くに流れていることも最高のお茶づくりの理に適ってい

る。収穫は5月なので、収穫前の春先の霜害が一番危険だ。しかし、宇治川があること で気流が発生し霜が降りない自然の仕組みになっているのだ。川に助けられて霜を避け ることができる。宇治の自然条件はお茶づくりに最適で、この土地をお茶作りに選んだ 先祖は、データなど一切なくても「ここだ!」ということを知っていた。その先人の知 恵に辻さんは深い尊敬と感謝の念を抱いている。 農作物において土壌は気象と同じくらい重要だ。高級なお茶づくりにおいて不可欠なの は強酸性の土壌と水はけなのだ。同じ宇治の中でも一定の範囲だけが土壌の作用によっ

て特別な味のお茶を生み出す。まるでワインのようだ。ブルゴーニュ中でピノ・ノワー

ルは生産され醸造されているけれど、ロマネ・コンティの畑だけが何十倍(何百倍?) もの値段がつくのと同じだ。あの畑の一角だけは、土壌に含まれるミネラルや水はけが ブルゴーニュの他のどの畑とも違っているらしい。辻さんの農園に、ロマネ・コンティ に相当する特別の一角がある。土壌に含まれている要素がほかの土地とは異なってお り、そこから収穫されたお茶は、究極の中でも究極なのだそうだ。 その畑を案内してもらった時、「同じお茶の 木の葉の色が朝と夕方では違うのをご存知で





家に生まれ、小さいころからお茶に親しん できた。子供のころからお茶職人になると 決めていた辻さん。 「お茶作りは私の天職だと思っています。国内だけでなく海外でも本物がわかる方に私

現在、日本では農業を子供に継がせたくないという親世代は多く、それゆえ日本の農業 は、超高齢化と後継者不足で衰退の一途をたどっている。辻さんは、「親が農業の面白 さを子供に伝えれば、後継者は成り立ちます。こうすればビジネスになるということを

のお茶が認められた時は本当にうれしいですし、消費者の方々がおいしいと言ってくれ

るお茶を作ること、それが私の使命だと思っています」と言う。

親が率先して子供に伝えれば、農家は育つんです」と信じている。 茶葉の摘採期は1年に1回、5月だけ。この1か月のために辻さんは毎年熱い11か月を費



Genuine Uji-matcha is just like "foie gras of farm"

As a matter of fact, Starbucks Matcha Green Tea Latte is loved around the world and even in the Hollywood movie, we get to see the character drinking matcha insted of coffee.

Matcha is now popular all over the world, especially popular for the people highly interested in health.

In Begin Again(2014), Dave, who is one of main characters, says "That's maccha tea. Gotta like 4 million antioxidants in it. I like it. Samurai used to drink it before they went out to battle.", drinking a cup of matcha insted of coffee. More over, we can see Japanese tea shop succeed in Paris and even in London whose people love drinking tea, matcha is getting good reputation. We can say that in addition to Asia, acknowledgement about matcha has been established. From now on, the time has come when the taste and quality should be more strictly evaluated.

As mathca become popular around the world, on the other hand the qulity of matcha ranges very widely from low to high. There is the case where low quality matcha is sold but it is not possible to call this matcha in terms of in credibly low quality. We can't always buy 100% pure mathca made in Japan everywhere around the world. In addition, talking of matcha

made in best matcha farm and by special method, it becomes more difficult to get because annual production of match

like this is very less, resulting in very rare products. It's Uji, Kyoto that produces matcha described before, that is to say, special and precious. We Japanese all

know that Uji is famous for "tea producing". But we hardly know the fact that there are 3 types of tea farms, which are respectively for sencha, gyokuro, and

tencha. Matcha is the powder made of tencha processed carefully and wholeheartedly and then ground. The color of high quality matcha of course is bright and fresh like color of living leaves.

KIYOHARU TSUJIKI is the master of tea production. He manages the tea farm in Uji and the tencha made by him has best quality even in Uji famous for tea producing.

He is the 5th generation since his ancestors came to live here Uji and he has kept producing match this place. In 2016, his endeavor and innovation led to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Award for tencha, which is first prize, at national tea competitive exhibition. Which means that his attitude toward producing matcha was highly evalu ated and it was confirmed his matcha had best quality in Japan.

So, what makes tea leaves cultivated by Tsuji so special?

Whether you can cultivate good tea leaves or not depends largely on climate and soil. Although there are many parts beyond control, Tsuji's method of soil and tea leaves cultivation can be said to be scientific. This is because he does try and error many times and get data through this experiment. He adapts to changing climate based on data and intuition.

Tsuji says "Although I've been producing tea for as long as 27 years, every year I am freshman because the the same climate condition never come again" "People come here from distant place to learn how to produce matcha by me but honestly speaking, there is nothing I can tell to them because what you need to do changes every year and my method is not useful to different types of soil."

There are many reasons which make tea made by Tsuji best. First, they harvest all the burgeon by hand.

Handpicking is less efficent compared to mechanical picking.

But there is the specific reason Tsuji choose this method in spite of low efficiency. When harvesting by mechanical picking, cut surface spreads as if it was cut by blade, which leads to rapid oxidation. On the

other hand, handpicking leads to small cut surface area and slow oxidation. Ryokucha with much less oxidation is genuinely ryokucha because ryokucha is said to have high anti-oxidation effect.

This is the reason Tsuji love handpicking.

Second, it's about a large amount of inclusion of nutrition. Harvesting by mechanical picking means you harvest all of leaves including what are not burgeons but when you choose handpicking, you can only harvest burgeons. So, handpicking makes it possible to retain high nutrient density.

Moreover, Tsuji uses manily organic fertilizer like canola oil at best timing. When canola oil is mixed with soil, it get more acid and causes a lot of ammonia. The more tea get ammonia, the much better it tastes. This machanisim was clarified just recent 10 years but the fertilizer of Uji-cha has been always conaola oil. "We can say tea is just like foie gras of farm. The more fertilizer we use, the more it absorbs. We continue using a lot of fertilizer and giving it stomach medicine.

We make trees feel great pain but it turns out to be Umami. The much better tea teastes, the more fertilizer it absorbs. " says Tsuji. In order to produce mild taste tea, what is needed is to decrease catechin causing bitter taste. Catechin is produced, when amino acid of tea is exposed to sunlight. "Characteristic of Uji tea is the mild taste, which mean it doesn't taste bitter, so, we cultivate by cutting off the sunlight and providing much canola oil as a fertilizer."

The average shade rating of tea farms of Uji is about 80%. But Tsuji provides twice as much fertilizer as other farms and shade rating of the Tsuji's farm is 95%.

Cover culture decreases the production because cover culture is the method which both increases mild taste and nutri ent density and inhibit growth at the same time. So production of Tsuji tea farm is equal to 60% of other typical farms. This method using a lot of fertilizer and high shade rating cover culture is originally invented by Tsuji but a tiny and little mis-decision making leads to big loss.

When Tsuji was 3-year-producer with curiosity and ambition, he tried this method next to the maximum level. But unfor tunately, he reached the maximum and exceeded that level. As a result, he ruined 10 are farm. It was fortunate he could harvest burgeons but all trees blasted. It takes five years to harvest since trees are planted. That is to say, he couldn't harvest anything from that 10 are for as long as five years.

Tsuji says "I'm very lucky to experience this when I was younger. I learnt the maximum level because of blasting."

Trees are provided with too much nutrition like foie gras, being exhausted, and getting them maximum level where trees can narrowly live and then he harvests burgeons which nearly blast. This is how he produced ultimate tencha and which tencha is the best masterpiece this year.

That big river called Uji river is near farm is rational for producing best tea. The most dangerous risk for tea trees is frost because harvest season is May.

Uji river makes natural situation where it doesn't frost by airstream. This means river help avoid frost. Uji's nature condition is best for producing tea and the

ancestor who choosed this area to produce tea knew that this is the best place for tea production eventhough

they had no data. Tsuji is respectful for and appriciates the wisdom of ancestors.

What is essentail for producing high quality tea is high acid soil and good drainage. Some specific area even in the same Uji area can produce special taste tea owing to soil effect like wine. This has similarity in the sense that

Soil is as important as climate for agricultural crops.

the farm of Romanee Conti is dozens times more expensive (or hundreds times?) than other farms even though Pinot Noir is produced and vinified in Bourgogne. The mineral and drainage of Bourgogone seems totally different from any other farms there. The Tsuji farm has the place similar to Romanee Conti. That place has different stuffs like nutrient and can produce the most ultimate tea of other ultimate tea.

morning and early evening even in the same leaves?"

When Tsuji invited me to that special farm, he asked me "Do you know there is color difference between

Of course, I didn't know that. "Tea production is a kind of communication with nature. So, we can't make a concrete plan.

I recognize whether or not fertilizer is effective when I see the color of leaves in the morning and likewise recoginze whether or not management is good by seeing the color of leaves in the early evening."

He says he checks the color of leaves every morning and early evening and thinking about how to produce better tea every 365 days. This dedication pushed him forward. Tsuji was born at tea farm in Uji best for produing tea and has been always with

tea. He decided to grow up to be tea producer when he was a child.

"I think producing tea is my vocation. I'm very glad when the people who can appreciate the real things evaluate tea produced by me very much. And my mission is to produce the tea consumers say excellent." says Tsuji.

of super aging of agriculture, resulting in scarcity of successor and sharp decline. "What is important is for parents to tell their child how interesting and exciting agriculture is, which leads to the many successor. When the parents tell how to manage successfully as a business, young farmers get to advance." Tsuji believes.

Now there are many tea farmers who don't want their child to succeed their job and that causes the situation

The best season for harvesting tea leaves is only once a year, just May. Tsuji spends intense 11 months every year for this one month.