

A History of Buckwheat (soba noodle seed) and its Advantages

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Summary

The dominant theory places the origin of buckwheat noodles, which is a lignum grain, at Yunnan in China, from where it spread to the colder climatic area to the east and west. Since buckwheat can be cultivated in poor soil, it became a supplemental slash-and-burn farming crop. Therefore, the history of buckwheat cultivation is relatively recent. The first Chinese record of buckwheat was a document in a 6th century book of agricultural resources, “Seiminyojutu (齊民要術)”. Around the 7th or 8th century, people in Huabei began cultivating buckwheat.

Buckwheat is said to have come to Japan through the Korean Peninsula by the 8th century. Its first documented mention is in the sequel of the chronicle of Japan, “Shoku Nihongi (続日本紀)”. According to that article, Emperor Gensho ordered buckwheat cultivation throughout the entire country to prepare for dry weather in 722.

Regarding the uses for buckwheat, according to an old Chinese food book, “Shokumotsuhonso (食物本草)”, it was first mentioned in “Senkinyoho (千金要方)”, the oldest medical book in 7th century China. Interestingly, it already described the effect of over consumption in detail. Since then, many food books repeated the knowledge found in their predecessors, describing the various uses and harms of buckwheat

Following in the tradition of these Chinese food books, buckwheat noodle use was introduced to Japan following the Edo Period (1603-1867). At this time, I am going to backtrack descriptions about buckwheat in food books published both in China and Japan, as well as the in Edo Period folk medicine and modern nutritional science, weaving this information together with my memories of buckwheat noodles.