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**Introduction Page 2**

Soybeans have been valued in Asia for centuries. Soybeans, commonly referred to as soy or soya, originated in northern China and Inner Mongolia in the eleventh century BC. The soy plant is a hairy plant that ranges from 2 to 5 feet tall. The soy beans come from the soy plant’s pods, which drop at maturity and release the beans. Soybeans were used as a staple food in times of famine in China, Korea and Japan. In addition, soy was also used for making preserved or fermented foods, such as tofu, miso, and tempeh. The Chinese also appreciated soy for its medicinal value. Chinese Emperor Shen-Nong conducted research on the soybean’s healing properties and recorded it in The Medical Bible of the Yellow Emperor, declaring soy one of the five sacred grains. A 16th century physician Li-Shi-Zhen added that: “it can be used medicinally mainly to 'kill bad/evil chi….' It stops bodily pain, eliminates water [reduces edema], dispels heat in the stomach, reduces bad blood, and is an antidote to poisonous drugs and kidney disease...” (Special Exhibit Museum of Soy)

Europeans discovered soy later in the 16th century. Explorers and missionaries traveling to China and Japan became intrigued as they noticed the use of soy in various foods. In 1665, Friar Domingo Navarrete mistook tofu for cheese.

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|  | **“They drew the milk out of the Kidney-Beans and turning it, make great Cakes of it like Cheeses . . . All the Mass is as white as the very Snow . . . Alone it is insipid, but very good dress'd as I say and excellent fry'd in Butter” (NSRL: About Soy).** |  |

In 1957, Florentine explorer Francesco Carletti discovered the use of soy sauce in Japan, which the Europeans came to call gravy. By the 17th century, soy sauce had become a common trade item from Asia to Europe, and soybeans were cultivated all over Europe.

Soy was then introduced to the United States in 1851 by the Japanese. However, Americans valued soy more for its industrial value than its nutritional value. They used soy as a source of oil, especially during the shortage of inexpensive oils during World War II. Thus, by the 20th century, the soybean had spread throughout the world, with its nutritional and industrial worth recognized around the globe.

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