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'Fa Tsai' a Chinese edible Nostoc in market.

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The Nostoc 'Fa Tsai' is sometimes seen in Chinese cooking materials stores. On this subject the late K. Endo Ph.D. gives a 'Fa Tsai' in his publication, "Concerning the Chinese names of marine plants", Botany Journal, 26, 1912, which is about his journey to Europe investigating the seaweeds sold in the markets of Hong Kong and Canton; he wrote that about the year 1906 he saw it in a produce exhibition opened in Yokohama City but he did not identify it.

[Photograph caption: Fa Tsai bought in Yokohama]

Next year the late K. Okamura Ph.D. in the same journal 27, 1913, indicated that SETCHELL had published in a 1911 Taiwan Government General Industry Office publication called 'Chinese edible plants', that he judged it to be Nostoc commune VAUCH. var. flagelliforme (BURK et CURT) BORN. et FLAH. and moreover he specified, in a text both in Japanese and English 1.), that it lives on stones in the basin of the upper stream of the Yellow River. Again, S. Kimura published from the North Sapporo publishing house a separate publication called 'Notes on the lives of river fish' (1948), in which he said he saw Fa Tsai being carried on camel caravans from the interior to Hōtō, in the 1935 statistics the annual production reached 267,000 kin 2.) and the quantity collected by one person in one day was about 1 kin, he also mentioned that Fa Tsai was definitely used as a dish 'Lacansai' on Canton menus. This is my only knowledge of Fa Tsai but the writer Tei Ei Kan writes Fa Tsai using the characters 海苔 3.) on page 195 of his latest book 'Zōge no Hachi' 4.). In the Japanese/Chinese Encyclopedia published by Ōbunsha it only said Fa Tsai is a kind of edible aquatic moss. As can be seen, we know little of Fa Tsai so far, according to the papers mentioned above the Fa Tsai which grows on the stones in the water of the upper basin of the Yellow River is a Nostocaceae. Fa Tsai only grows in north China, it is brought to Hōtō and sold. Therefore the growing place and eating place are far apart. Up to the writing of this paper it is difficult to obtain in Tokyo and since I like to eat it I am happy when I can buy it, I remembered that H. Kubayashi, specialist in bacteria, and I saw Fa Tsai in a Chinese store in China Town of Yokohama in 1936. Mr. Kubayashi was very fascinated to see it and reported that Fa Tsai cost 6 yen/kin at that time and he described Fa Tsai with an illustration when he edited the Bibliography of Chinese Plants by Yoshisada Yabe in 1941.

- 1.) Translators Note: Dictionary translation = European
- 2.) 1 Kin = 1.32 lb. or 0.6.kilograms
- 3.) Kai Sō
- 4.) "Ivory chopsticks"

I went to Yokohama Town and found it, but I was very surprised to find that it cost 400yen/100grams, however, it should be realized that that is today's price. I asked the shopkeeper where he bought it, he said he bought it at Canton. Then I thought that Fa Tsai could be used for Japanese cookery and I tried several recipes and found that it could be used in any cooking - it does not 'melt' when heated and can be used with vinegar. Of course it cannot be the main food like rice. This plant can be found in the 'Dictionary of Plants and their distribution' but this is now old.

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Notice

Please note that these translations were produced to assist the scientific staff of the FBA (Freshwater Biological Association) in their research. These translations were done by scientific staff with relevant language skills and not by professional translators.