

## **The History And Origin Of Chinese Tea**

### **What is the origin of tea in china?**

The history of Chinese teas predates historical record. Experts believe that the Chinese have been consuming tea in one way or another—whether for the tea plant’s medicinal properties or recreationally—for thousands of years. There are no other records to indicate that any other society had consumed tea as a drink prior to this point in history.

Before its diversity as a beverage had been discovered, tea leaves had been used for certain medicinal properties. A natural carrier of caffeine, tea probably served as a stimulant to promote alertness in ancient Chinese. This included the desire to prevent sleep and achieve clarity of mind.

Tea is not only a source of nourishment in China, but it has become deeply interwoven with the history and culture of the Chinese people. It’s even considered to be one of the seven necessities of Chinese life, ranking right up there with the traditional Chinese staples of rice, firewood, salt, oil, soy sauce and vinegar.

## **Emperor Shennong And The Fateful Tea Leaf**

### **Who discovered tea?**

According to Chinese legend, in 2737 B.C., the reigning Emperor Shennong and his traveling army stopped to rest and inadvertently made a discovery that would change the history of Chinese culture, and ultimately the world.

Shennong’s servants had a practice of boiling the Emperor’s drinking water in an effort to ensure its cleanliness. Having drawn water from a nearby stream, the servant preparing Shennong’s water took no notice of a dead tea leaf which blew into the water, having been picked up by a fortuitous (and some would say preordained or divinely inspired) gust of wind. As legend would have it, Shennong took no notice until the first sip. He was pleased with the taste.

Shennong, who in Chinese mythology is believed to have bestowed the knowledge of agriculture to his people, is also credited for having written The Divine Farmer’s Herb-Root Classic, widely considered the earliest Chinese pharmaceutical publication. Translated, Shennong’s name means “divine farmer.” Although his existence as historical figure versus mythological figure is a source of speculation, the character of Shennong and his status as the father of Chinese tea continues as a large part of Chinese mythology and popular culture.

## Tea Drinking Customs In China

### What are the tea drinking customs of China?

As is to be expected in a society whose culture is so ingrained in the tradition of the ages, there are a wide variety of customs in China that center around the practice of drinking tea, and that date back centuries.

Traditionally, the Chinese serve tea as a gesture of respect. In order to pay tribute and as a display of respect, members of the younger generation prepare and serve tea to their elders. The practice of inviting parents and grandparents to a restaurant for tea is one that frequently takes place in China during holidays. In more recent times, and as an acknowledgement of certain social modernizations, it's become more commonplace to see parents serving their children tea, or for an employer to pour tea for his or her employees at restaurants.

Other Chinese tea drinking customs center on the institution of Chinese family values. Tea drinking transcends any normal recreational activity by providing a ritualistic, almost holy activity that brings families together, whether for special occasions, or simply to spend valuable time together.

## China's Greatest Hits: The Top 10 Chinese Teas

### What types of Chinese teas are there and which are the best?

Chinese tea is broken down into five categories: green tea, black tea, oolong tea, puer (compressed) tea, and scented tea. From within these five categories emerge the many different types of Chinese tea; an immense number that, depending on the location and method of their production, can produce a vast variety of qualities.

Here, in no particular order, are ten of the arguably best Chinese teas:

- Bi Luo Chun – Green tea grown in the province of Jiangsu
- Da Hong Pao – Oolong tea grown in the province of Fujian
- Gua Pian – Green tea grown in the province of Anhui
- Huang Shan Mao Feng – Green tea grown in the province of Anhui
- Junshan Yinzhen – Yellow tea grown in the province of Hunan
- Keemun – Black tea grown in the province of Anhui
- Longjing – Green tea grown in the province of Zhejiang
- Mao Jian – Green tea grown in the province of Henan
- Tie Guan Yin – Oolong tea grown in the province of Fujian
- Yun Nan Puer – Puer tea grown in the province of Yunnan

## **The Provinces Of Providence: The Famous Tea Growing Provinces Of China**

### **What are the well known tea growing provinces in China?**

In China, tea is cultivated in a number of regions. Of these, a small handful of provinces have reputations for producing excellent teas.

One of the most prominent and productive of these provinces is Fujian, located on the southeast coast of China, across the Taiwan Strait from Taiwan. Fujian is one of the few tea growing provinces that produces all five categories of Chinese tea (green, black, oolong, puer, and scented) and is also known as having pioneered the standard production techniques for all except green tea.

Another east coast tea-growing province, Zhejiang is famous for its production of Longjing tea. Also known as “dragon tea,” Longjing is a green tea widely considered as the most prestigious of all produced in China.

Located a bit further inland, the Anhui province is famous for its production Keemun black tea. Across the country on the southwestern edge of China bordering Burma, Laos and Vietnam, lays the Yunnan province. Its native Yunnan large-leaf tea produces a signature puer and black tea that sets the Yunnan province apart from all others.

## **The Chinese Gong-Fu Tea Ceremony**

### **What is the Chinese Gong-fu Tea Ceremony?**

The origin of the Chinese Gong-fu Tea Ceremony dates back over 1,300 years, and is still practiced to this day, remaining one of the primary tea drinking ceremonies in Chinese culture.

Gong-fu is an alternative spelling of the term more familiar to western cultures, “kung-fu,” yet it has nothing to do with martial arts. The definition of gong-fu translates loosely into an activity that is carried out with great effort and skill—in the case of the Gong-fu Tea Ceremony, this translates directly to the making of tea. In layman’s terms, it’s a ceremony to the skillful production of a mean brew.

However, unlike the tea ceremonies of some cultures, the Gong-fu Tea Ceremony can be practiced by anyone, at any level of tea making sophistication. This naturally makes for a much more enjoyable, less stressful experience.

Of principal importance in the Gong-fu Tea Ceremony is the eventual outcome and taste of the tea.

## **The Chinese Marriage Ceremony**

### **What is the Chinese Marriage Ceremony?**

It's interesting to note that the concept of romantic love, the union of man and woman based solely upon an emotional bond, is a relatively new societal norm when taken in the context of human history. In many cultures, arranged marriages were—and in some cases, still are—the norm.

More interesting is the fact that in Chinese culture, a culture steeped in a kind of age-old tradition, the romantic element has always played a part in marriage.

Of little or no surprise is the role that tea plays in the traditional Chinese marriage ceremony. As tradition dictates, on her wedding day and prior to the arrival of the groom, the bride serves Chinese teas to her parents in their home. This is done as a demonstration of her appreciation and respect.

After the wedding ceremony, and as one of their first significant ventures together as a married couple, the newlyweds serve Chinese tea to the groom's elders. Adopting a kneeling position before the gathered group, they serve tea beginning with the groom's parents, then work their way from oldest to youngest.

## **Brewing Tea: The Old School Method**

### **What are the Chinese tea drinking customs?**

With Chinese tea, the preparation and brewing doubles as an art form, one that's carried out with spiritualistic ritual. As advances in technology and improved methods of serving tea (everything from tea bags to the all-too-frequent use of instant tea) creep, it becomes incumbent upon newer generations to appreciate the traditional methods of preparing and brewing Chinese tea.

In the traditional method, loose tea leaves are placed into the Chinese tea pots or directly into the Chinese tea cups. Hot water is then poured over the leaves and allowed to steep. Sometimes a tea infuser is used to let the water soak up the flavor and properties of the tea leaves, and allow for the easy removal of the leaves after steeping. After a few minutes, the tea leaves are removed, or a strainer used, to pour the tea from the Chinese tea pot into the awaiting Chinese tea cup.

Water temperatures and steeping times vary depending on the kind of tea being prepared. The strength of the brew should be accomplished by adjusting the amount of tea leaves used as opposed to the steeping time.

## **Trivia/Did You Know?**

### **What contributions other than tea did the Chinese make?**

The Chinese are well known for the discovery and early cultivation of tea, but that is only a small part of their contribution to tea. Two contributing factors to the rise of tea popularity around the world can be directly traced to Chinese technology.

The first is porcelain, appropriately nicknamed “China.” Experts believe that the Chinese invented the first true porcelain during the Tang dynasty, between approximately 600 AD and 900 AD. Porcelain Chinese tea pots were very rare outside of China, until the early 1700s when Europeans finally discovered a method for crafting their own porcelain. Soon after, and owing to any number of circumstances outside of porcelain tea pots, tea’s popularity skyrocketed across Europe.

The Chinese were also one of the early pioneers in chemistry, with gunpowder as their most significant discoveries. Though, it’s hard not to see the connection between Chinese tea acumen and the society’s early knowledge of chemical processes.