Lu Yu: The Patron Saint of Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Lu Yu and the Cha Jing, in summary:** A UK guide to Lu Yu: the 8th-century Tang dynasty author of the Cha Jing, and how one Chinese text shaped every tea culture from chanoyu to your cuppa.

Every brewing guide on this site, the water temperatures, the leaf-to-water care, the idea that tea is worth doing properly, descends from one eighth-century Chinese text.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.

Who he was

Lu Yu lived in Tang dynasty China in the eighth century (roughly 733 to 804). Orphaned as a child and raised in a Buddhist monastery, he became a scholar and the author of the Cha Jing, usually translated as The Classic of Tea, the first known monograph entirely devoted to tea. It is not a poem about tea in passing; it is a systematic treatise.

What the Cha Jing actually did

The Cha Jing covered the plant, its cultivation and processing, the equipment for making and drinking it, water quality, the method of preparation, and the culture and history around it. In other words, Lu Yu took a common drink and argued, in writing and with structure, that how you grow, prepare and serve it matters, and can be done well or badly. That single move, treating tea as a craft worthy of standards, is the philosophical root of everything from the Japanese tea ceremony to a modern guide telling you not to pour boiling water on green tea, see our water temperature guide.

Why "patron saint" is not an exaggeration

Lu Yu was venerated within his own lifetime and afterwards as the figure who elevated tea from beverage to discipline; tea merchants historically honoured him almost devotionally. The reverence is cultural shorthand for a real intellectual debt: he is the first person we know of to write tea down as a subject worth mastering.

The line to your cup

It is a long thread, but a real one: Lu Yu to Chinese tea culture, to Japanese chanoyu, to the European tea trade, to the British cuppa, to a wiki page explaining why your green tea tastes bitter. When we say tea

rewards a little care, we are, distantly, quoting him. He is the natural first name in the deep history that our tea history guide and figures like Thomas Twining sit downstream of.

Lu Yu at a glance

Detail	Fact
Born	c. 733 AD, Hubei, Tang dynasty China
Died	c. 804 AD
Famous for	Writing the Cha Jing (The Classic of Tea), c. 760-780
Upbringing	Orphaned, raised in a Buddhist monastery
Cha Jing scope	Cultivation, processing, equipment, water, brewing, history
Cha Jing length	10 chapters, ~7,000 Chinese characters
Cultural impact	First systematic tea treatise globally
Veneration	Honoured by tea merchants almost devotionally
Title	"Sage of Tea" in Chinese tradition

The Tang dynasty context

Lu Yu wrote during the Tang dynasty (618-907), one of the cultural high points of Chinese civilisation. The Tang court was the most cosmopolitan in the world; foreign merchants from Persia, Arabia, India and Korea conducted business in Chang'an (modern Xi'an); Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism coexisted; poetry, painting and tea drinking all flourished as scholar-class pursuits. Tea was already drunk widely by Lu Yu's lifetime; his contribution was not introducing tea but raising it from common beverage to subject of serious study. The Cha Jing reflects Tang scholarly habits (cataloguing, ranking, philosophising) applied to a daily drink. Without Tang prosperity producing the scholar leisure class, there would have been no Cha Jing.

The Cha Jing's 10-chapter structure

The Cha Jing is organised into 10 chapters across roughly 7,000 Chinese characters. Chapter 1: origins, plant botany, terminology. Chapter 2: gathering equipment. Chapter 3: processing leaves. Chapter 4: brewing equipment (the famous 24 implements). Chapter 5: water selection and boiling. Chapter 6: drinking method and etiquette. Chapter 7: historical references to tea in earlier Chinese literature. Chapter 8: regional cultivation across Tang China. Chapter 9: abbreviated procedures for travel. Chapter 10: a diagram-summary intended to be copied onto scrolls and displayed wherever tea was drunk. The structure is comprehensive, practical and self-contained; a Tang reader could pick up the Cha Jing and learn tea from zero. Modern UK readers could too, with a translation.

Lu Yu's water-ranking system

Chapter 5 of the Cha Jing addresses water with a precision that surprises modern readers. Lu Yu ranks water sources for tea brewing: mountain spring water is best (especially from rocky streams with white-stone beds), river water from slow-moving sections second-best, well water acceptable but inferior. Within mountain springs, water that bubbles up with audible noise is preferred to silent flows. Within boiling, three

stages are identified by visual cues: small bubbles ("fish eyes") for the first boil, larger bubbles ("crab eyes") for the second, full rolling boil for the third, each suited to different tea types and brewing methods. This precision (which water, which boiling stage, applied to which leaf) is the philosophical ancestor of modern brewing guides specifying 80C for green tea, 95C for black, 100C for pu-erh. Lu Yu got there twelve centuries early.

The 24 implements and modern brewing kit

Chapter 4 of the Cha Jing catalogues 24 brewing implements, from the brazier (heat source) to the strainer to the salt holder (Tang tea was salted, not milk-and-sugared). Many of these tools have direct modern equivalents: the gaiwan derives from the Tang lidded cup; the modern tea timer derives from the Tang water clock for brewing; the modern leaf-grading vocabulary derives from Cha Jing chapter 1's classification. Modern UK tea drinkers using a teapot, strainer and timer are using a stripped-down version of Lu Yu's 24-implement kit, with the philosophical scaffolding mostly absent.

From Cha Jing to Japanese chanoyu

Lu Yu's influence travelled to Japan via Buddhist monks in the 9th to 12th centuries; the monks Eisai and Dogen, returning from China, brought tea seeds and Cha-Jing-derived brewing rituals. By the 16th century, Sen no Rikyu had developed these influences into the formal Japanese tea ceremony (chanoyu) with its strict procedural choreography, specific architecture (tea house, tatami room) and aesthetic philosophy (wabi-sabi, mono no aware). The line from Lu Yu's 760 AD text to Rikyu's 1580s chanoyu is direct, traceable and acknowledged in Japanese tea scholarship. The Japanese refinement is its own civilisational achievement, but its philosophical root is Tang Chinese, specifically Lu Yu.

From Cha Jing to the British cuppa

The Western tea trade developed via Portuguese and Dutch merchants in the 16th and 17th centuries, with the East India Company taking dominance from the 17th century onward. By the time tea reached British households in the late 1600s, the systematic Chinese knowledge codified by Lu Yu had been filtered through eight centuries of Chinese tea evolution. British drinkers received a refined product (black tea, fully oxidised, suitable for milk) but largely without the philosophical context. Modern British wiki guides, like this one, are quietly trying to reattach some of the Lu Yu philosophy (water temperature matters, leaf grade matters, technique matters) to British drinkers who inherited the product but not the discipline.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · One good loose-leaf in a clean teapot beats five exotic bags drunk in a hurry.

Tea reading

For the deep tea history see the tea history guide. For water temperature (Lu Yu's core technical insight) see ideal water temperatures. For brewing technique see brewing loose leaf tea. For other tea founders see Thomas Twining and Thomas Lipton. For Chinese tea categories see Chinese tea types.

The bottom line on Lu Yu

Lu Yu took a common eighth-century Chinese drink and argued, with structure and philosophical seriousness, that how you grow, prepare and serve tea matters and can be done well or badly. That single intellectual move (treating tea as discipline rather than mere beverage) is the philosophical root of every tea culture that followed, from the Japanese tea ceremony to a modern British wiki page about water temperature. He is the obvious patron saint of tea, venerated within his own lifetime and ever since. Every "tea is worth doing properly" claim, anywhere on this site, is distantly quoting him.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/