Chinese Tea: The Complete Overview

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Chinese tea overview, in summary:** China is where tea began and still makes every category: green, white, yellow, oolong, black and pu erh, organised by type and region. The map.

China is where tea began, and it still produces every category of true tea, often the defining example of each. This page is the proper overview and the anchor for Chinese tea across the wiki, linking to green, black, oolong, white and pu erh.

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

The birthplace of tea

Tea originates in China, traditionally credited to the legendary emperor Shen Nong and first systematised by Lu Yu in the Tang dynasty Cha Jing, the text that first argued tea was worth doing properly. That long lineage is why Chinese tea culture, and the gongfu ceremony, sit at the historical centre of the whole subject.

The six tea types, all Chinese in origin

China is the only country that produces all six classic types from Camellia sinensis: green (unoxidised), white (barely processed), yellow (a rare, gently fermented style), oolong (partially oxidised), black (fully oxidised, called "red tea" in China), and dark or post fermented tea, of which pu erh is the famous example. Each has its own guide; this page is the map that connects them.

Type	Processing	Chinese example
Green	unoxidised	Longjing (Dragon Well), jasmine green
White	barely processed	Fujian white
Yellow	rare, gently fermented	a small specialist category
Oolong	partially oxidised	Wuyi rock, Anxi Tieguanyin
Black ("red tea")	fully oxidised	Yunnan Dian Hong, Keemun
Dark / post fermented	aged, microbial	pu erh

The great regions

The single most useful idea for making Chinese tea navigable is that, as with wine, region carries most of the meaning, so learning a handful of origins unlocks far more than memorising brand names. Fujian alone explains a striking share of the famous teas: the mineral, roasted Wuyi rock oolongs from its cliffs, the orchid fragrant Anxi Tieguanyin, delicate white teas and the jasmine scented greens. Yunnan, the ancient heartland where the tea plant is native, gives both the malty Dian Hong blacks and the deliberately aged, post fermented pu erh that behaves like wine with provenance and vintages, see Yunnan Dianhong and Jin Jun Mei. Zhejiang's Longjing is the benchmark pan fired green; Anhui gives the wine dark Keemun that anchors many English breakfast blends and the Huangshan greens. Once those few names mean something, a Chinese tea list stops being intimidating and starts reading like a map, the same logic as our black tea by origin guide.

Scented and aged specialities

Two Chinese craft traditions deserve singling out because they are so often dismissed as gimmicks when they are the opposite. Scented tea, above all jasmine green and jasmine pearls, is made by repeatedly layering fresh blossom with the leaf so the tea absorbs the fragrance and the spent flowers are removed, a labour intensive, centuries old craft rather than a sprayed flavouring, which is why a good jasmine tea tastes integrated rather than perfumed, see the jasmine guide. Deliberately aged and post fermented teas, pu erh chief among them, are produced to change and improve over years under controlled storage, the only major tea designed to be laid down rather than drunk fresh. Both reward the attentive short infusion method more than almost any other tea, which is the practical reason the gongfu method and Chinese tea grew up together.

Where to start

If Chinese tea feels vast, start with one accessible example of three types: a Dragon Well or jasmine green, a Tieguanyin oolong, and a Dian Hong black, brewed gongfu style so you taste them properly, see gongfu brewing at home and the water temperature guide. Choose a starting tea in the oolong range, the green tea range, or the full tea shop.

The takeaway

Chinese tea is not one thing but the entire spectrum of tea, organised by type and by region, from the country that invented all of it. Use this page as the map: follow the links by type or by region and the apparent vastness resolves into a small number of understandable ideas, which is exactly what the whole wiki is built to do.

FROM THE CURATOR

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Chinese tea companion reading

- Green tea guide
- Oolong tea guide
- Pu erh guide
- Chinese gongfu ceremony
- Lu Yu

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
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