



Origins in Ancient China

According to legend, the Emperor **Shennong** discovered tea around **2737 BCE** when wind-blown leaves from a wild *Camellia sinensis* tree fell into his pot of boiling water. Intrigued by the aroma, he drank it - and so began humanity's relationship with tea.

By the **Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE)**, tea had become China's national drink. The scholar **Lu Yu** wrote the *Cha Jing* (The Classic of Tea) around 760 CE, the world's first monograph on tea, covering cultivation, preparation, and the philosophy of drinking tea.

Tea was initially pressed into bricks, ground into powder, and whisked with hot water - a method that would later travel across the sea and evolve into something uniquely Japanese.



Tea Arrives in Japan

Tea seeds and the practice of drinking tea were brought to Japan in the early **9th century** by Buddhist monks returning from China. The monk **Saichō** (767-822) and later **Eisai** (1141-1215) are credited with introducing both tea and the Zen Buddhist practices surrounding it.

Eisai brought back new tea seeds and the method of **matcha** - finely ground powdered green tea - after his travels to Song Dynasty China. He wrote the *Kissa Yōjōki* (How to Stay Healthy by Drinking Tea) in 1211, promoting tea as medicine for body and spirit.

Tea cultivation began in earnest on temple grounds, and the practice of whisking powdered tea took on a deeply spiritual dimension within Zen monasteries - laying the foundation for what would become the Japanese tea ceremony.

805

Saichō returns
from China

1191

Eisai brings
matcha method

1211

Kissa Yōjōki
written

1333

Tea spreads to
samurai class





The Way of Tea - Chanoyu

By the **16th century**, tea had moved beyond the monastery and samurai elite into the hands of a merchant class seeking refinement. The tea master **Sen no Rikyū** (1522-1591) transformed the tea gathering into a profound aesthetic and spiritual practice known as **wabi-cha** - embracing simplicity, imperfection, and quiet mindfulness.

Rikyū established the four principles of tea, encoded in every aspect of the tea room, the utensils, and the gesture of serving:

Wa
Harmony

Kei
Respect

Sei
Purity

Jaku
Tranquility

"Though you wipe your hands and brush off the dust, so long as you are not cleansed within, you are not yet clean."

- **Sen no Rikyū**





Tea in the Modern World

Today, tea is the second most consumed beverage in the world after water. Japan remains a guardian of tea tradition while embracing modern forms. The three major schools descended from Sen no Rikyū - **Omotesenke**, **Urasenke**, and **Mushakōjisenke** - continue to teach chanoyu worldwide.

Japanese green teas have become global favorites, each with its own character and brewing ritual:

Matcha

Powdered green tea whisked in the ceremonial style

Sencha

Everyday steamed green tea, Japan's most popular brew

Gyokuro

Shade-grown premium tea with rich umami flavor

Hōjicha

Roasted green tea with a warm, nutty aroma

From a legendary leaf in an emperor's cup to a global culture of mindfulness, tea endures as a bridge between past and present - a quiet ritual that continues to connect people across centuries and continents.

