

# Global Tea Hut



## NEWSLETTER #5, JUNE 2012

This growing circle of people gathered here is to be celebrated. As the bowl goes round, and you see each calm face withdraw inwards after taking a deep draught of this ancient libation—older than the pyramids—breathe and rest with them there. As you sip deeply from this communal bowl of tea and rest more deeply in your true self, I too rest in mine—our breathing synchronizes and we find connection in our common heritage, in returning to the source. In drinking tea, Lu Yu said in the first ever book on tea, we can rest assured that at least once a day we share something in common with the emperor himself, who at that very moment is drinking tea with his own august hands. And it doesn't matter which age you drink tea in, now or then: step outside the time and see how this tea session we are having spans the globe, and ripples out in time and space. This gathering may never be huge, and we certainly don't believe that this global tea hut will end world hunger or stop war, but this small circle of people is very much connected to larger circles, which are in turn woven through even larger hoops, and so on...

We imagine a time in which the energy of this tea hut can be shared from the tea and farmers who harvest it to hundreds of people round the world. This can help impact and change agricultural patterns, as we together promote more sustainable, ecological and organic tea production. And your financial energy will help us create tea spaces that are beyond any and all self-promotion, a tea shared freely in the ancient spirit of leaves and water. We are constantly seeking out new ways to share this harmony and awakening through tea, including modern avenues of communication like our upcoming video series, which you will read about a bit later, and the Internet as well. We also plan to publish more resources for you: pamphlets distributed locally in three languages (so far), a new book, and a resurgence of the free online magazine *The Leaf* ([www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org)). We also seek to expand our roadside tea stalls, where we share bowls of tea with passersby free of charge. In that way, your energy is helping change the lives of farmers who are so proud to share their tea worldwide. Already, several are lining

up to donate a month's worth of tea, and so excited to reach out and share some of their life and work with you.

As you share in this great project—changing farmers and supporting our schools and center—we also return a bit of something to you. We write these newsletters with joy and spirit, and include gifts given from the heart. We package every one of these envelopes by hand, write the tea's info on the bag, lick the stamps, and glue on the addresses. And we do it all with a great loving-kindness and joy, thinking of each of you personally as we hold the finished envelope and hand it to the postal lady, who with us smiles at how happy we are. We wish each of you joy. We are so grateful to share this earth and tea hut with you, and to have your energy in our center and works. We hope this tea brings you peace and joy, and that it spreads from you out into all those whose paths you cross...

We thought we would spend this issue introducing ourselves a bit more, so that in this global exchange we can come to work together more and more to promote an awakening of consciousness and heart in this world, especially through tea. Sharing tea is simple, and it is the simplest joys in life that are the most important. In a confused world, we often forget that a simple bowl of leaves and water, and a bit of time together in calm joy is often the most important thing we have to share. A bit of time together, resting in our true selves is life changing.

We'd like to show you a bit of what we do and why, so you can further understand what you are supporting and in what ways you can participate more, for there is no true understanding of anything without participation. Involvement is how you come to grow in anything, and the more involved you are, the greater you will understand. And through understanding we find ourselves in others and others in ourselves.

If you look deep enough into that bowl, when it comes around to you, you will see this whole circle of amazing people just beneath the steamy surface. A breath and a sigh later, you pass the bowl on to the next person and it all disappears...

# Your Tea of the Month, June 2012

## 2011 Summer Bai Hao Oolong, Beipu Taiwan

The Your tea of the month for June 2012 is a very magical organic *Bai Hao Oolong*. This is one of those amazing months you'll be talking about for some time, and a big part of what makes this Global Tea Hut so special. It is great to connect people from all over the world to such amazing teas and farmers as this, and to see how they in turn light up at the opportunity to share their craft with the whole world—bright honest smiles, and a true and humble gift to our cause, and to you all, given from as pure a heart as there is. If you wonder what this hut is all about, have a drink of this tea. And if you then lean back into a quiet satisfaction we'll meet there and have a smile with Mr. Gu, whom we'd like to introduce you to now.

Bei Pu is a gorgeous valley in the northwest of this Formosa, covered in green fields and rice paddies set off by the occasional white crane soaring up from that brighter green to the dark green of the surrounding mountains. The mists are channeled into this valley daily, and the loose soil is rich in nutrients. It's no wonder that early tea farmers chose this special place to grow tea, knowing that the terroir here would produce a unique and amazing tea, but they couldn't know just how special it would be...

In the nineteenth century, many immigrants were crossing the strait from Fu Jian to start a new life in Taiwan. Many started growing tea for export, primarily to famous merchants like John Dodd. At that time, there weren't yet any commercial plantations up in the high mountains that would later make Taiwanese tea so famous. Most of Taiwan's tea at that time was exported, and was grown in the lower, flatter areas of the northwest, like Bei Pu. Here, they could have larger plantations and higher yields. It took some time to craft a tea that met the high standards of foreign merchants like Dodd, but eventually they achieved success and Formosa tea went on to international renown.

Like any and all the sane centuries before this one, the farmers of Taiwan of course grew all their tea organically. Unfortunately, a lot of the valleys here that are perfect for tea production—with excellent soil, humidity and a rich and diverse ecology—these environs were also perfect for Nature's manifold insects. Most bugs, however, are not particularly fond of tea as it is bitter and produces tannins to protect itself. Also, tea mountains are usually at high elevations where insects are less of a threat. In Bei Pu and some other regions, however, there are large populations of leaf-hoppers (jassids) that will eat tea in the late spring and summer months. For that reason, the farmers found their crops decimated every summer, and came to rely solely on the harvest of other seasons.

They say that one legendary farmer refused to give up, and taught us all one of the pivotal lessons of a life of tea, whether it be farming, producing or preparing tea: all mastery of any art comes in doing that thing the way it wants to be done, rather than how we feel it should be done. Rather than telling your tea how you want to prepare it, see how it wants to be prepared. This is indeed a way to master life as well. This mythical and unknown master didn't quit; he adapted his production to Nature. Rather than complaining, or using chemicals to tell Nature what he wanted it to do, he adapted his processing methods to suit this bug-bitten tea. This is, in fact, how all the world's traditional tea processing evolved. It wasn't invented; it evolved in response to new varieties of tea. Real farmers commune with the land and converse with Nature. They listen to the tea trees, communicating with them each and every day. They adapt and learn, growing and mastering their processing techniques in response to trees each and every season. Even Mr. Gu himself, our modern farmer who masterfully made this month's tea, has changed and adapted several processing steps to suit the tea of this particular age.

After some experimentation, our legendary Qing Dynasty farmer developed a new and exciting kind of Oolong that was processed in a way that enhanced the bug-bitten summer leaves. While other farmers were throwing away their crops, he sold it all to John Dodd. As legend has it, this amazing tea was so good that it





reached the august hands of Queen Elizabeth II, who was herself a great tea lover. She reportedly favored the tea above all others and named it “Oriental Beauty.”

In the 1970’s, Taiwan’s booming economy shifted from agriculture to industry and technology. As the quality of life rose dramatically, people shifted from rural places like Bei Pu to cities like nearby Hsin Chu. More and more people became interested in culture as they grew more affluent. High mountain Oolong from central Taiwan grew in popularity throughout the island and beyond, so much so that most people think of such tea first when they think of Taiwanese tea. The dwindling of land for tea plantations, migration to the city and the aging of the tea farmers themselves threatened the very existence of Taiwan’s Oriental Beauty. There were some families who carried on, nonetheless.

Mr. Gu is a fourth generation Oriental Beauty farmer who has, like his father before him, worked incredibly hard to preserve this amazing tea culture. They worked hard and expanded their traditional holdings to a neighboring field. With increased savings and years of hard work, they were able to revitalize Bei Pu’s Oriental Beauty production. In 2000, Mr. Gu’s Bao Ji Tea Company bought back several abandoned Oriental beauty farms, cleared several hectares and planted saplings there. They have thrived and are beginning to produce tea again.

Mr. Gu’s son has this year begun to take an active role in the family’s production, ensuring a future for Oriental Beauty tea and a fifth generation of magical Bao Ji tea. It is returning to popularity, and more people are discovering or returning to this amazing tea.

Mr. Gu’s organic Oriental Beauty is a real treat, as is any time in his company. He does a lot to promote sustainable agriculture that protects Nature and traditional culture. He is simple, genuine and giving; and he enthusiastically leapt at the opportunity to donate some of his tea to our project and share it with all of you. His face lit up when we told him people around the world would have a chance to appreciate his tea as much as we do. We hope that any of you who visit Taiwan get a chance to visit with him and share a traditional Hakka meal and some amazing tea. His tea center also does a lot to promote and preserve other aspects of Hakka culture like food, ground tea (*leicha*), pomelo tea, vinegar production, regional art and music and even bamboo tea utensils carved by hand. His son is actually also quite famous for making amazing tea utensils.

*Our tea is an Oriental Beauty from the summer of 2011.*

This year's tea is being processed as we speak, so we were of course gifted last year's tea. But this is a blessing, as Oriental Beauty is more heavily roasted. All traditional Oolong is produced with higher oxidation and more roast. Such teas need some time to rest after they are roasted several times. Traditionally, roasted oolongs like Wuyi Yancha, Anxi Tie Guan Yin or Oriental Beauty were stored for several months before they were drunk. Furthermore, the older the Oolong the better. Some green Oolongs are nice when drunk fresh and green, like April's tea; but this tea is better for having sat a year, as you will see when you drink this joyous and delicious tea.

The magic of Oriental Beauty starts with the leaf-hoppers who bite the leaves in the early summer. They usually eat the first flush and then the plant responds by producing a second flush with more tannins to discourage the insects. When these little green friends return, they often only bite part of the leaves before moving on to less bitter plants. There are enzymes in their saliva which cause the leaves to begin to oxidize before they are even picked, turning red around the edges and growing at a crooked angle from the stem. These unique leaves are the ones used for Oriental Beauty.

Oriental Beauty production involves many unique steps not found in other teas, one of which is that the tea is actually sorted as it is picked, which requires a slower and more involved picking. The highest grades are all bug-bitten leaves, and exclusively one bud with two leaves, as it is with most high-grade teas. This requires a much more careful and arduous tea-picking. The pickers must carefully select only the best bud-leaf sets and pick them one by one. This is, of course, only for the highest

grades of Oriental Beauty tea. At Bao Ji Tea, Mr. Gu and his team produce five levels of tea. The lower grades can actually be picked at a normal speed, relative to other hand-picked tea in the world.

Don't assume that just because these jassids are an essential part of Oriental Beauty production that all such tea is organic. Actually, very few Oriental Beauty farmers are organic nowadays. They have perfected the art of spraying their trees at the right times to prevent and allow bugs, and many still use chemical fertilizers and weed-killers as well. Mr. Gu's method is special and his organic tea is rare and clean. He has recorded more than twenty species of insects that interact with and affect his tea, not just the jassids that bite the leaves. Real tea production involves an entire ecology.

Oriental Beauty is the highest oxidized of all Oolong teas, in part because it begins oxidizing on the tree before it is picked, and in part because of the arduous withering process that begins as soon as the tea reaches the tea processing plant from the field. Mr. Gu, his son and a helper sleep but a few hours during the three weeks of annual Oriental Beauty production, as is the case with most traditional Oolong producers who still follow Nature and harvest but once a year, as their entire year's income is dependent upon this tea.

The tea is spread out on sheets to wither for a long time. Oriental Beauty tea will be oxidized to around 80% by the time it is done. The initial withering (*shai qin*) is done for about fourteen hours, on a covered, sunlit roof and sometimes indoors, depending on the weather and the grade of the tea (higher grades are done indoors and monitored much more carefully). On the roof, they have black cloth with holes that can automatically cover the entire area—rolling out like a garage door on electric shafts when needed. They shade the tea during the noon hours, and then retract the slightly



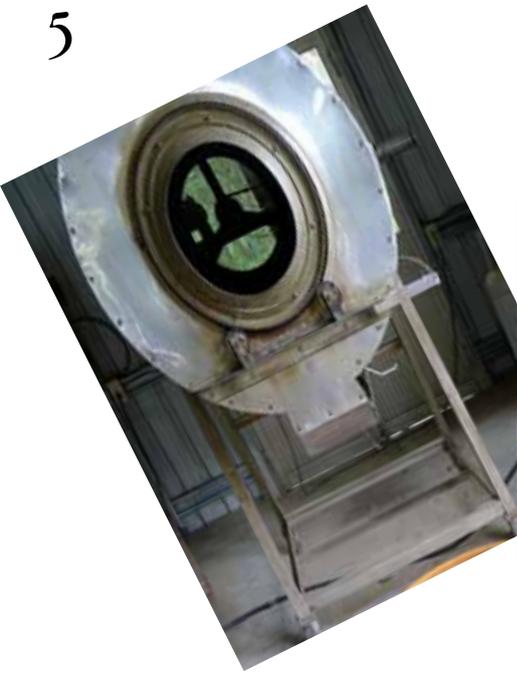


transparent black cloth when it isn't as bright. All of this requires careful observation and great skill. After the tea is adequately withered it is laid in a long pile to be shaken. The higher grades of tea are shaken entirely by hand, while the lower grades are tumbled in a machine for twenty minutes and then shaken by hand, as Mr. Gu says "the machines cannot be trusted with our precious tea." This shaking stirs the tea up and exposes every leaf to more oxygen. You can grab a handful of the tea Mr. Gu has shaken and another from the part of the pile that is yet to be shaken and smell the difference between them quite distinctly: the previously shaken tea is much more full-bodied, richer and more fragrant. The tea is then spread out once again to be withered even more. It will eventually go through four cycles of withering and shaking, though only the first is so long.

At the end of the withering and stirring/shaking, the tea is piled (*wo dwei*) to further oxidize it. It is piled on a round bamboo mat and covered with a cloth. Nearly all Oriental Beauty farmers use wet piling and withering throughout their tea production, as this is quicker and more convenient. Mr. Gu says it could increase their production by as much as 30%, but he doesn't believe that quantity is as important as quality and therefore uses a completely dry process, even drier than what was ever done traditionally. He says these adaptations are his own, and besides being organic and hand-processed, they are what separates his tea from other Oriental Beauties. When the tea is piled it is usually around 60% oxidized. It will then complete the other 20% in four to eight hours of piling, depending on the weather and the grade of the tea.

After the tea is fully oxidized, it is fried (*sa chin*). This stage, literally called "kill-green", destroys enzymes that make tea bitter and arrests further oxidation. It is done in a gas-heated tumbler that is around 280 degrees. After just a few minutes inside, the tea is then rolled into a ball inside a wet cloth. The cloth is damp only because Mr. Gu's special tea has up until this point been withered, shaken, piled and fried in a dry way—very unique for Oriental Beauty production. This stage of Oriental Beauty production is also very unique. The tea will rest in tight balls, which are bagged and placed in crates for around twenty minutes before being rolled (*ro nien*). The rolling breaks down the cell walls of the tea and releases the juices. Mr. Gu reminded us once again that he doesn't trust the machines with his heritage, and therefore rolls his tea three times, twice by machine and once by hand. When the tea emerges from its rolling it is at its most fragrant, and a handful is enough to send you to the fabled Heavens Chinese people once believed existed across the strait and up Taiwan's cloud-enshrouded mountains.

After the rolling, the tea is once again piled (*wo dwei*) for twenty or thirty minutes. At this time it is roasted gently at low temperatures for around three hours. This first roast is called a "water roast (*shui pei*)". It's done in a large oven with trays that are inserted horizontally, like shelves. It is not a real roast, but just to dry the tea and put it in a stasis—a limbo that will last til the end of the growing season. Roasting Oolong tea is the most difficult and potentially dangerous aspect of tea processing. Roasting secrets are guarded both in Taiwan and China, and often only known to the father and son.



As the roast takes days and requires constant monitoring, there is no time to roast all the tea during the growing season. The need to have the tea processed by day's end consumes all the farmers' time. Consequently, tea is always roasted briefly to arrest oxidation and dry the leaves sufficiently for it to sit in bags for the remaining weeks of the growing season. Then, after the season's tea has all been processed, the farmers can catch up on some much needed sleep and get started roasting the tea properly.

Before the final roasting the tea must be sorted (*fan ji*). The tea is first sieved through bamboo to remove all the fannings, which are later used in tea bags. The larger leaves are then spread out on large tables where they are sorted by size and quality by hand. This is necessary at this stage because different grades of tea are roasted in different ways. Usually, lower grade Oolong teas have always been given a heavier roast to cover up the defects in the tea. In places like Wuyi—and here in Bei Pu as well—lower grade tea is also often a blend of different kinds of leaves and cultivars, so the roast helps bring a kind of uniformity to these teas.

The final roasting is divided into three stages. It is done in large, round bamboo roasters with electric elements underneath that are meant to mimic the heat of charcoal, which was used traditionally. Mr. Gu would love to use charcoal to roast his tea, but recently the prices of hardwood charcoal have risen dramatically. Taiwan has a very unique kind of smokeless charcoal made from *Long Yen* trees. We actually use it here at the center to heat all our water. It is renowned worldwide for the amazing influence it can have on roasting Oolong tea, but the tree grows slowly and over-harvesting has driven the prices beyond what most any farmer could afford. Mr. Gu therefore roasts his highest grade Oriental Beauty with charcoal and uses electric roasters for the four lower grades.

The first roast is only two to four hours long, and is called the “*zhou jing pei*”. It awakens the tea from its slumber. Then there is a second roast called the

“*pei tze di*” which begins to enhance the tea and bring out its unique flavors. It is “roasting the body” of the tea. The final roast is where the real favor is enshrined in this amazing tea, called the “*pei xiang wei*”, which means that it locks in the fragrance. This is the point at which Mr. Gu uses charcoal for his highest grade teas.

The tea is then sorted once more and packaged for sale. It should rest for some time, usually at least a few months, to let the roast settle down and leave the tea. Otherwise, this will be the only recognizable flavor. They say that a good roast enhances the tea without leaving any trace of itself.

As you can see, a tremendous amount of effort has gone into the production of this amazing tea: billions of years of evolution, a glorious dance of Nature between the tiny jassids and enzymes in their saliva, hours of sweating in the summer sun to clear abandoned farms and replant this tea, shirtless and sleepless weeks on the roof of the tea processing center withering, shaking, piling, frying, rolling and roasting, and of course doing it all with great skill and a bit of gratitude, which Mr. Gu definitely manages. This wonderful collaboration between Nature, from Heaven to Earth—and from the tiniest insects to Man—is an inspiration that concludes in your soul, from sip to sip....

*\* As we mentioned last month, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized. Brew the tea as you wish, with slightly cooler water. You may want to use half the bag or so per steeping.*



## Outline of Mr. Gu's Oriental Beauty Production

- 1) Picking (*tsai cha*)
- 2) Indoor and/or covered withering (*liang shai qin*)
- 3) Shaking—machine-tumbling or by hand in long piles (*jing tze*)  
—Four cycles of withering shaking—
- 4) Piling for oxidation (*wo dwei*)
- 5) Frying to kill green enzymes and arrest oxidation (*sa chin*)
- 6) Rolling to break down cells (*ro nien*)
- 7) Piling for a short time (*wo dwei*)
- 8) Initial “water roast” to arrest the tea in stasis until season’s end (*shui pei*)
- 9) Sorting (*fan ji*)
- 10) Final roasting stage I: awakening (*zhou jing pei*)
- 11) Final roasting stage II: roasting the body of the tea (*pei tze di*)
- 12) Final roasting stage III: sealing the fragrance (*pei xiang wei*)
- 13) Final sorting and packaging

## Tea Sage Hut

*Our Center in Miao Li, Taiwan*

Baisao was an eighteenth century tea sage whose bright spirit illuminates our tradition in more than name alone. A Zen monk for most of his life, at the age of forty-nine he traded in his robes for what was paradoxically the more Zen-infused life of a roadside peddler of tea. His bowls were steeped in the ancient and priceless spirit of tea, unclouded by money, theory, ritual or even mind itself—a spirit from before the first fingers plucked the first leaves. And those who came by his wayside hut just might have passed by the old man so strangely donning the crane robes of an ancient Taoist hermit, but for the way the spirit twinkled invitingly in his eyes or the softness of his hands as he poured his tea into worn and cracked bowls. And after such a bowl, the passerby left changed somehow, though perhaps not able to grasp the importance of what exactly had shifted their perspective. He called his stall:

“(通聖亭 *Tong Shen Ting*)

*The Hut Which Conveys One to Sagehood.”*

Out of place and out of time, he was a revitalization of the ancient forest tea sages who haunted the mountains of a long-forgotten China, offering healing draughts and bits of insight to those who crossed their paths.

In honor of Baisao who also embodied the revival of ancient tea wisdom, we also have named our center “*Tong Shen Ting*”, which we lovingly call “Tea Sage Hut” in English. Like him we feel that it is a place of returning, drifting out of time to other places and lost wisdom. We too are revitalizing ancient ways of experience and sharing tea, and doing so freely in the true spirit of leaves and water shared in presence.

Our center is located in Miao Li, Taiwan—a small town on the Northwest of the island, surrounded by beautiful mountains and incredible spring water. For the last four years we have strived to develop a strong community of teawayfarers and help share some of our tea wisdom with travelers from around the world. We currently host around 50 to 100 visitors from around the world every year. They come to experience Taiwan, learn about tea and meditation or just rest and find solace in the quiet of our tea center. All room and board, as well as the teachings are free. We have a nice local

community as well, who work to serve tea to guests, knowing that in this tradition we don't focus on learning how to *make* tea, but rather *serve* tea. There are weekly classes in both English and Chinese, and we have other activities like yoga, tai chi and social gatherings as well.

We have sought to build harmonious, peaceful tea spaces where people can come to make use of a large collection of tea, teaware and tea wisdom, as well as to learn or practice meditation and self-cultivation. We also seek to expand community, promoting sustainable and ecological tea production, connection to ourselves, our environment and to each other through tea.

Our center has three tea rooms, each with its own unique look and feel. They are designed around the *Four Pillars* of this tradition, which we shared with you in previous issues. Of course, the Nature pillar has no room as it pervades all the rooms and beyond. There is a “Zen Temple” where we meditate and practice more formal tea ceremonies. Then we have a Daoist/shaman room that we also use as a classroom. This room has a large wood table supported by two enormous sandalwood roots. There is also a large tree in the middle of the room that spans from floor to ceiling, extending out over the table. And lastly, we have a gongfu tea room with a traditional, little table to sit around and prepare gongfu tea. Our center is home to a tremendous amount of tea and rare teaware to use and learn from. We can prepare tea in many different ways, from grinding to boiling, whisking to steeping and in many different pots and cups in order to learn all manner of tea preparation from now and then. All visitors to our center get a free bowl and a bag of our own red tea (shared in May's GTH) to take home and start their tea journey. We also distribute publications and copies of Wu De's books as well.

We currently have room for a maximum of six to eight people to stay at any given time, and it is rare that there isn't someone around or something going on. There are meditation sessions every morning and evening, with instructions available if necessary. Otherwise, the atmosphere is rather casual—we spend as much time laughing and playing as we do meditating, learning and studying. And you are all formally invited to come spend

some time laughing and drinking cup after cup, bowl after bowl with us. Every day we put out a cup on one of the altars for all of you—all our brothers and sisters around the world—so that you'll always know a steaming cup awaits you here. Should you find yourself having a bad day, know that such a cup is truly here waiting. And should you find yourself Eastward bound, know that you have a home here.

**Here are some testimonials from visitors:**

“It was a hot summer day when I entered the gate strewn with Plumeria flowers... The atmosphere behind the gate was so different from the hustle and bustle of the city: it is actually a hut, deep in the mountains, where an old bearded monk has just put on a kettle of mountain spring water—it's steam interrupting a deeper silence. I was received very warmly and spent two days in the center, meditating on each sip of pure and natural tea. It was a breath of calm joy and spirituality that was blown back into my heart, and which I am still carrying with reverence. Though I left the center after some time, the center is still inside of me.”

—Max, Russia

“Meeting people at the center was very much a chance encounter for me. I didn't know much about tea, yet was open and receptive to their teachings. I was struck in really seeing the ways that something as simple as tea can bring a deeper joy, a greater love, and a better understanding of life. To many, tea just is a beverage to drink and not a path to any specific kind of greater understanding. Yet, in its simplicity, its ordinariness, one can begin to look deeper to see how the extraordinary can be found in the simplest of things. In journeying for the short while that I have with tea I have been given the privilege to truly live ideals I simply believed in, and I've been able to meet people who have used their lives to grow in a better understanding of these same ideals. The mindful practice of Cha Dao has in it a very rich tradition of helping those of us who seek true peace, calm joy, and loving kindness. It is because of this living tradition that tea isn't a simple beverage. Neither is it some gateway to a mystical experience. To me, tea is a way to learn how to find real, every-day beauty and grow ourselves in it. In practical terms, one might look at the situation and say that encountering those at the center and encountering tea changed my life, but this is not true; life changed on its own. Those friends I met and experiences I had only helped me see the change more clearly.”

—Jon, U.S.A.

“Here is tea returned to its most potent minimum: good water and good leaves sought in kind company. Such is a place where conversations needn't be anything but natural, honest, and steeped in the mutual love of the Leaf. To be here, finding ourselves so privileged, it is tempting to get lost in long discussions, but you innately know that the wisdom of this place creeps in stillness, stillness found at the bottom of your tea bowl. And once you get there you may discover that your relationship with leaves, water, people and all the rest else has changed.”

—Andrew, USA

“My stay at the tea school was a great experience. It was a joy to meet with the other students, who were wonderful people. We drank many delicious teas, all grown in natural and organic methods, using a variety of teaware that complemented both the tea and people alike. There were many opportunities to learn and ask questions, and equally many to put intellectual matters aside and enjoy the tea and surroundings in comfortable quiet.”

—Sam, UK

“Although at the moment there is only enough room for passing guests, the Center is my home as much as if not more than the place where I do sleep each night. It is where I drink most of my tea, spend time with loved ones, laugh, cry, struggle, triumph, and transform. It is a place where every particle of the building is highly tuned to the language of tea, almost as though the tables and floors are even straining their ears to hear what it has to say. It's a place for wisdom and community, a place of love and light where everything has the space it needs to be cultivated and grow. “

—Elijah, USA

## Our Roadside Huts

*Outings in Taiwan, USA, Russia, etc.*

Long ago village roads wound around through mountain paths, past paddies and farms, through clusters of farmhouses and by small towns. On porches everywhere, and sometimes on stumps at the start of a trail or a chair by a field there would be a large pot full of steeping tea with an old cup slung over the spout. This “worker’s tea” was for a passerby like you or I: to drink on the way home after a hard day’s labor, or perhaps before the in-breath of a hike into the hills. And there was no need to distrust it, for it was with great care that the owner prepared the tea and carried it out to the stump each day, perhaps remembering a time when he himself was parched and happy to come across such a pot; or maybe a mountain landscape made a deep impression in the pause it took to sip a cup by some other old stump. Maybe he even noticed a crane he wouldn’t otherwise have seen if he hadn’t stopped for some tea. And so he put his own pot out on a stump everyday, in gratitude for those who had done this for him.

There is a great power in sharing the ordinary and simple gifts with another human, because it is in our most basic needs that we find a common ground—no matter how far away from home we find ourselves. Even if you don’t speak a word, you can share a meal or some tea together and smile. When we first came to Taiwan and didn’t speak so much Chinese we shared tea with masters for hours day in and day out and never had a problem. There wasn’t any need to talk, just smile and enjoy the time together. The tea always has more to say anyway. And such simple gifts as some leaves in water shared together in calm joy aren’t just for travels in distant lands. Look right nearby at the people you love and who love you. Are you ignoring your beloved sitting right next to you? Are you distracted from what’s important? And what could possibly be more important than a few moments of shared experience with the people we love? What child would rather have a toy than some presence with his or her parent? It is sad that as the pace of the modern world speeds up, people lose the ability to sit and share meals together, to enjoy quiet strolls in the woods or to sit and just share some tea. Chinese people have always valued moving, eating, drinking and traveling slowly and often still say so when parting. The old pots of tea put out on roadside stumps

sometimes had rice husks floating on the surface, forcing those who stopped to drink slowly. Such simple moments evoke a stillness in us, and through that a communion and sharing of our most essentially human qualities—the place where when you rest in yours and I rest in mine we are one.

It is with such an ancient intention that we set up our roadside huts to serve tea to passersby. With charcoal, mountain water and old-growth leaves we sit and serve tea simply and freely from bowls. There is no aim in erecting our roadside huts, other than to offer a bit of calm space and a pause for tea in a bustling world. Our work is pure and simple, unadorned and non-sectarian. We aren’t preaching any philosophy or theory, nor promoting any technique or tradition. We aren’t offering anything more than a warm smile, friendship and loving-kindness through a bowl of tea and the accompanying calm.

The Buddha said that when something is given with a pure heart it is transformed in the giving. The simplest things then become extraordinary. The heart’s light changes the way everything looks. Sharing tea with passersby in a bit of calmness, presence and stillness is older than the pyramids. In ancient China there were non-denominational monks roaming the mountains. They were sometimes called “forest monks” or “cloudwalkers” because their mountain homes were above the clouds. They wandered those ancient trails in such abundance that the very word for a sage is often “mountain person” in colloquial Chinese. And finding such a sage’s hut was good fortune. They may not have had much food or comfort to offer a traveler, but they surely had some leaves and water—and most likely amazing tea in spectacular spring water.

We seek out the hermit’s hut to find solace and peace. Our life and all our drama—all the vicissitudes of daily existence—can evaporate on the coals the old sage lays, drifting out the window with the steam from the kettle. And then on our return journey there’s a bounce in our step, that wasn’t there on the way up the mountain. Everything seems brighter and cleaner now. Peace is our true nature without our stories.

Other times we head up to the sage’s old hut to seek some guidance. Surely such a sage has cultivated some wisdom in those mountains. And



she'll share it as freely as she shares her tea. The perspective we get from looking down at our lives from such heights can help us to choose a direction, and to better see what lies ahead. In the bustle of the valley, we also often forget what is really important. Up above the clouds, things fall into place and we understand what really matters in life.

Here in Taiwan, and increasingly elsewhere as well, we set up roadside huts in the spirit of those ancient cloudwalkers and forest monks. We too offer a bit of solace from the bustle, some quiet and calm to find your bearings. We have been so kindly gifted a permanent stall in the Hope Market in Tai Chung. Every month we set up cushions on the ground at the market and serve tea to all the guests freely. People love to sit down and share a bowl in loving-kindness, and so often settle into themselves, leaving in a completely different state of mind. We also randomly set up in parks, art shows and other gatherings to share tea with people.

Sharing tea with people is a great way to connect this world and revive the hospitality and sharing so common before we started fearing each other. It is a celebration of the most ordinary mo-

ments of our lives, some leaves and water together for a few moments of loving-kindness; shared freely and without asking anything in return. We aren't asking you to hear us or to think like us, but rather listening to you and offering you a bit of calm and stillness. In many ways, this global tea hut is an extension of that same sharing, only the hut has grown much larger than it once was.

Try sharing some simplicity with the people around you. There is magic in the most mundane things when they are shared with a pure heart and in a space where people are present. A bowl of leaves and water uplifts us and allows us to let go of all the mind-made stuff and see each other as we really are. Chinese people understood this, leaving out a cup of tea for passerby to pause and look up at the sky. And when Chinese people part, they often leave each other with the words: "go slowly."

## Our Publications

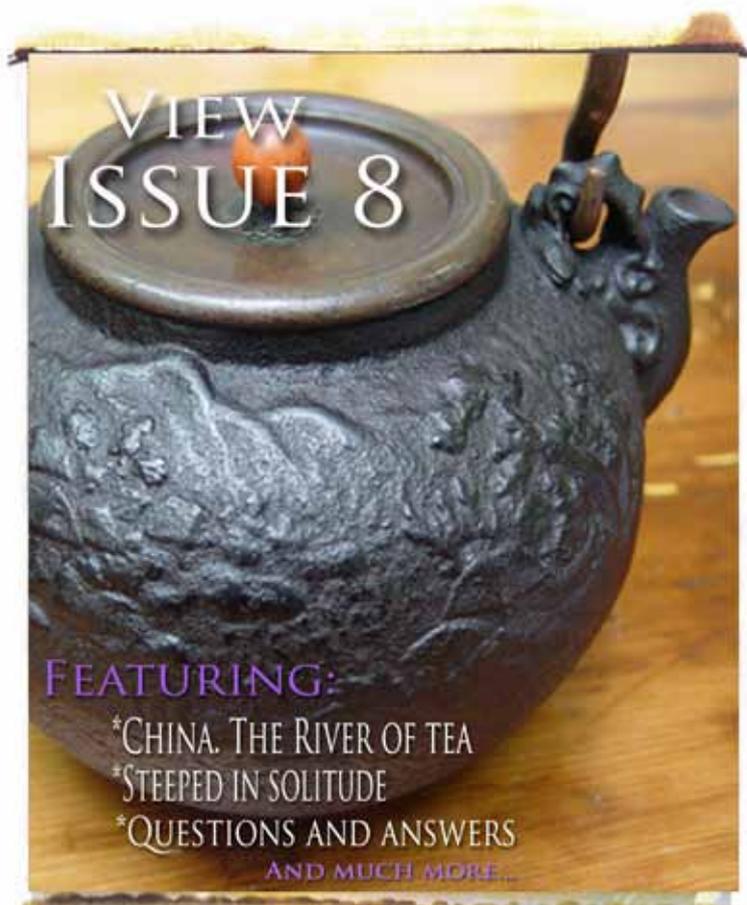
*Books, magazines, pamphlets, videos, etc.*

In this tradition, one chooses to be a teacher or merchant. This is not to be condescending or suggest that the two are mutually exclusive. Without tea vendors, where would we all get our tea? And there are some amazing tea merchants here in this hut amongst us. Moreover, many of our greatest and most important teachers also own tea shops or tea houses, like Master Tsai, whom we met in April. This isn't a black/white issue—there are great and honest tea vendors, from which we can learn a tremendous amount; and then the opposite end of the spectrum as well. Traditionally, spiritual matters were meant to be given freely: anything involving the Dao was considered priceless, and beyond any currency. For most of tea's relationship with man, over thousands of years, it was given freely. But in the last thousand years, it has increasingly become more and more profane—a commodity to be bought and sold, traded and fought over. Perhaps there is a need for some teachers and schools to arise alongside vendors, teaching in a completely unbiased way, and reconnecting tea wisdom to its spiritual heritage. In this cooperation, we can achieve more healing through tea.

Looking around the writings on tea, we found that there was so little available in English, and all of it controlled by vendors. Some vendors were providing incredibly educational information, while others confused by only promoting their own products. Many tea lovers have grown skeptical of any and all tea information as a result. And the spiritual/medicinal aspects of tea were always neglected entirely, with the exception of older books and some few Japanese articles. In 2008, we began *The Leaf, Tea & Tao Magazine* to promote free tea information that also included the awakening of consciousness through tea, as well as aspects of following Cha Dao and living a life of tea.

The magazine has since gone on to publish a total of eight issues with contributing authors from around the world. They are all available for free at: [www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org) We made a decision to make the magazine available only in electronic edition to promote a more environmentally friendly publication. We do, however, produce some simple black/white hard copies for the visually impaired and to put in various tea houses around the world so that customers can read them. *The Leaf* has had thousands of readers in these four years, promoting the spiritual ideals of tea, sustainable agriculture as well as tea education. It has provided a forum for tea scholars and those who practice Cha Dao to share their tea wisdom with the world, freely and in the true spirit of tea. Tea people, including vendors who love tea, are always the most giving, free-spirited people. *The Leaf* contains no advertisements and it is a requirement that all submissions do not promote any product or company. Due to that fact, the readership can rely more on the information, as so many have expressed that they were jaded by all the misinformation and contradictions on various vendors' sites.

Due to all the work going on here, with our travels and workshops as well as the huge influx of visitors to our center, Tea Sage Hut, as well as the creation of this Global Tea Hut, we have not had time to publish a new issue of *The Leaf* in over a year. But the magazine is not dead. We knew that eventually a solution would arise, as so many people expressed how important the magazine was to them. We are happy to announce that in September or October *The Leaf* will be revived, and with a



whole new look. A new student is coming to Taiwan to live and study tea for some time. She has a ton of professional experience as a journalist, including a lot of tea writing. She also has web design skills, and connections to new authors that she hopes will also contribute to *The Leaf*. We are not sure what shape the newborn magazine will take, as we still need to discuss how to differentiate it from these newsletters so the two are not redundant. If you are a fan of *The Leaf*, you can look forward to some exciting new issues soon. If you haven't yet checked it out, you have a few months to catch up on some of the back issues before we start afresh!

Aside from *The Leaf*, we also publish quite a few pamphlets that we distribute from our center here in Taiwan, at our roadside huts and in workshops we hold around the world. These pamphlets are so far being printed in English, Chinese and Russian. Some of the contributions you send

through Global Tea Hut go to producing these. They introduce our center, the *Four Pillars* and the *Eight Bowls* of this tradition and also give a bit of information on our classes, our center and even this global hut we're building.

This year we plan to self-publish our first tea book, called *Zen & Tea, One Flavor*. We aren't sure about any of the details as of yet, but the book will include several of Wu De's paintings and some original photography as well. We hope to publish a printed and electronic version. This will be Wu De's third book on tea. It will be sold, and the proceeds will go to support our center, roadside huts and other publication projects. Also, we currently purchase Wu De's two books from Tuttle Publishing and distribute them freely to guests who come and stay at the center. We have a limited budget for this, of course, but as Global Tea Hut grows we can give away more copies to more visitors. By self-pub-



## *Publications*

13 lishing the new book, we will have access to cheaper copies and can therefore give them away more easily.

Finally, we are beginning to produce a video series this month. We are incredibly excited about this project. One of the members of this hut—sitting right next to you over there drinking away at his bowl—is a professional cinematographer/cameraman and expert on all things film. We are so grateful to him, because he spent his only vacation this year to come here to Taiwan and help train us in the production of our small videos, so that they can look at least semi-professional. They will be up on our website within the month, and we have a Youtube channel for them as well. We are going to post them freely, after much discussion, and use a separate donate button on that page. Any donations to that project will go towards purchasing the remaining film equipment we still need (we have most things).

The videos will introduce Global Tea Hut, our center and roadside huts of course. Beyond that we hope to put up a ton of short instructional videos about all things tea. We may have some interviews, videos on tea production, Wu De lecturing on aspects of Cha Dao or brewing methodology, recording the experiences of guests at the center,

perhaps a video detailing the production/source of each Tea of the Month for this global hut, etc. After we have launched a few videos, let us know if you have any ideas for future shots. They are really going to be amazing, and will connect so much of the tea wisdom of this tradition to more and more people, as sharing tea and tea wisdom is our only purpose.

In this tradition, we always say that as the man/woman seeks the Leaf, the Leaf seeks the man/woman. And as the world has opened up so many new ways of sharing tea and tea wisdom has jumped right through these new doorways and into the lives of those it otherwise could not have connected to. The internet, videos and this Global Tea Hut are new and inspiring ways that tea is bringing people together, even across great distances. And the spirit of tea is about these connections. It facilitates a connection to each other, through the calm joy that allows us to be together without our ego-masks or social statuses and to communicate from our truth; and even through sharing articles, newsletters, books and movies that help connect us and solidify this community of tea lovers around the world.





*Wu De & Master Lu*

*Grinding aged-oolong matcha*



## Our Goals

*A permanent center, Puerh cave, etc.*

We'd like to share in the awakening of consciousness that is shifting here and there around the globe. It is our aim to be a part of the arising heart, and to cultivate it through this ancient medicine, tea. And tea is also such a powerful medium to share a reconnection to Nature, ourselves and each other. One of the most amazing aspects of tea is this ability to connect each other. It comes from our source in Nature, and is therefore not limited by any of the cultural, conceptual or religious differences that drive us apart. A Christian, Muslim and Atheist might argue if they talk of politics, but if they drink tea and talk about tea, they emerge brothers. For that reason, we know tea will play a large part in healing our world. Almost all the spiritual discussions in Asia have for thousands of years been over cups of tea, and many of the not so spiritual ones too: it has consummated weddings, sat between warring generals as they made peace or war, hosted old friends and been given in funerary offerings.

Our main goal is to purchase land in the mountains here in Taiwan to build the world's first free tea center and school. Our center now is amazing, and also free, but it is a bit small for the traffic we're already receiving. We hope to gather the funds to buy a quiet stretch of mountain land and build a center from scratch. We have some awesome architects willing to donate their time. We aim to use recycled materials, in keeping with our environmental ideals.

We imagine three or four buildings separated by koi ponds, walkways and landscaped gardens. The new center will have tea rooms and classrooms where people can come and use all our tea and teaware, learning various brewing techniques and experimenting with ancient ways that are mostly lost now. We hope to have several tea rooms where people can learn in classes, lectures and demonstrations, as well as rooms that people can use to prepare their own teahouse style. There will be a large kitchen and cafeteria nearby where we hope to feed people simple vegetarian food. At our current center, we always feed everyone who comes, as food and the sharing of meals are central to the spirit of tea.

The second building will be a large, open room for meditation, retreats, yoga and other spiritual work. It is our aim to build this large room with

a Chinese temple-styled roof, winged and with glass walls on all four sides, which open to Nature when the weather permits. This is to recognize Nature's role in our tradition as one of the *Four Pillars*.

We will also have an office, recreation room and several dorms divided into two kinds: simpler rooms with 2-4 beds for guests and larger rooms with a bed, desk and closet for long-term residential students. We expect the latter to work in the garden we'll plant and in landscaping, cleaning, cooking or serving in exchange for their room and board. The short-term guests will stay for free, as it is with our center nowadays.

Finally, we imagine a Puerh cave where we can all store our tea—cut directly into the mountain! It will have an altar and meditation cushions so that we can maintain good energy for all the aging tea. We hope to also have a nice farm and garden paths, with a tea hut here and there on the premises.

If you can imagine such a free center and the community it would promote, help us spread the word. This Global Tea Hut is our way of giving and receiving; it is the way that all of you can participate in our dream of a tea center and school with an amazing collection of tea and teaware, and a quiet atmosphere that promotes retreat and helps one cultivate spiritual awareness. And it would belong to us all!

We hope you can envision our center, and if you've been to Taiwan you know the potential for natural beauty (and if you haven't, make a trip soon). For now, you should know our small center here in Miao Li is very much alive and active, with visitors coming from around the world all the time. We are also planning to build a "Puerh cave" on the third floor when we get the funds. It won't be as nice as the actual cave we'll dig in the mountain once we build the permanent center, but it will suffice for now. As many of you know, aging fine Puerh tea requires the right balance of humidity and temperature, and is best done in Southeast Asia. Also, the more Puerh tea together in the room, the better it ages—it likes to be amongst friends as it meditates for those years. We plan to convert a space on the third floor of our center into a Puerh storage area that all of you can use freely. You can mail or bring a box of your tea and we'll shelve it for you. Then you can ask us to ship it back; or better yet, come

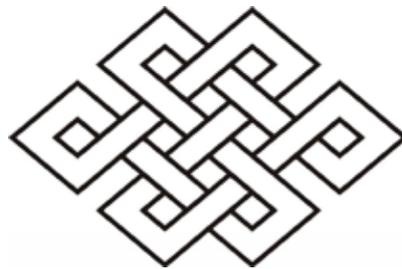
## Our Goals

and get it yourself! We won't open your box, merely store it for you. The room will have an altar and we'll meditate in there occasionally to promote good energy for the tea. This service will be free to all tea lovers.

We also hope to collect and open a public Puerh library where students can come and learn from various vintages and regions to better understand this magical tea. Other teas are easier to get and in greater abundance. Along with this we have already amassed a huge collection of rare, new and antique teaware. Much of these pieces won't be available to future tea lovers. We would like to continue this collection, so that our school will have most all the kinds of pots, kettles, cups and bowls for future students to use and learn from. For exam-

ple, we recently acquired an antique *matcha* grinder from Japan that is around 150-200 years old. We plan to use it to grind some other teas for whisking and boiling, and hope to share some of this amazing tea with you all soon.

All of our projects as they stand now are listed below. If you would like to contribute to any one of them, financially or in any other way, let us know. Money isn't the only, or even the best way you can participate. We are open to your contribution and service, for it is how you learn and get more deeply involved in this tradition. This in turn allows this tradition to work in your life more. The most basic way you can help is to help promote this Global Tea Hut.



## Our center

- Expenses (essentially covered by local donations and Global Tea Hut)
- Food and entertainment, trips and gas for visitors who wish to see Taiwan
- Bowls and tea for every guest to take home
- A Puerh Cave on the third floor
- A library of vintage teas for future students to study from
- A Large collection of various teawares to learn from

## Future Center

- Mountain land (probably around 200,000-300,000 USD for the size we need)
- Building (expenses unknown at this point)
- Gardening (both landscaping and vegetables for eating)

## Publications

- *The Leaf, Tea & Tao Magazine* (Online and free at: [www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org))
- Translations of some Chinese texts for free distribution
- Printing of pamphlets and introductions for free distribution
- The purchase of copies of Wu De's books: *Faces of the Master*, *Tea Wisdom*, *Way of Tea* and *Zen & Tea, One Flavor* for free distribution at our center

## Videos

- We still need around 500 USD worth of equipment
- We are also looking for a way to better host/share the videos

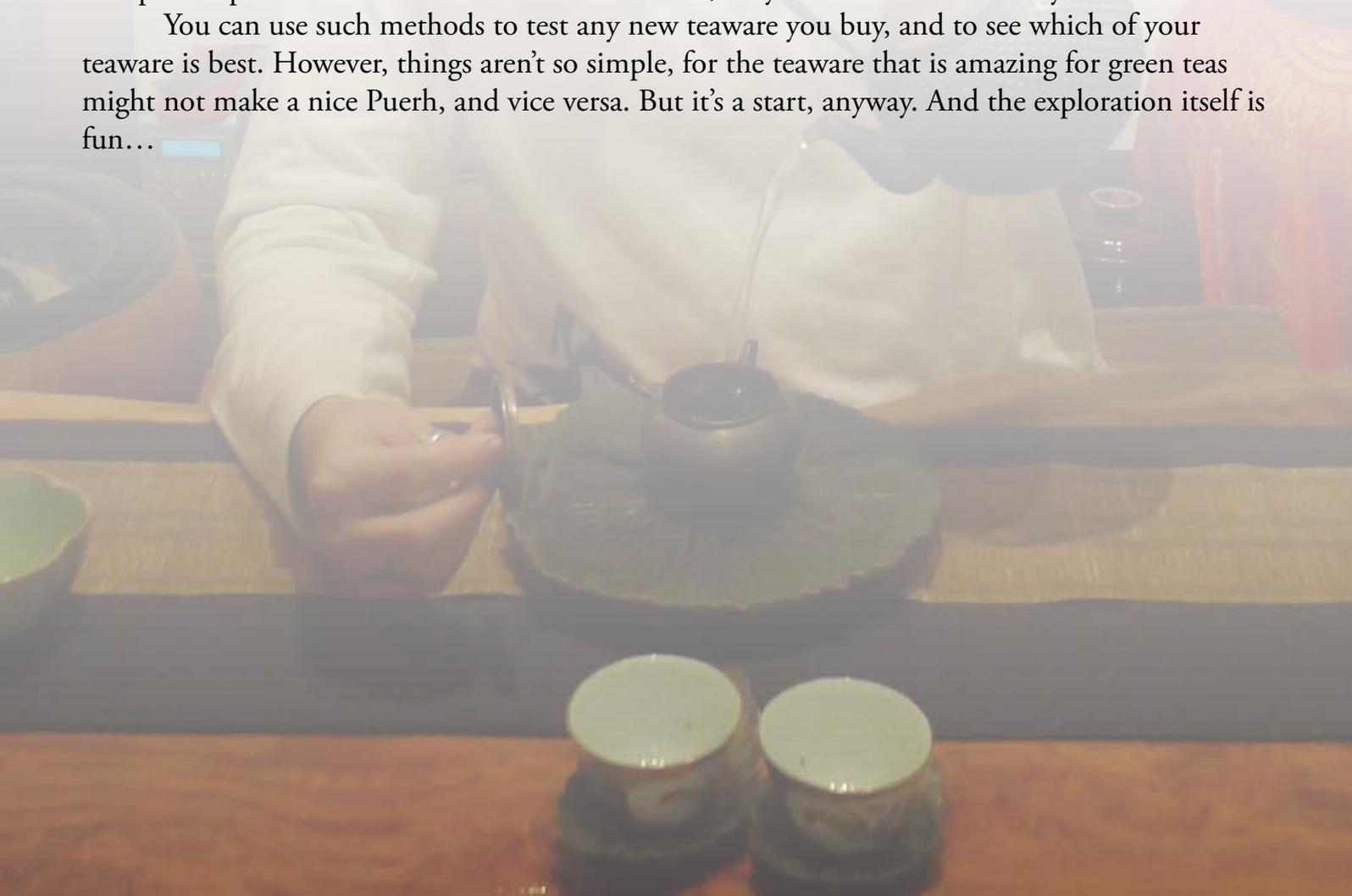
# JUNE GONG FU TEA-BREWING TIPS

In the last few issues, we've talked about spending some time moving away from fragrance and flavor to mouthfeel. Of course, we needn't shun flavor. We aren't taking away a dimension, but rather adding one. At first, you will need to experiment by ignoring flavor and fragrance so you can focus on how the tea feels in your mouth—the actual physical texture—but over time, you'll begin to be able to experience all these dimensions at the same time. For that reason, we also brew our teas a bit lighter and only use teas we are familiar with to do gong fu experiments, as new flavors will distract us from the mouthfeel. We also ask that you not use the tea hut teas for these experiments.

We spoke about using all different kinds of cups. With cups, you may have noticed, you can find a striking difference in the same tea; and not just in mouthfeel, but in flavor and fragrance as well. Using a few different kinds of cups to drink the same tea is an exciting way to realize just how much different kinds of clays, glazes, shapes, thickness and ages are impacting the tea. Try pouring your tea into as many different cups as possible and see how amazing a difference there is.

When testing different pots, you can use the pots as pitchers (*cha hai*). Set the lids aside and pour the tea back and forth between the pots. Then pour from the two (or more) pots into identical cups. Try to pay particular attention to the mouthfeel of each cup. Which pot's liquor is smoother? Which is lighter? Does the tea travel down on its own or do you have to consciously swallow it? Does it pinch the throat? Are there any flavors added by the teaware? Remember the best pots/cups/teaware never leave a trace in the tea, only enhance what's already there.

You can use such methods to test any new teaware you buy, and to see which of your teaware is best. However, things aren't so simple, for the teaware that is amazing for green teas might not make a nice Puerh, and vice versa. But it's a start, anyway. And the exploration itself is fun...





*Tea Sage Hut*



## HARMONY THROUGH ALCHEMY

*We started this series last issue, but thought we could properly introduce it this time and then continue it each issue, focusing on an element each time.*

“To know harmony is to know the Eternal,  
To know the Eternal is to cultivate insight.”

—Lao Tzu, *Dao De Ching*, Verse 55—

Harmony through alchemy has always been central to the aesthetics and philosophy of tea culture, whether clearly expressed by ancient Daoist mendicants, or left unstated, yet recognized by the modern tea drinker who intuitively knows when a tea set functions well, when a tea is brewed properly, or when something in the process is off. The mixing and blending of figurative and material elements in tea truly is alchemical—both externally in the way the leaf, water, fire and teaware combine to form the liquor; and internally in the way we use the tea session to create peace, quiet and a stillness that inspires dialogue with Nature and the Dao. And harmony has always been the guiding principle of these processes, for it is the harmony of a tea set that makes it beautiful and functional, the harmony of a tearoom which inspires relaxation, and even the harmony of the leaf, water and teaware which combines to make the best liquor. In the exploration of tea and our own development towards mastery, harmony is the ideal that we must seek out, just as masters past and present have always done.

The best teas are those which are brewed in a place where all the elements are in harmony together. This needn't mean anything magical or difficult to understand: “harmony” might just refer to the way that the proper water, at the proper temperature, combines with the right kind of leaves in the right amount, all in the best teaware, etc. What could be more alchemical? More and more modern tea farmers, artists that craft teaware, and even tea drinkers are beginning to understand that harmony must guide their tea. In exploring the elements that go into a fine cup of tea, and the way in which a more harmonious approach can be achieved, we can learn not only how to develop and progress in Cha Dao, but how tea can be a part of a healthier, calmer and more productive lifestyle.

Since ancient times Chinese sages and seers have separated the material world into five elements called “*Wu-shing* (五行)”: wood, earth, water, fire, and metal. These principal elements are extremely

complicated, influencing all aspects of Chinese culture, philosophy and spirituality—from Daoism to Buddhism, Feng-shui, medicine and even tea. Lu Yu himself inscribed symbols representing the *Wu-shing* on all of his teaware, and spoke of the way they all combined fluently in the brewing of tea.

Traditionally, these elements represented much more than just material aspects of the universe. They were also processes, with fire representing temperature and earth representing yin energy for example, and much more. They guided the selection and construction of buildings, understanding of the seasons and agriculture, spiritual work and meditation as well as Chinese medicine.

For tea brewing, it isn't important that one understand the library of concepts and ideas behind the *Wu-shing* or even recognize all of the phenomena that these concepts refer to as they occur in Nature. In order to grow in tea and develop in Cha Dao, we only need to understand how each of these elements combine to make the greatest cup of tea, and the way they come together in our spirits so that drinking fine tea daily can become more than just a beverage or refreshment, but a Way of living in concordance with ourselves, with nature and ultimately with each other as well.

As an ongoing column, I thought that each issue we could explore one of the *Wu-shing* as it pertains to Cha Dao. One should remember that the elements flow in and through each other, so the earth and water are in the wood, the fire in the water, etc., and we're just separating them conceptually for the sake of discussion. In understanding each of these elements, we might begin to see how they can either make or break the overall harmony of our tea session and our approach to tea as a time for relaxation, quiet, insight or even just the desire to share good tea with family and friends.

***Last issue, we discussed Fire. Let us now turn to Earth...***

## ~EARTH~ THE SPACE FOR TEA

The earth is feminine and accepting, and beyond comparing what's better or worse. In the Chinese elements, she is deep and spacious—receding and moving inward like the cracks and gorges that cover her. In tea, the earth element is the teaware. Teaware has always been primarily stoneware rather than clay, which means it is produced using ore that is processed into clay rather than river clay, which is softer and less porous. Porcelain and Yixing are both stoneware, for example.

We can learn so much from the earth element in tea. Teapots, unlike people, know when to be empty and when to be full. In the *Dao De Jing*, the Sage suggests that it is the space within things that makes them useful. A solid teapot could brew no tea. It is because the teapot is empty that tea flows through it. All of its power comes from the fact that it contains space, pregnant with the possibility of infinite teas. An empty pot has the potential to make any tea that will ever be, including the best or the worst cup ever. It is this same space that makes an empty page infinite, awaiting the brush strokes that will channel the formless into the world of form. The teapot does not condemn any of the tea that finds its way into its space, but rather enhances it all. No matter what tea comes, it is enhanced for having been brewed in this pot. Without such space, there is nowhere for the tea to meet the water and heat.

The best teaware enhances the tea and yet leaves no trace of itself. We look for teaware that is beautiful and also makes the tea smoother, rounder and more full-bodied. It should smooth out the rough edges of a tea, and help it reach its highest potential. The earth element grounds the tea session, and returns us to this moment no matter how far away we've drifted.

When choosing teaware, pay attention to the mouthfeel of the tea. Roll it on your tongue and see if the liquor is smoother and rounder in a particular

pot or cup. Has the pot or cup enhanced the tea? Has it left it with a flavor of its own? Does the tea want to be in that pot? Is its essence distorted? This is a powerful way to start.

The earth is the meeting point of the fire, water and wood. It holds space for them to come together, and makes peace between them. Choosing teaware is often daunting, and it will take a lifetime to master. Start simple. Choose a nice bowl and go on from there. With pots, unglazed clays are ultimately better, but also more difficult to choose since the quality of the clay will have a much greater effect on the tea. Purple-sand stoneware from the city of Yixing has been married to tea for over five hundred years, and nothing can compare to it for preparing most teas. We plan to write some more about Yixing in coming newsletters. Cups are almost always porcelain, which is glazed. Porcelain is smoother, thinner and more comfortable touching our lips. It is also white, which allows us to appreciate the liquor's color. As time goes on, you can learn more about different materials, shapes and sizes and the effects they have on various teas. There is so much to explore, especially when you consider that many of the variables can change from tea to tea. This doesn't mean your tea must be complicated. You should only explore the world of teaware if you find it exciting to do so.

Like the earth, the pot or cup doesn't pick and choose. And no trace of our session is left in them. They know when to fill up and when to empty, and are therefore able to serve an infinite amount of tea. Actually, a single pot and cup could be used to serve tea to everyone on earth, and just because they so deeply understand the relationship between empty and full.

# TEA THE TRANSFORMER

*This article is the beginning of an ongoing column that our very own Steve Kokker will be writing. He is a great soul and an amazing author and it is a great honor to share his tea wisdom with all of you from hereon!*

Starting a tea importing business in coffee-loving Estonia back in 2004 led to a lot of bemused comments. And living a short skip away from the world's largest coffee consuming nation per capita—Finland—had certainly influenced the small nation of 1.4 million perched atop northeast Europe. The frigid Baltic winds, long, dark winters and languid personalities were great excuses for coffee excesses: “We need strong black coffee here to keep warm and boost energy.”

I didn't quite buy the reasoning—if neighbors in next-door St. Petersburg, with a climate even less forgiving than Estonia's, or in nearby Riga, Latvia, can fill tea salons, why would Estonia be so tea-impermeable? In any case, why let stats and naysayers block passion? Having had no prior business experience, I also had no definite business goals; I basically wanted to ensure that I had a supply of decent teas in this tea-bereft country I had chosen to live in. I also espoused the lofty goal of helping to raise Estonia's tea drinking culture... as it had nowhere to go but up, it couldn't be such a stretch to fulfill this. “Good luck with your little hobby,” I was wished.

While I would now respectfully (tearfully!) caution anyone from running their business as a hobby, there are much worse pastimes than being steeped in the Leaf night and day. And has the coffee-only country become a tea-loving one? It's still no China, but within a European context, incredibly so. The changes I've seen over the years have been truly fascinating. I might one day write a book about them: *The Power of Tea—the Ultimate Baltic Transformer*, or some such tacky title best read out loud in the Trailer Man voice.

Not a week has gone by, already for the last two years, without someone telling me that they no longer drink coffee (or have reduced their dependence on it). They tell me that their bodies, minds and souls respond so much better to tea. They tell me they feel like better human beings from drinking good teas. They tell me of the major and minor transformations that have occurred with tea as the catalyst, of relationships solidified and meditations intensified. And with no loss of warmth or energy; on the contrary.

## The Road to Cha Dao

It likely began, as it so often does, with Milky Oolong. That was the first Tea tea I'd tried in the mid 1990s which wasn't store-bought, mass-produced, so-called “tea”. A small, Chinese-run teashop had opened in Montreal; finally, a small tea wave had begun to balance out the seemingly endless tide of coffee shops which had engulfed city blocks across North America for well over a decade.

Tea was a new, daunting, confusing world to me and I stuck with the sweetest thing they had for my first visit. Something I could understand. I thought it was the best thing I'd ever tasted. So do many of my new customers just stepping into the tea world. I don't tell them that I never drink it anymore. I'm happy they like it and make sure to give them a free sample of an unadulterated oolong to compare. If those same shop owners had insisted I buy their best Wuyi Rou Gui, I wouldn't have understood it and might have been scared off tea for a long time.

The road to Cha Dao is often challenging, trippy, meandering, obscure (and lots of fun!), and I suspected it would lead me to enchanted places. Not to a New Jersey shopping mall. That my road from Milky Oolong to the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan was via New Jersey just shows up Fate's Joker card: the unlikeliest of places and people often lead to the most profound changes.

I was intensely interested in anything to do with Japan at the time and when once in New York, thought it would be fun to visit the much-lauded Mitsuwa Japanese mart in Edgewater, New Jersey. Aside from some decent kabusecha and fried seaweed snacks, a book called *The Way of Tea* caught my eye. I flipped through it and immediately felt like buying it, but decided to be disciplined and not get it. I had a pile of tea-related books which I'd bought (I must! I'm into tea!) but then never read. I was not going to add to my collection just when I wanted to reduce it. Still, this one seemed to approach tea in a way I hadn't seen before. But no, I needed to be strong. I read another page and walked quickly to the register before changing my mind.

## *Tea the Transformer*

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I had spent by then a number of years traveling in North America and Europe, taking courses about tea and meeting many lovely souls who added to my knowledge about tea the plant, tea the business and tea the meditation tool, but the words on this book's pages appealed to a deep sense that I had not yet stepped into the realm where tea really wanted to take me. There was much about my life not in harmony with being a Chajin. I knew that, but didn't know what to do about it.

I thought I had already been transformed by tea pretty significantly by then: it had come knocking at the door, patiently taught lessons over and over again about concentration, discipline, the need to nurture inner calm. Tea as humble teacher offers lessons about humility, about receiving back that what you give, about living life in harmony with what is and not with what the mind would like to see. Yet I sensed that these lessons were not fully learned, wavering between a mind-based understanding of them and attempts to live them.

After absorbing the book, I felt compelled to write the author a note of thanks... and that led to me being picked up at an unlikely train station halfway around the world just a few months later.

The first thing I told my hosts at Tea Sage Hut is that I had arrived with an emptied cup. It was a cup I had long wanted to pour out—sure, much of what had been in it had been beneficial and already ingested. For a true transformation to occur, however, emptying just a few droplets and hoping that a new flavor or two would do the trick would only prolong a set of illusions. I was ready to toss out much of what I'd previously held to be 'true' or important about tea. And learn what tea wanted to teach us, in becoming us.

In the coming issues I plan to interweave some musings inspired by the tea-steeped transformations which Tea Sage Hut triggered in me at just the right time and place...

*Our center's 200-year-old, hand-carved Rikyu*



## EN-LIGHTEN UP

When you begin down an Eastern path, and Cha Dao mostly heads East, you quickly realize the important role language can play in our thinking, and consequently our insights. For the most part, we come to love the ancient spiritual words in languages like Sanskrit and Chinese—for their subtlety and breadth. There is one English word we've come to like better than its Eastern equivalents, however: "Enlightenment". When most people think of "Enlightenment" they see in the word the "light" and are reminded of the light in us, which we all travel towards. But "light" in English has another meaning: not heavy! Being enlightened means, literally, *lightening* up! Don't take yourself serious, or anything else for that matter. There is an old Indian saying: "beware the spiritual/religious man that takes himself seriously!" And many of you know how we here do so love laughter and humor. We thought that these newsletters might be getting a bit heavy and that we would en-lighten them up.

Here are some funny photos we've taken this month. You can laugh away at our captions or add your own:



***Hey! Don't get fresh!***





*Blue Steel*

*The essence of Cha Dao is this...*



# TEA WAYFARERS

*From now on, we plan to introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you each month in these newsletters. We hope that this helps us all get to know each other better. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and tea are becoming, as the tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of the tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to show you some glimpses of such beautiful people and their tea. Since he's spent June here at the center and is beginning a column here, we thought we'd introduce you to Steve Kokker.*

I grew up in Montreal, but even from early childhood I can remember feeling that somehow my true home wasn't in Canada. Even in elementary school I'd stare at photos of Europe and imagine that that's where I belonged. I graduated with degrees in psychology and social work, then worked for a few years with schizophrenics before deciding to follow other passions: writing and cinema. I became a film critic for a local alternative paper and made a few documentaries.

From the early 1990s, I had made several trips to Estonia, where my father was born, and fell in love with the region. My ancestral home of Estonia became my base. I had already moved there without admitting it. By the time I felt it was time to stop travel writing, my love for tea had already developed into a full-time hobby. At one point I told myself to stop complaining that there weren't any good teas in Estonia and do something about it myself. I started a tea importing business, and later opened a teashop. My great grandfather owned a few restaurants in pre-WWII Tallinn, and with my tea shop, I feel like I'm completing some ancestral circle.

I love to try to help the right teas find their hosts at the right time. There's so much life wisdom in Cha Dao, and I know I've only touched the surface but if I can inspire some wonder of tea, as so many have done for me in the past, that's what really makes my day.

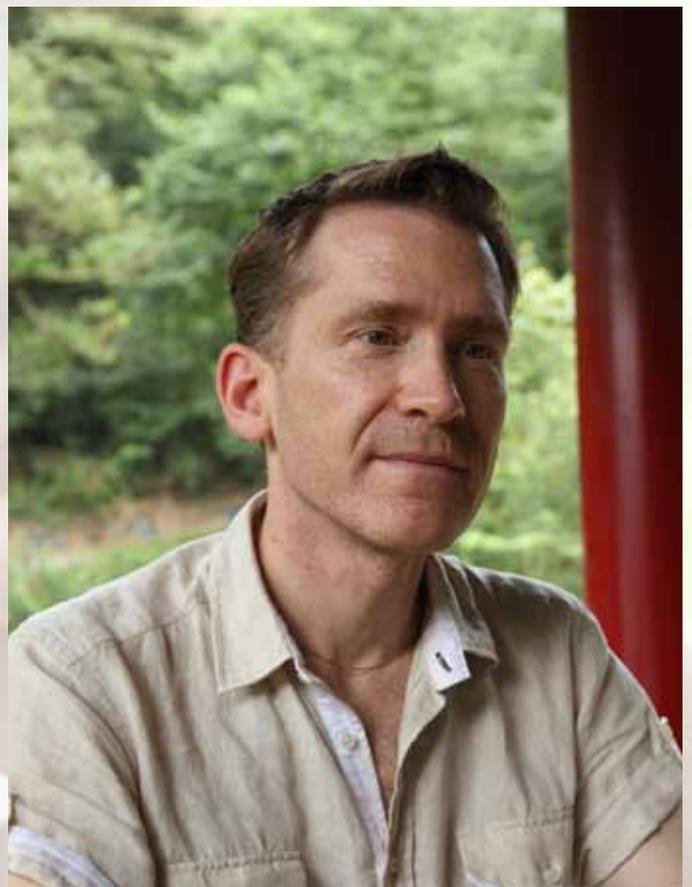
Since childhood, I've surrounded myself with antiques, old photos and old books. I felt comfortable among footsteps taken, lives lived. With good aged, wild Puerh, my

entire being can soak up the wisdom of ages. Tea has also taught valuable lessons on listening to the natural intelligence of my body and feeding it what resonates best with it on any given day.

I dream of lingering under a wild tea tree in Yunnan. To share simply-made tea with good friends in nature. Drinking tea with small-scale farmers on their tea gardens. To always be open to what tea wishes to show or tell me. To live the tea life I sometimes only think I do.

Steve can be found at his shop:

[www.chado.ee](http://www.chado.ee)



The Global Tea Hut website now has a forum up, where we can all discuss this month's tea and ask or answer questions, as well as share our experiences. It is a great way to meet some of your brothers and sisters in the hut. Come and join us:

**[www.globalteahut.org/forum](http://www.globalteahut.org/forum)**

(We are also on Facebook and Twitter now!)



We are launching a free video series of teachings this month, from our center here in Taiwan. Wu De will give some teachings on tea and share some life wisdom each week. We are working on editing the first video now, which should be up by month's end. Check the website for details and a link to our YouTube page is also up on the site as well.



There are currently 75 people in Global Tea Hut from all around the world: countries like Spain, Russia, Estonia, Australia, New Zealand, America, Canada, USA, the U.K. and Taiwan. Our accountant, Kaiya the Magnificent (and Merciful) says that once we get to around 100-120 people all our financial worries will vanish and we'll live happily everafter, forever and ever...



If any of you are interested in seeing these newsletters in color, you can read them on the Internet at the GTH website, under the link for 'newsletters'. Some of the photography is worth taking a peak at.

We have used some of your contributions to buy an amazing 100+-year-old matcha grinder. We are experimenting with grinding several kinds of tea for boiling and whisking. We've ground an aged-oolong matcha so far and are doing an aged Puer next. We plan to share some of this magic with you all soon!



We have given out 3 scholarships for a free year of GTH to people who want in but cannot afford the cost. If you know anyone else interested, please let us know. It is a great joy to expand this community!



Wu De will be in LA this July! We are doing some amazing tastings and workshops there from the 10th through the 19th. Come and join us if you are nearby.

*Contact the Hudonator for more information!*



Let us know about what you think of Global Tea Hut so far, either by contacting us or expressing your thoughts on the new forum. We would love to hear your comments or criticism. We are here to serve and make this experience better for everyone, bringing us all closer together.

**[www.globalteahut.org](http://www.globalteahut.org)**  
**[www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)**  
**[www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org)**

**Be happy!**

*A lost teawayfarer  
returns home again*

