

# Global Tea Hut



NEWSLETTER #9, OCTOBER 2012

It has been so remarkable participating in these monthly tea sessions that time has slipped by and two seasons have come and gone. But we haven't lost the joy behind creating these gatherings, serving you and this growing circle of people. We're just as committed to connecting you to astonishing teas and organic farmers, to this living tea tradition and our center in Taiwan, and of course to each other. As much as the first month, we learn about which tea to share with excitement and are thrilled to visit the farmers that wish to donate their tea to you. We are just as joyous about packaging these envelopes, writing these newsletters and selecting gifts for you as we were when this all started for a much smaller group of tea brothers and sisters. And we hope you are as thrilled to receive these packages as we are to send them.

It feels like this gathering has grown in more than size alone, like we have also all grown closer for these shared tea sessions. It seems easy to slip into a casual tone writing for these newsletters, as though chatting with old friends. And indeed, we have been thrilled to have visits from many of you, or at least to receive word that your Eastward-bound trips are in the works.

In this tradition we say that we learn not how to *make* tea, but rather how to *serve* it. This isn't a witicism; serving is in concordance with the true spirit of tea. Tea wants to be shared. It speaks to the soul as a connector, connecting us with Great Nature and with each other. A fine tea is so much better when the jar is opened in the spirit of sharing rather than in the name of enjoyment. Of the hundred best teas we have ever drunk, there have been so few that we could have owned ourselves—they were all shared with us freely and openly, given in the spirit of connection, many too priceless to ever be bought or sold. Long ago, the sages that cloudwalked Chinese mountains had little else to give a passing guest, other than the leaves they had gathered from nearby trees. And sometimes, these simple gifts are the most important. It is, after all, the priceless parts of life that matter most.

It has been amazing to hear that so many of you have figured this out and started sharing these lit-

tle envelopes of tea with others, in the spirit of spreading this tradition and Cha Dao as well. You inspire us. It seems that with each passing month, this center becomes more active—ignited by the energy of your support! There are more guests, emails and queries. We have a new book out, which you'll learn about later on in this issue; and if you haven't yet checked out the videos we are making, you should head to the GTH website ([www.globalteahut.org](http://www.globalteahut.org)) and have a look. They are getting better each time, as we learn our craft. We know this will also be an important medium in sharing our tradition with this magnificently modern world.

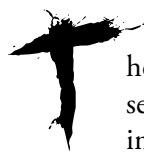
As this Hut grows and we share these teas each month, let the heart be warmed by our community and the small, though poignant, effect it's having on the world. Take the time to share this month's tea in a warm space, as so many of us are experiencing a shift in the weather, in the moon and wind. Perhaps go outside one last time before winter and share this month's tea with someone special. Maybe you'll tell them about the marvelous farmer that produced it, or about how proud he is to be connecting to you all.

It is amazing to imagine that so many travelers in other times can be recalled and remembered in our tea gatherings. Like us, they have gathered to share some warm tea around tables, on cushions or blankets by the falls, on a bridge or even on a boat, as we recently drank our tea...

A weary mountain man came across a hut after weeks of wandering alone. The hint of company enticed his soul in ways even food could not, and he realized how hungry he was for companionship. The smoke from the small hut seemed a ribbon of joy, descending rather than ascending from Heaven. He strolled up confidently, knowing that tea would bind him and his soon-to-be brother. Sure enough, there was little space between the opened door and the first bowl of tea, offered graciously and with a smile—for nothing pleased the old hermit more than a far-off traveler stopping by for some tea. Perhaps the traveler, a stranger no more, would smile at the scroll of calligraphy that was the only decoration in the otherwise sparse hut: "*Through tea make friends!*"

# YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, OCTOBER 2012

*2012 Summer “Mi Xiang” Oolong, Ming Jian, Nantou, Taiwan*



he most important role this Global Tea Hut serves is the friendships we broker between incredible tea producers and all the people gathered here each month. If you didn't know, all the teas we share with you each month are graciously donated. The farmers and vendors who give us tea to share know that we are a non-profit tea school devoted to sharing Cha Dao with the world, but that isn't the primary reason why they share their tea with us. All of our classes and publications are free and all the guests who stay here do so completely free, so without the gifts of tea these supporters donate to us, we wouldn't make enough from this monthly sharing to pay our bills. The farmers know that their tea supports us in this way, and of course think it is nice, but again it isn't the real motivation for their gifts: you are!

All of the amazing farmers who support us with their hard labor—tea is one of the most labor-intensive crops on earth—do so to share their tea with twenty nations. I have seen two tap their chests with a tear-jerking pride and tell a friend how, “Our tea, yes, *our* tea is being drunk by someone in Spain!” They want to connect their heritage, culture, art and work with the world. Any artist could relate. I certainly wouldn't turn down the chance to have my book read by people worldwide, even if it was for free! And with so many environmental problems in the tea industry, and all agriculture for that matter, it is very important that these organic farmers who are creating sustainable teas have such an amplified voice. So you might say that we at the Hut are the microphone, and you the audience.

Some people in their urban offices or at bars declare that “global warming is a myth” or debate whether the changes in the environment are “real” or “true”. But no farmer, living and working in concordance with the climate, denies the changes of late. Tea just isn't as good as it was even ten years ago. And when you ask the farmers, they all tell the same story: It doesn't rain enough; it's cold when it should be warm or warm when it should be cold; the mists aren't coming the way they once did in early spring, etc., etc... When you add to that smog, water pollution and over-use of chemicals, you have a dreary painting indeed. But wait, look there! Where? Just there, in the back of the painting—behind all those grays. There is still some green. Some hope. There are the seeds of change, already growing—thriving in a renewed soil based on community, sharing and a view to the future.

As many of you who have been to our center know, one of our modes of service is to set up our tea service at parks, trails or gatherings and serve free bowls to passersby. We do so without any agenda or teaching—simple tea in a quiet space of presence and loving-kindness. Tea is the great connector, connecting us to Nature and to each other. We blaze right past each other all the time, with more modes of communication than ever before, and yet less human connection since creation. We offer people a bit of humanity, a smile, a chat or even some silence to get in touch with themselves before they move on. We do so at a variety of venues, including our monthly service at Hope Market in Taichung.

Hope Market is a group of organic producers who work together as a model for a sustainable future. It is mostly farmers, though there are producers of recycled clothes, jam, miso, etc. They hold activities every week, including courses conducted by various farmers in which the public can come and learn to make tofu, honey, organic fertilizer, etc. There is no currency exchange allowed within the Hope organization, rather trade and barter. If a soy bean farmer wants some honey, he trades tofu for it. There is also a wonderful exchange of work as well, which means that if that same soy bean farmer needs some help harvesting he asks his brothers and sisters in Hope and they all come to help, knowing that he will also help them if and when they need him to. It goes without saying that they will also help us build our permanent center to replace the temporary space we are in now. Every month Hope also holds a market in a beautiful garden, with rivers, koi fish and lotus ponds. As members, we have been given a permanent booth in the market. We don't use tables like the others, though, instead setting up on the ground and serving tea to the guests that come to buy vegetables and other organic products. Next to sending out this Global Tea Hut, Hope Market is the highlight of our month here.

It was at Hope that we met the amazing Mr. Xie Yuan Zhai, whom we of course gravitated to immediately because of his organic tea. He came to the center a few times and we started visiting his farm. It was so easy for a friendship to develop (organically of course). He is kind and joyous, with smiles that fill a room, not to mention incredibly knowledgeable about tea. He's made every kind of tea you could imagine at some point, and has decades of experience.



Aside from providing this month's tea, which you are sure to love, Mr. Xie is a very important part of the scenery at our center, and will be very important for many of you as well, because so many of our visitors come here with a curiosity about how tea is processed. It is very important to experience with your own hands just how difficult it is to make tea, so that in your own soreness you will develop a tremendous respect for the Leaf. This respect isn't just in the billions of years of evolution, or in the Nature we always wax poetic about: the wind and rain, sun and moonshine, minerals, mountain and water that flow from roots to crown. It is also in the blood, sweat and tears of generation after generation of farmers. And there is a deep reverence in seeing just how much mastery, skill and, dare we say, art in the crafting of the Leaf. And so, with great joy we take as many of our guests as possible to a few different farms to try their hands at tea processing. It is amazing to make your own tea, and take it home with you. If you didn't have enough reasons to come stay with us, here's another: Mr. Xie has formally invited each and every one of you to come to his farm and make tea, eat a nice lunch and take the tea you picked and crafted home with you!

Mr. Xie is a third generation farmer in Ming Jian, Nantou, Central Taiwan. Ming Jian is lower altitude, in the foothills of the central mountain range. In the last few decades, such lower altitude tea has been adumbrated by the popularity of the teas grown higher up, as we discussed with regards to our Oriental Beauty from Beipu County a few months ago. Though areas like Hsinchu and Miao Li counties, where OB is grown, have struggled since high mountain Oolongs have come to dominate the market, Ming Jian has prospered by providing lower priced teas for export, or large-scale production for the bottled tea market (often called "Ready to Drink" RTD). Mr. Xie's family has grown small scale productions of Oolong tea through three lifetimes, since before the higher teas even existed.

When we discuss organic farming and the need to make changes in tea farming—as well as other kinds of agriculture—it's important to remember that the farmers are always the first victims. It is they who handle the agro-chemicals in large amounts, and most directly. Furthermore, it is only by humanizing and befriending them that we can bring about change. We must include rather than exclude—educate rather than ostracize.

Like so many other farmers, Mr. Xie started to get the nagging (coughing, wheezing) feeling that these





chemicals were harmful to his family, his community and his land. When his wife almost miscarried their second child in 1997, he had had enough. Despite opposition from friends and family, Mr. Xie made a commitment to become an organic tea farmer, no matter the cost. He first attended some organic farming classes held by the MOA organization, which we discussed in April with regards to the Qing Xiang Oolong we sent at that time (as it was MOA certified). In case you've forgotten, here is the MOA story again:

MOA stands for "Mokichi Okada Cultural Services Association International." It was created by Mokichi Okada (1882-1955), who started three great projects in his lifetime: a "Mokichi Style Detoxification Treatment" for land, "Natural Agriculture, Drinks and Food" and "Fine Arts and Culture". These three projects created affiliated groups of people with common goals to help each other. His overall aim was "to allow humanity to expand and flourish, helping create healthier people, families, regions, countries and culture". His Japanese NPO natural agriculture culture movement created the *Da Ren* farm in 1982, and then in 1991 developed standards for healthy, organic agriculture. They began to set up branches and create a social system for theory and practical cooperation amongst farmers in Japan.

In April of 1990, a group of people who cared about Nature and were concerned about environmental pollution wanted to change the situation in Taiwan.

They joined the Japanese MOA International Association and created a sister organization to educate farmers and legally certify organic foods and drinks. This Taiwanese foundation was formed to explore and seek health and happiness for mankind and to guarantee environmentally sustainable MOA natural agriculture, expecting this ideology and the sustainable agriculture techniques behind it to spread all over the world.

MOA certification is rather rigorous and they do a great job of ensuring sustainable, organic agriculture without much of the bureaucracy or financial interests that trouble a lot of organic certification worldwide. Watching for the MOA certification on teas is a good way to enter the world of organic Taiwanese teas.

From 1997 to 2000, Mr. Xie and his family struggled to maintain their principles. His tea was sub-par and he lost most all his customers. His father, who had been worried when he suggested upsetting the status quo in the first place, was very critical of his decisions. Organic farming is difficult, and it requires a radical change in farming and processing methodology—changes that would take time to learn. Rather than give up, as many would have done, Mr. Xie got a part time job as a painter and carpenter, working day and night—either painting or farming—to keep his family afloat. Finally, in the early 2000's, his acumen for organic farming improved to the point that he was able to take his teas to market again. Since then he has gone on to win awards, been featured on TV and has even

heard his father, now a sprightly eighty years old, bragging to others about how his tea is organic and good for the environment.

Mr. Xie's work hasn't stopped with his own farm. He knew that he would have to keep improving his skills, creating new and better teas, and help show his neighbors the value of organic farming, especially since their land and his are close enough to influence each other. He formed a co-op with other farmers and began teaching locals to shift to organic methods, offering them equal shares in their combined enterprise. As more people have joined this local group, the incentive to do so has also increased. To date, more than twenty farmers in the Ming Jian region are organic, including Mr. Xie's immediate neighbors.

Mr. Xie's kind heart shows in his teas. He cares deeply about tea and the Earth. He produces green tea, large and small leaf red tea, as well as several kinds of Oolong; and all with great skill. He's generous with his tea, which is why we've all gotten an extra share this month. To us, he is an inspiration and a kind of hero—the kind not talked about enough these days. It's easy to follow the crowd, maintain the status quo; or to say that “I am just one person. What can I do?” It is difficult to face criticism from family and friends and stand up for what you believe to be right. The problem is that it is

too easy for farmers to make more money with agrochemicals, and to do it with less work. And that's also why so many of them are over-using the fertilizers and pesticides, reducing the average life of a tea bush to fifteen years, all in the name of personal gain. Many of them get cancer from improper exposure to such chemicals, themselves victims as we mentioned above. Mr. Xie is a man who has seen a different way, and more inspiringly lived that way and taught others to do so. And that is the spirit of tea.

***Your tea of the month, a Mi Xiang Oolong  
from Ming Jian, Nantou***

This month's tea is one of our favorite teas from Mr. Xie. It is called “Mi Xiang Oolong”, which literally translates to “Honey Fragrance”, and you'll soon see why. It is completely organic, although it's plantation tea. It is a small-leaf varietal. As we discussed in April, if all tea in the world were grown as it should be—harvested once a year, allowed to grow up with room between trees, etc.—there wouldn't be nearly enough tea in the world. In this age, we must compromise. Mr. Xie's amazing story, and his great teas make that easy to do.





The tea has a honey fragrance because it is bug-bitten, much like the Oriental Beauty that we sent you in June. As more tea farmers have gone organic, they have had to come up with ways to cope with the katydids that come and eat their tea, especially when neighbors use pesticides and all the bugs come to their fields. Allowing bugs to bite the tea, and then processing it accordingly, began with Oriental Beauty in Beipu County, but has recently spread to Nantou as well. The resulting hybrid is sometimes called “Concubine Tea”. This month’s tea is a newer, more unique kind of tea: processed more like a traditional Oolong, with less oxidation or roast than either Oriental Beauty or Concubine Tea.

The bugs bite the leaves and their saliva reacts with the compounds in the tea to start oxidation before the leaves are even plucked. This happens in the summertime, usually between June and August. When the tea is less oxidized, the end-result is a musky, honey fragrance that lingers in the back of the mouth.

The tea is bug-bitten, plucked, withered outdoors and then indoors, shaken and mixed in piles (*jiao ban*), withered more, pan fried (*sa cheen*) to arrest oxidation and kill green enzymes, rolled to break down the cells and further oxidation, as well as to shape the tea (*ro nien*), and then roasted twice—once to dry the tea and then for a longer time to add flavor and fra-

grance. It is a semi-oxidized Oolong, lighter than traditional Oolong though darker than much of the green, light teas produced nowadays (like April’s tea).

The Qi of this tea is uplifting, sweeping upwards. You will feel elated drinking it, perhaps like us feeling the joyful toil Mr. Xie has impressed upon it. There is a great fellowship in this tea, between our fortuitous meeting at Hope Market, the many cups we’ve shared with Mr. Xie and now in the passing on of his kindness to you. He gave us all some extra tea, to drink a few times—spreading the love to a few of your friends as well...

*\* As a special treat, we will be putting up a video of Mr. Xie making tea right about the time you’ll be receiving this envelope and reading these very words. After you’ve drunk a cup or two, head over to the Global Tea Hut website and take a look at the video, so you can see his skill for yourself. If that doesn’t seal your plans to visit us, we don’t know what will!*

*\*\* As we mentioned in previous months, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized.*







## THE VALUE OF POURING A CUP FOR AN UNSEEN FRIEND

Article by Steve Kokker

In the last issue, I wrote about the joys of drinking tea outside, in Nature. Recently, when I re-read it to post it on our teashop's website, it inspired me to take advantage of what I knew might be among the last sunny, warm-ish days left of the year. It was a calm, sunny autumn Saturday afternoon and I packed up my tea gear and headed to my nearby forest-backed beach for a session among the pine and birch trees.

I spent about an hour drinking a braided Yiwu sheng Puerh from 2008, eyes closed in the sun, trying to practice some non-obvious tantric yoga breathing exercises without arousing too much suspicion to passing dog-walkers or mushroom hunters. I had my own swath of forest floor; no one came anywhere near. For a few blissful moments of no-thought I managed to approach feeling like a field of awareness, just taking in the curves and bends of the surrounding trees, the billowing patches of browning grass, all with a minimum of mental noise.

I was definitely happy to be alone. Besides just sitting and being, there were a few questions I wanted to ponder, and in short order, after just a few bowls, all felt in balance. Yet while I didn't particularly wish for company, I watched my mind calling up specific friends and wishing they'd be able to pop in for just a bowl or two.

But how to make people just suddenly appear, without having Samantha's *Bewitched* powers?

Somehow, my mind wandered to some film I saw long ago in which a therapist suggested to his client that if she wanted to 'find someone', she'd have to first make room for him. Too often we complain or fret about wanting this or that, he or she, but change absolutely nothing in our habits or actions to make room for this. The therapist suggested she set an extra place at her dinner table every night in her solitary apartment, as if expecting someone... and get used to this feeling, to this image of someone already by her side.

I realized that I had for some reason packed two bowls that day, and wasn't sure why, for a solo session. But I had deliberately packed and carried a second bowl with me and there it lay empty. Hmmm. I thought, in my sun-drenched, hazy kind of way. What if I poured tea in there and set it out in front of me? If I found myself even partially wanting company, why not do something about it? For a moment I had an image of a fantasy-come-true striding by and seeing a full cup of tea, then saddling down for a sip and flirt.

I poured the tea, set the bowl in front of me and went back to flipping through the *Art of Tea*







magazine, closing my eyes again when the sun pierced through the clouds.

No more than five minutes after I'd set out the second bowl, I heard some rustlings nearby, getting closer. No one had so far come anywhere near me so the sounds were distinct, crisp. I thought, "Already? Wow, that *The Secret* stuff really works!" and turned around. The large, disheveled figure of a broken man was standing a few meters away from me; large, sad, clownish eyes hanging over unshaven jowls. Clothes ratty, stained, oversized. People might refer to him as a bum, a drunk.

"Ex-excuse me," he faltered in Russian, "I don't mean to disturb your peace, but..." He stopped, looked around, placed a finger on his chin, frowned and looked back at me. Stilted head movements, very likely from intoxication. "...You—you wouldn't want some company?" he asked.

I found myself slip into automatic mode, that same kind of Big City Mode that wants to immediately say, "No!", when approached to give money or answer a questionnaire: "Ah, no, no thanks," I said, listening to my superficial self which told me that I did *not* want to talk to *this* person. With a tilt of his head, he softly held out an exposed palm as if to say, "Hey cool, no worries, I understand." Almost comically, he raised his eyebrows as he turned to leave.

I instantly felt terrible. Here I'd called out to the Universe to send me some company, and it seemed to listen to me, albeit not to my unspoken fantasies, and I immediately rejected the offer. An inner 'grrrr', then an inner softening. "But hey," I called as he was just a few meters' shuffle from me, "would you like a sip of tea?" and held out the second bowl with still-warm tea towards him.

He turned around and his face lit up for a second. He chuckled. "Tea," he repeated, almost sardonically, and walked back towards me. He leaned down and took the bowl and brought it to his lips, standing towering above me. I could see more clearly now that his clothes were indeed quite dirty, like the tattered plastic bag he carried. He set the bag and a large bottle of Coca Cola down in order to hold the bowl with both hands. As Wu De often says about drinking bowl tea, it forces people to put down their worldly concerns in order to focus on tea.

"Taste good?" I asked. He paused in that universally-understood polite way which indicated that he was searching for a diplomatic way to say otherwise. "It needs getting used to," he said with a smile. "Yeah, this tea we don't drink for the taste but more for how it makes us feel." He looked at me sharply. "Exactly," he said, "I know *exactly* what you mean."

He told me that he had noticed me sitting there so peacefully, drinking tea in the forest, that he'd never seen such a thing and felt compelled to come over, to maybe ask something about Eastern philosophy.

"What's that you're reading," he asked, pointing to *Art of Tea*. I flipped some pages for him to see, "It's a magazine about tea and tea culture." He started laughing and said, "You're reading about tea! You don't need to *read* about tea, you need to *drink* tea! Reading about tea, imagine! Drink tea, just drink tea!" And now we both laughed. "You're completely right," I said and motioned him to sit down on the grass near me.

He was overweight but sat down cross-legged easily enough. His brown woolen hat was greasy, his brown pants had large stains on them; his brown jacket showed signs of having spent time on grass and dirt, and his breath, even at this distance, was sharply redolent of alcohol. Yet his blue eyes were sharp, clear and moved to and fro observantly. They were large, slightly bulging and very expressive, like a Marty Feldman in training. They also got moist pretty quickly.

"I'm a drunk," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Okay." I merely looked at him.

He paused. "I so want to just leave this world, stop it all. End everything. I just – want to finish with it all." I allowed a silence.

He continued. "I... I tried yesterday..." Here he made a slicing motion at his throat, "...but it didn't work out; it didn't work out." He sighed. "I don't know!"

"Do you think that's the best thing to do? I think maybe it is not your time yet."

"But why not?" He blinked heavily and a large tear came rolling down his cheek. "I have nothing left. I had a family once. They... they killed my wife. There's ... nothing."

"That's rough," I said after a pause, and he hung his head lower and closed his eyes for a moment before raising his head again. Several more tears ran down his face.

"There's nothing left for me to do. I don't see why I should bother to live."

I wondered what I could possibly say of assistance to someone I knew nothing about and what either soothing words or practical solutions I might come up with. I thought for a moment and what came into my head was the thought, "If only he could help someone." I didn't know what that meant, but found myself thinking of a nearby social center which takes in homeless and troubled people daytime and offers minimal assistance. I didn't imagine him going there *for* help necessarily, but *to* help. Helping someone else (even though the term is a loaded one), has a magical way of imparting a sense of meaning to life. I found myself

telling him about this center and where it's located. He cut me off—

"Ah, I don't want to get any help!"

"No no, I mean, maybe they need *your* help. They serve meals and organize events and whatnot, and maybe you could help them out."

He looked at me. "Me help? Kind of a volunteer thing?"

"Yes! Who knows, they may need assistance and you might like the feeling of helping others."

He paused, raised his eyebrows, "That's a thought." After another pause, a frown, "But how could I help anyone? I can't give them money or anything."

A slim, middle-aged woman walked past us nearby with her fluffy little white dog. I saw him leering in that direction, suddenly a big smile on his face. I turned to see what he was staring at. "Cute dog, right?" I asked with a smile. He flashed a look of disappointment. "What dog!? Who cares about the dog!" He craned his neck to watch the woman's disappearing figure.

"Hey," I said, "*help* is too big a word. Sometimes just talking to someone can make them feel good, sitting down for a chat, even that can be a little help. You can do that, make someone feel a bit better?"

He considered this. He looked up and pointed to a forlorn older female figure sitting on a wood stump in the near distance. "You think I could help her?"

"Who knows? Maybe she won't want to talk. But someone will. And sometimes just a little contact is all someone wants, it doesn't need to be anything more."

We chatted hopefully about this for a few moments. At some point he got silent again, said that he once had a family, a job. He reached inside his bag. "I need a drink, I know it's shameful, but forgive me, I need it." He pulled out a plastic bottle of a bright red liquid. He called it "eau-de-cologne". The kind of poison they still sell at roadside kiosks here: Perfumed water itinerants drink for a cheap buzz. He took a swig. I poured more tea into his bowl.

"I saw you sitting here in the forest," he started, "so..." He waved a hand in front of him in the air making vague motions. "So... peaceful. Beautiful!" He smacked his lips and kissed his fingers. "I've never seen anything like that. I knew I just wanted to come over, even if I was disturbing your harmony. Drinking tea in the forest! Imagine!"

He asked me to enlighten him about Eastern culture. I told him I am no expert, but I am trying to live a life of a tea, in which we drink tea not just for the pleasant tastes or health benefits but for the dedication it requires of us to serve tea properly, for the focus and concentration it brings to our lives, for the appreciation it fosters in us for the small details of life, for the con-





nection with Nature it offers. And that's why the taste of tea is not the most important aspect for us.

He still liked the idea of drinking tea for how it makes us feel. "I know I am poisoning my body with drinking, but I can't help it."

He finished his second bowl of tea and we continued chatting in the sun for a while. I tried to remain unattached to the results of our dialogue (in that trying not to force him to go to this center, trying not to feel that this exchange of ours must lead to something monumental and positive) and just tried to be with him. Eventually, he decided to go over to another woman sitting on another bench and see if she wanted some company, and I decided to leave. We shook hands and both acknowledged what a pleasure it had been. "It's the first time I've ever had such an encounter!" he said.

"It's always a first time," I said, and motioned to that lady in the distance. "See if she needs cheering up." We smiled, and that was that...

**Postscript:** *I'm getting into the habit of pouring a second cup during solo sessions—either to share with someone I already know and love or for someone I have yet to love. I'm also trying to keep the passenger seat in the car uncluttered, the other half of my bed not a clothes way-station between body and washing machine, the living room couch clear enough for others, and a space around the heart wide enough to accommodate that which is gifted to me with outstretched hands. Thanks, Tea, once again!*



Have you ever considered how dramatic an effect the shape of your pot and cups is having on your tea? In this issue, we would like to encourage you to experiment with different shaped pots and cups. If you have an Yixing collection, now is the perfect time to try out your various pots with tea. If you already have your pots devoted to certain kinds of teas, you could try just one brew without too much of an effect, or perhaps leave those pots out of your experiment.

You may find that taller and thicker pots with high profiles are better for darker teas, especially red teas. Smaller, rounder pots are more universal, but typically better for balled Oolongs or fine green teas. Flatter pots with larger openings are ideal for striped Oolongs like Wuyi Cliff tea or Dancong teas. The shape and thickness of the pot will influence the tea. Puerh, for example, is often compressed and is therefore usually better brewed in a larger pot with room enough for the chunks to open completely. That however might require you to use a pitcher if the group is small, so you may want to have a smaller pot for Puerh and just be sure to break the tea up a bit more, if possible.

As with pots, the shape, thickness and height of the cup has as great an influence on tea as the material it is made of. Tulip-shaped cups are ideal for gongfu tea. As with Yixing, the older the cup the better. With Puerh and aged teas, we take large drinks and it is nice to have a large and full cup when drinking them. More fragrant teas, like Oolongs or green teas, are much better sipped in as small an amount as possible. For that reason, these teas are better drunk from as small of cups as possible. Originally, gongfu tea developed in conjunction with Oolong teas so the first gongfu cups were very, very small—thimble-sized! (Try sipping an Oolong in as small of a sip as possible and notice the difference.) Also, finer, more fragrant teas are better in thinner cups that barely leave an impression on the lips, adding to their ethereal qualities, while deeper and richer teas, like Puerh, can be drunk from thicker cups, which can lend the tea greater substance.

As an experiment, try pouring the same tea into many different sizes and shapes of cups, and an old one (if available). Try going back and forth rather than drinking each cup to the bottom. What is the difference? If you have access to some Yixing pots, you might want to take a small amount of tea, weighed for accuracy (say two grams) and put it into two differently shaped pots, and then pour the tea liquor into identical cups. What difference did the shape of the pot make?

Try experimenting with different teaware to improve your sensitivity and brewing skills. As your sensitivity is heightened, you will begin to notice all kinds of areas in which your relationship to tea can be improved. Gongfu tea is about respecting the tea, and wanting to brew it with mastery so that it can reach its greatest potential in the brewing.







*Pots and cups of various sizes and shapes for different teas*



## ZEN &amp; TEA ONE FLAVOR

*The Definitive Review**Article by Lord Kaiya the Pious & Unbiased*

It is my great honor and joy to find myself, unexpectedly, the only person in the world qualified to announce to you the publication of Wu De's newest book, *Zen & Tea One Flavor*. There have been allusions to it here and there over the last year, just enough to leave us all impatient. Those of you that have been a part of that I am happy to say the wait is over! I think you will find as you read it that this is exactly the book you were secretly wishing would be written and find its way into your hands all this time. And I don't think that is a reaction that will be reserved for the members of this group who have been in contact with this tradition for some time now; it's a book that is called for and needed within the scope of modern tea literature, and we can only hope that it will be received as such amidst the seemingly endless list of titles out there today which seem to be so stuck on either the physical qualities of tea or its historical story (and even then only as it relates to man, not really tea itself) rather than its spirit.

I'm sure most of you have already read *The Way of Tea*, and some of you have had the good fortune to read *Faces of the Master* as well. If not, don't let this review discourage you; in their own way, each one is a prelude to and even a part of *Zen & Tea One Flavor*. Nonetheless, I have to say that this is my favorite of the three, to the extent that it's possible to compare what are certainly still very individual works, each with its own definitively unique content. In *The Way of Tea* we are led through some of the more delightful bits of factual tea history and masters, followed by a look into the philosophical aspects of a life of tea. In *Faces of the Master*, we do not even see the word tea appear at all as we journey through the semi-fictionalized (or not, who can say?) lives of legends whose existence even those by-the-book historians must acknowledge. In *Zen & Tea One Flavor*, however, there is something that is at once a combination of Tea's history, philosophy, and legends into something greater than any of these things individually, and also into something more ordinary at the same time.

As the introduction itself states, "...the essence of Zen is more easily communicated through art and life than it is in words, though it can indeed be instigated by language." Appropriately, then, at the beginning of every chapter we are first met with a beautiful illustration, followed by a Zen/Tea story, and then the author's commentary on the story, serving to fill in (or perhaps rather to widen) the gaps, as needed. Poignantly and in the spirit of the Zen circle, called an "enso", each chapter then finishes with a bit of poetry for inspiration. Lastly,

we are treated to the ten-part illustrated journey of an unknown tea saint as he climbs the 10,000-foot pole of Zen only to leap off of it; a summary-in-action of the process pointed to throughout the book. They are based on the famous ten ox-herding pictures of Zen.

I found this book to span the whole spectrum of what I could want from a book. From the simple perspective of a reader of books, I was delighted and entertained by many wonderful and unique stories, clever insights and beautiful illustrations. From the perspective of a normal guy who finds himself sometimes caught up in various forms of 'rush' and 'things to do', I found daily motivation not only to take time out to sit down for tea, but even inspiration that could transform my 'rush' into relaxation with the constant reminder that my tea preparation is my day-to-day activity. From the perspective of a person of tea, I found endless inspiration and boundless insights; an expansion of my ability to see the aspects of the Universe in each cup and the cup in each aspect of the Universe. Lastly, from the perspective of someone walking a spiritual path, I found a powerful tool that I could use daily to enhance my practice, spending just 15 minutes in the morning first reading the story then another 15 that night or the next day reading the commentary after the story had some time to steep, preferably washed down (and washed away!) with a few bowls of tea.

In short, then, I will state the obvious: I highly recommend this book. Especially because it is the first book ever published to contain my most Holy and Magnificent Name, thus rendering it a priceless collector's item, and possibly of great import in protecting your soul from certain Doom at the End of Days; if they arrive prior to the publishing of my own book. That book will be entitled "Give your Life-savings to Kaiya the Generous & Receive Redemption from Eternal Suffering One Flavor." In the meantime, however, get this book, or better yet come and visit us and we'll give you one for free!

\* You can order the book via Amazon or directly from the publisher at: <https://www.createspace.com/3966017>  
One Hundred Percent of the profits go to support our center, free publications and roadside tea stalls.



# Zen & Tea

## One Flavor

Aaron Fisher  
無為海



# THE EXQUISITE BLACK DRAGON

Article by *Lindsey Badwin*

(*The evil twin of Lindsey Goodwin*)

**A**lmost exactly one year ago, I was witnessing an Oolong maker in Taiwan drip with sweat as he darted around two adjoining rooms to roast, measure and taste tea. Normally, he spoke quickly and with great enthusiasm. That day, he was more extreme in his behavior.

He weighed three grams of tea at a time against a *gong ge* coin, steeped samples for six minutes on the dot, assessed the aroma and flavor of each sample, and then bolted back into the baking room to tinker with his roasting parameters. Throughout most of these activities, he changed the topic with great rapidity, often leaving sentences incomplete to start new, unrelated ones as he set a timer or peered, eyes wild, into a woven bamboo roasting tray.

If his teeth weren't so good, I might have been convinced that he was high on the locally preferred stimulant (a nasty, addictive drug that leaves teeth red and rotten). But it wasn't that at all. Part of his manic mood was due to the task at hand: roasting Oolong tea to the desired flavor, aroma and moisture content, and part of it was due to a concurrent, yet entirely different, task. You see, the Oolong maker felt he had a limited amount of time to convince me (an American journalist) of what he had to say (that Taiwanese Oolong is one of the best types of tea in the world).

What he didn't realize is that I didn't need any convincing. The frenzied passion he displayed for Taiwanese Oolong that day was something that I could already relate to. Oolong was, after all, what brought me to Taiwan that year and the year before, careening around the island on a mad quest for more and more experiences of these beguiling teas. Like him, my fervor for tea was one of the sensory realm, which is to say one that brought only fleeting fulfillment. It was the long-suffering ardor that characterizes many a tea obsessive.

It is often said that if you ask a tea connoisseur what their favorite category of tea is, they will almost always say it is Oolong tea. (I've heard this said in various places around the world, but it's not consensus reality everywhere. For example, in Hong Kong, Puerh rules supreme over all other teas, and in Germany, Darjeeling is widely accepted as 'the best tea in the world.')

There is ample reason for this. Much of it relates to the inherent variety to the tea category we call 'Oolong.'

Oolong tea is an expansive tea type, one which ranges from light oxidation to heavy oxidation, light roasting to heavy roasting, lightly twisted to rolled into tight pellets, fresh to meticulously aged for decades or longer, etc., etc., etc. It encompasses everything from

teas that taste like tropical flowers and coconut to teas that taste like espresso and charred wood. Vegetal, fruity, sweet, dry, roasty, chocolatey—as a category, Oolong teas have all of these characteristics, and more. And, like other tea types, the flavor and aroma variations relate to terroir, but Oolong tea is particularly susceptible to manipulation at the hand of the maker. A skilled Oolong producer can elicit incredible nuance and depth in their teas, creating exquisite variations even within the multiple infusions of the same batch of leaves.

This immense breadth—So much to explore! So much to experience!—is part of the innate appeal of Oolong tea, and of tea in general. From the aroma (heady and floral) to the mouthfeel (buttery and rich) to the aftertaste (lingering on the palate for hours), it is easy to appreciate the sensory side of such a sensual tea as Oolong. However, to keep the sensual pleasures of Oolong (and of tea in general) as the primary focus of one's relationship with tea is to overlook the majority of the beauty of the Leaf (and, I believe, its intended purpose behind a connection to us humans).

Thankfully, the enjoyment of tea is not something to be *overcome* to reach a deeper connection to tea, but something to be *pierced through*. Much like the body (a seeming hindrance on a path away from worldly things and toward spiritual enlightenment) is often the gateway to spiritual enlightenment (through breathing exercises or yoga, for example), building awareness around your aesthetic enjoyment of tea can aid you in tapping into the spiritual side of tea. As a particularly sensual and spiritual tea, organic Oolong offers many distinctive opportunities to cross over from the physical to the immaterial.

One of the easiest entry points to the spiritual side of Oolong is mouthfeel. If you aren't doing so already, when you sip an Oolong, see how long the aftertaste lasts and how it changes over time. Forget about tasting notes and comparisons, and approach this not a matter of judgment, but a deepening of perception, a means of staying in the moment and a way of honoring the Leaf. Access the spirit of the Leaf through awareness of the sensations it activates in your mouth and throat as and after you sip it. In our tea tradition, a tea that splashes up to the roof of the mouth is particularly appreciated. You could think of it as your body's way of welcoming the tea or the tea's way of rejoicing at being welcomed into your body.

You can also apply this approach of observing change and impermanence to steeping Oolong (and other teas) many times. Listen to the tea and, over time, you may come to realize that tea patience is rarely lost by the





tea that being steeped, but often lost by the drinker of the tea.

The way your body reacts to a tea as and after you swallow it is also worthy of some attention. Does your throat constrict or feel uncomfortable? If so, the energy of that tea is not right for you. (Perhaps it is not organically grown and contains chemicals that your body finds to be objectionable.) Does it glide down smoothly, relaxing the throat and moistening the mouth? If a tea slakes your physical thirst in this manner, then it's also likely to help you quench a spiritual thirst for connection to something greater.

Fully experience the *anicca* (impermanence) of absorbing the tea into your physical body, remaining in the moment and honoring what the tea and your body tell you when they unite in this manner. You might be surprised by their wisdom.

Once you have begun to sense more deeply the ways in which tea and your body converge, you will likely notice the potential for a sense of intoxication from tea. It can be easy to slip into viewing this as a sort of 'high' to be chased down or an adventure to add to your catalogue of experiences. I recommend avoiding these traps, as they tend to keep people in a seeking mode that can be exploitative of tea, and result in an unending search for the next tea buzz instead of an unadulterated connection with a particular tea in a particular moment. Instead, harness the energy that results from the melding of you and a given tea in a given moment. Rather than using

the tea like a recreational drug, use the experience of the tea to elevate your perspective. (Or, better yet, use it to help elevate others by serving tea to other people instead of just 'getting high on your own supply.' Serving tea simultaneously promotes spiritual connection, connection with other people and connection with tea, while keeping you grounded and preventing you from generating attachment to that particular tea. More on that another time!)

During my visit to the Oolong roaster, a few weeks before my first visit to Tea Sag Hut and my initiation into the spiritual side of tea, both the roaster and I were rooted in the physical sensations of tea. However, we both sensed that this was just the threshold, that some sense of peace lay just beyond his bustling about and my copious note taking. Every now and then, the tea roaster paused his verbal onslaught and hummingbird-like movements for a few moments. We smelled the backs of our tasting spoons and slurped samples of two teas he was roasting. For a brief time, the two of us (the manic tea-maker and the then-equally-manic journalist) were still and quiet.

According to my notes from that day, one tea was vegetal and roasty. The other was sweet with notes of orchids and unripe stone fruits. Now, I understand that on the surface they were very different, but underneath they contained the same thing—entryways to peace. It is simply a matter of stepping through the open door...

**T**he confessional tone of many contributions to the Global Tea Hut monthly newsletter has led me to believe I already know some of you personally, though we are all spread out across the globe. Is there something in the nature of tea itself that lends itself to confessional storytelling? Or is this impulse brought about by the fact that we are sharing an intimate ritual, yet have never seen each other's faces, so we compensate by baring ourselves to each other verbally? Thus, as we sip from our cups of tea, each of us in our own corner of the world, we can better imagine the Others. Inspired by your stories, I find it time to come out and bare myself, share my own story with those of you sitting in this circle of tea who are willing to listen:

Humans differ from animals due to two vital activities, as author Michael Ruhlman recently stated: "We use fire to cook our food, and we use language to tell stories." The ritual of preparing, serving and drinking tea fits well into this distinction and perhaps even intensifies our human qualities by linking us to a millenary tradition. Much like cooking, tea brings together natural elements: water, plants, fire—and human intervention—utensils or teaware, and preparation skill. Moreover, the pause in our daily hustle-and-bustle that tea calls for, both when shared and sipped on one's own, activates reflection, recollection, removal from the, at times, overwhelming experience unfolding beyond our tea table.

The perspective granted by the ritual of tea can be a gift, as it allows us to gather together pieces of our broken selves. When things fall apart, the grounding nature of tea can help us through, by simply anchoring us to the here-and-now, away from the foreboding anxieties of pain and distress. Tea grounds us as it connects us to immediate sensory experience, and facilitates a moment of repose, which, sometimes unassumingly, expands from a physical state to a more tranquil mode of being.

Though I have been a tea-drinker for a long time, always preferring it to coffee, my deep devotion to tea, and especially to tea as solace, is relatively recent, and is ironically marked by a family tragedy. In December 2011, my sister in Buenos Aires suffered a massive brain hemorrhage as the extremely unfortunate result of a medical intervention with a 2% risk. She spent most of two months in a coma. She is my only sister, twenty months younger, and though our lives took different courses in different places, she is one of the closest people to me in the world. Ten months later, as I write, she is still in the hospital, thousands of miles away, very gradually recovering, but with severe after-effects: she can barely move the left side of her body, and she has no short-term memory. The account still sounds somewhat anecdotal and unreal, even now as I sit here, sequencing the words on the page in front of me.







Back home in Barcelona in early 2012, after spending some time in Buenos Aires, struggling to make it through unfathomable pain at a distance, I found myself getting up out of bed earlier and earlier each morning, before dawn, to sit for a while in silence with just the sounds of my tea, before my family woke up and I was forced to find the strength to reassume my role of mother, wife, teacher. One day I realized that the tea was offering me some comfort, through the opportunity to let go of my story, to just sit and be. The direct immediacy of tea's stimuli on my senses, along with its permissive nature, allowing me to not have to do, be, remember, think or speak of anything else in that moment, had me eagerly coming back for more.

Until recently, I had woken up each and every morning for five years to a long, strenuous Ashtanga yoga practice. For years this practice was my anchor, something secure I could rely on to accompany me every day, no matter where or how I was. But in this new state and situation, I found myself gradually and even at first unwillingly needing to soften my regular practice. At first, I would rise long before dawn to allow myself time for a session of sitting meditation followed by tea before the yoga. Somehow the repose and respite offered by the stillness, as opposed to the vigor of a practice that took more energy from me than I had to offer, seemed more fitting to the situation.

It took a while to accept this change in what had so long been a daily ritual for me; perhaps only now, as I put it down on paper, can I grasp that big changes in our lives require changes in even our most rooted practices. This is easy to observe in our habits on a small scale: we are often naturally inclined to drink more green tea and eat more fresh fruits and vegetables in the warmer months, whereas when the weather starts to change we crave more warming teas, such as Puerh or Oolong, and slowly-cooked meals. The seasons demand changes in our body's requirements, functions and demands. So taking on the enormous challenge of accepting a life with a loved one's health in serious danger meant, for me, learning to listen to the possibilities and requests my body, mind and spirit now set upon me. Though for a while I struggled to maintain the physical activity I was accustomed to, a morning session of silence and stillness with tea and meditation began to take shape, almost in spite of myself, as the way to make it through harrowing moments, one sip at a time.

I arrived in Buenos Aires on December 17, three days before everything changed. As a holiday gift for Melanie I brought along a ceramic kyusu and two small porcelain teacups, some Genmaicha tea (which she loved), and one of my favorite cookbooks. As this was the first time in many years that I was traveling without my children, we were looking forward to some quality time alone together, time we really hadn't had a lot of in the



14 years we'd been living on separate sides of the globe. We had made plans to share that time cooking, drinking tea, chatting leisurely. Obviously, those plans didn't come through for us, and the teapot and cups sat for months in her empty apartment, unused and gathering dust. I returned to my family in Barcelona in January not knowing how I could bear the pain of my sister's agony, and living it from so far away.

But tea as solace throughout the past year has not been merely a solitary endeavor; in recent months I was finally able to share it with my sister. As soon as the school year ended in early July, I took my family to Buenos Aires for the entire summer (winter there). By then Melanie was well enough to take part in the tea-half of our projects, so one of the first things I did was pack up the teapot and cups from her apartment and, carefully wrapped, place them, together with two types of Japanese green tea, in the small nightstand next to her hospital bed with the very few possessions she has there (mostly toiletries, such as the red lipstick she asks for whenever someone comes to visit).

During the seven weeks I spent in Buenos Aires, we developed our own daily tea ritual: after our mother left, and as soon as Melanie's lunch tray was taken away, I made some tea for us with hot water from the dispenser in the third floor hallway. Some days, when I offered, she may have said she didn't care for it, but I prepared it anyway. The moment she took her first sip never, not once, failed to arouse a timid sigh of pleasure. She thanked me for the tea, every day. Sometimes, I brought along a treat to nibble on: dark chocolate, some pastries or dried fruit. We deliberated on which snack paired best with each tea.

These simple pleasures are the only ones she has now, and she reveled in them every time.

Tea, as Okakura Kakuzō reminds us in the classic *Book of Tea*, shows that well-being lies in simplicity rather than complexity. Confronted with the complexities of her rebirth in this new state, my sister highly valued these shared, stolen moments of simplicity, in which everything else could be put on hold, and well-being was limited to the steamy goodness of a sip of roasted Bancha. When I wheeled her down to the hospital gym for her afternoon rehabilitation session, I parted until the next day in hopes that the calm, alert state tea helps us attain might stay with her during the session, aiding her to work towards regaining her physical and mental functions.

The nurses giggled at our ritual, not used to seeing their patients drink tea other than the one served in the hospital for afternoon snack (plain "black" tea from a teabag with lots of milk and sugar). They also admired the teaware, implicitly acknowledging how nice it was for my sister to enjoy some beauty in the midst of the stagnant, aseptic hospital surroundings. Melanie has always had a strong appreciation for aesthetics, and there was so little beauty in this place. Bringing her beauty in the shape of a teapot from the outside world nourished her spirit as well.


After two months in Buenos Aires, in late August I crossed the Atlantic once again towards Barcelona to begin the school year. I sip my tea in the mornings on my own again, and wonder whether anyone has used the teapot and cups with Melanie since I left. I hope so.





# THE RICHNESS IN A CUP OF TAIWANESE TEA CULTURE

*Article by the Wudekulous Rex*

ately, I am reminded of why it is I moved to Taiwan in the first place, having traveled so far. I had been to almost fifty countries when I chose to grow my roots on this small island, and for good reason: it is the tea capital of the world. (Why else would Wu De choose a place to live?) In sharing my week with you, perhaps you'll understand why I'm always flattering Taiwan, and even encouraging you all to visit if and when you can. For those of you who've already been here, this nostalgia will remind you of some of the reasons you also fell in love with Taiwan.

This small island boasts so much joy for a tea lover, and we are reminded of why more than often. Of course, there is tea culture and production all over Asia, though nowhere as vibrant, varied and alive as Taiwan. And in Taiwan, you find a meeting of all the different tea cultures of Asia. Casually walking into a new tea house you might find the owner boiling water with a Japanese tetusbin, steeping Taiwan Oolong in an Yixing pot with Korean decorations around. And Taiwanese tea culture is not as plastic, copied or business-minded as other places. It is inspiring to see new tea houses opening all the time, each with its own decorative style and brewing methodology. Other places, you often find many of the same shop—copying what they think is traditional, antique or perhaps just what tourists want to see. Taiwanese, on the other hand, are expressing tea spirit through the heart and soul of the brewer, and so you won't find so much redundancy.

There is so much tea to experiment with and enjoy in Taiwan that it can actually be overwhelming sometimes. It is hard for some tea lovers to find their own tradition and style in such a sea of tea. Still, each gathering—each new pot or cup—is a chance to learn something new, adding insight to even the oldest of traditions. And trust me when I say that you have wandered into the Hut of a very open tradition, where we pride ourselves on learning and growing all the time. While it is important to respect and grow upon our tradition as handed down to us, we must also give it life and blood, and better it for future generations.

This week we were invited to two of the many tea gatherings that are ever-present across the island. They were both inspiring in their own way, and just hint at all the vibrancy of tea available on this Formosa, which means “Isle of Heaven,” and a tea Heaven it surely is. Long ago, Mainland Chinese saw Formosa off the coast, with mountains that raise up above the clouds,

and thought that it surely must be the home of the immortals. I've found them to be Tea Immortals.

On the third and fourth of October, the second annual Southeast Asia Oolong Tea Seminar was held in Tai Nan, Taiwan, with visitors from Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, Japan, China and yours truly speaking for good old “Mei Guo”. My favorite part of such seminars is seeing old tea friends, discussing changes in tea and sharing great finds with each other. The event is held by Wushing Publications, and they do an excellent job of it.

Aside from the discussions, there was great food and tea for us to enjoy and we all walked away with gifts of tea and literature. Some of the discussions were boring, like the long talk about the scientific differences between various roasting temperatures, complete with “polyphenol” and “theanine” charts for various roasting temperatures, 80, 100, 120, 140... *yawn...* 160 degrees—and I was napping... Others, however, were interesting.

They had designed the hall with a circular table in the middle of the hall and a strange, though beautiful, decorative space in the middle: it was a large clear cylinder with tubes that connected to various teapots. As the convention went on, an unseen ice block above melted and the water ran down a willow branch and into the cylinder. When the cylinder was full, the water streamed down the various branching tubes and into the teapots. During the more boring speeches, I watched with glee as the water streamed down the willow leaves and into the chamber, wondering how long it would take to reach the point at which it would start running down the branching tubes and into the Yixing teapots.

Each of the seven seminars involved a group of experts sitting around this circle discussing various topics related to Oolong tea. The audience was allowed to participate by either grabbing a microphone and asking a question, or anonymously writing their question down and handing it to one of the attendants who were circling the crowd for that purpose. This made for some interesting dialogues, arguments and even some drama for spice... The topics included the incredibly laborious roasting discussion mentioned above, Oolong history in various countries like China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, a long discussion of Yixing teaware and Oolong preparation, Cha Xi and tea gatherings (a Taiwanese invention of hosting themed gatherings), “The





*Old tea caddies at Master Lu's shop*

Future of Taiwan Oolong Tea” (also boring), and an interesting discussion of what makes Oolong tea special.

I had a chair and a small voice in the last of those discussions, about Oolong tea. I think they wanted me to talk about if Oolong has spread to America and what tea culture there is like. Instead, I politely rebuked them all. I spoke of the fact that I loved Taiwan, citing many of the reasons I already mentioned at the beginning of this article, and that it was great to hear so many of the most important people in the tea world speak about tea culture, history, production, etc., but that we won't have any more tea conventions, let alone tea culture or production, if we don't also start discussing environmental issues in the tea world. Of course, I wasn't alone. Many people agreed and one tea lover in the audience even suggested that next year's gathering have a seminar on this theme, turning to the owner of Wushing, and organizing manager in askance, hoping that they would agree on the spot. Everyone applauded

and the embarrassing moment passed. I later wondered if I should have just spoken a bit about tea in America as suggested...

At night, they brought out tables in the beautiful old garden behind the cultural center where the convention was held and placed teaware on them. Last year, various shops had arranged their own Cha Xi (literally “tea stage” this refers to the decorations on which the tea is prepared). This year, however, each table had a tea sink (*cha pan*) with built in lights that lit up the tea table. There were pots and cups, but no other decorations. The idea was that various people could sit down and brew tea, switching every once and a while. They provided tea, but many people also brought out their own teas. You were supposed to keep your cup and wander around from table to table and try the different teas, brewers, company and conversation. This made for a quite hectic scene, but it also allowed for some in-

24teresting exchanges and the chance to try some unique teas. All in all, though, it wasn't my cup of tea...

The best part of the seminar, like last year, was the enormous feast at the end. They piled us all into buses and took us off to some ritzy five-star hotel in downtown Tai Nan. There, we were treated to a twelve course extravaganza in which every single dish incorporated Taiwanese Oolong of some kind. They had a few vegetarian tables, so I was in Heaven—so stuffed I slept soundly the whole train ride back home...

### *Riverboat Tea*

If that wasn't enough tea for a week, we were invited to go on a boat cruise just three days after the convention, hosted by Master Lu. I can't drive so Kaiya, Lindsey and I took a train up to Taipei, not knowing what to expect. Master Lu had called and talked to Joyce. All we knew was that there was tea and a boat.

We headed to Master Lu's new shop in Taipei. It is in the Chinese medicine shop district, on one of the oldest streets, *Di Hua*. The house is an amazing find: an ancient wooden house backed by a small, plant-filled courtyard. Master Lu has, of course, decorated it with many antiques—furniture, tea caddies, tea boxes and teaware. We sat around and drank tea with his brother and son for a while, waiting for the boat to come at four o'clock.

We got to the dock, still wondering how this was going to play out. I knew there was a good chance it would be amazing, as some of the best tea gatherings I have been to were hosted by Master Lu. He is gracious, generous and kind; and there is often good tea, music and food at his events. The river boat was big, with ample room for the 40ish people that were coming along. Before we boarded, everyone was draped with a purple and maroon scarf of hand-dyed cloth, placed over our necks like Haiwan lei.

Inside, we were seated six to a table. Each table had a brewer who had arranged their own unique Cha Xi. I immediately noticed that one of the back tables had a nice woman who had brought an Yixing pot, some antique porcelain cups from the Republic era and some antique Japanese coasters. Her inviting smile and tasteful selection of teaware beckoned us to her table. She had arranged some flowers in a celadon bowl for simple decoration. Earlier, Master Lu had told me I was going to have to brew at one of the tables, so I was relieved to find them all attended to.

When we set out on our long, five-hour cruise we were spellbound to discover that one of our favorite musicians would be providing the entertainment, and that the four teas we were going to enjoy were all very special Oolongs. Shou Ge plays guitar and a lute-like

instrument he built himself, with a sound somewhere between a *pipa* and a *gu zheng*, though it looks kind of like a precursor of the guitar. He also sings. His music is nice for tea. We were introduced to his music through Master Tsai, donor and highlight of our April issue. He can sing in a festive way—he's a wonderfully talented musician with a range of music—but also quiet and deep. He brought a couple flutists with him this time, and they filled our evening with great joy.

Like any good tea gathering, we are the guests of the tea. So many gatherings are disappointing because they forget this very important principal: that without tea there is no tea gathering! They create glorious Cha Xi with flowers and old cloth, and are often themed around a season, festivity, etc. They have all the great colors, sights, sounds and smells but forget about the tea, which seems to be some secondary, background opening act for all the pomp. For me, it is always disappointing to come into a gorgeous tea space and drink low-quality tea from such beautiful teaware, discussing everything *but* the tea we're drinking... But not at Master Lu's gatherings.

This night we were treated to four incredible teas: a 40-year-old "Iron Arahant" Wuyi Cliff Tea, a 1983 Dong Ding Oolong, a 1916 Taiwanese Bao Zhong tea and finally the star of the show, a 125-year-old Wuyi Cliff Tea that Master Lu recently acquired, which is called "Bao Quai," a varietal no longer in production. The last tea was amazing, and we could have sat drinking it all night long. It was stellar—beyond words. We all left drunk on it.

The first tea was a nice example of an aged Cliff Tea (*yan cha*) of the 70s, which were often lower quality for export. They usually come in little single-pot packets. Though the tea was commercial grade, the age adds a poignancy to it, enhancing what was once—long ago—a mediocre tea. There is a slight sourness under the fruity, aged qualities. The second Dong Ding was roasted by Taiwan's most famous farmer. It was fruity with a yang Qi that lingered for some time. The third tea was improperly stored, as are most aged Taiwan Oolongs. Mostly, such teas were just left in bags or drums, and very rarely intentionally stored. Still, 1916 is a long time ago. The brew was deep and wise, dark as Puerh and uplifting as green tea. After the storage flavors wore off, the true tea shone, with all the berries and elegance of a very proud *bao zhong* tea. The final tea was the oldest and best-stored aged Cliff Tea I have ever had. It was deep and profound in every way, carrying us off the boat to "soar with the moon" as a calligrapher who was with us on the boat later commented in the poem he wrote to commemorate the event.

The four teas were interrupted by a dinner on the top of the ship, watching the sites of nighttime Taipei as we sailed downriver. Besides the music, we were



*Tea on the river boat*

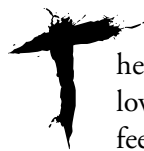


treated to an enthusiastic lecture on the history of Taiwanese tea and how it had once been carried down the very same river we were cruising on barges headed to Keelung harbor. Master Lu was a gracious host, acting as “cha tong (tea boy)” and fetching out water from the galley, applauding the musicians, introducing the teas and occasionally sitting down at each table to make sure we were all having a good time. At the end, he said words of mastery which touched my heart: he said that the essence of tea was in the serving and sharing, and that we all would probably never again drink some of these teas, especially the last, but that despite its rarity and incredibly expensive price, he could think of no better way to drink it than by sharing it with other tea lovers. He said that hiring the boat and organizing such a gathering was his greatest joy, and the centrifuge of his tea practice. I left with those words echoing in my mind, amazed that one of my teachers, whom I respect so much, had just spent the night fetching our water...

tea and otherwise drown in tea. I also said a special prayer of gratitude to Guanyin for guiding me to Taiwan, the Heaven of tea. I hope that these brief glimpses into the rich tea culture and heritage here have inspired you to start planning your next trip here to see us, or at least to return in thankfulness to the trip you have already been on. You are all so very welcome. A warm cup and a bed always await you here...

With such a tea filled week, I was of course inspired to return home and make more tea, write about





here are some very useful tea terms that tea lovers use to communicate aspects of mouth-feel. In looking for these sensations, you will improve your sensitivity. Of course, such terms can also be misleading if you focus on their meaning rather than trying to feel the actual sensation in the mouth. It is enough that you feel something, in other words. You don't need to be able to articulate it, just understand the basics of what you are feeling for now. These terms will help you explore mouthfeel.

1) *Co Gan* (口感): This translates as “mouthfeel”. It refers to any of the sensations we experience when drinking tea. It points more to sensation than flavor, and most all the following terms are parts of “Co Gan”.

2) *Gan* (甘) / *Hui Gan* (回甘): “Gan” is a coolness or minty-ness that fills up the mouth, a bit like breathing outside on a very cold winter day. (This is a different “Gan” than the “Gan” in “Co Gan”, discussed above. The same word with different tones occurs in tonal languages, to the confusion of us foreigners.) It also sometimes refers to sweetness with a fragrance that travels on the breath—cooling the mouth in this way. We say a tea has “gan” when it stimulates the mouth with such a freshness. With “hui” there is a “remembrance”, borrowing from the literary term “to reflect”. This means the sweetness rises up from the throat after the tea is swallowed. It lingers, in other words.

3) *Hui Tian* (回甜): This term is a clarification or distinction made to separate the cool, freshness of “hui gan” from a sweet fragrance arising from the throat. When the sensation is accompanied with a predominate sweetness, we call it “hui tian”.

4) *Nai Pao* (耐泡): This literally translates as “patience”. It refers to how long a tea can be steeped; how many infusions can be had from the leaves, in other words.

5) *Sheng Jin* (生津): This refers to a pleasant moistness caused by a tea. It means the tea causes salivation from under the tongue, and sometimes the sides of the mouth by the cheeks. It also coats the mouth, like oil or milk.

6) *Ruan* (軟): This is the ‘smoothness’ of the tea. A good tea has the texture of silk. It seems as if all the atoms in the liquor are in the right place, coordinated

and rounded. The tea liquor all stays together and is almost oily or gelatinous. It slides down the throat together, smoothly. Improperly prepared teas are rough, as if the atoms are jagged, misplaced and scratchy.

7) *Fong Fu* (豐富): In tea tasting, this means “full-bodied”. It means the tea is rich and complex, deep and subtle. The best teas have sensations, aromas and flavors that lead you onward—drinking them for years, you still discover new and amazing sensations. The best works of art are always like this.

8) *Cha Yun* (茶韻): This is a very elusive term. “Yun” literally means “to rhyme”; and “cha” is of course “tea”. When a tea has ‘rhyme’, it means it is well-rounded. A tea with “cha yun” transforms in the way the best teas do, as we discussed above. A tea with *yun* splashes up to the upper palate, rolls down the throat naturally and smoothly, coats the mouth and throat, causes salivation and *gan*. All the aspects of such a tea are comfortable and fit together the way lines of poetry do. Such a tea is, itself, a poem.





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.

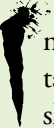
This month, we thought we’d offer you up a small helping of some of the funny tea memories we’ve shared. There are many involving burps, farts, nude tea or other inappropriate topics (don’t even mention the “Armpit Tea Incident” of 2011) but we thought we’d keep it wholesome this month, resorting to a more mild-mannered form of humor. If your sense of humor tends more towards the slapstick, send us an email and we will send you our two-hundred-page manual of “How NOT to Brew Tea,” which includes several dozen of Kaiya’s mishaps, with illustrations of course. As the great food and tea critic Mortimer J. Snerd said of the book, “...it’s a hilarious ride through the bumbling, crashing, breaking, chipping, falling down shards of teaware; not to mention spilled, lost and mislabeled tea—a strong brew to keep you laughing through your next several kettles worth of tea, though laughing so hard you might find it hard not break some teaware of your own.”


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## FUNNY TEA STORIES

 In a peaceful old tea shop, we sat around the antique table in quiet, drinking an Oolong and leisurely slipping in and out of conversation. The old master decided to brew an aged Puerh, despite the fact that two of the guests weren't really tea lovers. Perhaps he saw in them a longing for quiet, and wanted to share a memorable afternoon with them. He scooped some eighty-year-old Puerh from a jar into a small dish, sending it around the room for us to admire and smell. There were five of us, three tea lovers and a couple. The husband had a mild interest in tea, and was obviously the reason they had found themselves there that afternoon. The wife, however, was completely uninterested and betrayed the fact that their stay had been way too long and way too quiet for her taste. When the dish of old Puerh came to her, she held it up to her nose and inhaled deeply—at that moment she sneezed violently, scattering the old Puerh all over the table and guests. Needless to say, we all laughed uproariously!

 One time we were drinking some quiet tea from bowls. The Cha Xi was an elegant Japanese cloth, some flowers and a small bowl on the left to be used as the kensui, the waste-water bowl. A friend who was coming only for the second time showed up twenty minutes late and sat down at the only open seat, to the left. He saw us quietly sipping our tea from bowls and before anyone could stop him, swiftly grabbed the waste water and gulped it down. You can only imagine what he thought of our tea!

 One time we were serving tea to a large group of people, fifteen or so, at someone's house while they were out of town. In order to do this, you need one or two people to help bring water and one to serve the tea. On that night, there were only two us: one pouring and one preparing water. I was the one pouring the tea. About halfway into the session, the water stopped coming. This went on for some time, so I sent another friend to go see what happened. She went upstairs and began fetching the water herself, and continued to do so for the rest of the session. Afterwards, we found out that the one preparing the water upstairs had gotten hungry and opened the fridge to see what the owner had to munch on. Seeing some caramels, he quickly garbled up three of them. It turned out that they were marijuana caramels, and so he stopped fetching water altogether, maybe even forgetting about the tea session entirely. The other student found him on the sofa, smiling contentedly.

 One friend asked permission to smell a few teas in the various jars around my tea room. I said okay, and got busy preparing water for the tea we were about to drink. He didn't know that you can't really smell powdered matcha the way you do normal tea, and stuck his nose in it. When he came and sat down at the table, his nose was all green. We let him stay that way for the whole session, giggling gnomishly all throughout.



*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. We thought we'd introduce you to the kind-hearted genius of Jared Krause.*

Jared Krause was born in Ojai in 1979. He got a BFA in Film and TV production at NYU film school and an MA in Western Classics from St. John's College. He worked for some time on a production company he created with a partner, moving to LA to do so, but decided that the upward climb through the film industry was too crooked, like one of M. C. Escher's paintings.

Jared has a huge heart, and needed to do something that would have an impact on his community, humanity and the Earth. He has worked for various start up companies that are trying to change the way we live, towards a brighter future we all know, deep down, to be possible.

Currently, Jared is the co-founder and developer of Trade Ya ([www.tradeya.com](http://www.tradeya.com)), which aims to restructure the economy based on trade and barter. We often assume that bartering is a primitive, less-developed form of economic exchange. However, bartering doesn't necessarily entail a step backwards. There are many aspects of bartering that help solve many of our economic and environmental problems—solutions we encourage you to explore by trading there. After all, the way human beings live and interact is the only real environmental issue. The Earth doesn't have an environmental problem, actually. It doesn't have Nature problems. It has a human problem!

Geniuses like Jared, with big hearts that really care about the Earth and their communities, are going to fix this world, if it isn't too late. We hope you get the opportunity to have some tea with him, and pick his mind for any solutions you need! He's been essential to the development of this Hut, and will continue to be thus in the future as well.

Jared started drinking tea at Temple Tea. He says that he once felt it was "just a beverage, and not even one he particularly liked," but the tradition that was brought to LA changed his life, and now, "the leaves have woven

themselves into my life in an unmistakable way. Bringing me together with new friends and old day after day, week after week, for a ceremony of laughter, self-reflection, connection and joy—tea has become an irreplaceable part of my life."

You can contact Jared at: [www.tradeya.com](http://www.tradeya.com)



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 have launched the new video series! The first video is an introduction to this Global Tea Hut. The second is about bowl tea. You can visit our Youtube channel via the GTH website or watch the video on the new page at our site. We will be launching regular videos starting in August, with tutorials, interviews, introductions and much more about this love of the Leaf!



There are currently more than 110 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 120 people all our financial worries will vanish and we'll live happily everafter, forever and ever... Membership will be limited to 200ish members!



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.



You are all welcome to visit our center in Taiwan. All classes, as well as room and board are completely free of charge. We have tons going on. You can read more at:

[www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)

We weren't able to send the envelopes without having them registered. This is because the post office informed us that they will be mishandled that way. If your envelope is returned to us, we will send it back. If it gets lost, please let us know. Try to choose an address where someone is sure to be home during the day to sign for it. Also, remember to pick it up from the post office.



We have given out 5 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 Estonia this October/November! We are doing some amazing tastings and workshops there. Come and join us if you are nearby.  
*Contact Steve 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!*





## TEA SAGE HUT PROJECTS

### 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