

Global Tea Hut



NEWSLETTER #10, NOVEMBER 2012

As this project grows, those who have been attracted to this Hut to share together grow closer and more tightknit. Do you feel the family here? Have you begun sharing these bowls beyond this ring of tea brothers and sisters? Fellowships of tea lovers are growing in various cities around the world, like the bright and shiny seasoning on a worn old teapot—each a highlight of a unique and wonderful tea session. Allow this gathering to be a sacred space. Try sharing these teas with others, so the magic spreads, having a greater effect on the consciousness of the world. The giving and receiving of these sacred teas is truly life-changing.

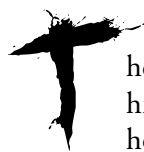
The energy you provide in the form of money is going really far. In Taiwan, the cost of living is lower, which means that all of you can actually fund a burgeoning and very active tea center. We have been receiving guests en masse from all around the world, and so many more of you are emailing to announce forthcoming trips. If you are new here, you should really have a look at all the back issues and understand the way in which this Hut functions. It is very much like the central hut of a Native American village, the hut reserved for gift-giving. The teas we send each month represent the hard work of organic, sustainable farmers who very much want and need a voice in the world, beyond Asia. They are very proud to donate their tea to so many brothers and sisters around the world. And all the work that has gone into these newsletters has also been voluntary, as with the packaging and gifts. Simply put, there is a great gift exchange in this hut: tea, gifts, money, energy, prayers and love...

This next year will be a huge one for us all. There are a tremendous amount of visitors coming here, including so many of you. We also think that this will be the year we finally get some mountain land and begin building our permanent center. We hope to hold very large, annual gatherings of ten days once a year after the center is built, which will be a time for us all to gather in person, share great tea, food and some meditative space together—family reunions! Imagine looking around at all the people gathered here drinking tea in person—finally!—and giving each one a hug.

As we travel the world, and this community grows, we more and more have the feeling that we are all coming together not for the first time, and that we've known each other so much longer than the ten months that we've been meeting here. There are new students coming to stay in Taiwan long-term and serve in the building of our new center. This growing local community feels deeper and more connected than it would seem from the surface, as if this is but the continuation of a deeper, longer-lasting work that began long before we all met. Many of our satellite communities in LA, Spain, Estonia and Russia are also headed by students with very deep connections to this tradition—people who we feel we have loved long before we ever met in person. A student in Russia told us recently that he felt a huge surge of warmth the first time this tradition and work was mentioned to him, and a compulsion to seek us out. Others have found us through equally poignant twists of Fate that cannot be random. We recently had a very special visit from our Spanish brother, who we have known for five or more years but had never met in person. The moment our eyes locked, we were brothers. It took only five minutes to get to know one another, and another five to be lifelong friends...

It has been so tear-jerkingly amazing to read and hear about how so many of you are changing through these monthly tea sessions, and the impossible ways that you found us, and each other. Again and again the story is the same: one of deep connection to Nature, to ourselves and to each other through tea. We are blessed to have this hut to meet in every month, drop the burdens we carry in our daily lives and share some great teas together.

May the loving-kindness in this project envelop you as this brown package was filled with Tea and Heart. May such connection spread to those whose paths you cross, steeped and poured again and again until all of the suffering around the world has had a large, healing draught and been reminded of our origin, presence and star-borne destiny above...



he old man can't speak your language, but his eyes welcome you into his small village home, darkened by the wood smoke that cooks his simple meals. His skin is dark and withered, cracked and crinkled like the folded hills you climbed back and forth on the long bus ride here. You can see all he owns; there's nothing hidden: a small bedroom, a small storage of rice, a kitchenette with an area for frying tea and bit of floor space for eating on mats. There's little distinction between in and outdoors—chickens wander in and out with dirty children, women gossiping in a sing-song language and visitors who drop by for some tea. The humans here live and breathe the jungle as much as the plants or animals, a part of the changing environment.

Tea regards no borders. People often say that tea belongs to China, Japan or India; but tea belongs to Nature, paying no heed to the imaginary lines we draw on maps. There is such a thing as Chinese tea *culture*, but not the leaves. We can discuss a Chinese way of farming, a Japanese processing or Indian preparation; but the leaves are just leaves, born out of the Earth. This is most especially true of the wild, seed-propagated trees that are the origin of tea, and ultimately all tea culture as well.

Tea was born in the jungles of Southwest China, in Yunnan, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and a bit in India later on. They say the first *Camelia Sinensis* evolved around a million years ago, which means that those old trees sat untouched and pristine for an eon before any human even noticed them—steeped only in dew, heated only by the morning sun, and drunk only by streams and rivers. And the seeds wandered the hills, each one a distinct soul like you and I. Like humans, tea trees are sexual and so each seed produces an entirely unique tree. Though they share a genetic heritage, as well as a similar climate which lends them similarities, they are also all special. This is why tea could adapt to so many climates, for surely in one thousand seeds there is one which is suited to a new place.

As tea moved east and north, whether naturally or carried by man, the trees adapted: The roots began growing outward rather than straight down and the leaves got smaller in colder climates. This has led some scholars to divide tea into large-leaf trees, with bigger leaves, deep roots and a much greater longevity; and small-leaf bushes, with wide roots and a shorter life span. In this modern age of industrial, plantation tea—rows and rows of bushes crammed so close we can't see

where one ends and the next begins—it seems almost too magical to imagine that the descendants of those first old trees are still living out in the pristine jungles of places like Yunnan and Laos.

The aboriginal tribes of this part of the world cross the borders often, and sometimes only speak their own local languages. On our first trips to Yunnan in the late 90s, we met tribal people that were completely self-sustained and cut off from all news of modern China. Nowadays, things are changing, and development is fast approaching this part of the world. A lot of that has to do with the growth of the Puerh industry. In 1998, tea shops in Kunming (the capital of Yunnan) weren't specialized in Puerh, and often suggested we buy Green or Red tea instead; and at the airport customs officials looked on our Puerh tea with askance, not knowing what it was at all. Now, the airport itself is crammed full of Puerh shops and Kunming has several huge and thriving Puerh markets.

This development has, unfortunately, also reached the villages where much of the old-growth raw material comes from. As prices have risen, many villages have grown rich and others jealous. There is little regulation, leaving Yunnan prone to falsely labeled tea, switched tea, etc. Take for example the very famous tea from Lao Ban Zhang, which is the most expensive of all raw material (*mao cha*). The spring harvest in this village is only measured in a handful of tons, perhaps seven. However, in the big tea market of Southeastern China, Guang Zhou, more than three-thousand tons of tea have some form of "Lao Ban Zhang" in the label. Are they blended? Are they fake? Are there magic elves that spin those seven tons into thousands before Rumplestiltskin shows up?

Other problems have also found their way into the region with the moneys. Before this time, the aboriginal peoples there were mostly self-sustained. It is not entirely evident, therefore, that they spend wisely—often buying disco lights for their trucks, satellite dishes, cell phones and other things that herald the end of traditionally processed tea. Of course, they have also begun planting a lot more tea, and mixing the young with the old (sometimes even using agro-chemicals). Young trees aren't always bad, depending how they are planted and cared for.

But all is not lost. The greater development in Yunnan has also brought information, foreign attention and more Puerh lovers than ever before—people with an interest in preserving the jungles such tea is



grown within. Trees are being leased and protected, and other promising projects are being created to maintain the living tea from this special jungle, the origin of all tea.

Traditionally, all the Puerh that came from Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar was called “Border Tea”. This was usually a derogatory term. Such teas were rarely pressed into cakes, and even today aged, loose-leaf Border Teas can be had for much cheaper than the Yunnanese vintages. They say the trees aren’t as good or the people there don’t process their tea as well, but actually calling Border Tea inferior has always been more of a pride thing. Traditionally, people across the borders didn’t specialize in tea as much as those in Yunnan, and sometimes didn’t process it as Puerh, which partially explains why it has had a lackluster reputation in the past.

Though the sense of pride continues today, and many Puerh tea shop owners would tell you to steer clear of Border Tea, their dislike for it has leant it the very magic that makes it so special today: the mass-market of China—buying and selling thousands and thousands of tons of Puerh—for the most part ignores this tea. This means that the jungles stay pristine, the cost stays low, the tea stays untouched and the aboriginals involved stay pure-hearted. Back in the day, *everyone*

making Puerh tea either did it because his father’s father had or because he loved Puerh. More than ninety percent of Puerh producers, distributors and so-called “experts” have only been doing this for less than ten years (since the boom) and only because they heard the jangle of coins in others’ pockets. But across the border, in the remote jungles of Laos, you have a better chance of finding an old farmer who honestly loves tea—a farmer like Insay.

Insay has two gardens where he grows and harvests tea. Behind his hut there is a tea garden with old tea trees up the hill. Usually his wife and his son harvest tea there. But they don’t make tea at home, they take it up the mountain on the motorcycle, it takes ten minutes to drive up the slope, which is a narrow and dangerous mountain path. On the southern slope of the mountain there is the second tea garden and a tea hut, where Insay withers and fries his tea.

The tea hills in Ban Payase are very beautiful and harmonious, a place you always want to come back to. Insay was discovered by some Russian tea lovers seeking to find pure, wild, old-growth Puerh. The Phongsali Province of Laos actually was once a part of the kingdom of Xishuangbanna, and therefore a part of “Yunnan”, until the eighteenth century when it was



taken from China to join French Indochina. This is why there are three hundred to four-hundred-year-old trees throughout the area, like those Alexander found in the village of Ban Payase. The trees of this part of the world have ho-hummed as the borders have changed, and sighed when people called them Chinese or Lao-tian. One wonders, then, if this really is “Border Tea” in a different sense.

The village of Ban Payasi is 1500 meters above sea level in the most rural of all Laotian provinces, Phongsali. It is so remote that the Buddhist religion has much less of a hold on the tribal people here, who still practice their native shamanism.

It was here that Alexander found a true lover of tea, caring for old and young-growth trees with equal love and affection. Our tea is a blend of the younger, forty-year-old trees and the older, three-hundred-year-old ones.

Alexander and his partner Timur formed the Russian tea company Tea Pilgrims, Ltd. to promote organic, local tea to Russia and the world. They graciously donated this month’s tea, which you will find the purest example of what a “living tea” can be that we have offered you so far. “Living tea” is a term we reserve for tea with deep roots; organic, sustainable, and allowed to grow up old and strong; with room between plants and a healthy relationship with the surrounding ecology. When you drink a living tea, you know it, as you will this month for sure. Monoculture inhibits tea in

so many ways, as it does most any plant species. It is impossible for us to understand or measure the infinite relationships a plant has to its local ecology: the other plant and wildlife that surrounds it.

Along with this month’s tea, your new tea brother Alexander would like to extend an invitation: They are looking for five or six volunteers to come live in the village in 2013, learn to make tea and help out with the harvest as well as to teach English at the local school. If you are interested, contact us and will pass on the information for you.

This month’s tea is a bright and glorious elixir of life, not made by the hands of man. We couldn’t possibly capture its majesty in a description. We recommend drinking it in a bowl, as we have explained in previous issues. (If you are new here, all the previous newsletters are on our website in full color and for free download or print.) Put a few leaves in a bowl when you have some quiet time and add some hot water. You may find yourself wandering down jungle trails towards a distant clearing where things are so peaceful you rest for a while, forgetting self and tea.

more info at: www.laosteana.com

** 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.*



One thing I've learned about love is that it transcends time. When you meet someone that you've known from another incarnation, you also know that you loved them then as well. It is obvious to see your love for a friend extending into the future, but what is more amazing is that our love also seems to blanket our past like the snow that came with me to Estonia. I meant that when I try to remember my childhood I do so with a heart that loves Kaiya, and I cannot therefore imagine what it was like before I knew him and we became brothers. Similarly, I can't remember a time from my past without a deep love for my wife, because that love is present and so is my act of remembering. It's as if we have always loved one another, long before we met in this life.

As I travel the world, I often have the very distinct feeling that this person is familiar to me, and that we have worked together before. I often know immediately who will play a deeper role in the spread of this tradition, and what that role will entail. It is hard to imagine that as I was starting to teach students in Taiwan, Steve was on vacation in New York and decided to take a drive out to a small Japanese market to see what they had. On some dusty shelf, he found my book. He says he almost put it back, as he had collected so many unread or half-read tea books. Something inside told

him this one was different, though. When he read it, the words resonated with him, because they were an expression of the same tea spirit he had often felt in his own sessions. From a dusty book, almost forgotten, Steve walked into our center around a year later...

I'm not sure I had ever even heard of Estonia before Steve's visit, but the moment he arrived I knew he was familiarly important—the way so many have been—and that we had worked together before and would do so again in this life. I knew I would eventually go to Estonia, and told him so. I think he was a bit shocked to hear that, having just arrived in Taiwan and only just met me (at least this time!). Well, it's always present and time flows by in torrents. In another Now, I was on a plane bound for Estonia with a full schedule of tea workshops and tastings.

Being an unconscious shaman, I brought a huge snowstorm with me and the mild weather of the past two weeks before I arrived was blown away by what Estonian meteorologists were calling, loosely translated, "the WuDödiludö Storm." Snow is fun when you haven't seen it in a long time, but the cold isn't. Still, Estonia is a beautiful country and Tallinn an amazing city. There is an old town built in the medieval times, with cobble-stone streets and charming little shops, turrets and walls and excellent views from the





higher parts. It was amazing to walk down such ancient and haunted streets.

I had been warned that Estonians were cold, but I found them to be a lot like Japanese and/or Chinese in that they just don't show emotions so easily and are concerned with 'face'—what others are thinking. In that way, I was already prepared and though I had some trouble reading them sometimes, I found them anything but cold.

It was so great to finally be able to situate my dear old friend Steve in his home and work, as we often think about him here at the center. Now it is so easy to imagine him at his desk, talking to Triin or driving and admiring the bleakness of a winter afternoon. He is also surrounded by some of the most beautiful people I have ever met, his two assistants Triin and Siim. Triin is a gorgeous woman who loves tea and has helped Steve since he opened his shop. Siim is a young man with a passion for life and tea, and who was eager to learn and grow. Needless to say, I fell in love with both of them before my trip was finished.

Steve had told me all about his tiny little shop in the old town and I had the impression that it was going to be the kind of kitsch tea shop you find in some places in the West and that I would have to be polite and not talk too much about what I thought. Fortunately, this was another of my life's many blunders. *Chado* is a gor-

geous little shop: quaint, with good warm energy and a very surprising collection of fine teas and chocolate. (It didn't hurt that the stunning shopkeeper Maria was behind the counter when I arrived, either.) It felt great to hug Steve and tell him I love his shop, would frequent it if I lived nearby and that I was so proud of what he has created. If you are in Estonia, be sure to drop in (especially if Maria is working!) It is small, but the old town is so atmospheric, lending its charm to the shop as well. And I think a teahouse of some kind will follow soon enough...

We did two one-day workshops the first weekend and a two-day workshop the second weekend, with three of the biggest public tastings I have ever done during the week—the last of which had thirty people! The first Saturday workshop started our work out gently, as it was small and intimate. I met some great tea lovers, like the unforgettable Edgar who is the tea expert at a small tea shop and Chinese restaurant in Tallinn. He was full of tea spirit, and asked nice questions. It was amazing to see him open up after each bowl as the day wore on. The second one-day workshop, on Sunday, was incredible—maybe my favorite of the trip. I met a beautiful Chinese woman named Rui Rong who hardly spoke any English, yet was intent on coming and sharing tea with us. I translated some for her, but she said she was very contented to

Tea in Estonia

Sit in quiet. Later, she hugged me with moistened eyes and said the day was pivotal for her life. She owns a Chinese restaurant in Tallinn and possibly faces a lot of stress. Everyone in that workshop was amazing: and Triin, Siim and Steve did a great job with the water for tea and food for lunch. Some of you who have attended such workshops know that they often seem timeless, as if we have been in that room sharing tea for eons. I also won't soon forget the bright smile of Jaanus, another whom I immediately felt familiar with. Many of our new Estonian friends are, in fact, sitting with us in the hut sharing this month's tea!

The tastings were at a trippy-hippie yoga studio in the old town. I have never served tea to such large groups at once. We boiled up some Five Element tea and sent them all to the moon! We sat in silence for around forty-five minutes and then I asked them if they had any questions. I think Estonians are shy about asking things in public. Fortunately, I had some Russian friends who came mid-week so there was some discussion. Then we watched the Global Tea Hut video and chatted for a while. The tastings were a bit shocking for a lot of the people, I felt. They had maybe come thinking to have some tea and ask about its flavors and origins and were instead cast into a dark and psychedelic yoga studio with Sixties décor and lifted out of themselves via Five Element tea. In all three tastings there was a different group of old ladies in the back right corner who—all three tastings—looked like they were freaking out a bit. Many people were touched, though, and I even saw some moistened eyes.

Speaking of Russians: one of the greatest joys of the trip was reuniting with Dennis who you remember from my trip to Siberia. He flew over to Estonia from Moscow to join the two-day workshop and help out with the tastings. It was wonderful to see him again and meet his friend Nikita, a bright tea lover with a real palate and a great soul.

We did have a three-day break in our schedule. We headed down to the small town of Viljandi where Steve has a small country home with a ghost in it. It was nice to see some of the Estonian countryside, forests and so-called “bogs”, as well as to rest in preparation for the work we did later in the week.

The last workshop was one of the most intense Five Element workshops I have ever given. Dennis said that the one in Russia was so loving, whereas this one was so deep and intense, “but both good!” He exclaimed in a thick accent. There were many beautifully sincere questions, notes and a deeper exploration of the elements of tea alchemy than is usually possible with beginners. They often asked such insightful questions that we were covering things way beyond an introductory course and doing some interesting experiments as

well: tasting waters, differences in heat sources, teaware, etc. I think everyone was touched.

As usual, I gave all those who attended the workshops a bowl and some tea and told them their homework was to drink at least three bowls every day first thing in the morning (yes, it was Sun Moon Lake Red Tea). So far, we have found that most all of them have done so faithfully, and some have even continued weeks later. I hope that the love for tea we kindled in Estonia is fanned and fuel is added so that it burns brightly til next time. To that end, I asked Steve and Timo to host some weekly tastings in Tallin. Timo is another Estonian who has made his way to the center. He now hosts small gatherings in his hometown of Tartu. The three of us had a great time eating, laughing, drinking tea and goofing around at night after the workshops and tasting—brothers, indeed!

If you had asked me a few years ago if I would ever be going to Estonia, I may have exclaimed “Where?!” Follow the Cha and the Dao where it leads: through tea make friends, Estonian friends! I couldn't imagine a life without my new Estonian family, and look forward to all the amazing tea we will share in the future. If any of you out there in the Hut find yourself in Estonia, look up Steve and your other brothers and sisters for some magical, medieval tea!

**This is the part where Kaiya makes air-guitars and I throw up the ol' Devil's horns and shout, “Estonia Rocks!” At which point we both start pumping our fists and howling, jumping around like idiots...*



Siim, Triin and Edgar



A few days have now passed from the amazing seminars and tea drinking sessions in which I had the honor to take part in. Still I can close my eyes and take myself back to the very spot where it all happened. It feels like yesterday, so clear, so powerful.

I have been on a journey of self-discovery and self transformation since April of this year and I have to admit that tea is the best friend you can ask for at such a time. Tea grounds me, makes me calmer and more in the moment so I can see deep inside: who I am and what is really important. And I have figured out that the most important things are small and simple, which you often don't notice and take for granted: Like spending time with your loved ones, or growing veggies rather than buying them. These little things count in the end, not how much stuff you have collected or your account balance. Tea has a lot to teach you if you are willing to learn.

The fact that I took part in Wu De's seminars shows me that I am on the right path. Because all is connected in our universe—every step you take, every

move you make, everything is influencing something and something is influencing everything. And thank God that I made such choices that eventually put me on a cushion next to other great human beings and Wu De. Just listening, learning and noticing the guest of honour, the Leaf. Wu De together with tea taught me many things, but for now I have noticed three main things which really have affected my life in a good way. I'd like to share them in no particular order, because they are equally important:

Respect and appreciation

I learned about these two during our little homework which Wu De gave us. The assignment was to drink three bowls of tea every morning for a whole week. I took this seriously, like no other homework before. On the fourth day, I realized something. I was drinking my bowls of tea and suddenly imagined ancient travellers who hadn't had anything to drink for hours and suddenly happened upon an oasis. I imagined them bending down and, full of gratitude, drink-





ing fresh water with their bare hands, hands held in a very similar position as mine were holding the bowl. I felt that I need to appreciate more what I am drinking or eating or using and respect it, not take it for granted.

Purity, cleanliness

Wu De said: “A messy room comes out of a messy mind, and a messy mind creates even more messiness”. So I looked over my cleaning and noticed that I was more relaxed and calm when my room was clean and in order. I haven’t been much of a cleaning-man but now I will take cleaning seriously. “Cha Dao is 80% cleaning. Clean, clean and clean—inside and out!”

Body is not just a body

I learned that objects aren’t just objects. Everything has life in it. I try to treat all my things with

great respect, because they are giving everything they have to make me happy and it would be foolish to not give them respect and thanks for it. A bowl isn’t just a bowl, a table isn’t just a table; they are part of us and make us the man/woman we are.

I will continue my journey with tea and I hope you will do the same. Let’s keep learning and practicing, listening to what tea has to say and grow from it. All the best to you and have cup of tea, my dear friends... Perhaps, hopefully, we may one day even share one.

As your sensitivity increases, you will begin to recognize the smoothness, or lack thereof, not just in the teaware you use, but one degree further: in what your teaware rests upon. It actually matters quite a bit what kind of coaster a cup sits upon, or what kind of tea boat or tea pillow your teapot is in, etc. Ever-increasing sensitivity is the essence of gongfu tea.

Developing our tea-brewing skills is more than just making better tea. Without a sharpness in our sensitivity, we can't get to the subtler and subtler aspects of tea, which ultimately allow us to move on to the next phase of our work with tea: energy. For that reason, it is nice to try to move deeper into subtler realms of tea as you progress. As we have mentioned in earlier issues, you may have to ignore the flavor/aroma of the tea when you practice *for some time*. However, after you begin to feel the differences more clearly, these aspects will return naturally. You aren't losing dimensions of your tea, but gaining new ones in addition to the grosser enjoyment of tea as a body.

Before beginning to practice working with the second degree of change, it is important to understand that tea is a liquid—mostly water—and that the water and the tea are both incredibly sensitive. As we have mentioned before, it's a good idea for tea lovers to read about water studies like Dr. Eomoto's *Hidden Messages in Water*. Suggestions, words, prayers and other energy effect water tremendously. Also, tea itself is equally sensitive, as anyone who has had tea stored in different places can testify to. My master used to make me taste the same tea stored in the shop versus the home, and I was always amazed at how different they were. He said that in a shop, you can't control the environment or the minds of all the guests and there is also a lot of business conducted, and people thinking selfish thoughts, often related to their money. Consequently, it is no wonder that what a cup comes into contact with changes the configuration of the liquid inside. We hope you all experienced some of that with the stickers we sent you as a gift.

The gongfu exercise for this month is to try tapping your cup on different objects and then taking a sip after each tap. The cup needn't rest on the object long, and as you grow more sensitive it will only take the briefest tap for the difference to register. In the beginning, you may want to use objects that are extremely different, so that the effects will be more apparent. Try tapping the cup on a cell phone and taking a sip, then tap an Yixing pot and take a second sip. You may want to use a tea that you are very familiar with and brew it lighter than usual, as with all gongfu experiments. Alternatively, you may want to use hot water.

Getting to the second degree in teaware is a very important step that opens up tons of doors in your tea practice. You will make quick strides once you've developed an acumen in this, and mastery (gongfu) isn't far off—maybe just a few taps away...





Learn to sense to the second degree



We are about an hour out of crazy-hectic central Taipei, Taiwan's super-modern capital of 8+million. It couldn't seem further. This is truly lush, thick Nature. We drive up a steep and winding road through ever-smaller villages and into ever-thickening forest and sweet air. I'd like to imagine that the aroma comes from the tea trees I've come to see, but I can't be certain.

We get out of the car on a particularly tricky turn of this road which has been carved through the forest and rock, and wait for Gao Ding Shi to arrive. I'd been told that he is a true proponent of a natural, wild tea farming technique dubbed 'shengtai', or 'arbor', and that to meet him would be... an experience.

Waiting, we look around us: there are enormous butterflies, baseball hat-sized marvelous beauties; there are small snakes disappearing as if from nowhere into the shrubbery. When standing in the sun, the heat is uncomfortable. Today is about 38C. Again. In the shade by the side of the road, however, the air is suddenly cooler, and the sweetened moisture from the trees provides embracing umbrage. My guides explain that Mr. Gao might take a little while. "He likes to do things slowly, to take the time needed to do them." We wait patiently, drinking in the Nature around us. The constant, rhythmic sound of crickets sets the brain waves to alpha. One of us goes off looking for multi-colored caterpillars.

I wasn't expecting someone as young and lively as the handsome, affable man who eventually drove up to greet us. Mr. Gao has considerable presence and seems to be deeply comfortable in his skin. He looks us over, nods, smiles and suggests that my thin sandals might be good for a day at the beach but not for where we're going. He opens his car and pulls out a mud-lathered pair of thick rubber boots, knee-high, and hands them to me. "I wouldn't want a snake to snap at you."

This is a Wild Tea Garden

His neighbors think his patches of land are ugly—unruly, unkempt, bug-ridden... and not even producing much tea at that; a waste of land.

We walk to the most accessible of his tea gardens; the others would be an hour's uphill hike. We need to push through the thicket of leaves and bushes, be wary of one's footing, be careful not to walk into spider webs the size of my torso, and keep an eye out for snakes. The tea is in the form of trees here, much taller than the meter to meter-and-a-half high bushes most of the world's tea plants are artificially kept. There are palm-sized, bright

green frogs at first indistinguishable from the tea leaves on which they placidly sit. God is indeed the DJ here; the soundtrack is wall-to-wall crickets interspersed with birdsong.

This is not really a garden, nor certainly is it a plantation. It is simply a hilly area on which tea plants are growing wild, into trees, and from which Gao Ding Shi plucks and processes his fine teas. There are *Camellia sinensis* here, certainly—everywhere—but not only. Other types of foliage grow exuberantly. "Whatever belongs here is welcome," says Mr. Gao with a smile, "whatever wants to grow here, please grow!"

That philosophy doesn't end with foliage; there are worms and bugs which want to live here too, and munch on the tea plants, and to that Mr. Gao says, "Please, let them come. If bees wish to make their hive in one of the trees, beautiful! If the worms and bugs are happy eating from the trees, let them eat. I also wish to drink from the tree, why shouldn't they?"

He bends close into the shrubbery, turns up a few leaves and branches before finding what he wants to show me. Turning over a leaf with one hand, he beckons me closer with the other. "Look at this." At first I make out nothing: large tea leaf with thick veins running along its underside. I squint but still don't see anything out of the ordinary... until his calm smile and focused gaze lead my eyes to one thin, unusual, vein-looking bulge, very slight, the thickness of a pin; the home of a little bright green pinworm.

Indeed the tea plant is favored by many bugs, some of them seemingly out of Star Trek. There's another worm which lives inside the branches, one that looks like a crawling piece of fluff, a kind of caterpillar which lives inside the vein of tea leaves, and another worm which imitates the look of a small branch. There are even tiny, scampering green bugs called jassids which are allowed to bite into the leaves as the chemicals produced by the plant's natural defense mechanism lends a uniquely sweet aftertaste for us tea drinkers—that is the unique case of Dong Fang Mei Ren (Oriental Beauty), a famous Taiwanese Oolong tea. "In any case," says Mr. Gao with a shrug and grin, "that bug eats only the bud and first two leaves. That means he has good taste! And he helps me make delicious teas!"

Indeed, bugs and the tea plant have lived in symbiosis for millennia and tea has been humankind's best friend all along. Before mass-production came along, bugs were either not feared as much, or controlled using natural methods. In Mr. Gao's case, they are not such a problem that he can't process his tea; there are plenty of



leaves left for him. But that leads us to another philosophical aspect of the small-scale organic tea farmer, a mindset more environmentally friendly than any organic farming technique: enough.

Enough

It's a concept I came across several times on my recent journey to Taiwan, in meeting small-scale tea farmers and their families: the desire to have just enough, not more.

Some of them lived right next to other tea farmers with much larger aspirations, who paraded garish posters advertising their teas—'the best', 'the rarest'—outside their homes in otherwise unobtrusive, bucolic villages. Those posters bespoke a desire to redo their homes, add another car to the newly constructed garage, perhaps get an alarm system to go with the solid electric gates they had recently installed to protect their assets. Nothing wrong, perhaps, with wanting to improve one's lot, but this striving comes with consequences: when we reorganize our priorities, the structure of our lives changes accordingly. If you're a tea farmer, you might start to

make compromises in how you make and produce your tea – you will want more, not necessarily better, but more. And to get more, you need to harm the soil and the tea plants (and ultimately yourself) by using fertilizers and pesticides.

When one is instead guided by the principle of 'enough', there are also consequences. You live in more harmony and cooperation with your surroundings and are not tempted to make compromises. Gao Ding Shi produces approximately 40kg of tea per year, a little more if the weather cooperates, sometimes much less if it doesn't. This is a laughably miniscule amount in the tea market, where tons is the usual unit of measurement. The tea he makes, however, he makes with great pride, with great care, and with love. This transfers so evidently into the leaf, and the cup, that his customers gladly pay the 50euro per 50grams he charges for it.

This high price ensures that this tea, when purchased for individual consumption, will be cherished, enjoyed fully, with confidence that it is an unblemished gift of Nature delivered via caring human hands. It's as close as the tea lover can get to the ancient tradition of Man-Nature interaction.

If a tea merchant buys this tea, he can almost certainly never resell it for a profit, and so thoughts of gain dissipate. Instead, the tea will likely be shared, and so often for free with good friends and/or valued customers. The focus here is on the Leaf, not the coin—as it should be!

In any case, when one buys tea from someone like Mr. Gao, one is focused on supporting the principles embodied before you—not only to acquire superlative tea. It's a vote of confidence for a lifestyle and approach to Nature all too rare in this age of 'more'.

Mr. Gao wishes only to have enough—to keep his children in school, to live comfortably, to continue this lifestyle for his family and himself. Selling all of his tea allows this, and even to accumulate small savings. He could easily think, 'Hmmm, if 40kg brings me this much, if I were to just double it to 80kg, still not much, I could get a better car and more satellite channels and take extra trips...' However, to achieve this, he'd have to do many other things: change the way he works; hire new people; make structural changes to his very simple processing space; start using some form of pest control; think more of how to market his teas, maybe develop a web site and hire someone to run that for him... These would be lifestyle and philosophical changes he is not ready to make. He knows that the seed of desire sprouts double-edged swords as buds. It's not possible to have one thing (lots more money, say) without a lot of other things, and he knows with great certainty that he does not want those other things.

"To truly live the simple life," he tells me while steeping one of his teas for us to taste, a Baozhong he calls "Wan Xiu", "you must be ready to put down many things: money money money, name name name. In the end, 'I am nothing—that's important to remember."

Every small-scale organic tea farmer I encountered who worked in collaboration with the Earth (versus forcing it to provide what he wanted from it) espoused the same philosophy—of living as simply as possible

while remaining comfortable and desiring only that which is needed. On top of that, none want to endanger their own health living near chemicals.

Running in the Family

If big profits are not his motivation, what fuels Gao Ding Shi's dedication to natural methods of tea farming? Indeed, Mr. Gao has great reason to be sensitive to this issue: personal tragedy.

Along with tens of thousands of other migrants from China's Fujian province, just 180km across the Taiwan Strait, his great-great grandfather arrived in these parts from Anxi, the mountainous county renowned as the homeland of Tieguanyin, perhaps the world's most famous Oolong tea. These mountains reminded him of home. He had grown tea in Anxi, and so when they moved to Taiwan looking for a better life, they grew tea there, with the clippings they'd brought from the Mainland.

The family's next generations continued growing tea; technology and the commercial tea market changed alongside them. By the time his father took over tea production, Taiwan was in an exportation boom and volume was therefore highly valued. Pesticides were commonplace, often cheap ones banned already in the developed world. His father died young and painfully of cancer, and other members of his family developed cancer and crippling diseases which by all appearances seemed directly related to living alongside chemicals.

This loss, and seeing his family suffer from needless poisoning left huge emotional scars in Mr. Gao (his eyes well up quickly when speaking of his beloved father) and served as the catalyst for major life—and business—changes.

"The tea trees are my brothers and sisters," he says, "members of my extended family. They have fed and protected my own family for generations and I wish to return the favor."





And then, The Rain

Gao Ding Shi's tea processing house lies at the bottom of a winding road cut through thick swaths of trees and has a terraced view overlooking valleys. One feels embraced by the mountains, a welcome visitor in their realm. The processing area itself is really just a concrete house, half of which is living space for his aging mother who spends most of the day peeling vegetables, making food and sleeping while her son, other family members, and a few hired helpers, carry on making tea.

This is not what many readers might have in mind when thinking about a tea processing plant; this is real life. There are bugs and flies coming in and out of the open doors; the floors are far from spotless; a friendly dog wanders about; laundry hangs next to baskets of drying tea. In short, nothing Better Homes and Gardens would aim their cameras at.

Yet this is artisanal tea production, not sterile factory tea production. Life happens here, and in the best sense, we can taste it in the tea. Mr. Gao washes his sturdy hands, which are thick from hard work—barely calloused despite the almost constant work he does—yet as elegant as a cellist's, and opens a pack of jiao tai, the green tea he produces.

Luckily, it starts to rain. Heavily. The transformation from sunny day to stormy lasts but a few minutes. Soon, relentless vertical curtains of water are falling across the outside landscape. The morning harvest yielded five bamboo baskets-full (each the width of outstretched arms) of tea leaves of the Qinxin Heimien cultivar and they were left to wither in the sun outside. With the

first drops of rain, though, Mr. Gao scurries to bring the baskets inside and place them on racks to wither there. He planned on making some Dong Fang Mei Ren from those leaves, but this slight change of procedure makes it more appropriate to make red tea from them. Man plans, God laughs. And man needs to quietly, humbly adapt.

I say 'luckily' about the rain. Had the day remained clear and dry, Mr. Gao would have been too busy with his tea leaves to attend much to us. Making Dong Fang Mei Ren takes more time and effort than red tea, foreign guests or none. But now he had some time to sit with us, pour us some tea, and chat. Somewhat unusually, he steeps his green tea for four minutes at 40C, water quite cool. "A good tea is good at any temperature," he says gently. He steeps and pours his tea calmly, slowly, one thing at a time. A lovely peace falls over the place, nestled as it is in the forest and now caressed by the lulling sounds of rainfall.

Before the weather clears and it's time to say goodbye, we have the luxury of spending a few hours in Mr. Gao's calm company. Even aside from what I know of his commitment to Nature and Tea, I have the feeling of being in the presence of a truly beautiful soul, someone living in total flow and happy with the easy partnership he has with life.

"Tea has taught me humility, to be humble towards Nature. When we want to smell tea leaves, we bow down to them, we don't keep our head held high."



ver since I was small, I wanted to spend as much time as I could in Nature. The first thing I said I wanted to be when I grew up was a ‘mountain-man’, living off the land with no ties to society. As a kid, I’d sit in school and stare wistfully out the window on crisp Fall days, considering all happiness to lie out there in the woods, and all misery to be the responsibility of this ridiculous system I was entangled in (which, by the way, was totally failing to prepare me for the skills I was going to need in life: how to build a log cabin, farming, trapping, wild plant identification, etc.) As I grew up, and grew more attached to the world, that initial vision changed a bit. However, traveling to places of great natural beauty and spending as much time as possible surrounded by Nature were still my primary motivations in life. Spending time in such places at the time represented the peak experiences of my life. I felt that I wanted to have as many such experiences as possible and went about trying to organize a career outdoors or simply make a lot of money to live where and how I wanted. Still the kid looking wistfully out the window, I felt that my life lacked enough time spent in the woods and had too much time devoted to job, rent, and bills.

Since I’ve begun my tea practice here, the amount of time I’ve spent going on adventures has diminished drastically. I’ve still never even been to the beach that I hear is within twenty or so minutes of Miaoli. There are dozens of Taiwanese national parks I’ve never been to, with huge trees and extraordinary flora, wonderlands of Nature I once felt it my purpose in life to explore and wander through. As a servant of this tradition, I am no longer ‘free’ in the old sense, that childish notion of freedom as the ability to do whatever you want whenever you want. The child that thought freedom was the ability to walk out of the schoolroom door, quit the job and wander the world in economic independence. Now, there is too much work to be done, too many people to make tea for. And this has been the source of great inner-conflicts for me at times; feelings of nostalgia, wistfulness, occasionally even resentments arise, but thanks to my practice I know exactly where those feelings come from and have tools to deal with them.

Everywhere you look, a powerful illusion is being woven, the illusion of “more” or “different” equaling satisfaction. Perhaps it’s more money, more life, more family, a different life, a different family, a different place to live, more free time. Some people have even found themselves thinking they’d be better off if they had more or different tea! (Or so I have heard). Literally trillions of dollars (an inconceivably huge force of united human consciousness

that could be used to create any reality we wish) are foolishly used to further this conditioning in us—illusions of “not enough”. The economy of every nation depends on this dissatisfaction with life, and as everyone knows, we might as well jump off a bridge if we lose our economic stability. So it is from this same conditioning, from a lifetime of being convinced by every social structure that I am not enough and don’t have enough. And even my desire to escape that structure still falls neatly into it if I’m not careful. It happened just the other day...

I was cleaning up my house, making space for my brother Shane (who is joyously moving to live here in Miaoli this very week, hurrah!), when I came across a brochure all about the national parks of Taiwan. I started flipping through it, and quickly was immersed in those old wistful desires to go and see those big-tree forests and lush landscapes. I began to tell myself a story about how I was not free. Resentment at the constant demands on my time that deny me the ‘freedom’ to go where I want, when I want, began to creep in. Why me? Why did I have to come across this path, this Way? Why did I have to be given the eyes to see that I must walk it? Why can’t I go back, just a little, go back to the way things were before, go off and cavort in the woods whenever I want to? These thoughts then bred dissatisfaction, and the belief that my unhappiness was because of a lack of adventure in my life. “I’m unhappy,” I quickly concluded. “I’m unhappy because I live in a Heaven-on-Earth country of natural beauty and I barely even know it, we have hardly been introduced,” I thought. “What am I doing, living in a place where I don’t know the Earth intimately? What’s become of me that this is possible? And it’s this tradition’s fault! What kind of an idea is this, anyway, giving *all* my time away, *always* sacrificing my desires, *always* putting my needs below not just those of loved ones, but people I don’t even know? It’s insane; anyone in the world would have to agree! Oh, the injustice! And all I need is a trip into the mountains. Had I had one just this past weekend I wouldn’t feel this way. I’d be content. If I’d been to that beach since I’ve moved here, then surely I wouldn’t feel this way now!”

“Hmm, wait a minute... have I ever had these thoughts before? Haven’t I been to hundreds of beaches and hundreds of mountains in my life already?” It’s as insane as though I were to wake up hungry tomorrow and start saying: “The trouble is I haven’t eaten enough lobster in my life. If only I had eaten lobster for dinner every night for the last two weeks, I wouldn’t be hungry now!” or if I expected that eventually, one day, I’d have eaten enough food; I’d sigh, pat my belly, and be done.



“Full forever, ahhhh.” How absurd! No matter how much I eat, drink or walk in the mountains, these are not foods that satiate the hungers and thirsts that truly drive me. They are at best physical cures for physical problems, but even at that they are embarrassingly short-lived and inadequate. I eat, and immediately a new desire arises and I am off to try to satisfy that one. I go up to the mountains, and quickly start thinking about how nice a hot shower is going to feel when I get back to the hotel, or what work I have to get done when I get home tomorrow since I just took a whole day off. There is always something new that arises, sooner than later, and it isn’t for a lack of experiences of any kind or amount that this happens, and no combination or amount of them can grant the true freedom that my soul ultimately is seeking beneath it all.

It all comes back to service. Service is the central element of our practice here, and with good reason. Living here, I choose to be somewhere I am often needed by others, whether it be in maintaining the center, helping a guest or writing these articles. If I had a personal plan of some kind it goes without saying that if either the center or a guest’s needs come up, even completely without warning, I will set my plans aside. In this way, I am constantly finding myself doing things I didn’t want to do. Don’t misunderstand! What I mean is that the situations here don’t arise out of personal desire; I don’t plan them and they don’t correspond with my personal ideas of what *should* happen. But I still really do want to serve.

In lowering the priority of my desires and placing others first, I create a rarified space between desire and myself that gives me a chance to actually look at my desires instead of *through* them. It becomes increasingly clear that it doesn’t matter at all if I never accomplish another personal goal again. I can also hone my skills at another vital aspect of our practice in this space, which is learning to listen to the desires of the Way itself, and to live in a state of Trust that if I need time of my own, or an adventure or a sunrise, I will get them. If I don’t, I won’t. There is no need to try to control events or inflict my ‘self’ upon anything. I am complete as I am. I cannot be added to or subtracted from in any way by anything: not a relationship, not experiences, not possessions. Therefore, I can just let these things be. Knowing my completeness, I am so grateful for it, astonished by the grace that continues to give me more and increasingly abundant life every minute even though I don’t need it. It is a gift that can’t be repaid through anything other than consciousness of the gift itself, and so I must live a life of practice.

With a beauty and poignancy that only this incredible cosmos of ours can arrange, not more than four days after my nostalgic encounter with the travel brochure, for the first time since I’ve lived here a guest (Viva Antonio!) asked me to go with him to Mt. Ali-Shan National Park. Truly, this island I call my home is a place of astonishing beauty and I am so glad to have made a



deeper acquaintance at last. Accepting those moments in the mountains as a gift from the universe, like manna from heaven, I easily found myself walking amongst the deep stillness of that enchanted place overflowing with gratitude for the abundance brought to me with each step, each breath, every turn of the eyes. (Even the nasty cramp I have in my leg a week later reminds me how lucky I am. Maybe a little reality check for future fantasies of perfection too).

This is so different from when I have gluttonously taken those experiences from the universe of my own ‘power’, out of a sense of ‘not enough’ or a desire for more. I don’t need another sunset, another mountaintop, another enchanted forest, or even another breath before I will have had all the experiences I need to have lived a completely fulfilled life. I’ve had every chance and opportunity in the world for all of it already, a thousand times more than many less fortunate than me—it’s enough. When I rest in this awareness, I find I don’t need to go anywhere at all. I can look out the window at the same tree I see every morning and rejoice in the bounty of Nature I have been given. There are people in prisons who haven’t seen such a tree in years. Or I can drink a bowl of tea and converse with Nature right there in my tearoom. Even if I’m doing something completely mundane like the standing in line at the post office, I am breathing, feeling, seeing; how ungrateful I must be to feel these are not enough!

It is said that to master one desire is more powerful than the fulfillment of one thousand. It is so tempting to do whatever I want at any given moment, to go down that path of self-centered desire. It seems insane at

times to serve anyone other than myself at all. But I’ve given the practice of self-service its chance at this point, way more than enough, to see that that path doesn’t lead where all the blazing neon signs say it does. There is no freedom that way, no satisfaction, no completion. Only more hunger, thirst and dissatisfaction. Imagine meeting a smoker who tells you his practice is that he’s going to always give in to the desire to smoke another cigarette, until he isn’t addicted to them anymore. Yet that’s exactly what I’ve been doing all my life with my “what I need is more...” mentality.

Don’t get me wrong, though; you don’t have to start questioning your plans to come visit us, or ask us to take you to beautiful places while you’re here! It’s all a matter of attitude. Absolutely anything can be an act of service, and I know for a fact that many of our guests have used the energy they gathered here for great deeds later on. For me, I quickly see the vacuity of it now when, out of a sense of lack, I think about going off on an adventure. I know I would miss serving some of you tea as a result, and realize it is actually a choice I can no longer make. Not because I’m suppressing my desires; it’s as though the thought itself is just some leftover habit, a false romance of the past lingers, some of the old confusion as to what freedom really is. But a moment later I realize that what I really want is to do what is wanted of me, and thanks to this tradition and to all of you, I find that I always get to do exactly what I want to do after all.

“We spend our lives learning how to choose what we must do” —Ursula Le Guin



Many a “tea master” certification program will tell you that there’s a rule to what is and is not “tea”: All “true tea” comes from the same plant. This rule is an easy way to distinguish tea from herbal infusions / decoctions. However, as people get rooted in the traditions of tea, they often come to know (intellectually and / or experientially) that tea does not simply come from one plant. Recently, I have been soaking this in on both the intellectual and the experiential levels, and I’d like to share a bit of what I’ve absorbed with you in the hope that it will be of benefit to your tea practice.

Through visits to tea plantations and farms over the years, I’ve had the opportunity to see many different “cloned” tea varieties (which are more like grafted plants than the laboratory creations that the term “cloned” tends to evoke). There are numerous variations amongst these tea plant types. Some can be easily recognized by their appearance, such as leaf shape and edge serration, leaf size, leaf color, bud / leaf downiness and plant structure. Additionally, many a plantation manager or tea farmer will point out the major differences in their heartiness, drought resistance, growth rate, yield, etc. And many a buyer will notice differences in the cup: a richer color from one variety, a more nuanced taste from another, more brewing patience in a third, and so on.

I must admit that compared to other aspects of tea, the traits of different clonal varieties is only of minor interest to me. After all, these plants are primarily used for monocropping across entire fields or, in some areas, enormous swaths of land as far as the eye can see. And monocropping has a history of generating monumental failures, such as the Irish Potato Famine and the massive coffee blight that (on the upside) led Sri Lanka to become a tea growing nation (yet, as an obvious downside, did not prevent the widespread practice of monocropping tea there). While the idea of generating plants to meet specific producer / market needs was intellectually interesting to me for a time, neither the idea nor the practice fed the needs of my soul. And the potential for the large-scale downfall, well... harboring or reacting to this kind of fear is the antithesis of Being. So, when people began to talk about different clones and their properties, my mind listened, but my soul did not.

Until recently, I took this lack of enchantment to be something broader than it is. Clonals didn’t generate a spark in me, so I didn’t place high importance upon learning about or experiencing tea varieties in

general. And then, I started drinking the Purple Tea we sent out a few months back, and everything changed.

At the risk of discussing one wonderful tea while ignoring another equally wonderful tea as it sits right in front of us, please allow me to explain how Purple Tea helped me understand and appreciate tea varieties more fully. As you may have read in our September newsletter, Purple Tea is ancient. As you may have felt from drinking Purple Tea, its spirit speaks of an age that predates mankind. To me, it conveys the moment of a dawning day at a time long before humans were around to observe the phenomena of celestial cycles. It is an expression of the beauty that existed before we did, perhaps simply for the sake of existing, or perhaps in preparation for human observation to reflect its beauty back toward it.

Suffice it to say, this is not the kind of radiance you are likely to encounter in a cloned plant.

Around the time I was sensing the splendor of Purple Tea, a package arrived. It contained a large quantity of forest-grown Puerh—this month’s tea. Like Purple Tea, it is from an older, wilder type of tea plant than the vast majority of the tea out there. And like Purple Tea, it speaks to the soul in a powerfully different way from a plantation-grown clonal tea.

Shortly thereafter, I had the chance to visit Sun Moon Lake with Kaiya and Antonio, a longtime supporter of Tea Sage Hut who recently visited us from Barcelona. At Sun Moon Lake, we walked around the local tea research center’s tea garden, where hundreds of seed-propagated plants grow freely. Each was an *Assamica* tea plant, yet each was distinct. Each was an expression of the plant’s genetic mixing through the sexual reproduction inherent to seed propagation. Similarly, when we visited one local tea farm, we saw a field of seed-propagated plants with varying colors, shapes and textures—a markedly different sight from the seemingly perfect uniformity in the fields of clonal, monocropped plants that make up the majority of tea production today.

Still, it took the visit of a tea friend from America and a session of Purple Tea for all of this to click into place for me. As Kaiya steeped and spoke of Purple Tea’s lineage in a poetic but vague way, our guest suggested the benefits of a stronger intellectual understanding of tea varieties. I could see both their perspectives and found myself to be devoid of any opinion on the matter—a rarity for me, indeed! But I could feel that I had been exploring tea genetics in a lopsided manner. This imbalanced approach was the opposite of my usual tendency—too much mind, too little soul—so I was



Our Tea of the Month Sundrying

loath to tip the scales too much in the opposite direction and fall into my old habit of favoring intellectual understanding over experiential wisdom.

For this reason, I waited one week before proceeding in the direction of deeper intellectual understanding of tea varietals. I checked myself for any glossing over of the present-moment *experience* of drinking tea in order to *think* about tea, and for any preference for mind over soul. When I felt I could trust my intentions and my direction, I waded my way through a scientific paper on tea plant genetics.

The paper was a study analyzing alleles, polymorphic information count and gene diversity in tea plants across China. It wasn't exactly what you'd call a beach read, but it was more absorbing than you might guess. It mentioned varieties of wild plants of which I'd never even heard. It shed some light on how the genes of tea plants spread and changed, and how diversity was amplified or squelched in various areas. It reiterated a

natural phenomenon seen in genetics, linguistics and other fields of study in which diversity is most abundant in areas closest to the origin of a given thing, then less diverse in outlying areas. (In the case of tea plants, the greatest diversity is around the Yunnan area, the birthplace of tea.)

On its own, this paper would have simply been a dry read. However, partnered with an understanding of how different means of tea production accompanied genetic mutations, it became fodder for a more enlightened understanding of the Tea Spirit.

After all, the majority of tea processing techniques were born out of adaptations to the changes in plants, which were adaptations plants made to the surrounding environment. White tea would not exist were it not for the downy buds and leaves that resulted from the "genetic distance" Fujian's tea plants have from other tea plants. Oolong might not exist were it not for genetic variations that produce a more leathery leaf that

24 can handle hours of rolling and shaping. And while you *could* make a Green Tea and a Puerh from the same arbor tree, you'd be unlikely to find that the tree is as amenable to yielding a quasi-drinkable Green Tea as it is to yielding a soul-quenching Puerh. In responding to changes in the Leaf, tea producers and tea drinkers are responding to Nature. And perhaps, in their own ways, Tea and Nature are responding to us through these changes, too.

But over the last few hundred years, our connection with Nature has dwindled and, sadly, the realm of tea is no exception to this. Alongside the mass-made products which characterize our current era, many of the recent innovations in tea production have been chemical or mechanical methodologies that make more tea, but which further remove us from the spirit of Tea. It could be argued that these innovations are in response to the widespread use of clonal tea varietals. We took the spirit out of the Tea and then we responded to what the Leaf told us. One could think of it as a natural progression initiated by an unnatural change. And just like with steeping and drinking, with tea production we got out of it what we put into it; in this case, a homogenized and less vital form of Tea.

In appreciating wild varietals, "landraces" (plants that are domesticated through natural adaptations rather than human breeding measures) and seed propagated plants (which contain biodiversity not found in clones), we can taste and feel the inherent variety and expressiveness of Nature in Tea. Through these types of teas, we can access the Tea Spirit more

intimately. And in this way, we can begin, once again, to listen to what She has to tell us.

This month's tea is a forest-grown Puerh from northern Laos, right near the imaginary line that separates Laos from Yunnan, China. As I mentioned, this area's tea plants are incredibly rich in genetic diversity. And a forest of tea plants grown from seed? Such extraordinary array of genetic material that must contain! Such an expression of Nature and Tea in harmonious multiformity. Such an opportunity to more fully sense and appreciate the Tea Spirit in all Her glory.

In gongfu tea traditions, they say that true mastery is the ability to distinguish each and every individual tea leaf. Not only are each tea session and each type of tea unique, each batch is different, each pot is different, each sip is different, and, ultimately, each individual leaf is different. It's just a matter of bringing our senses to the level of the Leaf in order to perceive it. What better tea to help one realize this truth than a tea made from plants which celebrate this plurality in their DNA—in their very essence! What better way to experience each moment of a tea session in its full color, in its infinite complexity and beauty, than with a tea such as this? I can't think of one, but then again, there's no need to. Paradoxically, it took a deeper intellectual understanding of tea as a plant to realize that all I need to do to truly understand tea is to be present and drink Tea as Spirit. And so I drink, knowing that each sip contains all the answers I could ever need.





There is no genre(s) of tea more powerful, safe or healthy as that which has been aged. Much like wine, teas also improve with time, gathering and absorbing energy to them throughout their journey. Tea is a very absorbent plant, capable of taking on the flavors and smells of whatever is around it—be that flowers, camphor or any other scent imbued to the tea by man, or even the natural flavors of the place it has been stored, for better or worse. It isn't a stretch of the imagination, then, to accept that tea that has aged for years, decades or even centuries, has also gathered energy to it over that time.

The highest caliber teas in most any genre are those that have been aged. Through time, the tea leaves grow wiser, richer and more connected to the Spirit. We used to think that only Puerh teas could be aged, but that is wrong—any quality tea can be aged, increasing in power and presence over time. Green teas, because of their frying, which arrests oxidation, are considered best drank when fresh, and one rarely has the opportunity to drink an old Green tea. However, we have had a forty-year-old and even one-hundred-year old Green tea. We were surprised to find that the tea had indeed improved, providing a deeper understanding of what is possible in fermentation. We think that Green teas just needs a bit longer, and perhaps do not age as well as other kinds of tea like Oolong or Puerh. Still, we would recommend enjoying most Green teas while they are fresh, as that is perhaps the time they might shine with the greatest glory.

Of course, we also enjoy many fresh Green, White, Yellow and Oolong teas. Some of them are exquisite and as beautiful an expression of Nature as any. However, buying older teas also usually ensures that they were manufactured at a time when most if not all tea was farmed organically, more in tune with Nature and the harmony of the mountains that they come from. While it is true that no tea ages as well as Puerh, we have also drunk several aged Oolongs and Rock Teas (yancha) that were equally powerful. It was vintage Puerh, however, that first connected us to the sense that there was something beyond pleasure, society and friendship in tea. Seeking out the spirit and essence of Cha Dao in this modern day, for most wayfarers, leads one to the wizened old leaves of vintage Puerh and Oolong.

No one knows how or why people began aging tea, realizing that it improved over time. Perhaps it was an accident, a result of simply trying some leaves that had been disregarded. Others suggest it was a result of the Tea Horse Caravans that carried Puerh tea from

Yunnan to other parts of China and beyond. Sometime in the Tang Dynasty the trade with Tibet motivated some entrepreneurial merchants to begin carrying compressed tea bricks by horse to sell to Tibetans. The success of the venture led others to follow suit, and there was soon a bustling coming and going of mule caravans that were sent all over China, even as far afield as Beijing. The tea was compressed to make transportation easier, and some scholars suggest that the humidity, sweat of the horses and distance would slightly ferment the tea; and then the consumers would recognize that the more fermented the tea was, the better the flavor and energy. This would lead to the storage of Puerh tea, like the cakes kept in monasteries in Tibet, recognized to have greater energy and even protective powers.

Not all tea sages agree with this idea, however. Some suggest that the storage of tea is a very ancient practice, perhaps dating back to the Daoist ascetics of the Zhou Dynasty and before. We also prefer such musings. We think that the ancient Daoist mendicants were far too sensitive to miss the affects fermentation has on tea. If they could discover the Leaf from a forest of other trees using such acumen, they could definitely recognize the difference storing it for some time had on its flavor and energy. It is hard to imagine that people who lived a life of tea would need to discover its aging process by accident. Furthermore, Puerh ages better when compressed and we believe that these tea sages surely knew that as well, which suggests that it wasn't just compressed for easier transportation.

There is a very real sense that cake teas ferment much better than teas in loose leaf, in part because of the microbes that get trapped inside the cakes during the damp steaming used to compress them. Some tea masters conclude that tea was first compressed because of this, and that tradition and convenience just carried on ancient wisdom. In fact, many factories producing Puerh tea in more modern ages might not even understand why they compress tea, other than as tradition. One of our teachers, Zhou Yu, discussed this topic at some length with us once:

"I did my own experiment not so long ago with regards to this issue. (And I would remind you that experimenting yourself is always the best way to learn.) I kept some 2003 Yiwu tea in cakes and loose form. It was the same tea. I produced it myself. I wrapped the cakes in organic paper and then bamboo bark tongs. I put the loose leaf tea in a nice cardboard box with ventilation. Everyone here thought the loose leaf would ferment faster, but actually the cakes had more and better fermentation. Not only that, but the



compressed tea tasted better and had a much deeper energy (Qi). It's impossible to know if our ancestors understood this, or just compressed the tea for convenience. Perhaps it was both. Some of the swords forged in the Song Dynasty are made from metals we cannot recreate today, suggesting that the ancients had technology and understanding that has been lost. Masters passed techniques down to students or to their children, often without explanation, until things like this just become a part of tradition. I think most factories compress Puerh tea today just because that is the way it's done, the cultural tradition. However, we have found that the cakes all have better energy (Qi) and ferment better than loose leaf Puerh. The compression offers the perfect environment for the microbiotic activity that leads to decomposition. The steam used to compress the tea cakes is only partially dried out. It also cools gradually. The trapped moisture creates an ideal environment for the changes in the tea to occur. It also holds the spirit (Qi) in, making the old cakes much stronger."

The energy (Qi) of these aged leaves

One of the most amazing experiences of my life happened when my whole family came to visit me in Taiwan, including my very aged grandfather and great uncle. I took the whole group to see a tea master. The eight of them sat around the table chit-chatting

about how exotic the tea room was, with its walls and walls of tea, waterfalls and bonsai trees. Eventually, my teacher passed me a sly grin and reached behind him to a jar of very old Puerh tea. Brewing the deep and dark liquor—leaves ancient and wise, connected to the spirit of Nature—changed the entire atmosphere of the room. Within minutes, it was enshrouded in a deep and peaceful silence, only the waterfall singing in the background. For the next two hours, I sat with my entire family in complete quiet, connected to one another as never before. Never in my entire life prior to that day had my family and I ever sat in quiet; never had we been so close. My mother wept in joy, my grandfather cried too, saying later that he felt the presence of my then recently departed grandmother. The power that these aged teas can have—the life-changing presence and connection to the spirit of the Universe that they offer—became clearer to me than ever before. I share this experience, so personal, to show that one need not be a saint, a meditator or even a tea lover to experience the profundity that a tea ceremony steeped in the Dao has to offer.

To many it may seem almost like a fairy tale that those Daoist mystics cloudwalking around ancient China were able to find a sense of oneness, transcendence and connection to the universal energy when today people all over the world drink tea all the time and

28 never get close to those sensations. I think that vintage Puerh tea is the closest that we in this modern age will get to the spirit of the ancient forests tea once represented. There are many aspects of Cha Dao that make the leaves irrelevant, many of which we may discuss later, but there really aren't any leaves as powerful as aged Puerh—so as a “handful of leaves”, the Dao is much more aligned with the wise, old leaves gathered from the source of all tea, in Yunnan, and hand-processed in the simple, age-old ways that haven't changed for thousands of years.

One of the biggest differences between Puerh tea and other varieties is that it comes from “trees”; “old growth” in the way discussed above. And not just any trees, but the ancestors of the original kings of Yunnan, the source of all tea and Cha Dao on Earth. While it is possible for tea to grow into large trees in other parts of the world, not all varieties are capable of this. Some will only ever be bushes, and even if left alone can only grow to about the height of a man. And even those places that can nourish tea into trees, cannot do so with the same combination of perfect rain, sun, humidity, soil and water that Yunnan can. The trees there produce tea leaves like no others on Earth. They are, after all, living in the Eden of tea.

From the very first time I ever sipped a well-aged Puerh, I was deeply and affectionately in love,

body and soul. It was truly love at first sip. I had been drinking other kinds of tea for quite some time and was used to all the nuances in flavor and aroma that different kinds of tea offered, and yet nothing had prepared me for the way this tea would affect me. Puerh tea isn't just about the sense of smell and taste; it touches a person on a much deeper level. From the first few sessions, I felt like a character in an age-old plot, like the ones that filled my childhood story books, in which the main character blindly stumbles out of this world and into another that is equally vast, complicated and rich. And this new terrain offered deeper and more varied flavors and smells than any of the teas I had drank previously. What's more, Puerh created sensations in my mouth and throat that I had never experienced; it calmed and soothed my body, and forced me into a meditative state of quiet. I was very blessed that my first teachers were ones who recognized the importance of the energy (Qi) in tea: as a meditative tool, an aspect of health and well-being, and a support in one's mundane and spiritual life. I never knew that meditative silence with others could bring with it such sensual joys. Not only was I at peace mentally, but these old teas seemed to “intoxicate” my body with melodies of bliss I had never known. I very quickly grew to love everything about Puerh tea. It satisfied me on so many levels, and still does today.



The changes that occur in raw Puerh tea as it ages are amazing enough to be called miraculous. The flavor changes from a jerky astringency to a deep and woody liquor that often tastes of the earth and spices like sandalwood, with the occasional hint of orchid or the ever-famous plum aftertaste. The flavors coat the mouth and throat and linger on the breath for a long time. When one is drinking old Puerh, though, the impressions left by the flavors and aromas are soon forgotten, for Puerh is often a more corporeal experience. One begins to feel warm and comfortable, calm and at ease—one might say, “intoxicated”, but this is misleading as the mind remains clear, perhaps even sharper than usual. The experience of drinking aged teas, brewed by one steeped in the Dao, brings a connection to the universal energy of the moment, and with it life-changing transcendence. No words can prepare one for the first times tea touches us in this way, and everyone’s reaction may be different: some may laugh, some may cry. Talkers, no matter how loquacious, often find a silence that they don’t find so uncomfortable. I have seen all these reactions and more.

Puerh tea has been in history sometimes referred to as “living tea”. This is because of all the microbial activity that is going on in Puerh cakes, from newborn to ancient. These microscopic organisms are a big part of why the cellular breakdown of Puerh tea (fermentation) occurs more smoothly and uniquely from other kinds of age-able teas. They assist in the fermentation over time, and have a kind of symbiosis with the leaves. It might be strange to think that the leaves, no longer ‘living’ in a scientific sense, are benefiting from these organisms, but they definitely are from the perspective of the tea and its quality. Many tea doctors have written about the health benefits of Puerh tea, and some relate them to the microbial communities that inhabit the cakes. From a more spiritual perspective, it is amazing that even after the leaves are harvested from the tree, they remain alive for all the years they are kept in storage, as if those tiny beings were in fact sentient—growing in awareness and wisdom over time. Besides the idea that tea is very absorbent, this is one explanation that many teaists in Asia share for why Puerh tea increases in spirit over time. I have a tea brother that always calls the microscopic organisms in Puerh tea “midichlorians” after the tiny sentient beings in the Star Wars mythology—humorously asking me to take a “midichlorian count” of certain vintages. Seriously, though, it is an explanation for the variations in spirit and energy (Qi) that characterize different aged Puerh tea cakes.

People often ask me if there is a limit to the age a Puerh can be, and whether or not they do continue to get better as they get older and older. I have read some tea scholars who think that aged tea has a “peak”

time that it should be drunk, but my experience has often shown otherwise. Of course, the older a tea is the greater the chance that some improper storage occurred somewhere down the line, for storing tea isn’t simply a matter of tossing it on a shelf (nor is it as complicated, in my opinion, as some scholars would suggest). Each genre of aged tea has its own method and criteria for storage, though much of this is only starting to come to light in recent years, as more scientifically-minded collectors begin to study the storage of tea. Still, the best teas I have ever had were very old indeed, and none of their flavor, aroma or energy had dissipated from that time—on the contrary, as long as the storage was pretty good, the older the tea, the more powerful of an experience it was. I have drunk several Qing Dynasty Puerh teas, from 150, 180 and even 200+ years old. All of them had been stored in ceramic pots that had been unopened for most of that time. It should come as no surprise that they were more powerful even than the Antique Era teas from the first half of the twentieth century.

In the late 1800’s, two or three British explorers to Yunnan reported that the market was then full of some Tang Dynasty Puerh tea bricks that had been unearthed from an ancient storage room. The explorers said that though the bricks were slightly “musty” the Chinese all seemed very keen to get their hands on them. At that time, those bricks would have been more than a thousand years old, a testament to the amount of time tea can actually be kept.

There is a lot of debate in the modern Puerh world about what makes a good candidate for aging and then how to store the tea. Some say a tea should be strong and bitter, to the point of distastefulness, if it is to remain strong throughout its journey. Others argue that a tea that tastes bad now will only get worse, claiming that old junk only differs from new in age. The debate twirls and gets more and more complicated when we add the idea of “Wet” or “Dry Storage”. Basically, Puerh tea needs some amount of humidity in order to ferment over time, and most scholars suggest somewhere in between 70-85%. The places that it has traditionally been stored, however—Southern China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia—cycle through periods of lower and higher humidity, allowing the tea to absorb moisture in the Spring, heat up and actively ferment in the Summer, slowly dry and cool down in the Autumn and then “rest” in the Winter. Storing the tea in a “Wetter” way, then, would be to expose it to higher humidity levels so that the fermentation speeds up, and “Drier” to slow down the fermentation.

Some tea lovers argue that “Wet-stored” teas smell and taste musty and have lost all value. They advocate complete “Dry Storage”. One must question this thinking, though, since all the great vintages of the

30 past were at some point “Wet-stored”, depending on how one defines that term. If one’s interpretation of “Wet Storage” is an environment where the humidity exceeds the normal range discussed above, then most all teas stored in traditional areas and ways, which means almost 100% of all aged tea, passed through some period(s) of such higher humidity in their long lives, and those that didn’t were thus accidentally. Dry-storing teas is a very new trend, dating back arguably to 1988, but more wide-spread to the late nineties. Puerh tea wasn’t always such a commodity, with experts, collectors and their endless debates popping up like so many monsoon frogs. For a long time Puerh tea was just tea, and people didn’t take so much scientific care in the way they stored it. Of course, it did represent an investment to many tea shop or tea house owners so most of them didn’t just throw it on the ground, but neither did they analyze and scrutinize it over time. The changes that happen in Puerh tea happen naturally.

They say that some of the most-coveted vintages of Puerh tea, like Hong Yin or Lan Yin for example, tasted awful and astringent when they were newborn. The debate about how much and what changes occur in Puerh tea over time, the best cakes for potential storage and the qualities that make them as such, the proper methods of storage—all of it ends in the same place this discussion of a “handful of leaves” has returned to again and again, falling right in the lap of our own intuition and sensitivity. If by the “best candidate” for storage you mean the one that will yield the highest financial return for investment as some kind of collector’s item, go sift through the endless debates on forums and magazines. If by the best tea, you mean for drinking and being with Spirit, then follow your own intuition.

A lot of people ask me for an opinion on which tea will age best, and I always say I don’t really have an opinion on whether a potential cake should be strong and bitter or pleasant right now. I personally store both kinds. Nor do I wish to get too wrapped up in a discussion on storage methodology, as I have had awesome “Wet-stored” teas and atrocious “Dry-stored” ones and vice versa. As I leave such social gatherings, whether pleased by the conversation or not, tea again sloughs such intellectual baggage and returns to just so many leaves in water, my mind joyfully calm and at ease. Moreover, as all such debates are far from being settled, the answers remain as enshrouded in mystery as the first day people discovered the miracles that occur in the transformation of tea as it ages. I like it that way. I don’t want a science and method to the mystery.

The less intellectual my tea is, the more intuitive and sensory it becomes. Why not a bit of mystery and magic in the way teas change over time? Why not admit that we don’t know what degree of humidity is perfect, how the microbes function, the way the leaves

break down and change? Why not admit that, like life, there are too many variables to control? Similarly, I’m not sure I care to have a scientific explanation for some of the miracles I saw living and traveling through Asia this last decade. Scientists might one day find an explanation for why yogis don’t need sleep, why they can maintain their body temperature in extreme cold—they may explain the reason why Indians don’t get sick from the polluted waters of the holy Ganges, or why the lights appear in the sky above some Himalayan temples—scientists may even one day explain why teas change over time and how the process can be sterilized and perfected, but as such I don’t really care to hear any of it, as it is all no less miraculous because it can be explained. You can explain the muscular or even emotional logic behind a smile, but that doesn’t make it any less beautiful; is Michelangelo’s *Pieta* just a hunk of stone some guy chiseled five hundred or so years ago? Why not just shrug and enjoy some tea, recognizing the beauty and power in the natural changes that occur as it ages—changes that were going on in Puerh tea long before any collectors or experts started arguing about them. To me, the transformation of any tea over time, as it ages and grows in spirit and power, is nothing short of amazing.

Thinking about the powers of something so simple as some leaves in water—to bring such pleasure, joy, friendship, and even peace and transcendence to so many people through time and space is almost bewildering. And when you add to that the idea that those same leaves can be kept even thousands of years, transforming like people into better, wiser beings, I feel nothing shy of astonishment. To me, there is no greater treasure than a handful of such leaves, and no greater experience than sharing them with a friend.

“Come inside,”

The old Chajin said with a hand on my shoulder, “and let’s try to make a more beautiful world.”



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.

On Wu De’s trip, while looking for a gift to bring home to his beloved Kaiya, he came across a tea called “Pink Lady” and thought of Kaiya immediately. Kaiya was unnervingly delighted to receive this gift, and rushed home to brew it right away. We’re not quite sure what happened, but he hasn’t been quite the same ever since. It seems this powerful tea may have set free a repressed personality, which, frankly, many of us had always suspected was in there! Funny enough, “Kaia” is a girl’s name in the Northern European area where this marvelous tea hails from!



ROSY DOILIES AND BLUSHING FLORAL DRAPERIES, PINK-ICED
SCONES ARRANGED ON A FUCHSIA PLATTER WITH A PINK RIB-
BON TIED TO THE MAGENTA SUGAR-CUBE TONGS (THE CUBES
THEMSELVES FOOD-COLORED PINK, OF COURSE)

*Article by Kaia Constance Snoot (The Transgender Al-
ter-ego of Kaiya the Gruesome, Beauty and the Beast)*

Well! ...There, I did it. Honestly I believe that exclamation points in general are rather uncouth, a sure sign of low-born literature. Nonetheless, our tea of the month this month, “Pink Lady”, is so refined, so sophisticated, so utterly unspeakably superb, that I feel it can smugly hold its head high in an article containing one.

Allow me to introduce myself to those of you who may be lacking in culture. My name is Kaia Constance Snoot, and I am launching a competing magazine and tea of the month club, “*Colorful Flavorful Tea-snack Hut*” (though, in my humble opinion, there isn’t much competition between the two.) I was a little surprised at first when a strange-looking man approached me about writing this article; I thought he wanted spare change by the look of him. (I can only assume the reason to be, in spite of the obvious danger to their membership, some dubious hope that a bit of my refinement may have a positive effect on their, ah, coarseness, shall we say? What is a “Global Tea Hut” anyway?)

We digress. Back to this month’s delightfully glorious infusion. When you have as many years of experience as I do, you can identify a fine tea by sight, and I knew as soon as I opened the bag that this was just such a rare tea. Although it is only a general rule and no substitute for expertise such as mine, if you can place your tea next to your potpourri in identical containers and be unsure which one to brew, that’s a good sign, indeed.

Now, as you all should know, the most important quality of any tea is its color, and this tea really delivers, providing us with a blazingly bright pink opportunity for decorating our tea spaces and ourselves. Be warned that there are those out there not sensitive enough to realize the importance of color. They may say that flavor is most important. If you meet such a person, however, you have an opportunity to practice the two great joys of a true tea lover: condescension and rejection. Make the most of the opportunity! Now, the color of your tea defines absolutely everything about your tea session, from your pot and cups, to your flowers, crumpets and fingernail polish (Though it shouldn’t

stop there, and if it does you’re a common floozy! *More on the subtler aspects of makeup and attire in a later issue of my new and far superior magazine.*)

On to flavor: Flavor is, to the credit of the common people I don’t ever drink tea with, second most important. It is tied in importance with tea snacks, since you can’t have one without the other. Now, this is the only area on which this tea falls slightly short. There are citrus peels, roses, spiced apples, cranberries, and even some little shreds of some unknown green leaf in this tea, which I regarded not without some suspicion. Frankly, it doesn’t quite fulfill my ‘minimum of nine ingredients’ rule. Upon drinking it, however, I actually felt more ladylike, and my nose rose up in the air at least twenty degrees with no conscious effort on my part. Not only does this tea actually taste pink, but you can feel ‘pinkness’ spreading everywhere as you drink it. I was actually colorblind to everything but pink for about a week, so it must have had something good in it.

It would be difficult to compare this tea with some of my other favorites, such as *Blue Razamatazz* or *Green Ringle-Dingle #5*, due to the obvious color differences. Those teas have the requisite ingredient amounts. Still, this tea is pink, and greens and blues are a dime a dozen—not to mention out of fashion this season. Not only that, but I discovered that the smell of this tea continued to rise from my skin all day, making it an excellent perfume, and it is also effective as a hair dye. All in all, I give it four out of five noses up, with lifted pinkies in the air. Stick another flower in your bonnet, grab a scone and we’re on to the next cup...

**If any of you wish to join my far better and much more refined tea of the month club email me at: pinklady@doilies.org Next month, we’ll all be drinking Chocolate Pumpernickel Rooibos together, yeah!*

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 wonderful Antonio Moreno.

I opened Čaj Chai Teahouse in 2004, motivated by my longing for a space to drink tea as I became accustomed to while living in Prague in the 90's... Barcelona didn't have a single specialty teahouse dedicated to pure teas, so my girlfriend at the time and I went out and made it ourselves! Our logic was that if people were content drinking artificially aromatized tea with little attention to preparation, surely they would flock to our teahouse once they found out what traditional tea was really about. And they did... but the flock sure moved slowly...

Once we made the crazy decision to embark on such a pure venture (no alcohol, no smoking, no coffee), in a festive country such as Spain, I began devouring tea literature of every sort, and ordering as many samples as I could get. Thus began this endless pursuit to understand and appreciate tea better, a search that progressively led me to seek out better and better organic and traditionally processed teas and to learn, experience and share the greatness of tea in a much more profound and spiritual way.

I first contacted Wu De years ago, when I read his articles for *The Art of Tea Magazine*. His beautiful writing resonated deep within me. I wish I could have met him there and then and shared tea with him. I also loved his artwork and wished we could exhibit them at Čaj Chai, so I wrote him and asked him about it and he replied affirmatively with such great enthusiasm, generosity and appreciation! Over time this exhibit clearly became an installation!

Global Tea Hut is an amazing initiative that I'm happy to be a part of and share with our customers. Every month we hold GTH gatherings at our teahouse or, weather permitting, somewhere out in the open. Each month our group continues to grow, even if it's admittedly difficult to get everybody together on a given day. I also make it a point to invite 1 or 2 new people to the group to experience GTH for the first time. I also let people repeat the experience when I see they are really appreciating it, even though for one reason or another they haven't signed up yet... GTH is clearly not about exclusion! All knowledge is meant to be shared. May we all drink organic tea; may we all find peace in drinking

organic tea and knowing we are supporting good people, good farmers who are caring above their land and us people more than the size of their harvest. We are forming part of something truly beautiful on a global scale.

This month I'm at Tea Sage Hut, living a blessed life, learning, sharing tea and meditating with Wu De, Kaiya, Lindsay, Daniel and others passing through. I don't want to speak too much about it now because I'm very much living in the moment... but when I return to Spain I'll be sure to write in depth about my time here with them! I'd love to share what they've shared with me and share a bowl of tea with all of you. If you visit Spain definitely get in touch:

cajchai@yahoo.es or www.cajchai.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

(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. The third is about Mr. Xie. 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 116 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

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!



Kaiya is very happy to review any other fruity teas you wish to share with his alter-ego. He loves them! Go ahead and send them out using the return address on your envelopes!



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

www.teasagehut.org

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)
- 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