



Global Tea Hut

NEWSLETTER #22
NOVEMBER 2013



WHO WE ARE

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, cultivating and expressing an awakening of harmony through tea. We believe that tea wisdom which has no connection to any financial motivation, good or bad, is very necessary in this modern world and therefore strive to build schools, centers and other tea spaces in the true, ancient spirit of tea—leaves, water and wisdom shared without any personal profit. There are several facets of what we do. Below are our main and current projects, branching from our roots outward:

Global Tea Hut

Global Tea Hut is one of our main sources of income, helping to support all of our projects. Members around the world donate money and then tea farmers, merchants or tea lovers donate tea. We connect the two gift-givers. For a minimum donation of twenty dollars a month, members receive a special tea, a newsletter and a gift. All the work involved is voluntary and the tea is donated, keeping expenses to a minimum. We have found that this Global Tea Hut connects tea lovers around the world, and that if you share in the tea with a desire to connect, you will clearly feel the community in the bowl. In joining Global Tea Hut, you can help support all our projects, drink a unique living tea each month, be a part of this community, read about the teas, this tradition and a life of tea and stay connected to our energy and activities here and abroad. For more information visit: www.globalteahut.org

The Leaf

Our free, online magazine about tea hasn't had a new issue in over a year, but it will be restarted very soon with an all-new ninth issue. The Leaf focuses more on tea information, differentiating it from these more casual/personal GTH newsletters. It is currently electronic only, though we offer free hard copies to the visually impaired. For more information visit: www.the-leaf.org

Tea Sage Hut

This is our current center, located in Miao Li, Taiwan. Each year, we host over one hundred visitors from all around the world. At the Tea Sage Hut, guests come and drink tea, eat vegetarian food and have a bed should they need it. We have weekly tea classes and daily meditation sessions each morning and evening. We also help coordinate travel around Taiwan and put guests in touch with tea farmers, tea and teaware shops and events. All instruction, room and board, and hugs are free. We operate on a donation basis, and guests are free to leave as much or as little as they like for future guests, knowing that their visit was supported by past guests and hoping to pay the experience forward. For more information visit: www.teasagehut.org

Light Meets Life

In December, we were donated three acres of gorgeous land in the mountains of Da Hu, Taiwan. The land has a waterfall, sakura trees, cliffs, views and abundant verdure. Light Meets Life will be the name of our future, expanded center. It will be a great place to learn about and drink tea as well as to meditate. We plan to have an ecological, organic tea garden for educational purposes and a communal farm to grow our own food. Our new center will be run on similar principals to that of the Tea Sage Hut, only on a larger scale.



NOVEMBER 2013

In November, shades of winter begin to set in and we shift more and more to our warmest teas: aged Puerhs, roasted Oolongs, aged Oolongs and occasionally even Shou Puerh (depending where one lives). The world is setting, and this should be a time for turning inward more and more. Maybe you want to plan the retreat you have been thinking about. Morning meditation is an excellent way to invite the winter, especially when followed by some nice tea.

This month, we enter the tenth moon which is known as the “Excellent Moon”. It is a moon suited for self-cultivation of any kind. Traditionally, this month was also a time for honoring our teachers who have given so much to us, from generation to generation. Everything we are is accumulated power: our language the product of thousands of years; our genes are millions of years descended; and even our learning is all built upon the experiences of those who have come before. Wisdom flows downhill. It is in humility that we grow. Every good teacher is also a good student. If she stopped learning, her teaching would also stop. Therefore, a good teacher must also pay homage to her teachers now and again—even if those teachers happen to be her students!

Take the time this month to tell a teacher you love him/her. Paying homage to your teacher is also honoring all the teachers before them. When we remember to respect the source of our wisdom, the wisdom itself also shines all the brighter, and we open to a greater receptivity as well. In Sanskrit, the very word for wisdom, “prajna”, literally means “pre-knowledge”, often translated as “the beginner’s mind”. Being humble and open-minded, ready to receive, is the state of wisdom and learning. When we take the time to pay our respects to our teachers, we also facilitate our learning.

This month some farmers are trimming the tea trees for next year, pruning so that a final flush will help the trees through the winter. Once every decade or so, in traditional farming (like in Wuyi), the farmer will show up to prune the trees and find an autumn flush worthy of picking. In the olden days, tea harvesting only happened once a year, in spring. So these autumn teas were rare treats. Nowadays, plantation tea is often picked three to five times a year, though we know farmers in Wuyi, Yunnan, Taiwan and Korea who are still keeping

to the old ways. If you have such a rare autumn tea, take it out and light some charcoal—share it with some friends. As the weather begins to shift from autumn to winter, a few last gatherings are great.

From now on, these newsletters are each going to contain an affirmation or a question to contemplate throughout the month. We hope that these inspire you each month, and that you will work on reaching your own potential in this Excellent Moon, which is so conducive to self-cultivation.

This month you can ask yourself:

Do I have room to grow?

All living things are growing, changing and transforming. Dead things are rigid; life is flexible. In Chinese medicine, all sickness is stagnation. We live and stay healthy in our growth. And to grow, you need room to grow. You don't report the bonsai when its roots are bursting out. Instead, you change pots long before that—there is always plenty of room for future growth. Is your space fertile for spiritual insight, fertilized by tea and meditation and watered by contemplation and prayer? Do you protect your practice from weeds? Or from predators that would eat it? Similarly, a koi fish will only grow as big as the container it is kept in. If your soul was a koi, how big would your fish be? How large of a container do you keep it in? Is it well-nourished? Where do you put that new painting which inspires you when your walls are covered? Where do I pour the tea if your bowl is already full? Ask yourself where you have room for your own future growth. Which part of your life is left open to growth and which is stagnating? These issues and analogies are all a small part of what contemplating this question “Do I have room to grow?” can encourage, so it's definitely worth thinking about, even for a month!



YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, NOVEMBER 2013

Spring 2013, Traditional Charcoal Roasted Oolong, Dong Ding, Taiwan

We love that our tea center is based in Taiwan—a small island with an abundance of magnificent teas. Although Taiwan acts as a sort of caretaker for many of the old Puerh Teas of Yunnan, it is better known for the Oolong Teas it produces. One of Taiwan's most famous Oolongs is Dong Ding (or Tung Ting) Oolong, and this is the tea we're sending you this month.

Dong Ding's name comes from the same place as the original Dong Ding bushes—Wuyi Mountain in China—and it means Frozen Summit. As the name suggests, this tea knows how to handle a chill in the air, and it can help you do the same. (There is another local story for how it got its name, suggesting that the “Dong” refers to the flexing in the calf muscles required to get up the cliffs to the trees, as it sounds identical to that word in the local, Taiwanese dialect.) Traditional Dong Ding Oolongs are expertly roasted, lending them a warming Qi and flavor that's ideal for late autumn and early winter. Better yet, they love to be infused many times, so they're perfect for warming up for a few hours in the chill of early morning or just after the increasingly early sunsets of the season.

According to local folklore, the original Dong Ding tea bushes were brought to Taiwan around 1855. Legend has it that a government official named Lin Fong Tse traveled to Wuyi and came back with 36 *ching-shin* (meaning ‘purified heart’ or ‘tender heart’) varietal tea plants. He gave twelve of these trees as a gift to a friend in Nantou, who then planted the trees amongst the gorgeous views outside the Nantou town of Lugu. Some of those original plants are still around today, and although some of them have been overly taxed by cuttings for cloned bushes, there is still reverence for them in the area, and small offerings can sometimes be seen strewn around their roots.

In the many years since the arrival of these twelve plants in Nantou, much work has gone into perfecting the processing of this distinctive varietal of tea. Nantou County tea makers (especially those around Lugu) have mastered the art of charcoal roasting Oolong and garnered immense respect for their medium-oxidized, dark roasted Dong Ding Oolongs in the past. Unfortunately, the region temporarily lost its way when lighter oxidation, unroasted Oolongs came into fashion in the 1980s, and many traditional processes were cast aside in favor of the prospect of higher profits. In an attempt to capture the high profits of nearby San Lin Xi's high mountain

Oolongs, the farmers of Lugu cast aside their traditional processes, and many lost the knowledge and skills behind traditional Oolong roasting entirely as a new generation of farmers took over. Perhaps even worse yet, the loss of traditional processes coincided with a switch to conventional farming. Realizing that they couldn't replicate the aroma of high mountain Oolong (which is, by the way, the only thing high mountain Oolong has going for it!), they began to pump their plants full of fertilizers in an attempt to increase their profit margins. Much of the land surrounding Lugu was scorched with harsh chemicals in the decade or so after this shift, and some of it remains fallow or seriously damaged today.

However, in recent years awareness of more sustainable farming methods has become not just a practice but a necessity, and the older styles of Oolong production have just begun to be revitalized by several tea masters who champion this classic style of tea. By now, most farmers in the Lugu area have recognized that overuse of chemicals is extremely short-sighted, and while purely organic production is still rare, ‘chemical load reduction’ has become the new buzzword, and an awareness of increasingly sustainable farming practices is ever-growing as farmers see the direct relationships between healthy earth and healthy plants, between their tea's desires and their own desires, and between the planet's well being and their own well being. And although traditional processing still isn't nearly so known or practiced as it once was, there is a growing support for it amongst the tea community within Nantou and amongst tea lovers around the world.

Traditional Dong Ding Oolongs are processed in a specific way requiring great skill. They are typically oxidized around thirty percent and rolled into a semi-ball shape during a process of *tsai-rou*, *tsai-pei* and *ding-shing*. *Tsai-rou* is a process of repeated rolling or kneading, requiring strength and endurance. It's often left to strapping young men who work as bamboo harvesters during the off-season. *Tsai-pei* is repeated firing and *ding-shing* is shaping. Both are processes handled by an experienced tea master who can evaluate the tea's oxidation levels by appearance and aroma at each step of the way.

After the tea has been processed, it is given a final ‘finishing roast.’ The lengthy firing process is traditionally done in a charcoal fire pit fueled with charcoal from a local wood, such as *longyen* (dragon eye) charcoal. During charcoal roasting, the tea is placed in a woven bamboo tray or basket and shaken over a stone pit. In the stone pit, embers gleam from beneath a thin layer of ash. The embers must be continually adjusted and re-



adjusted to get the right temperature and to keep smoke to a minimum throughout the roasting. And although roasting is a very physically demanding process, the tea is often roasted for as long as eight or ten hours straight by a single tea master. Using this process to produce a full-bodied, well-rounded, complex and patient tea such as ours this month requires immense skill and many years of practice. Indeed, a skillful or unskillful finishing roast can make or break an Oolong such as a traditional Dong Ding.

In Nantou, the transition to organic farming and traditional Dong Ding production is still fragile, and it needs proponents of real tea around the world to bolster it. Our Tea of the Month is not only organic, it is processed completely by hand and charcoal roasted. Supporting and sharing teas like this organic, traditional Dong Ding is exactly what we love about selecting a Tea of the Month for Global Tea Hut. We hope that you'll also appreciate that the old way is the best way in the case of this sustainable, traditional tea, and that you'll share it with friends to spread the love of this time-honored tea even further around the world!

We recommend brewing this tea gong fu and staying present with it over many infusions. Notice the way that as its aromas, flavors and Qi change as the tightly rolled leaves unfurl and expand in your pot. Feel the roastiness, warmth and strength of early infusions shift into mineral notes and a softer feeling in later steps. And listen to what the leaves want to tell you of their tale...

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.





AGED AND AGING OOLONG

Article by Lindsey Goodwin

In addition to providing a richer flavor and stronger Qi, a darker roast gives traditional Oolongs such as this month's tea another advantage over the more modern, greener Oolongs of Taiwan and China—the ability to age well.

The tradition of aging Oolong is as old as Oolong Herself. As with other types of tea, Oolong was quickly recognized to improve with age (especially in the long run). Yan Cha is traditionally aged for a while before it is drunk, and other areas of China have also intentionally and unintentionally aged Oolong over the years. Today, aged Oolongs are increasingly revered in Taiwan, where you can find Oolongs over 100 years old on occasion and more than a few decades old with relative frequency. Here, some Oolong teas are marketed as 'aged' after as few as six years of aging, but most tea connoisseurs consider an Oolong to be truly aged once it's about 30, and we've savored a few Taiwanese Oolong teas that have been around one-hundred-something years. We certainly don't expect you to age this month's tea for 100 years, but we'd like to share more about aged Oolong with you so that you can know more about what this month's tea (and other traditional Oolongs like it) are capable of doing when allowed to sit in meditation for a few decades or longer. Unless they're stored in poor conditions, most Oolongs will become incredible if you simply wait long enough to drink them.

Aged Oolongs cover a broad spectrum, and go all the way from teas that were forsaken for years up to teas that won awards and sold for enormous sums before they were aged with the utmost care for 30 years or more (in their sealed, original canisters no less). There are certain factors which influence the quality of the tea at the end of decades of waiting, and one of these factors is undeniably the quality of the tea at the start of the aging process.

Taiwanese aged Oolongs are generally made from a traditional style of rolled semi-balled Oolong, such as this month's tea. All other factors being equal, this style of tea (and other darker roast Oolongs in general) has an advantage over the greener Oolongs when it comes to aging.

One of the key differences is moisture content. Traditional roast Oolongs only have about two percent moisture content in the leaves (compared to five percent or more in greener, less roasted leaves), so they change and ferment more gradually and predictably. They are less likely to crumble into dust before their time or require excessive re-roasting to keep them from going all musty and moldy.

In order to have low enough moisture content for stable aging, Oolong tea needs a longer 'final roast'

during its initial processing. This is a natural part of traditional Oolong processing in Taiwan and it is still practiced in some parts of China, too. Although a solid final roast and good storage are enough to keep the tea aging well for many years, many tea masters also like to re-roast the tea to keep the moisture content low during aging. Some do this several times a year, every five years or at other intervals, and it's common to light up the charcoal fire pit or switch on the electric roaster upon discovery of an accidentally aged tea.

However, we are amongst another school of Oolong aging when it comes to roasting. More specifically, we don't re-roast our Oolongs at all. We find that it makes aged Oolongs taste more like roast than aged tea, and that the tea doesn't respond well to the inconsistencies of roasts (which are often done by different people using different roasting techniques over the years).

Because Oolong doesn't require moisture or oxygen to store, like Puerh does, you can age Oolong anywhere. Puerh really is best stored in humid environments, especially if you plan to age it for longer periods of time, but Oolong will happily transform wherever you live. Simply fill a jar to the brim, which reduces oxygen in the container, and seal it with wax. You'll want to put a string in the wax so it will be easy to open. If you want to check on it more regularly you can forgo the wax, but remember that every time you open the lid you are exposing it to unwanted air and moisture—disturbing the tea's meditation.

That said, we're not opposed to a roast just before it's time to drink an aged Oolong. Re-roasting the tea before brewing may dissipate some of the 'off' flavors that accumulated during aging, refresh the overall character of the tea and warm the tea up energetically, if it is done with skill. Roasting aged Oolong shortly before drinking it is relatively





common amongst tea lovers in Taiwan, and it's easy to find small, earthenware Oolong roasting sets for home use in Yingge (Taiwan's pottery town).

A good aged Oolong often has a clear surface and a color like amber, notes of prune and Chinese medicinal herbs in the flavor and aroma, and a balancing, powerful Qi. It feels silky in the mouth and smooth in the throat. It has hui gan (a minty-cooling sensation in the mouth and throat after swallowing) and a sweetness that lingers almost as if it is being exuded from the throat. Although thick-walled purple clay Yixing teapots are generally preferred for aged Oologns, a thin-walled, purple clay Yixing pot is said to be ideal for brewing an aged Oolong from Dong Ding (the

home of this month's tea), as it will elicit more aroma and Qi from the leaves. But you'll know when you're brewing it well because the leaves will begin to murmur to you of their past, present and future, speaking kindly of their many spent years circling the sun and all the while whispering hints about the illusion of time...





OLD SPRING, NEW PATH

Article by Shane “McPhane” Marrs

Where once a sage's journey to the source of spring water was but a trek beginning and ending in the wilderness, enduring as it may have been, now we begin in the concrete jungle. Where once animal trails and thickets of old growth trees pointed the way, pavement and roadside signs now guide. Where once a wizened old hand-cane supported such a trek, petroleum powered vehicles trek for us. Though there may be streetlights, front-loaders, houses and handrails along the way, where once there would have been sunlight, great beasts, wild habitat and moss-laden forest floors; though there may be sewers, stairways, ruckus, faucets and infrastructure now, where once there would have only been streams, cobblestone paths, birdsong, ladders and visceral Nature—the journey remains the same. The content along the path has altered, for better or worse (*only human thinking makes it so*), but the path itself remains for all to walk and, fortunately, it still leads to Nature's bountiful springs.

As contrasting as these paths may appear, for surely there are still springs with paths greatly resembling those of old, we are presented with a new opportunity: doing within when doing without. An inner cultivation of equanimity and awareness is required in lieu of access to the outer beauty of Nature. It's the water we're seeking, and no path, no matter the content, can be held accountable for one's intention along that path, which is to source quality water for Tea—Tea to be served and celebrated as a medicinal medium that draws us ever closer to the inner beauty of Nature, which is always accessible.

Just recently, my Tea brother and I made an early morning trek to source what we consider to be Taiwan's best spring water. We left particularly early, at 4AM, so as to reach the spring at a time when it was influenced by the Yang energy of the rising sun. Indeed, we powered our way to the foot of the mountain path by motorized scooters, passing over bridges, through tunnels, up paved and winding roads and past construction zones. Finally arriving at the point where scooters could bring us no closer, roughly six to seven hundred steps separated us from some outstanding spring water. I walked the gentle sloping path to a temple gate. Flowers dress the temple's entrance in ample arrangements. Always, it would seem, there is a great deal of temple activity: prayer, channeling, Teaching, purifying and fortune telling, I can only guess at the foreign looking rituals. It is here where we access the mountain's bountiful spring water.

One small drink, possibly whilst looking about the valley below from the temple's terrace, is easily enough to slake one's thirst. Swiftly and smoothly this water enters your body and hydrates. It has all the fine qualities of good drinking water: It has a smooth and rounded mouthfeel akin to oil or milk. It splashes to the upper palate, evenly coats the mouth, and comforts the throat when swallowed. It causes salivation, quenches one's thirst and lacks any flavor. It is also important that the water is subject to some movement, has a neutral Ph of about seven, and has a certain level of dissolved minerals. Drinking water like this is akin to drinking fine Tea itself.

One of the temple dwellers, taking notice of the unusual foreigner filling up his water container at 5AM, took it upon himself to brew some Tea. He silently gestured that I join him. It was a beautiful example of someone wanting to simply share a heart space, share a connection with another human being. There was no attempt to display conceit or show off. The Teaware was simple and the method of preparation simpler. The intention was there, and that was all that mattered. It's a bit of mystery that Tea, over the course of history, has played such an integral role in fostering human relations. What is it about Tea that makes it the second most consumed beverage in the world? Why has it been there to promote peace and settle wars? Why is it a gift fit for emperors and at the same time a medium through which social class is nullified? What quality in Tea lends itself to being regarded as the greatest of all medicinal herbs? Why this plant and not some other? I don't know, but the fact of the matter is, Tea *is* the second-most consumed beverage in the world, it *has* been there in times of peace and war, it *was* regarded as the greatest medicinal herb, and while such highly regarded qualities *might* exist in other plants, they *are* found in Tea, and to this day Tea continues to connect and heal us. Could it be that coffee or an herbal infusion might also offer what Tea does if enough mastery and appreciation were dedicated to them? Or is there something more to the specific relationship between humans and Tea? Did those Tea leaves, so long ago, mistakenly fall in to Shen Nong's vessel of boiling water? Or was there a conscious effort on Tea's part to reach out and share with us a connection that was always meant to be? More and more I am led to believe that this particular plant really was designed to commune with man. It's beautiful to think that such evidence points towards a unique and intentional relationship.



We shared silence together for a few minutes, the common language of Tea the only tongue that spoke. We finally did exchange what few words we could. He asked how old I was and made mention that he was eighty. I tried to convey that though our separation by age was great and though I don't speak Chinese, the common language of Tea could still bring us together. It probably sounded more like, "You old... me young... can't speak... we drink Tea." He just gazed at me and we drank some more Tea. The nonverbal quality of Tea in that moment spoke volumes more than my broken Chinese—just another example of Tea's ability to transcend the barriers of language, age, and culture.

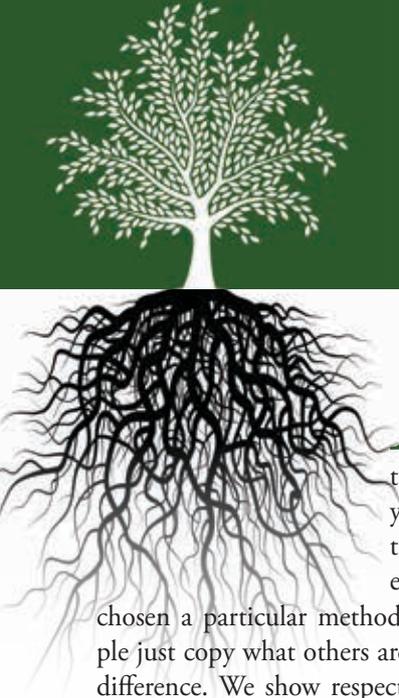
The abrasive surface of time revealed more of itself now in his darkened skin, weathered hands, graceful, slow motions and raspy voice. I paid my respects and made my way back through the temple's entrance and down the stepping stone path.

Because water is the most important element of Tea, spring water with all the qualities mentioned above is ideal. If you're simply not sure of where the nearest spring is, you can try www.findaspring.com. If you have access to spring water already, that's perfect. Sourcing a spring is also a great excuse to go out into Nature, not to mention that it will save you money and reduce the negative impact of buying bottled water. The physical journey of fetching spring water is worth celebrating and will deepen your connection to Tea.



GONGFU TEA TIPS

November 2013



As we discussed last issue, experiments are important so that tea brewing gets into you, becomes you. It is important to know where your tea practices come from and why you have chosen a particular methodology. Unfortunately, most people just copy what others are doing without trying to see the difference. We show respect to our tea by brewing it to its potential, so it is worth the effort to try different gongfu experiments. In doing so, we improve our sensitivity and skill (gongfu), resulting in better tea for our guests. In this issue we thought we would further explore this issue, especially as it relates to adaptation in your tea brewing.

It is curious to see that most gongfu traditions brewed tea consistently for a few hundred years and then a tremendous number of possibilities opened up in the 1980s. What is behind this shift? A greater interest in tea? More availability of tea and teaware? Why did so much variation happen at that time? Not understanding the changes that have occurred in tea brewing over the years is a bit like believing in a religion without understanding its history and the changes that have happened over time. In tea, most of the changes have occurred in the spirit of 'quick and convenient'.

It is important that you understand that you will have to develop your own brewing style, and that Tea wants it that way. She wants to be adapted to suit your life and the people you brew tea for. That is great. In our tradition, we practice adaptation and welcome new insights. However, it is important to understand why and where our changes come from. Otherwise, there is no skill, no "gongfu", and tea brewing is reduced to 'however you like it'. Quite the opposite: we try to avoid any changes that come from the ego, learning to listen to Tea instead. Mastery in any art is about adapting to the medium. As Michelangelo is often quoted, the sculpture is already in the stone and the artist just removes the excess. Similarly, the key to mastering tea lies in asking how the tea wants to be brewed, rather than how I want to brew it! Making changes based on egoic desires will not result in more skill and greater tea brewing skills (gongfu). If, for example, you are in love with your pretty red cup and you love it because Sam gave it to you, but the Tea itself is screaming that it doesn't want to be in that cup, you are stuck. Your skills have stagnated because you recognize that the tea would be better served in another cup and aren't willing to adapt. All your respect for Tea is manifest in better preparation, and more rewarding gongfu tea sessions. If you gave Michelangelo a new and better chisel, he would immediately start using it, no matter how sentimental he was

about the older one. If the new chisel actually and honestly made better sculptures, he would have to adapt for the sake of his art. Therefore, do not get stuck in adapting your brewing methodology to suit your ego.

The second kind of adaptation to avoid is, as we mentioned, those in the name of 'quick and convenient'—the banes of modern life and the vultures of culture. Tea is about slowing down. Gongfu tea means with skill; it means doing things the right way. If you love tea, then you want to take the time to master it—you want to improve your ability to serve Tea. Choosing quicker and/or more convenient methods of brewing is how so much traditional tea wisdom has been lost, and why tea brewing has changed so much in the last twenty years. Next month, we will talk about a specific example of this.

Alan Watts used to joke that rich people don't want to take the years necessary to master sailing enough to actually enjoy a yacht, so they park them in the harbor and throw cocktail parties on them. A more modern example of this would be buying an expensive camera and setting it to 'auto'. Take the time to master Tea, and to learn to do things properly. Make sure your adaptations come out of the spirit of Tea, and are in harmony with the way Tea wants to live through you. This is as relevant a question as how Tea fits in your life. In that way, you won't stop changing and growing, improving your gongfu skills...

恒温静心 (*Héngwēn jìng qīn*) -

Preserving the temperature, begin to absorb peace;

动轻揉运 (*Dòng qīng róu yùn*) -

with soft, graceful, gentle movements;

心無別向 (*Xīn wú bié xiàng*) -

and a heart free from distractions;

一氣呵成 (*Yī qì hē chéng*) -

everything is finished in one breath.







TEA COMPETITION

Article by Kaiya

Recently, I was asked to participate in something that sounded so strange to my ears as to be almost incomprehensible. A tea-brewing “competition”! Wu De has often told me I don’t realize how special I have it, coming directly to the Tea Sage Hut from almost the first moment I began my journey with tea, because I didn’t spend any time wading through the big ‘tea world’ out there. As a result, almost all the teas I’ve ever drunk have been real, organic, Living Teas right from the start, and my whole perspective on tea has been cultivated in the medicinal and connective spirit of tea. In many ways, this has left me a bit unappreciative and also naïve to some of the other kinds of tea energy that is out there. I knew of course that farmers will often pit their teas against each other to see which one is best, to get prizes and renown for their products, but for some reason it never crossed my mind that there might also be competitions in brewing.

Naturally, my first reaction was one of aversion. Being at first glance so completely opposed to the spirit of sharing and connection with which we always brew our tea here, I wanted to refuse. The whole idea made no sense and even seemed “wrong” to me, and I felt as though going there would automatically be a misrepresentation of our tradition. I also felt that the best way to represent our tradition would be to decline to go. If I must go, I thought, then the next best way to represent this tradition would be to intentionally fail. Naturally, when I voiced this aversion, Wu De was only all the more tickled to send me off to this lovely event and encourage me to do my best to win, and I suppose that recognizing how polarized I was against it was ultimately what helped me realize it must be what I needed. So I went ahead and jumped into it with enthusiasm and determination to brew the best cup of tea that I could.

Now, I should mention before we go on that actually my participation was for a good cause, and Wu De wouldn’t have asked me (I don’t think) to go if a very good tea friend of ours here, (a Taiwanese master in his own right whom we love and respect,) hadn’t asked him as a personal favor. As such, just going was also an act of service as it helped increase the “international” status of his event, and I got the impression that it also just made him feel good to do what he thought was a favor by getting us entry, and it would have been very rude to deny him an opportunity to demonstrate his influence and so on.... (It turned out all the Taiwanese competitors had to pay big entry fees and also qualify in a sub-competition to make it to this final point.) Still, I wanted to make sure to flow with it and cultivate

insights for myself out of it all, rather than seeing it merely as an act of service.

At first, I thought about the energy behind such an event, and what a pity it was that all these tea people had been brought together in such a way. Now it isn’t as though there were dirty looks and people slipping salt into their competitor’s teapots and such. I don’t think Tea would ever allow such an atmosphere to arise, even at an event such as this one. But I couldn’t help feeling that it was a shame the spirit of the gathering, indeed the necessary motivation to bring these people together, had to be one of competition and self-gain rather than sharing. I wondered what it would have been had it been an international “tea sharing” instead of a competition.

For most of my life, I’ve engaged in competition. Competitiveness was first nature to me. No matter what it was, I was always looking for opportunities to “win”. And the fact is, no matter how much you may respect another competitor for their abilities, or even respect the sport itself, there is always a difference between a competition and a casual game amongst friends. And pretty much everyone has seen what happens when someone gets competitive in such a game: it totally changes (sometimes even ruins) the atmosphere. And what is that atmosphere that is lost when the competition comes in, other than a sense of family/friends getting together to have fun and be together? It’s pretty difficult to be both “against” in the sense of wanting to win, and “with” in the sense of wanting to connect with your friends.

This contrast, to me, is very reminiscent of one of the most common themes of discussion for us, which is that of bowl tea and gongfu tea, equanimity and sensitivity. One of the main reasons new students here drink bowl tea for an indefinite period of time is that people who drink only gongfu tea tend to become very imbalanced towards questions of quality, comparisons and other sensitivity-based modalities. This imbalance then leads to snobbery, and an inability to connect to people through tea, because the heart of the brewer is missed through all the questions of this vs. that. It’s as though there is a little mini tea-brewing competition going on in the head every time such an imbalanced person sits down to tea- comparing tea, teaware and methodologies. Bowl tea also more naturally puts one in communion with the spirit of tea, with the more “internal” aspects of tea, using as few “man-made” contrivances as possible. On the other hand, gongfu tea is still very important because without developing our sensitivity, we remain unaware of our shortcomings and areas that need work, and we never grow. Not to mention we are beings of both internal and external realities, and so of course it is neces-



sary to focus our attention on both from time to time. And gongfu tea isn't necessarily external any more than bowl tea is necessarily internal, but that's a topic for another day.

This is a discussion that we've had a million times here at the Hut, and have even discussed here in these newsletters before. I wanted to review it a bit because, actually, even after all those discussions, it wasn't until I went to this event and experienced it for myself that it really started to fully hit me. As I said, I was pretty naïve and came more or less directly here, so as much as we talked of this phenomenon, I hadn't seen it very often, and the result was that I saw a deeper aspect of it I hadn't known about before. Extreme focus on the external, sensitivity-based side of tea practice, ironically, doesn't result in deeper sensitivity to tea: it actually superficializes it! It doesn't seem very logical. You would think that if Person A spent 50 hours drinking bowl tea and 50 hours drinking gongfu tea, and Person B spent 100 hours on gongfu, Person B would at least have stronger sensitivity and a deeper understanding of that side of tea, off balance though they may be. But that is not what I saw at the competition.

The evidence of weaker sensitivity was everywhere. It was in the *chaxi*, which were all the same, as though they had come out of an instruction manual: they displayed harmony of colors, patterns, shapes and so on, but lacked any motivational spirit, any theme, any *reason* other than to follow the rules and formulae of aesthetics. It was in the fact that there were rules, set in stone things you could do and

you could not do or you would lose points from the judges. It was in the fact that the huge majority of the competitors spent at least 75% of their time preparing for the competition with a box of make-up and a mirror. We were literally the only competitors that day who actually made tea during the nine-hour day of waiting our turn to compete! We were also the only competitors who brought our own water, which is a really strange thing to have set us apart in a gathering of tea brewers, especially when the alternative was Taipei hotel tap water. There was even an article in the newspaper couching the whole event in terms of "Taiwan vs. the World!" But perhaps the greatest, most obvious evidence that the focus was shallow, was the fact that the person who brewed the best cup of tea, according to their own standards, didn't win the competition! That's how much value was given to the six or seven other superficial elements involved in the total score. The person who made the best tea received an "honorable mention" plaque and a small token prize only, because concerns such as their *chaxi*, the way they answered some questions about tea (knowledge of tea), their "style", personal appearance and so on outweighed the tea itself! How absurd!

So this deeper insight into the way that bowl tea and gongfu tea work together was the big lesson of the day for me. There is no doubt that most all of the competitors there probably have drunk more tea in their lives than I have many times over, and all of it was gongfu, and all of it was focused on developing an ability to find the nuances

Tea Competition

in a tea and compare it with other teas, possibly comparing teaware and brewing methods as well. But drinking tea only in this way quite naturally results in an objectification of tea, and the moment we objectify anything or anyone, the relationship becomes superficial and lacks that depth of spiritual connection that is in fact available to us in all forms, whether they have eyes to look back at us or not. We have to look for this in our tea, or suffer the consequences. And the results are obvious: when tea is objectified, there is no longer a real or meaningful connection. Without that, next thing you know there are rules and regulations, definitions, rights and wrongs, dos and don'ts, and quite poignantly and ironically, what actually makes a good cup of tea is completely lost in all the hullabaloo and seeking to grasp what makes a good cup of tea!

The good news is that this is merely the insight I cultivated out of the general energy of this event, the structure and spirit from which it arose, and didn't represent the specific people I met there as a whole. As I said, it wasn't as though people were walking around "accidentally" shoulder-smashing in the halls. Tea is Tea, and there is only so much competitive spirit that is really possible around Her. Although there was a good bit of stand-offishness and self-concern, and not much "official" time for mingling or sharing, it wasn't as though it wasn't there at all. There were plenty of smiles and encouragement and congratulations going around with plenty of good nature. And when we brewed tea, at least a few people took the time out of applying their make-up and other business to sit down for just a cup or two. It wasn't as though the competitive atmosphere stopped tea spirit from shining through, but it most certainly did get in the way. And as was to be expected, there are always those at a tea event that have absorbed more tea spirit than others.

Meeting just one such fellow Chajin is more than enough to make the journey worth it. In particular, we met one nice foreign competitor who I can honestly say had absolutely not a single drop of anything other than open beginner's mind, and was just there to drink it all in. And actually, there was a potentially good event scheduled, the evening after the competition, for all the competitors to just sit down at tables and make tea for anyone that wanted to join, including other competitors. But unfortunately it was cancelled. I imagine that had this event been scheduled before the competition, and not been cancelled, it would have been a completely different event.

In fact, I'm not even sure that the event itself is necessarily imbalanced. As with all things, the way it is approached and structured is also important. So I am open to the possibility of a similar gathering with a similar focus on sensitivity that also brings out the finest qualities of tea, while maintaining an atmosphere of a gathering of brothers and sisters. That wasn't this event (as a whole), but it could have been, and we did our best to at least represent this tradition by making it as much like that as we could, in spite of the structural obstructions that were in the way.

I can honestly say that aside from my personal aversions (which alone would have been worth facing), I jumped into this competition feet-first and without resistance. I did everything I could to make the best cup of tea possible, infused not with the spirit of defeating, but with the spirit of sharing just that: the best cup of tea I could. That was my way of participating without participating, I suppose you could say. We made a 4AM trip to a mountain spring to gather water, used a silver kettle, my best *zisha* pot, saucers and antique cups, and did plenty of experimenting with brewing methods to get the hottest possible cup of tea over the twenty-foot distance from myself to the judges (not to mention slavishly drilling my *cha-tong* Shane on the simple act of picking up the tray, walking it to the judge's table, walking back, sitting down, etc.). The result? Third-to-lowest score on "best cup of tea" out of twenty competitors! (It was our lowest score in all the categories, though we ended up at about 9th overall) So, I actually ended up where I started out, failing, although with the added bonus of failing unintentionally. And I can't deny that my third cup was quite obviously oversteeped, so that was also a great lesson about teaware and remembering that without listening to the tea, the finest water and teaware in the world are of no consequence.

Our friend, however, (who was one of the minor judges) encouraged us and said he didn't agree with the end result at all, and all I had to see were his big smiles, his thumbs-ups and the photos he kept snapping as I was brewing tea (even though he was supposed to be judging at that moment!) to know it had been time well-spent, not only for my own cultivation of insight, but as an act of service and, poignantly, connection to a good tea spirit and friend, as well as an opportunity (no matter how briefly) to touch a few kindred spirits here and there through one or two brief cups of tea.

In the end, as usual, I have my practice, and the balance between bowl tea and gongfu tea in particular, to thank for getting as much out of this experience as I did. On the one hand, I found and explored the shortcomings of the event. I didn't ignore them or pretend they weren't there, focusing only on the positives. I used them to cultivate new insights and deeper understanding of an old lesson, which resulted in growth. At the same time, I saw that it was important to be open to the possibility of inspiration even in such circumstances, and met at least one really beautiful and bright young tea spirit as a result, which gave me the opportunity to see first-hand that Tea manages to shine through and be there underneath any amount of egotistical human baggage that might be on top.





Light Meets Life

光壽無量

You might be wondering where we are on our path toward making Light Meets Life a reality. We've had fantastic support from tea brothers and sisters around the world, in particular from those we saw face to face at recent events in Los Angeles, Estonia and the Ukraine. Also, we recently handed out USB sticks to fifty potential Light Meets Life donors in Los Angeles. Each USB stick contained a funding proposal outlining who we are, what we do, what our mission is and how you can help (plus a lot of love). Over the next few months, we'll be sharing excerpts of the funding proposal with you. May it bring you much inspiration and joy!

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, cultivating and expressing an awakening of harmony through tea. Right now, we are ready to build a new tea center in the peaceful, awe-inspiring mountains of Taiwan. From hands-on, organic tea production to a collection of extraordinarily rare teas to antique and artisanal teaware, this retreat space will be not only the quintessential Asian tea experience, but the greatest tea center the world has ever seen. This is our vision, Light Meets Life.

What's Brewing Now: Tea Sage Hut

Over the last decade, the interest in tea's profound wisdom and peace has flourished worldwide. People have increasingly realized that the ancient beverage of tea offers a window into a more sustainable, spiritual existence, one filled with calm joy and deep roots. For countless people around the globe, tea has become a source of insight, a connection to Nature, a means for building relationships and community, a meditative ritual and much more, creating peace and connection in a world in dire need of spiritual healing.

Perhaps the most significant push toward a wider awareness of the spiritual side of tea in the West has been from the writings and works of Wu De and of the Tea Sage Hut in Miaoli, Taiwan. Here are some of the influences our work has had upon the world:

- Over the last ten years, what began as a home welcoming fellow tea enthusiasts has become the Tea Sage Hut, a communal space for housing, serving and teaching visiting tea students and spreading tea wisdom.
- Through Global Tea Hut, *The Leaf Magazine* and other outreach programs, we have reached over 45,000 people from all walks of life and from around the globe.
- We've sold over 15,000 copies of Wu De's tea books and freely shared tea wisdom with over 60,000 unique visitors to *The Leaf Magazine's* website.
- Our monthly publication and gift project, Global Tea Hut, has built a vibrant international community of 200 tea lovers, many of whom view tea as their spiritual path and make a point of taking a pilgrimage to Taiwan. This community provides the bulk of financial support required to maintain the current center in Taiwan.
- Based purely on recommendations from friends or readings from a few of our publications, tea people from around the globe have packed a suitcase and headed for the small city of Miaoli, Taiwan, all in search of the deep wisdom tea has to offer.
- In the last two years, there has been a 20 percent annual increase in visitors to the center, and we expect that number to grow as word of our mission spreads further.

While all of this is wonderful for spreading peace through Tea, connecting people to Nature and to each other, and building a more sustainable, enlightened world, we are on track to exceed our current capacity for visitors within the next two years. The need for a larger center has become not just a vision, but also a necessity.

[Contact](#) us for ways to support.

Shen Nong's Brew

Shen Nong means “Divine Farmer” in Chinese. He is the legendary emperor who ruled China for a thousand years, teaching the people to farm, boil water and the use of medicinal herbs—bringing them civilization. He most likely represents the collective wisdom of all the tribal chiefs and shamans of pre-civilized China. They say he discovered tea while meditating in the forest. A single leaf fell into his boiling pot of water, and he exclaimed: “This is the ruler of all medicinal herbs!”

The first cake is a 2007 organic Lin Cang Shou Puerh blended with Kun Lun snow chrysanthemums. It is very rare to find a shou Puerh that is organic and has some old-growth raw material, especially since the price of such old tree tea has gone up recently. In 2007, however, it was still possible. The five years have also helped to mellow out the tea, adding depth. Snow Chrysanthemum tea is a rare and highly sought-after high altitude flower tea from Kunlun Mountain, Gansu Province, China. The flowers are picked and sun-dried once a year (late summer), then hand-sorted into various grades. This is the highest grade available, and it brews a lovely liquor with a strong sweet and spicy flavor. It is thought that properties within the chrysanthemum flower have a calming effect that aids sleep. In the Traditional Chinese Materia Medica, Snow Chrysanthemum is said to restore respiratory fitness, regulate blood pressure and prevent cancer.

Lu Yu's Classic

Lu Yu wrote the oldest known book on tea, called simply “The Classics of Tea”. In it he extolled the virtues of tea, discussed water and fire, processing and preparation methods and a deep and spiritual love of tea. One of the most poignant aspects of the book was when he declared that tea was the only time of day that he could rest assured that at that very moment he was sharing the same activity with the august emperor himself—ultimately, expressing the equality inherent in a life of tea. The tea space is one where we leave behind the dust of the ego: our names, our jobs, our social or economic status, our gender—none of it matters in a space of one heart!

This cake is a 2013 Wu Liang. The Wu Liang Mountains peak out at about 3300 meters, making them the tallest mountains in Simao prefecture. The Wu Liang mountain range is in the county of Jing Dong, which borders both Lin Cang and Da Li prefectures. This tea is grown in the area of Wu Liang known as Zhong Cang village at an altitude of 2300 meters. The trees are around 200 years old. These tea gardens are remote and pristine, untouched by any of the environmental problems that other parts of Yunnan face.

Even when young this tea is full in the mouth giving the drinker a persistent warmth and lubricated mouth feel. It's never harsh and never drops off suddenly, thus revealing the healthy characteristics of the trees and environment from which it came. This tea will develop

gracefully through years building its character and providing the drinker with ever more complex textures as it ages.

This tea was compressed with traditional stone presses in a small tea factory near Kunming. The tea was also sun-dried according to ancient ways.

Baisao's Single Bowl

Baisao was an eighteenth century tea sage whose bright spirit illuminates our tradition in more than name alone. A Zen monk for most of his life, at the age of forty-nine he traded in his robes for what was paradoxically the more Zen-infused life of a roadside peddler of tea. His bowls were steeped in the ancient and priceless Spirit of Tea, unclouded by money, theory, ritual or even mind itself—a spirit from before the first fingers plucked the first leaves. And those who came by his wayside hut just might have passed by the old man so strangely donning the crane robes of an ancient Taoist hermit, but for the way the spirit twinkled invitingly in his eyes or the softness of his hands as he poured his tea into worn and cracked bowls... And after such a bowl, the passerby left changed somehow, though perhaps not able to grasp the importance of what exactly had shifted their perspective. Commenting on the famous poem by the tea saint Lu Tong called “Seven Bowls” in which Lu Tong describes the higher and higher reaches of each successive bowl of fine tea, Baisao cheekily declared that “Old Lu Tong needed seven bowls to get there, but you'll only need the one of mine...”

The last cake is an Ai Lao. These mountains rise to about 3200 meters, making them second only to Wu Liang Shan as the highest mountains in Simao prefecture. The Ai Lao mountain range is in the county of Jing Dong, which borders Chu Xiong prefecture. This tea is grown in the area of Ai Lao known as Wang Jia village at an altitude of 2200 meters, making this some of the highest altitude Puerh in existence. The trees are healthy 200-year-old trees growing naturally on steep hillsides and ridges. These tea gardens are arguably some of the remotest tea gardens in all of Yunnan. Lack of roads and access has kept the environment of this area in good condition.

The tea itself is filled with hints of an orchid aroma, and a strong mouth-feel. Honey and grass essences are also present in this thick, soupy tea. This tea (in its young age) is subtler than the Wu Liang Lan Xiang cake, with less bitterness and a stronger aroma. The leaves are fatter and burlier than our Wu Liang tea. It features lots of hairy buds that make it somewhat resemble its close neighbors, Jing Gu Mountain teas.

Like the Wu Liang, this tea was also compressed with traditional stone presses in a small tea factory near Kunming. The tea was also sun-dried according to ancient ways.

If you want to purchase any of the cakes, contact us at: globalteahut@gmail.com



TEA-INSPIRED POETRY

Poems by Steve Kokker & Jasper Hermans

INTO THE MIST-IC

—*Steve Kokker*



Pause
Silence
A space widens
And into it we shift
Him and I
Separated on hardwood floor
By teapot, bowls
Tongues, hot and moist
From ancient nectar
Hold magic before
It slips into the void
Eyes fall shut
Then—expansion
Strands reach out towards boundlessness
Being becomes scattered
Dissolves into fearless bliss
This is No Mind Zone
Hovering, wordless peace
Here, matters not be it the
Rising mist from this bowl in hands
Or from the morning dew
In this primeval valley
I squint at the rising sun piercing over
Peaks which have not known human steps
I fly above these wise trees
And descend into piercings of soil, rock, roots
Expansion, ever
Expansion
Inside this infinite expanse of flesh
No longer a barrier but connector
My body cavernous, empty
Warmth spreads, again disappears
Into all things
For a long moment
Outside and in merge
Nothing
In the distant mind, now a faint panic
Senses refocus on a sound
Closer
Fabric sliding on fabric
Opposite, he shifts position
And sets bowl to ground
A gentle thud
Eyes open and a gaze
Lost and dazed
Set upon their mirrored reflection

Such beauty:
No difference
Between that which sees and
That which is seen
Tender sigh
Why can't this last?
The mind returns, valleys pull back
Bird retreats, roots recoil to far distance
Yet the noise is softer
Gentler
Than before
Softened
By the smile I see
In my reflection before me

GRATEFUL

—*Jasper Hermans*

Running,
Tumbling,
Falling.

I sit down, and take a sip.

Wind,
Blazing,
Howling.

I sit down, and take a sip.

Waves,
Crashing,
Rumbling.

I sit down, and take a sip.

Grateful,
For the teachings of Great Nature.
I embrace
Everything that is.

IN EVERY CELL

—*Jasper Hermans*

Seated
Ancient sounds
Humming kettle

Emptiness
Within the vessels
Within our hearts

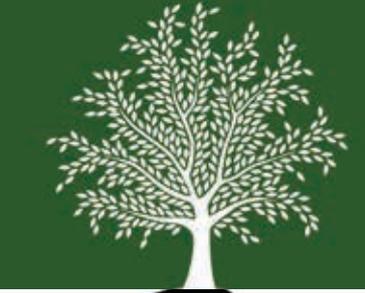
These leaves guide us
To the forest
Behind these leaves

Mother Earth
Is present
In every cell

IN EVERY STEP

—*Jasper Hermans*

To drink tea, or to sweep the floor.
That is not the question.
As in sweeping the floor, there is drinking tea.
And in drinking tea, there is sweeping the floor.
In flowing along with the river of this universe,
without a longing and desire to change its course,
I'm walking on this path together with many.
Together with every other being that acts in harmony
with the Divine.
We are radiating light;
we are peaceful warriors.
Let's hold hands,
dear sisters and brothers,
and walk on together,
enjoying every step.



TEA AS ART: PART I

Article by Lindsey Goodwin

Serving Tea is, in many ways, an art form. As someone who was trained in the arts, this is something that initially drew me toward Tea nearly a decade ago, and something which I have only recently begun to re-examine as a fundamental aspect of my Tea journey.

This month and next month, I'd like to discuss two aspects of Tea as art. The first is a topic that is given a good deal of consideration by artists the world round. It's the process of creating art, and the decisions, work and impact involved in each step along the way. The second, which I'll address later, is how working with this process of creation can elevate the act of serving Tea into the spiritual realm.

To begin, let's outline the main facets of creating art. There are six main aspects of artistic creation (including, of course, serving Tea). These are:

- **Idea / purpose** (why you make art / Tea)
- **Form** (for us, gongfu, bowl tea, etc.)
- **Idiom** (the genre or subject matter of the art)
- **Structure** (the logistics and practical aspects, such as what to include or leave out, and how to carry out a tea session skillfully)
- **Craft** (mastery, proficiency in problem solving, ability to innovate skillfully, etc.)
- **Surface** (the final touches which are most clear to those first drinking tea with you)

You could think of these aspects of creation as being layers in a sphere, with idea / purpose being the core, and surface being what is apparent immediately to someone experiencing the art form.

For most people, what initially piques their interest in Tea is the **surface**. This aspect of Tea includes a wide variety of sensory input, such as aroma, flavor, aftertaste, the appearance of the teaware, the music played or ambient sounds heard, the atmosphere of the tea space and the speaking abilities of the brewer. This aspect of Tea is rich and varied, and it's no wonder that many Tea lovers get caught up in it for years before probing the deeper levels of Tea. However, to get stuck on this level of serving Tea and appreciating Tea is a trap, one that severely limits one's ability to serve and appreciate Tea.

Generally, when people begin to get past the surface level of Tea, they get into the **craft** of preparing Tea. Unfortunately, at this stage there is some confusion between basic skill and mastery. It may be tempting to seek out formulaic approaches to Tea preparation, and to feel that brewing Tea

according to specific instructions is the way to make the best Tea. However, this is not a skillful approach in the long run, as it limits one's abilities to problem solve and innovate, and ultimately keeps one from attaining mastery. As a student of the Leaf moves along the path of Tea, he or she will likely find that cultivating one's own connection to and intuition surrounding Tea is a far more skillful way to hone one's craft than using specific brewing parameters, i.e. the usual time-temperature-amount model so heavily promoted in the West.

The cultivation of craft is something that can be done to a certain extent on one's own. However, as one progresses on this trajectory, he or she will reach a point at which **structure** becomes more and more important, and this stage logically coincides with serving Tea to others. This is where intention begins to come into play, and where sequencing, aesthetic and specific approaches to Tea preparation are used to relate to one's self and others. The structure of a tea session may be utilized to evoke a particular mindset or ambiance, to communicate a particular feeling or to transmit a particular understanding. But from the specific chaxi to the type of heating method used for water to the absence or presence of music and conversation, the way a tea session unfolds in linear time and each aspect of what is included or omitted in a given session will have an enormous effect on all its participants.

Considering and mastering structure opens up a lot of questions and opportunities for a Tea server, and almost inevitably leads into the exploration of **idiom**. Within this tradition, there are several ways we can think of idiom as applied to Tea. The most obvious is the focus on organic and/or Living Tea. When examining structure and its impact on participants in a session, the reasons for utilizing only organic Tea as a medium for creative expression become even clearer than they are when drinking on one's own. (If you haven't made a commitment to organic tea on your own already, continue drinking bowl tea to understand these reasons experientially.) But beyond that, questions of idiom deal with modes of expression which begin to emerge as one becomes more founded in his or her Tea preparation. One person's tea sessions may lean toward the light and airy, and utilize teas, music, chaxi and other elements which support that. Another person may have an innate tendency to hold tea sessions which evoke Nature, and may augment that with a style (visual or otherwise) that reflects Nature. And yet a third person may have a more austere, Zen-influenced approach which is communicated through everything from the way the tea space is arranged and adorned to the clothing he or she wears to the overall tone set since before the session even began.



Now, when you have worked with these different aspects of Tea preparation for a while, the subtleties of **form** begin to get clearer. In the realm of Tea, form refers to the style of Tea you opt to serve. You could prepare bowl tea for connecting more directly with Nature and for cultivating equanimity. You could whisk tea with the intention of elevating mindfulness, or you could brew gongfu for cultivating mastery and refining Tea preparation to its highest form of expression. Each one of these manifestations of Tea is equally useful and valid, but selecting appropriately for a given tea session requires ample experience with and understanding of each one.

With a strong focus on form, it is possible to be a revolutionary in Tea, and to completely change the way that people experience Tea. However, it can also be easy to lose oneself in the world of form (pun intended) and to lose sight of the traditions and intentions that have been behind serving Tea since before there was human consumption of Tea. This is where **idea and purpose** become essential to serving *Tea* rather than just serving tea. For some people, the reason for making tea *is* to focus on form, and that can be useful for spreading tea around the world and for changing the way people see tea. However, within this tradition, there is something much deeper to be considered when deciding how you want to approach serving Tea. It raises a question as simple as it is complex: Why do you serve Tea?

If, for example, your primary purpose is to make delicious tea, than this decision will play out in many aspects of your tea. It may mean that organic tea is not a require-

ment for you, or that the ambiance of a tea session is irrelevant to what occurs in your mouth. This focus could have a far-reaching and detrimental impact on your tea sessions, those drinking your tea, the environment and much more.

However, if your purpose is to inspire others, then this purpose will similarly drive everything else in your process of creating a tea session, all the way from your selection of tea, music and chaxi to your decisions on what to say and when to remain silent. But this focus could have a far-reaching and positive influence on your tea sessions, those drinking your tea, the environment and much more. The same holds true if your intention is to communicate peace and wisdom, to express the Divine or Tea Herself, to create of a heart space for sharing on a primarily non-verbal and emotional wavelength, to move toward global consciousness, or many of the other potential modes of working with Tea not just as an artistic medium, but also a spiritual medium.

Working with Tea in a way that returns to the spiritual roots of art is a topic I'll delve into next month... Until then, may you enjoy looking into your own approach to Tea, asking yourself the question "Why do I serve Tea?" and finding answers in each sip of Tea you take...





A RITUAL OF CEREMONY

Article by Mikki & Chris Sage

Blue skies, subtle breezes, and a warm sun danced through the bounty of trees that surrounds our enchanted nest. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in Venice and soon, our wonderful Los Angeles tea family would arrive, ready to shape, shift and turn our home into a bustling tea house. Add a touch of Chocolate and other local artists and designers and the result is a bit of pure magic!

Last year, we created the Chocolate Invitational, an event honoring our love of chocolate, with the mission of promoting chocolatiers who produce delicious chocolates while respecting the land and the people who care for it. More than just indulging in delicious chocolate all day, what I took away from this experience was how meaningful it was to celebrate the community, one where people truly honor their connections to each other and to the bounty of Nature that brings them together.

The idea for the day had been planted in late August after Wu De had paid us all a visit and we held our first community tea event in this space, sponsored by Living Tea. You see, this year for us has really been one of a growing and deepening connection to Tea, the practice and the community that have evolved around this ancient and wise Leaf. After Wu De came to town, it became clear that this was a special kind of magic that brought us all together, creating something that feels like family more and more each day. With each sip we took together, our roots became more firmly planted, the trees inside of us started to grow, and the leaves of the community blossomed.

With the help of our tea sister Tien Wu, Choclatea was born, an event celebrating our connection to the Leaf and each other. As you walked in, you were greeted with a warm embrace as you gazed around at colorful art work, perhaps catching the sweet smile of Warren, co-owner of Substantial Chocolate, passing out bits and bites of his divine chocolate. Skylar, an angel-eyed vision, enticed you to share in a seemingly endless cup of Boiled Tea.

As you made your way down the garden path to the ceremony space, you may have stumbled upon a man who some would say is the pied piper of tea, Colin Hudon of Living Tea. With his jovial smile and the extensive knowledge of the Leaf, he brought a deeper understanding to the cups you were about to share.

In the ceremony space, if you were new to tea or just had a question, my husband Chris was preparing a variety of different teas for people to compare and discuss. With the quiet sizzle of the water kettle providing the backdrop to open conversations; if this was your stop, you walked

away with an open mind and a full heart, ready for the next adventure.

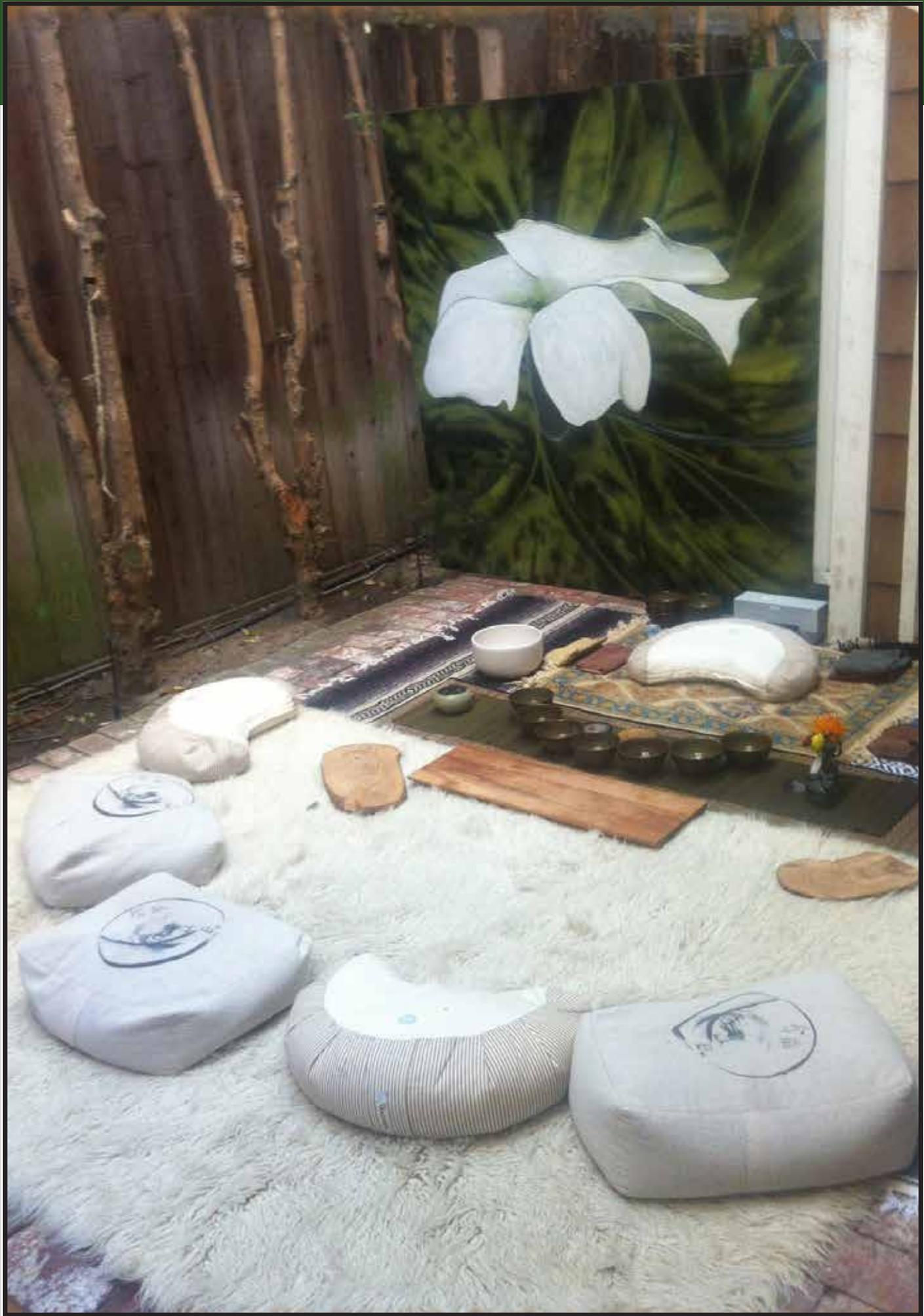
When it came time to go a bit deeper and sink into the magic of the Leaf, Tien Wu was there to guide your journey in a quiet, meditative ceremony. The tea flowed gracefully from her pot as the room sat silently, listening for the Leaf to whisper its wisdom. There is something to be said about sipping tea in silence: in the quiet, you can hear the whisper of the Leaf and begin to sense its true wisdom.

There was a lot to experience that day besides interacting with the growing tea community. Artwork by Selene and Wu De adorned the garden, gorgeous handcrafted bags by Vaalbara were on display, and the magic of Pitango and his rings were an inspiration to everyone who stopped by.

Even days you never want to end always fade into the night, the bliss carrying you out the door, back into the world. If you shared Tea with us that day, you really were part of something special. You see, Tea is many things: it is medicine, it is a beverage and it is a tool to deepen your connection to the Universe. For us, the most profound thing that tea has become is a conduit to build connections with each other. The ritual of ceremony is the catalyst and as the tea flows, so does our love for one another, sharing these moments, drifting into a deeper understanding of our human family and realizing we are all part of the Global Tea Hut...

As a community we have been collectively inspired to create a community Tea House here in the Westside of Los Angeles, so the motivation to create this event was ignited by that. The money we raised will go toward our future space and will continue to help our Life Meets Life center in Taiwan. We will be holding future events like these so please follow our FB page Haus of Sages or Living Tea for updates.

—Mikki



A Ritual of Ceremony

Like many of you, I really enjoy sharing a cup of tea with friends. There is something very special about seeing all the hands cupping the warm bowls, sharing the bounty that Tea is sharing with us in that moment. There is a profound kind of magic that unfolds in the space around the tea table—strangers, friends, lovers even adversaries... Tea is unconcerned and I doubt it gives much care about the boundaries that separate. Its purpose is simply to exist, flowing from kettle to pot to bowl—connecting them all seamlessly into a singular experience.

For many of us, in cities all over the world, sharing tea each month has become a subtle and invisible ritual in our lives. We take a moment to make space for each other, to connect, across the globe, to share a moment of bliss. Many of us invite friends over to share in the experience, deepening our affection for loved ones and those close to us through the kindness and intention inherent in the act of serving.

One of my favorite things is sharing tea with strangers. Mikki and I host fairly regular tea gatherings at our home. We have a fair amount of cherished “regulars” who we are always happy to see, but in truth it’s always a blessing when we have strangers stop by.

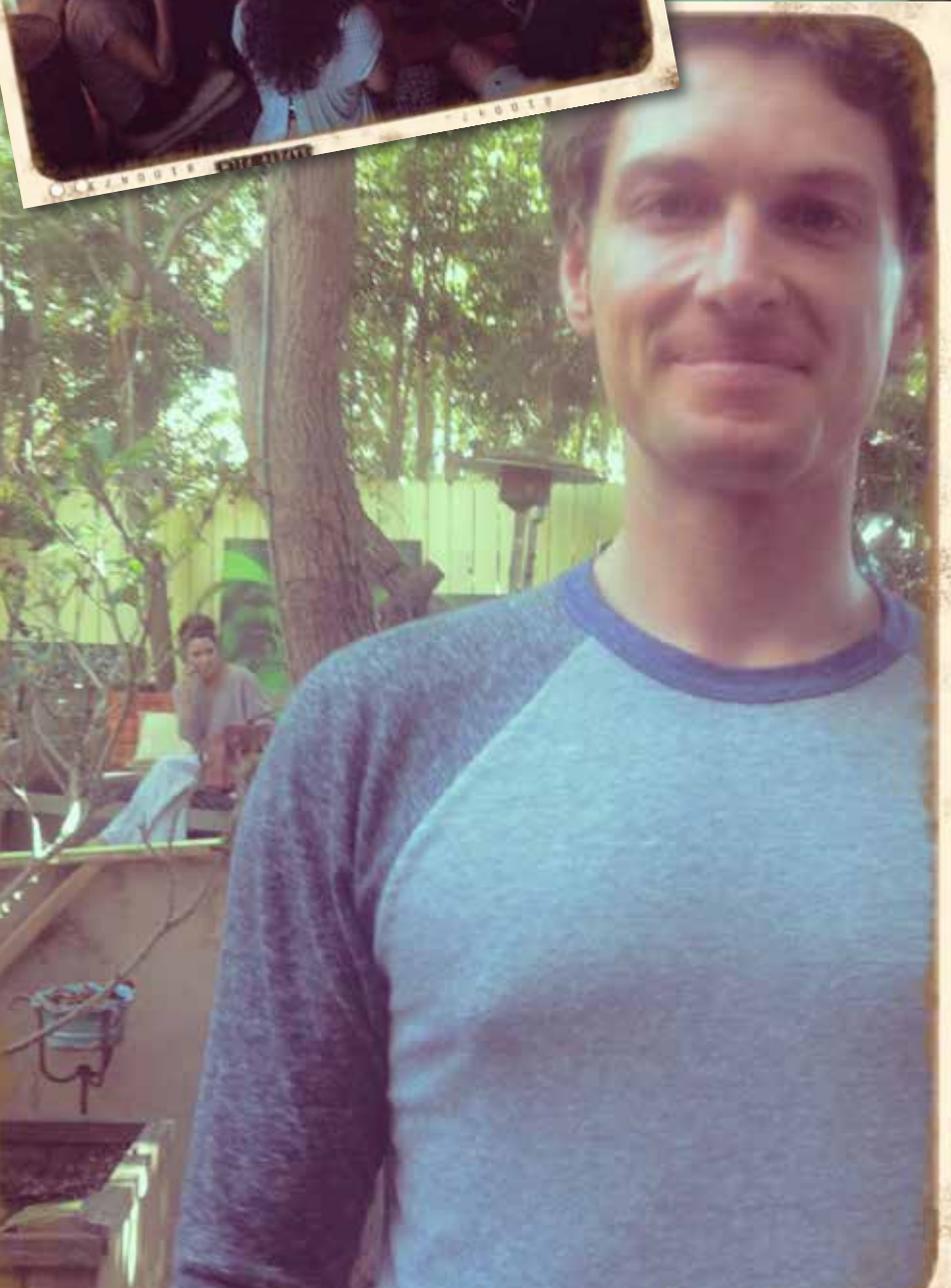
You see, our first experience with tea was in a bustling tea tent at a music festival. It was quite random really: we walked by on a chilly morning and we decided to have some tea to warm up. The whole experience was out of the norm for us: people gathered around small tables, huddled around small cups of a dark red liquor, strange statues and crystals strewn about. Where were the tea bags and mugs?

Had we wandered into the wrong place? Needless to say, since I am writing this, it’s safe to assume we had a moment of fearlessness and decided to stay a while. We squeezed our way in amongst a group of strangers and were handed our first cups of a strange brew that seemed to taste like old dirt... Soon enough, all that strangeness gave way to a building sense of familiarity; even though we didn’t know each other, we talked to each other like friends. All the concepts of separation, that I am this and you are that, began to fall away and for a moment we were all brothers under the spring sun.

This is why I cherish the stranger at the table. No matter where they are from, how they got there, how they earn their living or what their politics may be, they found their way to this space at this time to share in this ritual of humanity. Sure, the first few moments are always a little nervous, there are always questions to be answered about this strange and unusual rite. In the end, however, in a moment of silence, you can hear it: The walls crumble away and we are free to simply exist. The whisper of the Leaf tells us that we are together. We are infinite and we are all brothers under the spring sun.

—Chris







ESTONIA AND UKRAINE

Article by Wudoffsky

There is an old Chinese saying that through Tea we make friends, and it is something every tea lover can attest to: that Chajin (tea people) are some of the best people around. I have made so many great tea friends over the years, and many I would even call brothers/sisters, though I never dreamed of so many dear friends and so far apart. I have traveled a tremendous amount this year, wearied by flights and countless seminars but uplifted by all the smiles and heart-opening tea sessions. As my life harmonizes with my Dao, I find myself floating on Grace, and open to adventures again like when I was younger. I'm still not so interested in the tourism of the places I visit; it's the Tea that inspires me! I find immediate kinship with tea brothers and sisters, no matter how wide the cultural or linguistic gap. Tea people are always hospitable, always cook great food and always give out loving hugs.

This trip furthered my belief in the medicinal power of tea to transcend differences and teach in a way that everyone can incorporate into their lives. No matter what tradition a person comes from, they find tea wisdom to be their own. I always say that while all the other traditions are oracled by people, and therefore culturally, linguistically and temporally specific, these sutras are instead written in the veins of a leaf. They are written by Nature. And they are nonverbal, which means they transcend boundaries. You could say you don't want a bowl of tea I offer you, but it would be absurd to say you don't agree with it or don't believe in it. When we teach in words, people can disagree. They can say they don't believe in the concepts we are suggesting. But Tea says everything in a deeper way, and you can translate it into any language, any tradition or value system. If you put a Buddhist, Christian and Hindu in a room and they discuss religion or their respective worldviews, they will argue. But if they go into that same room and drink tea, they will emerge brothers and sisters. I have seen it, again and again.

This trip I did a very special event with a brother named Un Ryuu from Ukraine. He studied Shakuhachi in Japan for some years and our Ukrainian hosts arranged for a night of tea and flute. We drank a beautiful Five Element tea boiled and served in bowls, while Un Ryuu stunned us with visions of bamboo, flowing water and valleys rolled up in mist. Everyone was very present, awake and at ease—tranquility flourished like the growing notes that sprouted from his stunning bamboo flutes. For around ninety minutes the only sound was the clinking of bowls, the satisfied slurping of meditating minds and the transcendent flute, which reminded us all to not

drift too far away by occasionally rising in pitch the way a strong breeze would remind a still grove of bamboo. At the end, after so much silence, I was asked to speak briefly. It seemed everything I could say would intrude, so I said just that: I expressed how grateful I am that Tea is my vehicle of self-cultivation as well as my means of expressing my Zen. Un Ryuu and I really have it made, because we can express our Zen in a nonverbal way, which allows us the luxury of avoiding any arguments or disagreements. The Tea is just there, present, as is the music. You can't argue with it or refuse to believe in it. It just is what it is. Of course, I speak in my seminars, but I make a strong effort to use a universal, secular language that—as much as possible—is in concordance with the universality of Tea. I haven't so far met anyone who disagrees, especially since I repeat so often that the answers are in the Tea; that all my wisdom came from brewing Tea; and that I am only translating Her message to the best of my ability.

They say that Zen began after the rainy season when all the monks were assembled at Vulture's Peak for a discourse. The Buddha never said a single word. He only raised a single lotus in his enlightened hand, a legendary twinkle in his eye. And there was one student who heard that magnificent teaching: a slight grin and a flash to equal the Buddha's streaked across the eye of Mahakasyapa. From him this great enlightenment was passed down from teacher to student until the twenty-seventh master, Bodhidharma, brought it to China where it was to prosper, spreading and growing in Korea and Japan later. Bodhidharma clarified the four foundations of Zen: 1) direct, nonverbal transmission from teacher to student; 2) no doctrine, no dogma or reliance on scripture; 3) Zen must lead into the heart of a human; 4) Zen must reveal the Truth of Reality and Nature. Because of the first two aspects of Zen, it has always relied heavily on the arts to convey itself, most especially Tea. While Zen can be transmitted in 'Zen Buddhism' it is sometimes inhibited by it as well. Actually, the word 'Buddhism' was first used in 1805, and by a British author. The Buddha didn't teach Buddhism, and the idea of distinct religions was foreign to Chinese and Japanese who had, and often still see no problem in having Buddhist monks over for a funeral, praying for wealth at a Daoist temple and visiting a church on Sundays. For that reason, archery, calligraphy or Tea often say more about Zen than a lecture on Zen Buddhism every could.

There were a total of twenty-three events in Estonia and Ukraine, and all in seventeen days. Over the last few years, and lots of experience, our events have



Your Estonian tea sister: The amazing, magical and gorgeous Triin!

distilled into four varieties: The first are what we call ‘tea ceremonies’ or sometimes ‘tastings’. These are usually around two hours. There will be a period of silence with bowl tea followed by a small lecture. If there are a lot of people we boil tea; otherwise we put leaves in the bowl or use a side-handle pot. Ideally, I like these to be eighty minutes of silence followed by a forty-minute lecture, but I adjust based on the audience and their relationship to the Tea/Silence. The second and third kind of events we do are half-day and full-day workshops, sometimes called ‘seminars’. In these, I try to provide a balance of what I call ‘Heaven’ and ‘Earth’, meaning I focus on the practical aspects of tea, like how to brew or how to hold the bowl, while also discussing how to use tea as a means of self-cultivation and to shift one’s lifestyle starting that day. I hope that people who come will either begin a spiritual practice through tea, or deepen whatever practice they already have. Finally, we sometimes have parties—

usually with boiled tea and food in a social space and then a silent, sacred space outside or in another room where people come and sit for three bowls. In that way, people shift from a sacred experience to a party, creating a more conscious kind of social interaction. These usually end in a lecture, as well.

This trip we did nine tea ceremonies, including the most beautiful one with the flute, and eight workshops. The ceremonies were all packed, and some even had thirty people, so I made a lot of boiled tea (often Five Element tea based on Shou Puerh). The seminars also went really well, and we shared a lot. One of them was for older students and was designed to delve deeper into gongfu tea. Everyone had a chance to brew, and Ivan was thrilled and tickled—giggling his way to Heaven at the chance to be around so many gongfu tea discussions!

Estonia & Ukraine

In Estonia, the tea community has deepened and grown since my first visit last year, and I was happy to see so many of my soul family there. Siim, Timo and the stunning Triin, who work with Steve at Chado, did an amazing job organizing everything (the food was awesome). It was inspiring to see a deepening in their tea practice, improvement in their brewing and understanding of tea as well as a stronger commitment to serve more tea after I left (poke!).

This year, I have to admit that I have cried a few times, and find myself moist-eyed as I type these words, as I see one of my lifelong goals coming true. I seem to have been called to teach more in Russia, Estonia and LA—for whatever karmic reason—and I have always hoped that these communities would connect more. This year, I saw the seeds for that planted. Of course, I am so proud and brag about all of you to each other, so the three communities know all about each other. It is the honest truth that I only ever accept any compliments about my teaching because of how amazing my students are. That isn't false modesty: there are so many of you that are worth three of me + a pot of old Puerh! So, everyone had heard about everyone else. (For example, the female Russians have a big crush on the great Alec Breedges and the male Estonians seem endeared to Skylar.) With a joy and pride brimming my soul, I saw this year many of the Russians come to Estonia and meet the people there, and the man behind everything in Estonia, Steve, also visited LA this year and met all the wonderful tea brothers and sisters there. I hope to see more of this in the coming years, including large annual gatherings at our new center once it is built!

As it turns out, while I was in Estonia, there was a nice tea event happening in LA, and the pictures just helped confirm these sentiments. Everyday, I feel more and more like this is *our* vision, not Wu De's.

The turnout in the Ukraine was also amazing, and I met many new friends. Dasha and her husband Teras were great translators. I was worried because it was the first time I had ever taught to Russian-speaking people without my beloved Maximushka there to translate for me. They did an amazing job, though. Dasha also speaks Chinese with an incredible fluency, maybe better than some Chinese people even. Teaching through a translator is always an awesome experience because you have to slow down, and you can breathe and be more present to the people as they receive the message. Usually, one is talking at the same time as the audience is receiving, but such pauses allow me to focus on how they are absorbing the message. And you can tell a lot about the quality of the translation by watching the listeners to see how they are receiving the teaching. When you have given a teaching many times, you know how people usually receive it. Amazingly, I usually find that Russians receive things more deeply. The Ukrainians were like that too.

I had a small break on a Sunday morning in Kiev and Steve suggested we go to see an old church. The people there were in the middle of an Eastern Orthodox mass, and it was one of the most stunning experiences of my life. I find Greek Orthodox a bit more mystical than Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodox even more than Greek (I am no expert, though). There was a full choir and a huge two-story Mary painted on the wall, gilded in gold. I was moved to deep silence, and hand on heart I cried, saying some prayers for some of you specifically.

Seeing Ivan, Dennis and Katya in Estonia and Ukraine was a treat. Steve, Ivan and I had a ton of laughs, joking on and on into the night, even though we were exhausted from the day's event. Ivan and Steve both have wonderful senses of humor, and our Ukrainian host Sato was hospitable enough to join in the hijinks. (If you see Ivan, ask him to share a *bowl* of tea with you and tell you about what a "Puerh Gopnick" is.)

As awesome as this trip was, it was also great to return home, knowing that I have *five months* at the center. I have two books to work on, and so many lovely visitors on the way (hopefully more)! It is a dream I have strayed into: imagining how I could devote my life to tea and do so without getting involved in any of the business side of selling tea or teaware. I believe deeply in the need for free tea centers, starting here in Taiwan but hopefully soon elsewhere too. I also believe that the medicine of Tea can help awaken this world, connecting us to Nature, ourselves and each other. I always say that everything I teach can be distilled in six words, and if you understand these words you won't have to wait for me to return or come to you and have a workshop. They say everything:

Earth
Sky
Spirit
Plant
Medicine
Tea





Each month we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you 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. This month we thought you should meet our poet—the quietest and most serene tea drinker in GTH, Jasper Hermans.

How to introduce myself here to this amazing family which I'm so grateful to be part of!?. Okay, I'll give it a try... Once upon a time, long ago (actually last February, but it feels like years ago), I made plans to travel to Taiwan. And two weeks before my departure, while being lost again in the sometimes challenging and dangerous combination of two worlds: Internet and Tea, I stumbled upon the Tea Sage Hut website. I stayed one week at the center, and after being away from the center for less than a week, I felt that the only right thing to do was to go back and stay until my flight home to Amsterdam. I knew pretty soon that this was and is my home and family. Now I continue this path, step by step, trying not to take too many steps at once in my sometimes youthful impatience. And after three "break" years of working, traveling, staying at spiritual communities—of which two became my home, Plum Village and the Tea Sage Hut, I'm living together with my parents and sister in a town close to Amsterdam where I'm doing one of the most horrifying things I could imagine: going to school. (Actually tea and meditation pretty much transformed my fears about studying completely... Well, almost.) I have been trying my best to open my heart and space to anyone whose spirit is ready to meet and become one with the spirit of the Leaf and Mother Earth. Although at times I feel like I'm the only person on this path of Tea here in this piece of land we call the Netherlands, I never feel as if I'm drinking tea alone. Even when I'm not so fortunate to share tea (as I do often) with a true bodhisattva with whom I live under the same roof—and is also my biological mother—I'm always sharing my bowls and cups with many of you. And often while sipping tea I smile to you, because I know that you're there, and I'll do my best to be there for you too!

Here is a poem that I wrote recently on the plane back to Amsterdam while crying tremendous tears of joy and gratitude, after an incredible week together with Wu De and the amazing group of people in Estonia. Thank you all so much for sharing tea with me every day. Whenever one of you finds her or himself in Holland, you're very much welcome to come by and share some bowls, hugs, words or anything (even in between a transit at the airport—I'll bring the tea and bowls along)!

*The tears I shed today are the tears of thousands.
Thousands of beings whose paths we cross along the way,
And thousands of beings who are healed by the love from
Mother Earth every day.
These tears are also tears from Mother Earth.
Tears of compassion for the beings that have forgotten that they
themselves are Mother Earth,
And tears of gratitude for the beings who light up this uni-
verse.
Tears of only God knows what, as words can't describe where
these tears are coming from.
May we recognize each other in every sip, breath and step.
I bow deeply to you and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.*



The Global Tea Hut website has a forum, 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 a great video series online. There are many videos about this tradition, tea brewing, the center and Wu De's travels and work. They are all very inspiring to watch. You can visit our Youtube channel. We are launching videos all the time so check back!



There are currently 200 people in Global Tea Hut from all around the world: countries including Spain, Thailand, Russia, Estonia, Australia, New Zealand, America, Canada, USA, the U.K. and Taiwan. Our accountant, Kaiya the Magnificent (and Merciful) says that things are abundant nowadays so we should all live happily everafter, forever and ever! We are contemplating and discussing what will happen as more people join and what to do with energy, trying our best to be great stewards of your love and money!



If any of you are interested in seeing these newsletters in full 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 peek 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 have changed all the shipping to unregistered post due to an inflation in the cost of Taiwanese shipping. What this means is that you won't have to sign for GTH anymore; it will just be left on your door or in your mailbox. This may mean that some get lost, and we can't track them, so you will have to let us know if you don't get your GTH.



Wu De is not traveling to Estonia, Ukraine, LA or anywhere else. He is hanging around the center smiling huge ear-to-ear grins while making tea, working on his books and contentedly laughing from the belly!



As you can see, we are shifting our GTH services around: changing the format of these newsletters and the printer. (Hopefully you see this as improvement—we do!) We also had to switch envelopes, as the post office doesn't make the old ones anymore (but that means we can draw on the new ones). Please contact us or use the forums and let us know what you think!



Our center here in Miao Li, Tea Sage Hut, has a new Shennong. He was the last tea sage we needed! We have Baisao, Bodhidharma, Guanyin and Rikyu. Now with an awesome Shennong, all the traditions are represented. It is masterfully carved in clay and cast in copper sometime around 100 years ago in Japan. Come and see!

www.globalteahut.org

www.teasagehut.org

www.the-leaf.org

Be happy!



OUR PROJECTS

Our Center (Tea Sage 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 storage “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 (Light Meets Life)

- ~~Mountain land (We got it! Check this one off)~~
- Building (we will need from between 1,000,000-2,000,000 USD)
- Gardening (Including landscaping, Tea 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 need around 500 USD worth of equipment (Contact us if you have some equipment to donate)
- We are also looking for alternative ways to better host/share our videos online