

Global Tea Hunt

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

March 2014



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In March, we turn the corner of this new lunar year. As the firecrackers finally die down, the cold retreats from Taiwan and the rains approach. The changes in the weather and world are so much stronger this year, magnified by the support and encouragement we've felt to expand this magazine and gather resources to begin building the world's best free tea centers! Like the weather, it seems as if a great force encircles our center, crackling the air with energy waiting to be released.

In the last two months, we've sent out a record amount of envelopes, including all the gifts to many of your friends. We are growing, with your help, towards our goal of two thousand members by the end of the year. And in exchange for all your help, we decided to make the turn to full color early—before our previous goal of five hundred members! To be honest, at this stage it is an expensive shift, but we wanted to demonstrate our commitment to making this Global Tea Hut experience more worthwhile to receive, as well as to share with others. We think that showing up with an even better magazine will incentivize even more growth. And besides, there are still a lot of amazing improvements to come, including more and varied teas, greater support and connection with organic farmers throughout China, Taiwan, Korean and Japan; and also more varied articles, ranging from tea events to tea regions, history and folklore to interviews with famous tea lovers. Of course, we don't plan on losing the personal charm, community or spiritual depth these magazines bring either!

This is still very much a community to us, just a growing one! And that means that we are still open to submissions from any of you for coming issues. We would also like to encourage you to contact us more often with questions or topics you'd like us to write more about. We are thirsty for your criticism, knowing that if we want more tea lovers to be inspired by this magazine your opinions and input will help us make that happen. The move to color also allows us the chance to utilize more photography, as well as to highlight more teaware, art and Nature in print!

Aside from sending us with questions, topics of interest you'd like us to write about and/or articles of your own, the most important ways you can help are to share these Global Tea Hut teas with your friends, show them the magazine and share how rewarding the experience is. Hopefully they will feel as you do. If you are interested,

we are also trying to coordinate some exposure through online social media (contact us for details).

Some of you have been asking about the shift to a full-color magazine as it relates to the environmental footprint Global Tea Hut will have. As most all of you know, we are committed to sustainable, organic and living teas. All of the teas that come in these envelopes are exclusively organic, grown in harmony with Nature (though not always certified). We are just as interested in maintaining this philosophy with regards to our magazine, packaging, as well as the ways we build and maintain our free centers. We are researching alternative printing methods, ink, etc. for the day when we are a bit more financially free to choose how and where we print these issues. If any of you have any knowledge in this field, please contact us with ideas.

Putting down the news and the ongoing need to promote and expand this vision, there is a shining heart of gratitude. No matter how big Global Tea Hut gets, let's make a promise that we never forget one thing: that we are all here together, real people around the world sharing tea together each and every month! *We don't do this every month to sell tea or a magazine, but to drink tea together with all of you—even if it be from a distance!* Let us always remember why we showed up in the first place. Remember the early days? Remember when the intros to these issues were on the cover? If you don't, have a look at the past issues that are up on our website for free. In those days, we often started with a poetic metaphor of entering the large tea hut, sitting around the circle and sharing some bowls. Though we've grown up, and even have color all around, let us once more turn the corner of that winding trail to find the large gathering of all our tea brothers and sisters from around the world. They're almost all here...

Come have a seat. The tea will be ready soon...

For questions, more information, or to submit an article of your own, contact us at:

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2010 TEA NUGGETS, SHOU PUERH

SIMAO, JINGGU COUNTY, YUNNAN, CHINA

Last month we began exploring the world of black tea, beginning our journey via Liu Bao tea from Guangxi. As we mentioned at the time, this genre of tea is characterized by post-production artificial fermentation. We also belabored the point that what is so often called “black tea” in the West is actually red tea. black tea is darker and fermented, whereas red tea is oxidized to a high degree. (We’ll explore the differences between fermentation and oxidation a bit later on in this issue.) Before the seasons change, and we move on to lighter teas, we thought we’d have one more foray in dark/black teas, choosing one of our favorite teas. We hope that this tea will provide us the opportunity to discuss many interesting facets of black tea, fermentation as well as the opportunity for you to have a beautiful session with an amazing tea.

In the latter half of the 1960’s, factories in Yunnan were looking for a way to artificially ferment Puerh tea. Up until then, Puerh was almost exclusively fermented by natural aging. We say “almost” because there are some aboriginal tribes that have been using bamboo, burying tea, roasting and a few other methods to artificially ferment Puerh, and they’ve been doing it for quite some time. But, for the most part, Puerh was an aged tea.

When we started drinking Puerh in the early 1990’s, a tea was considered “mature” when it was at least seventy years old. In those days, aged tea wasn’t as expensive as it is today. It was also readily available, so we rarely drank tea younger than seventy years, except to check how it was aging. In those days, tea lovers weren’t so interested in young *Sheng* Puerh. The reason why seventy years was considered “finished” or “aged” was that at around that time a tea slows down significantly with regards to its physical characteristics, like aroma, flavor, mouthfeel, color, etc. As *Sheng* Puerh ages, the differences between years slow down. In other words, the difference between a new *Sheng* and a five-year-old one is very obvious, and so is the difference between five years and ten. Then, as time progresses, the difference between fifteen and twenty years is less obvious. After that, we may notice changes every ten years or so. And, finally, when you get to around seventy years the changes in the color of the liquor, the flavor and aroma are so small year to year that the tea was said to be “mature”. Of course, the tea continues changing after that—the Qi grows stronger and stronger, as if the tea is meditating. And you may even notice difference in the flavor, though only between several decades. Anyway, nowadays, as aged *Sheng* has become rarer and more

expensive, tea lovers have defined “aged” to mean twenty or thirty-year-old tea (or even less).

Having to wait seventy years for mature tea is a long time. Warehouse storage in Hong Kong or Guangzhou could speed up the process, but factories in Yunnan were interested in creating the dark, fermented flavors their customers in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan enjoyed. They therefore began studying the processing of other black teas, most especially Liu Bao, as mentioned last issue. In the early seventies, their research concluded, they applied for a license to produce the first artificially fermented Puerh tea. Officially, this began in 1973 or 1974, depending on whom you ask. This tea became known as “*Shou* Puerh”, which is often translated as “Ripe Puerh”, as opposed to “Raw” which is *Sheng*.

One of the amazing aspects of fermentation, whether natural or artificial, is that the microorganisms from place to place are completely unique, and cannot be reproduced. This is the main reason that wine, liquor, cheese, etc. from a particular region cannot be reproduced elsewhere. The bacteria, yeast and mold involved in the fermentation of Liu Bao tea are exclusive to that region, producing a tea that is very unique. To a beginner, the flavors of *Shou* Puerh, Liu Bao and other black teas, like those from Hunan, may all be similar. With more experience drinking them, however, you begin to see that they are very different. Similarly, the differences between an aged *Sheng*, which is naturally fermented, and a *Shou* are also quite distinct the more you get to know them.

When the processing of black tea was brought to Yunnan, the unique microbiology there, coupled with the old-growth, big leaf trees made for a new genre of tea. You could argue that if the factory owners were attempting to mimic the flavors of naturally aged *Sheng* Puerh, then they failed. What they did succeed at was creating a new genre of Puerh, and one that has to be evaluated on its own terms.

Both *Sheng* and *Shou* Puerh start out as “rough tea (*mao cha*)”. As we’ve discussed in many issues before, Puerh tea is grown in the humid forests of Yunnan, the source of all tea. The tea trees there are covered in bacteria and mold even before the leaves are plucked. As a result, Puerh tea has a deep and meaningful relationship with the micro-environs, fermenting like no other tea on Earth. The tea is picked and withered outdoors. It is then fired, to kill green enzymes that make tea bitter and arrest oxidation. This process, called “kill-green (*sa qing*)”, is traditionally done in a large, wood-fired wok. Puerh is fired



This month's tea in cake form

at a lower temperature than many of kinds of tea, which keeps certain enzymes around that are good for fermentation. The tea is then rolled (*rou nian*) to break down the cell walls and shape the tea. At this point, the rough tea could be sold loose-leaf, compressed and sold as *Sheng* Puerh, or go on to become *Shou* Puerh, like our Tea of the Month.

If the tea is to be *Shou*, it is piled about a meter high, dampened with water and often covered with thermal blankets. The heat and moisture allow the bacteria, mold and yeast to get to work. We think it is a shame that modern people have a tendency to dismiss that which science has a working explanation for. In other words, when we find out that the Northern Lights are a meteorological phenomenon caused by the Earth's magnetic field, they somehow lose their charm for certain people. However, being able to explain why a phenomenon occurs in Nature isn't any reason why it should be considered bland, or dismissed as "ordinary". The fact is that the changes that happen to Puerh through fermentation, whether naturally aged or artificially, are completely magical! It is stunning that these yeasts, molds and bacteria can interact with these leaves and create the amazing differences in our tea drinking experience—on every level, from aroma and flavor to Qi and spiritual depth!

The piling of *Shou* Puerh is called "*wo dui*" in Chinese. Typically, during the fermentation process to

make ripe Puerh the pile is kept wet to facilitate microbial growth, and turned every few days to help create an even degree of fermentation. The tea is moved from the bottom of the pile where it is hotter and wetter to the top of the pile where it is cooler and drier. Depending on the degree of artificial fermentation, the tea will be piled for different lengths of time. Nowadays, this process lasts around forty-five days.

We have found that most modern *Shou* is fully fermented, whereas the *Shou* Puerhs made in the 70's, 80's and up to the mid 1990's were only partially fermented. This allowed them to age. In fact, many of these older *Shou* teas could be convincingly brewed as aged *Sheng* and the beginner wouldn't be able to tell the difference. Also, the quality of these partially-fermented *Shou* teas is usually higher, as stopping the piling at the right time requires more skill and more careful monitoring of the process. The careful monitoring of this month's tea as it was piled, stopping the fermentation at a certain point, is one of the characteristics that make it great.



Smaller Cha Tou are often better

Our Tea of the Month is a very special kind of *Shou* Puerh that, until very recently, wasn't often seen outside the factory. This month we'd like to share with you one of our favorite miracles of this artificial fermentation: *Tea Nuggets*, called "*Cha Tou*" in Chinese. *Cha Tou* are leaves that ball up and get stuck together, usually near the bottom of the pile, where the temperature is hotter and there is more moisture. Also, the weight of the tea causes it to compress (just like Liu Bao, which often compresses into four large discs, as Liu Bao is pushed into the large baskets). Traditionally, these nuggets weren't often used in the commercial lines of *Shou* Puerh offered by factories. Since the early 2000's, however, more of this tea has begun to reach the market; and for good reason!

The best nuggets of *Shou* are smaller in size, and haven't over-fermented. Most of the *Cha Tou* in yesteryears weren't used because they weren't picked out of the piles and therefore always over-fermented. Nowadays, they are a treat, and are often picked out of the pile early to produce fine teas like the one we are all going to share together this month.

Our Tea of the Month was harvested in Spring of 2010 in Jinggu County of Simao Prefecture (recently renamed "Puerh"), Yunnan. The tea was then stored and piled/fermented that August-September at the Jinggu Tea Factory. Afterwards, the tea nuggets were allowed to mellow out until mid-May of 2011, when they were compressed into bricks at the Kunming Tea Factory, the first factory ever to produce *Shou* Puerh—back in the early

1970's! The bricks are highly-compressed using hydraulic machines, since the little nuggets need a lot of pressure to stick together.

These little nuggets are the most active micro-climates in the piles of tea that become *Shou* Puerh. The liquor is creamier, richer and darker than ordinary *Shou*. They are also more "patient (*nai pao*)", which means that they can be infused more times. The tea tastes like sweet dates or even chocolate, creamy and rich. Be sure to use very hot water, as the nuggets don't open so easily. You may even want to try boiling a bit of this tea, maybe to start with or even after you brew it a few times in a pot.

We find this tea to be so warming, creamy and earthy that it brings us into our hearts, dropping our energy to the ground. It makes you want to sit cross-legged on the floor, and reminds your guests where all life on this planet starts from—the soil! The Qi descends in Yang swirls, and invites you to ground yourself. It is one of our favorite Winter teas, and we always have some at the end of Winter in farewell to the dark teas and dark days. We also find it satisfying, almost like soup or a meal. The warmth of this tea is best shared, of course. Whether you share it with friends or not, remember you are sharing it with all of us together—hundreds of us now, and from around the world!



Serving this month's tea to some guests ►





OXIDATION & FERMENTATION

BY ROBERT HEISS

The manufacture of tea is a series of integrated steps that starts with freshly-plucked leaves and ends with what we in the trade refer to as ‘finished’, or ‘made’ tea. The seven classes of tea (green, yellow, white, oolong, red, black, and Puerh) have several steps in common (such as plucking, primary sorting, finishing, etc.) as well as other aspects that are unique to only one or several particular finished tea(s). Oxidation is one of the latter, a chemical process that must occur in the manufacture of several of the classes of tea, and prevented in others. In fact, the world of tea has historically been divided into two broad categories based on whether or not a finished tea has been oxidized.

Oxidation in Tea

First, let’s define oxidation: Oxidation is a biochemical, enzymatic activity during which oxygen is absorbed by and subsequently causes changes to the host physical matter. In the case of freshly plucked leaf for tea, this is plant matter. Oxidation can be spontaneous or controlled and cause positive or negative change. A familiar example of spontaneous negative oxidation is what happens when one cuts an apple or banana and leaves the cut side open to the air. The exposed cells absorb oxygen, soften and turn brown. This is a very simple form of oxidation that most people have witnessed. Left undisturbed, the fruit may simply air-dry or it may rot, depending on the atmospheric conditions present in the room. Similarly, cutting an apple into slices and drying these in a dehydrator is an example of controlled oxidation, occurring within the process of drying. The browning of the cut surfaces is not considered aesthetically pleasing in the marketplace, so sulfur compounds or citric acid are sometimes used to mitigate the color change, but oxidation occurs in this situation even without a visible change in color.

During the manufacture of tea, both spontaneous and controlled oxidation occurs. Spontaneous oxidation occurs during the withering phase of the manufacture of white, oolong, and red teas. An exacting phase of controlled oxidation is one of the most important components of the manufacture of both oolong and red teas. Green and yellow teas are prevented from oxidizing by meticulous drying and/or frying techniques.

Oxidation is a chemical process that requires an abundance of moist, oxygen-rich air. For red tea

production, oxidation rooms (or chambers) must provide ample humidified air to guarantee complete oxidation. The polyphenols in the leaf (tea catechins) bond to oxygen molecules, particularly during the early stages of oxidation. Oxidation in tea manufacture officially begins during the withering stage as spontaneous oxidation, and then accelerates gradually during the subsequent steps necessary to transform fresh leaf into finished red tea. After several preliminary steps, prepped leaf is ready for the controlled oxidation process that is often *incorrectly* referred to as ‘fermentation’. Several chemical reactions that together comprise oxidation take center stage now under the controlled environment of the ‘official’ oxidation phase in the manufacture of red tea. In traditional oxidation the sieved leaf is spread out in a thin layer (maximum 2 to 3 inches, or 5 to 8 centimeters) on the floor of the factory, on tables or perforated trays that are similar to the withering troughs used during the (earlier) withering stage. The oxygenation of the polyphenols stimulates them to start the series of chemical reactions that ultimately yield the flavor components and cup characteristics that we expect in red tea. During the first and most important period of the enzymic oxidations, the enzymes polyphenol oxidase and peroxidase act on other polyphenols to produce theaflavins. These red-orange compounds then react with more polyphenols to produce thearubigins, the chemicals responsible for changing the leaf’s color from green to golden, coppery, or chocolate brown. The thearubigins, meanwhile, are also busy reacting with some of the amino acids and sugars in the leaf, creating the highly polymerized substances that develop into the various and distinctive flavor components that we expect in red tea.

In general, theaflavins contribute to the brisk and bright taste of red tea, while the thearubigins are what provide strength (depth or body) and color. If the temperature of the leaf is allowed to rise too high, the controlled oxidation will rage out of control; and if it falls too low, oxidation will cease.

At this point the oxidizing leaf takes on a new moniker in Indian/Western tea classification: “*dhool*”. Oxidation requires two to twenty-four hours and is controlled by experience, not by science. Although there may be technical markers for determining a prospective end to the process, so many variables come into play that the best method for concluding that the proper oxidation level of the leaf has been reached is to rely on the experienced nose and eye of the expert monitoring the process.

The tea producer must control the thickness and raking of the leaf, which determines the exposure of the surface area of the *dhool* to the air; the ideal ambient temperature (85°F, or 29°C) and relative humidity (98 percent); and the ventilation (ten to twenty complete changes of air per hour). Also, the environment must be completely hygienic; bacteria must be prevented from ruining the *dhool*.

During oxidation the *dhool* goes through a predictable series of flavor profiles: brisk, high color, and overall strength. The tea maker can direct the *dhool* into a particular style by adjusting the length of time allowed in oxidation in combination with regulating the temperature/humidity of the oxidation chamber. Most tea is manufactured to yield a balanced cup showing bright liquor, good intensity in the aroma, and a solid full body. When the tea maker has determined that the *dhool* is oxidized to the desired level ('fully oxidized' is a degree, not an absolute) the critical phase of controlled oxidation is halted by the final process of red tea manufacture: drying.

Fermentation in Tea

Fermentation is an important component in the fabrication of Puerh and other aged teas like *Liu An*, *Liu Bao*, some Oolongs, etc. Therefore, any discussion of fermentation in tea manufacture ideally focuses on—and is well illustrated by—the manufacture of Puerh. So let's examine what fermentation is and why careful, expert fermentation is so integral to the manufacture of traditional, high-quality Puerh. While it is one of the oldest and simplest forms of tea production, the world of Puerh is complex and exacting, to the extent that volumes have been written on the subject by Asian tea experts. However, we will not examine the specific complexities of the different types of Puerh manufacture here, as this article seeks only to offer a more general description of fermentation and oxidation.

Fermentation is microbial activity involving one or more types of bacteria, molds and yeasts. By definition, fermentation occurs most readily in the absence of oxygen, though exposure to some is ideal for aging Raw (*Sheng*) Puerh. The leaf that is being transformed into Puerh must be exposed to bacteria (or have bacteria present inherently) in order for fermentation to occur.

As is the case with the fabrication of traditional 'hard' cider or Roquefort cheese, the bacteria necessary for microbial activity to commence is present naturally, in the atmosphere and/or on the interior surface(s) of the chamber in which the fermentation occurs (the cider-house or cheese-curing cave). In the case of Puerh, the bacteria required to both initiate and maintain fermentation are potentially present during several aspects of its production:

1. On the surfaces of the leaf of the old-growth plants themselves in the primordial forest where the large-leaf tea trees grow—most famously in the mountains

of the Xishuangbanna district of southwestern Yunnan Province, China.

2. In the controlled environment of the tea-production rooms in which the 'Raw' (*Sheng*) '*mao cha*' is temporarily stored as it awaits compression; in the piles of *mao cha* during the artificial fermentation of Ripe (*Shou*) Puerh; and finally in the humid steam-enriched environment in which the cakes are compressed.

3. To a lesser degree, in the monitored curing rooms where *Sheng* Puerh cakes are stored during post-fermentation and aging.

During the fermentation phase of Puerh manufacture, several important factors must coalesce. Following the harvest of the appropriate leaf, there should be 'wild' bacteria available on the leaf itself. This will range from 'very little' to 'an abundance' (#1 above). Leaf destined to become Puerh ('*mao cha*': withered, fried in a 'kill-green' (*sa qing*), kneaded (*ro nian*), and then partially-dried leaf) is bagged and stacked to await compression in bacteria-friendly steam; or in the case of Ripe tea (*Shou*), piled in a room whose exposure to the elements is traditionally controllable (#2 above). Unlike the shallow, porous piles of leaf created for oxidation, the mounds of *mao cha* that encourage the artificial fermentation of *Shou* Puerh are stacked thickly, densely and with minimal surface area exposed. The critical bacterial activity being encouraged at this point requires some oxygen replenishment but, as with a mulch pile for a vegetable garden, the *mao cha* pile is stirred infrequently, allowed to rest and generate the heat desired to encourage the multiplication of microbes and the paced decomposition of the leaf. Thermal blankets are often used to cover the surface and further encourage the process. Careful and methodical stirring periodically maintains the proper surface area exposure, temperature and minimal oxygenation of the tea in the pile.

It is somewhat understandable to imagine the early confusion regarding withering, oxidation and fermentation. Seeing piles of leaf on the floor being stirred and piles of leaf in troughs or on slats being turned, early tea traders may have been easily confused as to what processes were occurring during the rudimentary, artisan tea manufacture they were viewing (compounded of course by the reluctance of the Chinese to explain their 'secrets'). However, over the last 75 years much has been written, and definition has been accomplished as to the clear differences between these processes.



Robert Heiss is the owner of Tea Trekker and co-author of "The Story of Tea; A Cultural History and Drinking Guide", written with his lovely wife Mary Lou Heiss.



INTO A RETREAT CELL HOW TO STORE TEA

One of the most influential skills that goes into gongfu tea, and into making a cup of fine tea is actually not even an aspect of tea brewing. Between sessions our tea sits in storage, and how, where and in what kind of container we keep our tea can influence the liquor as much as any of the teaware, water or brewing skills we employ. Some tea is meant for long-term storage, and will require its own set of guidelines as it progresses through many years or even decades of change. We might write more about aging Puerh, Oolong or other teas in another issue. For now, we would just like to discuss the storage of teas that you are currently sharing with people, discussing how to store the tea between sessions.

A few basics of tea storage that apply to all tea are regarding temperature, light and smells. Tea should be kept in a cool (not cold) place where it is dark. If it is bright, not only will the light influence the tea, but there is also likely to be temperature fluctuations as well. Tea is very, very sensitive to smells. Some tea gardens in Yunnan were interspersed with camphor trees to help repel insects, and as a result the tea develops a distinct camphor aroma

and flavor. Actually, you could put a single rose blossom in a huge jar of tea and if you opened it after some years, you would find that all the tea tasted and smelled of roses. For that reason, the kitchen is usually an awful place to store tea—it's full of smells, cooking, oil in the air and spices, all of which may change your tea.

Basically, you could think of tea's trip into the jar as analogous to going on a meditation retreat, and imagine all the things you would want to provide yourself for a successful sit: You would want to be calm, undisturbed, dark and peaceful. Tea is also very sensitive to energy. In the 1990's/early 2000's, we conducted many experiments aging the same Puerh tea in different environments to see if we could then detect the energetic influence. We distinctly remember one such experiment in which several tongs of tea were kept in different people's homes, a shop and a temple in which three monks were living hermetically, meditating and praying throughout the day. The tea stored with the monks was distinct enough that all twenty or thirty people could pick it out from the others blind, in a taste test where each tea was given a letter so the participants wouldn't know which tea was which. So aside from keeping tea away from light, temperature fluctuations and any kind of smells, you'll also want to keep it somewhere with good vibes!



While the foil-lined bag your tea probably came in is decent for short-term storage of tea that you plan to drink up, it isn't ideal for a long period. Getting a jar is the best. For now, you will want to choose a jar with a tight lid. (Some teas require oxygen, like Puerh and black tea, but we'll talk about all that another day.) Different clays can influence your tea, so you'll also want to get a glazed jar so the tea is not in direct contact with the clay itself—unless you are sure the clay will have a benign or even beneficial effect on your tea.

This month's experiment is about testing the different kinds of storage. Try taking twenty or thirty grams of the same tea and storing it in a few different kinds of jars (or more tea if available). You might want to try leaving some in the foil-lined bag just for comparison. For us, we would try a porcelain jar, an antique porcelain jar, an unglazed clay jar, an antique pewter jar and an Yixing clay jar which is also unglazed. You can add any kind of jar or container to this that you wish.

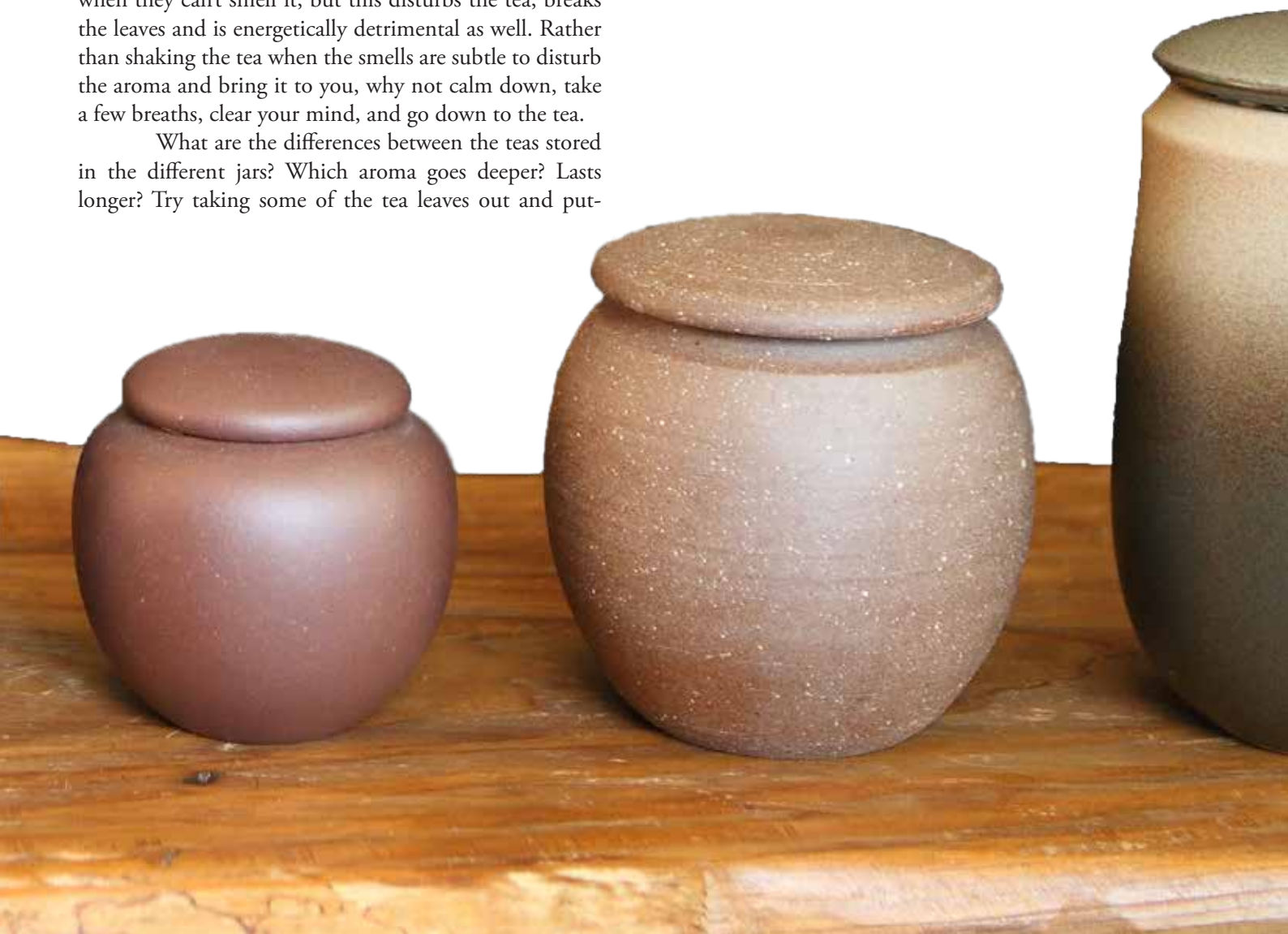
You can test the tea at any time really, but you will have to be more sensitive to notice the effects after only a short time. If you are really interested, you might test the teas every week or so. Otherwise, wait at least a few months, leaving the tea undisturbed for that time.

When you open the tea, try smelling it. Breathe in deeply, then place your nose over the jar and inhale as slowly and deeply as you can—slow is key! (Be sure to exhale away from the jar.) People often want to shake tea when they can't smell it, but this disturbs the tea, breaks the leaves and is energetically detrimental as well. Rather than shaking the tea when the smells are subtle to disturb the aroma and bring it to you, why not calm down, take a few breaths, clear your mind, and go down to the tea.

What are the differences between the teas stored in the different jars? Which aroma goes deeper? Lasts longer? Try taking some of the tea leaves out and put-

ting them in some small porcelain cups, smelling them there in order to be objective. You might also want to try removing the leaves entirely and smelling the different jars empty, as this will also provide you with some interesting experiences.

Be sure to let us know what you've found! We are also interested in learning from your experience storing tea in different containers.





THE BEGINNER'S MIND

BY LINDSEY GOODWIN

Like good Zennies, we at the Tea Sage Hut often practice “Beginner’s Mind”. This means approaching everything (especially those things you think you “know already”) without preconceptions, and with an open, eager mindset. It is an understanding that you can never really understand, and a practice of approaching everything, everyone and every circumstance as though it is for the first time (because it surely is!). At the Hut, we are sometimes gifted with visitors who are very new to Tea, and who look on with great enthusiasm and the wisdom of a mind unburdened by answers.

As someone who spent years around tea before focusing on insight, I built up a lot of preconceived ideas about tea, so I find spending time with tea newbies to be especially instructive. From them, I can learn so much about approaching each tea session as the singular event that it is, and appreciating each tea deeply and fully for what it is (rather than what my mind has labeled it and reduced it to).

In January, one such guest arrived. Her name is Vera. In the weeks since she arrived, she has gone from a total tea novice to one who clearly sees the wisdom and beauty in tea, and from a total stranger to a dear tea sister—we get to know teas like people, slowly becoming great friends. About a month after her arrival, we sat down for a session with this month’s tea, the tea nugget brick.

Vera is an ideal companion for a “Beginner’s Mind” tea session such as this, and this month’s tea is also ideal for such a session. It’s similar to other *Shou* teas, and yet it’s different from your usual *Shou*. It’s also much less common than other *Shou* tea, so it’s easier to have a session without thinking you “know it already”. (Hint: You don’t! None of us do!)

And so we sat down one evening during the Chinese New Year break for some silence between the sporadic bristling of firecrackers in the night air, and some quietude found in the bottoms of our tea bowls. The kettle leisurely worked its way up to a rolling boil, and we (remembering that it is a holiday) restfully reclined on tatami, listening to the hiss of air rising through the water, and the hiss of rockets rising through the air.

We drank two bowls. Upon filling the side-handle pot a third time, the kettle was spent. I offered Vera a third bowl—doubly filled, mine empty—and went to fetch more water. When I returned, we broke silence to talk about the tea.

“So,” I asked, “what do you have to say about this tea?” And, oh, what her Beginner’s Mind had to share! She

spoke of the tea not as flavors and processing, or matter that you drink, but as feeling and experience and spirit. She said it was like being deep in a forest carpeted with rich, dense soil and sitting across from Mother Earth in human form. This vision of Mother Earth, she said, was voluptuous and dark and comprised of moss and wood and loam, yet also colorful and vibrant.

If ever I had a firm reminder of why drinking tea with only your mouth is not the way to go, this was it. I could kiss my “notes of old-growth forest” goodbye! Her description of drinking this tea was so filled with the wisdom of direct experience and so inspiring that it brought me back to my very first experience of drinking tea.

This memory is one of the most significant memories of my life, and I have told its story at least a hundred times. As with so many stories, the story and the actual memory can become two different things over time. But in honor of Beginner’s Mind, I decided to tell Vera the story as though telling it for the first time, from my actual memory of it rather than from any previous telling of it or preconceived idea of what it “meant”... and this Beginner’s Mind approach to storytelling ended up completely shifting my perspective on this formative event in my life and on my relationship with Tea.

I told Vera of my move to vegetarianism at age five, and how my parents were supportive, but at a bit of a loss about what to feed me at times. I told her about when my father took me out to dinner at a nice Chinese restaurant without my younger siblings, and how I felt like a such a grown-up sitting at the table with the starched tablecloth and the foods which seemed so exotic to me then. And I told her about how after the meal, the waiter brought out a pot of steaming hot tea with two heavy, white, handle-less cups.

My father poured the Puerh tea carefully into the cups, almost comically so, emphasizing to me that it was hot and that I needed to wait a few minutes before drinking it so I wouldn’t scald myself. He said that he had never drunk a tea like this before. He sniffed the steam. I did the same, trying to grip the rim of the cup without burning my fingertips. After some moments, he took a tentative sip and closed his eyes in a peaceful, almost dreamy, way. “It has the taste of the earth after the rain,” he said. I tilted my head and then smelled my cup again. I had never really thought about what things tasted like before. Food was always just food, and drinks were always just drinks. I took a tiny sip of the black liquor, and a



The author and Vera sharing tea

whole world opened up before me. Yes, the earth after the rain! Nature was there, in that teacup. The earth after the rain was there, in my sense memory, and perhaps in something cellular that lives in each of us before we even begin to form memories of our own. And it was there in those leaves steeping in the teapot. (After all, did they not grow out of the earth and rain?)

As I related this memory to Vera, I realized that in approaching it anew I had gained new insights from it. For years, I had been telling a story about an opening up of perception of *flavors*. But that's not what happened at all. "The taste of the earth after the rain" goes far beyond a flavor sensation. It is a connection to Nature. It is a connection to Life. It is a connection with Tea as a communicator of great wisdom and experience. And this is not only what my father had understood upon first drinking Puerh, but what I had understood so clearly as a child, before I had formed all kinds of ideas around what Tea is (supposedly) all about (but not really).

Inspired, I decided to make a firmer practice of drinking and serving tea with Beginner's Mind. Each time I pour, steep or sip, I will recognize that each tea session is distinct from all others, and even if I drink a tea in the morning, "the same tea" is a different tea that afternoon. Indeed, each bowl is different. Each sip is different. Each leaf is different. And each one holds a world of experience, and of wisdom. We just have to be ready to receive it with

an open mind, without any preconceived ideas about what it has to tell us.

This month, I challenge you (and myself!) to drink Global Tea Hut tea (and all teas!) with a Beginner's Mind. Forget about the tasting notes and the processing. Kiss your "creamy mouthfeel" goodbye! Instead, go into the full experience of the tea without any ideas of what it's all about. Who does it connect you to and where does it take you? What does it tell you of Nature and Beauty and Truth? What words of wisdom do its leaves whisper? Let go of what you think the answers will be and see what happens when you allow Tea to guide you!



WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT TEA?

BY WU DE

What do you love about Tea? The more I answer this oft-repeated question, the surprisingly deeper it becomes. If you're like me, there may be a lot you love about it, making it hard to know where to start. Or it may be that you haven't ever thought about why you love Tea, just knowing that you do. On the surface, that's what we all have in common: a love for the Leaf. We all gathered here because of it, and it's often startling how many deep and lasting friendships you can discover and enrich through Tea. But what I want to talk about is another, more profound thing we all share in common—one that's a bit subtler than our shared love of Tea, though intrinsically bound up in it. You just have to peel away the layers of our common passion for Tea.

No matter what you love about Tea, from the catechins and flavonoids of the chemist, to the exquisite flavors and aromas of the sensualist, from the deep spiritual peace to the great conversations and joyous friendships—no matter what you love about these leaves, it got into them through the stem, the branch, the trunk, the root and the earth, the sun and the stars. That isn't just sentimentality; it's literal. And it inspires me to ask you a very real question: *How do you love a leaf without loving Nature?*

I have been drinking tea for decades, and in that time I have experienced a very real decrease in the quality and availability of fine teas. As cups and bowls pass by, marked by a few silver strands in my beard, I begin to feel a heavy weight on my heart, on my greatest passion, for this Leaf: I feel the burden of tea lovers past and future weighing on me. I feel those who have come before us, and handed down these trees—their very genetic heritage—as well as the processing methodology that makes such an amazing variety of teas. And those who have handed down the brewing methods, of my tradition and of the many other beautiful tea traditions in China, Japan and Korea—I feel them all staring down at me with furrowed brows, wondering how I could stand by and allow unsustainable tea production based on deep and lasting greed to end these traditions, deep spiritual heritage that goes back thousands and thousands of years... Turning the other way, I look ahead and see the same distraught looks on the faces of those tea lovers to come. They wonder why they don't have any tea to drink; and how, after thousands of years, we could so selfishly stand by and allow such a rich culture and spirituality to die.

I love discussions of teapots, tea and how it's processed, history and folklore as much as the next tea lover. I also adore the taste of a fine cliff tea, the feel of an old Yix-

ing pot and the exquisite invitation that glimmers across a nice *chaxi*. But what does it all mean without tea? When your child is sick, you don't speak of which kind of culture to expose them to in the coming year or what kind of fashionable clothes to dress them up in. When your child is sick, there's only one conversation in your house: *medicine and healing*.

Just about every day I ask myself about my decisions, my support and effort. Am I doing enough? Are we justified any pleasure at all when such momentous changes are occurring in our world? I wonder. And I know these issues aren't limited to the tea world. They affect us all, in every area of our lives.

I think that we need to start seriously rethinking our value systems. Maybe our very survival is dependent upon it. We have to begin to include provenance in our values. In other words, it doesn't matter how much pleasure a commodity brings, its value must also be determined by where it comes from and how it was produced. I think more of us are awakening to this truth, and as we do so we realize that all the beauty that we've created was made in the spirit of sharing happiness with others, whereas all our shared darkness was born out of self-seeking and greed for personal pleasure. And that's our real dilemma, not material, economic or environmental challenges. Our solution must also address this root cause if we're to truly ameliorate this modern dis-ease. As the activist Joanna Macy wisely says:

Even our scientists can see that there is no technological fix, no amount of computers, no magic bullet that can save us from population explosion, deforestation, climate disruption, poison by pollution, and wholesale extinction of plant and animal species. We are going to have to want different things, seek different pleasures, pursue different goals than those that have been driving us and our global economy.

When we begin to want different things, our value systems will also shift. It is perhaps necessary for our very survival as a species that all or at least most of us begin to want different things. Quality is, after all, an arbitrary measurement. What is valueless in one time and place may be the most valuable thing elsewhere, like water in a desert. Ultimately, the answer to the question 'Which one is better?' is another question: 'Better for what?' Is a Ferrari or a Nissan Leaf a better car? *Better for what?* We determine what has value, and as we shift our perspective



Our snow chrysanthemum Shou boiling away

towards a global awakening, wanting new things, our values will also shift. This isn't impossible. It has happened before. We can want different things, like a world where quality and value are determined by a product being produced in harmony with Nature.

As we awaken, the interconnectedness of all things becomes more than just an intellectual ideal; it's a very real truth. Every tea we enjoy represents the back-breaking labor of another person—their sweaty bandana around their wrist as they toil in the hot sun. Our tea also represents thousands of years of genetic and cultural heritage, not to mention the connection it has to Great Nature through the earth and sun, rain and wind. *Loving Tea is loving Nature*. And that's true for anything and anyone we love. Our bodies are seventy-five percent water, so if you tell me you love your children or your spouse, your mother or your father, you also love the water. And there is no more landfill "over there" where we can dump our garbage and pollution—our bodies are now the landfills as well. Since our bodies are literally made of water, the pollution and sickness in the world's water is our sickness as well. And worse yet, it will be the sickness of all the unborn children yet to come.

There is another truth, which is that the Earth doesn't have any pollution problems or climactic problems. This planet has only one problem: *people*! If there weren't any human beings in Taipei, it would be green and full

of birds and deer in just decades. And just as the earth's problems are in humanity and not the environment, our problems cannot be distilled in political or economic reform. Humanity isn't blighted by politics. Our disease is a heart disease. You heal the heart, and you heal a person; you heal a person, and the world is that much more healed. And as spiritual practitioners, we have to begin to be aware of all the invisible costs that come with all our choices. Every time we drive, we contribute to global warming; every tea we drink comes at a price. This is a globe, and an interconnected one, so it is not acceptable to pride oneself in a movement towards environmental cleanliness in the United States when that cleanliness has come at the expense of moving all the polluting factories to China.

Our bodies work in harmony with the environment. We breathe in the air, drink the water and our energy is the energy of the plant kingdom. The trees are as essential for our survival as any of the organs in our body, and just as the organs in our body survive through cooperation, we must also cooperate with the natural world. It is no longer okay for me to sit in beautiful surrounds and drink tea casually without being conscious of my body's connection to the body of the world. The tea I drink must be produced in a way that is sustainable for future tea lovers, is healthy for me and the Earth, for I know that I cannot have one without the other. If I am to be healthy,

What do you love about tea?

the tea I drink must also be healthy. And though it seems beautiful and peaceful here in my tea room, it actually isn't peaceful at all if the very purpose of the room, the tea, was produced in a way that is violent to the Earth. All the decorations and accouterments in this room are but weapons of greed and destruction if my tea is harmful to myself, my guests and our Mother Earth.

Though such a perspective seems strong, it isn't motivated by guilt or finger-wagging preaching. I am motivated by love—a deep love for Tea! And I think that real change comes through love rather than guilt, anyway. Sometimes I have to exhale and accept things as they are, sitting back in peace with my organic tea and sighing with contentment. Sometimes that is the best thing I can do for everyone—enjoy my tea and smile at the next person I see. Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, quite poignantly said:

To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is itself to succumb to the violence of our times.

If we don't keep our heads up, and our hearts positive, we become a part of the problem. If we get angry with our brothers, we just fill the world with more hate, when our very real heart problems are only going to be healed with love (and a little tea). Maybe it's alright just as it is, my Tea seems to say—each sip deepening a sense of completion... Still, we have to stand up for what's important. As the Hopi say, "We are the ones we've been waiting for!" It is up to us to commit to organic, sustainable tea production. As time goes on, and the quality and availability of fine tea goes down, I find that this point becomes more important than anything else. And tea has taught me to look for the costs of any of my enjoyments in life, recognizing that pleasure which comes at the cost of future pain for myself or others is not really going to bring me any lasting happiness or joy.

Sometimes it helps me to practice getting out of a human-centric perspective—to see things from Nature's eyes. So much of our world's problems come from the self-serving mind. We have to learn to rise above the self-ish conditioning of our times. Rather than viewing Tea as a substance or a commodity that brings me joy, I like to see Her as, well... a "**Her**"! In doing so, I ask myself about what *She* wants. If you love someone, you want to serve her. And when we awaken to our interconnectedness with everything in this world, we wish to serve it as naturally as we serve ourselves, knowing that its pain is *our* pain, and its triumph ours as well. However, if you want to serve someone, you have to know what she really needs. And so I often find myself asking the questions I now ask you: What does Tea want? What does your love for Tea compel you to do for Her? I think that just asking these questions is already the beginning of a transformation in the way

you see your place in the natural world, and the way you relate to Tea and others.

No one travels to our center to see Wu De. They come from around the world because of the tea and rich tea tradition here at this center. And Tea is my master, as all of my wisdom comes through Her, and other Chajin who passed their wisdom on to me. So even if you had respect for a wisdom I shared with you, I would just pass on your bows to Her anyway. She's taught me that we are connected to Nature and to each other. She's taught me the joy in serving others. She has taught me to live simply, asking myself about the hidden costs in my actions, knowing they are influential to my world. And She's taught me that living simply also makes me happier, for I find much more satisfaction and joy in helping others, alleviating suffering and awakening people to their own connection to the heart of Nature than I ever could in any self-seeking pleasure. One of my personal heroes, Emerson, whose legacy, when measured in his own terms, finds its conclusion in great success, put it this way:

To appreciate beauty and find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, a redeemed social condition, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded.

As the kettle dries and we bow, the tea drunk and this beautiful discussion ending, we might smile at the many bowls of organic, sustainable tea we've shared together. As we leave, we should do so a bit lighter, knowing that we share something deeper in common than our love for Tea. *We both love Nature*. Just as we can't love tea without loving the Nature that made it, neither can we love ourselves, our lives on this Earth or each other without loving that same Nature that made us. And maybe if we start to have more talks about simplicity and connection with regards to tea, we can all move towards a global tea production that will make past and future tea lovers proud of us.







PUERH CHANGES LIVES

BY MIKE BAAS

How can it be that pouring hot water on a pile of leaves has the ability to make an instant connection to the Present occur within us? You don't even have to drink it for the depth to start having an effect. When you do finally drink it, you cannot predict the results.

I am partial to Puerh. Perhaps that means I'm partial to "deep Qi". The substance of Puerh seems to affect all people. Tonight, for instance, I drank tea formally for the first time with my mother. After the second cup, she declared that she was done. The same declaration was made after the fifth cup. Even on the eighth cup, she was still declaring herself "completely finished". A few cups later and my father arrived to gladly take her place, drinking cup after cup for the first time. The cups started tasting less and less of tea but by that point, everyone was beyond tea, speaking joyfully and with truth, about everything!

My small children, three and one and a half years of age, are very much drawn to the "tea party" and enjoy a watered down cup of lukewarm tea as much as any adult enjoys their piping hot cup. The next-door neighbors have become tea party regulars, putting down their cell phones and turning off their TVs to enjoy cup after cup with us late into the night while the kids run hog-wild around the house.

Puerh tea creates a calm synchronous connectedness. It immediately gives you a PhD in Taoist philosophy, yet in a common language you can share with unlearned friends. It invokes "Asian culture" in its body. It makes me feel like travelling to distant lands or ancient times is superfluous. The information it holds is consistently satisfying, in-and-of-itself. Doing nothing is never easier than with Puerh.

Sometimes Puerh decides it is time for an inward journey. I recall closing my eyes to iridescent desert palm trees swaying in the wind of my mind's eye, repeating a siren song of unrepeatable Truth over and over again hypnotically. I intently studied this image as it appeared throughout the hour of my meditation and I never quite reached the bottom. I cannot now express to you what significance was uttered but I do know that I would have liked nothing more than to continuously reflect upon those glowing trees. Like everything in Tea, it too shall pass and I ended the meditation grateful that such insight was possible and even accessible to me. And perhaps most amazingly, even in this psychedelic story, Puerh tea is so sober!

There is no moral quandary with Tea. Tea stands up again and again as something truly reputable. I can

understand why Tea passed Herself down through dynasty after dynasty, and why it demanded tribute.

The world needs Puerh tea. Mankind needs to get deeper. We're killing ourselves with our lack of attention to the simple passing of time. This age old problem is showing more muscle now. Everything is accessible yet the quality isn't really there because "we" aren't there. We have lost "being there", if we ever had it at all. I am not well schooled in today's culture, but I don't much like what I see. I feel like an old, retired man in my Tea-detachment. I understand why people retire to sit on their porches for the remaining decades.

From my porch, I'd like to invite young people to this retirement culture of Tea. I want to create a society of Tea achievers, content on sharing tea with one and with all, which means sharing authentically with one and with all. (There's barely even a sense of "other" in Tea.) Tea wants only the bare minimum in all regards. Yet Tea is so productive! It accomplishes so much at every step on the Path. I want to live in a Tea world. And I think we are beginning to see it, though it may take lifetimes to accomplish. But Tea has all the time in the world...

Mike Baas is a newer member of Global Tea Hut from Southern California. He attended one of Wu De's workshops and was inspired to begin a tea practice—one that is spreading, as you can see.

One of our favorites: 2001 8582 Sheng Puerh ▶



Inner trademark ticket (nei fei) ▶





MASTER CHEN QI NAN

BY WU DE

Most of the various approaches to tea can be classified as either scientific or intuitive. Amongst the tremendous variation within these categories, most focus on the production, history and appreciation of tea or the aesthetic and spiritual sensation inspired by tea and Cha Dao. Of course, these approaches aren't mutually exclusive, and a more holistic understanding of tea would be found in the town where these two roads meet. Chen Qi Nan might just be the mayor of such a town. He fills his work with passion and artistic integrity, capturing the spirit of nature and the silent Dao. But Master Chen couples this aesthetic force with his background in science, bringing a unique function to the preparation of tea. This harmony of beauty and function has made him and his work famous in Taiwan.

Master Chen was born in Jia Yi in southern Taiwan. He graduated from university with a degree in electrical engineering and began a successful career and family. At the age of 27 he started taking pottery lessons from Master Ching Hua. "From the very first time I touched the clay it resonated deep in my soul," he says. As he advanced in his art, his career and life made less sense to him, and in 1994, Master Chen decided to try to make a living from his art. He opened the "Eight Piece Ceramic Art Studio" with his wife and six friends. The next several years would be very difficult ones for Master Chen. "One must suffer for their art," he laughs. All six of his friends closed their shops and returned to their previous careers when the art failed to reward them. Master Chen and his family also faced financial hardship. They had to sell their more practical pieces, like plates and bowls, at a roadside stand or market and even then often failed to make ends meet. Master Chen eventually tried returning to work as an engineer, but he confesses that "my heart just wasn't in it." He finally decided that come rain or come shine his life would be one of artistic integrity: "My years of Qi Gong had taught me to be sensitive to my inner self. I chose to live without regret." And when he put his heart and soul into his art without regard for accreditation or financial reward, people in Taiwan began to notice. In the last few years, Master Chen has seen a dramatic improvement. Not only has he won awards for his sculpture and teaware, but also his innovations have captured the interest of tea connoisseurs island-wide and in Mainland China.

The presence in Master Chen's work is self-evident, though the intelligence, experimentation and long hours of thought behind his innovations may be harder to notice. Master Chen said he started with the

knowledge that the quality of water is one of the most important aspects of tea preparation. Because many lack access to the purest water from a good mountain spring, he invented a kind of kettle designed to rectify water quality. Master Chen experimented with hundreds of kinds of clay, mixing different regions with various amounts of sand and stone. In the end, he created very porous clay that is both sturdy and retains heat beyond normal clay; it is also gorgeous in an unaffected way. "The mountain stone, sand and clay are capable of changing the quality of water," he says. "Even if tap water is left in a stainless steel kettle and one of my kettles side by side for several days, the water in the clay kettle will be very different." He says that the unique composition of the clay and its high porosity make the difference. We also find that the water prepared in his kettles was soft and sweet.

Master Chen then approached his work with fuel sources in mind. He says he experimented with several methods of heating water and found that water heated on natural hardwood charcoal is best. Amongst all the charcoal he has tried, he prefers that made from the branches of *long yan* trees and that the best charcoal is imported from Malaysia, because "it smells nice, heats the water quickly and has very clean Qi." At first he found it difficult to construct a clay furnace capable of withstanding the heat of the charcoal, but after much trial and error, Master Chen developed a unique method of using his special clay to create thick walls that trap the heat. He then applies a coating of another clay he developed that can withstand the tremendous heat generated by the stove. In order to make all of these innovations, every aspect of the creative process had to be modified. "Being an electrical engineer helped me, since I had to take apart my kilns and make my own controls so that I could adjust the heat to the desired temperature at specific points in the firing," Master Chen also mentions that he often uses a wood-fired kiln, especially for his more artistic pieces. We found that the combination of his unique stove and kettle does indeed make incredible water for tea. Not only do the kettle and stove retain heat and maintain higher water temperature, but they also added a soft texture and gentle sweetness to the tea. We also tested spring and tap water both boiled in one of Master Chen's kettles with hardwood charcoal and found them to be almost indistinguishable. The stones in the clay kettle seem to mineralize the water in a way similar to products like bamboo charcoal.

Engineering complete, Master Chen could focus on the aesthetics of his unique teaware. He always knew



Master Chen's side-handle pot at Tea Sage Hut

that he wanted his teapots and kettles to have a naturalistic presence that would connect the tea drinker to the mountain, tree and river—the Dao and spirit of the Earth and sky. All of the stones, sands and clay mixtures that he experimented with were gathered at the source by himself. “I have gone hiking in the mountains every day for many years. My two sons used to come along every day before school when they were younger. ‘An education in Nature before school,’ we called it.” Master Chen says he knew that wood was the missing element. He began experimenting with various roots, vines and branches, incorporating them into his artwork. “It took some time and many mistakes to master the control of the wood. First I had to scour the mountains for a more interesting piece of wood. It should be alive so it is more pliable and can be slightly bent.” The second obstacle was attaching the wood to the fired pot. He knew he didn’t want to use any form of glue; he wanted his pieces to be natural, through and through. Through his creativity and ingenuity, Master Chen developed a unique kind of stoneware clay, comparable to cement, that he uses to attach the wooden handles to the teapots and kettles. The result is a stunning blend of tree and mountain, water and heat that any tea lover would recognize and applaud.

Master Chen’s kettles, stoves, teapots and other art have contributed a distinctive approach in both form and function to the aesthetics and preparation of tea. We have found that his small teapots are especially good for

preparing Shou Puerh. Their ability to retain heat well and their porosity make them an excellent part of any collection. They add a simplicity that speaks to the heart of the tea ceremony, and the water that flows from them enhances any tea. The beauty of Master Chen’s pieces can halt a tea session, inspiring our senses to move outdoors to a meditation on our connection to Nature. The sweet water that lovingly embraces any tea, when sipped, was enough to silence this author...



“I want my work to illicit Great Nature and be a pleasure to use. I am passionate about tea, and so I make my pieces with function in mind. I use them myself, after all.”

—Chen Qi Nan



A Chabana vase or a tea sink ▲



The tea brewing area in Master Chen's studio ▲



A small pot Master Chen donated to us ▲



DEPTHS & SURFACES

BY WU DE

With every sip, we're a part of something profoundly cosmic. The heritage of tea is ancient, older than civilization. It extends back beyond even the memory of the Chinese, which is perhaps oldest of all. Tea begins in the ages before a brush ever recorded a thought or deed—our unspoken beginnings. It begins with the archetypal shamans, weathered and cracked by winter's wisdom, passing on their ways to one apprentice at a time. It begins in our tribal days, the glory days, where a younger humanity roamed free across a much vaster earth, under very influential stars, and always with the Mystery whispering to him from over his shoulder. But you could also say that Tea starts before that—before people ever entered the great green kingdoms stretching out to the east beneath the Himalayas.

Though we owe innumerable bows to the Chinese culture that improved on tea production and preparation over millennia, handing it down to us, it's also important to remember that Tea is Nature. It doesn't belong to any of us. It belongs to the Earth. And the first shamans to use tea in their spiritual cultivation predate China, and even the arrival of the first Han people to the area that would later become "China"—a name derived from the first dynasty, "Qin". Tea doesn't care for our politics, or the imaginary boundaries we draw on our maps. She is older than map-making, and older than our measures of time. She's timeless. She has opened leafy crowns to summer skies and winter nights, new moons filling, and suns rising then setting beyond count. She has seen the rise and fall of empires, nestling roots deeper into the soil where such things don't matter. She holds, in Her wisdom, the nascent dawn of Man, and before that the quieter times when Her closest friends were the mice that helped Her propagate Her children-seeds.

Since the first shamans boiled tea leaves with hot stones, ladling the first draughts, myriad bowls have passed. Perhaps it seems like one long session to Tea, a single bowl filling and emptying like the moon, which whispers its own dappled legacy to Her each night. For us, things have changed, and not necessarily for the better. As people came into Tea, She also came into our world. She is, after all, in our bodies, our minds—influencing our aesthetics, our consciousness and decisions. And over time, She has been humanized—commoditized, exported, imported, fought over, traded and taxed. Though the commoditization of Tea is a new development for Her, it goes back 1500 or even 2000 years as we measure them.

It is easy for us to fall nostalgic for a time when all tea trees were wild, un-domesticated and part of the brewing was in the seeking out, finding and cultivating of one's own leaves. The number of us left who see Tea as a sacred bond with Nature has dwindled. (Though perhaps this Hut is the renaissance of that approach?) And like most things spiritual, the material harvest of our father's material seeds has begun, as we move into an age of Earth practice. Even a cursory survey of Tea related matters, on the Internet for example, is enough testimony to dishearten the most faithful Chajin.

I've recognized and celebrated Tea's ability to be both mundane and sacred, to create sessions that are deep and silent as well as fun with friends, casual conversation, and bonding over Tea. I wrote about it in my first book, *The Way of Tea*. But this has been a process for me, and an intellectual understanding isn't equal to *being* this truth. I still found myself favoring the sacred sessions. I still found turmoil in my heart with regard to the so-called "worldly" aspects of Tea. I longed for a hike through virgin forests to some wise, old tree that I could speak to, seeking an oracle in the leaves I would pick with my hands, dry and boil—feeling a deep bond between Heaven and Earth steeping in my heart. Then the Mystery would open its gateless gate to the ineffable...

These days, tea vendors speak of "de-mystifying" tea. I understand what they mean. They are responding to immoral and vague business practices, as well as misinformation in the marketplace, all of which makes choosing tea a complicated and confusing process for the consumer. Still, I've read such ideals and felt sad, yearning for the Mystery of Nature that surrounded tea sages of long ago.

More recently, I've begun to find a great and powerful lesson in the worldly aspects of Tea. It's easy to see the worldly aspects of Tea as a burden when you approach Tea as self-cultivation—from a more spiritual orientation—but the world of Tea can be as much a strength and asset as it is a challenge. I have not lost faith in the fact that in understanding Tea, I understand my place between Heaven and Earth, and ultimately find my Way. How could I? I live in a tea center. I see the spiritual healing and insight available through tea practice every day. And yet, I also must wade out into the market place to buy tea. I also drink tea with those who approach it differently than I do, usually as a beverage, hobby or a sensual pleasure. How do we engage with the material aspects of Tea? How do we compassionately participate in a movement towards tea production in harmony with

Nature? After all, we must include, rather than exclude, if we're to make a real difference.

These and many other questions have, over the years, forced me to confront my desire to take Tea off into the mountains alone. And I've become more and more grateful for the fact that my spiritual path, this Way of Tea, is one that forces me to participate in the world—to apply my spiritual insights. This has made me humbler, more compassionate and more authentic in both my Tea and spiritual practice. I honestly feel I am a better, more awake and loving person than I'd be if I lived hermetically with only my tea stove and the blue mountains to keep me company. That doesn't mean it's always easy, as I was recently reminded.

On a recent trip to Taipei, a friend and shop owner was feeling especially generous and took out some very rare, old Puerh tea to share with us. But after only five steepings, he dumped out the leaves and moved on to some other, less special tea. On the one hand, it's his tea and he shared it with us in the way he chose to. We should be grateful. On the other hand, we all felt disappointed. It was a like an unsolvable Zen koan: I don't want to feel like I am somehow better for having a spiritual approach to tea, as if our friend's approach is no good, but at the same time I don't want to approach tea like that either.

I'm still sipping on this problem, and haven't yet found my way through the confusion, but I am learning as I grow. Nevertheless, the insights I have had are still worth sharing, even at this stage: First and foremost, I've realized that there is indeed a delicate balance in the way I have to work with those who buy and sell tea, those who approach tea differently than I do. At the same time, I don't want to foster any disconnection. I want to be able to share tea with anyone who loves tea, in any way, and do so fluently and easily.

There is a deep, Daoist truth underlying this, I have realized: *The depths also contain the surface.* The depth of the lake does not fear the surface, it embraces it. It is the surface which fears the depth. Having a spiritual approach to Tea shouldn't mean one can't drink tea as a beverage, share in the hobby of tea or even revel in the sensuality of the Leaf. As time goes on, and I drink more tea, I realize that I can hold these seemingly contradictory terms in my heart: to wholeheartedly connect to Tea on a worldly level, while at the same time not approaching Tea that way in my own practice. That is Zen.

I want to be able to go to a tea market in the morning and drink tea with some merchants, chatting away about quality and tea processing, which tea is over-roasted, etc., and then head off to the monastery that same afternoon to share some deep and silent bowls of tea with the monks there, surrounded by those blue mountains. Maybe I'll then head off to a grannie's cottage that evening and share tea bags in mugs with her, as she prattles to me in a very endearing way about the good old days. In each of these approaches and experiences there is truth. The tea spirit shines in all of those sessions. And yet, as paradoxical as it perhaps may sound to you, if all three sessions

were scheduled at the same time, and I had to choose, I would most definitely be found at the monastery, resting in sacred space.

I am realizing with each session that my spiritual orientation towards tea is not at odds with the worldly aspects of tea at all. The new contracts I am writing are about going to the tea shop to drink tea with a friend in the business, promising that I won't ever (even internally) judge him or his tea, but rather sip the tea he is pouring—chatting about whatever he likes, enjoying the flavors and aromas, and being fully with the session as he is. At the same time, another clause in this contract—to continue the metaphor—is that one of the lessons I will carry away with me when I leave is that I don't want to prepare tea that way, and I don't want my guests to feel the way many of his do at the end. Even though that seems conceited, there doesn't necessarily have to be a drop of pride in it.

Simply put, I prepare tea ceremonially. I drink tea in sacred space. I hope to awaken harmony in my guests, and to shift their perspective towards Tea/Nature, themselves and each other. At the same time, I am happy to just enjoy a cup of tea, a chat and a bit of friendship with anyone, over any tea, brewed in any way. And I don't have to spend that time judging, or resting in ego—thinking I am somehow better for having a “deeper” approach. As I said earlier, the depths contain the surface. That doesn't mean that the depths are better or more desirable; it means that once you have swum down to the depths you realize that it is all one lake. Or maybe I am just the kind of fish that swims deeper down, and though I'm able to have a tour of the lighter waters above, basking in the mottled sun, I always return to my usual haunts below.

There is so much of the worldly aspects of tea that I will spend a lifetime working with, like promoting sustainable, environmentally responsible tea production for example. And as I drink more tea, I've learned to be enthusiastic to face these challenges. I've learned that having a practice rooted in the material world, with all its foibles, is a good thing—one that forces me to grow in ways I wouldn't otherwise. And another thing, I'm finding, is that this is perhaps not the time for retreat into those blue mountains, not when the environment there is so threatened. Now is the time to get involved, to reach out and connect to people you find it difficult to connect to, and even to love them. In seeing how they approach tea, and finding that in myself, it's actually easy to find a common ground in our mutual adoration for the Leaf.

Past all the recent celebration for the engaging, though sometimes challenging, worldly aspects of tea, I still gravitate towards concluding these thoughts with a return to what's beyond all that human garble: *Tea is a leaf. Tea is Nature. She doesn't belong to us. We belong to Her.*



ONE ENCOUNTER, ONE CHANCE

BY KAI YA

We began our series on *chaxi* (pr. *cha-shee*) last month a little specifically with our discussion on tea cloths (*chabu*), which was appropriate to last month's gift. This month, we'll expand to an overview of the spirit of *chaxi*, before diving back into the more tangible elements next month.

The word "*chaxi*" literally translates as a "tea stage", the stage on which the tea ceremony is performed. At it's simplest, *chaxi* just means whatever you use to create the setting for your tea session. But as with all things tea, *chaxi* is like a luminous stone, simple in appearance from one angle, but concealing flashes of brilliant colors when turned in another direction. It is succinctly the things in the tea space and nothing more. And yet, arranging *chaxi* is rich with opportunities for insight and self-cultivation.

My personal favorite of the great legacy of tea sayings that have been handed down over generations is "*Ichigo ichie*", which is Japanese for "one encounter, one chance". Any discussion of *chaxi* would be remiss without an exploration of this poignant expression, as it speaks to the underlying spirit of a great *chaxi* and the session that will take place upon it.

Before the session begins, this expression asks us to remember that this tea session we are preparing for is unique, pregnant with possibilities. It reminds us to treat it with the same respect and attention we would give to a once-in-a-lifetime meeting with someone very important, which it surely is. Like that same empty page that was the beginning of all great works of literature, music and art alike, a clean and clear tea space waits for us to impress upon it our intention for the next session, and the *chaxi* represents those impressions put on the paper like musical notes, quietly awaiting someone to sit down and play. The energy and intention we put into these moments will greatly determine the outcome of this meeting.

This intention and the state of mind with which we carry it out are just as important as our intention and state of mind when the session begins. Don't rush to set up a tea session in order to get to the point where the tea-drinking begins! After all, if the instruments are not in tune or the stage improperly set, it doesn't matter one bit how well the music is played later on, it's going to be disharmonious.

Once the session has begun, *Ichigo Ichie* reminds us to cherish this moment, taking nothing for granted. Even if (*Especially if!*) you and I drink tea together every day, even if it's the "same" room, the "same" time, the "same" tea, this saying reminds us that, in fact, nothing

and nobody, are ever the same. We are always sitting down to tea for the first and last time together. The whole Universe is changing every second, and so are we.

This is much easier to realize when my guest is the cause of a special occasion, such as my teacher, or a dear old friend I haven't seen for many years. It is more difficult when the guest is a roommate or neighbor or weekly tea-friend, and perhaps most difficult when the guest is my own higher-self alone. But the more difficult it is to muster the spirit of "one encounter one chance" the more important it is to practice doing so! Invite your higher self to tea; invite more presence and awareness to join you when you drink tea—and in life—by spending more time setting up a nice *chaxi* as though you yourself were the dignified guest. Are Presence and Awareness not royalty?

Ideally, in the true spirit of *Ichigo ichie*, the *chaxi* should be changed before each and every session of tea. At the least, change it often. In this way I pay homage to the transient nature of this tea and this tea session, and recognize that it will never happen again in exactly the same way. Even if I make tea for you every single day, and even if we drink "the same" tea, what a loss it would be if I took even one of those sessions for granted! And it's the same with all days, all meetings, all moments. It's so important, such a crucial part of making the most of our brief time here, for our own happiness and the benefit of others, to cultivate as deep and experiential an understanding of this truth as we can. Arranging *chaxi* is a time for reflection and intentional practice.

Taking the time to thoughtfully prepare a new *chaxi* is also an important part of beginning to extend an awareness of "making tea" beyond the brewing and drinking. If I *really* can't reset the table, without any sense of urgency or rushing, I can at least do so in my mind, reflecting quietly while the first kettle is boiling on all the ways that I am different today than I was yesterday, perhaps.

Anything at all that instills in me a sense of the uniqueness of this moment in time is worth contemplating. I might reflect on the emotions I experienced the day before, or something that had seemed important once that has now passed away. I might notice that new smudge on the floor or the way the sunlight has changed since Spring. The subtler the better, but even more superficial changes such as a new freckle or haircut are worth acknowledging.

But before deciding to sit down without any external preparations, remember that changes needn't be drastic. As I suggested in my article on self-courses, it is



Chaxi are often themed, like Kuanyin sowing seeds

a nice practice to change a small item here or there, or to progress from one theme to another one over a course of a few days through small changes. This minimalistic approach to changing *chaxi* is also nice (and perhaps necessary) if you don't have a big selection of cloths and other utensils or elements to choose from yet.

At the end of the day though, there is something refreshing and complete in emptying the table, cleaning it, and laying out something wholly different than before. The more you practice *chaxi* the more you will begin to feel the way the energy you created at first slowly drains away the longer it sits, until like a flower it wilts and withers, instilling lifelessness into the space. You will notice that after about three to four sessions on the same *chaxi* it grows stale. Make sure to pay attention to this and change and clean the space before this happens, or your tea will be stale and lifeless as well!

Beyond the tea space, my *chaxi* practice reminds me that each moment of my life is a unique gift, no matter the form, and encourages me to respect and cherish them all. Over the years, I have cultivated greater appreciation and respect for all the moments of my life through practicing my *chaxi*.

Many times I have heard Wu De asking guests here to suppose that they have 1000 opportunities remaining in their life to share deep, meaningful, connecting experiences with their loved ones. "Given the choice," he

asks, "How many of those are you willing to give up in trade for something else?" I've never heard anyone say they'd give up even one of them, not for any reason. And yet I know I've done it often enough.

It's unconscious, it's thoughtless, and it's involuntary, yet there it is. And what I wouldn't give to take them all back! How well I know that each time was one time too many. Someone I loved was there, and I ignored them for something terribly unimportant: I was reading a book, working on a project, or just in a bad mood. I have shooshed and shoosed, tuned out, argued and shouted. Tragically, it's those closest to us most affected by our unconscious lack of presence. As with our practice of *Ichigo Ichie*, the person we drink tea with every day is the one we most often take for granted, *our self*.

In my heart I know I would want my last words to be words of love and gratitude, accompanied by a hug, no matter who it is. It's when I think I know someone, or start feeling as though I've seen them a thousand times before, as though I've already drunk tea with them hundreds of times and it's "just another tea session" that I take them for granted. I forget that their presence in my life is a miracle far beyond all reckoning, and I forget that nothing could be more important than making this a part of my daily consciousness.

When I remember this, there is nothing anyone can say to upset me, and no silly emotional swing that I

am willing to cling to at the cost of losing connection to that moment—I just drop it, whatever it is, meet their eyes and rejoice in our mutual presence. I've never seen this person before, in this place, in this way; I recognize their infinite ever-changing beauty, and then whatever happens and wherever we are, it's wonderful.

When I don't remember, then that's one of those moments I missed, one of those moments I said I wasn't willing to give up and I gave it up anyway. But these moments are good too; now I've got fuel and inspiration to practice, and bring the spirit of *Ichigo ichie* ever more into my consciousness and my life, so that I can lose fewer and fewer of those moments to that unconscious mind. It really works.

After several years of putting *Ichigo ichie* into practice through my *chaxi*, I have made huge strides towards appreciating the never-ending uniqueness of the moments and people in my life, and continue to improve. Of course, every moment of a tea session (and life) is an opportunity to practice this. But I have found that in setting up (or even simply contemplating) the *chaxi* for a given session, an opportunity to explicitly practice is created. Creating that space then automatically cultivates awareness and attention towards finding that truth in other moments throughout my day. Personally, I really need this time of intentional, explicit practice each day; otherwise I will miss many of those opportunities the day presents me with.

Nothing is guaranteed in this life. It's all a gift. We have no rights to it, we didn't earn it and we don't get to keep it as long as we want to. We don't even get to know when our lease is up. It has been granted us through

some extraordinary fate, and everything can change in a flash. Somewhere in Japan not long ago, a man was sitting drinking tea quietly in his house, and a huge wave of water fell on his head. The floor my tea-table and I are sitting on might crumble beneath us in an instant. We just never know.

As we travel along this journey with Tea, many of you will have noticed that the tea is never the same, although it is sitting there in its jar on the shelf where we left it last. Even more obviously within each session, we will never drink that same sip of tea we drank the sip before. Tea is an expression of the inexpressible and ungraspable beauty of change in this way, teaching us to let go of our desires to keep and possess, our desires for whatever we love in life to remain the same forever, allowing the beauty to slip through our fingers (and our cups) freely, without attachments and find the greater beauty in that very transience. Like our daily guest, each sip is different.

As I said in the beginning, there is so much there beneath that tea mat, such rich wisdom available for our cultivation. But let's not get too caught up in thoughts and words and practices. Let's remember that at its best, *chaxi* is beautiful and stirring and wonderful, without any thoughts connected to it at all. Therefore, let the articles in this new section of our new magazine be a guide to creating *chaxi* of your own, ones which strike the bell of stillness at the center of being and ring a greater, wordless truth to you and your guests...



“The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism... for it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about Man and Nature. It is hygiene, for it enforces cleanliness; it is economics, for it shows comfort in simplicity rather than in the complex and costly; it is moral geometry, inasmuch as it defines our sense of proportion to the universe.”

—Kakuzo Okakura, “Book of Tea”





BAISAO PART III; OUR TRADITION

BY NICK DILKS

Amongst the microphones, visual equipment, and other necessary tangles of modern technology, Wu De and myself sat down and discussed a very different time where a few strokes of Baisao's ink brush had sufficed to communicate his love of Tea to posterity. The interview marked the culmination of a journey trying to trace the footsteps of my Japanese Tea hero, stretching from early Taiwanese summer deep into the cold season. And perhaps it is fitting that I will finish my series on Baisao while the young sheng Puerh sleeps, ready to stir again with the spring sun as it wakens the clay jars.

All along, I've said that this would be a three-part series, but in the unfolding it has expanded. This time, I thought I would let you read some of the interview itself, and then next issue I'll discuss my comments and insight into how Baisao, his life and his poems can have an influence on our lives today. Here are some of the highlights of our conversation...

Baisao's connection with our tradition:

This connection is tacit, mysterious, spiritual and one of kinship. Like us, Baisao found himself both out of time and place, and distant from those around him. So, he shed his Zen clothes and put on ancient Taoist robes that he had sewed himself, and set about making tea for strangers in a way that expressed his Zen non-verbally, though, of course, later he wrote very famous poems about this. Primarily though, what Baisao had to say isn't his story and it isn't the few hundred poems he left behind. His story is in the thousands of bowls he served at the side of the road. This is his legacy. That's what he had to say to the world. So that's what we share with him, and he's the inspiration for a lot of tea work in the world, and especially this tradition because we are also trying to awaken people to a connection with Nature, themselves, and each other by serving tea. We do so indoors, but also outdoors just as he did. And so his spirit is honored that way.

And taking tea to the marketplace is very much in the spirit of Zen. It's there in the ten ox-herding pictures. The culmination of the spiritual journey is in the return to the market place, to the people, bringing the connection back. So, the retreat is to cultivate oneself and then you must take that cultivation and bring it to the world. And Tea is a marvelous way to do that because Tea is non-verbal: it is a very direct expression of one's understanding of Zen. And for that we are incredibly indebted to Baisao,

inspired by his work, by his connection to Tea and by his connection to Zen. The way he expressed that is very important to us because we are also trying to use that non-verbal vehicle to communicate something. So ultimately what we share with Baisao is an approach. We share the same approach to Tea as plant medicine, as Nature and as a path of self-cultivation.

The connection is there because, like him, we are also outside of time, outside of our society, because we do things differently—we're outside the box. We share this with him, and we approach Tea in the same way. He appeared after many hundreds of years of not so much of that in the world. He kind of just popped up and showed up. And we have too. It's like there's been a lot of materialistic approaches to life in the world, including Tea. And the beauty with Tea is that as it diffuses into the world, its ancient heritage goes with it. There's an old Chinese saying, 'Tea brings Nature to society'. There's a kind of beauty in that. We have the same issue as Baisao. He found himself in a place where spiritual principles had degenerated and become very worldly. He found this in the Buddhist movement that he was in and he found it also in Tea. So he resurrected something ancient, he showed up differently to other people, and he had the courage to do that. And we're very much like that too. Like Baisao, we want to revive the spirit of true giving. We want Tea to return to what it truly is, which is a *leaf*, *Nature*, and one that should be shared between spirits freely, without the need for anything other than a gift. And it's one of the most important gifts: that we show up, that we hold space for someone, that we allow them to be whatever they need to be, that there's no restrictions on the space, that there's no need to conform to anything. We just create this space—this space full of presence—and it's full of loving-kindness. So, sit down and enjoy some tea with us and be anything that you need to be. We're comfortable with anything that you need to be. There's great healing power in that, and there always has been.

Dangers of mixing Tea with the coin:

Baisao wasn't selling tea. He was serving it on the roadside, and you could give him some money if you wanted to. Actually, the tradition of roadside tea served in bowls to passers-by pre-dates Baisao by a long time. Kyoto was a tourist destination at that time. It was also a thriving hub for artists, literati and scholars, and average Japanese



All are welcome for roadside tea!

people; they loved to be out in Nature. And the Japanese are fervent admirers of sakura blossoms and other flowers and trees and gardens. In particular, of course, the artists and poets and the literati were into this. So Kyoto had many parks, temples and places where people went out walking and Nature viewing, as it still does today. In Baisao's era, as you looked at beautiful sakura flowers or walked around there were some vendors boiling tea. But Baisao did things differently. He gave people a choice. Instead of charging by the bowl, and it was very cheap normally, something like a penny or a *sen*, hardly anything, Baisao took this further. He carved on a bamboo tube: "The price of this tea is anything from a *sen* to a thousand in gold, otherwise it is free. I only wish I could give it for less". Our donation box at the Tea Sage Hut says the same thing. We've carved the same thing with the same spirit of giving. And this is the true spirit of Tea.

How do you put a value on a leaf? It's a leaf from a forest. It's the second most consumed substance on the planet. In houses all over the world when you show up you get free tea, from Britain to the Middle East to China. It's always been shared between souls, and the consumerist approach to it is a very modern thing. In thousands and thousands of tea drinking years the commoditization of Tea is a very modern thing, and it can definitely get in the way. Whenever someone tries to sell you something, it definitely gets in the way. It gets between the two of you

connecting and there's a loss of trust sometimes whether it's warranted or not. Maybe you should trust this person but it's difficult because he's a salesman. Even though they are a trustworthy one, he's still a salesman, so there can be doubt between host and guest. True Tea has always been the Tea that is just shared between spirits, and it is shared freely from the heart; it's shared to welcome someone in and to connect to them, to connect to Nature. So I think Baisao just found a way. He took off the price tag and people donated tea to him and he had this donation box and that was it. He could earn just enough to eat.

*There are times sitting
idly at the open window
I reach the hidden depths
of the immortal sages,
times, rambling free,
beyond the floating world
I ascend to the heights
of the wise men of old.*

—Baisao

Baisao's confidence in the transformative power of his tea:

Baisao had a little cheeky side to him, and he liked to celebrate the transformation that his tea brought about and the fact that this was different from the average tea sold on the road. He definitely had the power to wake people up. If you asked me to describe the meditative mind in as few words as possible, I would say 'Calm and Awake'. These are also the essence of Tea. Tea makes you calm and awake, and this is why the saying that Zen and Tea are one flavor goes back over a thousand years. Zen also means meditation: the meditative mind. It comes from the Sanskrit, *dhyana*, so Tea definitely has the ability to wake people up. If the Tea is strong enough, that's all you need, the medicine is in the plant. If it's not the right tea, then more is required: the presence of the brewer, the environment, and Baisao definitely had the presence to influence the tea, to push it. His mind was there too; the mind of the brewer is in the Tea. That's one of the first insights you get when you start to make tea. You may have the same tea, teaware, and water, but a different brewer will make completely different tea.

It was one of the first Insights I had, that my master made better tea. And I would go home with the all the same equipment and it just wasn't the same, it didn't feel the same. And it wasn't just about flavor, that he knew how to brew better flavor, though that was an aspect of it. But even after I figured out how to get the flavor and the smell down, people didn't leave transformed from my tea the way they did from his. And then there were times when I saw him make tea with very average tea leaves and the effect was still transformative. There's more to it than the skill of making it taste a certain way or smell a certain way. There's the energy that flows into it from mind and the brewer's heart is in it. That's ultimately it. When it's made with presence and mindfulness and love, that's what's transmitted through the liquor. Because if we're not mindful, present and resting in loving-kindness when we are making tea, then all we're drinking is our own delusions and afflictions. And if we're resting in this space and making tea, then it will inspire others. They will feel that way, and they will turn on and drop in and show up and move to their hearts. We've seen this thousands of times; Baisao did too. It's easy to see. If you care to practice making tea for people, you'll find that it happens to yourself and then to those around you, this turning on.

On Baisao's burning his teaware, rather than they fall into 'vulgar hands':

At the end of his life, Baisao started to become famous, and he realized that his teaware would end up in museums or be passed around from rich person to rich person and hoarded. This was very prophetic. Had

his teaware not been destroyed, it definitely would be in museums, in rich people's houses, and definitely worth a fortune. He didn't save himself completely, though, because some of his students had made line drawings of all of his teaware, so after he died all of it was reproduced, and even those early reproductions are worth thousands of dollars today.

The important point that he was trying to make was that my teaware dies with me, that these are my friends, and I don't want my friends to lose their spirit. It's almost like, if you had a friend who you knew would almost die for music, and you saw that he was in danger of losing his love of music as he became successful, you might warn him, you might tell him to be careful. This is what Baisao was saying with the act of burning. He was saying that everything dies, but it's better to die in a true spirit rather than live on in some incongruent form. So it's a famous incident. He burnt all of his teaware and wrote a poem, and there's a lot of love in that. It's almost like pulling a plug on a loved one who has been suffering for a long time and has been on a machine that's keeping them alive when they really want to die. He was saying to his friends that the teaware wanted to die rather than go somewhere unpleasant, which it absolutely would have. He was absolutely correct.

What would Baisao make of the world today?

There are many ways that ancient people would look at us and find us stupid. Our disconnection from and destruction of Nature is perhaps the prime example. Our bodies are 75% water, and we can't even drink it! This issue is one of the greatest signs that we live in a sick world, that we're sick. Actually, ancient tea lovers like Baisao had the freedom to pair teas with certain waters. They divided the water into *earth water* and *heaven water*. Earth water was from springs, streams and rivers, and heaven water was snow, ice and rain. They even subdivided these into further categories. They knew the difference, for instance, between snow collected from a pine tree and snow collected from a plum tree. They could even distinguish the month it had been fetched. They had access to so many kinds of water because they could drink all of its forms. We just can't do that these days, so we have to do the best that we can and find the springs wherever possible and locate good, clean water for ourselves. That's a big part of the alchemy of Tea.

I think that Baisao would find Tea is needed more than ever now. If he were alive today, he would get busier serving more tea just as we are doing. I think, actually, that he is alive in this tradition and that his spirit lives on in us. It's our job to explain that we've allowed the sicknesses of our hearts and our minds to spread and corrupt the world that we live in. So Tea is definitely a medicine of a returning, and we can remind people that

Nature matters, that organic produce matters. Isn't it meaningful that we have such a limited selection of water versus even a hundred years ago? And that's ultimately it: you have to love Nature. If you love any aspect of life, if you love your children and you know their bodies are 75% water, how do you not love the water they drink? They *are* water, so you can't love your kids without loving water, not ultimately. So, we've just got to make people realize that truth, connect with that truth, feel that in their hearts, and Tea can make that shift happen. I've seen it so many times.

Many thanks to Wu De for the interview, which goes into much more depth than we have space for here. Please do check out the video, if you would like to hear the rest. You can find it on our YouTube channel, via the YouTube symbol on our homepage. Next month, we'll finish this series on Baisao with some of my insights into incorporating Baisao's life into our own tea practice...



Our donation box

這茶價從一分
錢到一千兩黃金
都行。要不然
免費也可以
我只要單純地
要給您而已

Tea Wayfarer

*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 would like to introduce one of our first companions, **Xander Rijkee**:*

I grew up in a small village in the Netherlands on a mental diet of fairy tales, mythology and fantasy. When friends or relatives would ask me what I wanted to become when I grew up I always answered, "I want to become a wizard!" Eventually, I realized that was not going to happen and I did the next best thing... I became a physicist. The next decade or so I filled my mind with abstract things: logic, reason, philosophy, mathematics and I learned to create models with which to make predictions about the world. But I never lost the desire to dream and walk with my feet in the clouds, and like so many physicists I followed the circle of logic and reason and came out into the realm of spirituality.

Although I have always drunk tea as a beverage, the first seeds of tea drinking as a practice were sowed in Singapore's Chinatown where I visited a teahouse and tea school with my wife on our honeymoon. After a short demonstration of gongfu cha and we were left to brew on our own. While clumsily making tea a spark struck. Something awakened in me: an itch, a yearning, an urgency... Not quite as if my hair was on fire, but there was some definite smoldering going on...

When I got home, I tried to learn as much as I could, which was difficult in a country where tea was a bagged affair always accompanied by at least one biscuit. Eventually work and real life took hold of me again and the embers cooled. Half a year later my world collapsed. I lost the ability to focus my visual attention. I could not read, drive, cook, clean, sculpt or work, but I could drink tea.

Slowly, over time, my tea practice began to fill the void that was left by all the things that I could not do anymore, and I found something I could still grow in. But to be able to grow I needed information, a tradition, a master. None of that was to be found in Holland...

By coincidence I discovered the online magazine *The Leaf* and I have had many of its articles read to me by the computer many times. When I heard that the people who wrote it were about to start a sort of global tea community, I instantly joined. I have been in Global Tea Hut from the start, sharing many cups of tea with all of you.

This month I finally made it to Miaoli, to the Tea Sage Hut to experience the tea practice and living tradition for real. I cannot understate how important this experience has been. To see a living practice in action is far more powerful than reading about it. I have soaked up as much information and wisdom into my spiritual sponge as it will hold, to squeeze out and learn from later. When I get home, I will be able to revisit all the treasured articles, continue growing and practicing... And above all, drinking lots of tea...

If any of you ever find yourselves in the Netherlands wanting to escape the crowded streets of Amsterdam for a while, know that there is a friendly, warm place two hours drive to the south where you can have a quiet cup of tea.

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Inside the Hut

Our goals/plans for the coming year:

- Increase membership to 2,000 by January 1st, 2015
- Save enough to break ground in 2015, hire an architect, begin building, etc.
- Incorporate Global Tea Hut in Taiwan so that we can offer visas to volunteers

Ways in which Global Tea Hut will continue to improve as we get closer to our goal of 2,000 members:

- At 1,000 members, we will start traveling more in order to research articles on tea, teaware and also source new and different organic teas. This will also allow us to connect organic farmers to each other.
- At 1,500 members, we will start translating modern and ancient Chinese and Japanese tea wisdom to English.

Ways in which you can help:

- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Use social media to help promote our videos, links and membership to Global Tea Hut. Help us by making more of an effort to share it online!
- Share each month's tea with friends. Show them the newsletter and tell them that the magazine and the teas are improving as the membership increases. Tell them we need 2,000 members this year to begin construction on the world's best free tea center.
- Discuss Global Tea Hut with people you know, and try your best to get one member a month to join. If everyone does that, we can achieve our goals quickly and together!



Center News

- Colin “the Hudonator” Hudon took precepts on 1/9! His tea name is *Qing Yu* (清愚), which means “Clear Fool”. On the surface, it means “clearing away foolishness”; deeper still it expresses the essential Daoist ideal of a wise, but simple life; and finally, for those of us who know *Qing*, he is sometimes “clearly a fool”. Still, we can call him “*Qing*” most days...
- Wu De will be in LA from 3/18 to 4/3 doing workshops and some larger events. All the proceeds will go to the new tea center that is opening there! For event details, contact us.
- From now on, we will be posting videos every month with each new magazine! We hope to include some more info about the teas, as well as some brewing tips. Please feel free to contact us at globalteahut@gmail.com with any questions we can answer for you.
- ***We are offering a free month of GTH to new subscribers!*** Older members will also get the chance to give away a free month in the coming year in the anniversary month of when you signed up.
- As you can see, GTH is going through lots of changes in an effort to reach a larger audience, and thereby raise the necessary funds to build our new center. We absolutely need and adore your feedback!

Going far away to China
to seek the sacred shoots
Old Esai brought them back
sowed them in our land.
Uji tea has a taste infused
with Nature's own essence
a pity folks only prattle
about its color and scent.

-Baisao

