



Global Tea Hunt

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE
June 2014



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Tea Wayfarer

Yvone Gallegos, USA/Canada

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Letter from the Editor

In June, the summer solstice rises, peaking suspended in shining glory. The world multiplies and energies surge forward towards the peak of our third year in this Global Tea Hut. We've had an amazing three years: We've grown significantly, and these envelopes now reach dozens of nations around the world. And looking inside, or at the shelf of previous issues, you can see the burgeoning colors, variety of articles and tea, as well as great improvements in photography and layout over the months. And in the abundance of the season, we feel honored to have so much energy at our center. Our hearts also overflow with gratitude for your continued support and encouragement.

It seems that the world is bursting with tea energy, a love for the Leaf and all it is: a delicious, healthy beverage, an intriguing hobby full of connoisseurship, a vehicle for spiritual cultivation and even a gateway to the Great Nature that pulses in every leaf, every bowl. We sincerely hope that as tea and community grow through this magazine, we manage to express our love for each of these facets of tea. Consequently, at this, the halfway point of our year together, we thought it would be great to restate that it is our aim to utilize a portion of the moneys we raise to improve Global Tea Hut itself, not just to fund our current center or build the future one. We plan to start traveling to more tea regions, exploring their tea culture, history, tea processing methodology and tell stories of some of the tea people that inspire us. We'll hopefully translate some ancient and modern articles, treatises and other tea writings to look back at the heritage of the most revered Leaf. We also will continue to show you teaware artisans who craft gorgeous and functional teaware, much of which we use here at the center. And, of course, ours is a tradition primarily devoted to tea as a means for awakening more present, conscious living, so we will continue to share our spiritual insights as well.

The word is spreading, and slowly but surely we are moving towards these goals, and closer to our ultimate goal of building a free, permanent center in the mountains of Taiwan that we can all come home to, resting, meditating, drinking tea, learning and sharing community with tea brothers and sisters from around the world.

There was a time when Global Tea Hut was full of people who we'd met in our travels, or who visited our center here, and wanted to support our center. The fact that they got a "magazine" (in those days it was more of a newsletter) was a very welcome added bonus. Last November, however, we decided that we wanted to turn this on its head: We want Global Tea Hut to be such an awesome experience that tea lovers want to join regardless



of the fact that it supports a non-profit. In other words, the center used to be in bold letters and the gifts of tea and a magazine in parentheses; whereas, now, we want "Global Tea Hut" in bold letters and "supports a free, non-profit center" in parentheses on the back. Imagine if you picked up your favorite tea, which you love because it is organic and delicious, and read the small print on the back of the package, only to find out the tea you've been buying supports a non-profit. And we hope that you feel that we have indeed reached our goal of making Global Tea Hut that great!

A big part of what makes Global Tea Hut so great is the community behind it. We encourage you to reach out to us and let us know how we can include *you* more. We very much want you to feel at home here, amongst these pages, drinking these teas and then visiting our tea spaces if you get the chance. As you can see, in the last few months we have started a series called, "Voices from the Hut" featuring essays, articles and prose by Global Tea Hut members around the world. You should also contribute! Or at least send us an email to say hello, telling us what you think about the magazine or how we can improve it.

You are all included in our hearts and our prayers. Here at the center, we set out a cup of tea for all of you every day. It sits waiting for you, steaming and delicious. You always have some tea and a place to stay here. And if you can't come right now, don't worry: just imagine that cup and you'll be with us in spirit, sharing in our joys.

SPRING 2014 OOLONG/RED TEA

MING JIAN, TAIWAIN

As you can see, your gift this month is an extra tea! We thought it would be interesting for you to try the same tea leaves, from the same farm, but processed in two different ways: one as an oolong and one as a red tea. Both of these teas were generously donated by Mr. Xie, a farmer who has close ties to us here at the Hut, and has been helpful and kind to us in many ways. We thought that you'd perhaps like to reread our original article about Mr. Xie from 2012, as it is equally relevant now...

One of the most important roles this Global Tea Hut serves is the friendships we broker between incredible tea producers and all the people gathered here each month. If you didn't know, the teas we share with you each month are completely or partially donated. The farmers and vendors who give us tea to share know that we are a non-profit tea school devoted to sharing Cha Dao with the world, but that isn't the primary reason why they share their tea with us. All of our classes and publications are free and all the guests who stay here do so completely free, so the gifts of tea these supporters donate to us help us to serve in this way. The farmers know that their tea supports us in this way, and of course think it is nice, but again it isn't the real motivation for their gifts: *you are!*

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

Some people in their urban offices or at bars declare that "global warming is a myth" or debate whether the changes in the environment are "real" or "true". But no farmer, living and working in concordance with the climate, denies the recent changes. Tea just isn't as good as it was even ten years ago. And when you ask the farmers, they all tell the same story: It doesn't rain enough; it's cold when it should be warm or warm when it should be cold;

the mists aren't coming the way they once did in early spring, etc., etc. When you add to that smog, water pollution and over-use of chemicals, you have a dreary painting indeed... But wait, look there! Where? Just there, in the back of the painting—behind all those grays. There is still some green. Some hope. There are the seeds of change, already growing—thriving in a renewed soil based on community, sharing and a view to the future.

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

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

It was at Hope that we met the amazing Mr. Xie Yuan Zhai, whom we of course gravitated to immediately because of his organic tea. He came to the center a few



What's the difference between these two teas?

times and we started visiting his farm. It was so easy for a friendship to develop (organically of course). He is kind and joyous, with smiles that fill a room, not to mention incredibly knowledgeable about tea. He's made every kind of tea you could imagine at some point, and has decades of experience.

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

make tea, eat a nice lunch and take the tea you picked and crafted home with you!

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

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

Like so many other farmers, Mr. Xie started to get the nagging (coughing, wheezing) feeling that these chemicals were harmful to his family, his community and his land. When his wife almost miscarried their second

child in 1997, he had had enough. Despite opposition from friends and family, Mr. Xie made a commitment to become an organic tea farmer, no matter the cost. He first attended some organic farming classes held by the MOA organization.

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

In April of 1990, a group of people who cared about Nature and were concerned about environmental pollution wanted to change the situation in Taiwan. They joined the Japanese MOA International Association and created a sister organization to educate farmers and legally certify organic foods and drinks. This Taiwanese foundation was formed to explore and seek health and happiness for mankind and to guarantee environmentally sustainable MOA natural agriculture, expecting this ideology and the sustainable agriculture techniques behind it to spread all over the world.

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

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

Mr. Xie’s work hasn’t stopped with his own farm. He knew that he would have to keep improving his skills, creating new and better teas, and help show his neighbors

the value of organic farming, especially since their land and his are close enough to influence each other. He formed a co-op with other farmers and began teaching locals to shift to organic methods, offering them equal shares in their combined enterprise. As more people have joined this local group, the incentive to do so has also increased. To date, more than twenty-five farmers in the Ming Jian region are organic, including Mr. Xie’s immediate neighbors.

Mr. Xie’s kind heart shows in his teas. He cares deeply about tea and the Earth. He produces green tea, large and small leaf red tea, as well as several kinds of oolong; and all with great skill. He’s also generous with his tea. To us, he is an inspiration and a kind of hero—the kind not talked about enough these days. It’s easy to follow the crowd, maintain the status quo; or to say that “I am just one person. What can I do?” It is difficult to face criticism from family and friends and stand up for what you believe to be right. The problem is that it is too easy for farmers to make more money with agro-chemicals, and to do it with less work. And that’s also why so many of them are over-using the fertilizers and pesticides, reducing the average life of a tea bush to fifteen years, all in the name of personal gain. Some of them get cancer from improper exposure to such chemicals, themselves victims as we mentioned above. Mr. Xie is a man who has seen a different way, and more inspiringly lived that way and taught others to do so. And that is the spirit of tea!

*Dancing, swirling
dervish leaves
move to the music of a thousand
thrummy insects.
An arpeggio of water,
beating thunderclouds,
timpani rains
and droning, moody sun
fill the backdrop
of the hazy morning scene
where I lost myself in a honeyed tea.
Was I dreaming I was a katydid,
nibbling the day away on tea leaves?
Or was the katydid dreaming it was me,
sipping the day away on tea leaves?*

—Wu De

Mr. Xie's farm shows undergrowth and biodiversity, signs of organic tea



Teas of the month, a Mi Xiang oolong and red tea from Ming Jian, Nantou

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

The tea has a honey fragrance because it is bug-bitten, much like Taiwan's famous Eastern Beauty. As more tea farmers have gone organic, they have had to come up with ways to cope with the katydids that come and eat their tea, especially when neighbors use pesticides and all the bugs come to their fields. Allowing bugs to bite the tea, and then processing it accordingly, began with Eastern Beauty in Beipu, but has more recently spread to Nantou as well. The resulting hybrid is sometimes called “Concubine Tea”. This month's teas are newer, more unique kind of teas, however.

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

The oolong tea is bug-bitten, plucked, withered outdoors and then indoors, shaken and mixed in piles (*jiao ban*), withered more, pan fried (*sa cheen*) to arrest oxidation and kill green enzymes, rolled to break down the cells and further oxidation, as well as to shape the tea (*ro nian*), and then roasted twice—once to dry the tea and then for a longer time to add flavor and fragrance. It is a semi-oxidized oolong, lighter than traditional oolong though darker than much of the green, light teas produced nowadays.

The red tea is also bug-bitten, plucked, and then withered indoors, piled on bamboo mats for 12-24 hours. It is then rolled for up to ninety minutes before being roasted dry. The processing is, in many ways, simpler. Due to the prolonged withering and rolling, the tea's cells are more fully broken down, and the tea almost completely oxidized. This results in a deeper, darker liquor than the oolong—though less refined.

The Qi of both these teas is uplifting, sweeping upwards. You will feel elated drinking them, perhaps like us feeling the joyful toil Mr. Xie has impressed upon them both. What are the differences, though? How do the two teas resound in harmony and where do they drift apart?

There is a great fellowship in these teas, between our fortuitous meeting at Hope Market, the many cups we've shared with Mr. Xie and now in the passing on of his kindness to you...



Brewing this Month's Tea

This month's teas are best brewed in pots. You can brew them gongfu style, if you know how and have the equipment. If not, any teapot will do.

There is no way to determine the proper amount of tea, as this will depend on the size of your pot. However, a good general rule is to cover the bottom of the pot like the first, light blanket of autumn leaves—so the bottom is completely covered, but still visible through the tea leaves. Remember, you can always add more but it is a waste to take tea out! While this principle is helpful, it's also important to not get stuck in generalities. Every tea—every session—is different, with unique brewing parameters.

Try feeling the steeping times. This is the first way in which we begin to get to know tea preparation. Pay attention; don't multitask. Stay with the tea. If you are mindful and listening, you will improve your tea brewing quickly. If you find the tea liquor to be strong, bitter or too astringent, pour quicker, and vice versa if you find it too weak. A general rule is that the first steeping is short, and the second is called a “flash steeping”, because it is immediately poured out. Then the following steepings get successively longer. This is a helpful structure to use with these teas as you are learning how to listen and gauge the steeping time by “listening” to the tea—responding to the outcome, in other words. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. It's how we learn to brew better tea!

You may want to try taking just two grams of these teas and brewing them side-by-side in bowls, tasting them together to see what the difference in processing has brought about. Or, alternatively, it would be an interesting session to drink them sequentially. If you choose to do that, it is usually advisable to move from lighter to darker teas in a session, and therefore start with the oolong.



SANGHA AT ANY MOMENT

JASPER HERMANS

Recognizing sangha in the little things—The whole sangha in our hands, sangha anywhere at any moment—I was on my way to a young adult meditation group in Amsterdam with some bowls and tea to share, there was only one friend there to share some bowls with. And although we were sharing tea just the two of us, I felt that we formed a community, a sangha. Supported by the present moment, Nature and each other, we had the space to let go and relax. On our way back to the train station we shared about community and sangha, and he reminded me that we ourselves can practice at any moment—the art of providing space for and taking care of sangha anywhere we go, helping to make the sangha bloom like a flower.

“If we are a drop of water and we try to get to the ocean as only an individual drop, we surely evaporate along the way. To arrive at the ocean, you must go as a river. The sangha is your river. In our daily practice, we learn to be a part of this river. We learn how to look with sangha eyes, how to walk with sangha feet, how to feel with a sangha heart.”—Thich Nhat Hanh

On another day, I was sitting in my tea room early in the morning, sipping tea steeped from leaves grew in Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan. They were picked by a farmer who takes care of these trees with love, who knows his trees like we know our friends. Trees that I feel are so connected to our community, as many of us have been offered tea steeped from their leaves. Breathing in, I feel the presence of the spirit of these leaves in every cell of my body. I see that all is there, resting in this bowl between my two hands. I can see the presence of the trees, the farmer and all my brothers and sisters, all of you, in my bowl. I recognize that the whole sangha is present, right here and now, between my two hands. Breathing out, I know that I’m carried by the river of the sangha. I know that I can let go.

From the leaves of these trees my mother served us tea one day. Together with Nature, she gave birth to that moment and space with love, just like she gave birth to me one day. She had the chance to hold me tender at the hospital for a long time because the nurses were too busy taking care of all the other newborns.

Just the other day I opened my laptop to chat with one of our dear Global Tea Hut sisters on the other side of the world from where I live—a beautiful being with whom I was so blessed to share a room during my stay at the Tea Sage Hut. Being steeped in an abundance of kindness and love at the center, the presence of true brother and sisterhood, in which there was mutual understanding, unconditional love and support, I felt a love that

was fluid. I couldn’t do anything else than to let it flow through me. This time, too, my heart was brimming over with kindness and love.

“Hello!”

“Hey from the other side of the world.”

“How are you?”

“How was your day?”

“Just share with me anything you’d like to share!

I’ll happily sit here and listen,

While you clean up your room.”

As I pour more freshly boiled water on the leaves in the bowl, I realize how important it is to take refuge in sangha, independent of time and place, independent of whatever form it may take. Whether sangha comes in the form of a good friend, a teacher, family, a cat, a dog or a community of trees. Anything or anyone that can remind us to go back to ourselves and bring us back to the present moment. We can create sangha anywhere we go, taking refuge in the sangha at any moment. Then we appreciate all those little things that make up the whole.

I smile, and once again feel endless gratitude. Hoping that I too will be able to be there and show up and be able to face and embrace the fears that might come up in the process of doing so. To be able to contribute to the collective energy of the whole, the energy that provides safety for every individual drop of water in the river.

Breathing in.... I feel the presence of the whole sangha, right here, right now.

Breathing out.... I smile to the whole sangha, right here, right now.



*Tonight we dance the dance of freedom,
While the earth sings us a song.*

*When the kettle is empty,
And the coals no longer burn,
I lay down next to you.*

*So that your roots can be my pillow,
And your leaves can be my roof.*



CHARACTERISTICS OF FINE TEA

WU DE

One of the most important questions every student of gongfu tea must reach is the articulation of the characteristics of a fine tea. You have to practice gongfu for some time and “reach” this question because the description won’t suffice. As Master Lin always says, “If and until you try a fine tea, it is too hard to tell.” We thought we would spend this month exploring some of the characteristics of fine teas, not in an attempt to describe the ineffable, but rather as pointers in your exploration of tea. It helps to have some road signs along the way, pointing to various aspects of the tea experience. After all, drinking gongfu tea is a rich experience, one that involves the whole body, not just the obvious quality of having delicious flavors. By pointing out some of what masters in our lineage have found to be hallmarks of good tea, we can focus our attention and verify/disprove this—seeking greater refinement and skill, gongfu.

Below are some of the most important features to look for in a fine tea, brewed gongfu style. These aren’t meant to be definitive, and none take the place of actual experience. A single cup is worth more than all these words! Take the time to try experiencing these sensations. Ultimately, if it is to be mastery (gongfu), the answers are in you and in the tea. All of these traits apply as much to brewing methodology as they do to the quality of any given tea. In other words, a properly brewed fine tea will demonstrate these characteristics more pronouncedly than a poorly prepared one, allowing us to hone our craft, determine the proper instruments by evaluating teaware in these terms, etc.

- Fine teas immediately splash up to the upper palate. This is a very important feature of fine tea, since even beginners are able to start discriminating it immediately. The best teas travel across the top of the mouth, moving upwards as soon as they enter our mouth. This sensation carries aromatics upwards as well.
- Great teas travel to the back of the mouth naturally, without having to push them back. They glide back smoothly. Nice teas also transform through the five flavors smoothly and quickly: bitter, astringent, *gan* (more on this one in a moment), sour and sweet.
- In fact, “smooth” is the keyword for fine tea. It should feel viscous and soft in your mouth.
- A nice tea also swallows naturally. Just as you needn’t push it to the back of the mouth, you also needn’t push it

down. It glides down naturally. This is perhaps the second most prominent feature of fine tea, especially for beginners. A pinch in the throat is a sure-fire sign of a lower quality tea (or poor preparation).

- Fine tea coats the mouth. You can feel it everywhere equally. Anywhere you take your attention within your mouth, you will feel the tea.
- Fine tea also coats the throat, leaving it soft and comfortable. We feel slaked when we drink a fine tea, as our throat is warm and coated.
- The best teas cause salivation. The mouth begins watering in a very comfortable way.
- Fine teas have a very important feature that the Chinese call “*hui gan*”. As mentioned above, all tea has five flavors and a good tea transforms through them quickly in a balanced, even way. The third flavor is called “*gan*”, which is actually more of a sensation than what we call a “flavor” in English. *Gan* is akin to the minty, cool feeling of peppermint or the air on a cold winter’s day. The word “*hui*” means “remembrance”, so this term refers to a return of the *gan* on the breath. If you breathe out of your mouth after swallowing a fine tea, you’ll find your breath is very comfortable, cool and refreshing.
- Finer teas have a lingering fragrance that slowly rises up the back of throat and into the nasal cavity. Low-quality fragrances are always in the front of the face and do not last long. Cheap perfume hits up front and disperses quickly, whereas an expensive perfume doesn’t even start to come to attention until after she passes by you, and then it lingers long and deep. High-quality incense, like aloeswood, also rises slowly and subtly from the back. After drinking a fine tea, you sometimes get up and still find the aromatics in your nose—sometimes even after you eat, if the tea is great enough!
- Great teas have a deep Qi that relaxes you, slowly spreading to the whole body in various ways.

We hope that these descriptions are helpful in your journey, and that by focusing on some or all of them, you find an experiential concordance in your tea. Once they become real experiences, they are priceless tools to evaluate tea, teaware and gongfu brewing methods.





Over the next eight months to a year, we will be addressing the Eight Bowls of a Life of Tea in more depth. Each month, we will share some commentary on one Bowl or one aspect of a Bowl, clearly defining it and offering practical daily applications. Because these are aspects of a life dedicated to tea as a Way, we will be sharing with you our own understanding of them as they relate to our daily tea life. As a student of the tradition, dedicated full time to the center in Miaoli, I offer you my commentary and practice of the first of eight bowls. That is not to say these aspects of tea are applicable *only* to those living a full-time life of tea. Just the opposite. They can in fact be incorporated into anyone's daily life with as much or as little rigor as you like. Participation is what matters. May your understanding of these articles be the incentive for you to further invite these aspects of tea into your life.

Skillful Means; Moral Uprightness

The first bowl is an important one. At the tea table, it sets everything in motion. It expresses the culmination of time and energy as a means of sharing and connection. Within a life of tea, it lays the foundation upon which all other bowls can be imbibed. As a first bowl of tea must be consumed before a second can be received, so too this first of Eight Bowls of a life of tea must be assimilated and translated into daily life. Most important is the ability to integrate it into our everyday lives.

Though words are subject to the duality of language, let us flexibly define morality in terms of actions of body, speech and mind which are skillful, wholesome and healthy, as opposed to speaking in right and wrong, which are polarized words. From the mind, our body and speech arise. The mind then, is the best place to begin investigating our notion of morality. Moral actions and speech are born of a moral mind. You can think of your actions as thoughts in motion, outwardly perceived. In that way, your body becomes an intimate feedback system, presenting you with a physical replica of your own thought.

We become what we think about most and we *are* the environment in which we live. One cannot be healthy while living in an unhealthy environment. Moreover, outside of that environment, we cannot be understood as living beings, but rather, only as constituent parts like the pieces of a puzzle. Understanding

each piece separate from the completed puzzle misses the larger picture. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The *chajin* or person of tea, with respect to Cha Dao, is much greater than 'person' and 'tea' alone. Therefore, in understanding that our actions, words and thoughts piece together in a way that forms a greater overall process, we should consequently strive towards purifying that process in order that we should live a more moral life, and for us, a moral life of tea.

Without losing ourselves in codes of conduct, we instead practice self-effacement and recognition of the true oneness of all Being. There cannot be black without white, nor matter without space. The existence of both is dependent on the other. Though in one sense, black is black and white is white, in another sense, black is white and white is black. They are both one and same and separate unto themselves, (and neither one nor the other in a third sense). For if all were black, how could we even perceive it without its opposite to define black's boundaries? One defines the other. One is the other. Are you reading the black letters on this page, or the white space between them? With the discriminating mind out of the way, a recognition of connection is always available. Though we must also acknowledge the illusion of the separate self as a necessary means to realizing its opposite: no-self or oneness. From a state of recognizing oneness, it becomes nigh impossible to do harm towards others because you fully understand that you are doing harm to yourself. And in the opposite, it becomes a joy to be of service to others, knowing that you are serving yourself as well, and that is where true self cultivation lies.

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and beheld that service was joy.

No matter what it is you do in this world, through love do what you will. Whether it be serving tea, scolding a student or crying out—through love carry out these actions. From this foundation, it can't be helped that your actions will be skillful. As the seed, so the fruit shall grow. Time and again we must reflect on the fact that it is not so much what we do, but how we do it, not what we say, but how we say it. And, as the old Zen adage so simply and sharply puts it,

The way you do anything is the way you do everything.

The intention behind our action is more important than the action itself. A poor quality tea served with the greatest intention will always be better than the best quality tea served with the worst of intentions. How you store your tea, treat your teaware, design and rotate your *chaxi*, says everything about your approach to tea. Purify the mind, cultivate love and let *that* guide your intentions. Your thoughts, actions and speech will follow suit.

Love and do what thy will

— **St. Augustine**

If you find in your life, abundance, health, laughter, compassion, strength, mental clarity, smiles on the faces of those you meet, then take it for granted that your actions are skillful. Inviting moral uprightness into your life isn't really about what you want, but being aware of what wants to happen through you, and then finally, making space for that to happen. On any given day at any given time, you can always ask yourself if what you are doing is skillful, wholesome or healthy. You will have to use your own understanding of these words while also being open to letting go of that understanding, adapting it, or adopting anew.

I have steadily endeavored to keep my mind free so as to give up any hypothesis however much beloved, as soon as facts are shown to be opposed to it. Indeed I have had no choice but to act in this manner.

— **Charles Darwin**

When I asked myself how I make space in my life for skillful means and moral uprightness to act through me, I found myself reflecting on very small daily activi-

ties. It's the small things that count when incorporating moral uprightness into your life; how you sit and read; how you place your shoes down; how you close the door behind you; how you lift your kettle of water. The list goes on. These very subtle examples, which abound in our lives, yield an amplified effect when done with intention and awareness. Every moment is alive and pregnant with the opportunity to engage in presence and mindfulness.

There is always an opportunity to remember that everyday life is Zen (though Zen is not everyday life). You will probably spend more time in your life carrying out so-called "mundane" tasks, like tying your shoes and brushing your teeth, than so-called "sacred" ones, like seated meditation and prayer. If you want to be more morally upright, expand your definition of moral uprightness to encompass a larger picture. Don't just increase the frequency of one activity, but rather, increase the range of activities in which to apply skillful actions of body, mind and speech. Can you brush your teeth with presence and attention, just as you might while brewing tea? Or is it just a means of getting to bed? These "mundane" activities which make up most of our lives provide all the fuel necessary to practice skillful means. Find the sacred in the mundane.

Cultivate love and presence through any of the innumerable methods. Translate them into your daily life. Continue to ask yourself how you can be more moral, i.e., more skillful in all aspects of daily life. Is what you are doing and how you are doing it of benefit to others? To answer such questions, you must know yourself. And, in knowing yourself, you are partaking of the first Bowl of a Life of Tea.





A MOVEMENT TOWARDS SENSITIVITY

WU DE

One of the greatest shifts in the tea journey is a step beyond aroma and flavor to all the subtler dimensions tea offers. As soon as these other worlds are unlocked, your ability to evaluate tea, teaware and brewing methodology all develops much more quickly. In the *Classics of Tea*, Lu Yu says that you never discern the quality of tea by “merely contemplating its flavor or sniffing its aroma”, suggesting that he, too, understood this shift in perspective. Of course, the mastery of tea is a lifetime endeavor, and there is always more to learn. But with a bit of guidance and focus, you can begin accumulating your own experience and learn how to make better and more refined tea. Since fine teas are so difficult to produce, requiring the perfect balance of mountain, water and sun as well as days of sleepless toil, we honor them by improving our ability to extract greater and more rewarding cups from our brews: learning to prepare and appreciate tea more fully is actually the culmination of this process—from seed to sprout, calloused hand to elegant pot...

Most of us are first enticed into the tea world through the amazing and exotic flavors and aromas a cup of tea offers. There is a great pleasure in fine tea, sometimes deep enough to cause a sigh. And it is difficult for some to see beyond the flavor and aroma, as they are often overwhelming. There is never a time in which they need to be quit, or enjoyment set aside, but our development in tea and ability to communicate quality will always begin at a slightly deeper level. In other words, continue to relish the wonderful flavors and aromas your tea offers while at the same time expanding and deepening your appreciation to other, subtler levels. After all, the movement towards mastery of any art is always towards sensitivity to subtler, more refined aspects. This doesn't mean you lose the awareness of its more obvious, gross qualities, though.

If you've ever read a review of teas, you see that often the various participants have such discordant views that the results are almost unrewarding. Obviously, the differences in preparation methods, teaware and water reduce most tea reviews to a matter of opinion. It would perhaps be better for such authors to focus on sharing more information and insight into their criteria for choosing tea, water and preparation methodology, rather than their opinions on certain teas.

Still, even with the same water and teaware, opinions will vary just as greatly when the focus is on flavor and/or aroma. This is because everyone has their own taste: some like chocolate and some like strawberry. And arguing over which is better is rather pointless, don't

you agree? The fact is, there is no higher-quality flavor or aroma, merely one that is more suitable to you than the other. Everyone tastes and smells tea differently. This is in part due to our different taste buds, as well as how sensitive our noses are (how calm and focused you are while tasting plays a part as well, incidentally).

Even if our palates were more similar than different, evaluating and then communicating our preferences in flavor and aroma would still be very difficult because so much of our discrimination is based on our past experience. How much tea you have drunk in your life—both in kind and in amount—will drastically influence your perception of a given tea. You will then compare the flavors and aromas to other things you have tasted before, saying this tea tastes *like* “mushrooms” or “toasted bamboo.” It actually doesn't taste *like* anything other than itself—the association is in your mind and based on the interaction of the tea with your mind. We can influence others, by asking them to focus on a tea's “cinnamon” quality, but they will only recognize it if they have had enough cinnamon prior to trying the tea. Because we all have our own taste and opinion, there can't really be much agreement or development based on flavor or aroma.

Even the teas you find absolutely disgusting are enjoyed by somebody; and sometimes others scoff at the teas you love. You might even find that a tea with flavors and aromas you absolutely adore taste flat one day, and wonder what happened to its incredible aroma. Perhaps it had to do with what you ate that day, the weather, changes in preparation or any number of other immeasurable variables. There are a lot of us here in Asia who love a bit of mustiness in our aged Puerh. Maybe this is an acquired taste. There is no point in arguing to us that this means our Puerh is lower quality, when it brings us such joy. Obviously, it would be equally absurd for us to force you to drink lots of musty Puerh if you don't like the flavor, just like it is silly to argue that the stinky fruit *durian* should be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. Some people love *durian* and some hate it. It neither tastes good nor bad. It tastes good or bad *to certain people*.

What then should we focus on when evaluating and discussing tea? If not flavor and aroma, then what? Actually, there is a whole world of subtleties within a cup of tea beyond the flavor and aroma, and many of them are much more “objective”, in that most of us can agree on what we want. The first movement, after aroma and flavor, is towards what we call “mouthfeel (口感)”.



The highest sensitivity is discerning every leaf

The masters use the analogy of clothes when teaching about the differences between mouthfeel and flavor. Everyone likes different styles and colors of clothes. There is nothing wrong with that, and people should wear the style they like. And yet, when we close our eyes, we can all agree on which material is comfortable just by touching it. We all want smooth, soft material that can breathe on our bodies. Granted, some people sacrifice this comfort for clothes that look a certain way—have a certain style—but as soon as they get home, the first thing they do to “get comfortable” is change back into smooth, soft clothes which are made of natural fibers and can breathe. While we all have different tastes in colors and styles, we all can feel which is the most comfortable. And ultimately, tea is the same: we all enjoy different kinds of tea more or less, and appreciate different flavors more or less, but at the same time when it comes to the texture—the mouthfeel—of a tea, we all want it to be smooth.

Start paying attention to the way the tea touches your mouth and throat. Is it smooth or rough? We have found that the best teas are very smooth and comfortable. As soon as they enter the mouth, they splash up to the upper palate. The swallowing should occur naturally. With the finest teas, it's as if the tea goes down on its own, without any conscious energy in the swallowing. The best teas have a tendency to slide back on their own. They “want” to go down, in other words. Lower-quality teas, on the other

hand, have a tendency to pool in the front of the mouth, and you have to consciously push them to the back of the mouth and then consciously swallow them as well.

The best teas coat the mouth like milk or oil, so that after you swallow, you can feel the tea everywhere in your mouth, and slowly rising up into your nasal cavity. The tea should also be comfortable in the throat, often lingering on the breath for some time. This splashing up to the upper palate, traveling down smoothly, leaving the mouth moist and coated, as well as lingering on the breath are all signs of a fine tea. The more of these characteristics a tea has, the more comfortable it will be in your mouth.

Focusing on mouthfeel doesn't mean forever losing an appreciation of aroma or flavor, keep in mind. The best tea brewers can enhance any given tea in the most amazing way. What was flat and boring is full of life when prepared with skill. It never will cease to leave you awestruck: the way the tea is just better—in every way—when prepared by master hands. The master brews tea that is delicious and fragrant, but draws you in to subtler and subtler levels like mouthfeel.

When you begin to focus on mouthfeel, you'll find a whole world of textures and sensations awaiting you. It often helps to try this with water, or weaker tea if you are having trouble being overwhelmed by flavor and aroma. After time, however, you will find that you are

A Movement Towards Sensitivity

capable of appreciating and evaluating a tea's flavor and aroma while simultaneously recognizing if the mouthfeel is smooth or not. And you'll find that when discussing mouthfeel with others, there is always a greater concordance than our different tastes can ever offer. Pointing out the way a tea feels in the mouth one time is usually enough, even for a beginner. They are often able to begin feeling the effect quickly.

Furthermore, the evaluation of mouthfeel isn't just limited to tea. It also helps you choose which water and teaware is more suitable for preparing any given tea, as you begin to notice how certain water or teaware makes a tea smoother or rougher, and is therefore more or less

desirable. The more sensitive we become to this, the more we are able to make teas which reward us with great flavors and aromas, as well as comfortable mouthfeel.

As you move towards subtler and subtler aspects of tea, you find that after mouthfeel there are other levels as well, including the Qi of the tea. There is of course more to mouthfeel than what we have introduced here, but just the shift in focus away from flavor and aroma, to include these subtler levels will be a huge leap in your ability to appreciate tea, and ultimately prepare better cups for others, which is what gong fu tea is really all about.



Focus brings sensitivity





YIXING, THE FATHER OF TEA

WU DE

There is perhaps no art form that has married itself to tea and tea culture more passionately than the purple-sand teapots from Yixing, the “Pottery City”. The teapots made in Yixing often capture all the elegance and simplicity of the tea ceremony, while at the same time, hinting ever so slightly at the transcendence the ceremony can inspire. When artists master the craft, Yixing teapots can encourage us to find the harmony we are seeking when we sit for tea; for they bring with them the spirit of the Earth, the art of tea and the simplicity of true living. The best teapots are the ones where the decoration is so subtle, beckoning almost, as one holds them in the palm.

There is no ceramic art in the world quite like Yixing purple-sand teapots, for they aren’t just pieces of art meant to sit on the shelf and be admired. The beauty of tea art is only expressed properly as a living art. The pots want to be used. They develop a soft, silky sheen over time the more they find themselves in the company of good leaves and water—becoming more and more beautiful as they are used. In fact, finding a way to balance the elegance and function of a teapot is what mastery of Yixing art is all about. It is not enough that an Yixing teapot be inspiring to look at, it must also improve our tea as well as summon a second glance even when it sits on a shelf amongst others. Furthermore, the art of Yixing isn’t just about the sense of sight; it involves all the senses. We evaluate and appreciate these teapots by touching them, feeling their texture and form; we even ding them to hear the sound they make. Thus, the space around and between the teapots becomes just as important to the composition of the piece—the balance between the button and lid, the mouth, spout, the handle and base are all important features when crafting an Yixing teapot.

Like the favorite analogy of our eldest teacher Lao Tzu, the usefulness of the teapot also lies in its space—the tea flows *through* it, just as the Dao flows through us when we are clean and pure. And then, when we brew our teas, the improvement in aroma and flavor will help us judge our friendship with any given pot. Because of this combination of function and design, Yixing teapots have achieved a legacy of their own, finding a central place in the story of tea.

During most of the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE) popular tea was boiled in cauldrons with other ingredients and then ladled out. The tea itself was compressed into cakes that were then ground into powder before being thrown into the cauldron. Later, Lu Yu promoted the drinking of just the pure leaf, calling the liquor mixed

with fruits or flowers “gutter water.” In the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE) the real art of tea would begin in the monasteries, as the monks sought to refine the peacefulness and connection to tea, by crafting bowls, whisks, grinders and other implements that lent the ceremony an artistic expression like never before. For the first time, the tea ceremony was being expressed both spiritually and aesthetically, attracting more people over time.

During these two dynasties, tea would find its way to the royal court and beyond to the literati, who of course took to the new art with all the verve that such artists, authors and scholars could bring to a passion that incorporated their daily habits and deepest inspirations both. They, too, wanted to express the peace and serenity they had found on the mountain while visiting the monastery, to recapture it in some measure each day while they were at home. They wrote poems, calligraphy, books, painted pictures and of course made ceramics, like Song bowls to hold their beautifully whisked teas.

In the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 CE), the emperor would ban the use of powdered teas and all the art surrounding it would slowly die in China, though it was fortunately preserved, adapted and further explored in Japan. Instead, he promoted the use of whole-leaf teas, like the ancestors of long ago. All of the artistic intention was shifted towards this new form of tea preparation. Even before that, the town of Yixing, which was then called Yan Xian, was a pottery town, making all kinds of cheap household items for commoners, like jugs, plates, etc. It would very soon change to the teapot capital of the world, though.

According to ancient legend, there was a monk named Ding Shu who walked through the town shouting, “Honor and virtue for sale!” They say that all the villagers laughed at him, thinking him mad until a few weeks later when he changed his pitch to, “Riches for sale!” Some people then followed him and he led them to the iron-rich deposits of clay ore that would make the town famous for all the centuries to come.

During the reign of the Ming Emperor Zheng De (1505 – 1521 CE), Yixing teapots were elevated into an art form. Historians often attribute these changes to the now-legendary figure of Gong Chuan. Not much is known about Gong Chuan, as he was but the humble servant of a government officer. There are many versions of his story, though, and most of them involve some kind of trip where he accompanied his master to the neighboring city of Yixing. In his free time, he visited the Jing



A replica of Gong Chuan's first handmade pot

Sha Temple and drank tea with a monk there. The monk was an artist and had crafted all his teaware himself. Gong Chuan was amazed at the elegance and serenity expressed in the work and asked the monk to teach him. Over the coming years, Gong Chuan would return whenever he got the chance and try his hand at making the rustic teapots, using only his hand and a wooden spoon to form them. He had a natural affinity for clay, and soon started producing excellent teapots that were not only beautiful, but produced better tea. He gifted one to his master, who was also a tea lover. As his master shared tea with friends and family, they would all ask where he got the special teapot. In no time, all the government officials, artists and scholars in the town were feverishly collecting Gong Chuan's teapots. He became famous, quickly earning enough to support himself. His master gladly released him from service and he devoted the rest of his life to making teapots that expressed his understanding of Cha Dao. From that point on, the art of purple-sand teapots evolved and grew, spreading throughout China and beyond.

A big part of what makes Yixing teaware so special is the clay itself. The Chinese were master potters long before many Western countries, having developed stoneware and porcelain many centuries earlier. The clay used in Yixing teapots is mined from the local Yellow Dragon, Zhao Zuang, Shao Mei Yao and Hu Fu mountains and their surroundings, for it, too, is stoneware. Because the

clay is naturally lead-free, it can be used for food and drink even after the initial firing, without the need for a glaze. Without glaze, the clay remains porous and sand-like.

"Zisha" or "purple-sand" clay is composed of quartz remains, isinglass, kaolinite, mica, hematite, iron and several other trace elements. It is fired at a temperature of around 1100 -1800 degrees Celsius, and the quartz and isinglass remains create what potters call a "double pore structure", which ultimately was the ring that sealed its marriage to tea. Examination under a microscope allows one to see the deep chambers of pores that actually run from inside to outside in an Yixing teapot. Because of that, the oils in the tea are absorbed into the teapot itself and over time the pot gets "seasoned", as tea lovers say. In other words, it absorbs the fragrance and depth of all the teas it has met in its time. Also, the composite structure of Yixing clay makes it resilient to radical temperature changes, so that teapots can be covered with boiling water even in the cold of winter; and what could be a more elegant image than winter-plums covered in a light snow, perhaps pine-covered mountains in the distance beyond a frozen pond, as seen over the rim of a steaming Yixing pot?

After the clay is mined it looks like a block of stone, with a flaky consistency. It is then allowed to rest in the air for weeks or even years, called "corrosion", as

it breaks down into small, soybean-sized pebbles. These small chunks are then ground into sand and allowed to “ferment” in water for a period. The duration depends on the ore and the master overseeing the process, though most of the old masters I’ve met seemed to have a “the longer the better” philosophy when it comes to airing/storing the ore. More water and sifting produce smoother clay, whereas leaving more sand creates textured clay that is often more porous when fired. Sifters of various sizes are used to create these different textures. Then, after the clay is slabbed it is pounded with a large wooden mallet, sometimes blending colors in this way, until the putty is of the desired color and consistency.

The variety of colors in Yixing relate to where in the strata the ore was mined, how long it was allowed to “ferment” in air over time, as well as the firing temperature and occasional mixture of iron to redden the clay. Hotter temperatures will produce darker purple colors. Traditionally, the clay was categorized as purple (*zini*), red (*hongni*), green (*luni*), black (*heini*) or gray/yellow (*huangni*). Some scholars and Yixing collectors, however, suggest that the clays should be classified by what mountain they were mined from, rather than the color. In recent years, there has been the addition of a variety of other colors—green, yellow, blue, black and red in myriad hues—some of which may be due to natural or manmade additives, like iron for example. Some pots even include mixtures of one or more of these spectacular clays.

The *zhuni* red clay pots, especially antique ones, are the most expensive because this ore is virtually non-existent in its natural form anymore. Furthermore, the greater shrinkage and more delicate consistency of these *zhuni* pots make the success rate lower, as many won’t match their lid or get broken in the process. All *zhuni* pots are at least in part blended with some other kind of clay to increase their stability.

Despite the cost and rarity of *zhuni* pots, Yixing is famous as the “Purple-sand City” because it is the purple-sand (*zini*) which is the oldest and most common clay/ore. It was the purple-sand clay pots that become the “Father of Tea”, marrying Yixing forever to tea brewing. Real Purple-sand pots have a magic effect on tea liquor that can only be tasted and felt in the mouth.

Yixing clay has almost perfect plasticity, and can be molded, thrown or cast without being sticky or difficult to work. Furthermore, it has one of the lowest shrinkage rates of any clay, on average ten to twenty-five percent from production to firing, depending on the type of clay, the processing and the temperature of the kiln. This allows for the perfect fit of the lid and pot, as well as the porous texture that makes them so perfect for brewing tea. Moreover, the quartz and other metallic elements in the clay lend it a natural, simple color. The great potter Gao Zhuang once said that what he loved most about Yixing art was that the appearance couldn’t show its value, but rather its nature.

The Earth couldn’t have dreamed of a clay more suited for tea, for Yixing clay comes from deep mines, bringing that spirit and joy with it to the tea ceremony. One of the brightest masters in the Pottery City today, Ke Tao Chung says, “The art of purple-sand teaware is used to express the feelings the craftsman has for the Earth, and then to transcend them, so that people can feel the softness and freedom revealed in the Earth.” I also have found such artistic, spiritual and even elemental grandeur in holding my Yixing pots—they are wise and kind, and the way they improve our tea, by absorbing its essence and power and bringing it to all our future sessions, is nothing shy of miraculous.

They say that a Ming Emperor liked to leave the palace incognito and wander the cities, going to teahouses and other places to share in the conversations of the times. On one such excursion, dressed as a humble peasant, the emperor was walking down a quiet street. Through the window he saw an old farmer preparing tea. The ceremony looked so harmonious and pleasant, the emperor couldn’t resist and knocked lightly at the door. He politely asked the farmer if he could join him and the farmer smilingly acquiesced. The liquor was dark and deep, amazing the emperor. For several hours they sat in calm joy, content to just relax, basking in the peace the dark tea inspired. When the time came to leave, the emperor asked the farmer where he got such amazing tea. The farmer replied, “I’m sorry sir, I am but a poor farmer and can’t afford any tea at all; I have only this old Yixing pot used by my father and his father before him.” Holding the empty pot up for the emperor’s inspection, he saw that the pot was seasoned enough to create such deep liquor with just water alone. The next day, the emperor sent a bag of gold coins to the farmer’s house and arranged a caravan to leave for Yixing the very next day!

Over the years, the art of Yixing would evolve, incorporating all the other art forms in the Middle Kingdom. Since most artists, of any kind, were also tea lovers, pots soon had calligraphy, painting, seal-carving and even poetry on their sides as ornamentation. Some of the most sought after teapots were ones made by famous potters and artists together, one creating the pot and the other painting it or carving the calligraphy.

Eventually, two main styles would develop based on the differences in the tea art of the North and South. In the northern cities, near the capital, it was mostly government officials that collected teapots. They wanted larger pots to serve many guests, with a lot of ornamentation to show off their power and affluence. In the South, businessmen and commoners alike all drank tea every day. They preferred simple, small pots to make tea for themselves and their friends. There were regional exceptions to these trends. Though not associated with North, South or any particular region, these styles continue even today, and they have diversified, as generations of potters have innovated and creatively expanded the art and its expression, technique and method. I have found that the

so-called 'southern style pots' are often more conducive to a harmonious gongfu tea ceremony. Serving tea to large groups is usually better suited to bowl tea.

Over the years, potters would develop new clay compositions and formulas, refining the process so much that a whole class of "clay masters" would develop. These men didn't actually make teapots, they just refined the clay with enough mastery to surpass what the potters themselves could do. And the potters, then, were free to develop new techniques and methods of expressing the many sentiments of tea.

Much like the aged and wise tea leaves, Yixing pots have a kind of consciousness and even destiny. They seem to have a bond with their owners, as they are passed down through time. Walking into a store full of teapots, five separate tea lovers will be drawn to five separate pots without being able to explain why. These pots then become like dear friends, traveling with us over time as we progress. There are times when I enter the center's tea room undecided about which tea to drink and find myself choosing not based on which leaf I think suits the

day, but which teapot I wish to hold. A simple Yixing pot resting on a small plate, framed by mountains, is an image that for me carries all the peace and bliss of the tea ceremony with it.

I imagine myself living in some rural town long ago, with three Yixing pots and three jars of tea. After a hard day's work, I can't wait to return home to these friends each night. I spend the evenings drunk on old teas, poured from small Yixing pots that have been in my family for generations, watching the sun set behind the abundance of distant peaks...



*Gentle friend,
May your stream never end,
Changing generations of leaves and water
To golden cups of tranquility,
Long after I am gone.*





A 1960's hongni pot decorated with gold



A Qing Dynasty duani pot with the heart sutra carved on it



A modern wood-fired pot made of zisha flecked with duanni for decoration



Wu De's favorite teapot style, called "arhant" since it is said to resemble a meditating monk



TEA FOR TWO

LINDSEY GOODWIN

There's a certain magic in Tea that connects us with our higher selves, with Nature, with the present moment, with other people and with the divinity in all things. Above all else, this is what I love about tea, and that is a sentiment shared by many others in this community. Looking through the back issues of this magazine, you'll find many an article devoted to the topic of tea and connection—tea as a meditative practice, tea as a means for remembering your connection to Nature, tea as a tool for presence, etc. And lately, a lot of community members have been bringing to light one specific way in which tea connects, one which we have yet to cover.

I'm talking about the beautiful and unique connections that arise from sharing tea with a partner. In order to include a few of the many different ways of approaching tea with a partner, I've interviewed my own 'significant other' and two other couples in the Global Tea Hut community. We'll share our perspectives on drinking tea with a partner in a sort of 'conversation outside of time and space'—the interviews were conducted separately and pieced together around different topics. First, I'll briefly introduce everyone:

Chris and Mikki live in Los Angeles. They have been drinking tea together since 2010, and started working with tea as a practice for deepening their relationship in 2012. They drink tea together every morning.

Vera and Frederic's relationship sparked around tea in 2013. They spent several weeks at Tea Sage Hut earlier this year and are currently traveling the world together, sharing tea along the way. They drink tea together pretty much every day, though it's not around any certain schedule.

Merlin lives in Germany and I live in Taiwan. We spend several months a year together in either place, and serve tea to each other often during those times.

Making Space

Chris: Wu De came [to Los Angeles] to serve tea [in 2012]. He gave us two bowls and some Sun Moon Lake red tea. He left asking us to sit with each other and have tea in the morning one time a day for seven days. Just leaves in a bowl and hot water—that's it. It was a great start and a great experience because it was an opportunity for us to make time for each other.

Lindsey: Yeah, creating space for just being together in a peaceful state of mind can be so vital and healing in a relationship. It can be the ultimate "quality time". Sharing tea in this way can be like a date night, but without all the expectations and go-getter experiences and detailed plans. It's just hot water, tea and connection.

Merlin: Exactly. There is no agenda. Nothing has to be done, nothing is in a hurry, we can just be... spending time like this is the most valuable gift we can give to our relationship.

Chris: The collaboration holds the meaning. You and your connection to the tea make it meaningful. It's less about the tea than it is about having time that's unencumbered and with no purpose but to be with the other person. It's always that way for people when they dedicate time to it.

Mikki: It's a sacred space to share.

Lindsey: That's so true. There's a lot of ancient symbolism in Cha Dao. One very old way to see each session is as a temporary ordination in which the participants are all monks and nuns. This particular element of the sacred adds another level to the way in which you can share tea with a partner. It's sharing tea with your partner, but not *as* your partner. Rather, it's more like your higher self sharing tea with your partner's higher self, and seeing that they are one and the same. It's not about fixing relationship problems. It's seeing that there aren't any problems; that everything is exactly as it should be for your paths to unfold together (and perhaps also apart). That sense of no obstacles and nothing needing to be done creates such a freedom, such spaciousness, in the entire relationship. It infuses the relationship (and life in general) with this sense of light and play. It helps both partners release all those crazy fears and desires that skulk around in their minds trying to sabotage their lives, and to embrace the joy of the present moment and the divinity in everything (not just your partner). Perceiving the other person clearly and seeing that you are one and the same also gives the space for both people to grow into their higher selves so much more naturally and comfortably than they could otherwise. There is no more "I'm afraid you'll do X" or "I want you to do Y." There is only a brightly glowing "YES" to loving, living and growing!



Chris & Mikki sharing tea in Joshua Tree

Tea as a Foundation

Frederic: Tea, like the breath, can be a constant reminder for being present, aware. So drinking tea now has that “sacred” aspect glued to it. Drinking tea is like sitting.

Merlin: For me, tea is a form of meditation that Lindsey and I can do together.

Lindsey: Yeah, like an interactive meditation.

Vera: Tea is one of the most (if not the most) important foundations of my relationship with Frederic. I was completely new to tea prior to visiting the Hut, and prior to meeting Frederic. We came to know each other through drinking tea together. When two people are awakened to Tea in the same time, place and manner, it is truly a special connection that can never be broken (regardless of how long we journey together). Tea is a game changer, a whole-life changer. There were four significant changes that happened at the same time when I came to the Hut: I started drinking tea daily, I started meditating daily, I stopped drinking alcohol and I began a relationship with Frederic. I don't know if it was a combination of these things or all of them together, but something significant shifted at my core and my life will never be the same. It is in this time and with the support of these changes that I

am allowing myself to become all that I am. I am returning to my True Nature.

Chris: Sharing tea has been crucial for my relationship with Mikki. It has brought a lot of heart into it. I can be an analytical person, all about skill and craft. Drinking tea with Mikki has brought me back to heart and to the rare opportunity to share with others. It's not just perfecting the technique, but also energetically connecting with the person across the table. Not “How do I make really delicious tea?” but “How do I make tea that connects me with love to those around me?”

Mikki: Yeah, it really opens up heart space and connection.

Lindsey: Exactly. For me, it's like clearing a channel and allowing the love of Nature, the love of the Universe, Divine Love, whatever you want to call it, flow through. There's something really magical that happens when you serve tea with presence and love, and regularly serving tea to someone who you love deeply can open your heart so much. On the surface level, practicing tea by serving tea to your partner improves your tea brewing skills, but there's something much deeper going on too, and it is what makes your tea serving really special. It's learning to serve from the heart. And ultimately, that expands far

Tea for Two

beyond how you serve tea to your partner or to anyone else. It's a practice that brings you into a more compassionate way of being with everyone you meet.

Slowing Down & Seeing

Vera: I've noticed many benefits of drinking tea together. Perhaps the most important is that it has enabled us to slow... way... down. We both tend to move too fast, rush the process, project our relationship into the future too much... We both come to the table with a lot of "fire". The "water" and "earth" energies and the alchemy of their coming together in the tea brewing and drinking process can help to cool the flames a bit, assisting us in being present for ourselves, for each other and the moment.

Lindsey: Yes. Again, it's that space of nothing needing to be done, and the alchemy that occurs when you are simply present and accepting.

Chris: Tea has an incredible ability to open you up into a place of complete acceptance. It's really just, "Hello. How are you? I see you. I'm happy to be with you. I remember why I'm with you."

Lindsey: Yeah, tea really brings you into a heart space where you can so clearly see others without any kind of projections or judgments. And that can be such a powerful thing in a long-term relationship, where there's a high risk of accumulating toxic emotional baggage unless you have some good methods of clearing it away, like tea and meditation.

Advice for Newbies

Chris: If you're looking to deepen your connection, start with tea. When we talk with other couples, they often feel like they don't have any quality time. I tell them you can't have it unless you make it. Instead of getting up, making tea, etc. as an individual practice, make it a shared activity in the simplest, fastest way—tea in a bowl.

Merlin: Yeah, normally I would go for side handle or leaves in a bowl. In most tea sessions, it's about the connection between us, and tea gives the space and amplifies it. As a couple, we trust and know each other very well, so when the focus is on the tea, it's easy for us to pick up on the energy of the other person and amplify it.

Lindsey: That can be especially obvious with bowl tea, when brewing technique isn't much of a factor. Sometimes, we use the same teaware, the same kind of tea and the same water source... yet your tea and my tea are

totally different! Sharing tea with a partner is a wonderful way to learn to recognize the energy in different people's tea, and to pick up on the subtle energy shifts in each other. So, yeah, I usually prefer bowl tea, too.

Merlin: But there are definitely times when gongfu tea is great.

Lindsey: And whisked tea, too! Anyone else have some advice to share?

Frederic: Yes, get yourself a ticket to Taiwan and stay at the Hut for some time.

Lindsey: Yeah! Contact us through our website. When you visit, you can learn firsthand about those tea brewing methods we talked about and (more importantly) learn to brew from the heart.

Vera: Wu De's words ring in my ears: "Always drink tea with a clear heart." This is the most important. Frederic and I made an agreement to follow this advice and I pass it along to others. Where, when and how we drink tea don't seem to really make that big of a difference. Life goes on as it always has, with all the noise and the clutter and so on. As best as we can, we try to 'clean it up' and prepare for a 'perfect space' in which to drink tea... But you can be sure that the perfect, pure space is inside of you.

Lindsey: Beautiful... Here's hoping that you can find that space in your next tea session!



*If you are cold, tea will warm you;
if you are too heated, it will cool you;
If you are depressed, it will cheer you;
If you are excited, it will calm you.*

—William Gladstone



FINDING CHAXI ELEMENTS

KAI YA

As any of you who have come to visit us know, we are just a short distance from a whole town with hundreds of shops dedicated to selling tea and teaware, and many examples of all the items we talked about in last months' article are available for sale wherever you go. This is an awesome part of living in a country with a strong tea culture, but it isn't necessary to live near such a place to make great *chaxi*. One of my favorite aspects of tea, and indeed one of the joys of any tea lover, is converting "non" tea things into tea things, or finding tea things in unlikely places. So if you were feeling lost or wondering where you were going to buy such tea-specific items as we talked about last month, hopefully this article will give you some ideas on where to start looking.

As I first began to drink more tea, my vision started to change on its own. Anything flat and of the right size became something I might make tea on, or set my kettle on. Anything thin and long and strong enough might be a spout cleaner or a guide for the leaves. I started to see tea things wherever I looked, and whenever I walked into a store, the thought, "Can anything here be used for tea?" was always floating around in there somewhere in my conscious or subconscious mind. Truly, this article could end right here, because the more you drink tea and the more tea-oriented your attention is, the more you will be rewarded with all kinds of tea discoveries, wherever you are.

The most obvious place to start looking is on the ground. Tea has been drunk for over ten thousand years. Long before tea shops started selling expensive artisan-crafted bamboo tea sticks and scoops, if someone wanted a stick for their tea they would just pick one up, or pluck one off of a tree. A big percentage of tea artists are using pieces of wood or stone they picked up off the ground to work with in the first place, so you can too! Your pieces might lack the level of refinement that comes from knowing how to gently manipulate the raw materials into the subtle works of art for sale in boutique shops, but they will shine with more spirit; and most of all, they will be entirely your own. And who knows, it might spark your own first steps down a path towards being the first tea artist in your community! Shane already took some steps in this direction last winter when he laboriously sanded sections of bamboo down into scoops to give all of us for Christmas.

Now rocks and pieces of wood don't quite exactly fit into the category of converted teaware. For that, we have to start looking at stuff that people did make, with

some function in mind that wasn't tea-related. One good example are Japanese *obi*. These articles of traditional Japanese clothing are very long and thin, with a huge array of colors and patterns. Tea people have been buying them and cutting them down for use as tea cloths (*chabu*) for a long time now. The world is also absolutely full of man-made containers, of infinite variety or styles, materials and purposes, which can be converted into a waste water vessel (*kensui*). But when using modern items especially, you have to be a little more considerate when making choices.

Some things are too obviously not meant for tea, or can't be converted for another reason. Beautiful carved wooden hairpins are common in Taiwan, and catch my eye all the time. But if you were to use one for tea (at least in a lot of Asian countries) your guests would probably feel strange that you were touching tea with a personal hair item, no matter how beautiful it is. A nice counter-example to this is the gongfu teacups we usually drink from at the center. Long ago, these cups were all used for drinking alcohol, but at some point they were converted for tea and in this day and age everyone thinks of them as teacups when they see them.

This is one reason why antique stores are a great place to look. You often can find objects which almost nobody even recognizes anymore, or old versions of new things, which can make all the difference between a good tea item and a piece of rubbish. The other reason is that somehow, the energy of times gone by has a way of blending with tea that just can't be described, lending another energy to the session that tea welcomes naturally—not to mention most things were simply made to abide in by gone days which now are made with a mind towards waste. Cheap, flimsy, quick and convenient manufacturing doesn't translate well to the tea table.

On the other hand, if you are going shopping, one definitely shouldn't rule out such modern atrocities as department stores in one's search. I'm not particularly suggesting you go there on *purpose* to look for tea things, as other local specialty shops will probably be better. The point is, don't prejudge and turn off your tea eyes wherever you go! Although I don't happen to walk into one of these places more than a couple times a year, I definitely have my "tea stuff" antennae turned on full blast if I do get forced into one. After all, if I can find a way of turning even a little piece of all that useless rubbish into something that will transform the consciousness of the world, isn't that a wonderful deed and an act of tea alchemy worth braving a department store for? These are partic-



A simple flower arrangement made of found plants and wood

ularly good candidates for tea cloths. You aren't likely to find one lying on the ground with your sticks and stones, after all. *Don't* forget, in many cases the manufacturer just didn't realize they were making a tea item!

Chabu are a good example. There probably isn't a shelf anywhere in your city labeled "cloths for *chaxi*". But, chances are there are some bamboo "placemats", or "table runners" for elegant dinner arrangements, and so on, in most any store that sells kitchen goods. Kitchen supply sections are also often useful sources of items that can be used as tea pillows, *kensui*, or even sealed porcelain jars for storing your tea. We have a nice tea pillow that cost only three dollars we bought at such a place, a colorful ceramic piece meant for table mints or something like that. You also might take a look in home furnishings at the floor tiles for more tea pillow options.

Lastly, I want to talk a bit about vases. Flower arrangements are of course quite optional as far as *chaxi* goes. Also, of all the *chaxi* items, a flower vase is the most universally recognizable and available. But, because flower arrangements can be such a deep, diverse and rewarding aspect of *chaxi*, I feel we shouldn't just leave it at that. Note again that flowers are a great item that can be found anywhere and simply placed on the table for free, whereas when we begin to use vases, we begin to refine the practice and move towards the ancient art of *chabana*, the Japanese word for describing a flower arrangement made for tea.

Along with this art form comes also the necessity for a wide variety of vases and dishes in which to arrange the flowers. At first it might seem like this is going to be an expensive endeavor, but it is not necessarily so.

With a little creativity and an expansion of the way you look at the world and define a "vase", you can start delving into this aspect of *chaxi* without spending a lot of money on Japanese antiques. A good start is to look up "*chabana*" on Google Images and see the enormous variety of forms "vases" can take. Often a simple ceramic or even wooden bowl can be used, or a very shallow dish you might have thought was a plate might actually be your most beautiful *chabana* vase, you just didn't know it yet. Most garden suppliers sell metal flower spikes and other accessories that can hold tall flowers in shallow or wide vases. Again, some of my best vases are things I have found on the ground, such as rocks with holes in them or pieces of twisted wood into which stems can be fixed, creating "dry" vases. In some cases I might put the twisted wood or rock onto a dish or into a bowl also if they suit each other, so that the arrangement can get water.

Your efforts will be well worth it. No other element adds the kind of vibrancy, life and beauty to a *chaxi* the way a good flower arrangement does. And as we discussed last month, *chaxi* is all about honoring the transient unique beauty of the session, and flowers are the perfect representatives of the spirit of *Ichigo Ichie* in Nature.

All you need to do is start looking around wherever you go with tea eyes open. Ask yourself, "Can I use this for tea?" and look for things like these:

- Anything I can put my teapot on
- Anything that I can put water into
- Anything I can push tea leaves with
- Anything I can hold tea with
- Anything I can use as a tray for my bowls
- Anything I can rest my lid or stick on
- Anything beautiful or inspiring in the spirit of tea

This is quite a formalized list, and although you might at first actually have such thoughts running through your head, the fact is that over time it just becomes a reflex. As I said before, this is one of the joys of a tea lover, and if you love tea, you will notice more and more often this exclamation: "Hey, I can make tea with that!" It's much more about your

orientation than anything else, and I think it even ties into the old saying, "As the man seeks the Leaf, the Leaf seeks the man." The more you steep your spirit in Tea, the less you need to intentionally seek Tea out, and the more you find Her finding Her way to you. Similarly, I think you will be surprised to find that in fact you do live in a place that is full of things for tea after all, just as soon as you start looking...



A simple chaxi made from a piece of an abandoned chair





Tea Wayfarer

*Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. 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 the creative and vibrant **Yvonne Gallegos**:*

This past January, sitting upon the Flower of Life in Tulum, Mexico, is where Tea found me. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life. I was served bowls of tea with such reverence and love that it moved me deeply to my core. I was in awe of this ceremony of serving tea in a way that I had never seen or heard of before. Sure, I had heard of tea, as tea is everywhere—in the markets, in my kitchen cabinet, served to me at a friend's house, etc.

This experience, however, was something completely different. This tea was completely different. What was this ceremony I had just experienced? I marveled at the way I opened up to Her with humility and for the way She listened. For as I looked within those bowls of tea, there it all was: earth, air, water, fire, ether, spirit, oneness... *Life!* It spoke to me in a way that nothing had before. It was like reuniting with a loved one, overwhelmed with such joy and love and so many other emotions. To me, it was clear that She possesses all the wisdom in the world. Within these bowls of tea are absolute truth. There is nowhere to hide, for She is truth. Within these bowls are absolute love, for She is love.

I honestly do not know much about tea, compared to those in the 'tea world'. I am a complete beginner. I cannot have a conversation with you about how great this oolong tea is or how old that puerh is, but that's okay, for I'm in no rush. What I do know is how everything you need to know about life is within Tea and in the ceremony. *Patience* while the water brews. Willingness to listen and witness life as the water slowly opens the tea. A loving heart-space not only for when you reach for the kettle but when you also reach for the bowl—taking into my body and sharing centuries of gratitude for those who nurture and harvest the Leaf and all plants on earth. The mindfulness of preparing the tea table with simplicity that reminds us to de-clutter our minds and life, to keep only what is necessary, for excess distracts. The way to handle objects that serve us over our lives with respect and care. Being 'in love' with those sitting around you. And most importantly being present. Truly present in that moment.

Meeting the Leaf has changed my life. It is such a precious gift to have a reason to sit in silence and reflect on life, on your own or with friends. To put your cell phones away or, even better, turn them off for a while and have a moment in time to connect and share a loving space or conversation with friends or family. Our world is in such a hurry these days that we often lose sight of

what is really important. Sitting with a bowl of tea, I experience beauty in the quietness, and gratitude for the space it gives me to reflect on all the things I have to be grateful for.

I knew from the first bowl of tea in Mexico that it was never a question of 'if' I came to Taiwan; it was really a question of 'when'. It was really important for me to come and learn more about Her—how to handle Her and how to communicate with Her better. To learn the tools that will bring my relationship with Her to a higher level and to share this special experience with others. I have already served tea here at the Hut and it brought me so much joy and love. A love that I've only ever felt for my daughter, as I look at her and she gazes back with the most supreme, pure love you can imagine. Tea is also my daughter. She is everything and nothing.

So here I am, three months after being found by Her, sitting here at the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan, expressing my complete love and gratitude for Tea and all She has to teach me. Nothing ever felt so right. I'm right where I need to be, present in this moment...

I'm either in Toronto or LA these days, so if you are in the area let's have some tea:

ygallegos@me.com



Inside the Hut

Global Tea Hut sessions around the world:

- In Los Angeles, there are Global Tea Hut events every Thursday at 6 PM and Sunday at 9:30 AM. To reserve a spot, email Colin at livingteas@gmail.com.
- In Barcelona, Spain, Global Tea Hut member Antonio holds tea events each month at Caj Chai Teahouse. The next Global Tea Hut event is on June 7th at 9:45. Contact him at info@cajchai.com for more info.
- In Moscow, Russia, there are frequent tea events. Contact Tea Hut member Ivan at teeabai@gmail.com or Denis at chikchik25@gmail.com for details.
- In Nice, France, GTH member Sabine holds regular tea events at the tearoom Les Causeries de Blandine. You can email her at sabine@letempsdunthe.com.
- In Darwin, Australia, Sam holds GTH tea events on Fridays at 6 PM. Email him at sdsgibb@gmail.com.
- In Tallinn, Estonia, Chado tea shop holds events most Friday evenings at 7 PM. Contact events@firstflush.ee for more details. Also, Timo Einpaul and Herkko Labi both hold small weekly tea events in their homes in Tartu, Estonia and Tallinn, Estonia (respectively), on Wednesdays at 6 PM. You can email Timo at timo@sygis.net and Herkko at herkots@gmail.com.

Our goals for the coming year:

- Increase membership to 2,000 by January 1st, 2015
- Hire an architect and begin building in 2015
- Incorporate Global Tea Hut in Taiwan so we can offer Taiwanese visas to foreign volunteers

Ways in which Global Tea Hut will continue to improve as we get near our goals:

- At 1,000 members, we'll start traveling more to research articles on tea and teaware, and to source new and different organic teas. As an awesome side-effect, this will allow us to connect organic farmers to each other and to you!
- At 1,500 members, we'll start translating modern and ancient Chinese and Japanese tea wisdom to English. In many cases, these will be the first translations of major Asian tea texts into English!

How you can help:

- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Use social media and email to share our videos, our links and membership to Global Tea Hut. Post photos of your tea sessions and GTH envelopes. Spread the word to people who may benefit from membership as much as you do!
- Share each month's tea with friends. Show them the newsletter and tell them why you love your subscription. Tell them we need 2,000 members this year to begin construction on the world's best free tea center.

Center News

- Before you visit, check out the center's website (www.teasagehut.org) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. We've had a big increase in our number of guests lately, so if possible please contact us well in advance to arrange a visit.
- We just returned from a trip to Yunnan, where we pressed organic Ailao sheng puerh cakes as a fundraiser for our new tea center, Light Meets Life. We will also press two more types of cakes, including a snow chrysanthemum shou puerh like we pressed last year. To make a donation for a cake to support our new center, email us.
- Wu De will briefly visit his tea teacher in Malaysia in June. Look forward to new insights from their time together! Other than that, Wu De will be here at Tea Sage Hut all summer. Yay!
- Residents of Europe, you're in luck! By the time you receive this, Nick will be serving tea in England. Also, Lindsey will be serving tea in Germany from June 1st through July 15th. Contact us for details: globalteahut@gmail.com



Tea Inspired Poetry

A List of Times for tea

*In idle passing
When poetry fails to inspire
Thoughts confused
In time to a song
When the music is finished
A life in seclusion
Enjoying the scholarly life
Conversing late at night
Studying on a sunny day
In the bridal chamber
In honor of favored guests
As host to scholars or pretty girls
Friends return from far away
In perfect weather
When skies are overcast
Watching boats sail by in the canal
Amidst trees and bamboo groves
When the flowers blossom and the birds sing
On hot days by the side of a lotus pond
Burning incense in the courtyard
After tipsy guests have retired
When the children are out
On visits to remote temples
Near a spring or scenic landscape*

—Hsu Tzu Shu