



Global Tea Art

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE
July 2014

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Letter from the Editor

In July, midway through this third year of Global Tea Hut, we find ourselves blossoming like the frangipani flowers outside the center. This is one of the best and most unique months of GTH ever! We hope that all the joy and love that went into this month's envelope will be transmitted to you, and help spread this experience further. In this month, two long-term GTH goals were met with great elation:

Firstly, as we have been discussing in great detail these past few months, we hope to take this magazine further afield, bringing more and more journalism to these pages. This month, we all traveled to Qian Jia Zhai, Ai Lao Mountain in Yunnan. And in the coming pages we plan to tell you all about this magical region, sharing our adventures with you as well. We hope that this trip is the beginning of many more to come, and that future trips are even more focused, with travel articles, info about tea growing regions and families, history, translated texts and much more. As membership increases, we will be able to fund more such trips—bringing you rarer and more exotic teas, and brighter, more interesting stories to surround you tea drinking. We are sure that this will bring an even greater magic to this GTH experience, as well as to connect you to great organic farmers who are committed to environmental preservation.

This trip also heralds the beginning of an annual Global Tea Hut tea trip that we plan to host each spring. Thirteen people joined us this time around, from six different countries around the world. We foresee a time in the future where these annual trips will be much larger, and the camaraderie will be all the more pronounced! Imagine meeting each other for the first time on the slopes of Ai Lao Mountain, as we did. Or sharing your first cup of tea together in person with a GTH brother from Estonia beneath the stunning cliffs of Wuyi Mountain (next year's destination)!

The second goal we achieved this month was to produce our own tea for GTH. As you will soon see, this month's tea is the rarest and most special we've ever sent out in these envelopes, containing all the love and good wishes of thirteen of our very own brothers and sisters in this community! May this be the beginning of many more teas handcrafted with spirit and love—teas that further this community and make this experience all the more intimate.

As promised, we've brought you better packaging to protect the teas, rarer and more personalized tea, and more journalism based on direct connection with tea growing regions, farmers and producers. We hope that this experience helps inspire you to share Global Tea Hut with people. In that way, this experience will expand and



Wu De

we will be able to further improve in all these areas. And, of course, all the proceeds of this magazine will be devoted to maintaining our current center, as well as to building a better, brighter future center that will belong to all of us!

As you travel with us in the following pages, we hope you feel the vibrancy of our trip and the deep and lasting bonds we made with each other—some of us having met for the first time in person. Traveling together brought us all closer together and deepened our love of tea. We hope you feel that too, as if you were there. Actually, you all were. We talked of you often, hoping that the coming issue and the tea sent with it would inspire you as much as it has us. You traveled with us in spirit. And as we begin to travel more to seek out such teas and experiences worth sharing, we know that you'll be along for the ride: in our hearts and prayers. In that way, this experience is much more than a tea of the month club. Plenty of vendors are selling that.

We are offering the chance to connect with a vibrant, living tea tradition and the community that surrounds it! We are offering the chance to learn about tea itself as well as how to utilize tea as a transformational tool in your life. And, most importantly, we are offering you the chance to participate in building free, non-profit tea spaces in Taiwan and later abroad—spaces you can visit yourself and feel a part of. We are offering family...

A photograph showing several round, woven baskets filled with fresh, green tea leaves, arranged in a row. The leaves are vibrant and appear to be in the process of being processed or dried.

Tea of the Month

SPRING 2014 WILD RED TEA

QIAN JIA ZHAI, YUNNAN

This is by far the most special and treasured tea we've ever sent, and that's saying a lot! This month we've fulfilled a long-standing goal to make tea with our own hands to share with all of you, infusing the entire process from tree to bowl with the energy of this community! We hope that this marks the beginning of many more teas right from the source, bringing you a rich background to complement the amazing experience that is Global Tea Hut. As membership increases, we plan to devote some funds to traveling to tea-growing regions and finding farmers who produce tea organically, and who love the earth and wish to protect it the way that we do.

Drinking tea with this community each month is a profound experience, and we are always blown away by how different the tea is once it starts arriving at its destinations and we all start to drink it together. As so many of you have verified, you can really feel the community in the cup. This month will be extra special because we have such a magnificent story surrounding every bowl.

Sometimes people in the tea world get jaded, hearing so many stories used by vendors to sell tea. We know. After you go to a tea market in China and hear a few dozen wild claims about how the boss bought more tea than a region actually-factually produces, how they know him so well in such-and-such a village that he's family; or how his close relationship with some high government official allows him access to otherwise inaccessible tea—after all that, you start to tune out stories and rely solely on your own taste. Good teas don't need a story. They speak for themselves. "The truth is in the cup," as Master Lin always says. Relying on your own taste when buying tea is great, but let's face it: a tea with a story is more enjoyable! Isn't that true for anything? Isn't your favorite piece of jewelry the one with a story? Isn't your favorite piece of decoration or artwork in your house the one you found on that special trip?

We believe that honest, heartfelt stories can enhance a tea and help connect us to the source. Since we aren't selling any teas, our trips to tea-growing regions will always be invested with a pure-hearted wish to deepen your relationship to tea and this community. We have three goals in mind: First, to inform you, so that you can learn about tea, tea regions, processing and history. Second, to make the drinking experience personal. This brings myth and emotion to each bowl, beyond what this beautiful community already brings to the tea table. Finally, we hope to promote organic farmers who grow in sustainable ways, connecting them to the world

and to each other, so that we can educate tea lovers about the effects their purchasing decisions have on the environment, as well as the effects you each have on the future of tea production...

Our Trip

This month, a group of thirteen Global Tea Hut members traveled to Yunnan in Southwest China, which is the birthplace of all tea and Cha Dao. This trip was the first of what we hope will be many activities designed to bring this community together in person. We hope to use our tea centers to create movement from this magazine, and the experience that surrounds receiving it, to actual tea spaces and then back home again. Receiving these envelopes always means more after you've visited our center and met the authors in person, seeing how your financial support is used. We hope to host a lot more tea trips in the coming years, as well as big gatherings at the new center after it's built!

The impetus for this trip actually began years ago... Wu De is always ready to learn anything tea related from anyone, and will humbly receive any teacher, whether in his lineage or not. Amongst many teachers he's studied tea with, he learned a lot from a Taiwanese tea master named Huang Chuan Fang. Some of you may recall that he even discussed Master Huang's calligraphy in his book *The Way of Tea*. Master Huang is a kind and gentle teacher, who has a way of conveying the spirit of tea simply and unadorned, so that people from all walks of life feel inspired to let Tea change their lives. He also has a vibrantly experimental streak, exploring new tea regions and testing new processing methodology. This sometimes creates amazing teas. In the mid 2000's, Master Huang began spending more and more time in Yunnan, eventually settling there and only returning to Taiwan on occasion.

In 2007, Master Huang began exploring more remote areas of Yunnan—literally getting off the beaten path. He began hiking up as yet unpaved roads to more remote villages that other tea connoisseurs weren't yet exploring, often uncovering amazingly clean and stunning teas. Around that time, Master Huang started visiting the village of Qian Jia Zhai in the Ai Lao mountain range. While there, he met the amazing Ai Li Juan, a tea lover and producer with the same verve for bright, clean and old-growth teas. He began producing small batches



of tea with her burgeoning company and the two formed a powerful business partnership. Around that time, Wu De met Ms. Ai at a tea expo in Malaysia where he was visiting his master. Her strong personality, friendliness and love for tea made Master Huang's flattering introduction unnecessary—the two were fast tea brother and sister. It also helped that her tea had more than an amazing liquor; it had an amazing story as well!

Years later, traveling by bus for more than ten hours from the capitol of Yunnan, Kunming, our group arrived at the Ai Lao Mountains late at night. The Ai Lao Mountain Range is huge, extending hundreds of square kilometers. (The Nature reserve alone is more than 500 square kilometers). The highest peak is over 3000 meters. The Ai Lao range is China's most vibrant evergreen forest, with vegetation covering more than eighty percent of the mountains, hundreds of species of plants and more than seventy kinds of large arboreal trees, including several varieties of *Camellia sinensis*. There are also vibrant ecologies of animals: everything from Bengal tigers and leopards to bears, rare birds, cobras and monkeys. Yunnan is a very lush and vibrant province, with fertile soil, mists and fog and crystalline waters that flow down from the Himalayas to the West. Ai Lao is mostly situated between the two most important of these "Nine Dragons," as the major rivers are called, the Lishi/Yuanjiang and the Lincang. There are eight traditional villages in Ai Lao with

Dian Hong

Red tea from Yunnan is often called "Dian Hong". "Dian" is an aboriginal word for Yunnan, so this just means, "Yunnan red". As we have often discussed, 'red tea' is what is often mistakenly called 'black tea' in the West. Ordinarily, a name doesn't matter so much and we wouldn't even take the time to correct this age-old mistake, and most vendors don't. But in this case, there is an important issue that a Chajin (tea person) will face if this mistake isn't corrected: there is another genre of tea in China called "black tea". So if you call red tea "black", then what do you call black tea? The problem began because early trade between Chinese and Europeans was limited to the ports, and most merchants/sailors didn't see the tea trees, farms or processing and learned what they knew through broken Pidgin English on the docks, often from Chinese merchants who didn't care to correct them. Actually, Europeans used to call Oolong tea "black tea" as well, probably because it has the word "black" in the name ("Oolong" means "Black Dragon").

seven tribes. They have all cooperated for as long as they can remember—most recently working together to build their own roads, electrical grid, water treatment facilities and schools.

Our destination was Qian Jia Zhai village, which literally means "Thousands of Families". It is located in Jiu Jia Township, Zhenyuan County in the heart of the Ai Lao range. There are around 16,000 people spread out over the Jiu Jia Township, most of them rural farmers. Up until recently, there were no roads to the village

and everything was carried in and out by donkey. The elder generations still tell stories of those days, reminding their children and grandchildren to not take their modern amenities for granted. There are 4,700 acres of tea forests here at an altitude of 2,000 to 2,500 meters. And these tea forests have a story that left Wu De standing agape when he first heard about them in 2007...

As Master Huang described the tea-growing situation there, Wu De's heart leapt, for it sounded as if it was one of the answers to all the environmental degradation happening in Yunnan in the name of tea—much of which had dampened many of Wu De's two dozen or so trips there. In fact, he has even cried for tea. Seeing trees that have been a part of a people's cultural heritage for centuries killed by unnecessary chemicals, like fertilizers, felt to him like someone spray-painting a Ming Dynasty painting. He remembered crying in the embrace of another of his teachers, Zhou Yu, and a reporter present asking another member of the group why the two were crying. The answer later overheard in the video was, "They just love tea." Being an optimist, though, Wu De was always on the look out for inspirational stories. Stories of hope. And he found it in Master Huang's description of Qian Jia Zhai.

The tea in Qian Jia Zhai is completely controlled by a co-op. There is little that any one individual can do to spoil the old-growth tea; its protected environment or any aspect of its processing without the other members of the group coming down on them. This means that personal greed cannot destroy what rightly belongs to no single human. Having lived for hundreds, if not thousands of years means these trees have a right to see future generations of people who *tend* to them rather than claim "ownership", passing them on to the next generation as healthy as they found them! When Wu De first heard about the co-op in Qian Jia Zhai, he developed an interest in visiting there, and kept an eye out for any and all tea from Ai Lao, tasting a lot along the way.

To continue our story, in 2010, Mr. Liang, a dear friend of our center, which many of you have met, came back from visiting Ms. Ai with a small batch of green Ai Lao *bings* (a *bing* is a discus of Puerh). This 2010 cake is amongst our all-time favorite teas. Many of you have tried it, or were even lucky enough to purchase a cake of it when it was still available. And, believe it or not, that very tea was the first ever Global Tea Hut tea of the month! (Be sure to go back to the first issue and read about it on our site!) Sharing that tea hundreds of times around the world ensured that one day we would take Ms. Ai up on her offer to visit her village and make some similar tea, which we finally did this May...

From the very start, Ai Li Juan made us feel like family, so much so that we came to know her as "Auntie Ai". She housed and fed us, guided us to see the tea trees and showered us with traditional songs and heartfelt smiles. She is an amazing, strong and modern woman: a single, tribal woman in rural China who controls an

international tea production company! She has been a member of the co-op in Qian Jia Zhai since 2005, tending to more than 400 hectares of tea. In 2012, Auntie Ai took all her savings from tea production and began construction on a tea processing and pressing facility that will include guest rooms for friends, as well as a museum and theater to preserve traditional Ku Chuong culture. She said that Master Huang's mentorship has been invaluable in the improvement of her Puerh processing, which she feels is getting better every year.

The Ku Chuong tribe has around 40,000 people with some heritage living throughout China and Laos. Until very recently, they were still living primitive lifestyles in the mountains of Ai Lao—completely self-sustained. In the last decade, they have moved down from the original village site, now part of the protected National Reserve, to settle in a small town below. They have paved roads leading to the capital and some modern amenities. The evidence of their traditional culture still abounds, however: in the gloriously colorful clothes of Ms. Ai and her old mother, as well as the way they cook and farm.

Auntie Ai told us that in the nineties, some farmers cut down a lot of the old tea trees to grow tobacco. Some of the elders then tore up the tobacco in protest of this. Our faces grew long, and a few of us looked down at the ground. "Cheer up," she said. "Those old tea trees are as strong as the mountain. They have deep and vast root systems. Even though many were cut down, after the land was returned to the National Reserve, many of the trees came back as though they'd never been cut!" And sure enough, she was right! The trees were strong and healthy again.

Tea of the Month *"Daughter of the Forest"*

Originally, we had planned to make Sheng Puerh to share with all of you. But the recent heavy rainfall made that impossible. We were resigned to buying some tea to share, each of the members traveling with us donating a portion, but Ms. Ai smiled and said, "Why not make some red tea instead?"

In Qian Jia Zhai, they call the red tea "Daughter of the Forest". We didn't have time to pick the tea ourselves, but we got to see the trees. The tea all came from trees that are two to seven hundred years old. Red tea is fully oxidized. It is picked and withered for a long time, sometimes with machines that blow hot air into large piles of tea. Our tea this month wasn't withered with such machines, but rather naturally withered, spread out on bamboo mats overnight. Making red tea is a simple process, and even though Yunnan is more famous nowadays for Puerh tea, it has always been a region of red tea as well, producing as much or more red tea as other regions for some decades. In fact, Puerh's rise to fame is rather recent, and in Yunnan there was more red tea by

Mia singing beautiful Native American songs while shaking this month's tea like an accompanying rattle



Tea of the Month

volume fifteen years ago. But our red tea isn't a plantation tea, since it was grown semi-wild in the forest.

The sun greeted us, beaming on our third day in the mountains, having shrugged off the rain for a while. After breakfast, Ms. Ai led us out to the back courtyard to make our red tea. The Ku Chuong of Ai Lao have a unique process for making red tea. After the twenty-hour withering (typical for most all red tea), we started by shaking the leaves, bruising the edges. This is usually a step only associated with oolong tea. We did this several times: shaking the tea, spreading it out, piling it, shaking... This helps further oxidize the tea, and the bruising opens the cells. We knew right away that this extra step would make our tea very unique. After the bruising/shaking, we began the rolling. You have to roll red tea for a long time, usually around ninety minutes. Because of the bruising, we only needed to continue rolling for around an hour. This shapes the tea and completely breaks down the cellular structure, releasing all the juices that will make the tea dark and red. It also helps to completely oxidize the tea (or as close to 100% as any tea can get). As we rolled and rolled, our L.A. friends sang some Native American chants. Hearing this, Auntie Ai smiled and burst into her own songs: a traditional Ku Chuong tea-picking song, a lament to the moon and our favorite, a song about how the arrival of distant friends can create memories that last a lifetime. These songs helped us infuse the tea with our love for all of you, as our hands were infused with tea oils for the rest of the day!

After the rolling, we put the tea in cloth bags and tightened them up into balls so the tea could ferment in its juices for another couple hours. The final stage was

to roast the tea dry, which Ms. Ai did for us in drying machines/roasters.

Of course, it would have been nice to have all our own teas and be able to taste the differences in each person's processing skills. But in the end, we decided to mix all the tea together. At first, Auntie Ai looked on in askance. She wondered what on earth we were doing. But after we explained that we were going to combine our love and share this tea with hundreds of people around the world, she was ecstatic! The next morning, there was extra tea waiting for us. Auntie Ai smiled, saying that it was tea she had made, as she wanted her energy to join ours. Everyone decided to donate some money and purchase a bit more from her, supporting her endeavors and adding more tea so that all of you could have a full tin!

We said some prayers over the tea and again when we got back to Taiwan and put it on the altar. We hope that all of you find in this tea health, happiness and fortune. It was made by our hands for you! We hope that you realize in drinking this tea just how much a part of our trip you all were—there in spirit throughout it all. You were on our minds and in our hearts. We mentioned you often, hoping that some of the wonders we were seeing came through in this issue of the magazine, and in the tea we made for you.

Try enjoying this tea in the morning in a bowl. Remember Auntie Ai's smile. She, too, wishes you all well. She said she is honored to the marrow that so many people around the world are enjoying her tea. "May it bring you the spirit of our ancient forests, for it is their daughter!" she exclaimed.



Brewing Tips for this Month's Tea (Brought to you by Mike Baas)

- Zen is doing one thing at a time. Make sure you are always doing one thing at a time.
- If you are just starting out on the Way of Tea and you don't have any equipment, remember that tea is just water and leaves.
- Setting up a "tea stage (chaxi)" can be helpful in creating a space for drinking tea. If you feel like you don't know how to create one, start by using whatever objects you happen to have around that have meaning to you. There are no rules for creating a chaxi. Also, read some of the wonderful articles in these magazines! Remember, a tea stage can be as simple as a piece of wood upon which to rest your bowl.
- Seek out a tea bowl with a base that will allow you to rest the bowl on your hand without feeling the intense heat of hot tea.
- Different teas require different temperatures, but a

good rule of thumb is to use water heated to just below a rolling boil.

- As you develop in tea, the need for additional equipment will become apparent. However, at first, start by drinking bowl tea: leaves placed directly inside the tea bowl with water poured directly onto them. ([See our YouTube video for a demonstration.](#))
- A good tea to start drinking at first is a red tea. This month's tea is a great choice, due to its large leaves and strong Qi (energy). This is a nice tea for the morning.
- When finished drinking tea, clean up before moving on to other activities.
- Attending a tea ceremony is an excellent way to develop your knowledge in tea. This helps keep your relationship to tea sacred and pure.
- If you feel the impulse to share tea with others, do not hesitate to do so!





JOURNEY TO THE KING TEA TREE

WU DE

We woke up early and headed over to the tea shop for some light breakfast and tea. The rain was pouring down and it looked as though we were going to have to spend the day indoors, which wasn't so bad considering we were surrounded by tons (literally) of old-growth puerh. It had started raining during our ten-hour bus ride up the mountains the previous evening, and then continued throughout the night. And yet, I still felt compelled to put on my hiking shoes that morning, perhaps foreseeing the coming respite. Sure enough, right as we finished breakfast the rain slowed to a drizzle and then stopped altogether. We grabbed some rain gear and headed up the mountain, hoping that the gap would be long enough to at least make it most of the way to our goal—the Wild King.

We drove around more winding roads and quite crazily drove our tourist bus through a one-foot-deep river, with a waterfall to our right and another gushing over a forty-meter drop just to our left—lolling up and down over the stones as the driver of the other car guided us through the water. We then parked and began our walk, the rain still abated.

For an hour or so we climbed rows and rows of steps, switching back and forth as we wound our way up the mountain, occasionally stopping to admire the views. There were amazing cascades of waterfalls—the same river falling down steps, each more beautiful than the previous. The dampness of the stone and steps made it seem as if the falls had danced out of bounds, wild and carefree, through a night of crazy spirit. After many hundreds of steps we came to the gate of the protected reserve and were allowed entrance.

At that point, the road began to meander up the river we had moments ago seen tumbling head-over-heels down deep cliffs—now a steady current growing more and more peaceful at each turn further upstream. We walked for some time on cobblestone paths that followed along the river, sometimes crossing narrow log bridges to walk along the other side. The land started becoming more and more forested, the trees growing denser and denser as we traveled. Then, the path narrowed and became dirt, mud-died by the night of rain. Having walked an hour or more, we stopped to look up. I had the distinct feeling that we would spend the whole day dry, despite our guide's insistence that we hurry up or get wet.

After some time we rounded a corner into a clearing where an ancient tribal village once was. There were three large Ku Chuong totem poles guarding what was

now the government watch station for the foresters who work here. We took a break to drink some water and eat some of the fruit and steamed buns we had carried with us. There was also some amazing old-growth tea boiled in a large pot that the absent foresters had made that morning before they left. We helped ourselves and set out refreshed. With brightened eyes, we knew the way home!

The journey over the next couple hours became more arduous. The path inclined steeply, and was muddier as well. It was only a dirt path through the forest, at times only a few feet across, offering only roots and rocks as steps as it wound ever upward through the jungle. The damp, fresh air was amazing, though. And more importantly, we began to come across more and more ancient tea trees, each one over a thousand years old. We stopped to photograph them, put our hands or foreheads to them and tell them how grateful we were. They were all numbered, protected and looked happy, healthy and most importantly completely chemical-free! It was hard going, pulling yourself up, avoiding moist cow paddies left by some of the foresters' cattle grazing along the path, or deep mud patches that flanked the trail. There were plenty of well-positioned roots along the way, though, each perfectly angled to help you up to the next level. All in all, it was a pleasant hike with amazing tea trees all along the way.

There were several varieties of wild trees, each with its own look and feel, and each with a unique energy. Many of the trees were old and quiet, while others seemed to thrum with an awakened energy. They were all well cared for, which brought smiles to all the tea lovers' faces. The gloriously fresh air, the clean forest, Nature and Tea, invigorated us.

Finally, rounding the last corner we came to a man-made deck that looked out over a small clearing at around 2,500 meters above sea level. There, on a little hill, was a small altar facing the Wild King of Tea. This ancient tree is one of the oldest in the world. It is almost 26 meters tall and almost two meters wide, which makes it the tallest of the very ancient trees. Using the rate of growth and cutting analysis, scientists have estimated its age at 2,700 years. It was here before the Buddha walked the earth! People were bringing offerings and prayers to this little shrine hundreds of years before Christ! The coming and going of people like me, full of awe and reverence, was tacit in this place, casting a spell of heaviness over the clearing. I felt the thousand, thousand humans coming and going with fruit and incense, prayers and reverence.



The girls celebrating the Nature surrounding us



Our guide gathered herbs along the way

It opened my heart to the immensity of our world, and the depth and power of life looked down on me from within that tree, older and wiser than I could imagine.

The girls traveling with us were overwhelmed, breaking into song. We all cried a bit and said some prayers. The magnitude of this place, and the deep life energy the tea embodied moved everyone present. There was something lasting and sacred in this place. This was the grandfather of all the tea trees we had passed on our way here, and so we asked him for some of his healing energy in our tea. Like thousands who had journeyed here, over millennia, we asked permission for some of his healing leaves, from his branches and those of his children, and children's children. We prayed for his longevity and continued blessings. His roots guard this mountain, and open our relationship to all the tea from this place. Maybe you'll feel hi in this month's tea!

Seeing such an ancient tree and feeling the sacred intention that has surrounded him for thousands of years inspired us all, and lent a spring to our step on the way back down. Sure enough, our prayers were heard and the mountain left us dry all the way back to the tea shop. I won't ever forget the presence of that great old tree, or the way he answered me from the inside, as if my prayers

echoed all the thousands of prayers others had left at his feet—murmurs heard only briefly, as a small insect passing our ear would sound. I left stirred by a poem that echoed in my heart:

Ancient ones

Sing us your song

Tell us of life without time

Tell us of life without separation

We will listen

As you listen to the Mountain

The Mountain to the Sky

And the Sky to the Stars...

—Wu De

The King reigns over his domain. Long live the king!





A KU CHUONG TEA CEREMONY

LINDSEY GOODWIN

During our time in Yunnan, we shared tea ceremonies amongst ourselves a few times when we had breaks in our full travel schedule. As we've discussed in previous issues, every tea session is a beautiful and unique chance for connection. These sessions were no exception—we shared a deep peace and bond in each one. Yet one tea ceremony stood out from any we've ever shared before and any we're likely to share again. It was a tea session served by our gracious hostess, Ai Li Juan, in Ai Lao, Yunnan.

We had just rolled red tea for this month's Global Tea Hut, when Ms. Ai appeared in stunning traditional garments bearing some yellow-hued rice, chunks of *jaggery*-like sugar and a bowl of sheng puerh leaves. We didn't quite know what to expect, but we saw in the light shining from her eyes and the humble grace with which she moved that it would be something really special.

Ms. Ai is a member of the Ku Chuong ethnic minority. The Ku Chuong have inhabited Ai Lao since around the third century CE, and they are also found in nearby Laos and Vietnam. For about 1700 years, they have been interacting with local tea trees, including the ones Wu De wrote about this month. Today, some still say prayers to the trees, leaving offerings at their roots. And some, like Ms. Ai and her family, still revere the trees and the deep soul nourishment they offer. During our short time in her town, she had already sung us songs about Tea. She had blended tea with adept skill and with more than a touch of artistry. And she had rolled tea with graceful ease and firm strength in perfect balance. Certainly, we were in for a treat.

Charcoal smoldering in the concrete brazier, a slab of stone resting on its wire grill: the set-up was simple. Ms. Ai spread the dry, yellow rice on the slab. Its color, we learned, was from a local flower (just one of the many wild plants that locals gather by hand to make their food powerfully nourishing and downright delicious). She spread the rice over the hot stone with a pair of wooden chopsticks, and then placed a glazed, brown pitcher over the coals. Into the pitcher, she dropped a handful of long, wiry sheng leaves.

An aroma hinting at old trees and far older mountains curled out from the lip of the pitcher. She held the vessel out to each of us so we could savor this ode to nature, written in hot air only to disappear no sooner than it was created.

Next, she added a new pitcher to the heat: a smaller, unglazed clay one, streaked with the horizontal ridges of a potter's fingers as they met the gentle, rhythmic spin of a

pottery wheel. She scooped up the grains of rice with her fingers and placed them into the small pitcher. Then, she shifted the larger pot to the space she made on the slab. With her chopsticks, she patiently stirred the rice, as it got increasingly hot over the coals. After some time, the grains began to puff and pop, like the toasted rice in Japanese Genmaicha (only yellow, thanks to the flowers).

A sudden look of alertness in her eyes... Time for the sugar! Using chopsticks, Ms. Ai swiftly took the russet-colored lumps of sweetness from a bowl and placed them, gingerly, on the hot block of stone. She poured the contents of the small pitcher into the large one, mixing together the roasted sheng and the puffed rice. Then, she transferred the hunks of sugar into the small pitcher for more heat. After a few minutes, they began to bubble and sizzle softly, caramelizing in the heat as the rice and tea continued to roast. As she stirred, the dark brown sugar began to melt into an even darker brown syrup.

The rice and tea were ready to brew. Ms. Ai grabbed a kettle of simmering water and poured it into the pitcher. She gave it a stir then plopped in the melty nuggets of sugar. She waited and watched closely. Then, she arranged white tea bowls on the stone above the fire. She gave the brew a final stir and poured a small sip to sample. Satisfied with the result, she poured a bowl for each of us. Hands still red from rolling tea, we received the bowls with thanks and smiles.

The liquor was rich and roasty, sweet and complex, and just as tasty as you might expect it to be. More importantly, it contained all the care and love that Ms. Ai had put into it from the trees to handing us the bowls. And it contained all the tea sessions shared by her and her family, stretching back many generations. She wasn't just giving us homemade sweet tea. She was sharing a tradition that has been a part of her culture for hundreds of years, and sharing the love of tea and hospitality that has been a part of her people's tradition for all that time. She was giving a blessing from one tea tradition to another, and we were grateful to receive it. And while we probably won't start sweetening our tea with *jaggery* any time soon, I can only hope that we learn from and spread the spirit of Tea she shared with us that day. Perhaps the next time we serve you tea, you'll see a glimmer of Auntie Ai in us...





The rice is yellow because of a flower added during cooking



An aroma hinting at old trees and far older mountains...

A Ku Chuong Tea Ceremony



Stirring the rice with deft hands, it began to pop...



She added the lumps of melty sugar to the simmering rice and tea...



Tea Legends

A KU CHUONG TEA ORIGIN TALE

AI LI JUAN



One evening, close to sundown, the Ku people chased a fat deer deep into the forest. Eventually, the deer outran them. When they'd caught their breath, they realized they were lost. Worse yet, a dangerous storm was brewing. The eldest had an idea to climb a tree to look around, hoping to get some bearings. He volunteered to climb, but one of the younger hunters insisted. He climbed up an old tree and looked around, but there was only a sea of green in all directions. The dark sky made him anxious, so he nervously plucked one of the leaves from the old tree and started chewing on it. His whole body filled with bitterness and he thought he was poisoned. He spat and choked, and his tribesmen below were worried he was dying. Then, his face changed and he shouted, "I've found it! I've found it!" He fell out of the tree he was so excited! Now, his mouth was filled with a sweet aftertaste. His energy was full and his eyes bright as the stars. He got up and smiled, again exclaiming, "I've found it!" His tribesmen looked on in amazement. "What did you find?" They asked. "I can see the way home now—see it through the heart!" Everyone started chewing the leaves from the wise old tree, and with renewed energy and clear hearts they made it home safely before the storm, carrying knowledge of this new powerful medicine with them.



Wu De and our gracious host, Auntie Ai

Grandma Ai loved the girls from L.A.



Tea Travels

GLOBAL TEA HUT YUNNAN, 2014

LINDSEY GOODWIN



Our recent trip to Yunnan was filled with shared Tea wisdom, dancing, the forging and strengthening of friendships, enjoyment of great meals, triumph over a few challenges (ahem, food poisoning!), deep connection with Nature and various other magical experiences. In the (glossy, colorful) pages of this month's magazine, you'll find accounts of a few of these happenings, such as Wu De's telling of the hike to the King Tree and my narration of a local tea ceremony. However, since so many people have been asking us to "tell all about the trip", I thought I'd briefly share a few other stories from the journey.



Rolling Red Tea

The day after our hike to the King Tree, we were each presented with a tray of tea leaves that had been picked the day before and allowed to wither. The withering process had reduced their moisture content, making them more pliable and readying them for rolling. We were instructed on how to roll, shape, knead and ‘rest’ the leaves, and when to apply more or less pressure. We were told that the science of making tea by hand isn’t anywhere near so important as the intuition behind it, and we knew instinctively that the *doing* was only part of it. For the most part, we were more interested in *being* and in sharing that energy with all of you through the end result—this month’s tea.

As we rolled the tea, clouds flitted over the sun. Our hostess sang ancient songs about friendship, the moon and Tea. One of the Chinese travelers on the trip with us began to play a traditional song about tea harvesting, and some of us sang songs to the leaves. During each time for the leaves to ‘rest’, I meditated over them, putting in *metta* (loving-kindness) for all who drink their brew. I can’t speak for everyone else, but from the looks of focus and compassion on their faces, I’m pretty sure they did the same.



Blending Puerh

A few days after our arrival, we sat down at a long table just after dusk. We were given some samples of tea. Wu De looked at and smelled each one, selected three he deemed to be free of pesticides and worth consideration, and fired up a kettle. We cupped each one, comparing its aroma, flavor and *Qi* to see what would make the cut for this year's batch of Ai Lao Light Meets Life puerh cakes.

We were torn between two options. One had amazing *Qi*, but not much aroma and aftertaste. The other had an enchanting aroma and flavor, but weaker *Qi*. With feedback from the group, Wu De played around with various blends, adjusting toward the perfect balance of aroma, flavor and *Qi*. We then perfected the blend the next day after comparing it to the illustrious 2010 cake, which we of course brought. Those lucky enough to get one of these limited edition 2014 cakes will be blown away! (As I write this, the 2014 cakes are being prepared. When they're available, we'll fill you in on all the details!)





Pressing Puerh

Part of the trip was fairly 'touristy', and one day in particular had a full schedule. Some of the events were, well, not so much what a *Chajin* looks for while in Yunnan, so we ended up deciding to change course to see what would happen unexpectedly. It ended up being a great decision.

We went to a small factory up in Dali, where four or so workers were pressing sheng puerh cakes. They showed us their process—measuring the leaves, placing them in a metal cylinder, steaming them, shaping them in a piece of cloth, pressing them with a machine, removing them from the cloth and putting them on wooden racks to dry. Off to one side, we saw large, cylindrical stones. “What about those?” some of us asked. Wu De explained that they were traditional stone presses, used for many years before the hulking metal machines were invented, and that it was traditional to dance atop one to get the puerh cake pressed just right.

Immediately, we knew: We had to press puerh cakes! With a little smooth talking, fellow traveler Mr. Liang (of Wushing Publications) arranged it for us. We cupped a few teas to select the raw material. We selected *nei fei* and *nei piao* (the papers that get pressed into the cakes and placed into the wrappers), all sharing the same Buddhist symbol for our *nei fei* (inner trademark ticket) and selecting one of personal significance for the *nei piao* (outer trademark ticket). We went through the same steps as the workers did; only we steamed the leaves twice and pressed them under the stones ourselves (dancing to get them 'just right') instead of compressing them with a machine. And after we left, Wu De created beautiful paintings for each of our wrappers.

Although this trip filled me with many fond memories and left me with more than a few souvenirs, I can't think of a better way to remember it than the cakes we made, which we will treasure for years to come. They're a symbol of the whole trip, of our journey together and of our connection to each other and to Tea. When mine is aged, I hope to share it with other tea lovers in many magical tea sessions!

The Meals

This trip was more “Tea, Pray, Compassion” than “Eat, Pray, Love”. Still, we managed to get our fill of Yunnan’s (usually) fresh, delectable vegetarian cuisine. Especially satiating specialties included freshly handmade noodles, puerh steamed buns, all sorts of potato dishes, tofu like we’ve never had it before, soups laden with leafy green veggies, walnuts we cracked ourselves and dipped in dark local honey, peanut soup, a sort of “Yunnanese salsa” made with super-fragrant seed pods from a local tree, a few dishes spiced so hot that it hardly mattered what was in them besides the chili peppers, and rice scented and colored with the yellow flowers I mentioned in this month’s article on the Ku Chuong tea ceremony.

All the wonderful meals were starkly contrasted with a couple bad ones. Still, the food poisoning was (for me, at least) a fair price to pay for the great joys of (most) Yunnanese food!



The Shopping

Shopping is not an especially deep activity, but we enjoyed the heck out of some shopping while we were on this trip. Some of us found antiques. Others bought gorgeous, handmade clothes. Shane and I searched high and low for a good gift for Joyce, and found a few things she loved. I also picked up some handmade embroidery, an old bronze Tibetan necklace bearing a large spiral, and a handmade paper book, as well as some handmade felt bags bearing Buddhist symbols (which I’ll use to store tea and smaller teaware). We even found some new pillowcases for the kitchen in Tea Sage Hut, so the next time you visit and join us for a meal, you’ll be sitting on a little piece of our journey.



The Mountain, the Lake & the Spring

One of the most touristy things we did was to visit a mountain, lake, ‘jubilee show’ and spring that Chinese tourists flock to. We were wary beforehand, but it was kind of awesome.

We first took a bus and then aerial tramway up to the glacier-topped peak of a high mountain. For one of the Taiwanese women with us, this ascent was her first encounter with snow, and she cried with joy (as well as, perhaps, a bit of fear from the jolt our little cable car gave). At the top, we were surrounded by fog, and could not see much beyond the droves of tourists snapping photos of themselves and each other. We walked to the edge of a deck, away from the crowd, and Tien Wu began to sing to the mountains, the Sky and Mother Earth. Some of us joined along in song, and suddenly the clouds parted. Light, glorious light, and a view of the surroundings made us gasp with elation. We could see the snowy, cloud-dappled mountains in the distance, the bluish glacier all around our little platform, the swirling clouds and glittering sun up above, and the lush valley down below. We were hesitant to leave such a place, and very glad we went in the first place.

After returning to the valley below a little late, we took another bus ride to a lake. Its name is Blue Moon Valley Lake and, as if to flaunt its adaptability, it shimmered brilliantly with the high noon sun. We walked to a more remote area of the lake and lay down to bask in the warmth from above. We sang a song to the spirit of the water, a sort of call-and-response chant that could go on and on forever. Eventually, it was time to go, and we shuffled off to the bus again for...

The jubilee show. I know what you might be thinking: *Bo-ring!* Actually, it was pretty enjoyable. The earnestness of the performers was endearing, and some of the dance numbers were kind of epic. Also, it had a scene about tea plucking, which was undeniably cool.

Next stop: the spring. This spring is said to be inhabited by an ancient Nature God, whose lower half is made up of snakes. Most of the Naxi people of the area worship Nature, so behind the spring there was a temple devoted to it and to Nature. We each drank from the spring. The water had incredible *Qi* and slaked our thirst immediately. I made a wish for the worldwide realization of the oneness of all beings through water (something that is becoming more and more likely as water becomes an increasingly valued-yet-misused resource in this world), and tossed a Taiwanese coin into a wishing well. It landed right in the center of a vessel in the center of the well. I have the feeling it was more than a lucky toss!

Then, I walked with Steve to the temple. When we entered the stone gateway, we found that Tien, Mia and Dawn had beaten us there... and they were beating on a huge drum at the top of a long flight of stairs ahead of us! After some drumming, a few of us meditated, while others learned about the local religion through murals on the walls and through talking with our local guide. In the Naxi religion, there is great importance placed on respect for Nature, and an ancient myth outlines a story of retribution and rebalance after an episode of disrespect toward Nature. It was a beautiful reminder of how Nature provides for us and how we must strive to live in harmony with Her for our own good and for the future of our species and our home.



The Temples

In Shangri-La County, we visited a compound of Buddhist temples. For me, this was one of the most profound parts of the trip. From watching the graceful birds soaring at the entrance to savoring my last moments of meditation there as I walked away with intense focus on each step, it was a journey that merged the physical with the spiritual, seamlessly and beautifully.

Although the grounds are rather small, there are many packed buildings in the compound, so to avoid getting overwhelmed, we each had to narrow down our focus a bit when we got there. The two most ancient temples there pre-date the advent of Buddhism in the area. They were originally temples for the Tibetan shamanic religion called “Bon”. Although I checked out a few other buildings and saw some beautiful works of art and places of peace, these Bon temples were the ones I mainly gravitated toward.

My interest was rewarded with a well-timed visit to one Bon-turned-Buddhist temple. I entered at the same time as the monks, checking first to make sure I was welcome to join. The space was still. The monks sat down to chant from ancient books. I stood and took it all in.

Then, I walked around the periphery of the great hall, observing each of the large murals that donned the walls. Having seen so many Buddhist paintings like these in India, Taiwan and elsewhere, I felt I had reached an impasse with them that could only be surmounted by study and intellectual understanding... but my time in this temple proved me wrong. I began to understand these images more deeply on an energetic level, to understand experientially their messages about impermanence, the non-dual nature of creation and destruction, the meditative mind and other lessons that can't be put into words without losing their real meaning. I contemplated these realizations for some time, eyes closed, taking in the chanting of the group of monks. It was a transformative experience, and one for which I am grateful.

What came next was a surprise, though perhaps it shouldn't have been. When I continued to circumambulate the room, a senior monk approached me with a kind smile. He asked me about my practice, and I told him that I drink and serve tea as meditation. As we spoke about meditation and Buddhism, two young monks emerged from a room to the side of the main hall to change the large candles that lit the room—a symbolic shift, the monk told me. We spoke more, and then the two monks emerged again with buckets of tea. They ladled the tea into the chanting monks' bowls, and then invited me to drink some as well. I was ushered into the room at the side of the temple. In it, there was a large, coal-heated stove. Butter tea boiled away in a large, cauldron-like pot. A rambunctious monk with a toothy grin scooped some tea into a simple bowl and handed it to me with a chuckle. Steam rose from the bowl and dispersed into the air. Smoke rose in curls and wafted through shafts of light on its way up along the high wall, toward a gap in the lofty ceiling. I took a sip of the tea. It was viscous and strong, salty-sweet from the butter. It was made with love and it was just what my heart needed in that moment. The bowl emptied, I thanked the monks and stepped back into the main hall, just in time to see their lunch being served—rice heaped into the same bowls they had used for tea. I thanked the senior monk, took a moment to let the experience seep deeper into my memory, bowed and left...

Returning to Taiwan, we each felt that we were not the same person who had left ten days before. We had learned so much from this journey, and were eager to share these lessons with others through our stories and (most importantly) our tea. In the days since, we have begun to integrate what we experienced in Yunnan, and will continue to do so for many months to come. We also began a bit of planning for our next trip: a visit to Wuyi in April of 2015. We hope that more of this growing tea family can join us, and can gain deeper insight and wisdom through the experience.





The Eight Bowls

A MEDITATIVE MIND

SHANE MARRS

Over the few issues, 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. And so pouring... let's sip from the second bowl...

Mastered Mind; Meditation

I often like to say that everyday tea served with the best of intentions is better than the finest tea served with the worst of intentions. Which then is more important, the tea or the intention? Clearly, both are important. There are so many factors that go into an actual tea ceremony, and they're all important to a degree. On the surface level, there are details to consider, like the time of day, the weather, the guests, the season, the choice of music or no music, etc. Below the surface we enter a deeper arena of factors like energetics and intentions. Tea is a sensitive plant, aware and responsive to human consciousness. Water too, as demonstrated by Dr. Masaru Emoto in *The Hidden Messages in Water*, responds at the physical level to human thought. If this is true, then my state of mind becomes yet another factor at the tea table. There is a bold Zen saying that if I'm not mindful then it isn't tea that we're drinking, but rather my afflictions and delusions.

At any social gathering you can see how people's state of mind is often outwardly obvious and has an affect on their environment as well. More specifically, at a tea gathering, you might try a simple experiment: Have some tea and allow everyone to take turns brewing a few bowls, rotating through everyone at the table. Notice the difference in atmosphere that everyone brings to the table while brewing. And more importantly, notice the difference in the tea: in its aroma, flavor, mouthfeel, etc. Considering all of this, we can understand that the person brewing is not simply an inert mass, and that their state of mind affects the tea. It becomes clear then, for the person approaching tea as a Way, that tending the mind is as necessary as tending the lit charcoal, the boiling kettle, the steeping pot, the empty bowls, etc.

Our intentions play an integral role when serving tea. Without mastery of the mind, however, one's intentions will never reach their full potential. Like we've said so many times before, we are not here to learn how to

make tea but how to *serve tea*. Our goal is to bring about an awakening and presence in others through tea. Therefore, we must cultivate that inner peace within ourselves; otherwise our afflictions reside in the bowl. For these reasons, meditation will always play an integral role in the life of a tea wayfarer.

Meditation begins and ends with posture. Of course, this means the literal posture of the body in a seated form of meditation, but in a greater sense, the posture of the mind. Again, it matters not so much what you do but how you do it. An upright mind, regal like a king, grounded like a great tree, and oriented towards the heavens translates any activity into a meditation, seated or not. Meditation isn't done in order to achieve anything, though many qualities may be achieved as byproducts.

Calm and awake. These are the two words that most simply describe the meditative mind (and the experience of drinking tea). Taking time to cultivate a calm and alert state of mind becomes ever more reasonable in these times of increasing chaos. And speaking from my own experience, meditation has brought a great degree of well-being to my life and in turn the lives of those around me.

As someone with a great capacity to carry out physical work, I often have to be reminded that there is no end to my "to-do" list. So long as I live in the future, treating tasks as means to an end, moving from one to the next and always thinking about the one after that, I do myself (and the task at hand) a disservice because I am not present unto what I am doing. In my case, it becomes increasingly important to practice "being before doing." For me, this means drinking tea and meditating before doing anything each day.

In my experience, everything plus meditation is better. Meditation plus tea, plus yoga, plus work, plus life. I say this because anything plus meditation means presence, great focus, deep quiet and balance. There is no aspect of human life that is not affected by our degree of presence and focus. You may have had a heightened experience of concentration already during an activity, without meditation at all—possibly while playing sport, during a dangerous scenario or spontaneously while walking amidst Nature. But this type of experience need not be left up to a particular set of conditions. Focus and presence can be cultivated.

A simple but important experiment to try for yourself is to take any activity and marry it to medita-



A stunning Kuan Yin we saw in Yunnan

tion for one week. Then, for the following week, remove meditation from the equation. Whether that activity is yoga, fixing cars, reading the morning paper, or drinking tea, try meditating before the activity for the first week. During the second week, carry out the activity as you normally would, without any meditation. Ask yourself what the difference was. Try not to brush this off as a rhetorical experiment. Generate your own experiential understanding of the influence meditation can have in your life. Give it a fair trial and then make a decision from your own personal experience.

One of the most poignant aspects of tea is the emptiness that allows everything to connect: the empty space of the tea room which allows us to be; the brazier which holds the charcoal; the kettle which holds the water; the tea pot which holds the tea leaves and water; and the bowl which holds space for the liquor... Everything is holding space and serving a function to promote connection through tea. As noted before, since the brewer is just as much a part of the process as any of the other tea elements, so too must we empty ourselves. Just as any impurities in the teapot would be evident in the cup, so too are the impurities of our mind steeped into the liquor. For the Chajin, person of tea, therefore,

cultivation of mindfulness through meditation will be a necessary framework for each and every day. If I am to serve tea in a way that inspires calm wakefulness in others, then it must come from a place of calm wakefulness within myself. Like this, all great tea comes out of the meditative mind.



One of the most poignant aspects of tea is the emptiness that allows everything to connect...



Tea Travels

YUNNAN, 2014; ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

STEVE KOKKER

One of the many images that remain with me from my recent trip to Yunnan with GTH friends is how the Chinese would hand objects to you with both hands. Be it money, a business card, a plate at a restaurant or something you have just purchased from a shop, they present it held in two outstretched hands, often with a slight bow of the head. Far from seeming stiff or overly formal, this implies being fully with 'the deal', being present there with and for you in that moment. It implies respect to the object itself and to the transferring of it. In contrast, handing things over with one hand almost feels like the other hand wishes not to waste time and to instead engage in something else. It demands nothing of you while still gently nudging the recipient towards an attitude of mutual respect. With both hands typing this, then, I offer this article to you as a personal reflection of our recent journey to the heart of tea's birthplace.

To call our recent trip to Yunnan a 'tea trip' would require the kind of slight stretch that Global Tea Hut members can easily follow. On the surface, only a part of the voyage seemed outwardly related to our tea passion—the 'Cha' part of Cha Dao. The rest of it however was the Dao, finding the tea in everything we did. How we do anything is how we do everything, and so in all that we did, we were making tea.

When I close my eyes and think of Yunnan, first come images of clouds and mountains. They compete for size and grandeur there. Ever-present are clouds, often mountain range-sized ones, hovering seemingly not far above you, and casting shifting, viola-somber shadows over red-gold soil. Everywhere too is this soil, blood and rust. Mountains seem to cover every inch of space in Yunnan; walls of them follow your every move. They force you to move along their contours. This is their territory, their land. They cascade down from the heavens in sloping layers, in soft and lush terraces, or in stark, rocky expanses. Their blood and rust interiors are sometimes stripped away by erosion or machine, elsewhere covered by thick, boundless growth. Sometimes the mountains rise from wide stretches of flat plateaus, jutting sharply upward as if pinched by God's outstretched fingers and pulled skyward. The landscape is epic in Yunnan, far beyond providing eye candy and endless 'Wow!' moments from sleepy-eyed travelers looking out of bus windows—it informed us always of tea's natural habitat. This is the landscape; this is the energy that gave birth to tea. For all of us, being there gave us a very tangible sense of tea's roots, tea's energetic domain. When we close our eyes and drink a living

puerh we can have a very real sense now of the tea's origin, the land it calls home.

The most radical, awesome experience of being guest in Tealand came right at the beginning. After an almost 11 hour bumpy bus ride from Kunming south to Zhen Yuan county in the Ai Lao Mountain range, we arrived at the township of Jiu Jia late in the evening, tired but quite thrilled by the penetrating mountain air and being so close to the origins of that favorite tea at Tea Sage Hut, the near-legendary 2010 Ai Lao cake. We all went wandering around. Even through the darkness we could see clouds and luminous mist hugging distant mountain landscapes which became dramatically visible come bright morning. Dawn took photos of Shane to make him look like a 1970's rock star, and locals attempted to ply us with liquor at the teashop-cum-bar attached to our hotel. Despite being tired, few of us slept much that first night. The intoxicating air, the almost palpable earth energy surrounding us and the excitement of tomorrow's promised trek through an ancient forest kept most of us abuzz and awake.

A 30-kilometer drive to the starting point of a several-hour hike straight up a mountain to the famous village of Qian Jia Zhai and the 'King of Tea Trees' followed the next morning. It was telling of the rapid, impressive, sometimes monstrous development in this remote area of China's wildest province that just a few years ago there was no road where we were comfily bussing along. (Even on Mr. Liang's last trip, just a few years earlier, they had to walk the 30 km stretch we were driving on, or use horses.) The new roads and infrastructure we saw while travelling was in part built by tea money (mining richness was also in evidence). We all contemplated for a moment this rapid development, comparing it in our minds with some very sad sights we had seen already on our travels (horizons of cranes perched atop seemingly useless skyscrapers on the outskirts of already over-sized cities; sides of mountains blighted by metal monsters digging out earth for metals). Few of us however minded that we didn't have to trek for six hours only to begin the several-hour hike up the mountain towards Qian Jia Zhai.

It was about an hour up stairs to the village itself, or what is left of it. The villagers themselves were moved out several years ago to more modern locales nearby, as local government upped efforts to preserve and protect this region of dense, primeval forest. What is left is their raised huts, remnants of a very simple life where pigs and chickens lived underneath their masters as they slept. We



The author looking cool on our hike up the mountain...

stopped at a clearing in the woods near these huts and the larger buildings still intact, where locals were cleaning and preparing food. There is still human life there, but it has more to do with forest management and conservation than tea making or daily life.

We all continued sharply upwards—no more stairs—along mountain paths and muddy slopes towards ‘the King Tree’. We were all pretty excited to be there, in what appeared to be a Hobbit land. The forest around us was wild, a child’s imagination of a magic land where every tree came to life at night and made magic with each other. Tangled, twisting roots, some as thick as the tree trunks they sprung from, others wiry as snakes frozen in time, emerged from the ground to tango upwards and splay out in all directions. There were ancient tea trees, massive, wise magnolias, even schizandra. We kept expecting to see elves emerge from the massive holes inside interconnected tree trunks so wide it would have taken four or five people to wrap around.

As this was so thrilling to us all, most of us chatted a lot on our way up and down: good, deep talks; bonding, memorable ones. Only Wu De remained stalwart in silence throughout, and of course in retrospect this would have been a good cue to follow. These were indeed hallowed lands. This was our time to connect with Tea Spirit in as close proximity to it as we were going to get on this trip and for who knows how long again in our lives?

This was truly a tremendous opportunity to be at one with the kind of jungle-forest which begat our beloved *Camellia sinensis*. At the end of the road, there was a 2,700 year old tea tree. There are likely dozens of ‘King Tea Trees’ throughout Yunnan, as every district lays claim to a unique, ancient tree. We heard several times that, well, “This tree is nice, but another one further away is even older...” Even ancient tea trees are subject to human comparisons. I think they pay no mind. Our King Tree was a beauty: around two meters wide, but over 25 meters tall, it is majestic and incredibly elegant, like an aging dancer who has lost none of his grace. The tree was surrounded by a fence to prevent people touching him, but we stood on a wooden platform built to observe in reverent silence. Recording devices were whipped out and aimed towards him, and backs were turned so that smiles could radiate outward from him in selfies and groupies—the usual Western photo op. Yet there was also true reverence there. Silence fell upon us all as we tried to take in what we were seeing: the age, the mystery, the realization that we were all actually there. Mia spontaneously sang a beautiful Argentinian song before the old tree and we all hung in that moment, transfixed. Thanks, Mia!

The next few days saw us processing tea, as well as sampling tea leaves from 1,000 year old tea trees. Wu De was selecting leaves from this magic land for one of the Light Meets Life puerh cakes, soon to be pressed. Anyone

who contributes to get one of these cakes will be in for a mind-expanding experience. These teas, even when we all slurped them from bowls with Chinese soup spoons, in a jovial atmosphere and crowded around a wooden table inside a tea storage room, provided us with deeply-felt energetic waves. Stunning tea. Sometimes we would just look at each other on those days and smile, a bit dizzy.

The weather wasn't great for puerh processing (too humid), so we processed the tender, fragrant Ai Lao leaves into red tea on the next day, each one of us sitting with root chakras pressed firmly to concrete in front of a bamboo wicker basket-full of the beauties we knew would eventually be sent around the world to GTH members! We rolled and twisted into large balls these leaves, pressing their juices out, accelerating their oxidation. All this was under the watchful gaze of the beautiful woman who hosted us in Jiu Jia and who ran the tea processing plant, Ai Li Juan. She'd come over to show us how the rolling is really done (it's not easy work!) and comment on the different fragrances which emerged from each pile. This was stunning to us all. Even though we each have shared the mystery and wonder of the same tea brewed by different people turning out so differently; this time, it just didn't make logical sense. How could my pile of leaves smell so very differently from my neighbors' when 'all' that differed was the pair of hands handling them? Fantastic!

Our Chinese and Taiwanese co-rollers were bemused when us Westerners would occasionally just sit and hold our hands over the leaves, eyes closed in meditation, faces either blissfully relaxed or slightly scrunched in serious concentration, trying to feel their Nature energy course through us, or perhaps sending an intention towards them. A few of the Taiwanese tried this out themselves for a few seconds, then giggled, shook their heads and got back to the work at hand. Our gorgeous California sisters sang beautifully as we pushed and rolled, helping the process turn into a happy and focused group ritual, not just a bunch of individual experiences. They also coaxed our host to sing some local songs as we worked, and her lovely voice had us all soar above the mountain ranges visible over our shoulders across the top of the veranda where we sat.

That was not to be our last hands-on opportunity of the trip. A few days later in far away Dali, and rather unexpectedly, we were treated to an impromptu visit to a tea processing factory (Thanks, Mr. Liang!) where we observed puerh cakes being steamed and pressed into bings. I was dazzled by the speed and gong fu skill of the women wrapping the cakes of tea, and by the patience and care involved in wrapping and preparing *tongs* (seven stacked puerh *bings* wrapped in bamboo husks). All of our moods were soaring as we got to each press our own cakes then do a hip-swivel dance atop a stone press to compress them. As dizzily sexy as Wu De's, Shane's or my bum-balance moves were, Dawn's, Tien's, Mia's and Lindsey's did out-sexy ours by a narrow margin in the end. Wu De sealed

the end of this perfect day by hand-painting wrappers for each of our cakes.

As you can tell from my already-long but still incomplete description, the Cha part of our trip was amazing! The Dao part was equally, if not more memorable. This is the trickier part to describe, and best left to each traveler to describe his or her own experience. However, everything that was learned about tea but not directly from tea during the trip made us all recall that indeed, 'In everything I do, I'm brewing tea.'

Traveling in groups or on group tours always presents occasions to learn and grow from the accompanying challenges, and everyone on board the Yunnan '14 Happy Bus admirably dealt with all the usual human mini-dramas: the calls to compromise, the need to put aside personal desires in favor of the "general good", bouts of food poisoning and being tired. A little well-timed song, a little altitude sickness-induced head buzz, a dance around central square in a place called Shangri La and a carefree willingness to go along with the flow went a long way towards tempering many irkings of the Little Me. So did reminding ourselves about how very lucky we were to be there, with each other. *Ichigo ichie* hung over our heads with every turn of a corner revealing breathtaking scenery, as well with every rustling of ego-driven discontent.

Lucky is right. To have such access to lovely souls devoted to Tea Spirit, access to such mind-blowing teas. Lucky to be taken to the clouds and back, to be bathed in the mist which has moistened tea leaves for endless millennia; to be charged by the starlight and mountain energy which has nourished tea trees since way before humanity. Mainly, however, as we do live on this human plane, some of our peak moments of pleasure came in sharing with gorgeous souls the long bus rides, the waits in airports, the pee stop stretches and spontaneous restaurant dancing and giggles over hilariously translated Chinglish. It came in sharing OMG expressions over breathlessly delicious food every single day, in banging temple gongs together, in back rubs and shared stories and emotions, in special moments of human connections with the journey's brothers and sisters...

After the bags are unpacked and the digitized memories sorted, what is left is gratitude. As white and pure as the Guan Yin statue in the middle of the pond we stopped off at in an absurdly stunning national park in northwest Yunnan, impossible neverland of tea, smiling, handsome minorities, clouds and mountains—mountains! Thanks to everyone on the trip for offering themselves, for opening themselves to make the trip the joy it was!



Andy dancing on his puerb cake in the traditional way



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 share glimpses of such beautiful people and their tea. This month we would like to introduce our dear sister **Anastasia Kotliarova**:*

My first deep experience with tea was during my second year of university in my hometown of Rostov-on-Don, Russia. I was attending a college open house, trying to determine what my field of study would be. As it turned out, one of the lectures involved a tea ceremony. I thought, "This should be interesting!" The lecturer was a psychotherapist, who also happened to run his own tea house. Interestingly, he combined his profession with his practice of making Chinese tea, often seeing his clients over tea.

Maybe I learned more about tea than psychology on that day! During this first encounter, I was already learning about how the way we prepare tea affects the Qi of our water, which eventually goes into the tea we are preparing.

I listened and watched with a completely open mind, instantly falling in love. The first tea seed was planted in me. By the end of the lecture, I wanted nothing more than to work at his tea house and learn more from him! Sure enough, while still in school, I would begin to work there. In the beginning, this meant being the dishwasher—but that did not affect my happiness and joy from being there.

Even though the tea house was amazing, I eventually felt I had to move on. After all, being around tea naturally causes you to daydream about far away places—majestic, enchanted places in the world where tea comes from. I could almost touch the misty mountain air that covers the hills of tea trees high above. In my heart, I was already in this place!

Eventually, Denis, a friend from Moscow and GTH member, told me about the Tea Sage Hut. Hearing how special he made it sound, I knew I would have to visit someday.

That day came earlier than I expected! From the moment I stepped out of the railway station, I would experience the hospitality of the Hut. After a few days there, I knew I wanted to go deeper into this way of tea, and share it back at home.

Eventually, I studied to become a massage therapist, and, just as the psychotherapist, I am working to connect this profession with sharing tea. In April of this year, I opened *Studio 108* with two other people. It is a center for massage, yoga, Taichi, Qigong and ... *Tea*.

As a massage therapist, I have yet one more way to help people relax, opening their hearts to their own

natural beauty and wisdom within. Often, after a massage session, I will share tea with my clients. It works perfectly, as they are often reluctant to rush back into the real world! With tea, I feel I am caring for someone in the deepest way possible, especially my clients. The power of touch, and the power of tea both communicate unconditional love.

I felt like I had found a form of hospitality that anyone could warm up to. Actually, children in Russia often drink out of big bowls, holding them with two hands, as they're easier to drink from. I remember drinking tea with my family as a child, holding my bowl. I like to think that people here feel the same way I felt in Taiwan; a homecoming and a return, not just to childhood, but to a beginner's mind.

When sharing tea, we become connected with our spirits, and with the entire cosmos! To me, it's important to invite people to enter this sacred space inside. Nowadays in daily life, we rarely make space for ourselves. Maybe, like me, a single experience could inspire someone to begin meditating, or make some deep change in their life. My hope is that in making space for tea, I am helping people to make space for themselves. I am still sharing tea publicly, once a week, but I would love to do it more often! If you are in St. Petersburg, please connect with me:

sugarsunfish@gmail.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. 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 rest of the 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 pressed organic Ailao sheng puerh cakes from 1000-year-old trees 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 and "Golden Vajra", May's tea of the month (only in cakes).
- Wu De will be at the center until October working on two new books!
- 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

*Willow branches graze the grass,
As I sit in the shade drinking tea.
A note from a flute blows clearly,
Mingling with the sound of rain.
I could sit here alone forever,
And still I'd never feel lonely.*

—Anonymous