

# Global Tea Art

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE  
September 2014

SPECIAL PUERH EDITION

喬木王





## SPECIAL PUERH EDITION

*This is a very special issue of Global Tea Hut! As part of this month's gift, we asked Wu De to teach us as much as he could about puerh tea and then spent the gift money on the added pages in this month's magazine. We hope to do this once a year, gifting you bonus tea information!*



LOVE IS  
CHANGING THE WORLD  
BOWL BY BOWL

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# Letter from the Editor

In September, we enter the final quarter of the solar year. It's also a very important month in the Chinese lunar calendar because it is the largest moon. This month, the weather starts to get cooler and the first hints of autumn arrive. We find that our teas start to shift from green teas, sheng puerh or more lightly-oxidized oolongs to darker, more heavily roasted oolongs. Cliff Teas, especially, start showing up with more frequency.

The Moon Festival, or Mid-Autumn Festival (*Zhongqiu Jie*), is one of the most important Chinese holidays of the year. The full moon of this month is considered to be the largest of the year, and family members gather to have picnics or meals and stay up to see the full moon, which is a symbol of abundance, harmony and luck. It is also a romantic time, and you'll see lovers out on benches holding hands celebrating the fullest moon of the year. Chinese people eat pomelo as a symbol of fortune and abundance. They are huge and delicious, gifted to the center from many family and friends. We also eat moon cakes, which are traditional sweets with an egg yolk in the center, combining sweet and salty—like life. (We prefer the ones without the eggs, however, some of which are made with amazing pineapple filling!)

Every year, children hear a retelling of the story of Hou Yi and Chang'e, who lived during the reign of the emperor Yao, around 2200 BCE. Hou Yi was Heaven's archer and Chang'e was an attendant to the Mother of the West. They fell in love and were eventually married. Some of the gods were jealous of Hou Yi, however, and slandered him to the Jade Emperor who then banished the two lovers to live a mortal life on earth. Hou Yi hunted for the couple and they were abundant on earth. At that time there were ten suns in the sky. Each one was a three-legged bird that roosted in mulberry trees around the world. Each day, one of them would ride across the sky in Mother of the Sun's chariot. One day, however, they all rushed out together and dried up all the lakes and caused a huge drought, killing many people. Emperor Yao asked Hou Yi to shoot down nine of the bird-suns, which he did. The emperor gave him a pill of immortality as a reward, advising him to meditate and fast for a year to prepare himself. While he was away, Chang'e noticed the light coming from the pill he had hidden and ate it. She floated up into the sky. Hou Yi tried to follow but couldn't. She floated up to the moon. Once there, she coughed up half the pill and asked the rabbit who ruled the moon to make some more Elixir of Life for her lover. If you look closely at this month's full moon, you can still see the Jade Rabbit pounding herbs to make the elixir for Chang'e. In the meantime, Hou Yi meditated enough to



rise up and live immortally in the sun, longingly watching his beloved. The two are only united at the full moon of the Osthmanthus month (September), which is why this month's moon is the fullest and brightest of the year—testament to their love...

Membership around here is increasing all the time, and with hearts full of gratitude we acknowledge all the efforts you have put into helping spread the word. Thank you! We hope you feel like this is *your* Global Tea Hut as much as it is ours. Not only will you find an improvement in the quality of these envelopes as membership increases, but all the proceeds are going towards a center that also belongs to you. All the tea and teaware here are for learning and sharing. And a little bit of that travels in each of these envelopes every month!

This is a good month to share some tea. We have an exciting month planned for you, with some great tea and articles to learn from. Aside from just inviting new people into the Hut, take the time to look around and get to know some more of the people already here. You might find a lifelong friend sitting somewhere nearby! There's a list of local tea sessions happening at the end of this magazine. If none are close to you, maybe it is time to start one and get your name up on next month's list!

We hope and pray that the last quarter of this year is as full for you as the bright and radiant Osthmanthus Moon. With this package of tea and magazine, we send our enduring affection. We also have added some prayers for your happiness, health and fortune! With bowed heads and lifted bowls...

# SPRING 2013 SHENG PUERH

Bing Dao, Yunnan

*As an intro to this month's tea, Wu De reviews Living Tea and also discusses the five characteristics that make puerh tea so special. After that, he dives into September's amazing old-growth puerh and even gives us some brewing tips.*

茶道

As the seasons start to change, so do our teas. The green teas, white teas and sheng puerh we've enjoyed all summer start to take rest, meditating another year on the shelf or in jars. We usually drink a few of our favorite sheng puerhs in a last farewell to the summer. Of course, this doesn't mean we never drink a sheng in the winter (or a shou in the summer), but over time a tea lover finds a natural harmony with the weather, as it should be. When we are in harmony with Nature, our diet, exercise, tea drinking and every other aspect of our lives are also in tune with the climatic and vibrational changes that occur in our local environment over time, and we adapt our lives accordingly.

This will be a magical month, as we metaphorically travel to Yunnan once again to share one of our favorite young sheng puerhs.

Sometimes visitors to the center see all the puerh around and think that it's our favorite tea. Actually, we love all tea, as long as it is produced with a love for Tea and Mother Earth. There are spectacular and sustainable, organic examples of every kind of tea. We hope that we'll drink many, many more of them in this Hut over the coming years! Still, there is a certain magic in puerh, and it might be

worthwhile to discuss just what it is. There are five magical characteristics that make puerh tea so special:

## **One: Living Tea**

First and foremost, there is still a lot of "Living Tea" in Yunnan—perhaps more than any other tea-growing region. "Living Tea" is a term we use a lot around here, so it is worth getting to know. True wisdom is always founded in a desire to learn and the wise never "repeat" anything; rather, with a beginner's mind, they "renew" their understanding. In that way, we deepen our truths with each time we delve into them. There is a lot to know about Tea—a huge and vast world, and a lot of it is worth repeating now and again, especially concepts like Living Tea, which is the first and most important aspect of what makes puerh tea so special!

In past issues, we have discussed what Living Tea is and why it has such healing potential. We talked about the five characteristics of Living Tea:

- 1) Seed-propagated
- 2) Room to grow
- 3) Biodiversity
- 4) Chemical-free
- 5) Respect

First, all living tea is seed-propagated. As we mentioned in previous issues, tea is a sexual plant and a lot goes into creating the seeds—a tremendous amount of natural energy, mostly involving insects and cross pollination. Every seed is unique, and every seed-propagated tea tree will also be an individual soul. In fact, that is why so little tea is seed-propagated today. Commercially, farmers think that consumers are ruled by their palates and want flavor uniformity. Is that true? Do you really want to throw out so many potatoes and carrots because they don't fit unnatural cosmetic standards? Or do you realize that Nature is wiggly, and that the magic of tea shines differently every time? It is also more work to tend a variety of trees with different needs. The vitality, however, is very different between cuttings/clones and seed-propagated trees. First and foremost, seed-propagated trees live longer by orders of magnitude—think centuries or even millennia versus decades—and, moreover, birds won't eat the seeds of cloned trees after the second or third generation.

Second, all Living Tea is given room to grow. Living things grow as large as their environment permits. Koi fish will remain small if kept in a small bowl, but grow big if they



are in a big pond. The same is true with Bonsai trees. People are this way too: we only grow as much as we give ourselves room to... Every plant has a ratio between its roots and crown, and when you prune the crown the roots also shrink. Plantation tea is pruned for easy picking. Many old-growth puerhs, on the other hand, are plucked with ladders or climbed by the pickers.

Tea trees organize themselves, in fact, in a living garden, rather than being forced into rows like on a plantation. They know which soil is more nutrient dense, and can support more trees clustered closer together, and which soil is less so, and so there they must grow more spaced apart.

Third, all Living Tea is ecological. It includes a vast array of biodiversity. We always think that in controlling a few factors in a monoculture system we can generate sustenance for ourselves, but the overall

impact is always more complex, intricate and subtle than we could ever imagine. And as we are finding out, our destructive intrusion into natural ecologies is having many larger and unintended effects, over time and space. There is no saying what the true relationship is between the weeds, bugs, snakes and even snake poop and tea trees. How are the local squirrels related to the tea trees? It may not be apparent, but if they cohabitate, they are related. Maybe the discarded nutshells help fertilize the trees, or maybe it is more complex by one or many degrees: maybe the nutshells are food to a certain insect that attracts a certain kind of bird which sings in a way that tea trees enjoy, helping them to flourish? True tea is ecological—you

### The Name “Puerh”

The word “puerh” really doesn’t refer to a kind of tea. It was once a city within the Yunnan region of China. In 1950, after the Communist Revolution, the city was renamed “Simao”. Then, in 2007, after a tidal wave of puerh madness and popularity, the local government made the decision to call the city by its original name, so it is now once again called “Puerh”, as is the province.

Traditionally, Puerh was the market center where all the tea grown in the region was brought to be traded and/or sold. Later, all the tea from Yunnan came to be known as “Puerh Cha (普洱茶)” or “Tea from Puerh”. There are many markets today, like Kunming in Yunnan or the biggest puerh market in Guangzhou, where producers trade and sell tea. Many producers and factories nowadays have contracts with particular farmers and buy their crops directly. Since the tea produced in Yunnan is so unique, puerh has come to warrant its own category of tea.

cannot distinguish a Living Tea garden from the surrounding forest!

Fourth, and the most obvious, is that Living Tea is chemical free. The evil triad (pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers) that pollutes our earth, animals, birds and people is not sustainable and not a healthy compromise. It doesn’t matter that a study proves that such pesticides *can* be consumed by people without quantifiably detrimental effects. First off, they destroy the environment,

often running down the mountains and harming other ecologies as well. Second, what are healthy amounts? And how long was the study? Maybe the participants showed no deterioration of health after a two-year study (which would be a long one), but what happens when you consume pesticide-laden tea for ten years? Such chemicals are unhealthy for people and harmful to the earth. They defeat the purpose of tea, which is to bring Nature to society. Master Zhou Yu always asks, “How can you sit in a beautiful tea room and connect to Nature, when the thing you are using to connect was produced in a way that destroys Nature?”

Finally, tea is a conversation between people and Nature. In the Chinese character for tea, the radical for ‘man’ is right in the middle. Tea was traditionally always respected. Each tree was seen as a unique being, with life and spirit and treated that way. Most farms don’t treat animals or plants in that way anymore. There is no respect for the individual being in any of the trees—you can hardly tell where one ends and the next begins on most farms. It is just uncountable “tea”—product, value, stuff, object for consumption, etc. Living Tea, on the other hand, is cared for, plucked and processed by hands and heart that love Tea and Nature!

## Two: Yunnan

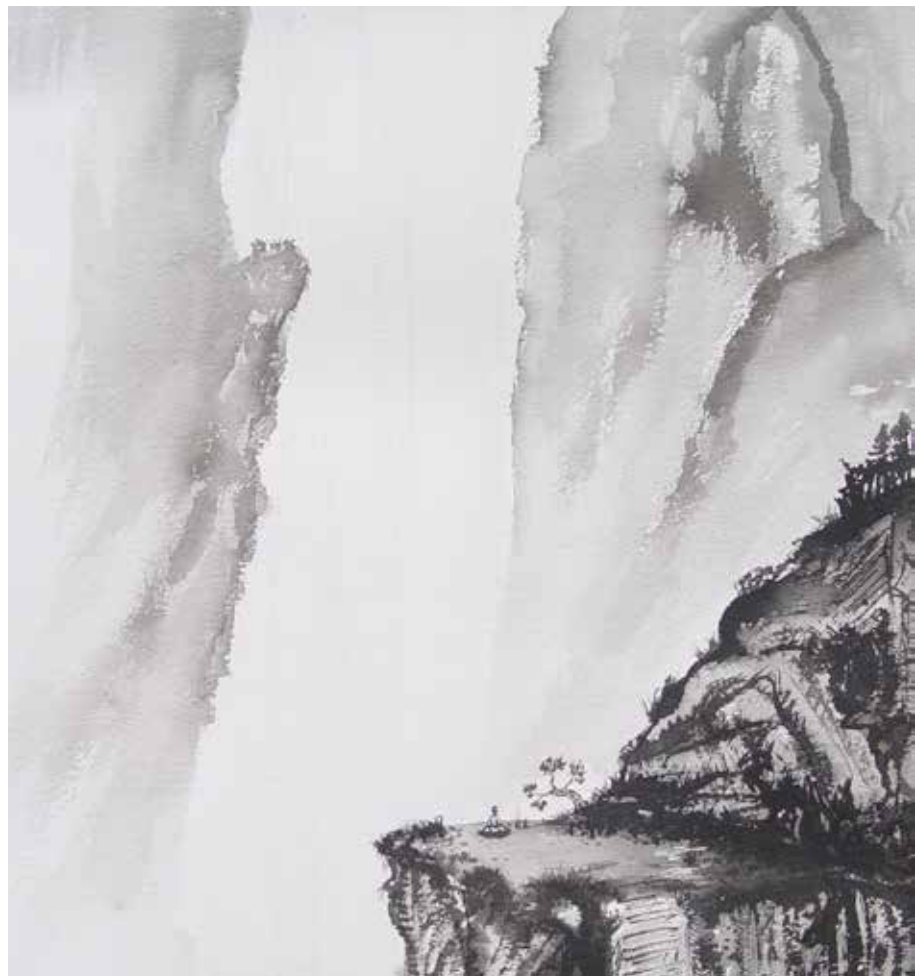
It’s no wonder that Yunnan is the birthplace of all tea. It is a magical land, vibrant in flora, animal wonder and distinctive culture. There is more biodiversity “South of the Clouds” than anywhere else in China, and more than most places on earth. In fact, 25% of all species in China live in Southern Yunnan, which is tiny compared to the vastness of China itself. The soil there is rich and loamy, and even plants found elsewhere are bigger here. Rich mountain soil, con-

stantly shifting biodiversity and the moist climate of mists and rains that roll through the valleys make this the perfect place to farm tea.

The terroir of Yunnan also includes the rich cultural heritage here. Where there is such tremendous vibrancy—and has been since the last ice age carved these valleys—people were of course attracted by the easy life and abundance here. Yunnan has always been a meeting place of many people: Sino-Tibetans who migrated here from the Himalayas, Han Chinese as well as the hundreds of aboriginal tribes who migrated here from Southeast Asia. These are some of the oldest cultures on earth, with shamanistic traditions dating back to the dawn of man. (In fact, the majority of Chinese herbs used in Traditional Chinese Medicine originated in Yunnan, the best of

which is of course tea!) It is likely that these tribal peoples are related to the same who crossed the Bering Strait and began Native America. They are deep and earthy people, with a strong connection to the mountain spirits and Nature. It was their ancestors who first gathered tea from the forest, using it to commune with Spirit, themselves and each other. We should follow in their footsteps!

Every variety of tea on earth is found in Yunnan, even the ones that evolved elsewhere. They have been brought by modern farmers to grow there, and most all of them are happy. The vibrant soil and fertile energy of Yunnan influence the tea, pulsing through the leaves, through the liquor and into us. Sages of the Dao, past and present, have always taught that there are what they call “Dragon Veins” running down into the Earth



*Dragon veins have always been a part of traditional Chinese paintings, connecting Heaven and Earth.*



### *Wild, old-growth tea trees in Yunnan*

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from the Heavens above, bringing “Cosmic Vitality” (*yang*) down into the energy of the Earth (*yin*). This philosophy forms the basis of the ancient teachings of Daoist Geomancy (*Feng Shui*), which situated hundreds of the most famous and beautiful monasteries and hermitages in ancient China. And, so it is said, Yunnan has more Dragon Veins than anywhere on earth! With such an environment as its birthplace, it is no wonder that tea developed into such a powerful, rich plant.

### ***Three: The Trees***

The indigenous, wild, old trees found in Yunnan are of the most important aspects of why puerh tea is so unique. Remember, there are two general kinds of tea trees (every tea tree is a unique being, so categorizing them is like categorizing people: useful but also dangerous). Big leaf tea trees have a single trunk, and roots that grow down, while small leaf tea trees have many trunks, are bush-like

and their roots grow slightly outward. The big leaf variety is older, while small leaf tea evolved later as tea traveled to colder climates, both naturally and carried by man. Traditional Yunnan tea is big leaf, and made from old trees grown in gardens or wild.

The age of these trees belies wisdom. The depth of their roots connects them to the earth and all the Nature and biodiversity around them in a very powerful way. Ancient trees have such deep roots that they are connected to the heart of the mountain, and many even get close to the geothermal warmth of the earth, absorbing this heat into their beings. Some of the trees are completely wild, while others were planted by people and tended, but still live in the forest and are indistinguishable from the jungle around them. In fact, a beginner would hike into the forests of Yunnan and find it difficult to pick out the tea gardens if they weren't pointed out by a guide. There is a natural mystic in the leaves

of such old trees, many of which have seen millennia of suns and moons—the rise and fall of dynasties. Some were here before the pyramids were built! And there aren't many words that can describe the age and wisdom that comes with consuming the energy of such an old life form.

Such old trees are indeed plant teachers. They evolved to show us our source. Most every tribe in Yunnan believes that they are descended from tea trees, and one even believes that all life on earth was born out of tea. This mythology holds great truth, if you but have a bowl of this month's tea and shift your perspective a bit. Of course the plant kingdom is our source; it is our source in the big way, as we all evolved out of the plant kingdom, as did all animate life on this planet. It is also our source on a more daily level, since all our energy is plant energy. We breathe air made from plants, we eat plant energy (whether you are vegetarian or not, it's originally plant energy). The plant kingdom is indeed the source of life

on this planet, for it is through the plants that the cosmic energy is transmuted: they absorb the sun's energy and provide it to the rest of the life forms on this planet.

As the oldest beings alive, plants have a lot to teach us, and these old trees in particular. The old trees from this forest speak a gentle language that we can easily learn and incorporate into our own, human vocabulary. We can learn to live closer to Nature and see ourselves in it, as opposed to apart from it. Due to increase in demand, a lot of puerh is now being produced on plantations. When this happens, you lose this quality and the magic of puerh with it.

#### *Four: The Water*

Beyond just the combination of rich soil and poignant mists, Yunnan is also irrigated by one of the most holy of all waters. More than 5,000 meters above sea level in Tibet,

on the Zhanarigeng Mountain, there is a glorious spring the locals call the "Water of Stone". From this fount, a great flow of water and life begins its epic course down the steps of Yunnan, and eventually through six countries on its way to the ocean. Through Yunnan it becomes the Lancang River (River of Countless Elephants), in Thailand it is the Mae Narn Khong (Mother of All Water), in Cambodia the Toule Thom (Great Water), and then in Vietnam the Mekong. This "Danube of Asia" has ever been the mainstay of countless animals and people on its 4,000+ kilometer voyage from the Himalayas to the South China and Indian seas. The Chinese once called this great body of water the "River of Nine Dragons", referring to the vivacity and spirit of the water elemental. The pure glacial water that flows down into the southern parts of Yunnan from that enshrined spring at the top of the world brings with it an incredible amount of minerals, nutrients

and the spirit of the highest mountains on Earth.

#### *Five: The Midichlorians*

Like no other tea on earth, puerh has an amazing and wondrous relationship with microbial life. Before it is even picked, puerh tea trees are covered in hundreds of species of molds, fungi and bacteria. The leaves are teeming with them. Of course, such bacteria play a role in all life on earth. You and I are mostly composed of them. By number, around 90% of the cells in our bodies are non-human DNA. The bacteria in us are much smaller than our human cells, though, so they are much less of our mass. But if you count the cells in a human body, they are the vast majority of what we call "me", and further testament to our deep connection with everything around us!

We need bacteria and other microbial life to survive. There is



*Cracks millennia deep  
and a beard of moss  
are signs of your wisdom.  
And yet, the sun still shines  
through each branch and leaf,  
and the forest floor sparkles  
with all that dancing shadow and light.  
Far away, I raise a bowl of you,  
and sit wondering  
if anyone can see past those leaves...*

*— Wu De*





true: that a large part of the medicinal power of puerh tea comes from these microbes, and perhaps from the relationship they then have with the microbes in us. Our friend, the microbiologist, extracted some of the living microbes from the sample we gave him and cultured them. He made a drink, similar to kombucha, and shared it with us when we visited the States. It was amazing, and almost as powerful and as medicinal as the tea itself. It forced us to acknowledge just how influential the Midichlorians in puerh tea really are!

# 此為藥中之王

literally an entire ecology of them in our bodies that mirrors the great diversity of beings that live symbiotically with puerh tea. These molds and bacteria are what give puerh its unique ability to ferment and age like no other tea on earth.

We gave a piece of 1950's Red Mark puerh to a brother of ours in the States who has a PhD in microbiology. What he found completely amazed him. He later told us that he found species of microbes that the scientific community had thought to be extinct for millions of years. He hopes to eventually publish his results in scientific journals. He also informed us that the aged tea was

swarming with microbes that could change shape. We're no experts on what this means, or even the proper terms to discuss it, but energetically it reminds us that tea is an "adaptogen", which means a kind of medicine that can change its vibrational pattern to help heal many different kinds of ailments.

When I was younger, we drank a lot of aged puerh. It was cheap and much more abundant back then. We used to joke that teas with a ton of Qi had a higher "Midichlorian Count" based on the microscopic intelligent beings from the Star Wars world. While the term was facetious, what it pointed to was very real and

## King of the Forest 喬木王

This month's tea is one of our favorite young sheng puerhs. It was produced by the well-known Mengku Shuanjiang factory in the spring of 2013, using the first flush of tea from the village of Bing Dao. Located in Mengku county, "Bing Dao" literally translates to "Ice Island". The aged trees this tea comes from are found at around 2,500 meters above sea level. The whole county is well known for its strong, pungent and bitter puerh teas. Teas like this are said to age better, having the strength and power to last the years. But with some brewing finesse, they also make for a fine bowl or cup even now!

When this tea was first released in 2006, it won the Expo Tea Award in Kunming, and the factory then continued production into the coming years. It is called the "King of the Forest (*Qiao Mu Wang*, 喬木王)". Our 2013 version was produced in a very limited amount, especially considering how big the factory is. Only 500 cases, called "jian" were produced. (Later on in this issue, we'll discuss all the parts of puerh cakes and their packaging, including a "jian"). Each cake is 500 grams, which is bigger than the traditional 357.

This tea was processed in a traditional way, sun dried and stone-pressed. The wild leaves bring it to life in a powerful way. We also have a love for it because it is certified organic, which is rare for puerh. Most great puerh comes from small villages, and the farmers can rarely afford certification. We don't mind that. We support clean tea, certified or no. But it also helps when some of the bigger factories can step up and produce high-quality puerh that can win mainstream competitions and is also certified organic. When mainstream consumer demand starts to push for organic production, the tea world will shift. This is true of all agriculture. There are, of course, many limitations to certification, but it is one positive force amongst many, helping to change our consciousness and promote greener living.

This tea is a powerful one—strong, bitter and astringent. When a guest complains that a tea is bitter, one master we study with always replies, "The nature of tea is bitter." Tea is a bitter plant. It can be processed in a way that makes it sweet, but then all of it isn't there. You have to take things out to do that. This is a symptom of life as well, we want

to process it so that all the flavors aren't there—only the sweetness. But it isn't possible. We have to learn to accept the bitterness. Over time we even begin to enjoy it. Most old people love bitter things! Try paying attention to the way the bitterness and astringency transform in your mouth, moving through to a sweet aftertaste. Check the brewing tips for some help, as over-steeping this tea might make these qualities unbearable. In the later steeps, you'll find a deep Qi arising with a sweetness that grows more and more pronounced. The energy of the deep rocks and minerals will also shine through.

We chose the name "King of the Forest" due to this tea's power and force. You can feel the jungle thriving through it. It races through your physical body to the subtle body, transforming into Qi in a fast and vibrant way. It will purge unwanted toxins—of body, mind and spirit. We recommend drinking it in the morning, in quiet. In that way, you'll find that it can change your whole day!



### Brewing Tips for This Month's Tea

The most important brewing tip for this month is: *don't oversteep this tea!* You will need a pot to brew a compressed, strong tea like this month's. Try using less tea at first and then add more. In fact, that's a good rule of thumb for all tea preparation: you can always add more but it's a waste to take tea away! Less is more, as with all things. Try flash-steeping the first few brews, which means pour the liquor out as soon as possible. Later on, you can increase the time.

Puerh tea responds well to hotter water. Try using crab-eye water for this tea, or as close to a full boil as you can get without rolling. The hot water will bring out more in the tea.

It may also be a good idea to share this tea after breakfast rather than before. Young sheng puerh can upset some people's stomach, especially when empty. It is strong and astringent, aiding in digestion. You will find that it feels very comfortable to drink tea like this after a nice meal!



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 YUNNAN SHUANGJIANG MENGKU TEA CO.,LTD.MANUFACTURE

Our tea of the month: front and back wrapper, inner receipt and the cake. Notice the organic certification sticker on the back.

# TEA-GROWING REGIONS OF YUNNAN

Wu De

*Every puerh lover needs to know a bit about the rich geography of Yunnan itself. In this article, we get a brief sketch of Yunnan's diverse tea landscape.*

茶道

If you love puerh as much as we do, it helps to get to know Yunnan a bit. In previous issues, we've discussed the term "terroir" and its significance in relation to tea. "Terroir" is a French word that is generally used in discussions of wine, but it is so applicable to tea as well that most tea lovers have adopted it into their discussions of the Leaf. Terroir denotes the special characteristics of a place, found in its geology, geography, climate and even cultural heritage, which interact with a cultivated plant species to create unique expressions. Terroir is the soil and weather of a particular region, the geography and culture of the people and their relationship to the plant, and even the microorganisms and their interaction with the plants. Every place has a unique soil composition, pH, minerals and climate—all of which create a distinctive tea. When we talk about a tea's terroir, we are speaking to the unique environment that created it, one that couldn't be reproduced. Even if you took a grafting of a tree and cloned it elsewhere, it wouldn't be the same since the sun would be weaker or stronger, the soil composition different, etc., etc. It follows, then, that every region in Yunnan produces a very distinct puerh tea, with unique flavors, aroma and Qi.

The vibrations of an environment *are* the organism itself, and the organism is the environment. There is great wisdom in understanding that living things "go with" their environment, as Alan Watts used to say. Any change in the environment is a change in the organism—physically, and more subtly, on the vibrational level as well. When you watch a documentary on "Rivers", it isn't just an hour of water flowing by; it also contains the fish, frogs and crayfish. Each of these affects the water chemistry of the river, the levels of its banks, etc. And the river in turn affects their lives. They *are* the river, in other words. Similarly, tea trees are their environments, which is why it is so important that we promote living and/or organic teas!

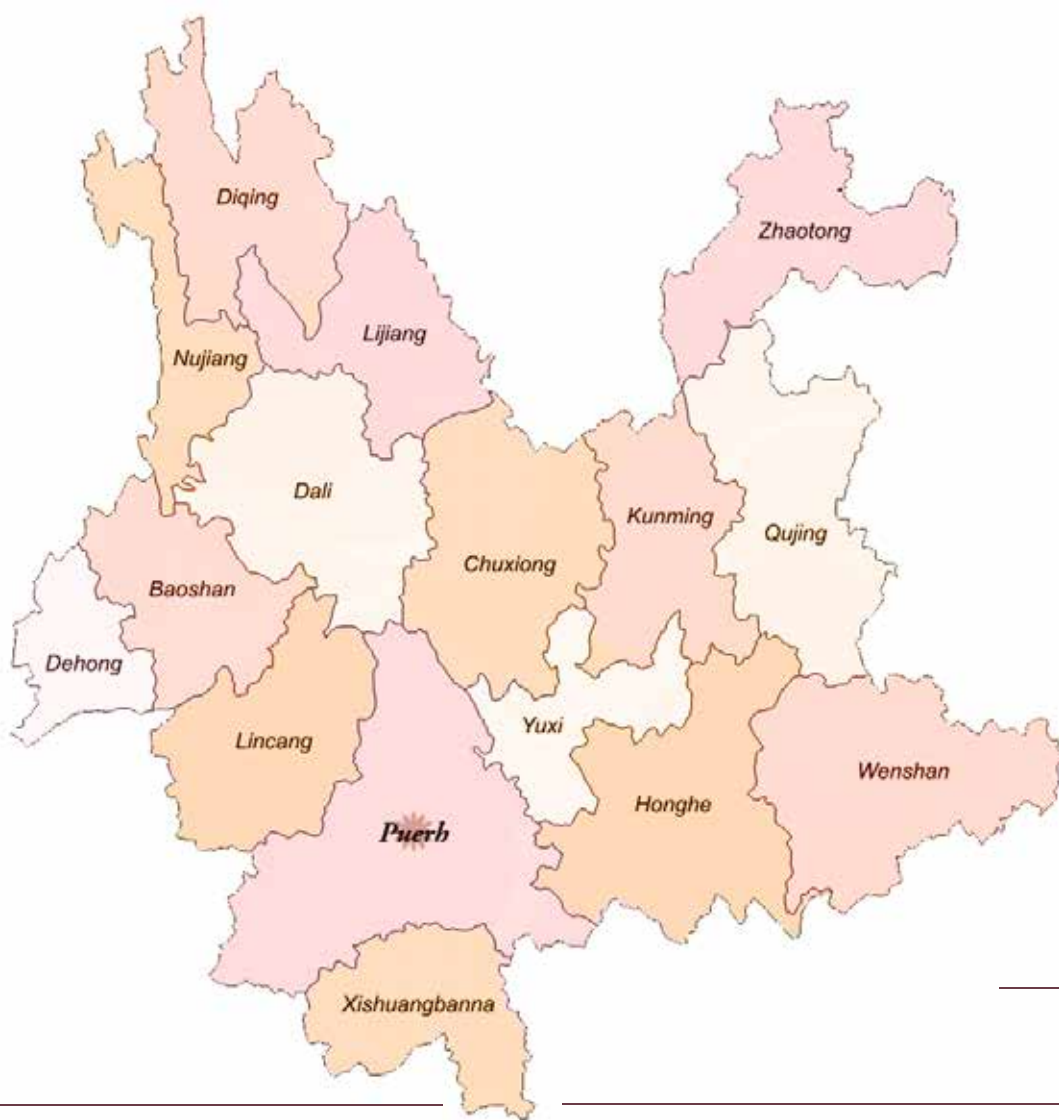
As a result of tea trees being their environment, one of the first steps on your puerh journey will be getting to know some of the key regions of Yunnan, the birthplace of all tea, as well as the flavors and vibrations of the teas that come from those places.

Nowadays, puerh tea is mostly produced in three areas: Xishuangbanna, Puerh (which was called "Simao" for a long time) and Lincang. Historically, the most famous of these was Xishuangbanna, which literally means "Twelve Rice Paddy

District". During the early eras of Puerh, almost all commercial tea came from this region. It is in the very south of Yunnan. There were traditionally "Six Famous Mountains" in Xishuangbanna, all located in a cluster to the northeast of the Lancang river (Don't get confused—"Lincang" is a province and "Lancang" is a river). The names below are Yunnanese aboriginal words. We have also included the meaning in English, Mandarin characters and pinyin as well:

- 1) Mansa (慢撒山)  
literally, "seed sowing bag"  
(sa dai, 撒袋)
- 2) Mangzhi (莽枝山)  
literally, "copper cauldron"  
(tong mu, 铜钵)
- 3) Manzhuan (蠻磚山)  
literally, "iron brick"  
(tie zhuan, 铁砖)
- 4) Gedeng (革登山)  
literally, "leather stirrup"  
(ma deng, 马蹬)
- 5) Yibang (倚邦山)  
literally, "wooden clapper"  
(mu bang, 木梆)
- 6) Youle (攸樂山)  
literally, "copper gong"  
(tong luo, 铜锣)

\*(We remember 3 Ms, 1 G & 2 Ys)



150 km

### *The prefectures of Yunnan*

There are many other popular areas producing puerh tea in Xishuangbanna. The most famous in recent years is Lao Ban Zhang (老班章), which is the most expensive of all puerh tea regions. Nannuo (南糯山), Bada (巴达山) and Menghai (勐海山) are amongst other famous tea producing areas that are to the southwest of the river.

The “Puerh” region is home to the city where this magic tea got its name. This is also where we took our trip, covered in July’s issue of Global Tea Hut. Qian Jia Zhai is in Puerh, which means many of you will be drinking tea from there soon. Puerh is in the southwest of Yunnan, just north of Xishuangbanna.

The Lincang region is the northernmost of the three major tea areas in Yunnan. It is also the birthplace of all tea. The forests there have the oldest trees, and deepest roots in Cha Dao. There is some disagreement amongst scholars as to the origin of tea, but in traveling to the three major areas of Yunnan, we have found that the Lincang region is the

home of all tea. We especially feel this in the “Five Mountains”. Our understanding, however, is based more on a feeling, a connection and affinity to Tea and Her spirit than on any linear proof—take it or leave it... The five mountains all tea originated from are:

- 1) Ming Feng (鳴風)
- 2) Mang Fei (忙肺)
- 3) Mei Zi Qing (梅子菁)
- 4) Wu Jia Zhai (武家寨)
- 5) Da Xue Shan (大雪山)

There are many other tea-growing regions in Lincang, like Bing Dao, where this month’s tea comes from. Tea from this area has only blessed the market in modern times, though the aborigines have been drinking this tea for millennia. The tea here is strong and deep, with sun, moon, mountain and air pouring through it.

Recently, teas from other regions in Yunnan have also started to become available, following the great popularity of puerh tea in China. De Hong is one other region in the very west of Yunnan. Our beloved purple varietal red tea, which we have recently named, “Plum Blossom Trail” comes from De Hong.

While it is nice to learn some of the names associated with the tea we love, more information alone doesn’t really improve your affinity with tea or your ability to appreciate it. It is much better to travel to Yunnan and meet the geography in person—or, if that’s not possible, travel the regions by drinking your way through them. In this way, your knowledge of puerh will be experiential! We hope to provide more chances for you to do that. Of course, not all of our teas will be puerhs, or even come from Yunnan, but we will definitely be sending more of this magical tea—and from different regions of Yunnan—in the coming months and years...



# THE CENTER OF A TEA SESSION

Wu De

*One of the most important insights along the tea road is the realization that you are the tea you prepare. At that point, everything you do becomes your art. And that is the essence of gongfu. But, as we point out, you must experience this truth for yourself.*

茶道

For this month's gongfu experiment, we would like you to focus on the most important aspect of any tea session: the brewer. Water is the mother of tea and an Yixing pot is the father of gongfu tea, but neither of them influences the tea as much as the brewer. You'll often hear us say that water is the easiest, cheapest and most practical way to improve your tea, and that is true to an extent—at least on the outer level. But the deepest and most profound aspect of your tea that you can change is yourself!

As we have so often written in these magazines, gongfu tea means mastery; it means skill and harmony with the medium. It is a becoming of the medium. The true potter *is* the clay, just as the best tea brewer *is* the tea. There is an oft-repeated story around here that the student asked the master how to paint the perfect scroll of calligraphy, to which the master responded, "Perfect yourself and paint naturally!" And the same can be said about tea: what you eat affects your tea, as well as how you treat people, the fluidity of Qi through your body, etc. And that is why the road to mastery of tea is also a road to mastery of the self—a Dao in other words.

Of course, most of you will by now have realized that your tea is different depending on your own

state of mind. Quieting your mind while the kettle is boiling is a very important, and ancient aspect of tea brewing. I always teach my students to never, ever pick up the kettle until the mind is still. Nothing good can follow if the mind is distracted or disjointed. (Of course, this doesn't mean you wait and wait and never serve your guests. Pacify your mind as much as possible. In making an effort, you will certainly be calmer than if you hadn't made any effort at all.) Most of you can experience this as you brew tea day in and day out—the difference a bit of peace makes in your brewing.

As your tea practice develops, you may also try paying attention to other aspects of your cultivation and how they affect your ability to brew fine tea—not just fine in the sense that it is the perfect flavor, aroma or mouthfeel, though those are important, but also in your tea's ability to transport and transform people. Experiment with diet, exercise and meditation, focusing on your tea all the while. In that way, tea is an amazing gauge of progress in all things spiritual. In fact, tea has been used to monitor the Zen of students for centuries. Unlike mind-made measures, cleverness won't help! Your state of mind is in your tea, and there is no hiding it from the sensitive. The path

from the mind to the hand is through the heart. As with mastery of any art, the heart from which the inspiration comes is more important than one's talent, even.

You may want to keep a journal, noticing different aspects of your lifestyle and how they affect your ability to brew fine tea. Aside from diet and meditation, the movements and flexibility of your body will play a role in your ability to brew fine tea or create any art. Opening up the channels in the shoulders and especially the elbows and wrists will be important if you are to master gongfu tea.

For this month's experiment, we'd like to drive this point home to you. You will need some friends for this one, preferably people you know very well. The experiment itself is very simple: get together with three or four friends who all know each other very well. Ideally, you should choose a tea you are all very familiar with and have shared many times. With the same teaware, water and tea, switch brewers every few steepings. You can start over a few times if you have the time, switching the order of brewers so that the tea is brewed at different strengths by everyone at least once (since the first few steepings are different from the middle and later steepings).

Besides these practical parameters, there is one other rule: *there are no rules other than that you must behave naturally*. You should act however you feel motivated to, chatting or sitting silently, singing or shouting... Don't feel constrained. Let yourself go. Make sure that everyone understands this before the experiment begins.

Afterwards, you can have a discussion about the ways that the different brewers affected the tea. Did the flavor, aroma and mouthfeel change? In what ways were the physical characteristics of the tea affected by the change in brewers? What about the Qi? Did you notice a difference when you switched brewers? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what about the ambience? Did people behave differently when different brewers showed up? Did any of your thoughts change? Did

you feel motivated to do anything which you repressed? Since you all know each other very well, could you say that any of the ways in which the energy of the session changed match the character of the brewer? In other words, were people joking when the goofball (*Qing Yu*) amongst you was brewing? Did the session grow somber when the serious person stepped up? These questions may be over-simplified, and the reality more subtle, but you get the idea.

We think that this experiment helps you develop a true understanding of one of the fundamentals of tea. And through it, many doors are opened. Through them, you will realize some new and exciting ways that tea can change your life and the lives of people around you. You will also have taken a step closer to mastery...



動作輕柔



# THE PRODUCTION & PROCESSING OF PUERH TEA

Wu De

*We'll be turning back to this article as time passes; it's an excellent reference for how puerh tea is made. And understanding all that goes into this amazing tea furthers our appreciation of puerh. It is indeed a vast world! From forest to farm and from farm to factory, we follow the tea on its journey to our bowls.*

茶道

Puerh is unique amongst all the genres of tea because the importance of the raw material far outweighs any processing skill. The quality of most oolongs, for example, is determined as much by the source of the leaves as by the skill of the one processing the tea. The value of puerh, on the other hand, is ninety percent in the trees. There are many kinds of tea trees in Yunnan and the source determines the value of the tea. What village a tea comes from and which trees will decide its value, in other words. Of course, there is also plenty of dishonesty in the puerh world: material picked in one region and then taken to a more expensive one to be sold as native tea, young trees sold as old trees, etc. This means producers and consumers have to be able to distinguish the differences between regions and types of leaves.

Puerh trees can roughly be divided into two main categories, though it is useful to understand some of the subdivisions as well: old-growth (*gu shu*, 古樹) and plantation tea (*tai di cha*, 台地茶). Old-

growth tea is by far the better of these two. This refers to older trees. There is some debate about what constitutes “old-growth” since tea trees in Yunnan can range from dozens to thousands of years old. Arbitrarily, we think that when a tea tree becomes a centenarian (100 years), it can rightly be called “old-growth”. Old-growth tea can then be subdivided into trees that are wild or those that were planted by people. Though planted by man, the latter are often indistinguishable from the former as they are both found in small gardens in the heart of the forest. In fact, you would have difficulty picking the trees out from their surroundings without the help of a guide. Another subdivision could be called “ecologically-farmed old-growth”, which refers to old trees planted in gardens closer to villages and/or homesteads. Some people also like to have a category for 1,000+year-old trees as well, calling them by that name or maybe “ancient trees”.

Plantation puerh (*tai di cha*) is far inferior and often not organic. The trees there might even be several decades old, but they aren't Living

Tea, and lack many of the qualities that make puerh so special, as we discussed in our article about this month's tea.

## Rough Tea (*Mao Cha* 毛茶)

All puerh tea begins with *mao cha* (毛茶), which translates as “rough tea”. *Mao cha* refers to the finished leaf as it leaves the farm to be sold directly to factories small and large, or independently at market. Tea at this stage has been plucked by hand, wilted, fried to remove the raw flavor (called “*sa chin*” 殺青), kneaded (*ro nien*, 揉捻), and dried. These processes need to occur almost immediately after the tea has been plucked, which is why they are done directly at the farm rather than at the factory.

Most varieties of tea include all the same stages of processing as puerh, though unlike puerh, the final processing often ends there and the loose-leaf tea is then packaged right at the farm. (Some oolongs were traditionally finished at shops, as well. The shop owners would do





the final roasting to suit their tastes.) Puerh, on the other hand, often travels to a factory for final processing: compression into cakes if it is raw, sheng puerh or piling and then compression if it is ripe, shou puerh.

Some varieties of puerh are also destined to become loose leaf. At the start, that means that they remain “mao cha”, but once they are aged, they are technically no longer “rough tea”. So an aged, loose-leaf puerh shouldn't really be called “mao cha”.

Traditionally, these loose teas were the ones that were grown at smaller farms that didn't have contracts with any factory—often from so-called “Border Regions” where Yunnan borders Laos, Vietnam or Myanmar. Such teas were then sold at market, traded between farmers or bought and stored by collectors. You can't be certain, however, that a loose-leaf puerh is a Border Tea, as the big factories also packaged

and sold some of their teas loose, though not as much as compressed tea. Although some of the tea that was sold loose was fine quality, most of it was considered inferior.

We have a huge collection of loose-leaf puerh tea here. In fact, we have so much that we have also become collectors of rare antique jars to store it all in. Loose-leaf puerh, no matter how old, is always cheaper than puerh compressed into cakes. One reason for this is that the cakes have an easily-verified vintage. Though there are fakes, experts have developed systems of identifying them, using a combination of factors from a kind of “wrapperology”, which identifies characteristic marks, color changes, etc., in the printing of the wrappers to the cake itself—its

### *Puerh Is a Genre in Its Own Right*

Puerh tea is sometimes put into the black tea category (remember, this isn't red tea, which is mistakenly called “black tea” in the West), but it should actually have a category all its own. Traditionally, all puerh was fermented before consumption, whether artificially in the case of shou or naturally over time in the case of sheng. As we've mentioned elsewhere, tea lovers back in the day considered new, sheng puerh as “unfinished” and rarely drank it, except to see how it was aging. Therefore, all puerh tea was fermented and fit nicely into the black tea genre, which is categorized by post-production fermentation.

These days, however, much more sheng puerh is consumed young than old. And since sheng puerh vastly overshadows shou in quantity and in historicity (shou only dates back to the sixties or seventies), sheng obviously typifies puerh tea.

One solution to this change in tea production/consumption would be to put young, sheng puerh in the green tea category and aged sheng along with shou in the black tea category. But that seems much more confusing than just giving puerh tea its own genre. We think that since it's the oldest tea, and from the birthplace of all tea, puerh deserves its own genre!

shape, leaf color or size, compression, etc. On the other hand, very few aged loose-leaf teas are pure. Most of them are blends. Some were blended during production, though more often, tea was added later on to increase the quantity of an aged tea. Sometimes blends of wet and drier-stored teas, or even sheng and shou are mixed to make a tea seem older than it is. When drinking aged loose-

leaf puerh, it is a good idea to only rank them relative to other loose-leaf puerhs, rather than believing in the date the merchant has given. While some loose-leaf puerhs do have a distinct vintage, most are blends. Looking at the wet leaves after steeping will also verify this.

Beyond that, cakes have been found to have more Qi than loose leaf puerh, so that if the same tea were left loose and processed into a discus (*bing*, 餅), for example, and then aged for thirty years, the cake would have more Qi than the loose leaf. Having done several experiments where we stored the same exact tea from the same farm in both loose leaf and cake form, we can say for sure that the compressed teas age better, and not just in terms of Qi. They are better in every way: flavor, aroma, etc. They also age faster and more evenly. One possible reason for this is that the steam used to compress the cakes seals the bacteria in, and the inner moisture creates a better environment for them to do their work. Still, despite the fact that cakes are better, loose-leaf teas are often great deals since they are much cheaper than cakes of the same age. It's like choosing a more affordable antique teapot with a chip under the lid versus a perfect, very expensive one. Depending on your budget, the former may be the better choice.

### Processing

The freshly plucked leaves are carried back to the house or village and gently spread out on bamboo mats to be slightly wilted before they are heated to remove the raw flavor. The purpose of wilting the leaves is to slightly reduce the moisture content in the leaves so that they will be more pliable and less likely to be damaged when they are heated. This process must be watched carefully so that the leaves do not oxidize more than is absolutely necessary. For that reason, wilting typically takes

place outdoors and indoors. The tea is withered outdoors for some time and then placed in a well-ventilated room, often shared by members of a particular farming village.

The heating process/firing (*sa chin*) is literally performed to remove the raw flavor of the tea leaf. This occurs in the production of most all kinds of tea (except white tea, which categorically skips this process). In Yunnan, the heating process is still often done by hand in large wood-fired woks. The temperature must remain constant and the leaves have to be continuously turned to prevent any singeing. In larger farms, though not often in Yunnan, this is done in large barrel-like machines that spin around like a clothes drier. With puerh, however, the firing is still done by hand, once again lending tradition and wisdom to the puerh process. Workers sift the leaves around in circular motions ensuring that they never touch the wok for longer than a blink. Through gen-

erations of experience the farmers can tell by appearance and feel when the leaves are sufficiently cooked, and their timing is as impeccable as any time/temperature-controlled machine elsewhere. Scientifically, the process is removing certain green enzymes within the leaf that lend it the raw flavor, which in some varieties is too bitter to be drunk. As we'll discuss later, the *sa chin* of puerh is less-pronounced than in many other kinds of teas.

After the leaves are fried they are kneaded (*ro nien*). This process also occurs by hand on most puerh farms or villages near old trees. A special technique is used to knead the leaves like dough. This bruises the leaves and breaks apart their cellular structure to encourage oxidation, and later fermentation (*fa xiao*, 發酵), which will occur through the various methods (explained in the box about sheng and shou puerh on the opposite page).

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## THE PROCESSING OF MAO CHA



## Sheng vs. Shou

*There are two methods of fermenting puerh tea. Knowing the difference between these categories of puerh is essential for anyone who wants to begin understanding, buying, and/or drinking puerh tea.*

Green puerh (sheng 生), often called “raw” or “uncooked”, is produced without any fermentation (*fa xiao*) during the production or compression of the cakes. The fermentation of these cakes occurs slowly through an aging process that takes seventy years to reach complete maturity. These sheng cakes are by far the more valuable of the two varieties of puerh and represent the traditional method of puerh production.

Sheng puerh is said to be fully mature at around seventy years. Of course, we can enjoy aged puerh at any time, and each age has its own charm. Young puerh has characteristics unlike any tea, as does teenage puerh, middle-aged and fully-matured. Nowadays, as vintage sheng puerh gets more and more expensive, many people consider thirty-year-old tea to be very old. Still, there is a reason why puerh experts have always said seventy years was full maturity: after around seventy years, the changes in the physical characteristics of the puerh will slow down enough to say they have stopped changing. In other words, the tea liquor isn't going to get any darker, and the flavors, aromas and mouthfeel of a tea this old are changing so slowly, you will have to find a much older specimen to see the differences. Of course, all things equal, the older the better.

As puerh ages, the rate of change decreases, so the difference between a five and ten-year-old puerh is more pronounced than the difference between a thirty and forty-year-old tea. After seventy years, the tea has reached the point that its leaves won't get any darker and the liquor will look the same as a one-hundred-year-old tea, though the latter may have more Qi and a slightly different flavor profile.

Black puerh (shou 熟), often called “cooked” or “ripe”, is produced through a processes that ferments (*fa xiao*) the tea to varying levels before it is compressed. Called “wo dui (馱堆)” in Chinese, this step in puerh production is akin to composting. The tea is piled, moistened and then often covered with a thermal blanket to increase internal heat. Sometimes previously fermented tea is introduced to promote certain bacterial growth. The process could be stopped at any time, though a typical, “full” fermentation runs from forty-five to sixty days. Different factories may adjust the length of time that a tea is piled based on their recipes, the kind of tea they use, or the desired level of fermentation. Most older shou tea was fermented only partially, whereas the majority of shou produced today is stronger, fully fermented tea.

Ripe (shou) puerh can never attain the quality of flavor, aroma or Qi as a properly aged sheng puerh. The process of piling puerh to artificially ferment it was developed in the late sixties and then licensed for commercial production in 1973, which is usually the date most books will cite as the beginning of shou puerh. Factories were looking to mimic the qualities of aged sheng in less time. Of course, they were not successful. What they did create, instead, was a whole new category of puerh tea to be evaluated and enjoyed by itself, and according to its own criteria of quality, rather than comparing it to sheng puerh.

Ripe tea doesn't age the same as sheng. If the tea was partially fermented, however, it will age. Since many early ripe teas were only partially fermented, they can even be sold as sheng to the uninitiated. Fully-fermented ripe teas tend to mellow out over time, losing some of the rough, “pondy” or ammonia flavors associated with such a long period spent piling.



It takes skill and method to achieve a gentle bruising without tearing the leaves. We have personally tried this in Yunnan and Taiwan, and found it is very difficult to achieve. We invariably tore up the leaves. The farmers, however, can go through the movements with surprising speed.

Finally, after the *mao cha* has been kneaded and bruised it is left to dry in the sun. Once again this process must be monitored carefully to prevent any unwanted oxidation or fermentation from occurring. Usually, the leaves are dried in the early morning and late evening sun, as midday is too hot. They will move the leaves into the same well-venti-

lated room used earlier for wilting during the hot hours of the day. The leaves will be inspected hourly and when they have dried sufficiently, they will be bagged and taken to the factory to be processed, or to market to be sold as loose leaf.

The two most distinguishing aspects of puerh production are the *sa chin* and the sun drying. The firing of puerh tea does arrest oxidation, as in all tea, but it is usually less pronounced than other kinds of tea, leaving some of the enzymes in the tea alive, as they help promote fermentation. Then, after firing and rolling, puerh is sun dried. This gives it a certain flavor, texture and aroma

and helps further the natural vibrations present in the tea. Not all puerh is processed in this way, especially with all the innovation and change in the modern industry—though, ideally, we want tea made in traditional ways.

Once the leaves are processed, they will often go through their first sorting (*fan ji*). A second sorting will occur later at the factory itself. This sorting is to remove unwanted, ripped or torn leaves, as well as the leaves that weren't fired or rolled properly. At this stage, the factory/producer may ask the farmer to sort the leaves according to size, called "grade". This practice is becoming rarer, however, as the prices of old-growth puerh increase. Nowadays, farmers sell most everything. Sometimes, they don't even sort out the broken or mis-processed leaves.

### THE PROCESSING OF PUERH AT THE FACTORY



### At the Factory

Upon arrival to the factory, the *mao cha* goes through its second sorting (*fan ji*). This is often done by hand even at the larger factories, though some have large winnowing machines. And most have strict rules controlling the diet of the sorters. Tea is an extremely absorbent leaf and will be altered by any impurities. Sorters therefore shouldn't eat chili, garlic or onions. Nor can they drink alcohol the night before a sort, as it will be secreted through their skin and contaminate the leaves. The sorting that occurred on the farm was more cursory and based solely on leaf size or "grade". This second sorting is more detailed and thorough. The leaves are distinguished not only by their size, but also by their quality, type (old or young growth, which mountain they came from, etc.), and other criteria that are constantly changing. Larger factories often have *mao cha* arriving from all over Yunnan and therefore employ experts to monitor all sorts of conditions to determine which leaf size, which locations, etc., will have a good harvest that year.

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*The best puerh teas are still processed by hand, and in the old ways. This tea is being sun-dried on the roof of a house.*

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More and more, factories are targeting collectors by creating limited edition sets, with cakes from certain mountains, for example.

There is a lot of discussion nowadays about the differences between single-region and blended puerhs. For the last fifty years, most all puerhs were blends. The factories would collect the *mao cha* from various regions and then blend them in ways they thought improved the tea: choosing strength and Qi from one region, blended with sweetness and flavor from another, etc. In this way, cakes would be more balanced. In the last fifteen years, there has been a trend towards single-region cakes, and with it the idea that such tea is more pure. It should be remembered that all old-growth puerh is actually a blend, since no two trees are the same. So even tea from a single mountain will be a blend of different teas. If you are sensitive enough, you can even distinguish the leaves from the eastern and western side of a sin-

gle tree, since they receive different sunlight. There are merits to both kinds of cakes, and it seems pointless to say that one is better than the other in general. It would be better to talk about specific teas, as a certain blended cake may be better than a given single-region cake or vice versa.

The trend towards boutique, private and single-region cakes has also changed the way that puerh is produced. For example, some cakes are made on site and completely processed by the farmers themselves. Most tea, however, still travels to factories for sorting (blending) and compression. What was once one of the simplest teas, at least as far as processing goes, has now become complicated by the vast industry that has grown up around it.

*Mao cha* can sit in a factory for a long or short time, depending on many factors. In doing so, it technically ceases to be “rough tea”. Sometimes tea is aged for a while and then piled to produce a nice, mel-

lower shou tea than a new tea could produce. Other times the tea that was inferior and didn't make it into a cake, is then sold loose leaf later, and labeled “aged” to help market it.

Once ready, the leaves are carefully weighed and placed into cloth compression bags or metal pans. The texture of these bags can be seen imprinted on puerh tea if one looks closely. They are not used to package the tea, only in the compression process itself. They are made from special cross-woven cotton. Strangely, even the larger factories that we've visited still use antique-looking scales to do their weighing. Along with human error, this explains why even new cakes are often incorrect in either direction by a decimal of a gram (of course in aged tea this is usually due to pieces breaking off).

Steam is used to prepare the tea for compression. The steam is carefully controlled—mostly automatic in the larger factories—to ensure the leaves are soft and pliable, but not cooked or oxidized in any way. It is basically a process of slight rehydration. The steam softens the tea and the cloth in preparation for compression. Sometimes the steaming takes place before the tea is placed into the cloth, using metal pans instead. In a non-mechanized factory a wooden table is placed over a heated wok full of water. The steam rises through a small hole in the center. This is far more difficult than the automatic steam generators at larger factories because the temperature control is lacking and the leaves can end up being burnt. It requires the skill of generations to successfully steam the tea this way.

The compression process was traditionally done with stone block molds. The tea is placed in the cloth, which is then turned and shaped into a ball. The *nei fei* is added at this time—an “inner trademark ticket” compressed into the tea to establish branding. The cloth is then twisted shut and covered with a stone mold block.

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# THE SHAPES OF PUERH CAKES



## 1 Discus (bingcha, 餅茶)

The discus ages better than other shapes. Traditionally, they were 357grams. However, nowadays they can be as small as 100g and as large as 1or even 5kg. Those compressed using the traditional stone mold will be looser. Some *bings* are compressed very tightly. Those are called “iron discuss (*tie bing*, 鐵餅)”.

## 2 Bowl/Nest (tuocha, 沱茶)

These open, nest-shaped cakes are usually smaller than bings. Traditionally, they were from 75g to 250g, and most commonly 100g or 150g. Nowadays, there are huge ones as well. In the old days, more buds were put in *tuocha*, making them sweeter. They are also compressed tighter, so they age slower.

## 3 Melon/Pumpkin (jing gua, 金瓜)

Like a *tuocha*, these are bowl-shaped cakes, only with ridges that make them look like a pumpkin or melon. This is one of the oldest shapes, often given to honored officials—even the emperor himself. They can be many sizes, and stacks of them, from larger to smaller, are often used to decorate shops and for good luck.

## 4 Mushroom/Heart (jingcha, 緊茶)

Mushroom cakes are typically 250grams. They were mostly exported to Tibet. The Chinese literally means “tight tea”, but the words sound like heart in Tibetan. And the Tibetans found these cakes to be heart-shaped.

## 5 Brick (zhuancha, 磚茶)

Bricks are also ancient shapes, and amongst the oldest teas ever found. Like mushrooms, they are almost always 250grams. There are smaller and larger ones in modern production. They are also usually tighter than *bings*.

## 6 Square (fangcha, 方茶)

These flat and square cakes aren't as old as other shapes. They are often 100-200g in size. Sometimes they have pictures or characters compressed into them for luck or decoration. They are always tight in compression, as they are machine-pressed.



The producer would then physically stand on the stone block and use his or her weight to compress the cake. In some of the smaller family-run factories, puerh cakes are still created using this method. On our recent visit to Yunnan, we had the chance to make our cakes by dancing around on the stone molds, to the delight of the Chinese audience present. Larger factories often have machines for compressing their cakes, though some still produce some of their cakes in the traditional way. Some are hand-operated presses that require the operator to pull down a lever and press the cake into shape; others are automatic and occur with the press of a button. We even saw one machine that was capable of compressing twelve *bings* simultaneously.

After compression, the cakes are taken out of the compression cloths and placed on wooden shelves to dry. They are still slightly damp from the steam at this stage. Many larger factories have a separate room with tons of shelves lined with drying cakes. The cakes are monitored and often even stored on particular shelves that are numbered according to their processing time. Different types of puerh leaves and different shapes or levels of compression will affect the amount of time that is needed to dry the cakes, from hours

to days and sometimes even up to a week. Some big factories use ventilation systems and/or fans to speed up the process.

When they are finished drying, the cakes are taken off the shelves to be packaged. Each generation of cakes has its own unique characteristics with regards to the wrapping paper, printing, style of Chinese characters, *nei fei*, etc. As we discussed earlier, there is a whole science of “wrapperology”. Each decade brought revolutions in the printing process worldwide, so it seems obvious that the larger factories would change their printing methods. Also, the wrapping paper in particular is handmade, and a lot can be discerned via fibers, texture, and the appearance of the paper as well as the ink color. It is impossible to forge many of these paper and ink combinations and make them appear aged.

Discus-shaped cakes, called “bingchas” are individually wrapped in handmade paper and then bundled in groups of seven (*qi zi*, 七子) called *tongs* (桶). Each *tong* is wrapped in Bamboo bark (*tsu tze ka*, 竹子殼). Sometimes English articles mistakenly assume that these are bamboo leaves. Actually, bamboo trees shed their skin whenever they get bigger or sprout new stems. You can see this material covering the floor of any

bamboo forest. The Bamboo bark conserves the freshness of the tea and makes packaging easier. Twelve *tongs* are then further wrapped using Bamboo, into a *jian* (件), which is twelve *tongs* of seven, so eighty-four *bings* in all. Other shapes of compression include bricks (*zhuan*), mushrooms (which look like hearts to the Tibetans they were primarily exported to, and thus named “jing cha”), bowl or nest shapes (*tuocha*), and sometimes melons. We have found that the discus-shaped cakes (*bings*) age the best.

Puerh production may seem complicated at first, but it really isn't that difficult to understand. We hope that the basics we've covered in this article, along with the accompanying charts, will help simplify the process for you and increase your understanding of the more linear aspects of puerh tea. By including other articles about the energetics of puerh in this issue, as well as past and future issues, we hope to fulfill you in a more balanced way. Thus, our understanding of puerh will be more holistic, including its history, production methodologies and other informative approaches along with a spiritual and vibrational understanding of this amazing tea.



## Information and Wisdom

Having a lot of information about puerh is no substitute for drinking these teas, and really only useful in purchasing tea, establishing or verifying a vintage or having discussions with connoisseurs. To us, Tea is medicine, and aged puerh teas hold the highest vibration. Puerh is magical in its ability to connect us with ourselves, Mother Earth and each other. It is stronger and more vibrant than most other teas. We hope to cover Tea from many perspectives in these pages, including linear information about tea, tea production, history and cul-

ture. But these are not so worthwhile without experience. What would books of tea information be without any tea to drink? Consequently, be sure to temper all this left brain with some right, all this mind with some spirit—all these tea words with some tea wisdom!



“I’m using bamboo bark to wrap seven cakes up into *tongs*. This is a very old tradition. The bamboo bark helps protect the tea from the elements and humidity, and lends it a nice fragrance as well. The bamboo has good energy.”



# COMING AND GOING TEA

Solala Towler

*Solala is a Qi Gong teacher and a bit of a Daoist sage, as is apparent in his insightful writing. His story-telling always leaves us inspired to put on another kettle and think about our place in the world. And here is no exception. In this article, he explains the oneness and duality of things over a cup of Dragon Well.*

茶道

The student came to the teacher and asked, “What is the relationship between birth and death, of coming and going, of emptiness and fullness?”

The teacher smiled and put down her teacup. She was tempted to send this eager student off to the kitchen to scrub the pots. How many questions this one was capable of! And all in one sentence! But instead she thought back to her first days here at the Shrine of the Universal Mother and remembered how full of questions she had been then...

So, instead of sending the inquisitive student off for kitchen duty, she decided to answer her questions: “First of all,” she said, taking a sip of the fragrant green tea. (It was *Long Jing*, Dragon Well, her favorite.) “First of all, the relationship between life and death is like the relationship of yin and yang, the seemingly opposing forces of the universe. Yet, as with yin and yang, they are, in reality, only two sides of the same thing. As our Masters tell us, yin and yang would be better written as yin/yang, in order to denote their union. In this way, birth and death should be written as

birth/death, as each one is born from and then returns into the other. Indeed, there cannot be birth without death as there cannot be death without birth.

“The small seed germinates in the cold, dark ground, only to burst forth into the world of light, then to die back down again as the plant it becomes gives way to the dark days of winter. So too do we, as humans in the world of the ten thousand beings, have our day to play in the light of life, only to give way, in the end, to the darkness of death, there to lie easy in the earth, awaiting who knows whatever form of life we may find ourselves in again.

“So too is the act of coming just another side of going. Dao is endless and fathomless and we are but a small part of the whole yet we each, within us, carry a portion of that great whole.

“Master Zhuang said, ‘What makes my life good will also make my death good.’ What this means is that who and what we are in this life will ordain who and what we are in death. If we are grasping and selfish in our life, we will be grasping and selfish in our death, except in that other side

of life, there will be nothing to grasp and nothing to be selfish about and our suffering will be endless.

“Therefore our teachers tell us that we must be humble and open, soft and pliable, so that we will find our place in the Dao and be free men and women.

“So too, in this way, are emptiness and fullness two sides of the same thing. The Old Master wrote:

*Yield and overcome.  
Bend and be straight.  
Empty and be full.  
Wear out and be new.  
Have little and gain much.*

“As we are taught, if we try to amass a store of wealth, we are leaving ourselves open to thieves. Only the one who has little has little to lose. Only the one who gives away much of what she or he has, will gain in wisdom and inner power. Only the one who knows that fullness and emptiness are but two sides of the same thing and that a period of great fullness is often followed by a period of great emptiness does not feel smug and self-important when their energy

cycle is high, and also does not feel despair and desperation when their energy cycle is low. We must always remember that the high is built upon the low.

“This teacup I hold”, she said, holding up the cup to the light, “is now empty while a moment ago it was full. When it is full I enjoy the rich taste of the tea and then when it is empty I hold it up to the light and enjoy the lovely lace of cracks that have built up in it over the many years I have been using it. Either way, I can enjoy and savor its place in my life.

“As the Old Master has said:

*In the world of learning,  
everyday something is added  
But in the world of Dao,  
everyday something is let go.*

“In this way we learn and experience, in our very beings, that the seemingly opposing form of death and birth, coming and going, and emptiness and fullness are but steps along the way on the Celestial Path of Dao. We give thanks for the many lessons we are given, we give thanks for the opportunity to learn

and grow within our spiritual being, and lastly we give thanks to be able to fully appreciate and honor both our birth and our death, all our comings and goings, and our experience of being full and of being empty.”

So saying, the teacher held her teacup out to the student to be filled once again with good, rich Dragon Well tea...



不老丹

*Original artwork by Wu De.  
The calligraphy says,  
“The Elixir of Life (Bu Lao Dan)”.*



Here are some old tea trees:

- The left picture is a few-hundred-year-old tree near Lao Ban Zhang.
- The right is an ancient tea tree, at least 1,000 years old, in Ai Lao.



# THE THREE ERAS OF PUERH TEA

Wu De / *Cake photos by Wuxing*

*This article was published in a previous issue of Global Tea Hut, but Wu De has added some new and significant details about the history of puerh tea. A puerh lover's education isn't complete without an understanding of aged tea.*

茶道

In coming to understand the history of puerh, especially the last century or so, you include heritage and historicity into your appreciation of this magical genre of tea. For a long time, aged puerh was the mark and measure for every discussion of the genre. In those days, we rarely drank any newborn tea, except to see how it was aging. So you really haven't explored puerh as a genre until you've also had some aged tea. We hope this article helps you on that journey.

It should be noted that most all the terms used to identify the families and eras of puerh tea began for the most part with the scholarship of the 1990's. During their own times, these teas were everyday commodities, and names and trends always changed with the times. Also, one should remember that the lines between these eras, while based on reason, are ultimately arbitrary. Though most scholars agree in general, certain vintages right near the boundaries might slip into either age depending on what one reads.

Throughout the coming pages, we'll discuss the eras of puerh tea, accompanied by pictures of the rare and priceless teas from the Masterpiece Era...

## Young or Old

As puerh ages, something magical happens and it changes from a bitter, astringent and strong brew to a dark, smooth, soft and sweet ambrosia. There is no tea as nice as a well-aged puerh! Back in the day, when aged puerh was readily available, people rarely drank newborn tea, except to check how it was aging. Nowadays, exploration of new regions in Yunnan, exciting new teas and the rarity of aged puerh have all shifted the tea world and much more newborn puerh is consumed. As this shift was happening, many who had been drinking aged tea were saddened by the very sudden increase in price, as many vintages became way too expensive for all but the richest amongst us. Previously, it was thought that puerh couldn't be called "puerh" unless it was fermented. Tea lovers back in the day thought of new puerh

as "unfinished tea", but things have certainly changed in the last ten or fifteen years.

Time passes, as it does, and rather than feeling down about this, we've discovered a whole new dimension to enjoying puerh! Young and old puerh needn't be compared against one another, but rather appreciated and used medicinally—each for her own reason. We used to only evaluate new tea based on how it would age, but now we drink it for its own sake. There is a great joy in drinking newborn puerh, like this month's, and also in aging it, watching it change over time. We've learned to appreciate all the different ages of puerh from new to adolescent to well-aged. They each have their place and season to be brought out and shared with beautiful guests like you!



*One version of the now legendary 1950's Red Mark*

### *The Antique Age*

This era of tea includes all the tea that was produced prior to the formation of Communist China in 1949. All of the factories from that time were private businesses and none had anywhere near the output of those today. Many of these trading firms also dealt in other goods as well, like rice and other agricultural products. Puerh tea was just one commodity amongst others. Some of them were even owned by single families, like the legendary *Song Ping Hao* and *Tong Qing Hao*. They were often small, rural houses where tea and other products were all processed completely by hand. The demand of the market at that time was small and annual production in numbers that would make even the state-owned factories of later years scoff. Old tea house owners in Hong

Kong have reported that 10 *jian* (or “cases”, each with 84 cakes, therefore equaling 840 cakes) was enough for the entire island for one year. The demand for puerh was low because the retail price was relatively high compared to other teas. Nevertheless, many would argue that the cleaner and more natural farming methods and environment lent these cakes a certain majesty not found in any of their descendents. The fact that many of these teas are now 70 or more years old, coupled with the fact that very few were produced to begin with, makes them extremely rare and valuable—sometimes costing more than a hundred thousand USD per cake.

The cakes from the Antique Era were never wrapped with an outer wrapping paper. Perhaps it was considered too costly at the time; and preservation wasn't as much of

an issue. However, all the cakes did have a *nei fei* or “inner trademark ticket” embedded into the tea just like the ones of today. Many also had a *nei piao* or “stack ticket” that rested in each stack of seven cakes (*tong*). Other than the leaves themselves, these trademarks are really the only way that collectors can tell cakes apart, especially ones from the same factory, like for example the Red and Blue Mark *Song Ping Hao* cakes. The leaves in these ancient cakes were larger-leaf blends, and were harvested completely from old-growth trees.

When the “New China” was established in 1949, the central government declared that all industry belonged to the people. Even the tea industry was handed over to the local government. These changes closed these family-run, private businesses in the 1950's and the Antique Era came to an end.

## The Masterpiece Era

The start of the Masterpiece Era began with the creation of the state-run factories, like Menghai, which is still in existence today (though it is privately owned now). In order to control and stabilize the production of tea in Yunnan, the “China Tea Corporation, Yunnan Branch” was created. They had their own logo, brand and trademark—established in 1950, and registered with the central government in 1951. This trademark is the now famous “8-Zhong Tea” character that is in the center of all the cakes from the Masterpiece and later Seven Sons eras. The character “*zhong* (中)” means “middle” or “Middle Kingdom”, viz. China. Eight of them surround the character for tea (茶) since that number was considered lucky. It also symbolized the goal of

distributing Chinese tea to all eight directions of the world.

Red and Blue Mark teas, as well as others from the Masterpiece Era, are now also very rare. While they aren't as expensive or as difficult to find as Antique Age teas, many vintages are quickly approaching comparative values. Like the older teas, these too are treasures.

Tea cakes in the Masterpiece Era are distinguished from earlier ones by the obvious change to using outer wrapping paper. All these cakes were wrapped in handmade papers with the “8-Zhong” trademark in the center. The name of the “China Tea Corporation, Yunnan Province Branch Company” was printed in a ring around the central character, and read from right to left (which helps distinguish these cakes from later ones produced in the Seven Sons Era). The style and methods

used to wrap seven cakes into *tongs* didn't change in the Masterpiece Era: they still used bamboo bark with soft bamboo twine to hold the *tong* closed.

The Masterpiece Era is considered to be the 1950's and 60's, and characterized by four main categories of tea. Some authors subdivide these cakes into more varieties. This list is, therefore, a gross simplification, as most Chinese anthologies will include some later teas in this era, as well as subdivide these categories into many cakes. Nevertheless, this is a start to understanding the Masterpiece Era:

- 1) Red Mark Round Cakes
- 2) Red Mark *Tie Bing* (iron discus)
- 3) Grade A & B Blue Mark-Round Cakes
- 4) Artistic Font Blue Mark-*Tie Bing* (iron discus)

*...continued on pg. 33*

### One version of 1960's Blue Mark





天然無汗染高山茶



## The Seven Sons Era (Qi Zi Bing)

The Seven Sons Era began in 1972 with the formation of the now-famous “China National Native Produce & Animal By-product Import & Export Company”, referred to so often as the “CNNP”. The new agency would take control over all the puerh production during the period. The three main factories of the time period were Menghai, Xiaguan and Kunming. During this time, the production of puerh tea increased as a result of a growing foreign market. More tea was exported than ever before. As a result, more of these teas are floating around the vintage market than their predecessors, though some of these famous vintages are also now starting to become rarer and more expensive. Some of the earliest cakes from this

era are just now starting to reach maturity, and connoisseurs are all interested in tasting these vintages as well as the earlier ones.

When the CNNP took over the production of puerh in Yunnan they changed several aspects of the design used to package tea, as well as the blends and raw materials. Consequently, besides the change in management, these changes justify the demarcation of two eras of tea at this time. Firstly, all the teas were no longer called “*Yuan Cha*” or “Round Tea Cakes”; instead, they were all now called “*Qi Zi Bing Cha*”, which literally means “Seven-sons Tea Cake”. As mentioned before, the characters on these cakes also changed from ‘right to left’ to ‘left to right.’ The cakes made by Menghai also began using Roman Pinyin font beneath the Chinese for

the purpose of exportation. (Xiaguan and Kunming factories were slower in making this change). Menghai also began adding a *nei piao* between every cake and outer wrapping. Scholars often differentiate these *nei piao* tickets from the ones used in the Antique age by calling them “Description Tickets” and the earlier ones, “Stack Tickets”. The *nei piao* from the Seven Sons Era were called “Description Tickets” because they contained short descriptions of the tea inside, sometimes with the region, product information or even marketing about the health benefits of puerh tea. Again, Xiaguan and Kunming’s early Seven Sons Era cakes didn’t have these *nei piao*s inside. Of course, the name around the “8-Zhong Tea” was also changed from the China Tea Corporation to the CNNP. There were several other

## One version of Yellow Mark





*These are the wet leaves of this month's tea. Newborn puerh is green and fresh, with a bitterness and astringency that lend it strength.*

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changes in packaging at this time, like the use of metal wires to tie *tongs*, factory and batch codes and even changes to the design of the *nei fei* tickets compressed into the tea.

### ***Newborn Era***

Different authors end the Seven Sons Era at different times. Many modern factories are still producing cakes with the same packaging designs as those made during this era, and the continuous

production of that design makes the delineation between the Seven Sons Era and what scholars call the “Modern” or “Newborn Era” difficult indeed. However, most all puerh historians end the Seven Sons Era sometime in the mid to late 1990’s. For us, 1997 is a good time to mark the end of this era because the private orders made by tea merchants to the national factories increased drastically after 1997. In addition, different kinds of wrapping styles emerged alongside the Seven Sons style. Since

the beginning of the Newborn Era, the production and variation of puerh tea has increased in a whirlwind of volume. Also, more single-region tea is being made these days and there has also been a dramatic increase in what we call “Boutique Tea”, which means private, small productions made by shop owners or puerh lovers who travel to Yunnan themselves to see the trees and order cakes to their taste. (*Like our amazing cakes, discussed on pgs. 43-4*)

## Factory Codes

Many state-produced *bingchas* have a four-digit production number. This trend began in the late 1960's or early 1970's and consequently doesn't apply to very old antique puerh. These were internal factory batch codes originally and were only known and used by factory workers and merchants who ordered from them. Nowadays, however, the old recipes have become famous and many companies, small and large, are trying to reproduce the famous "7542" or our favorite, "8582". Consequently, it's worth knowing a little of what these codes are about.

Basically, the first two digits are the year in which that production was first started. If a particular mixture/processing procedure marketed well, it was then continued the next year, sometimes even for decades to the present. In other words, if the first two digits are "75," this means that this particular production method/mixture was first begun in 1975. This doesn't mean that the tea itself dates to 1975. It could be a 2006 cake. It just means that the recipe itself began in 1975. The methods used to blend and process puerh tea into cakes are often experimented with until better formulas are developed.

The third digit refers to the leaf size or "grade" used in production of the cake. Grades of teas were

and are often very complicated. Different factories follow different guidelines and/or change them over time. Generally, though, the first grade leaves are the smaller ones, buds, and then the bigger the leaves and further back up the stem, the higher the grade. In the olden days, the first four grades were often used to process bowls or nest-shaped teas (*tuochas* 沱茶) and mushrooms (*jingcha* 緊茶) and larger fifth through ninth grades were reserved for *bingcha* and brick puerh. This has changed in the modern era. Nowadays all different kinds of cakes are made from the selection of grades.

The word "grade" can occasionally confuse English-speaking people. This is because the grade mentioned above is not always relevant to quality. Of course, a first grade leaf is more expensive by weight because the buds are smaller and there is a lot less of them. But price and quality are not always commensurate. The word "grade" in English also denotes "quality" and is therefore misleading. There are two Chinese words, one for the grade (*dang ji* 等級), i.e. size and location of the leaves on the plant, and another for the quality of the leaves/tea (*pin tze* 品質). Many times the first leaves are better quality, but not always.

The final number in the four-digit code refers to which state factory produced the cake. Knowing the factory can often help determine the tea-growing region in which the raw material was farmed as well. In those days there weren't so many factories as today. As we mentioned above, these recipes are now copied or commemorated by many different factories, so the last number has less relevance in modern times. The numbering for the factories is as follows:

- 1 Kunming Tea Factory (昆明茶厂)
- 2 Menghai Tea Factory (勐海茶厂)
- 3 Xia Guan Tea Factory (下关茶厂)
- 4 Feng Qing Tea Factory (凤庆茶厂)
- 8 Hai Wan Tea factory (海湾茶厂)
- \* "8" was also used by  
Long Sheng Tea factory  
in the past (龙生茶厂)
- 9 Langhe Tea Factory (郎河茶厂)

Sometimes factory codes are also followed by a dash and then a number of the particular batch. This doesn't occur that often, though. But when it does, it can help identify the vintage as long as one knows how many batches are produced each year. Below is a summary, then, of the four numbers present in a factory code with an example for clarity:

75

These two numbers refer to the date in which this processing method began, so that in the case of this tea, processing began in 1975. It unfortunately doesn't describe the date of the actual tea, as many production processes are carried on for many years.

4

This digit refers to the average size of the leaves used, often called "leaf grade". So this tea is composed of 4th grade leaves.

2

This last number refers to the factory that produced the bingcha. So this cake was made by Menghai Tea Factory (勐海茶厂).

# THE PARTS OF PUERH CAKES



## 1 Outer Wrapping (bao zhuang, 包裝)

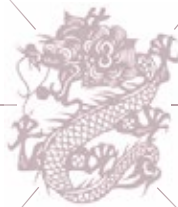
Wrappers are almost always made from natural fibers. These surround the cake itself. They help identify vintages and to some degree protect the cake. However, since the wrappers are made from natural fibers, there are more bugs that eat them than the tea. Many cakes' wrappers have nibble marks on them.

## 2 Inner Trademark Ticket (nei fei, 內飛)

A *nei fei* is a small piece of paper mixed in with the tea and compressed into the cake. This is to verify brand and/or vintage even if the wrapper is lost. That can still be hard when it comes to vintage tea, as many *nei fei* are the same for years at a time.

## 3 Inner Receipt (nei piao, 內票)

This is a paper that is sometimes inserted between the cake and the outer wrapping. Not all cakes have them. They often contain details about the production, region and sometimes even advertising. Some vintage *nei piao* even have broken English ads promoting the health benefits of puerh.



## 4 Bundle (tong, 桶)

A *tong* is seven cakes wrapped up in bamboo bark. Sometimes bamboo twine is used to tie them, while other *tongs* are tied with metal. Traditionally, a *tong* was always seven cakes, but nowadays some are five.

## 5 Case (jian, 件)

Cases were traditionally twelve *tongs* bundled together, or eighty-four cakes. They were usually tied together with more bamboo twine for shipment. Nowadays cases can have more or less cakes, and are often cardboard boxes as opposed to the traditional bamboo *jian*.

## 6 Big Label (da piao, 大票)

*Da piao* were big brand labels that are attached to each *jian*. This sometimes is still practiced, but it was more prominent in previous eras. They often detail the batch, recipe, etc. We have one from the Antique Era in the center.

# THE LEGEND OF SEVEN SONS PUERH TEA

Wu De

*We love nothing more than a good tea story! In a humorous session with an old hermit, we learn why puerh cakes are always stacked in bundles of seven, and why they've been called "Seven Sons Puerh" for so long. Stories like this add to what makes tea so great!*

茶道

Puerh cakes from 1972 to 1997 are all called "Qi Zi Bing", which literally means "Seven Sons Cake". Puerh teas have always been packed in bamboo-wrapped bundles, called "tongs", each with seven cakes inside. This tradition of packing seven cakes together caught on in the Seven Sons Era, and later scholars have since started calling the period by that name. But why seven cakes?

One funny old man seems to know the story of why puerh always comes in seven cakes and why it's called "Seven Sons". Let's go visit him for some tea, shall we...

The old man pours the thick black brew into worn old porcelain cups. The steam rises in swirls from the amazing liquor. In its shadows, you can see black and brown swirling towards red and a golden tinge that rings the outside of the liquor. The tea starts blurring the corners of the world—everything grows softer and more pliable, while at the same time clear and bright. The old man grins toothlessly, suggesting a looseness in his bearing, as if some of his mind isn't here, but rather drifting out the window with the dust particles and

tea steam... "Seven Sons, eh..." he mumbles, starting his story:

"They say that long ago in the distant village of Feng Yang," he begins waving into the distance, "there was an old couple that really, really wanted a daughter, so they ended up with eight children... Now why anybody would have eight children," he mumbles more to himself than us, taking a sip of the dark brew... "Now, what were their names..." He pulls at his beard, and then picks up his cup to take a drink. Looking into the brew, he suddenly remembers! "Oh yes. Ai Lao was the first. Then Bu Lang, Ji Nou, Ah Wa..." He sips loudly, "As you can see, this couple was strange, indeed... The fifth son they named Ai Ni, which means 'Love a Daughter'. Apparently, they kept trying because they wanted a girl..." He giggles—a cute, yet toothless sound that is so filled with mirth that we're all soon laughing. "The next one was La Gu, which means he would 'Pull in a Daughter'. The seventh was named Wu Liang. That means 'Too Many Damned Sons!'" He guffaws,

rolling around and patting his belly. "Anyway, they finally had a daughter—the eighth child—and named her 'Ha Ni' or 'Finally!'" *Hahaha!*

"Now this family was a bunch of tea farmers, puerh in fact, so having the extra hands around the house was alright, since it meant less to do for the old rascal that sired them all, eh!" he says smiling mischievously. "They didn't earn much, but they raised their children well.

"When they were of marriageable age, the old soot gathered them all together to talk about their futures. Like most Chinese puerh farmers, the father wanted his sons to follow in his footsteps and farm tea. It turns out that this particular farmer wasn't as stupid as this story makes him out to be: he actually loved tea, and thought the world of it. He knew it had good *juju*..." The old man smiles and the tea gleams so brightly in his eyes. "As they talked on, the old man knew that his small farm would not be enough to support so many children, especially if they all got busy making as many kids as he had!" As the tea session continues, the tea and the funny, toothless old



man both start to get funnier and you too roll around a bit, laughing with glee. “They went to bed without a resolution. Over the coming days, the poor old man was so distraught and worried about his children that he fainted, and fell into an illness... Maybe he wasn’t so smart, after all...”

“All his seven sons were sad. Their father had fallen ill worrying about them. They therefore ventured off in seven directions to find some medicine for Old Ba... Now, this is my favorite part,” the old man says,

pouring out another pot into the stained old cups. “The seventh son, Wu Liang, came to a distant mountain where it was told that there was a magical elixir that could cure anything. He hiked up an old, worn trail and found an ancient and mystical tea tree with thousands of years of canopy rising up into the sky. He prayed at the altar there and plucked a few of the leaves, rushing home... I bet you know what happened, eh?” He looks down at your recently-filled

cup and giggles. “You got it, the tea revived the old coot!” He laughs.

“The tea also showed that old dodger a vision... and he had an idea. He summoned his seven sons and told them all to travel to distant, remote tea mountains and bring back the amazing old tea leaves that grew there. The sons obediently started doing this and brought the leaves back home to be processed. Over time, they had to travel further and further afield, but they did earn enough to start families of their own... Hopefully, not as big as their old man’s, though!”

“The daughter stayed with the old couple, as she rightly should since that old mom went through so many births to bring her into the world!” The old man slaps his knee, taking another sip. The liquor is starting to turn from deep black and brown to amber and red. “The father renamed her ‘Nu Er Cha’, which means ‘Daughter Tea’. Those sons all settled down in the mountains that are to this day named after them, though they always sent tea home and came to visit now and again like good brats...” *Funny old guy!*

“Each year, they would also bring a cake of their best tea, from the oldest and wisest trees to gift to their father. He would drink that tea himself, aging what he couldn’t use in bamboo bark. The aged tea helped him live a long and healthy life, and he never swooned into a coma again—especially now that his house was finally quiet!”

“And over the many long years he lived, he also shared that tea with all the other villagers, and the many guests that come to disturb such toothless old men,” he winks playfully. “Some even came from far away. And to all of them he would proudly hold up a bamboo bundle of seven cakes and proclaim, ‘*This is my Seven Sons Tea!*’”

The old man pours a last brew from the wizened pot, as we look around at all the bamboo *tongs* on the shelves, each with seven cakes inside...



# OUT OF BOUNDS TEA

Steve Kokker

*Steve's chatty and entertaining writing style pulls us in. He always writes like a friend, and we feel like we're sharing tea. Here he tells us about two tea gatherings he served at recently. Each one had its share of challenges, but ended in insight, joy and a deeper understanding of Tea and himself. After reading, we might feel the same!*

茶道

As we have all seen, tea is appropriate in all sorts of situations and spaces. As we get more practiced in serving tea, the comfort level and desire required to bring tea into different environments also increases. We love the traditional meditative approach in which we serve tea and see its immediate effect on people, yet recently we have also been shaking it up a bit, trying out different teas, different spaces and incorporating different elements—to sometimes delirious effects! Recently, there have been a few less-than-classical settings in which to enjoy tea, and I thought I'd share two of them with you:

## *Big Hair, Big Heart, Big Tea*

When an opportunity came up to serve tea recently at a concert given by Dustin Thomas, there was an instant “yes” that bubbled up from the tummy region. The brain then stepped in with its worries about the logistics involved in preparing tea for 40 to 50 people, as well as murmurings about how “appropriate” a “tea ceremony” during a concert might be. Just the left-brain doing its usual, tedious thing: finding fault and look-

ing for something to worry about! Luckily, they were gently placed aside and the right brain enjoyed a little triumph. And the evening turned out to be one of the most free-flowing and joyful tea experiences of my life!

Thomas has for years been the bass player and a powerful contributing force to *Medicine For The People*, the now-massive spiritual-folk band led by Nahko, who calls Thomas “a light, teacher, warrior and deep brother.” “Little Buffalo”, as he was dubbed by the band, has toured with MFTP extensively throughout their frenetic rise to fame. Calling them a band almost misses the point; they are more of a movement, spiritual and activist. In their lyrics and interactive live sets, they propose a higher, more exalted way of living and being, a reconnection with Mother Earth and a realization of how precious this life we live is. Most people know them thanks to the hard-to-believe-gorgeous video to their song *Aloha Ke Akua*, and anyone who has spent time at Tea Sage Hut likely knows *Budding Trees* as a background soundtrack to Wu De's cooking/dancing-cooking.

Though the group has received a lot of attention centering

on Nahko, Little Buffalo is a powerful force of light in his own right, and has recently been touring the world, playing sets over-flowing with love, from Australia to Moscow, and most recently in Tallinn and Helsinki. Tom and Jane, a couple who have done so much to awaken the same kind of life-affirming energy in Tallinn with their singing evenings, met him in Bali and on a whim asked/told him to come to Estonia during an already-planned European tour. Promised a land of “berries and fairies”, it didn't take Dustin long to agree.

Indeed, his Estonian introduction was mind-boggling. On the day he arrived, he was taxied from the airport to one of the planet's largest outdoor concerts; the Estonian National Song Festival, held just once every five years in the spirit of reconnecting to tradition, roots and nature via song. Suddenly he was among over 100,000 people gathered peacefully to sing. His head was still spinning as he was brought the next day to an isolated bog, a favorite Estonian hangout to have tea there. “I was like, ‘Where am I? What is this place I had never even heard of a few weeks before?’”



Dustin is all hair, all smiles and all heart. His has an eternally young, cute face framed in a dread-afro combo that would be the envy of bushmen and yogis alike, often lit up with an ear-to-ear smile and bright, eager eyes ready to face the world with wonder.

Not sure how Dustin was to react to the already-planned idea of serving tea during his concert, I was psyched to hear how psyched he was about the idea. Turns out that Dustin is an avid tea drinker and even worked at a knowledgeable teashop in the US. He even knew about the Black Tea (*hei cha*) I was planning to serve. Indeed, right after the event, the first thing he did was call his old buddies back home and say, “You’ll never guess! My dream has finally come true—I just combined a tea ceremony with my music!” Turns out he had long fantasized about somehow, somewhere combining tea and music, and here in little Estonia the Universe responded.

As more and more people piled into the room, somehow I didn’t even worry about service questions, knowing that all would take care of itself. It did. As 63 people finally turned up, I had to ask couples to share bowls. Indeed I didn’t really worry about anything that night, and while sitting at the front of a roomful of people is not my preferred scenario for evoking a calm and restful spirit within, somehow everything felt like it was progressing as slowly and sweetly as flowing honey. Time was stopping and I tried to be just an empty vessel doing what was required at the moment. At some point, only after much practice, the “me” components in any focused act (serving tea, engaging in sports or concentrated on a craft) appear to diminish into irrelevance and you are simply responding to the necessities of the moment.

Dustin had the crowd in a state of bliss with his joyful, rhythmic songs. Many are interactive, meant to be sung along to in a verse-repeat-verse method well known to Estonians, as this form evokes traditional folk songs for them. Here, to

warm, lush, often rousing guitar melody lines, we were singing songs like *One Way Or Another* and opening our hearts with simple but touching lyrics like: “I don’t care how long it takes / I don’t care what people say / One way (Or another)/ We’ll learn to love each other someday...”

Amazing what sitting on the floor and singing along to a friendly spirit playing a guitar can feel like! What a simple gift Dustin offers: one man, a guitar, a smile and lots of heart. Armed with just that, thousands are touched.

And the tea, I must say, helped some too. I boiled up some 1990’s Liu Bao, my favorite choice for anything requiring a bit of heart opening. It flowed continuously as some gorgeous, angel-helpers poured it into people’s bowls. As I truthfully said at the end of the concert, I think

that it was perhaps the most delicious tea I had ever brewed, as it was made with a heart fully opened by the joy and love in that room then and there, and steeped while singing along to his touching songs. Dustin, by his very openness, in the simple way of just presenting himself to others as he is, served as a powerful, living example for everyone to just shine! No matter who you are or what your specific talents are (and we all have some), don’t hide them! Let them come out! The space into which you step will be steeped in love and acceptance, and your doing so will open others’ hearts as well!

Truly, it was among the finest moments of my life, a powerful learning experience and an honor to serve tea in such a state of flow and bliss. So glad, too, to be in the company of friends throughout.





## *Tea and Tantra*

There was another recent tea event that stepped out of the boundaries of our usual experience. We dubbed this the Tantric Tea Temple, after an actual space run by Tantra teacher Shashi Solluna. We met at the recent Tantra Festival in Estonia, where she was hanging out in our Chado tea tent, and it turned out that she was so into tea that she had merged tea drinking sessions in with her tantric courses in Thailand. Her space there was called the “Tantric Tea Temple”. Of course, we hit it off and after being taught a lovely Guan Yin Qi Gong ritual by a lake, we decided to set up a tea session before she left.

In attendance were three tantric instructors and some friends. Inspired by the heart-opening theme of the eve, I again chose a Liu Bao

tea—this time an unopened 800g basket from the 1980’s. There was quite a lot of excitement in the air that this tea had been packed over 30 years ago and had been meditating all the while, waiting for us to open it up again! Shashi started with a heart-opening meditation exercise, which centered us and provided the perfect ambience into which tea could start flowing. Recently, I have also found that a short, loosely guided meditation before a tea session helps a great deal to shed everyday concerns.

We enjoyed a few bowls of the black brew in silence and then I gently suggested that during the next bowl, we all shift our focus on ‘where the tea goes’ as it slips into our bodies at the back of the throat: To follow the liquid as it dissolves into us. To simply see ‘where it goes’. There were a few giggles. “Well, seeing as this is

a tantric tea session, there may be a few obvious destinations, but just stay focused. The tea can surprise you.” What soon followed was unlike any other moment I had experienced during a tea session. Someone started laughing, at first just gently, as if the laugh had bubbled up unintentionally from deep within. Then a few more laughs, starting to sound free-flowing. Another, and then another started laughing after this, genuine just-for-its-own-sake kinds of laughs: mouth relaxed, with the sounds emerging from the middle of the chest (versus those throat laughs we often use to signal joy to others but are not very deeply felt). Soon, about five of the eleven gathered were laughing quite uncontrollably, shaking their heads, moving shoulders rhythmically and enjoying the feel of big smiles on their faces. Fantastic!

Had anyone walked in on us, they would have either thought I'd slipped something into the tea or that we were all a bit loony (or at least that we were having a group Kundalini awakening moment). I kept pouring tea; lips parted in a joyful smile, enjoying the happy, unbridled chaos around me. Delightful! One guy lay on his back and let out a whooping exclamation, placing his hands over his head in seeming disbelief.

Had the tea spoken through them? Had it helped dislodge free-flowing energy (which, in the tantric community is never too deep under the surface anyway)? Were the spirits of the tea farmers who had processed the tea in the 1980's coming back to do a little tribal dance through us? Did the spirit of the tea wish to experience this form of human joy vicariously through us? Or are tantric tea drinkers just a tad... on the sensitive side?

Either way, it was a glorious tribute to the tea plant. There was also spontaneous dancing that seemed to emerge seamlessly from the flow, and, of course, hugging. And in tantric circles when people hug there are no body parts pulled back, back-slapping nervous ticks or a sense even in a full embrace that the person is holding back due to inner fears and discomforts, as happens so often in everyday life, even among friends you'd think were comfortable with each other. These are full-frontal mega embraces—soul hugs in which the spirit seems to dislodge ever so slightly from the body and lilt upwards. The heart-opening exercises and Liu Bao had helped loosen inner tensions and everyone sensed the safety and acceptance of the space.

Tea finds its place among us all, in every kind of situation. Now it is up to us to learn from Her flexibility!



# 茶把大自然帶進社會



# LIGHT MEETS LIFE LIMITED EDITION PUERH CAKES

Spring 2014, Ai Lao

*The first and best of this year's puerh cakes have arrived! This magical tea was blended on the trip we took in May, which was covered in July's issue. The tea is wonderful! The fragrance alone is intoxicating.*

茶道

Most of you will have thoroughly enjoyed our July issue of Global Tea Hut by now. Having read all about our trip to Yunnan, and all the exciting adventures we had there, you no doubt were waiting for this announcement: the first of our 2014 Light Meets Life teas have arrived!

This is the first, and most special of the three teas we've produced for LML this year. The second two teas should arrive soon, and we will announce them in due time...

This amazing tea was hand-picked from 1,000 to 1,800-year-old trees deep in the forests of the Ai Lao Mountain range in Yunnan, China.

Yunnan is the birthplace of all tea, and the cradle of Cha Dao. Old and wise trees such as these have been a part of the cultural heritage of the local aboriginal people for millennia. In fact, many of the tribes in Yunnan believe they are descended from Tea. The local tribe, called the Ku Chuong, also believe that in drinking this tea your heart sees clearly and you can never get lost. May every sip be your guide!

Ai Li Juan is a Ku Chuong from the village of Qian Jia Zhai, in the Ai Lao Mountains. She loves tea

and her culture. A vast amount of the funds she raises from the production of old-growth Puerh is being devoted to a new center that will preserve the Ku Chuong handmade tea skills as well as other aspects of their cultural heritage, from weaving to singing and dancing. All of the ancient trees surrounding Qian Jia Zhai are protected by the local council, and the farmers cooperate in their harvest. The trees are numbered and also guarded by a forestry service to prevent over-harvesting or other harmful agriculture, like agrochemicals. Only a very limited amount is harvested each year, and always by hand; it takes hours to hike into the forest where the old trees reside. For that reason, only 150 of these cakes were made—each one numbered.

The magical liquor of this tea was ordered in May of 2014 when around fifteen Global Tea Hut members traveled to Qian Jia Zhai together to purchase the tea. Together, we hiked for several hours up the mountain paths to the "King Tea Tree"—an old grandfather that surveys his mountain of heirs. This wise old tree is 2,700 years old. Beneath him is an altar, where generations of aboriginal people have come to pray. Like the

Native Americans, tribal people in Yunnan ask permission from elder plants to take the medicine of their children and grandchildren. We also laid our prayers at his feet, singing our songs of gratitude. We asked permission to bring this tea home. We asked for his help in the creation of our tea center, and we asked for physical, mental and spiritual healing for all those who drink this tea.

The boxes the tea comes in are handmade, and a special wood was used that imparts no odor to the tea. Also, the boxes are hand painted by Wu De, in the spirit of our journey to this mystic place. Each one will come with a unique painting and be signed and numbered on the inside of the lid. Inside, there is a description card with much of this information along with three pictures, one of Auntie Ai, one of the King Tea Tree and one of his many children from which this tea was produced. The cakes themselves are made of handpicked, processed and traditionally stone-pressed tea. Each one is 250 grams. They are wrapped in natural-fiber, handmade paper, which also supports the local Ku Chuong community.

As many of you know, we are an organization devoted to awak-



ening harmony through the spirit of tea. We seek to build community through our mutual love of tea as plant medicine, Nature and as a spiritual vehicle. Our current center (Tea Sage Hut) in Miao Li, Taiwan, hosts hundreds of visitors each year. They come to learn meditation, Cha Dao and to deepen bonds with this growing, worldwide community. All room and board, tea and teachings are free. In continuation of this, we plan to build a bigger, more permanent center, which we will call “Light

Meets Life”. *100% of the profits from this tea will be put into savings towards the building of Light Meets Life, which will also be a free space to learn meditation and Cha Dao.* None of the proceeds from this cake will be used towards our current center or any other project.

The minimum donation for one of these amazing cakes is 100 USD. You are welcome to donate anything beyond that, knowing that it will help bring us closer to build-

ing our new center! This price does not include shipping, which will be quoted to you and depend on your country. If you are interested in having one of these 150 cakes or have any questions that weren't answered here, please contact us at:

[globalteahut@gmail.com](mailto:globalteahut@gmail.com)

# A RUSSIAN TEA WEDDING

An Interview with Katya & Denis

*This growing community often blows our hearts wide open. It is the reason we feel so inspired to publish these magazines, build centers and host tea ceremonies: tea family! Connection between hearts is going to heal this world, one bowl at a time... Katya & Denis are tea family to us all, and so let's share in the occasion and be distant witnesses at their beautiful tea wedding!*

茶道

One of the things we love the most about Global Tea Hut is the growing community, and all the beautiful family we've made through tea. As time passes, this aspect of being here, sharing tea with all of you, starts to grow. New branches sprout every week, and we hear about new and amazing ways that members are connecting to each other. More than just reading a magazine or learning about tea, we are also sharing tea with hundreds of tea brothers and sisters around the world! And that adds a dimension to the teas we drink here—they're somehow deeper and... well, *more* than they would be otherwise.

In the last few months, we've heard about Global Tea Hut members drinking their tea of the month together at the same time, which means organizing to meet different people in different time zones. Last month, people in Russia, the United Kingdom and Estonia shared one such session. We're also hearing more and more about members from one place visiting other members: people from Holland going to Estonia to stay with brothers or sisters there, Russians going to Spain, etc. We

imagine this continuing in so many beautiful ways!

We very much want to foster community here, and way beyond just promoting our tea tradition. It doesn't matter if you practice tea in our tradition or not, we're family—in our love for tea, Mother Earth and each other! If any of you have any ideas about how we can further the connection we all have to each other through these envelopes, we'd love to hear about them!

In the spirit of this growing bond between us all, we would like to share with you the exciting news that our brother and sister, Denis Mikhailov and Katya Kucherenko were recently married. They met through tea and their mutual love of the Leaf also fostered their relationship over time. They are also big supporters of this tradition and Global Tea Hut in Moscow, where they currently reside. Both have attended several of Wu De's lectures and workshops.

Katya and Denis met on a big Buddhist tour across Russia. They actually met in a Chinese restaurant in a small town called Blagoveshensk, which is close to the Russian/Chinese border. After the

dinner, there was a party for the Buddhists on the tour and Denis invited Katya to share some puerh with him. It was the first time she'd ever tried such tea, and she loved it from the first sip. Then, in 2010, Katya moved from her birthplace in Siberia, Komsomolsk-na-Amure, to Moscow to live with Denis (her hometown is actually closer to Taiwan than to the capital of Russia).

Wu De, this tradition and all the brothers and sisters here have played a large role in their relationship. They attended workshops and afterwards founded the "Tea Hut Moscow" which meets weekly to share tea, organizes events, etc. "Through these gatherings we have built a strong community and made life-long friends with some of the best and brightest souls in Moscow—let alone all the wonderful people we've met in Estonia and Ukraine, where we traveled last year to help serve at Wu De's events there," They said. "We wholeheartedly welcome any Global Tea Hut members to visit and stay with us and share tea and hugs!"

There is a tradition in Russia that the bridegroom comes to the bride's parent's house to take her

to the wedding. Since Katya's family home is so far away, she stayed in their apartment and Denis went and stayed the night at his mother's apartment. On the twentieth of

*A thousand, thousand blessings  
for this growing community!  
Great tea, peace and happiness  
in the bowl we meet in.  
There's room for all the devas,  
bodhisattvas and Buddhas  
in this small thatched Hut!*

—Wu De

June, he came back to take her to the wedding. She remembered that Wu De had said that in Chinese culture the bride brews tea for the groom, and that acceptance of the tea is an acceptance of her into him. The bride is therefore supposed to brew it with all her heart inside. Katya decided that she would make tea for Denis when he arrived. The two had an impromptu wedding tea ceremony, as their families looked on lovingly.

Now, we can also look on lovingly, as their extended family—their Global Tea Hut family! Katya and Denis were excited to share these pictures with you, with the hopes that you all would see how much they care about you, and how much drinking these teas together with you each month has changed their lives and their relationship to each other. “You were all invited to our wedding!” Katya said happily.





*In Chinese wedding ceremonies, the bride puts her heart into the tea and the groom accepts her into his spirit and home when he accepts the tea.*







# LONG-TERM STORAGE OF PUERH TEA

Wu De

*This article was originally published in two parts in The Leaf Magazine ([www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org)). Wu De cut down the content and updated some of the information for us. There's a lot to say about aging puerh. If you're interested, check out the original as well.*

茶道

There is always a commotion in the world of puerh concerning the proper way to store tea and create fine vintages—a teahouse bustling with friendly discussions, arguments, laughter and wisdom in both English and Chinese alike. Like so many topics floating around the global teahouse, there are a lot of rumors, conjecture and even misinformation offered up between sips. And like most things, mastery only comes with experience. In the meantime, we have to seek out as many trustworthy sources as we can, and rely on a rational comparison of them all based on whatever experience we have acquired—although sometimes common sense and even intuition can lead us to teachers with a better, deeper understanding of these matters.

One problem we find is that, especially in the English-speaking tea world, there are too few people with real, lasting experience aging puerh. We are, of course, indebted to the few Chinese who have braved the topic in English, but otherwise most of what you read is not based on any real foundation—it's teahouse rumors and conjecture. It seems obvious that someone who has only been storing

tea for a couple of years cannot have anything of substance to say about long-term storage. We have been storing puerh for fifteen years, and yet we still would rather go to masters like Zhou Yu or Paul Lin, who have been watching tea change for more than thirty years, seeking any information on the transformation of puerh over long periods, as well as how to make sure such teas reach their highest potential. I trust their wisdom not just for its profundity and breadth alone—they have been teaching tea almost as long as I have been alive, after all—but also because I have tasted many of the teas they have aged into maturity and found them all exquisite.

Even more problematic is the idea that you can learn about aging and aged tea by drinking new tea. The tea room now is a bit rowdy with the opinions of people who have drunk little to no aged puerh. You can't sample a few different kinds of tea from any genre and expect to have any kind of grasp on its flavor profile. I drank aged puerh from the Qing Dynasty, Antique, Masterpiece and Qi Zi eras almost daily for five years, sampling every vintage, and many of them several times, before

I felt even a little confident when commenting on the characteristics of the genre itself. I really don't mean to come off snobby or elitist in saying this. Almost all the great teas I drank weren't ones I myself owned. I was just really fortunate to meet some of the great masters, and through no worth of my own to be given wisdom and steeped teas I often felt and/or was undeserving of. Anyway, for much of the time that I have been drinking vintage puerh it wasn't as special or rare an experience as it is today. As I said, I don't mean to boast; I made this point merely to express the common sense that without a lot of experience, one really should do more listening than talking. You wouldn't expect someone to write a substantial, meaningful article on oolong tea, for example, if they hadn't tried hundreds of kinds—enough times to develop an experiential wisdom worth listening to. Similarly, a handful of sessions with a few aged teas is not enough for one to understand the genre. And one thing all masters I've ever met have concordantly exclaimed is that when it comes to storing puerh tea for a long time, the only way to really understand which new teas are ideal,



and how to store them properly, is to drink a whole lot of well-aged puerh.

The need for a substantial experiential foundation in the genre of vintage puerh in order to really explore proper storage seems rather obvious to me. The problem, however, is that the growth of the puerh industry has led to dramatic price increases of vintage puerh—to levels that are often well beyond any realistic value. Those of us who were lucky enough to drink and collect all the great vintages did so at a time when they were much cheaper than now. I paid 300 USD for my first cake of *Hong Yin* (Red Mark). Now they are often sold for more than \$70,000. I would, of course, never pay that price even if I could afford it. This incredible price increase has effectively pushed the enjoyment of vintage puerh into the hands of the few wealthy tea lovers who can manage to pay for it. Unfortunately, the Chinese saying “those without grapes call the wine sour” all too often applies to many of the conversations one

can hear as one strolls around the teahouse: some people dismissing this or that vintage more out of such jealousy than a real understanding of its nature.

Leaning heavily on the wisdom of my masters, as well as my experience drinking a whole lot of vintage teas these years, I would like to explore the controversial topic of puerh storage. Much of the topic is unknown and mysterious; but some predominant truths became clear as I had many, many conversations about storing puerh with people like Zhou Yu, Lin Ping Xiang, Chen Zhi Tong and other tea teachers, as well as various biology and agricultural professors at universities in Taiwan and in Yunnan, and even some of the old timers in Hong Kong. While we do have a decent-sized collection of old tea at the center, and I have drunk my way through all the old vintages, I still feel that these are the men we all need to be listening to, rather than the teahouse rumors that all too often lead back to urban legends, insub-

stantial conjecture, and worse yet, even back to vendors who are merely marketing their own products.

### *Wet versus Dry*

Traditionally, all puerh tea was aged “wet”, and for that reason Chinese people often call wet storage, “traditional storage.” There are some well-aged teas that were dry stored, but most of them were accidental, like the famous 88 *Qing Bing* which was kept on a floating shelf near the ceiling due to a lack of storage space. The whole concept of intentionally dry storing puerh is therefore a relatively recent development, especially when you consider that people have been aging puerh tea for millenia.

It is important to understand the difference between oxidation and fermentation—often confused by the fact that there is but one Chinese term for both: “*fa xiao* (發酵).” While fermentation also utilizes oxygen, it relates more to cellular breakdown caused by the presence of bacteria. Puerh tea is unique in that it is covered in bacteria: the jungle trees themselves are teeming with it, as are the villages where the tea is processed. When the cakes are steamed and compressed, more bacteria and other microorganisms make their home in the cakes. As a result, puerh cakes are truly alive—packed with colonies of fungi, bacteria and mold. *Penicillium chrysogenum*, *Rhizopus chinensis* and *Aspergillus clavatus* are just a few examples of mold colonies natural to puerh tea. All puerh tea is moldy, in other words. Puerh tea has always been fermented, and throughout history many ways of going about this have been developed, though storage for long periods is the oldest and best method.

In order for the bacteria to do their work, puerh needs a humid environment, some oxygen and heat. One of the reasons puerh was always stored in Southeast China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia is the seasonal fluctuation of these variables. In the spring, the humidity goes up and the tea absorbs more moisture. The heat of summer then

encourages the fermentation process (filling the whole center with the strong fragrance of tea); the Autumn acts as a kind of buffer, as the humidity and heat decrease slowly; and then the tea “rests” in the winter, when the humidity and heat are much lower. Much more goes into storing puerh than just the humidity level, in other words. It does indeed need moisture and heat, though you might say that in order to remain healthy, the bacteria and other microorganisms in and on the tea, which cause the very fermentation that results in the magical transformation of puerh tea over time, need oxygen, humidity and heat. And that’s the tripod that supports the aging of all puerh tea. The seasonal variations only complicate the process and show with greater clarity the beauty and dexterity with which Nature wields her creative powers.

Teas that are too dry will die. *And you must view your cakes as living things.* A friend recently visited us from London. Since we are both lovers of Zhou Yu’s teas, we drank some nice 2005 and 2006 cakes. He was shocked. By the end of his trip, after visiting Zhou Yu and trying some of these teas again, he said he realized that his teas were in fact dying in the part of England he lives in, as the humidity is too low and/or the seasonal fluctuations in temperature/moisture/oxygen aren’t suitable. We’ve had similar results comparing the same tea stored here and in Russia.

Today, when we say that one should “dry store” one’s high-quality teas, this means in a place where the humidity is neither too high nor too low; a place that obeys the seasonal fluctuations that makes puerh healthy, which is why I actually prefer the term “well stored” to calling such tea “dry stored”. Given the choice, though, I would take a tea that was too wet over a tea that was too dry any day of the week. We’ll get into why in a minute.



*“And you must view your cakes as living things.”*

Traditionally, teahouses and collectors kept tea in basements and beneath hills to speed up the aging process. This is called “wet storage.” Most experts agree that a relative humidity of around 70% is ideal for puerh, though it may go higher seasonally and still be “dry.” Longer exposure to higher levels of humidity will speed up the fermentation and make it a “wet” tea. Wet stored tea has always been subdivided into mild, medium and heavy wet. Even those who prefer wet stored tea will agree that the first two are almost always the best, though I have seen rare examples of heavy wet teas that were excellent.

Sometimes, tea and fruit in this part of the world develop a seasonal, white mold. Finding this on vintage puerh is very common, and while it does usually signify the tea was wet stored for at least some time, depending upon the amount of mold, it is not necessarily an indication of its overall character. A short period of wet storage followed by a couple decades of drier storage might

create a tea that still bears some white flakes from its period in wet storage, even though it has an overall dry profile. Unless the cake is very seriously wet, these conditions can be overcome with time, and often only affect the surface of the cake, depending on the degree of mold and how tight the compression is. I have little experience drinking any of the other kinds of mold—red, green, yellow, black, etc.—but I have heard from several different teachers that all of them are potentially unhealthy and to be avoided. We have, however, drunk gallons of the white mold—and eaten it on fruit—and so have teachers of mine for decades, without any harmful side effects. Moreover, scientists studying aged puerh in Taiwan concluded that all mold is killed in waters of eighty degrees. Anyway, if the idea of drinking bacteria, fungi or mold makes you squeamish you should get out of the puerh (and cheese) genre categorically. Even newborn, raw (sheng) puerh is covered in bacteria, and often fungi and mold as well.

Actually, ripe (shou) tea is the wettest of the wet, as it is covered in mist, raked into piles and left to ferment under thermal blankets—and sometimes in unhygienic conditions (though that has improved a bit recently), far more so than any traditional wet storage warehouse. And that's why you have to be careful purchasing shou puerh, being sure to buy from reputable sources.

Amongst those who haven't really drunk a lot of vintage puerh, there exists this idea that wet stored tea is bad; and you'll even hear lots of people who reject vintage puerh because of this, claiming that wet stored teas are all scams: "terrible tea", "not worth the money", etc. However—and that's a big fat "however"—you never hear this from people who have been drinking vintage puerh for many years. People who love aged puerh, living in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia are all quite accustomed to drinking wet stored puerh and do not consider it to be a scam, or in any other way unworthy of attention. The fact is, since wet stored tea represents the majority of vintage tea, you might consider it a genre in and of itself—and within that genre there are both excellent and poor quality examples, exquisite wonders and garbage. Furthermore, as I said, there is a huge range of wetness, from mild to heavy. And I have never, ever been to a shop, throughout all my tea travels, with any amount of aged puerh or expertise therein that did not carry some amount of wet stored, primarily loose-leaf puerh. Never!

While most of us who have tried dry stored teas agree that they are indeed better, this doesn't mean we don't like wet stored tea or that we store all of our own tea in that way. Of course, people like Zhou Yu dry store all their best teas (or "store well"). No one is disputing that at all. However, we can do nothing to drastically change the state of all of the vintage teas that are in existence now; and therefore learning to enjoy them is, in part, learning about wet stored teas. As I've mentioned repeatedly, every lover of aged puerh I have

ever met drinks wet stored teas. Since so many vintages are wet stored to some degree or another, how could they not? There is an article that we published in *The Leaf Magazine* written by a British traveler to China and Hong Kong in the nineteenth century, and he also describes the "mustiness" of the puerh the locals know and love.

Furthermore, not every newborn tea warrants the care and attention needed to properly store a tea. Most of the collectors I know still keep some loose teas or cakes in wet storage to speed up the process and make the tea ready for enjoyment sooner. This is not to say they dump a bucket of water on it. Who would want to ruin their tea like that? It just means the tea is put in a more humid part of the warehouse or room and left alone for longer.

One thing that I think many people with little experience drinking vintage tea sometimes don't understand is that 99% of the people you meet who drink old tea do so for its Qi. Zhou Yu has said to me dozens of times that you'd have to be a fool to spend thousands of dollars on a

flavor. You could buy a plane ticket to Switzerland and eat some of the best, fresh and warm chocolate on earth for that price! I would have to agree. If you are just after a flavorful tea, there are other, more rewarding and cheaper genres, like oolong for example. And this is what I was hinting at earlier when I mentioned that I would take a tea that was too wet over one that was too dry: Teas that are stored in places that are too dry in a sense die, losing most if not all their Qi. On the other hand, I have had plenty of wet stored teas that don't taste great but have awesome Qi—leaving the whole body enveloped in warm, comfortable vibrations of bliss. This is not to say there aren't incredibly delicious flavors to be had in the world of puerh: there are, and I've had plenty of delicious wet stored teas as well. Still, no flavor is worth spending such amounts. And when Qi becomes the predominant criteria for evaluating a tea—which it is for almost every drinker of vintage puerh I have ever met—then we often forgive some bit of mustiness, or other problems with the flavor.



No matter how careful you are, *it isn't easy to store anything well for fifty years!* And many experts argue that puerh only reaches excellence at around seventy or more years, though it may be “drinkable”—well-fermented, in other words—in as little as 20-30 years, depending on how it is stored. Still, keeping anything in mint condition for decades is not easy, as any collector of antiques can testify. Just as we must forgive a dent or scratch in a hundred-year-old kettle or teapot, we must also excuse some slight misfortunes in equally-aged puerh, especially when the price candidly reflects these issues, which it does in any honest shop. If you collect vintage teapots, for example, you are of course thrilled to find a Qing pot in mint condition (though

your wallet will not be as happy) but equally excited at the prospect of another specimen that costs a third of the price because there's a chip on the inside of the lid—especially if, like us, you're a collector that actually *uses* his/her pots. The same argument applies to buying vintage puerh—vintage anything—and always has!

Most of the mustiness in wet stored puerh tea rinses off quickly. “Last thing in is the first thing out” as Master Lin always says. A longer rinse usually takes care of it, and there are also some other brewing techniques to minimize or completely eradicate the musty flavor should you dislike it: using extra leaves is one; using charcoal and an iron tetsubin to get deeper heat that penetrates the leaves is another. There are still others...

However, I have met several people around Asia who actually like that flavor. I myself prefer the taste of “well stored” teas—meaning properly stored as discussed above—and store the center's own high quality teas in that way. Still, I cannot wave a wand over all the vintage tea out there and change it. As I drank my way through all the vintages and tons of loose-leaf teas as well, I came to appreciate that wet stored tea represents a huge category of tea, and I have had really, really wet teas that turned out to be awesome and dry ones that were not so good, and vice versa.

We recently found a big jar of early 80's tuocha, for example, that were very heavily wet. This is always a good thing, because the extremely tight compression of tuochas renders their fermentation unbearably slow. We brushed the cakes off with a toothbrush and left them in the sun for an afternoon. Then, we brought them in and broke them up completely. After that, we returned them to the sun the next day for a couple hours. When they cooled, we tightly sealed them in a large, glazed pot that was completely free of odors and left them for around six months. We also added some white charcoal to help purify and absorb unwanted odors. When we opened the pot, we covered the mouth with cloth and let them sit, exposed to air, for another two weeks. Then? The tea was amazing! All the worst parts of the wet storage (the musty flavor and smell) had gone and what was left was a clear, bright tea that tasted so much older than it was—with strong Qi to boot! This is just one example of many of the awesome wet stored vintages I have had. Also, this is not the only method of “cleaning” and “revitalizing” wet stored puerh. There are others.

If we were going to spend a few thousand dollars on a well-aged cake of tea, we would of course find the cleanest, best-stored cake we could find. Nonetheless, reading or hearing such evident truths has led some people to the mistaken notion





that all wet stored tea is therefore bad. If you hand me a cheap wet stored, loose-leaf tea of 50 years with awesome Qi I would be just as thrilled as with an expensive, well stored cake. And accordingly, in all my years in Asia, I've never met a long-term lover of vintage puerh without some wet stored teas in his or her collection. This cannot be overstated.

We must all, therefore, make a very real distinction between the way we wish to store our tea from here on out and the way in which we evaluate vintage teas that are already old. They are completely different areas of study, though you can't have true knowledge of the one without understanding the other. We will store our newborn teas properly, which for the most part means "drier" than they were "traditionally" stored, and care for them more thoroughly—especially since newborn tea costs many times more than what it once did when most vintage teas were stored—but this does not mean that we should evaluate all vintage tea using these same criteria, or that some of those "wet stored" gems of yesteryear did not in fact turn out way better than our "dry stored" cakes ever will! Also, if you are storing your teas nat-

urally, which, as we'll discuss a bit further on, is really the only way, it is nigh impossible to store puerh tea in any real amount without some percentage of it getting at least mildly wet. The only environments that could truly prevent this are too dry for puerh and would cause it to die.

The saddest thing about dismissing wet stored tea entirely is that you are missing out on all the vintages of old puerh that are actually affordable, even today. I know a vendor in the West who has access to a wide variety of cheap, wet stored puerh and knowledge thereof, who told me anonymously: "I can't sell it in the West, at least not online. Too many people would ask for a refund. They've been misinformed and I wouldn't know how to combat that. It would seem, sometimes at least, that some of my customers don't really like aged puerh, as they were very critical of teas that were only very, very mildly wet and easily corrected. Still, things are getting better. I keep such tea in the shop, and when people come in, I show them how to brew it properly and explain aged tea and Qi. Then, they get along fine." I have heard tons of similar testimony from people who have traveled to

Taiwan, tasting properly brewed wet stored tea, and learning about Cha Qi for the first time.

We paid only roughly 30 USD per *tuocha* for the heavy wet cakes we mentioned earlier, buying the whole jar's worth, and the tea turned out way better than a dry stored Xiaguan *tuocha* we have from the same period that costs 100 USD. While there are poor wet stored teas, there also dry stored teas that aren't very good, either. Doesn't this hold true for any genre of tea? The first, last and only question of relevance is not whether the tea is wet or dry stored, but in fact, whether it is good tea or not!

### ***What do we really know?***

The problem with over-analyzing the storage of puerh tea, trying to seek the right parameters that can lead invariably to "well stored" tea, is that this tacitly assumes that the transformation of puerh tea over time is somehow controlled, or potentially controllable, by human beings. In fact, so many of our modern social and environmental crises revolve around similar delusions. The way that puerh tea changes from cold to warm in nature, from astringent and

acidic to smooth and creamy, gathering Qi until it is aged to the point that it causes one to fall head over heels into a state of bliss—all that happens due to a completely natural process. Humans are involved; I'm not arguing that they aren't. The center of the character for tea has the radical for Man. But when I ask all the old timers how they created these incredible "well stored" vintages of tea, they invariably exclaim "*create!*"—mocking my choice of words—"I didn't do it. I just put the tea on a shelf and left it alone for fifty years." Zhou Yu then added, "This is just one of the treasures of Nature, and no amount of explanation can make it any less mystical." I'd have to agree: like any of you, I am anxious for more scientific research into puerh tea, and will read about the results with as much excitement as any tea lover; but there's no explanation that can make these changes any less awe-inspiring in my view—just as no meteorological elucidation could deflate the power of the experience I had in Tibet seeing colored lights off the cliffside of a temple there!

Most of the old timers in Hong Kong, as well as Zhou Yu, Master Lin and others I have a more personal relationship with, have all showed me their warehouses and storage "techniques". The fact is that there isn't much method to it at all.

They simply check on the tea now and again. If it smells too wet, they move it to a higher shelf. Teas they want to let age a bit slower, more "drily", they encase in cardboard boxes, usually with a slight cutout to admit oxygen (of course, they are produced from recycled, odorless cardboard). Some, and we follow this method, even put *tong*-sized boxes within larger boxes, doubling the protection. For most warehouses, most of the time, the bamboo wrapping used to package seven cakes (*tong*) is protection enough. Still, if a tea is moldy, they brush it off and move it. Thus, checking to make sure the tea isn't too wet or moldy is really all that goes into their "storage methodology". Beyond that, they come into the warehouse once or twice a year and clean. Nature does the rest.

So what, then, do we really know about producing "well stored" puerh tea? Puerh needs humidity, heat and a bit of oxygen. It is best kept away from light, and of course it should not be near any kinds of odors, as it is very absorbent. Sheng and shou teas should be separated. Sometimes different vintages are separated as well, usually by age rather than kind. At times, however, it is good to have old tea with new as it helps it to age. (Maybe the bacteria and other microbes move from the well-aged tea to the newer cakes.)

Check the teas now and again and move them to less humid places if they become too wet. Those teas we wish to slow down, we put in odorless cardboard. Those we wish to speed up, we put in unglazed pots on the floor with cloth over the opening, or simply keep lower down where the humidity is higher (a lower floor, lower shelf, etc.). When the tea is fermented to the desired degree, most collectors will also break it up and let it breathe in an unglazed clay jar before drinking, to expose the inner parts of the cake to more oxygen and allow the Qi to begin moving. And yet all of this assumes something implicitly: *location!*

The fact is that all we really know about well-aged, "well stored" teas is that they can achieve that quality in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia and to a lesser extent in a few other places. Some masters argue that many factors beyond climate are relevant to this, arguing that *Feng Shui* (Daoist geomancy) and other mystical forces play a part in the transformation of tea. Whether you regard any of that as important or not doesn't matter. The fact is that *all* our great vintage teas at this point were stored in these places. The best ones were stored carefully, and the lower quality, often "wetter" ones weren't—it's really that simple. This should, in fact, come as no surprise, since there

*We store a lot of loose-leaf puerh at the center. Inside, we fill up any remaining space with rice paper and add white charcoal. Along with the cloths we put under the lids, these measures help reduce humidity and keep the tea drier.*





Another example of a 1970's Yellow Mark, different from the one we displayed in the article on the eras of puerh. This one is younger, from the mid to late 70's.



are several varieties of wine, beer and cheese that also must be fermented in special locations—not to speak of the location the grapes or other products are grown—just where the fermentation takes place. I once even read of a Belgian ale that ferments in open vats, without any additives, because of natural yeast only found in that place. Could puerh be the same?

I do think there is something to the idea of letting the fermentation happen naturally. There was an article in a Chinese magazine with a detailed comparison of some semi-aged teas. One batch had been watched carefully in the natural environs of Hong Kong and the other had been stored in a small room with an expensive machine that controlled the humidity and temperature day and night. The author argued that the natural cakes were much better than the ones stored in an “artificial” way. It makes sense to me that too much machinery, humidifiers and de-humidifiers,

this-and-that-conditioners, would harm the tea—and definitely dampen the amount of Qi it would accumulate. No man-made anything ever compares to the creations of Nature. Furthermore, can you imagine the cost of such machinery? And the electricity bill for maintaining the perfect humidity and temperature in a room for fifty years! If you think vintage puerh is expensive now, what do you think the cost of tea stored in that way would be? Wouldn't it have to reflect the atrocious cost of the machinery, electricity and/or maintenance over such a long period?

Does this mean that all tea stored outside Southeast Asia will be lower quality? I don't know. No one does. We won't know for a few decades. The fact is that the puerh boom has taken this backwater tea from Yunnan all around the globe; to places it never dreamt of going before. Furthermore, the gardens being utilized for production, the

processing methods—the amazing variety of raw material (*mao cha*) used—all have added innumerable facets to the world of puerh that weren't pertinent when all the current vintage puerh was produced or aged. Will these new kinds of tea age the way the great vintages did? Will they be better? Can puerh tea be aged in France? In Canada? Who knows! Many of the legendary teas, like *Hong Yin* for example, were notoriously disgusting when young, only to be transmuted in the cauldron of time, fueled by the fire of Nature herself. Will your teas similarly transform?

I guess if you're willing to help participate in this global experiment, then keep some tea and make sure to share your experience. *But as of now, the only conclusive, factual results we have all come from Southeast Asia*, so if you want to be really, completely sure, I'd just buy vintage tea stored there. I always use the analogy of stock investments: if you are only going to invest a little, then some risk is fine. But if you are going to invest a larger amount of money, you should be careful and invest in stocks that have proven their worth over time. Similarly, a few cakes here and there may be worthwhile to store wherever you are, even if the conditions seem unsuitable, just to see what happens. But if you plan on investing in larger quantities of puerh, you should really store it in Southeast Asia. Unlike any newer puerh cakes stored in other places, the vintage teas floating around are the only proven ones; and the differences in their value are relative to the original quality of the tea and the care with which they were stored in such an environment, rather than differences in the environment itself.

Above all, we need to continue sharing our experiences, and in that way grow as the world of puerh itself has done. Let us then steep another pot, call for more water; and after a few more bright cups, a smile and a laugh, fill the teahouse with more conversation, dialogue and wisdom...

# 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 Ville Sorsa:

Finland has rather little by way of tea culture. People drink mostly coffee. And tea is usually enjoyed in the form of teabags. Thus, I spent my youth under the illusion that tea is merely a bitter, thinner substitute for coffee.

At the age of eighteen, after moving to Helsinki for studies, I had my first loose-leaf tea. It was a sweet blend of green and red tea, flowers and fruits, steeped in a ball-shaped single serving tea strainer. Although the tea wasn't very high class by my current standards, it rewrote my conception of tea.

Then I started trying out different teas. After a short introductory phase with blended teas, I realized the wide diversity of aromas of the Leaf itself, and I began exploring the different categories of tea. My brewing methods evolved from single serving strainer via pressopan to gongfu tea with a gaiwan. At the beginning of 2013, I met my first true tea brother, Tertti. It was the first time I met a person of my age who brewed gongfu tea, loved puerh and even made kombucha! We drank lots of tea together. We soon found more tea lovers, and in the summer of 2013 we founded a student association called, "Tea Club Chai".

That same summer, I took another important step on my path of tea: I visited Chado, Steve Kokker's teashop in Tallinn. Steve introduced me to Global Tea Hut and sold me Wu De's book *Zen & Tea, One Flavor*. I subscribed to Global Tea Hut and enjoyed my first cup of Living Tea. The articles resonated with me deeply, and I realized the deep spiritual element of drinking tea.

On the 2nd of July, this year, I flew to Taiwan. When I arrived to Tea Sage Hut, I was in terrible shape. For way too long I had been doing things out of a sense of obligation. Nearly every action I made was based on fear instead of love. I was stressed, worried about things left undone and uncertainties about my future, and I was in an extremely negative mood. I was not present. I wasn't enjoying all the beautiful things around me, and I began to doubt if tea was my path after all.

But staying at Tea Sage Hut, bowl by bowl, I began to heal. Wu De's teachings about life and the Way of Tea changed my point of view toward many aspects of life. Daily morning and evening meditations made me more conscious about my thoughts and actions, and gave me more compassion towards my weaknesses. Organic, vegetarian food and endless bowls of clean tea cleared my mind and body. Andy, the Chinese medicine doctor, helped



to alleviate my postural problems. But most importantly, Shane and Max's relentless optimism and positive attitude, and the loving atmosphere of the center changed my perception: I began to see more light! Finally, one Friday evening, I came to realize: "I'm am here, in Taiwan!" I was my true self again, here and now.

Now I see that coming here was one of the best decisions of my life. I have had so many beautiful experiences: tea sessions, insights, movie nights, trips to tea farms and the sea, and getting to know good people. I've changed as a person, in several positive ways. When I return home, I will make sure to drink bowl tea on a daily basis, continue to follow a vegetarian diet and dedicate time for daily meditation and prayer.

As Wu De says, this tea tradition is not about *making* tea; it's about *servicing* tea. Thus, I will also start arranging regular tea sessions, working to improve our yet-rather-small tea association, and spread awareness about this Global Tea Hut. If you ever happen to visit Helsinki, come share a few bowls with us! You can contact me by email, phone or by writing a message to our association "Tea Club Chai" on Facebook.

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Gsm: +358 40 823 8392

# Inside the Hut

✿ 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](mailto:livingteas@gmail.com). The community in LA also has a new meet up page: (<http://www.meetup.com/Los-Angeles-Tea-Ceremony-Meetup/>).

✿ In Barcelona, Spain, Global Tea Hut member Antonio holds tea events each month at Caj Chai Teahouse. Contact him at [info@cajchai.com](mailto:info@cajchai.com) for more info.

✿ In Moscow, Russia, there are frequent tea events. Contact Tea Hut member Ivan at [teeabai@gmail.com](mailto:teeabai@gmail.com) or Denis at [chikchik25@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:sabine@letempsdunthe.com).

✿ In Darwin, Australia, Sam holds GTH tea events on Fridays at 6 PM. Email him at [sdsgibb@gmail.com](mailto:sdsgibb@gmail.com).

✿ In Tallinn, Estonia, Chado tea shop holds events most Friday evenings at 7 PM. Contact [events@firstflush.ee](mailto: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](mailto:timo@sygis.net) and Herkko at [herkots@gmail.com](mailto:herkots@gmail.com).

✿ In England, Prabhasvara (Nick Dilks) holds regular Tea events all around the UK including a weekly Tea Club in Birmingham. For more information, please contact him at [livingteauk@gmail.com](mailto:livingteauk@gmail.com).

✿ In Almere, The Netherlands, GTH member Jasper holds tea events every 4th Tuesday of the month at 19:45 PM. Email him at [hermansjasper@gmail.com](mailto:hermansjasper@gmail.com).



## Center News

✿ Before you visit, check out the center's website ([www.teasagehut.org](http://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.

✿ Our two other puerh cakes will be arriving this month. Look for updates online or in next month's magazine.

✿ Wu De will be at the center until October working on two new books! After that he will be teaching in Spain & France. Contact Antonio at Caj Chai Teahouse ([info@cajchai.com](mailto:info@cajchai.com)) for more information about dates and events.

✿ There is a lot of momentum towards a more permanent tea space in Moscow & LA. Say some prayers for our friends there!

✿ This month, our dear friend and Chinese doctor, Andy, moved to Miao Li to live at the center permanently. Yeah!

## SEPTEMBER AFFIRMATION

***I see that I am a part of this world.***

*In what ways am I making a difference to my world, my loved ones and others in my community?*



## *Tea Inspired Poetry*

*When you hear the splash of the  
water drops that fall into the stone  
bowl, you will feel that all the dust of  
your mind is washed away.*

*—Rikyu*