Global Tea Hut

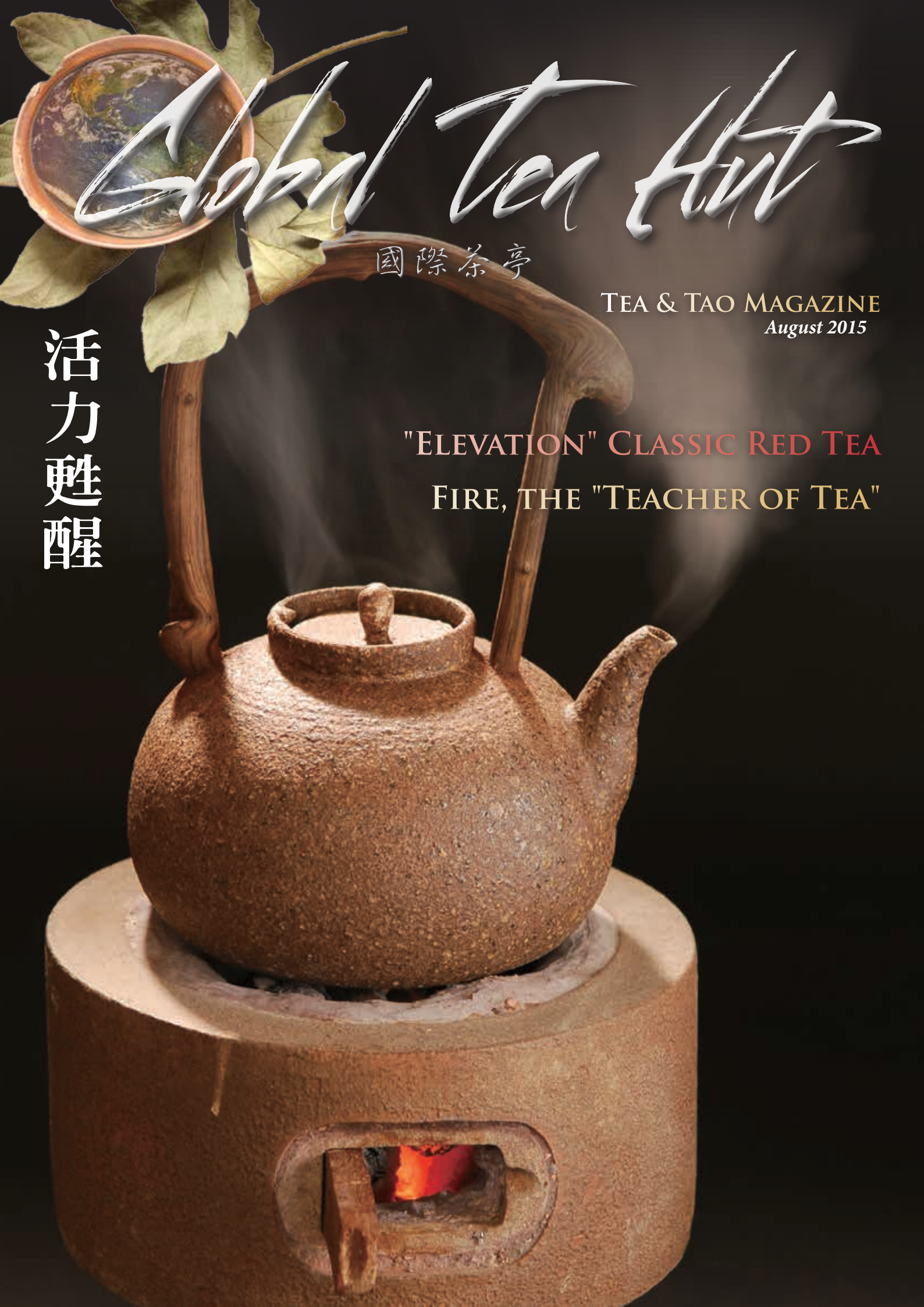
國際茶亭

Tea & Tao Magazine
August 2015

活力甦醒

"Elevation" Classic Red Tea

Fire, the "Teacher of Tea"



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GLOBAL TEA HUT
Tea & Tao Magazine

Elevation

There's nothing as nice as the return of old friends for tea, like the only tea we repeat each year! As promised last month, we are continuing our tour of water preparation. Following the source and storage of water, a tea lover must begin to explore heat and fire. This issue may be the most comprehensive introduction to fire for Tea in the English language!

Love is Changing the world Bowl by bowl

Features

Regulars

**Unless otherwise noted, photography was created by the genius of Max Raphael*

Letter from the Editor

In August, there is a coolness that comes with breezes to Taiwan, relieving the sultry heat of summer. We find ourselves a bit more active, seeking red tea in the mornings and Taiwanese oolongs in the afternoons. An earnest desire to explore and practice our gongfu tea starts to stir in the soul, and we find ourselves eyeing the Yixing teapots in the cabinet, and making excuses to drink more gongfu tea. To temper that, we still put some leaves in a bowl some mornings. And nothing balances better than our favorite bowl tea ever—the only tea we send every year!

Usually, we find that we have fewer guests in the summer, as Taiwan is so hot and it is often a nice time to be at home for many people. But Tea Sage Hut is growing, just as this Global Tea Hut is. This year, the center was full even throughout the summer. We've had a steady stream of amazing guests here sharing tea and hugs! To us, this is a sign that we are on track for building our new center, Light Meets Life, and that having a free tea center in Taiwan is something wanted and needed by the world. This magazine, and the guests that come to our center as a result, are our inspiration, motivating the heart of service based on loving-kindness!

When the water touches the fire, a tea session begins. They say that water is the Mother of Tea and fire its Teacher. Fire is what extracts the essence from the leaves; without it our tea would be as clear as water. And fire conveys the medicine to our body, for it is the heat that moves the energy of the Tea within us. The heat of a tea session is its movement; awakening the water and opening the leaves, it then warms our hearts and brings tea from the center to the hands and feet. Like the other elements of tea brewing, fire is not something we control or even manipulate. Fire is an energy we harness and guide. You might say that we introduce the fire to the water, to the tea and teapot.

Since ancient times Chinese sages have separated the material world into five elements called "*wu shing* (五行)": wood, earth, water, fire, and metal. These principal elements influence all aspects of Chinese culture, philosophy and spirituality—from Daoism to Buddhism, *feng shui*, Traditional Chinese Medicine and even tea. Lu Yu himself inscribed symbols representing the *wu shing* on all of his teaware, and spoke of the way they all combined fluently in the brewing of tea. There is a very real way in which tea is an alchemy, combining these five elements into the sacred libation that heals the soul. Harmony through alchemy has always been central to the aesthetics and philosophy of tea culture, whether clearly expressed by ancient Daoist mendicants, or left unstated, yet recognized by the modern tea drinker who intuitively knows when a tea set functions well, when a tea is brewed properly, or when something in the process is off. And that alchemy is also our cultivation. As we refine our tea brewing, sensitivity, skill and discipline, we also change ourselves, turning our own lead into gold.

Photo by Mikki Sage

There is no question asked more, via emails and by guests here at the Hut, than this: "Will you please write about charcoal and its role in tea?" After water, the greatest influence on your tea is your heat source. As we promised last month, we've put together an entire issue exploring all the details of fire as the Teacher of Tea. From kettles to coals, implements to braziers, we've created a manual of all you'll need to begin exploring fire. Hopefully, you'll never heat water for tea in the same way again.

Wu De

Tea of the Month

Summer 2015 "Elevation" Large Leaf Red Tea

It's that time of the year again: the only tea we repeat every year, the return of the classic Sun Moon Lake red tea we've come to call "Elevation". The tea for this month is our all time favorite tea, and the one we send home with travelers who stop at our center! You could say it's our signature tea: the one we use to introduce new tea wayfarers to the path—the first wayside sign on the road. It's also one of the teas we like to serve when we set up our roadside huts, serving tea to passersby.

This amazing red tea is definitely a living tea, in all the ways we have been discussing in previous issues of these newsletters: It is seed-propagated, the trees have room and space to grow, there is a living relationship with the local ecology—undergrowth, plants, insects, animals, molds and bacteria—there are, of course, no chemicals used in its production and no irrigation either. It shines with a bright and uplifting energy that makes it the perfect morning tea, radiating your day and filling it with "elevation". It is simple and true, and you feel like you know it after your first bowl, as if a beloved friend from another lifetime has come back to you.

As you may remember, there are two main varietals of tea: small leaf and big leaf. Originally, all tea comes from the forests in and around Southwest China: Yunnan, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Eastern India. The ancestor trees are single-trunked, with large wide crowns that can grow several meters in height. The roots are also deep, extending down into the Earth before branching. Then, as tea traveled north and east—naturally or by human hands—it adapted to colder, sometimes higher, climates and terroir. These trees, called "small leaf", developed into several trunks, like a bush, with roots that extend outwards rather than down. The leaves got smaller and smaller as tea progressed north into colder climes, until they get so small in places like Japan that when they are rolled, they look like little needles (like *sencha* or *gyokuro*). Our tea of the month is a large leaf varietal, like puerh.

When the Japanese occupied Taiwan, they wanted to develop several long-term agricultural projects to help their economy. They brought many large leaf trees and saplings, as well as seeds, from Eastern India to make red tea plantations, choosing Sun Moon Lake for its accessibility and for the way the terroir was similar to the original home of these trees. Soon after, the Japanese were expelled and their gardens were abandoned. In the coming decades, these semi-wild gardens would grow up and also produce completely wild offspring, as well as adapting and relating to the local terroir in all the amazing ways a tea tree can—through the soil, the insects, rain and minerals, sun and rock. Our tea comes from one such small, organic and ecological garden consisting primarily of semi-wild trees with some wild ones scattered about.

The farmer, Mr. Shu, is an amazing man. Many of his nearby neighbors have utilized their gardens to create more industrial plantations and get rich. He says he only wants enough to provide for his family, and therefore keeps it simple and organic. He has even bought up some nearby property so that he can control the proximity his trees have to anything harmful others may be using.

"Elevation"

Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan

Red Tea

Taiwanese Aboriginals

~800 Meters

For that reason, the tea is incredibly clean and bright, speaking of its long heritage here in these mountains, and beyond to the older forests its ancestors once lived in, at the foot of the great Himalayas.

Further proof of Mr. Shu's love for Tea is found in the way he dealt with the betel nut trees on the new land he purchased. Betel nut is a mild intoxicant sold throughout Asia. The tree is easy to grow, requiring little care; so many farmers plant it in and around their tea to supplement their income. This kind of palm is unhealthy and bad for the land, depleting the soil and causing landslides due to its root structure. It has a negative impact on the energy of the tea as well. Consequently, Mr. Shu has killed the betel trees that were on the land he bought. The dead trunks have been invaded by grubs that quickly consume the pith of the betel trees. When split open, this makes a nice fertilizer for the tea trees.

In Harmony with Heaven

Mr. Shu is a second-generation farmer with an incredible attitude. While his neighbors constructed new-and-improved houses with satellite dishes, he stayed humble, simple and in love with his work and trees. Two years ago, there was a drought and bugs that decimated the area—insects that come only every decade or so. When we talked to him about it, he responded with great wisdom, proving that—like the ancient Daoist texts—even the simplest people can achieve harmony with the Dao, mastery of life and a great wisdom that we all can learn from. He said that at that time, he received less. If he were to stress about that, or worse yet,

compromise his values and turn to pesticides for help, it would be like rejecting his destiny, arguing with Heaven. Furthermore, he said that it would show how ungrateful he was for what Nature *had* given him. "We should be grateful for what Nature provides and accept the times that Heaven takes from us—learning from times of having less, or even losing what we have, as much as in times of abundance. We all will face lack and loss sooner or later. If you resist, and argue with Heaven that your destiny is unfair, you don't learn and there will be greater misfortune later. Better to accept whatever Nature gives us and be grateful for it. I have less this year, but it is okay because I saved when I had more last year; and maybe next year I will have more again." There couldn't be deeper life lessons than these!

Red Tea vs. Black Tea

Once again, it is important to understand that what most Westerners call "black tea" is actually "red tea". Ordinarily, it doesn't matter what something is called, but in this case there is actually a problem, because there is another kind of Chinese tea that is called "black tea" (characterized by it post-production, artificial fermentation). So if you call red tea "black tea," then what do you call black tea? The reasons for this error are to do with the long distances the tea traveled in chests to Europe, and even more importantly with the general lack of information for the first few hundred years tea was traded. Europeans weren't allowed inland in those days, and never saw the tea trees or the processing either (except some roasting). Buying through middlemen in broken pidgin, you could see how

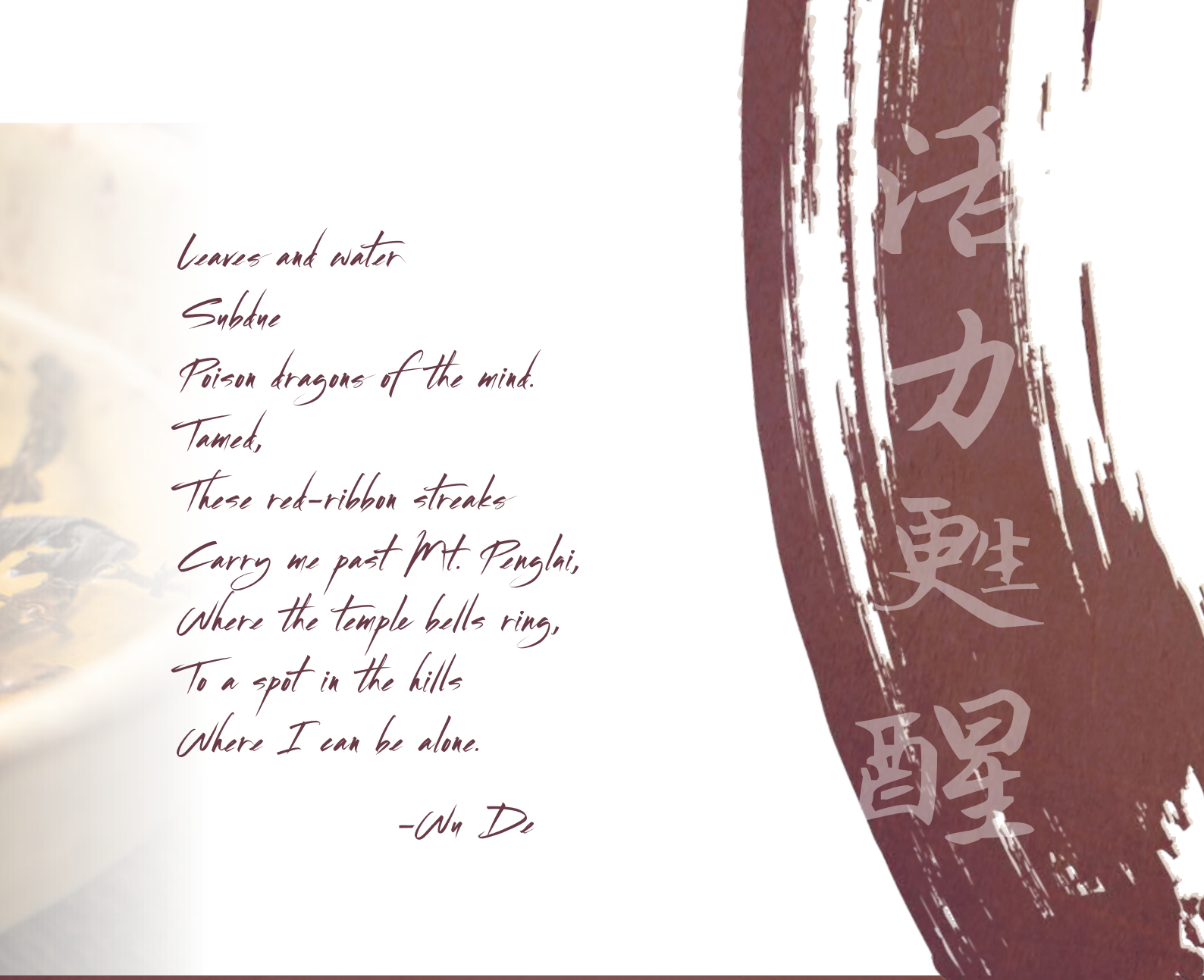
easy it would be to spread misinformation. We repeat this every time we send a red tea, because it is an important mistake that we tea lovers have to correct in the world, so that the real black tea can have its name back!

Tea of the Month

Most red tea is processed in 3-4 phases: first it is picked and then it is withered, traditionally on bamboo trays stacked on shelves built to hold them. The withering of red tea is very long, usually from twelve to twenty-four hours. It is then rolled for an exceptionally long time, to continue the oxidation and break down the cells. It literally turns into a pasty mass in the process. Then it is dried, usually in an oven. Our tea, however, is completely different. The farmers think we are crazy, but we ask them to decrease the withering and the rolling period, leaving some green in the leaves, which you will see when you brew them (essentially, we've asked that the tea be less oxidized than that which is produced commercially). The reason for the heavy oxidation in normal red tea processing is to make the tea sweet and delicious. Nevertheless, we have found that such extreme processing removes some of the tea's Qi, and distances it from the mountain and deep essence it touches. This is especially relevant when the tea leaves were plucked from old-growth, big leaf tea trees. The leaves of these large-leaf trees are often bitter and astringent, but we can accept a bit of that along with the sweetness, can't we? And isn't that a significant life lesson as well? In the end, we'd rather have a slightly less sweet tea with incredible and relaxing Qi than the other way around.

The old farmer smiles and says he likes our quirkiness. We hope you will understand why we make our red tea like this. We don't produce it for sale, only for free. *We only wish we could give it to you for less.*

Like last year's, the tea this year was a bit more oxidized than usual, due to a lack of rainfall. Mr. Shu still decreased the withering and rolling for us, but not as much as in previous years. The raw tea leaves themselves were also more astringent, so a bit more oxidation was necessary.



Leaves and water
Subdue
Poison dragons of the mind.
Tamed,
These red-ribbon streaks
Carry me past Mt. Penglai,
Where the temple bells ring,
To a spot in the hills
Where I can be alone.

-Wu De

Brewing Tips for Elevation

We recommend putting these leaves in a bowl, watching them unfold in the oldest brewing method around—older than the pyramids, in fact! Elevation is the penultimate bowl tea! It often defines this brewing style, as so many of us started our tea journey drinking this very tea in this very way. It is a great morning tea, leaving you awake, bright and calm. Try waking up a bit earlier one morning, alone or with some loved ones. Put more or less leaves in your bowl, to your taste, and fill it with hot water. As it steeps, have a moment or two of meditation. Then pass the bowl between you, sharing a single bowl as you share a single encounter, a single chance…

As we suggested last month, take a hike to a water source and gather some fresh water yourself. Store it in a sacred urn, waiting for that perfect day when you are free. If you can, strike up some coals and let the kettle of fresh spring water awaken to a strong and lively fire. With such leaves, water and heat, the session is sure to be transcendent. And what if it were outdoors in Nature?

If ever there was a month to try heating your water on coals, this is it! If you can, strike up some coals and heat a kettle over a true flame, awakening these big red leaves in a glorious steamy swirl. Some nice spring water heated on charcoal will make this one of the best tea sessions you'll have all year. Elevation is an amazing, humble and simple tea. It teaches us to celebrate the simple, ordinary moments in life.

This is an amazing tea to have in the morning. Try sitting cross-legged and putting a few leaves in a bowl. Sit and soak up the warmth and feel how it invigorates you. It has an amazing energy that calms and uplifts simultaneously. Try this for a few days and you will find that afterwards your outlook each morning is getting brighter and your life is starting to change—and all from a few leaves scattered in a bowl…

火是茶的老師

Fire
The Teacher of Tea

-Wu De

And so we begin our exploration of fire as an element in the alchemy of Tea. After water, fire is the most important part of serving tea. Without heat, the essence of the leaves won't release, and the medicine won't spread throughout the body. Heat is the movement of a tea ceremony. And as we'll soon see, there is much more to heat for tea than just temperature in degrees.

Fire is the energy at the center of our universe and our civilization. The stars of fire fill our sky and remind us of how vast a world we live in. And their nearest kin, our sun, lights our world and courses through all that we do. Even our technology is fueled by solar energy, fossil or renewable. Ancient people knew to respect the sun, and its relationship to our lives. They always made their sacrifices to fire. As our sky is filled with the fire of so many suns, so too is our own Mother Earth pregnant with a deep, burning warmth. That warmth has nurtured all life on this planet as much as the sunlight that enlivens us from without. And within us too is fire, which is how we digest our food and turn it into energy.

Without heat nothing moves. Tea, like all plants, translates sunlight and starlight into wood—into physical substances we can touch and taste, smell and drink. Through the plants, we absorb sun energy and motivate our bodies. The temperature in our bodies is a measurement of life itself, and consequently so many of our metaphors regarding death contain variations of the word "cold". Internally, so many of our bodily and spiritual processes require heat, and externally fire is the center of our tribes—the beginning of civilization.

In most of the mythologies of the world, fire is stolen from the gods and given to man, usually by a relay race of animals that get burned carrying it to us, which explains their color variations—in plumage, fur, etc. Such stories remind us, amongst other things, that our earthly lives are connected to greater, Heavenly circles. There is insight in understanding that the fire at the center of the first human councils, and the heat that powers our cars and jets, is all the same as the heat and fire in our sun; and that the heat in that sun is the same as the heat in its distant relatives, many of which are fueling and energizing their own planets full of life. Do those distant relations pay homage to their sun, knowing that it catalyzes all life on their planet or have they forgotten as many of us have?

Though the movement of Tea begins with water, it is fire that stirs the ceremony and begins the

alchemy. Imagine the tea ceremony as a dance: the water is the quiet rolling that begins. A hush so fluidly lifts us into its quiet embrace, as the dancer and her music gently drift onto the stage. But it is only when she meets the first surge of energy, and the music rises in tempo and grace that the magical alchemy of music-to-dance begins. A rhythm ensues between the water and fire, and when it peaks we will introduce it to the tea.

The tea has known temperature before. It was once a leaf on a tree, gathering sun and water through its stem. It has since been in meditation, resting without the air, temperature and water that once meant life for it. Now, we will resurrect it, returning the sun, water and air to it through the boiled water. For an old tea, it's a long time coming.

Fire is the conveyer of Tea. Without it, Tea cannot give its essence to us. Without heat in the water, the Qi is not released and conveyed to us. Also, as the tea reaches our bodies, it is the heat that allows it to spread to our extremities and communicate with our whole selves. Heat disperses the energy of Tea, releasing its fragrance and flavor as well as its soul.

Remember the poem that expresses the four principles of gongfu tea, as handed down in this tradition? We have discussed it in our gongfu tea tips articles often.

As you can see, only one of the lines really has to do with external principles, and that is the first, which essentially means: *maintain temperature throughout.* This means that the temperature should not change from the kettle to the guests' mouths. That is way harder than you'd think; and like most ancient gongfu principles, it takes layers upon layers of work and skill to get to the point where temperature can be steady throughout a tea ceremony.

Preserve the heat and begin to absorb peace,
With slow, gentle, graceful movements,
And a heart free from obstructions,
Everything is finished in one breath.

Ideally, the heat for tea should be quick and Spartan, allowing the water to retain its essence as it transforms in this way. If the heating process takes too long, the water is over-cooked and flattens, losing much of its magic. (Over-boiling also causes such flatness.) As any tea lover who experiments with heat sources knows, *there is so much more to heat than just temperature*, especially when it comes to boiling water for Tea. The way the heat penetrates the leaves and extracts the liquor is very different using different heat sources. Why does water from charcoal feel so much hotter even when the temperature is the same? And is there not a sense of depth to heat? Is there a difference when the heat source is even/uniform? Or how about how quickly the water is heated up? All of these issues and more are beyond just the temperature of the water. Consequently, the exploration of fire for tea is more than just heat; *it is elemental*. There is a lot more for the Chajin to explore than just the temperature of the water in degrees, which is only one factor in fire, the Teacher of Tea.

Heat Sources

There are many kinds of heat in this modern world, and each has to be weighed in terms of alchemy and suitability for tea, as well as convenience. Last month we talked about sourcing water for tea, which is similar in a lot of ways. We have to face the facts that much of the natural water sources around these days are polluted and we can't try our teas with rain, snow and river waters to see which is better the way past tea sages could. We sometimes have to settle for what we can find, which is different for all of us depending on our living conditions. Just because you can't fetch spring water every week, or use charcoal for every session (because you live in the city, for example), doesn't mean that you still shouldn't do so every now and again on special occasions; or that you can't find other ways to put more heart, attention and love into your tea practice!

We share our experience with different kinds of heat for tea so that you can learn, explore and further your tea knowledge. All teachings are always and ever invitations to explore. Tea is a path of self-cultivation. *The best tea is tea prepared with love, from the heart.* And that has nothing to do with what kind of heat source you use. This article is not an exercise in snobbish judgment. As we progress on our tea journey, we naturally seek out finer tea and tea brewing methodology to bring out the best in our tea and to create sacred ceremonies that transform others. When we're starting out, however, it's best to keep in mind that tea is just leaves, water and heat. Heat your water with the love in your heart, and you are sure to find the best source of heat for you.

Electric Heat

The plus side of an electric heat source is that you can control temperature very easily and consistently when heating water, and it is quick and convenient. The downside is that you are then using electric heat to power your tea ceremony rather than actual fire, and therefore lose one of the five elements. Here are the varieties of electric heat for tea:

Induction: Many electric water heaters use induction to heat the water, which is a way of reversing electromagnetic currents to create heat. While such devices are convenient and incredibly fast and efficient, they also spoil the water. Some of the energy gets in the water and changes the energetic structure. I, therefore, wouldn't recommend using them unless convenience and speed outweigh other parameters.

***Above:** Infrared burner with handmade ceramic brazier.*

***Top right:** Antique Japanese electric stove (furo).*

***Bottom right:** Dual hotplate from Germany.*

***Bottom left:** Induction setup commonly found in teashops throughout Asia.*

Using induction devices with spring water basically deflates its Qi. In many ways, induction heaters are akin to microwaving food: it is fast and convenient, but not the same as properly cooked food in some essential ways. It is not a natural heat, and this will be felt by the sensitive tea lover, especially when you compare such water with water prepared on other heat sources, even electric ones. Some of the water's spirit is lost. Induction heaters come as plates, kettles or kettle/base sets. Some of them even impart a flavor into the water. Also, as an aside, these induction heaters are often cheaply made and rarely last for years; and sometimes they're made of sketchy plastic, etc. (though there are nicer induction kettles that you can find which are well made and a nice long-term teaware).

Iron hot plates: These electric plates are simpler than induction plates or kettles. An element heats up an iron or Teflon plate, which then heats your kettle. These are usually built stronger, last longer and make better water than induction plates or kettles. They aren't as quick as induction, but the water will be smoother and brighter. Hot plates are also very convenient; with dials so you can boil the water and then turn the heat down to keep it warm throughout a session. If you are going to get a hot plate, we recommend real iron as opposed to coated, man-made hotplate (Teflon). The iron will make nicer water for tea. We find that German companies make excellent and affordable iron hot plates that last forever. We have a Vastar at the center, which is a Taiwanese company that produces its hot plates in Germany.

Japanese electric braziers: In the 1970's, the modernization of the tea ceremony in Japan meant preparing tea in places where charcoal was no longer a viable option. Tea lovers invented braziers with electric coils in them that wrap around pieces of artificial charcoal to give the appearance of a charcoal arrangement. While these coils can be slow if you have a big kettle, they make nice water and look great for an electric heat source. The element is often housed in a bronze or ceramic brazier and can look gorgeous in a tea space.

Infrared: Infrared plates make very nice water, as close to charcoal as we have found in an electric device. In fact, the heat in charcoal is essentially infrared as well. This technology is also convenient, fast and has a dial to control temperature, but makes water that is comparable to a real flame. Infrared plates can be cheap or expensive, depending on the wattage and the style. You will want to get one with the highest wattage possible to heat the water as quickly as you can. In Taiwan, there are nice infrared plates that are sealed into handmade clay braziers. We have several in the center and often recommend them to guests.

Gas & Alcohol Flames

Gas and alcohol are a slight step up from electric heat sources. These stoves at least have a real flame, closer to fire in its elemental form. Though heat and fire are related, there is something very different about them. Elemental fire changes everything. Most people can tell the difference between a room heated by a fireplace and one heated by an electric radiator, just as we can distinguish between water heated on fire and that on electric burners. Alcohol burners are more for maintaining heat than for bringing the water to a boil. If you have one of those, you will want to heat the water on a gas stove and then use the alcohol burner to maintain the heat.

You can either use a gas camp stove and seat it next to you while you serve tea, using a higher flame to boil and a lower flame to maintain temperature, or you can boil your kettle on gas and then use an alcohol burner by your side to keep the kettle warm. If you have two kettles, a gas stove and an alcohol burner, you can make endless water for the largest of groups. This is always our setup when we do events out in the world: one kettle boiling on the gas and the other staying warm on the alcohol burner. To do larger and larger events, you just need to add gas stoves and kettles. The downside to such camp stoves is that they use up gas cans, which aren't good for the environment long-term. If you are going to use gas at home, it's better to boil on the stove and then carry the water to an alcohol burner. Alcohol is inexpensive and lasts a long time, since the flame is small.

Lin's alcohol burner

Charcoal

The ideal way to heat water for tea is to use charcoal. Charcoal has infrared energy, like the sun. It returns that energy to the tea. We aren't sure of the scientific reason why, nor is it necessary for us to figure it out, but water prepared on charcoal steams much more than other water, even if they are the same exact temperature. Also, we have done experiments heating water on electric and charcoal to exactly equal temperatures and then found that everyone present could still distinguish the water heated on charcoal as being hotter and brighter. Sometimes we use the adjective "ionic", though not in any proper scientific way.

We mean that the heat seems elemental, like it is in each of the atoms at their core. It feels as if more of the water's substance is infused with heat. Such heat penetrates deeper into the tea, and then into us when we drink the liquor. The heat is penetrating, extracting and then conveying more of the tea's essence to us.

Our Japanese master said that a Chajin who wishes to understand charcoal should keep their coals going for three years. At the end of that time, they'll be an expert. That is a bit hard for most people. Don't be intimidated by charcoal. We suggest starting with a simple brazier and smokeless, non-toxic charcoal. Here in Taiwan, we start students out with a smokeless coal made of compressed coconut husks. It is good because all the pieces light uniformly and are all the same shape, which makes arranging them easier than the natural kinds of coal. Better, hardwood charcoals will burn with a more lively flame, and heat the water quicker. One of our favorites comes from the dragon eye fruit tree (*long yan*). Later in this issue, we will go through all the different kinds of charcoal we use here at the Hut, as well as the different kinds of braziers and charcoal implements.

You should try to experience, harness and master the heat in Tea. Harnessing heat was a huge step in human evolution. We must respect fire, and not assume we create it. Rather, we invite it into our Tea and bodies. If it is not harnessed with respect, fire can be very destructive. In order to experience the fire element in Tea more deeply, you should learn to experience it on as many levels as possible. This means gauging temperature with your senses rather than using a thermometer.

Fire is a huge aspect of Tea and life. There is so much to explore looking into its swirling depths when you are camping, or seeing it twinkle in the distant stars that map our sky. Most essentially, we can feel it burning from within the center of our Earth and the center of our bodies. When we drink tea, we can look inward at the temperature as it flows in currents that awaken us, and connect us to all these greater circles around us…

善用茶感受

Use your Tea Senses

-Wu De

Tea preparation is an art and a means of cultivation. It's great to use a linear approach to study tea, especially when you're starting out. But eventually the artist has to rely on her own intuition, gauging amount by sight and steeping by feel.

In preparing our water, the actual relationship with our tea ceremony begins. The skills of the tea master are developed over years of refining sensitivity. She approaches every aspect of the tea ceremony with mindfulness, and skill—gongfu. This is how the Way is achieved in a natural and unaffected approach. For that reason, we should avoid approaching water or any other aspect of the tea ceremony with our intellects. The more we research or analyze, the more disconnected we will be. There are several ways to gauge the temperature of the water. And in moving away from the intellectual approach to tea, the inclusion of all five senses is everything the mindfulness of tea is about. We listen intently to the gentle crackling of the charcoal, the bubbling of our kettle, or perhaps the birds and Nature if we are drinking tea outdoors. Tea sages of long ago often drank beside the spring or river where they gathered their waters, in part to be able to listen to the water's song. The smell and taste of the subtleties within tea is apparent; and the touch is in the mouthfeel, as well as feeling the energy in our bodies, or even the tea's warmth; while we use our sight to appreciate the beauty of our teaware and surroundings. Let all the senses alight naturally, without effort; and being present to them is perhaps the greatest summation of Cha Dao itself.

When our tea is made with all the senses, its peace will radiate through everyone sharing the tea; and not an escapist kind of peace, but stillness within the motion and commotion of life—*wu wei* in Chinese. Soon enough, we won't need to cultivate the Way in our tea sessions, but just brew it naturally and allow the nature of the water, fire and leaves to flow of their own accord.

There are four basic temperatures of water important for making tea: "baby water" (app. 65C-70C), "crab-eye water" (app. 70C - 80C), "fish-eye water" (app. 80C - 90C) and "old man hair water" (100C), which is sometimes also called "dragon water". Sometimes tea lovers add two other kinds of water as well, "shrimp eye" and "string of pearls". All these kinds of heat are named after the size of the bubbles at these temperatures. There are several ways to distinguish these temperatures and different senses can even be used according to individual taste:

Sound: Many people listen to the sound of the kettle. When the water reaches the "baby" stage, the kettle will often begin to make a humming sound. Later levels will pop like popcorn to various degrees and can thereby be distinguished.

Feel: One can either feel the heat by resting the palm near to the kettle, or often just by feeling the vibration in the handle. Many kettles begin to vibrate at different frequencies as they reach the stages of boiling.

Sight: The easiest method, and often the first one taught, is to look at the water. For this a glass kettle is convenient (without it one can just lift the lid and look inside). One can judge by steam or bubbles both. Baby water has no bubbles rising but they are beginning to form at the bottom. Crab-eye water is composed of the smallest bubbles rising in packs. Fish-eye water is when the bubbles are large but haven't yet begun to boil. This is the ideal temperature for most teas. Finally, dragon water is when the water has reached a full, rolling boil. Since each kettle makes different sounds

and vibrates differently, it is best to look at the water and thereby learn the other methods comparatively.

The crab eyes are gone and the fish eyes have arisen. The wind is whispering through the pines. Strings of pearls fall from a coarse pile. Dizzily, slurries of snow swirl about the edges of the boiling water in the silver kettle. The ancients too often neglected the spirit of boiling water. —Su Xi

Most teas are resilient. Though they are best steeped with fish eye water, slight temperature changes won't damage the tea too much. In fact, subtle temperature changes may indeed produce pleasant variations in the flavor of some teas. Lighter teas, like green and white teas, are more sensitive and require lower temperatures. This is often achieved simply by removing the kettle from the heat source, taking off the lid and allowing it to stand for some time. Alternatively, one can pour the water into a decanter to allow it to cool. We should try to avoid using old man hair water (boiling) as the oxygen evaporates at this heat and the crisp freshness and energy of the water are lost. It is important to stop the water before it reaches that state—full of too much *Yang* energy just like water drawn from turbulent rivers.

Some modern kettles will reach boiling electronically. This is convenient and acceptable, but not ideal for making tea. It is far better to control the process, stopping it at the desired temperature. As mentioned so often in these tips, much of the skill in tea preparation comes from the same place that great art or even food preparation comes from: *our intuition*. If you use your intuition you may mistakenly brew your tea, but you will have uplifted the process to an art form, a gongfu, regardless. And in the end whether it is a tin cup and a tea bag or antique porcelain and very nice puerh, the elevation and enjoyment of the Leaf is what it's all about.

When the water is boiling, it must look like fish eyes and give off but the hint of a sound. When at the edges it chatters like a bubbling spring and looks like pearls innumerable strung together, it has reached the second stage. When it leaps like breakers majestic and resounds like a swelling wave, it is at its peak. Any more and the water will be boiled out and should not be used. —Lu Yu

For this month's experiment, start out with a glass kettle in order to get to know the fire in tea. Make friends with it, which ultimately leads to mastery over the harnessing of heat in tea. Start by watching the bubbles in the kettle and associating them with various temperatures. Later you can use other senses, like hearing the different sounds the kettle makes, or touching the handle and feeling its vibrations, but start with the bubbles because that is the easiest way.

Experiment with different temperatures. Some teas, especially green, white, lightly oxidized oolong and yellow tea, can be more delicious with slightly lower temperatures. (But if they are high-quality, they will also respond to higher temperatures as well.) Otherwise, the more heat the better. It conveys the Tea's essence to us and distributes it throughout our bodies, facilitating deeper and longer-lasting communication. As usual, we are excited to hear about your insights: globalteahut@gmail.com

燒水壺是終生同伴

The Kettle
A Companion for Life

-Wu De

The kettle is perhaps the most important teaware choice, spanning leaves in a bowl, side-handle pot tea and gongfu tea as well. When the water and fire meet in the kettle, a tea session begins. You could say that the kettle is the hut the water and fire hold council within. There is a lot that goes into choosing the right kettle to heat water for tea. Let's explore some of the options...

The vessel that heats water for tea is just as important as the source and storage of the water itself. Each kind of kettle has its own energy, and different kinds of kettles may also be better for different kinds of teas. The ideal is to have a variety of kettles, becoming sensitive to the relationships different teas have to different kinds of water and heating methodologies.

Water preparation is paramount to developing mastery in tea art. Most of what goes into a cup of tea is water; and for that reason, choosing good mountain spring water and preparing it properly are the most influential ways to improve one's tea. All too often, we have seen great teas disrespected by poor water or inadequate kettles. Some tea houses mistakenly devote their time to seeking out and providing high-quality teas, which then never flourish because the water and kettles they supply reduces the tea to average quality. Similarly, many tea lovers never spend the money or time to research a good kettle, and/or find the best source of water, and consequently aren't getting as much out of their tea as they could. When you realize just how tremendous an impact a good kettle can make, and that you technically only need to buy one to last you for the rest of your life—enhancing all the tea you'll ever prepare—finding the right one becomes paramount.

But just what is the "right one"? That is where the whole idea of recommending teaware and sharing one's experience gets tricky. First and foremost, it is important to remember that all you ever need to explore and share tea is *leaves, water and heat.* The best tea is made with love. It is the heart of the host and guest that make a session transformational, not the teaware. And yet, there is a refinement that can be pursued in the cultivation of a tea practice. In exploring the different kinds of kettles with us, please don't feel that there is ever a need to buy expensive teaware in order to make fine tea, or that "real" Chajin have such wares. The cost of silver or iron kettles has changed over the centuries they have been made based on the arbitrary whims of the market. Actually, they are priceless, much like Tea Herself. Choose the kettle(s)

that work for you on all levels: functionally making nice tea, is aesthetically pleasing to you and affordable to your budget.

Metal & The Alchemy of Tea

So much of tea preparation is alchemical and elemental. The ancient Daoist mendicants utilized tea as a part of their spiritual regimen, leading to the transmutation of the immortalizing "Morning Dew (*gan lu,* 甘露). The combination of the elements isn't just about the spiritual, internal aspect of Tea either; it also leads to the most flavorful, aromatic and rewarding cup of tea. Lu Yu himself carved the trigrams that represent the elements onto his teaware, recognizing the importance they play in a life of tea. Proper preparation is everything in gongfu tea, which refers to something done with deep skill or disciplined mastery. And even in simple bowl tea, the elements are there. The five elements—water, fire, metal, wood and earth—are all important in tea, as is the way they dance and move amongst each other. Exploring each of them, and their complicated roles in tea preparation is rewarding, indeed. For now, let us begin by touching on the most sensitive of all the elements, metal, which enters the art of tea through the kettle, of course.

Many ancient masters thought that metal was the element that could affect tea the most. Some even rejected the use of all metal in tea brewing, since the Qi is potentially harmful to the leaves, which are the wood element (axe slices the tree). These old masters argued that the flavors of metal are strong and overpowering, are able to drastically alter water and tea liquor both, as well as change the Qi. We also have found that the flavor, aroma and Qi of a tea are greatly influenced by the quality of metal used, and which step in the session the tea or water contacts the metal. Just as metal conducts electricity, so also does it conduct Qi. Perhaps more than the other four elements, metal has the potential to make or break a tea

session. It is, therefore, important that all the metal we use be high-quality. If we don't have access to fine metal, then we might consider removing all metal from our tea brewing, as many tea masters have suggested. And yet, without metal, one is missing one of the elements that make tea so naturally holistic.

Aside from quality, it is important to know where in the tea brewing process metal can be used. We have found that the only ideal place to allow the element of metal to enter the tea ceremony is between the fire and water. Because fire and water both are stronger than metal, it overpowers neither of them and buffers their relationship as well. For that reason, we very rarely use a metal teapot, strainer or other implements at the Hut. (We even use horn puerh knives rather than the more common metal ones.)

Silver (Ginbin)

Since ancient times, tea masters have agreed that silver was the ultimate refinement in tea preparation. We have had the fortune to try water prepared in a solid gold kettle as well. While the water was slightly better than that prepared in silver, it was not worth the extreme difference in price. Furthermore, such gold kettles are extremely rare. For most all of us, silver is therefore a much better option. In his book *The Classics of Tea* (*Cha Jing*), Lu Yu said:

For the best and longest use, the kettle should be made of silver, yielding the purest tea. Silver is somewhat extravagant, but when beauty is the standard, silver is the paragon of beauty. Likewise, when purity is the standard, silver yields such purity. Consequently, for constancy, long-term use and supreme quality one always resorts to silver.

Even then, tea masters understood the magical effects that silver has on water, as well as the aesthetic grace that a beautiful silver kettle brings to the tea table.

Of course, there are many qualities of silver, ranging from the silver-plated kettles of Japan and England to the solid, hand-crafted antique pieces made in Japan. There are also some modern, mold-cast kettles produced in Taiwan and Japan using extremely pure silver. Of these, we have found the traditional handmade Japanese kettles to be the best choice.

The Japanese were masters at every craft they explored, and silver was no exception. The silver mined in Japan was unusually pure to begin with. The masters then further refined it through secret smelting and folding techniques passed on from teacher to student. The folding of the silver was perhaps similar to the steel-forging techniques used to create Japanese swords, also masterpieces that are considered by historians to be of a higher caliber than contemporary weaponry. The Japanese silver exceeds Sterling in purity, the latter being around 92.5% while most of the Japanese kettles have a silver content of 95% or more.

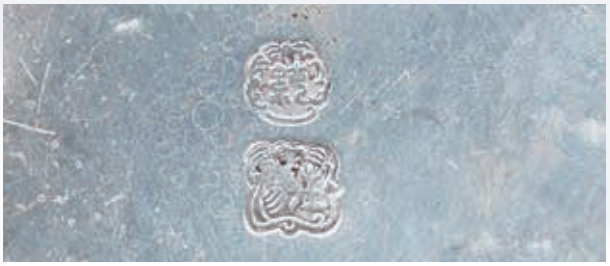
The Japanese made their kettles from a single sheet of this pure silver. Very few of them were cast in clay molds that were only used once. Almost all of them were hand-hammered—slowly formed into bright and functional masterpieces. When you look at them up close and notice all the amazing work that went into hammering the body, joining the spout and handle—often with handmade pins or joints—they are truly awe-inspiring. Some of them took weeks to create and it is perhaps only the Japanese devotion to perfection and mastery that could have focused so much time and energy into a craft, as they did with most all aspects of their lives.

The kettles come in wooden boxes that usually give the artist's name, sometimes the date and even the name of the kettle itself if it was given one. There are nickel/tin kettles that are silver plated, and some student-made pieces that are much cheaper than the masterpieces. The pure-silver kettles have a mark on the bottom signifying their quality level, an important characteristic to look for. It is crucial to be careful with all antiques. Seek out the guidance of an expert when purchasing an antique silver kettle, especially since they are so expensive.

The purity of the silver cleans the water, making it brighter and sweeter. We have experimented in several ways over the years, including several comparisons using people who do not drink tea and have no particular sensitivity or refined palate. One experiment was to line up four identical porcelain cups and ask the participants if they found any of the waters to be "different." All four waters were room temperature, and three of them had been poured from the same clay kettle, while one had sat for about ten minutes in a Japanese pure-silver kettle. We conducted the experiment about seven times, each time with 3-4 different participants, none of which were tea lovers or had any experience with silver. We found that an overwhelming 96% of the time, the participants could pin-point the water that had been in the silver kettle. We then trained them, explaining the experiment and pointing out some of the characteristics of the water that had been in contact with the silver, at which point they could find the water without fail. And this was unheated water that had merely sat in the kettle for some time!

We have also experimented by taking a pure-silver kettle around to various tea lovers' houses and shops—all of whom were unfamiliar with such silver kettles. We then asked them to prepare tea in their usual way, using all their own teaware, a tea they are very familiar with, as well as the water that they generally use. The only difference was that we substituted the pure-sil-

Inside the kettle there is a "singer" which hums when it boils. There is a "pure silver" stamp on the bottom.



ver kettle for the one they ordinarily use. We then asked them to report any differences they experienced. All fifteen of the tea lovers we tried this with, unanimously agreed that the tea was better, brighter, sweeter and had a better aftertaste. About half also noticed that the tea was more patient.

The water from the silver kettle even looks a bit different. If it is put in glass, side-by-side with normal water, it appears slightly shinier, especially at the top. The real difference, however, is in the flavor and Qi. The silver-induced water is sweeter, softer and smoother in the mouth. It tastes "purified", for lack of a better word. We have also found that teas prepared with this water are always more patient, yielding almost twice as many steepings.

The Qi of the water prepared in a pure-silver kettle is also light, smooth and refined. It rises up, making teas shine, and causes the vibrations and flow of Qi to become softer and smoother. It is especially suitable for green, white, yellow and light oolongs, refreshing them in an amazing way. The water seems to rise up, with a buoyant Qi that makes one feel as if floating.

There is a jeweler's cloth that polishes silver nicely, though you should only use this on the outside of the kettle. Otherwise, it is better to leave the cleaning to experts, making sure your kettle has been scoured before you purchase it. It is also helpful to dry it, wrap it in cotton and return it to the box after each use, in order to prevent oxidation and reduce the frequency one needs to polish it.

The effects of silver on water for tea are really amazing, and worth looking into, if you can find the chance to save up for a kettle. We have found that the value of the kettles continually appreciates, making them a solid investment as well. Tasting the smooth and sweet water, and the magical way the Qi of the silver subtly transforms a familiar tea into something exquisite, one can't help but feel a sense of awe for the mountain smiths who hammered and forged these exquisite pieces.

Cast Iron Kettles (Tetsubin)

Antique iron tetsubin are a great addition to any tea lover's collection. They can be anywhere from decades to centuries old. Most of the ones on the market in Asia date from 1900 to the start of WWII. They are cast in an array of designs including bamboo, various natural textures, plums, fish, etc. and the higher-quality ones are often inlaid with gold and silver on the handle, knob or even sometimes on the body. The prices of such kettles also vary tremendously, and part of this is due to the artist or "house" that made them. Of course, handcrafted kettles that were made by famous smiths will be worth large sums of money. It is still possible, however, to find a nice tetsubin from this era at a reasonable price.

When buying an iron tetsubin, there are two things to keep in mind: aesthetic appeal and water quality. Of course we want a kettle that is attractive and lends itself to the tea ceremonies we are having. For this aspect, there is no set of guidelines or advice, since each of us must use our own discrimination.

The function, then, is perhaps of greater importance than who made the kettle or even how nice it looks. It should heat up nicely, pour smoothly and of course not leak anywhere, which some of the antiques do unfortunately. If the pot has sat unused on a shelf, the inside will be rusted in hues of orange and brown. This isn't ideal. One should instead look for a kettle that has what the Japanese call "fur", a layer of whitish-yellow minerals on the inside. This is a sign that the kettle was used in conjunction with mountain spring water for some time, and these mineral deposits enhance the water greatly. It is difficult to find one used so much that it is completely covered with "fur", but try to find one that has at least been used regularly since it was made. By using mountain spring water yourself, you will also contribute to this build-up of mineral deposits. Some of the newer tetsubins have enamel coatings on the inside, which means that they are made to be teapots, not kettles. It is much better to use the antique, cast-iron ones, which are porous and absorb minerals. Antique cast iron tetsubins are also made of the famous "pig iron" that influences water for tea.

We have found that, because of the differences in the original iron, coupled with the water that was boiled in it over time, each antique kettle has its own unique flavor. No two are alike. There are those with similarities, but every antique tetsubin adds its own flavor to the water. There are of course, generalities that are common to all good iron kettles: they all impart a sweetness to the water, bringing depth and more flavors. For that reason, they are best suited for brewing heavily roasted teas, aged teas, puerh and red teas. These teas are already rich, so the added depth—even the extra flavor a kettle may have—only make the tea more complex, varied, deep and rich. We have found that the water brewed in iron tetsubins has a heavier mineral content and an earthy Qi. It brings to the water or tea a depth and richness, with a slightly sweet aftertaste depending on the kettle. Because many of these teas are as much or more about the Qi as they are about flavor and aroma, and because they already have deep, rich, earthy flavors, an iron tetsubin really enhances them and brings everything to a deeper and richer level than otherwise possible. As the Qi of the water moves downward and is loaded with earth and Yin, this kind of kettle isn't as nice for oolong, green, white or other lighter teas—often overpowering their delicateness. There are exceptions to this, though, as some iron kettles are lighter and sweeter, more like silver.

One great thing about iron kettles is that they can be used in conjunction with hardwood charcoal. They are strong and durable and respond extremely well to charcoal. The water cooked on such charcoal always maintains a higher temperature, steams more and brings depth to the tea. The temperature and energy of charcoal is very different from hotplates. Most masters, ancient and modern, agree that in general, higher-quality teas respond better to higher temperatures, while lower-quality teas are better brewed at lower temperatures. The obvious reason for this is that more of the essence of the leaves is released when using higher temperatures. No electric heater can ever get to the depth of hardwood charcoal. It brings out many deeper, subtler levels from a tea, rewarding us with a deeper sense of the tea's essence. Try using hardwood charcoal with your

The lids of nice tetsubin are bronze and the buttons are handmade of silver. Sometimes the handles or spouts are inlaid with silver or gold.

higher-quality teas and you'll find a whole new world waiting for you.

In order to truly shine, these iron tetsubins also really need the added heat. We have found that when we use a hotplate in conjunction with an iron kettle, the effect is not nearly as nice and we feel like we would have been better off using silver. For the minerals and earthy Qi to really shine, it would seem that these old iron kettles need that extra bit of heat from a natural fire. They were created to be heated in that way. The fire element is purer in a charcoal fire, and the heat deeper.

After trying the water from several iron kettles and choosing one, there are some important things to remember in raising your antique tetsubin. Since it is porous it is important that you continue to fill it with good water. If it has a mineral layer from decades of spring water, you shouldn't continuously fill it with low-quality water. By adding spring water, you will further its seasoning and it will get better and better with each use. Also, iron tetsubins cannot be used in conjunction with gas stoves. The flames will crack the bottom of the tetsubin over time. If it is necessary to use a gas stove, you could buy a clay disk sold throughout Asia. The disk distributes the gas flames through pores and prevents them from harming the bottom of your tetsubin.

Finally, to prevent rust, it is important that you keep your tetsubin dry. For that reason, you must "roast it dry" after every use. This is done simply by emptying out all the remaining water and returning it to the heat source—lower it if possible—and monitoring the inside until the water has evaporated. When using a hotplate, we just turn it off and place the iron pot on top. As the hotplate cools down, there will still be enough heat to evaporate the water inside. This is done with the lid off, but the lid should be returned once the kettle cools down.

If you prefer heavily-roasted tea or aged puerh, an antique tetsubin will greatly improve your tea. Aside from the depth in flavor and rich, earthy Qi, an antique tetsubin has a certain aesthetic that is appealing, especially when it's resting above some charcoal. Listening to the "wind soughing the pines" and feeling the gentle heat of the charcoal is often a worthwhile enough reason to appreciate iron tetsubins.

Stainless Steel and Purple-sand Combo

This is Wu De's teacher, Master Lin Ping Xiang's favorite way of making water. He prefers the high-grade stainless steel kettles/pans made in Germany for chefs. These pans or kettles are made of high-grade stainless steel and aluminum folds, which ensures an even temperature all throughout the kettle or pan. Since the temperature is perfectly distributed to a decimal of a degree, the bubbles rise in even strings without ever colliding with one another. This results in very smooth and even water that comes to a boil quick and strong, and brings a light briskness that will enhance and bring out the best in a fine tea. Master Linn suggests buying kettles by the company Henkel, famous for their steel technology.

Master Linn boils the water in a stainless steel kettle and then pours it into a smaller Yixing purple-sand kettle that sits by him on the table, boiling on charcoal or an alcohol stove. An Yixing kettle is perfect for gongfu tea, bringing the same smooth, roundedness to the tea that a good pot can. You may find that you will need a *cha tong* (tea assistant) to make water for tea in this way, but the water will be especially vibrant and bring out a very smooth and fine cup. This is an excellent way to brew gongfu tea. Each and every cup will shine brightly with such discipline in water and fire.

If you find a good stainless steal kettle, you can also use it without a smaller Yixing kettle. Stainless steal is nice as it can be used for a long time, and on any kind of burner, including charcoal. There are many grades of stainless steal, just as with cooking pots/pans, so it may be worth doing some research and /or experimentation if possible.

Electric Kettles

When we have to, we use a plug-in electric kettle to boil water. For some reason, we find the stainless steal kettles made by Phillips to make nicer water for tea than the other brands available in Taiwan. This probably has to do with the quality of the stainless steal. There may be nicer ones out there. We must admit that this is our least favorite option when it comes to kettles. Many of these products use induction heat, which is a bit like microwaving food.

Glass

Glass kettles are great! As long as the glass was tempered and has a protective coating on the bottom, they can be used for a long time, cleaned easily and be surprisingly sturdy. It is better to have a kettle made completely of glass rather than the ones that are metal on the bottom, as it is often low-quality metal like cheap stainless steal, aluminum or even tin. Glass kettles let one watch the water, recognize the bubbles and temperature, and learn about the changes in the water as it heats up. Many of us used a glass kettle for our first few years of tea brewing. Watching the bubbles is the easiest way to get a feel for the water temperature. Also, after time, you can then compare the temperature you know from the size of the bubbles to the vibration, sound and other methods. The water is also pretty neutral in a glass kettle, which is good for tasting new water sources or storage methods, though you lose the enhancement other kinds of kettles offer.

A small Yixing kettle and two colors of Lin's kettles. We fixed a broken knob with turquoise: Wabi!

Clay

Clay pots can be superb or can ruin the water. One should be careful to choose a kettle that is made from good quality, natural stoneware. It is better if the clay was refined naturally without any man-made additives. Some masters suggest that volcanic ores mixed into clay for kettles makes them produce cleaner, better water. Such clays conduct heat better. This is important, as mentioned above, because it is better to heat the water quickly so that the energy isn't changed.

Clay kettles are much cheaper than silver or cast iron kettles. A good-quality stoneware kettle is often a nice improvement after learning from your trusty old glass one. You may notice right away that the water is smoother and deeper. Clay kettles also force you to use your sense of touch and hearing to gauge water temperature, which isn't as easy as looking at the bubbles. However, the problem with glass and clay kettles is that you lose the element of metal, so your tea sessions are lacking one of the five elements. Having all five elements and learning how they interact with each other to refine one's tea is an ancient and beautiful art. Of course, this isn't essential, but the quality of one's tea will be affected in every way: flavor, aroma and Qi. In fact, the best clay kettles will have a high iron content in the clay used to make them, which conducts and maintains heat better—so they heat up faster and stay hot longer.

There are two tiers of clay kettles that one can find: The first kind is more mass-produced, and comes in a range of qualities. We usually recommend those made out of volcanic ore, and then mass-produced here in Taiwan by a company called Lin's. Many of you have started your tea journey with these kettles. They are affordable, and though they are made in larger quantities, each one is trimmed and finished by hand. They look nice and make very decent water for tea. The red clay inside is high in iron and therefore closer to a metal kettle. What's more, they can be put on infrared heaters, hot plates, gas and even charcoal due to the lining that is painted onto the bottom of these kettles. This makes them extremely convenient for anyone. Their only setback is that they do not hold temperature at all, which kind of forces you to have an alcohol stove, a candle or some other kind of burner right next to you as you are preparing tea. These kettles will only stay hot for a minute or two, so they need constant heat.

The next step up from Lin's clay kettles are those that are handmade

by masters like Chen Qi Nan or Deng Ding Sou (both of which we have covered in this magazine). Their kettles are master-produced, and by people who love tea and brew it every day. Each one is unique, with an exquisite aesthetic and innovative designs, like catches for the lids so they won't ever drop off. They also test and retest the minerals/ores they add to their clay to make better and better water for tea. Since masters like this have been drinking tea for decades, they are often very skilled at making teaware that enhances the water, the tea and the experience through the art they bring to the tea table. We would also like to acknowledge and fully recommend the kettle/brazier sets made by our dear brother Petr Novak, who many of you have met in these pages or in person. His girlfriend, Mirka (who we'll write about soon), makes braziers and he makes the kettles.

There are also traditional side-handle kettles that have been used for gongfu tea these last few centuries. The four treasures of gongfu tea are an Yixing purple-sand pot, porcelain cups, a tea boat and a Mulberry Creek stove/kettle. These white clay stoves and kettle sets come from Chao Zhou. Originally, the clay came from a creek by this name, though potters there have used all kinds of local clay for hundreds of years. The braziers and side-handle pots from this area make nice water for tea. You can find antique and modern ones, as well as Japanese copies. These days, they also make the stove sets out of red clay, but we think that such clay doesn't make as nice of water as the white style (though still not terrible). The drawback of such sets is that they rarely make the side-handle left-handed, and as you learned in our series on the Five Basics of Tea Brewing, in this tradition we hold the kettle in the off-hand to promote a smoother, more fluent brewing. Our solution when we want to brew gongfu tea in the most traditional of ways is to use an antique Mulberry Creek stove with a left-handed kettle Petr Novak made for us.

水火相遇只為茶

Left: *Clay kettle by Chen Qi Nan.*

Right: *Traditional stove with Petr's custom side-handle for gongfu tea.*

放置木炭

Lay the Coals
Fire in a Life of Tea

-Shen Su

A Chajin lives a life of tea, and each aspect of tea preparation becomes a way of cultivating Zen. Laying charcoal is just one of the many skills that take a lifetime to master. Shen Su has learned a lot in his two years laying coals at the Hut, most importantly about himself. His journey and insights are helpful for anyone mastering a craft.

Though there are many different approaches to tea, our primary approach is as a Dao. It is our Way of Life. Everything we do revolves around Cha Dao, and is in one way or another connected to Tea. Though the connection to Tea in some daily activities is more difficult to see than others, like placing your shoes on the shoe rack for example, the connection charcoal has to the tea ceremony is evident. Cutting, lighting, and laying charcoal to heat water for tea are among the most important and difficult tea practices to cultivate. In approaching this part of the tea ceremony for only a short time, I can already see the road ahead to mastery is long, indeed.

Among the many lessons to be learned by working with charcoal, there are two in general that stand out for me at this time. The first important lesson I am constantly reminded of is a practical one: When laying charcoal in an open brazier like the one we often use at the Tea Sage Hut, it is the space between the pieces of charcoal that generates the heat, not the physical pieces themselves. When they are laid properly with sufficient space between each piece, a visible connection occurs and you can actually see the power of the heat. With enough airflow, a bright orange glow is emitted as the pieces "talk" to each other, often followed by a developing flame. When laid properly, what we call "fusion" can be seen around the entire structure and a powerful, central flame shoots up the middle of the charcoal arrangement. When laid improperly, however, only partial fusion can be seen in some areas and not others, which heats your water unevenly and slowly. Worse even, no fusion occurs, and your kettle struggles to even boil! There is a balance to be found. Too much space between the pieces can result in a quickly heated kettle or two, but too much airflow causes your charcoal arrangement to burn out before the ceremony has ended. When it comes to laying charcoal, the arrangement can't be too loose

nor too tight. Too loose, and your arrangement burns out early. Too tight, and it struggles to burn at all. It takes time to find that balance, and the balance shifts based on how many people there are and what type of tea ceremony you have chosen: gongfu tea, bowl tea, or whisked tea. Of course, there are countless other factors to consider as well. There are many different braziers, charcoal types, and methods of cutting, starting, and laying the charcoal. It is a challenge, to say the least, to properly lay charcoal for tea, let alone create an art out of it, but a worthwhile challenge for the Chajin!

For most tea ceremonies, we use a locally produced charcoal made of compressed coconut husks. The briquettes are compressed into hexagonal logs with a hole down the middle to increase surface area and to promote airflow. The hexagonal shape makes laying the charcoal easier. With the right tools and attention, the briquettes can be cut easily into thin slivers or medium to large pieces. The number of different pieces depends on the brazier and the occasion. For gongfu tea, I use a smaller kettle and slightly less charcoal than for bowl tea. If the arrangement is too big in relation to the size of the kettle, it tends to heat the handle, making it uncomfortable to hold. For bowl tea, I use more charcoal, arranged with a larger opening or "door" to allow more airflow to heat larger kettles.

To achieve proper spacing and airflow, it is most important to cut your charcoal well and in the right volume. I use a simple chisel or cleaver to cut our charcoal by hand. After cutting the pieces to the desired sizes, I adjust any sharply angled pieces to create a flatter surface, which is important for laying a stable foundation within the brazier. Then I light them on a gas stove. I lay the lit charcoal in a circular shape in the center of our brazier. Easier said than done. Speed is important to achieve “fusion,”

and so that your *hibashi* (metal chopsticks for charcoal) don't get too hot to handle. At this point, I often place a small piece of unlit white charcoal in the center of the arrangement. White charcoal is very dense charcoal that burns longer and hotter than others. Using it at the center of a charcoal arrangement is a good way to keep your fire burning longer and hotter. Having properly cut surfaces on each charcoal piece allows you to lay a stable structure that either stands up straight or slightly angles towards the center. At the end of a tea session, a good charcoal arrangement will collapse inward. Again, with properly cut, lit, and laid charcoal and a skilled consideration of the space between the pieces, "fusion" is much more likely to happen. But it's not some phenomenon that just happens when all the practical factors line up. There is more to it than that, which brings me to my second, more inward lesson.

Everything we do is part of the tea ceremony. All of our daily activities are a clearing away of the last session and a preparing for the next one, quite literally. As a Chajin, how you clean up after a tea session *is* how you make tea. How you do everything is part of the overarching tea session for the one who lives a life of Tea. More generally speaking, *how you do anything is how you do everything*. Everything at the Hut revolves around Tea. Therefore, how we do anything is how we do Tea.

Working with charcoal is not just some job to finish—some means to an end. It's not a task to get done so that we can finally sit down and *drink* tea; it *is* the process of drinking tea. My teacher says, "Zen is the art of creating sacred space around everyday activities." That means shifting one's perspective. The only thing that separates everyday activities from sacred ones is our discriminating mind. Working with charcoal can be done with sacred intention, mindfulness, and reverence, or it can be viewed as an everyday chore falling somewhere between breakfast and drinking tea. How we orient ourselves makes all the difference. That's exactly why Tea is such a good medicine for these times, because it is so ordinary: just leaves and hot water. And yet, She can be consciously raised up to be sacred and ceremonial, which is something so many of us have lost touch with. That's part of the reason so many of us are drawn to Her. Tea is the point at which spiritual progress and worldly joy intersect. That being said, the lesson here is that my orientation towards working with charcoal can completely shift it from being a task to being an honor. How to achieve that shift in orientation is different for each individual, but the results will manifest as progress and improvement. As I said before, there is more to creating a fine charcoal arrangement than simply lining up all the practical factors. Like the ingredient of love that makes a mother's soup better than any other, the remaining factor is orientation when it comes to consistently laying charcoal well. Mindfulness, attention, and reverence will improve the quality of everything we do, whether that be cooking food, setting down shoes, or laying charcoal.

I still make a lot of mistakes when working with charcoal. It's a great feedback system, demonstrating where I'm at and how many mistakes I've either learned from or failed to learn from. At present, I still have lots of work to do and many lessons to learn. Sometimes I lay charcoal well and other times terribly. If how I do anything is how I do everything, then through working with charcoal, I can see my work is patchy and needs cleaning up! At the same time, even the imperfection is Zen. It was never meant to be done perfectly, just well. And done well means with heart.

Like all aspects of tea preparation, each activity offers an opportunity to create sacred space around it. Working with charcoal is particularly important as it creates the heat, without which there would be no tea. It is the fire and light, the very life of the tea ceremony itself. Traditionally, a person's house was centered around an altar to connect to the Divine, or the hearth, acting as the warm heart of the home. So too, a well-lit charcoal arrangement within a brazier centers the ceremony around its light and warmth. With this in mind, I aspire to tend the flame of the ceremony with honor and reverence. This is the orientation with which to approach charcoal for tea ceremony. This is the frame of mind with which I surround the art of working with charcoal for tea.

放置木炭是修行

The Element of Fire

-Andrew Taylor

Andy elucidates the fire element, summer and health from the perspective of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

The five elements, or five phases, are a central philosophy within Chinese culture. They categorize and organize the qualities and relationships of the human body and other naturally occurring phenomena. Much of Chinese Medical theory is based on the five elements (along with Yin/Yang, Qi and blood) and each element has an associated internal organ, sensory organ, body tissue and fluid, color, season, flavor, climate, and emotion. As we did in our article from this February's magazine entitled, *Winter Wellness* (now applicable to those Down Under!) we will consult the *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon)*, the first original text discussing Yin and Yang, Qi, and the five elements from the first century CE, as our guide to living more in harmony with the seasons.

The summer months mark the most active and exciting time of the year for many people. As we have moved into the fire phase of the five elements in Chinese philosophy, Yang energy has now grown full and abundant. Our natural inclinations are to utilize this abundant and expansive energy through more activity and movement. We are naturally inspired to take full advantage of the longer days filled with warm weather and sunshine to be outdoors, go traveling or complete projects that may have begun in the spring. Though, we must take caution, as this Yang energy is not without limit, and may even possibly transform to a state of excess. Just as flames burn out or may spread rampant, we must skillfully remain in harmony with this fire season to ensure healthy transitions back into the predominant Yin energy of autumn and winter.

In the three months of summer there is an abundance of sunshine and rain. The Heavenly energy descends, and the Earthly energy rises. When these energies merge there is intercourse between Heaven and Earth. As a result plants mature and animals, flowers, and fruit appear abundantly.

The fire element represents a blooming energy, characterized by warmth and heat, growth, expansion, upward movement, passion and creativity. The new life that was birthed from the wood energy of spring has now reached its peak in the summer, burning bright and strong like the hot sun. The *Nei Jing* advises on how to live in harmony with the summer season. Let's take a look and go a bit deeper into a few of the lines from *Chapter Two, Discourse on Regulating the Shen (spirit) According to the Four Seasons*, to get a better understanding of this renowned classical Chinese text.

"One may retire somewhat later at this time of year, while still arising early." My favorite memories as a child were those long summer evenings, when the day just didn't want to end and the sun stayed up past eight o'clock. Under a tamed sun, those late evening bike rides into the apple orchards or basketball games in the driveway made July and August a favorite time of year. A healthy body will naturally tune itself to the nature of Yin and Yang energy. At this time of year our bodies tend to be more active late into the night. Allow yourself to go to bed later than you would normally throughout the year, but make sure to still arise early. Longer days come with more daylight, a kind of invitation that suggests using the more abundant natural energy that exists. Now that the Yang energy is more active, we don't require the same amount of rest needed during the restorative months of the winter. Turn off the air conditioner, keep the window open and let in that bright summertime sunshine to greet you in the morning.

"One should refrain from anger and stay physically active, to prevent the pores from closing and the Qi from stagnating." This statement relates to the interconnected functions of the liver, lung and heart in Chinese Medicine and their relationship with emotions, exercise and perspiration. In Chinese Medicine, anger is the emotion related to the liver. When one is angry, Qi rises up. Therefore, because of the exuberant Yang energy of the fire phase, an unskillful or unhealthy expression of anger may further constrain liver Qi, resulting in illness. Yoga, Qi Gong, or any exercise with movement are great ways to help promote the circulation of Qi and prevent its stagnation in the liver and lung. One of the other benefits from these types of exercise comes with perspiration. Sweat is the body fluid associated with the heart and cannot occur without a proper regulation of the pores (governed by lung function). Of course, this concept of exercise for maintaining good health applies

year-round, but because of the abundance of energy that requires more circulation during the fire phase, it becomes even more crucial at this time of year.

"Emotionally, it is important to be happy and easygoing and not hold grudges, so the energy can flow freely and communicate between the external and internal." Each of the five elements has an associated emotion and between that emotion and the corresponding organ there exists an interconnected relationship. When the organ is in balance the emotion will manifest harmoniously, and conversely, if that emotion is exaggerated (excess) or lacking (deficient) it may signify an imbalance in that organ. Joy represents the healthy emotion of the heart. A calm and open heart releases tension and can function properly to circulate blood and Qi. An imbalanced heart in excess causes restlessness, over-excitement, impatience, and hysteria. A deficient heart may manifest as a lack of joy or apathy. For me, I have found the practice of daily tea and meditation to be the best prescription to keep my heart calm and open. This statement also reminds me that when the students here at the center have made a real boneheaded mistake or broken valuable teaware, Wu De teaches us a valuable lesson by saying in jest, "Don't worry, it's OK. I'll just hold a grudge for the rest of my life!"

"The heart holds the office of Monarch, whence the spiritual light emanates." The heart, with its several important roles in the physical body and spiritual realm, along with small intestine are the associated organs of the fire element. The heart is regarded as the Emperor of the human body. And just as ancient civilizations would cease to function without an Emperor, the body will cease to work without a functional heart. In its role as "master of the blood" and "ruler of the vessels", it promotes the circulation of Qi and blood throughout the body. As the "house of the *shen* (spirit)" the heart provides a storehouse for Spirit and consciousness that can be seen through the eyes. And as the sprout of the tongue, the heart governs speech, so an unclouded heart spirit manifests clear speech.

The role of diet is seen from a vastly different perspective in Chinese culture. Less emphasis is put on fat content, number of calories and carbohydrates, whereas the energetic properties of food are more taken into consideration when choosing something to eat. Naturally, because of the summer heat, most of us are now reaching for lighter foods like salads and fruits. But what foods are appropriate from a Chinese medical viewpoint to clear heat and quell fire? Bitter, the flavor associated with the fire element, is a flavor we don't often incorporate into our diets in the West. However, Chinese and Taiwanese cuisine will often use bitter foods in dishes. The nature of bitter flavor is contrary to that of fire: cooling, contracting and descending. It also has a purgative effect along with antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. Bitterness in Chinese Medicine also dries dampness, so bitter foods will help to reduce mucus membrane secretions that result from inflammatory processes. Some bitter foods that are commonly used are bitter melon, asparagus, vinegar, turnips, alfalfa sprouts, dandelion, and of course, tea! In addition to the aforementioned bitter foods, there are many other foods that are cooling in nature, helping to suppress the heat of summer. Fruits and vegetables such as watermelon, strawberries, grapefruit, pineapple, peach, cucumber, tomato, celery, lettuce, radish, and tofu are all cooling in nature. Here in Taiwan, the summertime comes the multitude of mung bean and grass jelly dessert dishes prepared in a variety of forms and at roadside stands. You can find old aunties selling homemade cooling beverages made from *qing cao*, literally "green grass" or local wild plants, mint or chrysanthemum. On a hot summer day, these snacks and drinks will instantly provide cooling relief to an overheated body! Do yourself a favor and make these foods a part of your everyday summer diet.

Just as we carefully select our tea to serve or drink based on the time of day or year, the weather, or expected guests, we must use this same approach in our orientation towards the energy of Heaven and Earth. Summer marks the time that allows us to embrace the resounding abundance, reap the benefits of a world in full bloom and creatively and skillfully channel this active energy for the good of all beings. Raising a bowl to all our sun-drenched calm and open hearts!

Fire Element

Cardinal Direction: ***South***
Color: ***Red***
Body Organ: ***Heart & Small Intestine***
Season: ***Summer***
Sense Organ: ***Tongue***
Taste: ***Bitter***
Emotion: ***Joy***
Life Phase: ***Youth***
Sound: ***Laughing***

添了火

Stoke the Fire

Implements of Charcoal for Tea

-Wu De

Entering the world of living fire for tea may seem intimidating at first, but it needn't be. It is not necessary to make all your tea with charcoal, either. In this article, we explore the necessary and supplemental tools needed to begin a fire practice, as well as some basics techniques for laying coals. We hope that you will be inspired to experiment (carefully) with some fire for tea!

There is a lifetime of practice and devotion that goes into laying charcoal for tea, and the depth to which you wish to make it a practice is entirely up to you. My master suggested that we students keep the same charcoal going for three years in order to learn everything there is to know about charcoal, which is a difficult (and for many, extreme) ideal to follow. That doesn't mean that charcoal can't be a part of the life of every tea lover, no matter how busy you are. It is not necessary to brew all your tea with charcoal. We also use electric heat sources in the center when the situation calls for it. And there are easier ways to enter the world of charcoal for tea.

One of the keys to using charcoal for tea is non-toxic, smoke-free charcoal. We will go over the kinds of charcoal for tea in more detail later in this article. You will also need to make sure you have proper ventilation if you are going to use charcoal indoors. Even non-toxic charcoal creates a minimal amount of carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide is odorless and undetectable by humans. It can reach lethal levels very quickly, so it is important to always be safe and ensure adequate ventilation if you are going to use charcoal for tea!

If you are worried, you can use a handheld carbon monoxide detector to monitor your tea space (our carbon monoxide levels are safe, due to proper ventilation), or only use charcoal outdoors. If you have a nearby balcony or veranda, you could also heat the water for tea on charcoal and then bring it in to an alcohol burner to stay warm.

There are many tools used traditionally in making charcoal for tea. Many are non-essential and can be replaced by modern, sometimes more affordable tools. Most of the tools we use for charcoal are from the Japanese tea ceremony, which we also practice at the center. Sometimes, implements that are used ceremonially in Japanese tea also function practically in our day-to-day tea, like the *haboki* (feather brush), which is used to purify the sunken hearth but also serves so well in cleaning up loose ash from our brazier that we use it daily. You will have to decide which of these tools to invest in, and which to make or replace. Later, we will talk about the kinds of charcoal we use and give some brief instructions for laying the coals.

The Brazier (火爐)

The most important teaware you will need for making charcoal, and the only absolutely essential piece is the brazier. These can be modern ceramic, antique iron or bronze,

rattan baskets with ceramic lining that you can carry away from an outdoor session without waiting for it to cool down, clay braziers, etc. There are so many varieties, and most of your decision will be an aesthetic or financial one. Of course, certain braziers function better than others, with better airflow for the coals, but most of your choice will be based on your style and what you can afford. If possible, make sure the airflow is strong, as the aim of using charcoal is to have as lively a flame as possible, and thereby heat the water as quickly as possible. Antique Japanese braziers are usually the best. Japanese craftsmanship was exquisite (and still can be). Antique braziers are often gorgeous and well designed, obviously built to last, and have the right airflow for their design. You may also want to account for how and where you will be using the brazier—whether on a table or the ground—as the height and size will matter. Also, ceramic braziers can break and have to be handled with more care. There are also cheap metal braziers that you can find. One way to make a nice-looking and affordable brazier is to buy a cheap metal brazier with handles, light the coals in it and then place it on a small board inside a nice-looking plant pot. You can adjust the height by using varying thicknesses of wood, so that the kettle sits on the metal brazier just inside the pot. Decoratively, the ceramic plant pot then becomes the brazier.

There are essentially two kinds of brazier, and knowing the difference between them will matter when making your choice: open and closed.

Braziers

Open braziers are wide and open inside, without ventilation holes. They can use more kinds of charcoal and have more of a range of use, but the charcoal will have to be properly arranged. You will need a tripod or a hanging rod/chain for the kettle in order to use an open brazier. Using an open brazier requires more skill, as the charcoal will have to be arranged in a pile that is conducive to your kettle, brazier and brewing style, but they have more versatility and can be used with any kind of charcoal. Using an open brazier will also require knowledge of other skills, like using *hibashi* (metal chopsticks for charcoal).

Closed braziers, on the other hand, have an insert for coal. This is usually a kind of sleeve made of metal or ceramic that you place the kettle on top of. Make sure the design allows for proper airflow under your kettle—ideally with air hole(s) in the body to increase ventilation. Closed braziers are often smaller, lighter and more portable so they can be placed atop a table as well. They are also much easier to use, as you can fill them with charcoal and start them (outdoors since the starter will always smoke) and then carry them to your tea space before they get hot. There is less technique to using them, as you can essentially just stuff them full of coal. We usually recommend that people start their journey into charcoal with a closed brazier, which is much simpler and requires fewer tools.

Implements

Haboki (羽箒, feather brush): In traditional Japanese tea ceremony, after the *kama* is removed from the sunken hearth (*Ro*), the rim is ritually cleaned with this feather brush. This is done again after arranging the charcoal. However, at the Hut, we also use them to clean the brazier of ash before starting any ceremony. There are different styles, with wider or longer feathers for different seasons. Most of them are recovered eagle, crane or hawk feathers.

Hibashi (火箸, metal chopsticks): We light our charcoal outside, using a fire-starter or gas stove depending on the charcoal, and then carry it to the brazier with a pan. We then arrange it using the Hibashi. Traditionally, these were used to arrange unlit charcoal into the sunken hearth. This means some of them aren't meant for lit coals and can get hot. The winter ones have mulberry wood handles. When the others get too hot, you can stop and wipe them with a rag. These aren't necessary when using a closed brazier, as you can light it and then carry the brazier itself to your tea space.

Sumitori (炭取, container for coal): In a Japanese tea ceremony the charcoal container is usually a basket, and is used to carry in all the equipment used in arranging the charcoal. We have one of these baskets around our tea space with extra charcoal we can use to add to our coals during extra-long sessions. We would also include the charcoal pan as a kind of *sumitori*, though. We use it to transport unlit charcoal outside to be broken and lit, and then to carry lit charcoal indoors to be arranged. We made ours out of a kitchen pan with a wooden handle (so it won't get hot), which we then decorated.

Hai (灰, ash): After time, you will develop a continuous flow of ash from used charcoal, but you will want to start out with a good layer if you are using an open brazier. (This is another place in which closed braziers are better, since they don't need any ash). The best ash comes from burnt rice paper. After you start accumulating an excess of ash, it can be used for many wonderful tasks: like cleaning dishes or pans, rinsing/scouring teaware and other cleaning.

Haisaji (灰匙, ash spoons/scoops): These come in all shapes and sizes. We use them in many different ways: to scoop out excess ash for use in cleaning, to compact the ash in the brazier, etc. You can find a set of different sizes, which will be very useful.

Rake (灰耙)***:*** We use this to rake up the excess ash in the open brazier; and also to draw nice patterns in the ash, making the tea space more beautiful—even in the places that guests rarely look.

Fire-starter **(火種):** For some kinds of charcoal, we use a gas stove to light them. For others, you will need a fire-starter. These are compressed sawdust, essentially. Try to find ones that are not coated in wax and are more environmentally friendly. The wax smokes, smells unpleasant and melts onto your coals.

Fan **(扇子)/** ***hollow bamboo tube*** **(竹管):** It is nice to have a couple different ways of bringing the flames out of your charcoal arrangement—whether using an open or closed brazier. If you light the coals outdoors and then bring them in, the new arrangement will take some time to get going. Sometimes it helps to fan or blow on the coals until you have a lively flame. We use both these tools often, though we usually fan a closed brazier and blow through the bamboo tube on the open arrangement. Our tube is a simple piece of bamboo with the nodes hollowed out.

Charcoal

Sumi (炭, charcoal): "*Sumi*" is the Japanese word for charcoal. Japanese charcoal has been produced for centuries. Beginning in the eighteenth century several types of charcoal were produced to be used in the tea ceremony and the processes were refined. Black, hardwood charcoal is made by firing the wood at temperatures between 400 and 700 degrees Celsius. The kiln is then sealed until the burning stops and the heat dies slowly over a period of time. Black charcoal is often soft and retains some bark. Many kinds of trees have been used over the years, including the famous oak charcoal from Osaka prefecture. Japanese charcoal for tea ceremony is made in several shapes and sizes, used together to create a beautiful arrangement. The oak burns well and long. There is often a piece of "branch charcoal" added, which is called "*edazumi*". It's a branch of oak, azalea or even camellia coated in lime to help start the coals. Such an arrangement will be gorgeous and produce an excellent, lively flame. The downside is that this kind of charcoal is expensive and the learning curve is higher, as it will take you time to learn how to arrange it properly.

Coconut Husk Charcoal: Charcoal made from compressed coconut husk is an environmentally-friendly and easy way to start using charcoal for tea. It is often easier to source non-toxic coconut husk charcoal than other kinds of coal. You will have to light it on a gas stove and then transfer the hot coals to your brazier. Since it is compressed, the pieces will all have a uniform size and shape—a hexagon with a hole in the center. This makes it easier to arrange, as you can use a chisel or cleaver to chop the pieces to the desired length and then light them. After they are lit, you can then transfer them to your brazier—piling them in if it is a closed brazier and arranging them if open. This is the charcoal students start learning from at the Hut. The ease of use and long burning time of coconut husk charcoal make it the best choice to start learning about using coals for tea.

White Charcoal: White charcoal is made by charring the wood at a relatively low temperature for some time, then, near the end of the process, raising the kiln temperature to about 1000 degrees Celsius to make the wood red-hot. The charcoal is then pulled out and quickly smothered with a covering of powder to cool it. The powder is a moist mixture of earth, sand and ash, and gives a whitish hue to the charcoal surface. The rapid rise in temperature, followed by a rapid cooling, incinerates the bark and leaves a smooth, hard surface. If you strike it, you'll hear a clear, metallic sound. White charcoal is excellent for a variety of uses. We add a little piece to the center of our arrangement every day. It makes the coals burn longer and hotter, changing the water texture noticeably. White charcoal is more expensive, but if you only use a small piece in the center of your arrangement, it will last a long time. You can't start it on gas (a gas flame would cause this kind of charcoal to crack and pop apart). So just place a raw piece, sawed with a hacksaw, in the center of your arrangement.

Dragon Eye Fruit Tree Charcoal: In Taiwan, tea is roasted using hardwood charcoal from the dragon eye tree, which is also renowned for its delicious fruit. It produces a great flame that also boils amazing water for tea. This is the most beloved of all charcoal at our center. It burns with a lively flame and has a glorious odor. It takes some skill to arrange the large pieces in an open brazier, but once you do it can heat up some amazing water. If you learn how to manage the temperature, covering pieces with ash when you aren't using it, such a hardwood coal can burn for days. Like the wonderful flavors it imparts to roasted oolongs, this charcoal makes great water for tea. This kind of coal also cannot be started on a gas flame, so you will need a fire-starter to get it going. We have also found that you can age dragon eye charcoal. We have some twenty-year-old pieces that we reserve for the best tea sessions, as they produce amazing water.

Olive Pit Charcoal: When using a small, closed brazier there is no better charcoal than olive pits. It is great for maintaining temperature on a smaller kettle that water is transferred to. In this way, you can boil a large kettle outside on a larger charcoal fire and then pour the water into a small kettle on a little brazier, as you would with a gas and alcohol setup. The oils in the olive pits make the flame burn strong and concentrated. They also last a surprisingly long time, given how small they are. We often use olive pit charcoal when brewing traditional gongfu tea with a small, ceramic side-handle kettle on a traditional Mulberry Creek stove.

Laying Charcoal

There really is a lifetime of skill in each and every aspect of tea, which is why it is a discipline of mastery (gongfu). Most of what is needed to master charcoal arranging for tea will have to be learned in practice, and will depend greatly on whether you are preparing bowl tea, gongfu tea or a Japanese tea ceremony. The easiest way to get started is to get a closed brazier. You may want to wash off your coals when they arrive to remove dust. Simply hose them off with a spray nozzle and let them dry out in the sun. In that way, you can also learn to pick out the pieces that are misfired. Look for shiny inconsistencies. These pieces can be used to purify the air, be placed around your puerh storage cabinet or even in your water urn. Then, pack the closed kettle around a fire-starter, using a long lighter to reach in and get it going. After the fire-starter burns down, fan the coals until you have a nice flame and carry the brazier in to your tea space before it gets hot (unless you choose to heat your kettle outdoors).

The most important thing about your charcoal arrangement is what is called "martial heat". The ideal is to heat the kettle as quickly and evenly as possible. When the heat is spread evenly it makes smoother water. For that, you will want a nice, lively, flaming arrangement of coals. Also, the flames greatly reduce the carbon monoxide, making an indoor arrangement healthier (you will still need proper ventilation, of course). The greatest heat isn't in the charcoal, actually; it is in the spaces between the pieces. There is a great and deep Daoist wisdom in that. As you practice, pay attention to the way the pieces interact with each other. You will soon realize that most of the heat comes from the spaces between the coals.

Be careful and have fun harnessing fire for tea. Treat fire with respect and love, as you do water and Tea. The rewards are more than better heat, for this alchemy changes your heart!

掌握火為茶

Mastering Fire

An Interview with Master Zhou Yu

-Wu De/Zhou Yu

Wu De sat down with Master Zhou to talk about fire and its role in the eta ceremony. Learning from the generations above us is one of the highlights of living in Taiwan. Zhou Yu is the founder of Taiwan's oldest and most famous tea house, Wistaria. He has decades of experience with tea on all levels. Like most tea masters, he is hospitable and generous with his time and wisdom.

There is an old Chinese adage that "water is the Mother of Tea, a teapot its Father and fire its Teacher." There seems to be a lot of discussion about the importance of proper water—source and storage—as well as a lot of books and articles on the best kinds of teaware; but little is ever said about the role fire plays in the preparation of fine tea. I thought I would sit down with a master and get some ideas about what role fire plays, and the ways in which it can 'teach' our tea.

In most Far Eastern philosophies, including Chinese, Korean and Japanese, the world is divided into five elements, called "*wu shing*" in Chinese: water, fire, earth, wood and metal. To the ancient tea sages, the perfection and balance of all these elements was necessary in order to create the best cup of tea. Lu Yu himself carved elemental symbols on all of his teaware and spoke at length about how to find the perfect leaf (wood), water and fire, as well as how to mix them together into "liquor like the dew of Heaven." Like Zhou Yu, he also had many ideas about what made the ideal fire for tea preparation.

Zhou Yu mentioned that it was important to understand that in Chinese tea, one wants what is called "martial heat", which means that the water is boiled quickly. If the water is boiled too slowly, it will lose much of its Qi. This is especially important when using pure mountain spring water. For us, this advice is especially relevant since we hike up so many mountain stairs once a week to get our tea water. Zhou Yu suggested tasting different waters oneself, not only to establish water quality but also to compare different heating methods and help cultivate sensitivity. He poured out two teas, one heated quickly and one slowly, and I found that the second did in fact taste flat, and was rougher on the tongue and throat. Zhou Yu showed me that this second water had been boiled using an alcohol burner, common throughout his teashop. "These alcohol burners are actually not designed to boil the water, only to keep it warm. We have them because we bring

boiled water out from the back and these burners look nice and do a good job of keeping the water at a nice temperature."

After that Zhou Yu brought out two kettles to teach me another lesson about fire. He used one of the kettles until it was half empty/full (depending how you see it), before adding some cool water to the boiling water. He then poured a cup from each. I found that the unaffected water was much better. It was smoother, cleaner and since we were drinking good mountain spring water, it was easy to notice the difference in Qi. Zhou Yu said that we should always use all the water in the kettle, or dump out the last bit, before adding more. Adding cool water to hot water shocks the Qi of the water and takes away some of its smoothness. I experimented with this more at home and found that almost every time I could identify the water that had been affected in this way, and always in a negative way.

Knowing that different teas prefer different temperatures of water, I asked Zhou Yu whether we should first allow the water to reach a rolling boil and then cool down, or try to reach the proper temperature in the initial heating. He said that at the tea shop they of course boiled the water for sanitary reasons. "Throughout history different tea sages have disagreed on this point. Some thought it better to boil first, some to gauge the proper temperature each time. I think it depends on the water," he said. He went on to suggest that some very clean mountain waters need not be boiled for sanitary reasons and therefore it might be better to never let them reach a rolling boil, as oxygen is depleted, and the texture or Qi changed. Whether or not we let the water boil, one should never let it boil for very long. Zhou Yu sent me to look at the section of the *Cha Jing* in which Lu Yu discusses the best water sources. He says that the best waters are mountain springs and rivers. He then goes on to say that the water shouldn't have too much Yang energy, and therefore shouldn't come from turbulent,

churned water. Zhou Yu said that a rolling boil was in effect the same as a cataract. However, he did seem to think this point of boiling or not of minor importance, and immediately launched into a longer lecture about using the senses to develop sensitivity.

In one of his favorite lectures, Zhou Yu reminded me that sensitivity, refinement and real appreciation come when the senses are aligned with what we are experiencing—when the mind is free of discursive thought and focused on the moment at hand. For that he suggested connecting to the fire in tea preparation as directly as possible: "Feel the temperature through the handle of your kettle, listen to the boiling as 'the wind soughing through the pines'; and then when it is time, you'll know." Watching his gentle old hands lift the kettle and quietly cover the pot and leaves said more to me than the words he had used. To master the Way of Tea, we must make it a part of our lives, a part of us. That means that the process of brewing tea has to flow through us, as our intuition finds the point at which the water is ready and determines the stream that will embrace the leaves. And the way in which the water is poured is perhaps the point at which one's technique becomes most evident. Beyond that it's all mind and the absence of mind.

Zhou Yu said that the ultimate form of fire is of course hardwood charcoal. "Losing touch with the elements and with Nature is the saddest romantic tragedy in the history of humankind", he remarks poignantly, and one is left with the feeling that he was born in the wrong age. He reminded me that tea is not a beverage to quench thirst, though it sometimes is made in that way. Truly, most everyone—no matter what culture or method—brews tea to relax, whether alone or with friends. Like the true master, Zhou Yu asked me to wonder how one could ever rush relaxation. "Most people think using hardwood charcoal is a hassle, when actually it just takes a few extra minutes and the rewards are well worth the effort. I would never brew any of my higher quality teas without it." Like most masters I've had tea with, Zhou Yu seeks to refine the tea experience with the best leaves, purest water, antique teaware and hardwood charcoal. I, too, have found that the water heated with charcoal is very different, in an almost indescribable way. The temperature is always more direct, the water brighter and stronger in Qi. The ambience such a brazier brings to the experience and the effect it has on the water are only the beginning for masters like Zhou Yu, who recognize more subtle levels where all the elements are working together harmoniously. "Without charcoal, you're missing the element of fire, and your five elements (*wu shing*) have become four", he says.

Lu Yu also devoted much of his time to finding the purest water and fire for tea preparation, and through that process a connection to Nature. "In tea, there aren't any short cuts: to merely pluck tea from the shade and dry it on a cool evening is not to truly process it; to sip it for flavor or sniff at it is not to be discriminating; to bring along a rusty old brazier or a stinky bowl is not proper teaware. Resinous firewood or charcoal from one's kitchen do not make a seemly fire. Gathering water from turbulent rapids, dams or flood water is not suitable for tea…," he says in the *Cha Jing*. We could replace some of his proscriptions with the contraptions and gimmicks used to cheapen tea nowadays and make the process easier, less connected—to Nature and ourselves—and other forms of neglect that have set in since the time when Lu Yu wandered the mountain crags alone,

his teaware in tow; finding his own leaves, roasting and grinding them in the shade of a bamboo grove. He would carefully remove the fresh water he'd collected from the spring below and light the charcoal he had made at home and carried in an elegant box within his basket. Can you see him sitting there, the sun setting behind the distant peaks?

There really is a special affinity between Man and fire that speaks of Nature, lonely vistas and time that is free and open. You can't rush a fire. You can't turn a knob and control it. It doesn't come on and off when you want. It requires care and skill to ignite properly, and effort to maintain and master; but once you've experienced the joy of sitting next to a portable brazier or sunken hearth and boiled your water in this way, tasting the difference in quality the use of charcoal has on the water's temperature and depth, you'll understand why masters like Zhou Yu would never even consider brewing their better teas without it.

A lot of the highest quality teas are also very rare. Because of that, Zhou Yu stressed to me, it is very important that we take the time to truly appreciate them. Many old teas are getting rarer and more expensive over time. It would be a shame for all the future tea lovers who may never get a chance to drink a tea like *Song Pin*, for example, if those who have had the chance to try it have done so too quickly and capriciously, without fully enjoying the tea. "To me, a big part of that is taking the time to get the right water, lighting some charcoal and sitting back with plenty of time to just be with the tea", he says.

It isn't always easy to get a true tea master to talk, especially at length, and Zhou Yu was happier to show me what he meant than to talk about it. He left and returned with a Qing Dynasty *zisha* pot filled with some old puerh from my grandfather's day. We hushed up and let the charcoal do the work. I took his advice and let its warmth and placid aroma fill me. As my thoughts started to thin, the water started to sing, first quietly like the tuning of instruments, but slowly gathering to become a symphony. A few minutes later and a soft, old hand silenced it. As the water steamed and poured over the small pot, permeating the tea, I thought perhaps I understood the lesson the fire had taught it…

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 Stephanie Ayres:

It was upon coming back to Falmouth in the south-west of England for my second year of studying illustration that I was introduced to a beautifully adorned, small shop that seemed to slip by unnoticed for most of the general public. It was where I was to find a peaceful sanctuary; it was where I discovered Tea.

The small shop in question was The Essence of Tea run by David and Kathy Collen. I feel blessed to have been given a year and a half to experience tea drinking in such a beautiful way, and what an incredible bonus that it was on my doorstep. From first sip, I was in love. I think the first proper tea that I tasted was a 2010 Sun Moon Lake, on a balmy September afternoon. To this day, Hong Shui & Shui Xian remain some of my favorites, and the taste of delicious 1980's bamboo *tuocha* just will not leave my memory.

I jumped at the chance to learn more about tea, and was given that opportunity in the form of attending an evening tea class every week. I have to say that at that point, I was more focused on writing notes than being fully present with the teas. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that when we catch ourselves being not fully present, that we are all constantly learning how to be with ourselves, and with Tea.

During my illustration degree, it was a place of refuge, and as I always had my trusty sketchbook to hand, inevitably, I took to drawing the teaware and my surroundings. I loved all the different textures. Eventually David and Kathy asked me to illustrate the wrappers for their 2012 Puerh teas. It was such an honor to have my work nestled up against Tea, and I am forever grateful to have had that opportunity.

It was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to the tea shop when it closed. Drinking tea from the 1920's in the last tea ceremony in that shop was one I will never forget (although the name of the tea escapes me!) In particular, a moth landing on my nose nearing the end of the evening brought smiles and joy into my heart.

Since then, I've fallen in love with teaware. I sat spellbound, watching Master Zhou Qi Kun craft a teapot in under two hours, along with Master Lin's evocative commentary. I will forever remember the likening of the handle of the teapot to the reins of a horse, having to rein in the energy from the spout of the teapot and create balance. Poetry such as this can only melt the heart. I have since attended pottery classes, and made some very rudimentary slab-built teapots. It is my wish that some day I can find someone to apprentice under, so that I can learn this art more fully, and create a lid that actually fits! (Just how they manage it is beyond me.)

Tea has always brought me home, and given me a sense of peace and comfort. It has connected me back to myself and the Earth, and opened my heart once again. I wish to continue to deepen my rudimentary knowledge of Tea, falling deeper and deeper in love.

May we all fall in love with Tea and each other, more and more with each passing cup.

Stephanie's beautiful, tea-inspired artwork is this month's gift. We have made some small prints of a few of our favorites. You can use them as decoration or even as a postcard.

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. 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 for more info. In Madrid, Spain, GTH member Helena hosts a monthly GTH session. Contact her at helenaharo@hotmail.com

In Moscow, Russia, there are frequent tea events. Contact Tea Hut member Ivan at teeabai@gmail.com or Denis at chikchik25@gmail.com for details.

In Nice, France, GTH member Sabine holds regular tea events at the Museum of Asiatic Arts. You can email her at sabine@letempsdunthe.com.

In Melbourne, Australia, Lindsey hosts Friday night tea sessions at 7/7:30 pm. Contact her at lindseylou31@gmail.com

In Brisbane, Australia, Matty and Lesley host a monthly ceremony on the first Sunday of every month. Contact them at mattychi@gmail.com

In Tallinn, Estonia, *Chado* tea shop holds events most Friday evenings at 7 pm. Contact events@firstflush.ee for more details. In Tartu, there are tea gatherings held every Wednesday evenings. Contact kaarel.kilk@hotmail.com for more information.

In Almere, The Netherlands, GTH member Jasper holds tea events every 4th Tuesday of the month at 7:45 pm. Email him at hermansjasper@gmail.com.

August Affirmation

Like fire, I convey energy from beyond myself.

Do I feel my energy to be limited or do I feel connected to larger systems at my disposal? Is it possible that energy is boundless through me?

Center News

Before you visit, check out the center's website (www.teasagehut.org) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. We've had a big increase in our number of guests lately, so if possible please contact us well in advance to arrange a visit.

Our 2015 Light Meets Life cakes are here. There are some amazing teas this year. Check the site regularly for details. (Evening Sky is going fast, so if you want one you should order soon!)

If you haven't yet, you should listen to Wu De's podcast on Zen and tea with Rich Roll (www.richroll.com). Please leave a comment on his site to help support us!

Wu De will be in Holland, Belgium and Estonia late this month and early September. Contact us for details.

Check out our new website! We now have a page for discussing the Tea of the Month and Gongfu Tea Tips: (www.globalteahut.org)

Love is like a friendship caught on fire. In the beginning a flame, very pretty, often hot and fierce, but still only light and flickering. As love grows older, our hearts mature and our love becomes as coals, deep-burning and unquenchable.

—Bruce Lee

www.globalteahut.org