



Global Tea Art

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

March 2016

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OUR 50TH ISSUE:

RED TEA

HISTORY, PRODUCTION
BREWING & LORE

RUBY RED, TAIWAN 18



RUBY RED

It is really wonderful to reach this milestone of fifty issues! This month, we're going to explore the genre of red tea, from history to production, its beginnings in the East to its journey West. And to honor the tea we all wake up to, we're sharing a rare and amazing tea called "Ruby Red" from Sun Moon Lake!

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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From the Editor

In March, the weather starts to shift in Taiwan. We find ourselves reaching more for red teas, which are good all-year-round teas. Red teas wake us up in the morning, making the shift from the Yin of night to the Yang of day more fluid and comfortable. In the same way, they seem to mark the change in seasons well, especially from the cold winter months into the warmth and sun of a Lunar New Year.

Red tea is amongst our favorite kinds of tea because it is one of the simplest to produce and prepare, which makes it the perfect topic to start the new lunar year of Global Tea Hut. We must remember to return to the basics, as they are the foundation of our tea practice. If I had to choose from amongst the many benefits that Tea has brought to my life, learning to celebrate simplicity would be the brightest and most influential lessons that I have learned. Tea has taught me to adore the ordinary, to rest in the simplest moment and to celebrate the way the sun highlights a pot, the warmth of a bowl or the glance of a dear friend. And red tea, as well as this month of Global Tea Hut devoted to it, will help remind us all to do the same.

This whole issue is the first in a series devoted to the seven genres of tea. Over the next year or so, we plan to find rare and interesting green, yellow, white, black and puerh teas and fill an issue with articles on the history, processing, lore and spirit of each of these kinds of tea. This month, we are starting with the second of these (we covered puerh in September, 2014). But first, let's discuss some Global Tea Hut updates.

As I mentioned last month, don't shake your envelope up and down for a gift this month. You won't find it. We are using the budget we ordinarily spend on gifts to build an amazing website that will connect all of you to each other. We know that many of you love these small gifts, and we very much love discussing, planning, finding and wrapping them with love to send to you. But we needed a way to fund the new website, and thought that making this new site your three-month gift was the perfect idea. What do you think? Are you happy with that? My guess is that you'll want to know more about the site before deciding.

We are still mapping out everything that will go into this, and the ideas are amazing. Some of the features we are hoping to include are: a profile you can update, including your pictures, a way to meet other members or have Global Tea Hut travelers stay with you, an ability to post events and invite people (even from outside



the community), private messages, a global event feed, and much more. If you have any ideas or things you'd like to see the site do, please feel free to contact us through our website. We would love to include you in the creation process, as it will be much more your website than ours.

Unbelievable to reach fifty issues together! Fifty teas and fifty months of sharing love and light around the world! Watch the special video recounting the changes in Global Tea Hut over time on the video webpage.



Further Reading

- 1) *Tea of the Month, Issue 43, Aug. 2015, pp. 3-8*
- 2) *Sun Moon Lake, Issue 19, Aug. 2013, pp. 20-22*
- 3) *The Seven Genres of Tea, Issue 39, Apr. 2015, pp. 33-38*
- 4) *Oxidation & Fermentation, Issue 26, Mar. 2014, pp. 6-7*
- 5) *Characteristics of Fine Tea, Issue 29, Jun. 2014, pp. 10-11*
- 6) *Introduction to Chaxi, Issue 47, Dec. 2015, pp. 19-24*



Tea of the

North

When you see just how much variety there is in the tea world, you can't help but feel some awe, as well as a sense of great excitement and adventure. There is so much to learn, so many teas to taste and so many cups to share! Some of the famous varieties of tea are wild mutations, created by the energies of Nature and Earth, while others are the result of the genius of generations of farmers and masters who devoted their lives to the Leaf. And looking back at the many millennia of culture, heritage and spirit that have gone into tea, a Chajin (tea person) can't help but be overwhelmed with gratitude.

Many authors, especially in English, write that "all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in teas are all in the processing." There is some measure of truth in this, but it is also potentially misleading. It is important to remember that processing methods developed over time in response to certain varieties of tea, which in turn evolved in response to a particular terroir. Farmers were learning, honing their skills through some trial and error, as well as through a deep connection to a life of tea, trying to process their local varieties in a way that would highlight their greatest

qualities and fulfill the tea's potential. It would not be correct to say that oolong, for example, is just a method of processing tea, because that processing was advanced to suit certain varieties of tea. And as varieties have changed, moving from place to place (whether naturally or carried by people), so too have processing skills adapted and changed, creating a whole array of different teas.

Nowadays, there is a lot of experimentation. Farmers process teas from one region in the way that they are made elsewhere, trying Fujianese oolong processing techniques on Darjeeling leaves, for example. Like most changes, this trend is due to faster communication, more access to information, easier travel and the greater connection to the rest of the tea world that modern farmers enjoy. And some of this innovation is great. Some new teas sparkle with spirit and feel like they were made with the insight that has always pushed any art forward. Others are created out of marketing—to make cheap and inferior copies of the much better original. In other words, the new experiments do occasionally result in amazing teas, like the purple red tea from Dehong many of us know and love,

but the majority of such teas don't turn out well, like the modern attempts to cultivate Taiwan's Three Daughters, as well as *Chin Shin* oolong, in Vietnam and Mainland China. No matter how nice the trees or the skill of the farmer, you can't find the same quality elsewhere. In other words, a Taiwanese tea processed like a Wuyi Cliff Tea might be a nice tea in its own right, but it will never compare to a real Cliff Tea, at least not by Cliff Tea standards.

When it comes to Taiwanese varieties, there is a lot of misinformation and debate about details. This makes it difficult for tea lovers like us to explore the history and science of new Taiwanese teas. But a basic understanding is worth the effort, and listening to different farmers' accounts of local tea varieties is often interesting, and often highlights their pride and sense of place in the mountain they were born on. In exploring the amazing variety of tea that has made Taiwan famous, we can learn about the heritage, culture and history of tea here, and also about the amazing variety of energy and healing available through tea.



Ruby Red



Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan



Red Tea



Han Chinese/Taiwanese



~800 Meters

*Check out the Tea of
the Month video to
learn more!*



www.globalteahut.org/videos



Varietals & Cultivars

As you may remember, there are two main varietals of tea: small leaf and large leaf. Originally, all tea comes from the forests in and around Southwest China: Yunnan, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Eastern India. The original trees are single-trunked, with large wide crowns that can grow several meters in height. The roots also grow downwards, often extending deeper than smaller leaf varietals. Then, as tea traveled north and east—naturally or by human hands—it adapted to colder, sometimes higher, climates and terroirs. These trees, called “small leaf,” slowly evolved to have 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. In fact, they are so small in places like Japan that when they are rolled, they look like little needles (like *sencha* or *gyokuro*).

Like many plants, every tea seed is unique, allowing it to rapidly adapt in new environs. And without any of the grafting technology used in plantation agriculture today, all the traditional teas were what we call “living tea,” which, as many of you will remember, means that they were seed-propagated, allowed room to grow up (and between each tree), lived in biodiversity, weren’t irrigated and were cultivated with respect. (Sadly, most tea is not living tea these days.) The early farmers quickly realized that when you moved tea to a new location, it changed completely to suit its new home. Because of this, they called it “Immovable,” celebrating that a region’s tea trees were forever bound to that region and that region alone. As a sacred herb, tea has always decorated Chinese relationships, from business deals to spiritual transmissions between Zen master and student, offerings to the gods and even weddings. One of the reasons why tea was used to solidify important relationships is that they also

hoped these commitments would be “Immovable.”

It should therefore come as no surprise that the tea trees planted in Taiwan quickly developed unique personalities due to the terroir here. It’s amazing how quickly this happens, especially when skilled craftsmen are involved. Not only do the trees evolve into new varietals naturally, but farmers begin to create new hybrids, researching the differences in search of wonderful new teas. Here we can make an important distinction between varietals and cultivars. The former is a natural distinction caused by tea adapting and evolving in new terroirs. A cultivar, on the other hand, is a manmade kind of tea, produced by crossing strains and exerting genetic pressure on tea trees over many generations. Our tea of the month is a cultivar.

Farmers also adapt their processing methodologies over time, listening to how the leaves want to be dried. Great skill (*gongfu*) in any

art always involves listening to and deeply understanding the medium. In tea brewing, for example, we try to brew the tea as it wants to be brewed. Similarly, master tea makers adapt their processing to suit the leaves, the season, the rainfall, etc. Saying that they processed the tea the way it “wanted” to be processed is perhaps misleading, but English lacks the proper sentiment. More literally, what we mean by this is that as new varietals evolved to new environments, influenced by the unique terroir there, the farmers also evolved their processing—testing and experimenting, “listening” to the results as they drank each year’s tea, and slowly changing their methods to bring out the best in the tea. In fact, bringing out the best qualities of that varietal is what we mean by processing the tea the way it “wants” to be processed. You could say the same about brewing any particular tea.



Red tea is then rolled for an exceptionally long time as well, to continue the oxidation and break down the cells. It literally turns into a pasty mass in the process. It is the most oxidized of all teas!



History

With the help of the Portuguese, Dutch, and later the Japanese, Taiwan tea production would gain international repute. From 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was under Japanese rule. At that time, the Japanese sought to increase all agricultural production island-wide, and took a great interest in Taiwanese tea. 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 because the terroir is similar to the original homes 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.

With the help of local farmers, the Japanese formed the Taiwan Oolong Tea Research and Development Association in 1926. They focused on research into new varieties of tea that would be suited to different terroirs around the island. They hoped to optimize desirable flavors, aromas and other characteristics in Taiwanese teas and also promote a greater resistance to pests, perhaps unknowingly foretelling the detrimental effects pesticides could have on sustainable agriculture. And this organization survived the war, continuing this project after the Japanese were expelled. They still have a large research area in Sun Moon Lake, still devoted to experimental cultivars, and are even conducting a long-term study on the detrimental effects of pesticide use.

Many unique varieties were created to suit Taiwan. In the 1970s the three most famous varieties unique to Taiwan began commercial production, often called the

“Three Daughters”: Golden Lily (*Jing Shuan*), Kingfisher Jade (*Tsui Yu*) and Four Seasons Spring (*Si Ji Chun*). Some of you who have been in the Hut for a while will remember that we sent you all three of Mr. Xie’s daughters. The Three Daughters have played a large role in propelling Taiwanese tea to such prominence in the tea world over the last few decades—an eminence that has brought positive influences to the island, in the great surge of economic growth for farmers and aboriginals, as well as the development of one of the world’s richest and most vibrant tea cultures, but also negative influences, as the great increase in demand for Taiwanese tea has also increased the need for agrochemicals and therefore caused a lot of environmental destruction.

Of the Three Daughters, only Four Seasons Spring is a natural variety. Golden Lily and Kingfisher Jade are manmade cultivars developed to be heartier and resist pests.

Even though the Three Daughters have been instrumental in promoting Taiwanese tea culture, there is another famous manmade cultivar we'd like to introduce this month, called "Ruby Red (*Hong Yu*)." In 1933, Mr. Kuo Shao-San overcame a series of hardships to bring back a special type of red tea from the Chi-ang Mai Mountains of Myanmar. He called the trees "Zen Tea." He planted these seeds in Puli, Taiwan and they flourished into a "Zen Tea" garden.

Currently, amongst all the types of Sun Moon Lake red tea, Taiwan Cultivar No. 18 (Ruby Red) and Taiwan Cultivar No. 8 (Assam red tea, like the "Elevation" we send out every year) are the most popular. Taiwan Cultivar No. 18 is a hybrid of the large leaf "Zen Tea" trees from Myanmar and wild indigenous Taiwanese trees. The artificial crossing was accomplished at the Yuchih Branch of the Tea Research and Extension Station in the 1950s, and had the experiment number of 40-58, so the local farmers also called the hybrid "40-58" or sometimes just "58." It was not until 1999 that the "40-58" hybrid passed the cultivar nomenclature review and was officially named "Taiwan Cultivar No. 18." The common name "Ruby Red" was chosen through an open selection process, involving many Taiwanese tea lovers, in 2003.

Tea of the Month

Ruby Red has one of the most distinct flavors of any tea on earth, which is what caught the experimenters' attention in the first place. Though this cultivar was developed as part of the ongoing research to create varieties that have higher yields and are more pest-resistant, Ruby Red was quickly recognized as delicious, with a very unique flavor unlike all other tea. Its creation was therefore different than the other

daughters of Taiwan. While their flavors are also unique, and were to some extent enhanced and encouraged over time, they were noticed and promoted primarily for other reasons, like Four Seasons Spring's increased yield. Ruby Red, on the other hand, is a cultivar born, grown and promoted mostly for its exceptional flavor. And when you drink it, you will see why. Repeating that it tastes like no other tea again and again still won't prepare you for that first sip!

Ruby Red tastes of cinnamon and wintergreen or mint, in some ratio, depending on whom you ask and which Ruby Red they are drinking. It unfolds in a complexity that few red teas are capable of. And your exclamation of "Wow!" is probably not much different from the first farmers who recognized the new cultivar. As Master Lin always says, "If and until you try a fine tea, it's too hard to tell."

Ruby Red is a difficult tea to produce. The yield is low and it requires more work than other kinds of red tea. You can read that red tea is "fully" oxidized, but that actually isn't possible. But it is the most oxidized of all tea. Most red tea is processed in three to four 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 a very long process, usually lasting from twelve to twenty-four hours. It is then rolled for an exceptionally long time as well, to continue the oxidation and to break down the cells. It literally turns into a pasty mass in the process. Then it is dried, usually in an oven. Ruby Red is more delicate and so the withering/oxidation and the rolling have to be controlled and monitored more. When it is well made, it is often expensive as well. We are very fortunate to have this month's tea, which was partially donated by Master Su in Sun Moon Lake, whom you can read about in the Further Reading section. If you've joined us through

the great teas we've shared so far, you can see that this is our year!

Ruby Red is an amazing tea. Try sharing it in the morning. If you can, wake up very early and have a dawn session with Ruby Red in some meditative space. You will find that its delicious flavor and excellent energy will change the rest of the day. We hope you enjoy this month's special tea as much as we do!

散落的葉子是禪



*Zen in hand,
The long and winding road
Feels less foreboding.
Letting go my staff,
I can walk on my own now.*

-Mu De

Ruby Red

Like so many of you, we also sit down with friends to share the Tea of the Month. And though we drank this Ruby Red at a different time than you, we are reminded once again of the interconnectedness we share within this global tea community. Just as we set out altar cups in acknowledgment of our tea brothers and sisters the world over, we also drank this tea with all of you in mind, knowing that somewhere under this global, thatched roof, you'll likely be doing the same! And just as you might discuss your experiences drinking this tea with your friends, we did the same:

☞ At the beginning of the session, many thoughts were running through my head. But after a couple of bowls, the sensations around my chest became more apparent, and I slowly became more aware of my heartbeat. Even as my mind floated from one thought to the next, the tea grounded me by allowing me to fall back into this heightened awareness around my heart.
-Ingrid Herrera, USA

☞ I really enjoyed this tea brewed in a side-handle teapot with as high a temperature as possible and a very short steeping time. This preserved the very pronounced flavor and aroma over many infusions while the high temperature invited the tea deeper into my body. The liquor was smooth and coating and easy to drink bowl after bowl. I felt uplifted and clear while drinking this tea, and at the same time, completely satisfied right where I was, appreciating the strong flavor of peppermint and cinnamon. It was excellent to drink on a cool and sunny morning shared with four amazing guests, leaving me satisfied and in high spirits after the tea session finally concluded.
-Shen Su, Canada/Taiwan

☞ This tea was fragrant and smooth. I was really surprised by its effect. Normally, I feel very uplifted yet grounded by red tea, and that is why I love to start my active day with it. This time, however, I felt that my energy relaxed, dropping down and I had to lie down. It felt like energy had to spread through my body. When I put my head on the pillow, I felt that the warmth of the tea was covering my body like a warm blanket, leaving me feeling cozy and nourished. **-Katarzyna Stryczniewicz, Poland**

☞ The first thing I noticed was a sweetness in the tea's aroma. But taking it in, the first sip felt strong and bold. It flowed smoothly, leaving an earthy taste in my mouth. Sitting with this tea, I felt really content and connected to all the elements around me—the wind outside, the rustle of the trees, the others at the table, sitting in silence and the Leaf, connecting us all. I had a really peaceful feeling and enjoyed many bowls.
-Serena Donnelly, New Zealand



Check out the video on
brewing tips now!

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Brewing Tips

Ruby Red can be made in a bowl or with a side-handle pot. Originally, all bowl tea was prepared as leaves in a bowl or boiled tea. The traditional kettles used to boil all Chinese herbs, including tea, were side-handle. Wu De developed side-handle tea brewing because of the great variety of tea in the modern world. A long time ago, there was little processing in tea, so all leaves could be dropped into the bowl or boiled. But nowadays, we have such a huge world of tea, and many varieties aren't nice directly in the bowl—some are teas with small bits that get into your mouth or teas that become too bitter when steeped for so long in the bowl. Side-handle tea, therefore, is a way of drinking all these teas with the same spirit of bowl tea, as simplicity and connection with Nature.

If you think you would rather focus on the energetic, meditative aspects of Ruby Red, you may want to put a few leaves in a bowl. The tea will be less patient, and maybe less delicious, but the session may be deeper and more inward. Conversely, if you are excited to try out the flavors in this amazingly delicious tea, you may want to steep it in a side-handle pot. Fortunately, we have sent you enough that you can try both if you want.

Red teas are usually forgiving, which means they are easier to brew (though Ruby Red is less so than other red teas). Red teas are nice when they are a bit strong, so either put a tiny bit more leaf than you are used to or steep this month's tea a tiny, tiny bit longer (not too much leaf/steeping time or it will be bitter). We don't like offering exact amounts, as this will depend on what size of pot you're using, what kind of fire, and so many other factors. It is better to grow a sensitivity to your own tea and teaware. You will know if you have put in too much, or steeped the tea too long. Tasting an under-steeped, as well as an over-steeped tea is an important experience for learning how to brew tea properly, and adjusting our mistakes is how we improve over time.



RED TEA

THE FURTHEST STATION ON THE TEA PROCESSING LINE

You may be surprised to learn that red tea is the most popular type of tea in the West. How is it that most Westerners drink red tea without ever having heard of red tea? Simple. It just isn't usually known by that name in the West.

In China, where red tea originated, it was (and is) known as *Hong Cha* (literally, “red tea”), after the reddish color of its infusions. However, early in the tea trade to the West, very little information was exchanged when the tea was handed over for silver. Even things like teas' names could be (and often were) terribly misunderstood or mangled in those days. And so it came to be that the name red tea was dropped in favor of “black tea,” which referred to the dark, withered leaves of the tea. (After all, these already dark leaves were likely made even darker by the long and salty boat journey from China to Europe and to America.) Therefore, a large part of the confusion came from the fact that the Chinese tended to differentiate tea based on the liquor, whereas Westerners looked at the leaf itself. The name “black tea” stuck in the West, but in recent

years there has been a shift toward more tea awareness and the spread of the term “red tea.”

What is Red Tea?

Unlike other tea types, red tea typically has leaves that dwell in the red-to-black range of the color spectrum. This includes the muted orange of *Dian Hong*, the deep rust of Assam Second Flush, the greenish-black of Darjeeling First Flush and the blue-blacks of many Keemun and Ceylon teas. Regardless of the color of the leaves, though, the infusion is typically dark and warm in color, i.e. deep tan, rust red or espresso brown. The colors of red tea infusions and leaves (which resulted in the names “red tea” and “black tea,” respectively) are both primarily the results of tea processing.

As we've explained in previous issues, different kinds of tea are processed differently. While processing is not the sole differentiating factor (varietals, terroir, harvest seasons and many other factors can make substantial differences), processing often has the most profound effect on how the liquor will look, taste

and feel by the time it reaches your teapot or bowl.

Oftentimes, Western authors mislead us by saying that all tea is the same plant and *only* differs in processing. Actually, of the seven genres of tea, this is really only true of red tea, which happens to be the most consumed tea in the West, which helps explain some of the confusion. The other six genres of tea are as much a varietal as they are a processing methodology. But you can process *any* tea as a red tea, and usually with nice results.

Long ago, all semi-oxidized tea was called “red tea.” There really wasn't a demarcation between oolong and red tea, and Chajin used the terms interchangeably. Red tea was just the final stop on the semi-oxidized line. Though red tea is sometimes called “fully oxidized,” that really isn't possible; but it is more heavily oxidized than any other genre of tea. Because it has more processing and more oxidation, red tea is stronger. The leaf has had more of its essence opened up. Even chemically, it has more tannins and caffeine, and is therefore more brisk and uplifting than all the other six genres of tea.



紅

茶

Red tea processing generally follows these steps:

1. **Harvesting**, either by hand or by machine.
2. **Heavy withering** (or “piling”). This step involves piling the tea in woven trays or in large troughs with fans to circulate air and remove moisture as it evaporates. The withering process reduces moisture content and initiates oxidation.
3. **Rolling** by machine or by hand for up to 90 minutes.* This breaks the cell walls and releases their essential oils, allowing the air to interact with otherwise trapped chemical components, furthering oxidation.
4. **Further oxidation**. This optional step entails additional exposure of the leaves’ essential oils to oxygen. It involves letting the tea sit for up to a few hours before the oxidation is halted with heat. This additional oxidation results in further changes in the tea’s flavor, aroma, color and impact on Qi when drunk.
5. **Baking or firing**. These quick, high-heat processes halt oxidation and dry the tea for storage.
6. **Sorting** by hand or machine. In this process, waste material (such as large stems and tiny, broken leaf fragments) is removed. In India, Sri Lanka and other countries geared toward mass production of red tea, different sizes (or “grades”) of leaves are divided into separate batches.
7. **Flavoring and blending**. These optional steps are usually reserved for commodity-grade teas and some specialty teas rather than handmade or single-batch teas. For example, teas like English Breakfast Tea and Afternoon Tea are typically blends of many different batches of tea, while teas like Earl Grey are typically made of blended teas that are flavored with essential oils and/or other ingredients. However, there are some handmade teas that are flavored or blended, such as true Lapsang Souchong from Wuyi Shan, which is aromatized with pine needle/bough smoke.
8. **Packing**. Tea leaves are stored in bags or boxes for shipping and the containers are labeled with the lot number, if applicable.

** In the case of CTC (Cut, Tear, Curl) Tea, rolling is combined with additional steps: the tea leaves are chopped into tiny pieces, causing them to quickly oxidize, and then rolled into pellets as it is further oxidized and dried. CTC processing is an efficient and cheap means of tea production, and is therefore commonly used in teabags or in less wealthy tea-drinking countries, such as India and Sri Lanka. CTC Tea is intended to release all its flavor very quickly; it usually lasts only one infusion or two to three boils.*

You may have noticed that three of the eight steps above involve oxidation. Heavy oxidation is the main differentiating factor between red tea processing and other types of tea processing. It is what brings out the deep colors and the aromas and flavors of fruit, malt and tobacco leaf in red tea. It’s also a factor in red tea’s relatively long shelf life.

There is some overlap between tea types with regard to oxidation.

For example, a heavily-oxidized oolong such as a traditional Wuyi Cliff Tea may be considered to be an oolong in China and a red tea (“black tea”) in the West, while a lighter oxidation red tea from Darjeeling or Nepal’s first flush (spring harvest) may be thought of as akin to an oolong. However, oolong tea entails several steps that are not utilized in red tea production, like shaking to bruise the edges of the

leaves, for example, differentiating it from red tea despite the occasional similarity in oxidation levels. Therefore, while oxidation is a key difference between red tea and other tea types, it is not the sole difference.

Red Tea’s History

The Ming Dynasty saw many developments in tea processing, including oolong tea, flower-scented tea and red tea. Later, in the Qing Dynasty, many of the teas developed during this age of innovation were evolved further.

As with any timeline detailing groundbreaking developments, there is some controversy over when the “first” red tea appears. Accordingly, there are several origin stories about red tea. Some claim that the appearance of Wuyi Cliff Tea (also known as “Congou black tea” in the West, and as we discussed above not really a red tea at all) in the 15th or 16th century heralded the age of red tea, while others credit it to the appearance of *Xiao Zhong* (“Souchong” in the West) in Fujian around 1730 or to various red teas that were developed in Qimen in the 1700s. Later, around 1875, the technique for making *Gongfu Hongc Cha* was introduced to the Anhui region, a major producer of *Qimen* (“Keemun”) red tea to this day.

Ultimately, which tea was the first red tea didn’t matter much to the local tea drinkers of the time—in general, red tea wasn’t very popular with them. However, starting in the early 1800s, the import markets in Europe, the American colonies and the Middle East couldn’t get enough red tea. Some attribute the international popularity of red tea in particular to red tea’s shelf stability (a necessity in long ocean journeys), while others say that it has more to do with the compatibility of the bold flavor profiles of red teas with the cuisines of Germany, England, France and other nations where red tea has become the default tea type.



It was this popularity that led to large-scale production of red tea in China, and to the eventual theft of tea seeds, tea plants and tea production techniques, which were taken by Scottish and English adventurer-entrepreneurs and transplanted to India and other colonial territories (such as modern day Sri Lanka and Kenya). These entrepreneurs took their limited knowledge of tea production and used it to fashion machines that replaced the handmade aspects of tea processing. The availability of cheap red tea fueled its popularity as a tea type further, making it the most popular category of tea in the West to this day.

Today, red tea is produced using this machine-driven approach in many countries, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. More

recently, machine-made red teas have appeared in Japan (where they are called *wakocha* or “Japanese red tea”), and machine-made red tea has even made its way back to China.

Meanwhile, green tea and oolong remain the most popular types of tea amongst tea drinkers in China. However, in recent years the interest in handmade and more traditionally made red tea has seen a resurgence in China, Taiwan and elsewhere, resulting in a wider availability of handmade red teas from China and Taiwan (including our Tea of the Month). For this and other reasons, the characteristics that red tea drinkers in China and Taiwan prefer tend to be different from the typical tea drinker in the West. Instead of looking for a dark color in the infusion or boiled liquor and a bold flavor that can handle milk and sugar,

these tea lovers seek out beautifully shaped leaves and infusions that are best savored without any additives. Also, while most red tea drinkers steep their leaves only once, those opting for more traditionally made red teas prefer to let the leaves open up gradually with many short infusions, savoring their tea patience and their inner spirit rather than gulping them from a to-go cup while eating a pastry on the way to the office.

Fortunately, this newfound appreciation for more traditional red teas is spreading beyond China and Taiwan. It is our hope that you will be able to further your own growing appreciation of red tea with this month’s Ruby Red, and to perhaps even spread the love for red tea in general.





THE RED RIVERS

A HISTORY OF RED TEA

-*Gan Hou* Article donated to us by Wushing Publications

Continuing our promise to increase authorship and translate more articles by Chinese tea experts, we've included this very informative journey through the history of red tea, especially in Taiwan. Tea is a vast world, and its history is deep and rich. The more we appreciate all the many generations of tea farmers, masters and teachers that have gotten us to this very bowl of Ruby Red, the more we'll treasure this month's ruby gem!

Not so long ago, puerh was usually brewed with chrysanthemums and enjoyed as an accompaniment to meals. But ever since people began putting it into small purple-sand Yixing pots used for brewing oolong tea in a gongfu style, its standing in the tea world has skyrocketed. Over the past two decades, the mainstream has begun to find puerh palatable enough to be had on its own, without the accompaniment of food. More recently, Taiwanese tea drinkers have begun a new experiment using the gongfu brewing style in small pots to brew red tea. As a result, we see that so-called “Gongfu” (made of small leaf, all-bud teas from Fujian that require more skill to process) and “Souchong” red teas, usually intended for export, have found their way into the connoisseur tea market. (Souchong is a varietal of red tea from Wuyi, *Lishan Xiao Zhong* in Mandarin, which literally translates to “a varietal from Lapu Mountain.” It is known for its smoky taste as the tea was originally withered above

people's cooking fires and took on the flavor of pine smoke. Nowadays this scenting is done intentionally.)

The gongfu brewing method is a mainstay of traditional tea culture; it is also the “orthodox” way to drink oolong tea. The teapot, which once played a supporting role, took center stage in the Ming Dynasty after the issue of an imperial decree that banned powdered tea in the form of cakes that were ground and roasted. Five hundred years of cultural development has fixed the teapot's place in the tea lover's heart, so that now it is an essential part of tea drinking around the world. This development naturally led to the introduction of gongfu tea culture, which in turn formed the gongfu tea industry and its characteristic method of tea-drinking. The manufacture of teaware has changed much from the era of tea cakes ground into powder, reflecting a remarkable shift in tea-processing infrastructure, the art and appreciation of teaware and, of course, the way that tea is prepared and shared.

Gongfu preparation was originally developed to brew oolong, which abounds in variety. Semi-fermented tea is roughly dividable into Taiwanese oolongs, Tieguanyin, originally from Anxi, Narcissus teas from Phoenix Mountain and Wuyi Cliff Tea. This kind of tea, and tea preparation, was therefore originally a local culture. Teabags, at the other extreme, are a distinct product of international commerce.

Before the global economy took shape, the only teas available in Mainland China were green and red teas. Green tea production goes back thousands of years. “Red tea” was the term applied to all semi-fermented teas in general, and also denoted the teas produced in the Fujian region.

The duration of oxidation determines the color and flavor of the tea. Leaves that are given no time to oxidize will be green after drying, whereas leaves that are allowed to oxidize will be a reddish color. Obviously, the green leaves are called “green tea,”

紅玉漫遊



and the reddish ones “red tea.” The length of the oxidation period determines how deep a color the leaves will have. Arresting oxidation through steam was perhaps the most ancient method. Firing tea, according to Luo Dan’s *The Origins of Wuyi*, was an improvement upon the tea processing methods of Anhui Province, introduced in 1395 AD. As for “red tea,” which, remember, once referred to all semi-oxidized tea, including what we call “oolong” today, in Wang Caotang’s 1717 *Discourse on Tea* we find the following record: “After rolling, Wuyi tea must be exposed to sunlight, spread out on a surface, raked, and then stirred when it begins to emit a fragrance.” In *An Anthology of Petty Matters of*

the Qing, Xu Ke of Zhejiang Province (1869-1928) gives a clearer and more complete record of green and red tea processing:

Green Tea Processing: *Place the tender, rolled leaves in a basket for steaming, or in a cauldron for stirring. When the leaves become sticky and fragrant, remove and spread them out on a flat surface. When they have been cooled, place the leaves in an oven, rolling them as they are baked so that they are allowed to dry gradually. Transfer them to an oven heated by a weak flame, turn and roll them until they are totally dry. This completes the process.*

Red Tea Processing: *This tea is a produced in the Fujian-Guangdong region. When the fresh leaves have yellowed under sunlight, place them in a trough, roll, then transfer to a large cauldron, firing until wilted. Cover with a piece of fabric, allowing the leaves to ferment until red; dry them to complete the process.*

(Farmers at the time didn’t differentiate between oxidation and fermentation, so there is only one Chinese term. This confusion still exists in rural areas even today.)



This tea production room dates back to 1889. The roasters were used to make oolong and the old winnower below was used in red tea as well as oolong production. It helped speed up the process of sorting leaves for sale.

These are actual tea boxes that were sealed more than a hundred years ago for export from Fujian, China. They have been on quite the journey! They belong to Master Lu, who we wrote about in January, 2015. He plans to open them later this year and try the tea inside. Exciting!



After the fifteenth century, the rise of a global economy left radical changes in its wake, as foreign merchants took tea to Europe. In 1607, when the Dutch sold Chinese Wuyi tea for hundreds of times its price in China, they opened the door to an export market that would last for centuries to come. Records from the reign of Emperor Xuan of Han detailing a domestic tea market date back to 59 AD. 1,688 years later, this regional product, considered lowliest among the “Seven Domestic Necessities,” became the main focus of a new global economy. The enormous profits and commercial oppor-

tunities it ended up creating went far beyond anything the feudal rulers of the preceding thousand years could have imagined.

The Dutch discovered Chinese tea, but it was the British who popularized it. By 1669, the competition between the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company for control of the tea market was in full swing. Then, in 1721, the British obtained exclusive purchasing rights and began exporting up to one million pounds of green and “black” tea a year. (Here, “black” tea refers to oolong and red tea, which the Brit-

ish called “black” tea on account of the dark color of the leaves.) The long time spent at sea affected the tea’s quality. The British eventually issued laws against imitations and substitutions, while also devising some way to produce tea for themselves. In 1780, having obtained a quantity of the much-sought-after tea seedlings of Guangzhou Province, the British began their large-scale tea cultivation operations in India, then later Java and Sri Lanka. According to William Ukers’ *All About Tea*, in 1830, George James Gordon successfully innovated upon Chinese tea-processing by effectively

simplifying the complex and difficult oolong-making procedure, which yielded Indian red tea of a highly consistent quality. In 1855, the British invented the mechanical tea cutter and tea mixer in response to the demands of red tea production, followed by the tea roller in 1872 and the tea dryer in 1874. Such a proliferation of machines to aid in tea production indicates that they saw manual labor as inefficient, and sadly began its decline. As the market in China began to shrivel, so too did the two-centuries-long tea boom that had flourished there—another change that gave rise to more changes...

In the wake of oolong's decline, as it was included in the fall of Chinese and Taiwanese "black" tea, Baozhong tea came to the fore. Taiwan began producing Baozhong in 1881 and tea-producing regions across the Mainland followed suit during this period. In 1876, Yu Gan Chen, a merchant from Anhui province, learned about British methods for producing red tea during his time in Guangzhou, gradually turning Qimen in Anhui into a red tea-producing region. 1874 was when so-called "Gongfu" red tea appeared in the village of Danyang in Fujian Province; it was also the year that Xing Village Souchong red tea appeared in Tongmuguan. Xiuning tea from Jiangxi Province is said to have been in production by 1823, eleven years before the "fully" oxidized, and now distinctly and truly "red" tea method of tea processing was developed by the British. As William Ukers notes in *All About Tea*, many new types of Gongfu red tea emerged in rapid succession at that time, indicating the refinement of old processing techniques and the appearance of new ones. Oolong comes from Fujian, green tea from Jiangxi, and some of these areas have effectively transformed into Gongfu-red-tea-producing regions that have continued for more than a hundred years, up to the present.

In the twentieth century, tea has become a global commodity. The makeup of the industry in tea-producing regions has stabilized, as the habits of consumers have also normalized. Red tea is particularly precise and stable in terms of quantity and quality. In the year 2000, the global output of tea was calculated to be 290 million tons, consisting of 70% red tea, 25% green tea and 5% other types. Red tea made its first appearance only a little over a century ago, and has since come to be enjoyed the world over for the simplicity involved in brewing it, its consistent quality and precise manufacturing specifications by mainstream standards. Green tea remains popular in specific areas, favored by the loyal tea-drinkers in non-minority ethnic communities. Both of these mainstream tea production methods have issues as well, often bringing teas to market at the expense of the environment. Oolong, on the other hand, is a delicacy among the minority groups of Fujian, Guangdong and Taiwan. Though it has some environmental and marketing issues as well, they are on a smaller scale. The mainstream tea market is less interested in oolong tea. The complicated brewing process, owing to the irregular quality of the leaves, has become an art form in itself. When we delve into tea, we find that it is all too easy to become enchanted by brewing tea gongfu, and exploring teas that require traditional skills to produce and brew.

In terms of its sensual qualities, red tea has a caramel aroma, a bright red tint and a flavor reminiscent of lychees or dragon-eye fruit, all of which encouraged tea lovers around the world to develop a taste for it very early on. From a factual perspective, the production, processing and distribution of the seven major kinds of tea differ in size and types of infrastructure, and there are even customs regarding the proper way to drink each of them. Moving into the highly inaccessible market of those

who brew tea gongfu style, the usual method for consuming red tea, with its single-use brewing, has changed. Nowadays, people brew red tea like oolong tea, with gradually longer steeping times. I anticipate that, like puerh, red tea will come to be considered a high-end tea product. Red tea will join the ranks of other fine teas, worthy of brewing with skill and attention to detail. Hopefully, that will shift its production towards greater artistry and more attention to the environment as well!



打旋的葉子 流動在時間裡

*We've been together before
In a different incarnation
And we loved each other then as well
And we sat down in contemplation
Many many many times you kissed
mine eyes
In Tír na nóg*

-Van the Man



Gongfu Experiments

A CLEAR PITCHER

UNDERSTANDING A FINE CUP OF TEA

-Sam Gibb

Without a measure to strive towards, we won't be able to progress in gongfu tea. Understanding what to look for in the cup will help us to conduct these experiments in a meaningful way. As we learn to distinguish and articulate what a fine cup of tea is, we can then evaluate our skill, teaware and brewing methodology.





Understanding the motivation to do these experiments every month may help some of you to try them with more verve. It certainly helped inspire me! Once we have considered and understand why we undertake gongfu experiments, we can then move onto the how. This month I'd like to explore the how and why of gongfu experimentation before beginning this month's experiment on what the effect of using a pitcher, or *cha hai* (茶海), has on tea brewing.

To understand why we experiment, we must understand a little bit about the origins of gongfu tea. It was developed in Southern China, mostly in Fujian and Guangdong, predominately by martial arts practitioners. These early pioneers of the art used it as a way to develop sensitivity, one-pointed focus and balance. Their lives were devoted to mastery, both inner and outer. Tea, like all art, does not leave room for middle ground. Our arrow either finds its mark or it does not. We pour a fine cup of tea, or we do not. Nothing else matters.

And so why practice? Why has this tradition stayed alive over the centuries? For me, refining and cul-

tivating sensitivity and the ability to focus and stay sharp, as well as the grace and fluidity of gongfu tea have all helped teach me to live well, not to mention giving me an art to express the insights I cultivate with others. Gongfu tea has changed my life!

Motivated by a powerful why, we still need a how. How do you know you are getting better? How do we measure the arrow's proximity to the mark? When we shoot an arrow, the mark is obvious. The bullseye is painted red before us. We can use it to track our progress. As we get closer, with more consistency, we know we are moving towards mastery. What then is our bullseye in tea brewing? How do we experiment, in other words? What is a fine cup of tea? Without a definition, you can't make progress. There is nothing to progress towards otherwise. We need some road signs to point us towards improvement.

We are fortunate to have such signs handed down to us in this tradition. As Master Lin often says, "If and until you try a fine tea, it is too hard to tell." Perhaps another way to express this would be "Until we see the bullseye, how can we know if the arrow has found its mark?"

These marks of a fine tea are not definitive and will require you to explore them on your own, but they do offer a bullseye for us to aim towards. And they are well designed and intelligent, I find. You can read more about them in previous issues. Though they mostly deal with how we can distinguish a fine cup of tea, they are also incredibly useful in gongfu tea brewing and experimentation, as our skill (or lack thereof) will influence the tea in all these ways.

There is a perspective in which all quality is ultimately arbitrary. As Wu De always says, "Put ten grams of cheap tea and ten grams of fine tea in the forest and they turn into ten grams of dirt." Quality in tea is never objective, but that doesn't mean the criteria we use for defining a fine cup of tea should be completely subjective and arbitrary, either. We need a working definition of quality in order to practice, and we need to base it on a rational, thought out, communicable and practical system that many of us can agree on. The following list is our tradition's attempt to do so. In the future, we can discuss all the reasons why we've chosen these criteria.

Qualities of a Fine Tea

1. Fine teas immediately splash up to the upper palate. The best teas travel across the top of the mouth, moving upwards as soon as they enter our mouths.
2. Great teas travel to the back of the mouth naturally, without having to push them back. They transform through the five flavors smoothly and quickly: bitter, astringent, *gan* (we'll define this one in a second), sour and sweet.
3. The tea is smooth in your mouth, feeling viscous and soft.
4. A nice tea also swallows naturally; you also need not push it down. Look for a pinch in the throat as a sure-fire sign of a lower quality tea or poor preparation.
5. Fine tea coats the mouth. Anywhere you take your attention within your mouth, you will feel the tea.
6. Fine tea also coats the throat, leaving it warm, soft and comfortable.
7. The best teas cause salivation.
8. Fine teas have a very important feature that the Chinese call "*hui gan*." *Gan* is akin to the minty, cool feeling of peppermint or the air on a cold winter's day. The word "*hui*" means "remembrance," so this term refers to a return of the *gan* on the breath. If you breathe out of your mouth after swallowing a fine tea, you'll find your breath is very comfortable, cool and refreshing.
9. Fine teas have a lingering fragrance that slowly rises up the back of the throat and into the nasal cavity. After drinking a fine tea, you sometimes get up and still find the aromatics in your nose.
10. Great teas have a deep Qi that relaxes you, slowly spreading to the whole body in various ways.

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Watch a video on the
Qualities of a Fine Tea now!



www.globalteahut.org/videos

Now that we have a bullseye, we can try to shoot an arrow. As already mentioned, this month we are going to observe the effect of introducing a pitcher, or *cha hai*, to our tea session. Pitchers are one of the common items we find on a tea table and often one of the first purchases a tea drinker makes. We are told they are important to distribute the liquor evenly between guests and to make it more convenient to dispense subsequent brews. But how many of us have tested the pitcher in regards to these ten factors?

What you will need

As in most of our experiments, we recommend a lightly-brewed tea. Too much flavor can distract you from the phenomena we are looking for. Most often we use a lightly-oxidized oolong tea, but you can use something else if you do not have one. Using a lighter tea allows us to focus on the ten qualities of a fine tea more easily without getting distracted by the flavor and aroma. It also helps to use a tea you are familiar with for the same reason. You will also need a brewing vessel. (A purple-sand Yixing pot is, of course, ideal for gongfu experiments like this one.) Two cups are also required, and if they are identical, you will find such experiments much easier to do. And finally, you will need a *cha hai*, a pitcher. For this experiment, the material the pitcher is made of is not important. After you have completed this experiment, you can compare pitchers made from different materials in another experiment.

The Experiment

Bring your water to temperature, then rinse your cups, pot and pitcher, followed by the tea. Pour from the pot evenly between the pitcher and one of the cups, and then pour the tea from the pitcher into the remaining cup. Take one cup in each hand and taste back and forth, beginning with the cup from the pitcher. It may help to have a two-column table drawn out with the signs of a fine cup of tea down the margin. That way you can make sure you are trying to experience all of them and compare the differences. It also helps to do this with a fellow tea lover and share your findings afterwards. Just remember, maintaining silence throughout will help you focus on your own experience!

If you do not have someone to do this experiment with, you can always go online to our discussion board on the website and share your findings with the whole community. We would love to hear from you!





HONG CHA GOES WEST

-James Norwood Pratt

We are blessed that Norwood once again put brush to paper for Global Tea Hut. There is no one more qualified to talk about red tea's emigration to the West. He literally wrote the book on it! Like all great authors, his reflections ask as many questions as they answer. Understanding the history of Tea's movement around the world helps us gain some perspective and context for the best English tea magazine (Global Tea Hut, of course), and what it has taken to get to the point in time that people around the world can read this issue!

Where does tea come from? All that can be said, finally, is that it comes from somewhere else and it takes us somewhere else. And that's about all Europeans were able to say once they were finally introduced to this miracle leaf about four hundred years ago, when Asians had already known tea for thousands of years.

And where might specific kinds of tea come from? The mists of antiquity swirl around the question. Can we really attribute controlled oxidation of the leaf to Zen's venerable Da Feng, abbot of Lao Zhu Ling temple near Huangshan in Anhui? I have been told his disciples in the late 1500s took the idea to Wuyi Mountain and gave birth to oolong, of which *hong cha* or what Westerners mistakenly call "black tea," is the dead-end outcome of leaf that's fully oxidized. Is this to be believed? What we can say with

certainty is that Europe's latecomers to tea-drinking readily recognized different kinds of tea as well as different levels of quality within each kind.

Thomas Twining opened for business in London in 1706 with eighteen different descriptions of tea, three of which were "Congou," almost certainly red tea (*hong cha*). "Congou¹ with Pekoe²" was his most expensive offering, followed by "Congou with Bohea.³"

Flash forward sixty-four years to other business records: Of the 340 chests of tea dumped overboard in Boston in 1773, 240 were Bohea, 15 Congou and 15 Souchong⁴, all of which were designated "black" tea. The terms "Congou," "Bohea" and "Souchong" are worthy of a separate dissertation on each, but they are definitely not interchangeable equivalents for "black tea," as the Chinese understood "*hong cha*"

and as the West clearly did not. But a Western preference for oxidized leaf was probably inevitable since its "keeping quality" surpassed that of green tea, none of which could retain springtime freshness after a six to nine month voyage in an East Indiaman "tea wagon."

Hong cha, destined to become popular in "barbarian lands," has never been much appreciated in China proper, where perhaps eighty percent of total consumption remains *lü cha*, green tea. *Hong cha* manufacture expanded under the Ming in their ever-growing government plantations, which produced *hei cha* (true black tea, often called "dark tea" in the West) and *hong cha* ("red tea") for export to Tibet and beyond the Wall. The principal consumers of these teas seem to have been the nomads who subsisted entirely on the milk and meat of their herds—black/red tea takes



A drawing of one of the tea clippers designed to bring tea to Europe faster. This one is called the “Taeping.” These ships reduced the time at sea significantly, and therefore improved the freshness of the tea.

to milk without complaint. Many of these black/red tea customers were “Manchu” (people from Manchuria), who managed to occupy Beijing in 1644 and establish a new emperor and new dynasty, the Qing. The Manchu elite misunderstood the Han people so completely that they had a proverbial saying, “They would steal the milk out of the tea if they could,” little guessing Chinese have an abhorrence of milk and would never dream of adding it to their (usually green) tea. An English eyewitness in 1793 reported that the Qing Emperor Qianlong “drank a tea mixture that would little please the Chinese, since the emperor’s tea was infused with as much milk as water.” *Hong cha* with milk might properly be called tea Manchu-style.

Up until the “Opium Wars” of 1839-1857, Guangzhou or “Canton” was the sole outlet for China tea and “barbarian” European trad-

ers were not allowed beyond its waterfront, where tea had to be brought from long distances, often on the backs of coolies. In 1811, the Qing emperor decreed it could be barged down the Min River to Fuzhou, a port much nearer Fujian’s black and oolong districts, and shipped coastwise to Canton, saving

more than a month’s time and three-fourths of the cost of transport. Black tea consumption boomed in Britain, but soon this trade was, for reasons of state, eliminated by imperial edict. Eventually the long-incubated Opium Wars “opened” China, allowing Europeans to penetrate the interior at will and purchase teas

Notes

1. This is the Western mispronunciation of the word “Gongfu,” which refers to teas that are made from small leaf bud sets. They are more difficult to process and considered finer red teas.
2. Pekoe tea grades were determined by how many of leaves were included in budsets. The highest quality “pekoe,” like that mentioned here consisted of leaf buds exclusively.
3. Western term for Wuyi tea.
4. A varietal red tea from Wuyi; “Lishan Xiao Zhong” in Mandarin, which literally translates to “a small leaf varietal from Li (Lapu) Mountain.” It is known for its smoky taste as the tea was originally withered above people’s cooking fires and took on the flavor of pine smoke. Nowadays this scenting is done intentionally.

at their origins. *Ichang Hong Cha* was prized as the strongest in the cup; like *Hankow Hong Cha*, it was bought on the spot and floated down the Yangtze to Shanghai for shipment. I recall from the '60s a brand still called "Hankow Bachelor Tea," a tribute to the solitary pleasures of a discriminating tea-man alone and far from London. China's tea exports soared from about 30 million pounds in 1830 to about 300 million in the peak year of 1886. *Hong cha* was the principal export, but British colonial tea would prove its nemesis.

Production of various teas was a traditional cottage industry in China, involving over 200,000 households in Fujian alone. Colonial tea, based on the plantation model and mechanized factories, was all red tea from the start. All the tea in China had always been organic, as we now might say, and was artisanal, mostly handmade, whereas in India, plantations often comprised hundreds of acres and even the earliest rolling machines did the work of eighty men in a day. For several decades, British merchants were obliged to blend the cheaper colonial tea from India, and later Ceylon, with Chinese *hong cha* to win market acceptance, but the end was inevitable.

The British established the Indian tea trade as an 'in-house' operation, to avoid bowing to China's terms on tea trade. There was an early need for blending with the then-superior Chinese tea. Eventually, as they developed the ability to grow and produce their own tea, the "Buy Empire" campaign began. This promoted tea consumption that they controlled from leaf to cup and eliminated the need for trade with China at all.

In the British Empire between the years 1890 and 1915, only gold mines paid greater dividends than tea plantations. Their "Buy Empire" campaign encouraged slanderous and deceptive negative propaganda regarding tea from China. One



advertisement was headlined "Black Death in China—7,000 victims—Danger of Plague Carried in the Cheap China Tea Now Used in So Many Blends." China lost its major market, for more tea was drunk in Great Britain than in all of Europe and the United States combined. All told, it was the tea trade's rise and collapse that proved the ruin of China and Chinatowns the world over, testifying to the resulting diaspora of the "sons of the Yellow Emperor."

The sufferings of the homeland of tea had not ended in 1958, and on Wednesday, October 22nd of that

year, the cantankerous London tea-man Edward Bramah offered Chinese red tea for sale once again, after long absence, at the London Auction, exactly 300 years to the day since its first appearance. London's venerable tea auctions lasted only two decades thereafter, but *hong cha's* recovery in the West continues still. Yunnans and Assams seem like cousins (are they not?), and Keemun sometimes struts like Darjeeling. Perhaps one day, we'll see *hong cha* called "red tea" and made with the quality it once had, for the modern tea lover to once again raise a cup to the birthplace of tea.





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 another kind of Chinese tea that is called “black tea.” So if you call red tea “black tea,” then what do you call black tea?

The reasons for this mistake are manifold, having to do with the long distances the tea traveled in chests to Europe, and, even more importantly, with a general lack of information for the first few hundred years tea was traded. Another layer to the confusion comes from the fact that the Chinese have always categorized tea based on the liquor, and Westerners used the leaf itself. The difference between black and red teas are much more obvious in the liquor than in the leaf, though the leaf is also slightly red to our eyes. Europeans weren’t allowed inland in those days, and never saw the tea trees or the processing (except some roasting). Buying through middlemen in broken pidgin, you can 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!

The basic difference between red and black tea is that red tea is heavily oxidized through prolonged withering and rolling during production and black tea is artificially fermented post-production. This usually happens through piling, which is akin to composting. Local bacteria are important in the post-production artificial fermentation of black tea, which means that it is a very regional kind of tea—its terroir includes the micro-environment, along with the trees, soil, weather, etc. Red tea, on the other hand, is the only genre of tea that is truly a production methodology, which can therefore be applied to any leaf.

*Old Grove Liu Bao
(December’s Tea of the Month)*

*Ruby Red
Taiwan 18*



茶席練習

A CHAXI PRACTICE

TOOLS FOR DECORATING YOUR STAGE

-Shen Su

Over the years, we've gotten so many requests to cover chaxi in Global Tea Hut. After introducing the philosophy and the elements you'll need, Shen now dives into the practicalities of arranging your stage. This is an excellent article, which will give you all the tools you need to start approaching the empty tea space ready to decorate for any tea on any occasion!

In this tradition of Cha Dao, we live a life of tea. And that includes all facets of our daily life beyond the tea ceremony itself. It's about carrying the meditative mind into all that we do, on and off the tea table. The closer an activity is to the tea table, the easier it is to understand its relationship to a tea practice. The further away from preparing tea we get, however, the more difficult it is to recognize the influence an activity has on our tea practice, like taking out the garbage, for example. But a tea practice is comprised of many skills, like working with charcoal, fetching water, cleaning, arranging flowers and so on. And each of these can be further refined as our understanding of Cha Dao moves from the gross to the subtle. It is, therefore, easier in the beginning to stay focused on the big picture, before zooming in on details—to start at the tea space, for example, before expanding into other areas of our lives. We can consider our tea space as a stage upon which to practice what will eventually become a way of life. And in a life of tea, the art of arranging elements on a “stage” to facilitate serving tea, and that stage itself are called “*chaxi*.”

My two previous articles on *chaxi* covered an introduction and a description of the elements used in arranging *chaxi*. In this article, I would like to offer some practical tips to help create a *chaxi* practice. I hope in our journey as Chajin (tea people) and through this series of articles, we can develop our skills towards successfully designing *chaxi* to suit any occasion.

Honoring the Guests & the Occasion

As host, when you invite guests to your house for a special occasion, the first thing you do is clean and then decorate. Out of respect for ourselves, our environment and our guests, we clean! After creating a tidy space, we decorate in a way that's appropriate to the occasion—be it a party, wedding, birthday or other special event. In this way, we welcome our guests into a clean and specially-beautified space that says, “I care about you and this time we're sharing together!” This is common practice around the world. Hosts

clean and decorate before opening their houses to guests.

Similarly, when we prepare for tea, we first clear off and clean the table and then decorate our tea stage. And the desire to honor our guests and the occasion is where our *chaxi* practice begins. A well thought out, well-arranged *chaxi* says to your guests: “You are important to me. This time and occasion are important to me. I am honored to welcome you into my home.” This is why creating a *chaxi* for every tea session is so important. It demonstrates a heart of respect that recognizes the uniqueness of the time you'll have together. It also celebrates the occasion itself—the precious time shared in sacred space, drinking tea. In Cha Dao, this quality is called, “one encounter, one chance.” This means that even if we drink the “same” tea with the “same” teaware in the “same” place every single day, this session is still unique because you and I and everything are always changing and never the same. Here and now is our one and only encounter, and our one chance to be together. And that is easier to remember for “special” occasions, like when serving tea

"You are important to me. This time and occasion are important to me. I am honored to welcome you into my home."



to an old friend traveling from afar. It is all the more challenging, however, when we drink tea with someone regularly, and thus that much more important to express, especially when drinking tea with oneself! In this way, we treat every occasion as special, and they certainly are! We need a *chaxi* therefore to welcome guests in a way that expresses our respect for them and celebrates the fact that this will be the first and last time we drink tea together...

*Tip for Honoring the Guest: One simple tip to begin setting the occasion apart is to avoid “sticky teaware!” By “sticky,” I mean teaware that you are reluctant to move—teaware that has a tendency to sit around and gather dust. This might be a heavy, clunky tea sink that is not convenient to move, or a piece of teaware you always use when you lack creativity. Sticky teaware that lingers on your table stagnating betrays an over-casual air, as if to say, “Well, if you’re here, I’m having tea anyway. Join me if you’d like, and if not, no worries.” By arranging a new *chaxi* for each occasion, with your specific guests in mind, you are developing the respect that will lay the foundation for a successful *chaxi* practice to take root. When you care about your guests, clean your space and decorate it in their honor, then this love and care will come through your *chaxi*, and the tea you serve, in a way that makes them feel like this occasion is special, and like they are welcome and loved.*

Keep Tea as the Focus

I have seen beautifully decorated *chaxi* at many tea events in which all of my attention went straight to the elegant and flashy elements of the design. The themes were obvious, but what was missing was the guest of honor—Tea Herself! This is akin to hosting a party and paying so much attention to the surface-level details that amidst all the lights and banners and music, you forget to invite the guest of honor! A well designed *chaxi* should always invite our attention towards the tea.

Your design should have a clearly defined subject and background. In other words, it should be clear from the beginning that tea is the subject. Every step in your design must stem from this understanding. *All* elements of your design should draw attention towards the tea. That includes the runner, tea pillow, scoop and stick, and any other element or utensil used. Tea sits at the center of the *chaxi*, so the elements should focus our attention on the center of the stage. Remember, *chaxi* can be translated as “tea stage.” And like in theater, the backdrops, music, lights and other elements should draw the audience’s attention to the star, not detract from her performance. Otherwise, Tea becomes

lost among the elements, without the due respect She deserves. It is, after all, a *tea* ceremony, so we must keep our priorities straight and remember for whom we’re throwing the party!

茶席



Don't Forget Function

In order to design a successful *chaxi* you must understand the occasion. Who's attending your session and how many guests are there? How are they feeling and what tea will suit them? What season is it? What's the weather like? What time of day is it? All of these questions and more should go into designing your *chaxi*. Intuition is also important, but in the beginning, stick to the functional questions first. When you understand the practicalities of the occasion, you will be able to choose a suitable tea, the appropriate brewing method, and design your *chaxi* accordingly.

It is important to focus first on function and then form. A *chaxi* that looks beautiful but doesn't function well is like a fine teapot that delights the eye but doesn't handle nicely when brewing tea. The ideal is almost always a *chaxi* that is functional and beautiful, like food that is both nutritious and delicious.

In the beginning, focusing on function first will be very helpful. Get the basics down and don't let your creativity get in the way of the session that's trying to unfold. This is not to say don't express yourself creatively, but rather remember that anything which draws attention to *you* is drawing attention *away* from the guest of honor, which is worth repeating throughout this discussion: *Tea Herself!*

Knowing which brewing method you will use makes a big difference in your *chaxi* design. *Chaxi* for gongfu tea, while not lacking in beauty, is often more contained around the brewer and is designed, like this method itself, to make the best cup of tea possible, which means it will naturally be a more function-oriented arrangement. Traditionally, gongfu tea was reserved for smaller parties of up to five people, which meant a smaller tea space. Therefore, additional ele-

ments quickly became unnecessary and only the essentials remained. When designing a *chaxi* for gongfu tea, stick with the necessary tools to brew the finest cup of tea possible, and then refine and highlight with decoration. Oftentimes, the essential elements themselves can be decorative, like choosing a fine wastewater basin, for example.

Chaxi for bowl tea, on the other hand, while not lacking in function, may appear to be more aesthetic in its design, which is appropriate for the purpose of the method: to share tea as medicine with sacred intention in ceremony. It's therefore easier to make the mistake of letting aesthetics override function, but the function should be well-integrated into the design of this kind of *chaxi* as well.

Bowl tea is appropriate for both large and small tea sessions, so utilizing space for function and form becomes more of a challenge.



Tip for Keeping Tea as the Focus: Your design should be simple. Less is more! My teacher almost always takes something away from my "completed" chaxi. If adding an element to your design doesn't absolutely offer an enhancement in form and/or function, as well as draw attention towards the subject, then it's probably superfluous. There are no neutral elements in a chaxi. If you feel it's neutral, then it is most likely detracting from the subject. Remove it. Simplify. Do so until your chaxi expresses what it needs to with as few elements as possible.

A *chaxi* for ten people is quite different than one for three. Knowing how many guests there will be plays a large role in the functional elements that will guide in the arrangement of a *chaxi* for this kind of ceremony.

Tip to Not Forget Function: In general, keep chaxi for larger gatherings simpler and lower to the table, with fewer elements that might easily become obstacles when serving so many people—obstacles to the one brewing, who will have to navigate them when handing out and collecting the many bowls, and obstacles to your guests' attention. When designing a chaxi for bowl tea, I always sit at the brewer's seat first to see how it feels functionally, and then stand back to see how it looks and feels from the guests' perspective.

What's the Theme?

This is where your creativity can finally come into play! What is it that you want to express? It helps to keep your themes general in the beginning and then work towards more refined, specific themes as you get better at arranging *chaxi*. Obvious themes can be based around certain events, like Chinese New Year, anniversaries, birthdays, etc. You could also theme your *chaxi* as an offering to your highest self, or a friend or family member far away, setting aside an extra bowl or cup of tea for the person in mind. The possibilities are limitless...

You can think about your *chaxi* as a *mandala*: a piece of art connecting this brief moment in time to the entire universe. This can be achieved by using symbolic elements in your design. For example, a small statue of the Buddha, a *vajra* (a symbol of spiritual power), a red or gold runner or a sutra, just to name a few, are powerful images, symbols and colors that express a lot of meaning. Use them wisely, for the right occasion and in conjunction with tea—never at its expense!

There are many ways to theme your *chaxi* around Nature, the season or the weather. For example, strive to make your guests feel cool in the summer. A small water feature might be used to this end, or a blue runner that could symbolize a cool river. In the cooler months, you can create a warm ambiance by using certain colors, like orange

and red, and/or arranging the elements in a tighter configuration. There are always seasonal elements, often just out your front door, that you can bring into your design to bridge the boundary between inside and outside, Nature and Tea. Flowers, greenery, rocks, moss, leaves and more can all be brought inside to connect us to Nature.

Practice Makes Perfect

If you really want to improve your *chaxi*, then you have to get started designing and arranging them, which, of course, means hosting more tea gatherings and serving more tea in general! Find the motivation and inspiration you need, and practice arranging many different *chaxi* arrangements. There is something called the creative gap that you want to close! This gap is the difference between what you envision and what you can actually create. In order to close that gap, you need to practice consistently and often, until what you see in your heart meets what you create in your tea space. Most important will be to remember the four key points we covered in this article: Honor your guests and the occasion, remember the guest of honor is Tea, design with function first followed by form, and finally, choose and express a theme that suits the occasion.

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Tip for Your Theme: In bowl tea, some elements, like the bowls, tray for bowls (if you use one), or teapot, for example, will be used during the tea session but won't be part of your chaxi. It's often better to leave your chaxi as bare as possible for when the guests arrive, suggesting the tea to them, inviting them onwards. This is like when the guest of honor makes a grand entrance at her party. By leaving the teaware off the stage until all the guests are seated, the tea will have a more defined beginning. Let your guests sit at the table and enjoy what you have created for them. Once the water for tea is ready and the feeling is right, slowly and carefully add these other elements for the actual brewing of tea to commence. Usually a chatong (tea helper) will aid in this process. This doesn't mean the teapot can't be used in the design of your chaxi as a centerpiece; it will often be so. The bowls and tray for bowls will almost always come out after the water is ready, once your guests have had some time to sit and appreciate the tea stage; but they can also be used successfully in a stunning chaxi.



LEAVES IN A BOWL

RED TEA IN THE OLDEST WAY

-Wu De

There is a magic in scattering a few leaves in a bowl and adding water. This is tea at its simplest, and without all the human pretension, it is easier to connect to Nature through our tea. There are many reasons to return to this way of brewing, and a good striped red tea like Ruby Red is among the many reasons to revisit this topic again. Watching a few leaves unfurl in a bowl is one of the greatest joys a Chajin can know.

Years ago, I learned one of the most powerful ways of brewing tea I've known, and my tea journey has never been the same. Now, I also pass it on to my students as they begin to explore the world of tea. It is brewing for beginners and masters alike. There are many convenient, simple and inexpensive ways to teach a beginner to brew tea, but many of them then need to be put aside as they progress in skill and develop a palate. But I try to never teach anything that will later be put aside. I think trust between teacher and student requires that we pass along only that which we would use in our own practice ourselves. I thought I would share this wonderful brewing technique with you as well, whether for the first time or as a pleasant review, and along with it explore some of the many ways that it is useful in a tea journey.

There really isn't much to it: you just put a few leaves of tea in a bowl and add hot water. *Bowl, leaves, heat and water...*

You want to use a bowl that is more open, wider and V-shaped, though any bowl will do. It is also nicer if the bowl is a special, handmade piece of pottery. There are many great bowls out there, but we always prefer those made with tea spirit, like the tea ash bowls we will discuss later in this issue. It really is all about what speaks to you—what kind of bowl holds the leaves gently and beautifully, is soft and feels a part of your hands and inspires you to brew more tea.

You don't need much tea for this, just a few leaves. We have found that this is actually the best way to brew old-growth, newborn puerh. Since newborn tea has not yet fermented, its nature is cold according to Chinese medicine. It can sometimes be harsh on the stomach. However, a few leaves in a bowl turn out lighter, smoother, less bitter and less harsh on the body. The result is much more fascinating and profound. We also drink old-growth Taiwanese oolong and red tea in this way, the latter of which is Taiwan's

only variety of *Camellia sinensis var. assamica* (a large leaf, tree variety like that used to make traditional puerh tea), brought here by the Japanese during the occupation. While these teas are ideal for this method, we've tried it with everything from greener oolongs to white tea to aged puerh, and it's all nice.

This type of brewing, like all tea, responds best to fresh and pure water, preferably from a mountain spring. The cleaner the water, the more the bowl will sing in your hands.

Even after decades of tea, many masters I respect still continue to drink tea in this way at least once or twice a week—a tradition I have carried on in my own way. There are many reasons why drinking tea in a bowl is so beautiful, some of which we can discuss; some of which you'll discover on your own; while some of the reasons are left beyond the gate, where words can never intrude. One of the most important is humility.

We drink bowl tea to reduce all the human parts of tea brewing



to almost nothing. There are no, or very few parameters: Simply adjust the amount of leaves and water temperature—or don't and enjoy the tea however it turns out. In this way, we let go of all pretensions. There is no longer any quality in the tea brewing, no comparative mind—no better or worse. A lot of skill and mastery often leads to snobbery. Then we miss the chance to connect with Nature, ourselves and each other through tea. In drinking bowl tea, and minimizing the human role in tea, we can return to just leaves and water, where the true dialogue begins.

Try drinking a bowl of leaves and water, simply and beyond all refinement. Returning to the simplest and oldest way of making tea is often very profound. Through drinking tea in this way you may awaken your own insights, beyond these few I share freely now.

Ancient

Putting a handful of leaves in a bowl and adding hot water is the oldest of tea brewing methods, dating back thousands and thousands of years. In antediluvian forests, pristine in verdure, sages exchanged wisdom over such steaming bowls. They would find wild tea trees and process the tea on the spot, withering, roasting and drying it as they talked or sat in silent meditation. No doubt they also had pouches and jars of aged teas lying around for special occasions, when distant masters chanced to visit—when certain astrological and cosmological conjunctions happened, making the time ideal for powerful tea and deeper meditation, or even to celebrate seasonal changes...

Using crystal mountain water, boiled simply over charcoal, they would cover the leaves in water and in energy from their Qi Gong and meditation—passing more than just tea and water to the traveler or student, but a part of themselves. Tea has always been a communication

of the Tao precisely because it goes beyond words and the concepts they engender, and there is a truer representation of my wisdom in the tea I serve you than in a thousand books or lectures. “The tea doesn't lie,” as they say. You can't make your gongfu, your skill in tea, any more than what it is with any amount of embellishment, fancy words and descriptions: the tea will tell the tale.

When you are drinking tea in this way, you continue this ancient tradition. Close your eyes and imagine the craggy folds of an ancient mountain chain, dancing like a saffroned scroll painting. In billowing silk robes you sit beneath a wizened old tea tree, by some rocks and a stream. You can hear the “wind sowing the pines” as the kettle boils away. The master sticks his hand into an old pouch, more cracked and worn than his hoary face. His gentle hands reach across and flutter the leaves into your bowl. He holds the kettle for a moment or two, until it whispers to hush... And then in slow, gentle circles, he covers your bowl in steam—swirling the leaves around in more circles as they open...

Simplicity

It is important that we don't get caught up in all the pretension that can accumulate as you learn about tea. Unfortunately, some people become snobby about their tea and lose the ability to enjoy the tea without all the perfect accoutrements, expensive pots, kettles and jars. The Japanese tea ceremony was often criticized by monks and spiritualists alike, since many practitioners lost the true spirit of tea over time and turned it into a chauvinistic obsession based on collecting expensive teaware and tea and showing off to others. Rikyu tried to right this by incorporating local, simple raku pottery and natural decoration in a simple aesthetic. Today also many people use tea to promote them-

selves, and get lost in knowing more or having more than others.

This isn't the only way we brew tea at the Center; it is great to explore all the nuances of different kinds of teaware and gongfu methodology. But more important than any kind of teaware, pouring skill or brewing technique is respect—one of master Rikyu's four essential virtues of tea (the others being harmony, purity and tranquility). Don't lose yourself in connoisseurship, thinking you are better than others or know more about tea. I would much rather drink gas-station-quality oolong with a humble monk in the mountains, pure of heart, than expensive tea with someone using his tea and knowledge to promote himself.

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By returning to the simplest of tea-brewing parameters a few times a week, we can effectively wipe the slate clean. All of our affectation is gone. There are no better cups, jars or pots; no need to pour in certain directions or from certain heights; no better or worse—just leaves in water.

The discriminating mind can often ruin tea, analyzing and criticizing what should be enjoyed, embraced and absorbed into the body and spirit. There is a time for working towards bringing the best out of teas through skill, and a time for returning to softness when the human element and all our posturing is put aside in favor of the simplicity of Nature, which since

ancient times has attracted people of spirit to tea.

I have my students follow only this method for the first months that they are learning about tea, so that when they move on to learning about all the different kinds of teaware and tea, skills and techniques, they do so from a simple base. And returning to that foundation each week, they never forget their roots in the “beginner’s mind,” free of all the ego that ruins tea more than any bad water ever could.

Wabi

The Japanese tea aesthetic was long ago called “wabi,” which in part means the simplicity we discussed above. Wabi is also about

enhancing and then rejoicing in the imperfection of true life. It means that the moon partially covered by clouds offers more to the imagination than the radiant full moon, and more adequately represents the formless and form as one. As poet Leonard Cohen put it, “There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

Wabi is a difficult aesthetic to master, as it is hard to contrive imperfection that is natural. It has to be spontaneous and flow out of Nature, which is also often so beautiful precisely because it is illogical and disorderly, and the mind cannot organize it. It is no wonder that such a rational society as ours would prefer the ordered, hedged garden

to the forest the sages of old rejoiced in.

Of course, you can find a tea bowl made with wabi aesthetic and this may enhance your experience. There is nothing like holding a master-crafted bowl of tea, exploring all the nuances created by the kiln and seemingly or truly unintended by the artist.

Also, we often get a clearer representation of a tea's quality brewing it this way, and it may involve a fault of some kind. Rather than criticizing or even accepting the issues, why not embrace them as an aspect of the tea before you—this very moment of your life as it is, and as it ever shall be? There is an even more profound relaxation and a deeper, more rewarding attitude towards life when you can step beyond mere

acceptance of the imperfect moment to an actual participation in and enjoyment of the experience, despite whatever perceived defects you may notice.

Nature

These days, a greater and more understanding dialogue between human and Nature is needed above all else. All of our personal and social problems stem, in essence, from the fact that we have ignored this conversation—a subtle whisper still heard if you quiet the mind or walk in the forest where the noise of the city is far away and the river's voice more audible.

Over centuries, our analytic, rational minds have been developed to an extraordinary degree, creat-

ing such wonderful advancements in technology and science, like this very computer I now type on. But this exclusive focus on the rational mind has also meant the loss of another, more ancient kind of intelligence: *the feeling of being a part of this world.*

Lost in the rational voice that narrates our lives, many people feel completely disassociated from each other, Nature and the world. An intelligence and wisdom born of a connection with Nature was self-evident to ancient peoples. Through this connection, they understood inarticulate aspects of Nature that are completely lost to us today—the names and ways of the star constellations, the role of the seasons, rivers and mountains in our lives—the way a lifespan was measured in “winters” for example—and all the communication between Spirit, animal and our nature that we no longer understand... And in our solipsism, ignoring Nature to explore our own desires and satisfaction, we have polluted the Earth; and only now that the warning voice has reached a cataclysmic volume is humankind once again beginning to hear and understand what has been sacrificed in the name of technological development.

Obviously, our social problems aren't about a lack of science or information. We have so much information that huge computers can't store it all, and you couldn't learn even a fraction of it in a lifetime. Wisdom is what is needed. It isn't new technology or information, but the proper application of the sciences and awakened, aware living that is the key to our prosperity, both personally and as a species.

When you drink tea from a bowl, there is an even greater connection to the Nature within the leaves. Lighter brews often reveal the deepest qualities of a tea, connecting you to the sun, moon and mountain that all worked in conjunction to form these leaves. When you then cover them in mountain





spring water, the effect is powerful indeed. If you stop all other activity and focus on the bowl before you, the voice of Nature often returns, louder than ever before. You find yourself connected and complete, a part of the process that began with a seedling gathering sun, water and mountain to it as it grew into a tree, sprouted a crown of glorious leaves, which are now culminating in this very warmth and energy coursing through you as you drink...

Purity

Brewing tea simply in a bowl allows for a kind of clarity of the senses. Between sips, you can hold the bowl and close your eyes, allowing the warmth to flow through your arms, just as the inner warmth spreads through your chest. With all the room in the world, the leaves open up gloriously in the bowl and are a delight to behold, which is one more reason why this method works so well with old-growth teas.

There is a sense of openness to the bowl and leaves other brewing methods cannot compare to, connecting the tea more clearly to the room and people around it. This connection, more than anything else, is why my first such session will

remain one of the most memorable tea sessions of my entire life, even though that first ‘leaves in a bowl’ session was simple green tea in a rustic, dark Rabbit’s Fur bowl; and even though I’ve also drunk many rarer and brighter teas since.

When you drink tea this way there is no question of quality, or evaluation of any kind. There is no need to record your impressions internally or communicate them externally. The tea ceremony is stripped down to its most basic elements: leaves and water, self and no-self.

In such a space, you are free to be yourself. Many times, the conversation naturally winds down and you and your guests smile at each other one last time before drifting off into contentment, contemplation or meditation. This quietude is paramount in living a healthy life in accord with the Dao, balancing stillness and activity and acting from depth and with meaning, when the time is right. After all, what is important cannot be expressed as well in words as it can in the direct transmission of something so intimate as liquor we ingest into our bodies, prepared by the hands of the master—not I, but the true master behind your face.

Essence

The essence of a tea is beyond its flavor or aroma to the energy deep within the veins of the leaf, just as the essence of the tea ceremony is beyond the tea or teaware. Master Rikyu once told a student, “imagine your life without tea and if it is any different than it is now, you have yet to truly understand Cha Dao.”

If tea becomes pretentious and snobby, the essence is lost. Anyone can learn about tea by reading and traveling to tea-growing regions. It is the Dao that is the more powerful and lasting part of a tea session, not the tea. And actually, though it may sound paradoxical (or even downright zany-Zenny illogical), transcending the tea *is* the true tea. So it’s either all about the tea or not at all, depending on how you look at it.

The tea bowl before you is a gateway to yourself, and beyond that the Nature and the flow of energy through this universe. And it is often easier to transcend the tea when the process is simpler and closer to the essential Nature that produced the tea in the first place.




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TEA ASH GLAZING

THE MAGIC OF THE KILN

-Petr Novak

These tea ash bowls are such an exciting experience we hope you will one day have when you come here to the Center. The cycle of minerals absorbed by tea trees, whose leaves are drunk and then dried again, before being fired and returned to crystallization as minerals in bowls that serve more tea is profound, indeed. There is an ancient alchemy at work here. Petr is a true artist, channeling tea spirit into all that he creates, and we are honored to use his wares to change the world bowl by bowl.

Let me share some magic with you, an alchemy of tea and teaware—Earth, Sun, Water and Fire all dancing in the wizardry of a wood-fired kiln. Although I know some of the science behind making ceramic bowls, the process isn't any less magical to me. And a tea ash bowl shines especially bright with allegory and poetry, for each of these ash bowls is a journey of minerals from the jungle undergrowth of Yunnan, the cliffs of Wuyi or crags of Taiwan which have been mixed with my local clay and fired in wood, forming bowls that return to the tea space and brew more tea from the jungle undergrowth of Yunnan... Holding such a bowl, you sense that these minerals aren't just in the tea you drink—you can also appreciate them with your

eyes and hands. When looking into an empty ash bowl, or running your fingers along its rim, when cleaning the bowl or getting ready for another tea session, you are appreciating tea leaves in a whole new way.

I am going to give you a glance inside a potter's kitchen with a bit of theory. I hope this will be as fascinating to you as it is to me. As Wu De often says, "knowing how things work should enhance, not detract, from the sense of awe we feel for them." There is indeed great enchantment in tea ash bowls...

Ash Glaze

Potters have been using ash from many different kinds of plants for

more than three thousand years. The fact is that one of the first glazes ever used was made quite simply out of clay, ash and water. How does this work? What is glaze, anyway? Succinctly, glaze is a coating fused to a ceramic body during firing. Glazing serves to waterproof, decorate and/or give a ceramic piece greater utility. From a chemical point of view, glazes are vitreous, because they are melted silica (SiO_2), similar to glass. Silica itself is a refractory material (its melting point is very high), so potters have to lower this melting point by adding fluxes, chemicals like NaO_2 , KO_2 , CaO_2 . Also, to keep the glaze affixed to the ware, you need some alumina (Al_2O_3) in your glaze mixture. Potters in the Song Dynasty didn't have



a laboratory to prepare and measure all this, nor oxides or carbonates in their backyards. They had clay and rocks, which contain silica and alumina. And, more importantly for this article, they also had wood ash from their fireplaces, which is usually high in fluxes. Over generations, potters learned how to mix and combine these elements to prepare the right composition, creating a wide variety of glazes in which ash plays a central role.

With Fire as the teacher of all potters throughout the millennia, we've learned how to use ceramics to connect to Great Nature.

If you chemically analyze any ash, you will find the minerals

needed to blend a glaze—silica, alumina and fluxes, all in different ratios. A wood ash contains a high amount of fluxes (where calcium is very often the main one), and ashes from herbaceous plants are much higher in silica. But even the oak or pine from the forest near my home have different and unique mineral compositions when compared to other oaks and pines around the globe. Why? Well, all those minerals are the bones of the plant. To build their bodies, plants are using minerals from the soil and rocks around their roots. In other words, the minerals from the ground are drunk up by the veins of the oak tree, becoming the tree itself. And since the soil and minerals of every place are different, the minerals in different trees

will also be unique. The ash left after the wood has been burned is composed of the very minerals the tree absorbed when it was alive. When we use pine to heat our house, for example, the only thing that does not burn—what we call ash—are those minerals.

Tea Ash

Throughout the ages, whenever potters have looked for ash to use as raw material for creating glazes, they most often chose the ash that was most accessible to them—wood from their kitchen, hay, straw, etc. Of course, it is nice to think about glaze made from roses. But you would need close to ten kilograms

of dry rose petals to have enough glaze for just a few bowls. This impracticality held me back from trying to make glaze from tea ash, as it held other potters back from using aesthetically or energetically pleasing plants in the past. But then, one day, we started to collect our spent leaves. Day by day, bit by bit, this pile grew. And then some of our friends started to do the same, bringing bags of dry leaves when they came over for tea. After a year, we had around five kilograms of tea leaves, which was enough to start our first experiments.

I burnt the leaves as well as possible, mixed the ash with water and sieved it through a fine mesh used for making glazes. We ended up with 500ml of clean ash glaze, thick enough to glaze a few cups and bowls. Tea creates quite an interesting glaze, surprisingly dark and matte. After a few more tests, the original 500ml was almost gone, so I decided to try a different approach. I knew that there are many tea lovers out there like you, who would like to have a bowl glazed in tea leaves. And the 'five kilos for a few bowls' worth of glaze'

approach would make them too special and rare. I therefore started to put dry leaves directly into the bowls and let the kiln fire do its magic. Different clays reacted differently to this method, which meant lots of trial and error. In the end, the kiln taught me to use a mixture of rough stoneware, using white clay as slip inside the bowls, along with the dry tea leaves. The white clay inside serves as a canvas onto which the fire and ash can paint—the Tea spirit can unfold and leave its traces for us to decipher through the tea liquor when we hold the bowls in our tea sessions.



Tea ash bowls filled with spent leaves waiting to be fired; and then after the wood-fire kiln cools, you can see the effects in the tea ash bowls, and compare the tea glazing to the ordinary glazes of the other white and blue bowls that surround them.





Sharing the Magic

I believe that, like myself, many of you can enjoy the symbolism and metaphorical power of using tea leaves to fire tea bowls. The mineral footprints left in each bowl have then traveled from the origins of our beloved tea trees to the very bowls we use to consume our tea, creating a wonderful cycle that I feel expresses the changes of Great Nature Herself.

Nowadays, I put a few bowls full of leaves into each kiln we fire. The amount is still limited, so I've decided that all of these special bowls will travel to the Tea Sage Hut, for all the visitors and tea pilgrims who wind up there to use, and eventually as they accumulate more, to take home. I hope that this not only encourages a chance to enjoy these bowls, and all they

represent, but also helps support the Center. If this is the last excuse you need to make your way there, I would be honored to have my bowls help invite more people to a place that has meant a lot to me and my tea journey!



Teawayfarer

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 Jesse Öro.

The first cup of tea I had was a Twining's tea bag. My second was a whole leaf Darjeeling, and that contrast of quality put my eager mind on a path of tea-geekiness. Thus my tea hobby started with analytical tasting sessions on my own or with a few other enthusiasts. I am a very intellectual person, so tea was a fascinating challenge. There was a huge amount of information to learn, and the sources were full of contrasting opinions. So the hobby was very difficult to progress in, but also very exciting.

Maybe a year after my first two cups, I was sitting in the home of an esoteric, modern shaman. This dude was brewing a tea he called "the Purple Lady," using big coffee mugs as improvised *gaiwans*. His words about Qi were something alien to me. However, after a few gulps of that tea, they started to somehow make sense. I felt the Qi. It was as if tea had been black-and-white to me before this tea, whereas this one was in full color. Later, every once in a while, I encountered something similar, but it was rare. Over time, all tea started to be a more holistic experience. Some teas didn't taste very interesting or complex, but there was something else to them, which made me savor them even more.

In Finland, there is a surprisingly large community practicing Japanese tea ceremony. I was more drawn to Chinese and Taiwanese teas, so I went to their beginner's course mostly out of curiosity, and without expectations. I learned a new way of approaching tea. I used to think that drinking tea alone was superior, without any peer pressure so I could stay more objective. For these Chajin, tea was primarily an act of sharing. My time there was quite short, but their attitude and aesthetics affected me. Many Westerners seem to regard whisked tea as nothing but a set of complicated rules, though actually, underneath the rules, lies something very simple and beautiful.

Some time ago, I met a new bunch of tea people in Finland, and one of them had just become a Global Tea Hut member. Leafing through the magazine convinced me to give it a try. I had the mentality of a customer at first, like I was ordering a product which was worth the price. As you know, these pages house a lot of information, and the teas are very high quality as well.



My first visit to the Tea Sage Hut was a very short one. I wanted to see the place and the people and form an opinion about the operation. I saw a lot of similarity with the spirit of tea I'd touched upon in Finland. Later, Wu De visited Finland, and stayed in my home for a night. Having somebody as your guest changes something. I think that's when I ceased being a *customer* and started to be a *member*. When I visited the Tea Sage Hut for the second time, I stayed a week. As I'm writing these words, I'm staying for a third two-week stint.

Today, Tea is present in my life on many levels. Often, She is the center of my attention, and at other times the background. Tea is starting to feel something familiar and cozy to me. Maybe our relationship has matured a bit. I love having tea by a forest spring or sharing tea at home after a busy day. But I have to admit, when Wu De starts to speak about puerh mountains, tea cultivars or processing methods I still listen particularly carefully—I'm still a tea geek as well!

Welcome to share some tea with great spring water should you find yourself in Finland!

Inside the Hut

Because of the large number of tea sessions happening around the world, we are going to post about them on our site from now on and use this section to discuss news happening around the world. If you have any news, like a wedding, birth or tea happening, let us know and we'll write about it here. Also, our new site, coming in the next few months, will connect you to tea sessions around the world in a much better way than this page ever could!



In Germany, there is a gathering for men on Tuesday, March 15th hosted by Christopher Tarnow at the Eichgrund-Institute for Gestalttherapy. They use tea, indigenous rituals, music and movement to explore how men experience and express love, loneliness, longing, desire, fear and anger; while building self-esteem, competence and compassion for themselves, others and their environment. For more information contact Christopher at (0)6078-759435 or tarnow@eichgrund.de.



Longtime student of Wu De's, Antonio, will be holding the final event in a tea education series on the 5th of March at Čaj Chai Teahouse in Barcelona. The topic will be an Introduction to Tea Preparation, since he already introduced the varieties of tea and types of teaware earlier this year. If you are interested in attending please contact Antonio at cajchai@yahoo.es.



Please fill out our online survey about Global Tea Hut! Check your email or our social media for the link (it is also up on our site). This year, we're committed to making this the best tea magazine in the world, and we need your feedback to do that!



In Russia, there are plenty of events happening this month. Raneta, Minghui and Ivan will be traveling to the central Russian town of Samara for a number of Global Tea Hut gatherings. Raneta is also hosting a Tea and the Feminine event. If you are in Russia, or close by, do not miss this chance!



International Women's Day is a special occasion to recognize and celebrate all women in our lives. On Sunday, March 6th, Global Tea Hut members Jade Robinson, Julz Ashwood and Sahar Zadah are hosting a special tea ceremony and women's circle with proceeds going to the V-Day Foundation, Byron Bay, Australia. This event is already full, but we are happy to announce it so you can also raise a bowl with them!



Our Old Man Dong Ding jars are over halfway gone and our Big Snow Mountain cakes are down to the last few. If you are planning on getting either of these teas, now is the time! They may not be around next month.

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.



Congratulations to our dear brother Denis Mikhaylov, who took precepts last month. He has been given the Tea name of "Minghui, 冥慧." *Ming* (冥) means "deep" or "profound." It is used in the first part of "meditation" in the Chinese language as well: *Mingxiang*, 冥想. And *Hui* (慧) means "wisdom." *Minghui* is the Profound Wisdom that comes from connection to the deep stillness within us all. As he progresses on his journey, we take this moment to stop and raise our bowls to him!



The Center will be closed from April 24th to the end of May for the third annual Global Tea Hut Trip. Wu De plans to do less traveling this year, so he will be here teaching except for that time. Check the Hut's website for more details.

March Affirmation

I celebrate the ordinary.

Drinking leaves in a bowl reminds me to adore the simple things in life. Am I passing over life waiting to get to the exciting moments? Do I treasure simplicity?



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The best tea magazine in the world! Sharing rare organic teas, a magazine full of tea history, lore, translations, processing techniques and heritage, as well as the spiritual aspects of Cha Dao. And through it all we make friends with fellow tea lovers from around the world.

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