



# Global Tea Art

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

September 2016

SPECIAL EXTENDED EDITION

TAIWANESE OOLONG TEA

HISTORY, PROCESSING & LORE







## NOSTALGIA

It is that special time of year again: time for the extended special edition of our magazine, with lots of extra pages to explore a tea topic in greater depth! This year, we're staying home, touring the island of Taiwan to learn more about Taiwanese oolong tea, sipping cups of Nostalgia along the way—one of the best teas we've ever shared!

Love is  
changing the world  
bowl by bowl

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# From the Editor

**I**n September, the weather in Taiwan turns to tea. It cools down and the oppressive heat of the summer lifts, allowing us to open the doors and drink a greater variety of tea. And then there are the rains: a tea session in the rain is one of the true joys of a tea lover. The sibilant drone lulls you and encourages the tranquility of the bowl. It is a joy to be inside—dry, warm and full of contentment for all that you have in your life. At such times, oolong seems to bring the right melody for that drone of rain, and we find ourselves drinking traditional oolongs, aged oolongs and also Cliff Tea all the time. Of course, that also means more gongfu tea around the Center.

Though it means a lot of extra work, this is one of our favorite times of year. The Extended Edition of Global Tea Hut is a chance for us to get into a single topic more deeply, making lasting contributions to the tea world. We do this in lieu of a gift. And we spend several months discussing and planning, thinking about which topic we'd like to explore more fully, knowing that these issues are a big part of the education in tea that Global Tea Hut provides. Our first year, September 2014, we created the largest English-language publication on puerh tea (except for a sociological work by a Yunnanese scholar), which has since become an invaluable source of tea wisdom for the thousands of tea lovers who have downloaded and read the online version. Articles from that monumental issue have also been posted in many of our Further Readings posts on our blog, which enhance and contextualize topics and also point out relevant articles we've already published. Then, in 2015, we translated and annotated the entire *Cha Jing* by the Tang Dynasty tea scholar Lu Yu. The hundreds of annotations alone have made the translation a much-needed contribution to the scholarship of tea. Lu Yu is the most famous of all tea sages, and his influence is without rival.

This year, we've decided to stay closer to home, exploring and learning about Taiwanese tea together. Taiwan is, after all, one of the tea capitals of the world. As such, making an issue about Taiwanese tea, including culture, brewing methods, history, etc., would have exceeded the pages of even an extended edition. We had to focus our exploration a bit more. We decided to cover the many, varied oolong teas of Taiwan: where they grow, some of their history, how they are processed, what varieties they are made from, and so on. You could say that this issue is a geographical survey of Taiwanese oolong tea, including not just where each tea is made, but how. As you will see, our preferences for organic, traditionally processed oolong have steered this vessel and very much determined the orientation and destinations on our journey.

Traveling further into any tea region, history or topic exposes just how vast, rich and varied the tea world is. This can be intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. It can also be inspiring. Even after decades of study, I am often amazed at how much there is still to learn. Like a true romance, I want to know everything about my beloved, recognizing also that I can't. "Still in love after all these years," Master Lin often says.

We hope that this issue inspires you to learn more about, discuss and appreciate Taiwanese tea. Taiwan is our home. We love it here. The people are amongst the kindest in the world and tea is very much at home here: in every home and in all social settings—from monastery to family gathering—inspiring peace and tranquility as well as friendship, hospitality and a love for kindness. And though it may not always be overtly discussed, we hope that all the interest, curiosity and demand for Taiwanese tea that this issue generates will bring more of the right people to the tea table: *you!* There is a growing organic, sustainable movement in Taiwan, amongst farmers and tea lovers alike. But it is struggling. All the farms we'll visit in this issue are, of course, organic and sustainable. However, the majority aren't. While it's wonderful to discuss tea processing, teaware, brewing, culture and all else tea related, none of that will matter if there isn't any tea. What will an issue on Taiwanese tea mean in fifty or a hundred years if there aren't any leaves? Wouldn't we be a part of the problem if we caused a great demand for Taiwanese tea from various regions without this caveat? Explore and drink, as no magazine—no matter how extended—will be as educational or as rich as a tour of Taiwanese teas in the drinking of them. But do so responsibly, caring about and preserving the teas you explore and the environment that made them. This is the Global Tea Hut way!



## Further Reading

This month, we hope to expand this already in-depth issue to make it one of the most comprehensive publications on Taiwanese tea ever. We hope that this issue will contribute to a growing awareness of how wonderful and beautiful Taiwan is.

\*Further Readings are posted on our blog each month.



# TEA OF THE MONTH

To explore Taiwanese tea further than we ever have before, we needed a very special tea along the way—something worth stopping for, even amongst the gloriously lush mountains of Taiwan. We've sent out some great Taiwanese oolong teas over the years. Some were special because of the work of the farmer who produced them, like Mr. Xie's Three Daughters or the GABA tea we sent one autumn; others were as rich in history as they were in ecology, like the Old Man Dong Ding Master Tsai donated or the special roasted Buddha's Palm Master Lu donated. This month's tea is another gem in the Global Tea Hut oolong crown: an eco-conscious, traditionally processed Li Shan oolong roasted by one of the most famous and best tea roasters in Taiwan's rich tea history. As you can see, this tea has a lot going for it!

We send out a lot of magical teas, and so many of them have been stunners. This month's tea ranks amongst the best of them—right at the very peak of all Global Tea Hut teas! And the three characteristics that make it an exceptional Taiwanese oolong all invite further discussion and learning together: it's sustainably grown, traditionally processed and master-roasted by one of Taiwan's best and most famous roasters, Tsai Ming Xun.

We talk a lot about sustainability around here, but it is a topic worth discussing, and over again. In the *Treatise on Tea* written by Emperor Huizong, which we translated in April, he says that the arts, including tea, are all flourishing because of a time of peace and prosperity. This suggests that tea is, indeed a luxury, even when used medicinally or as a part of one's spiritual cultivation. And if there ever was a time we could afford luxuries that come at the expense of Nature (a big "if"), now is not that time. It is important that we have more discussions about environmental sustainability and the importance of how the things we make affect the world we are a part of. And as the second-most-consumed substance on Earth, Tea has an important voice in such councils.

There are nuances, but mostly the problems are obvious: feeling separate from our environment and Nature (a kind of spiritual illness in itself), humans have misunderstood the very real connection between the health of our environment and our selves. You can't have a healthy organism in an unhealthy environment. Even if agrochemicals can be shown to have minimal effects on humans, which is doubtful, especially in the long term, they are definitely not healthy for

the ecology surrounding the cleared area where monoculture is occurring, and that negative impact will eventually influence humanity. If we had to make such a sacrifice in the name of survival, for medicine that could save or ease the suffering of many, for example, then it might be worth weighing the benefits versus the long-term consequences of such so-called "conventional farming" (we think the way plants have grown, naturally from the ground for millions of years, should be the real "conventional;" it's strange that such unhealthy practices have become so ingrained as to be "conventional"). Risking the health of the world and people to make sure everyone has enough food might be worth discussing (*might*), though the lack of sustainability in such farming makes the environmental view seem to be the clear and obvious choice. However, harming the environment and risking your own and other people's health over a luxury like tea seems absurd.

And if tea is less of a beverage/luxury to you and more of an aspect of self-cultivation or Dao, then the need for the tea to be clean and grown in a way that does not harm the Earth, farmers or those with whom you share it is even more essential. Our tea should give, not take from the world.





Nostalgia



Li Shan, Taiwan



2016 Traditional Oolong



Taiwanese



~2000 Meters

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



[www.globalteahut.org/videos](http://www.globalteahut.org/videos)





Most of us trying to cultivate ourselves realize that our conduct will form the basis of our practice and also help us gauge the results. When we start cultivating the qualities of our highest self, a compass of compassion starts forming and our conduct in speech, action and thought starts being oriented in the direction of loving-kindness. Our ability to live from that orientation, along with our mistakes when we don't, will be our guide in knowing how our practice is going. But these days, understanding the effects of one's choices is more difficult, as the globe becomes more connected. We have what some Zen masters call "ghost karmas." Ghost karmas are the results we can't see, as they happen too subtly or too far away. Nowadays, our choices can impact the lives of people very far away, like which tea we choose, for example. For that reason, it is essential that we purchase and then prepare tea skillfully.

If our aim is to find peace and connection to Nature through our tea practice, then we will be frustrated by conventional tea. How could we claim that the Center is a place of peace if the whole place orbits a tea practice that is built upon tea produced in a way that is violent to Nature? What would connection to Nature look like if the vehicle of that connection is offensive to Nature? In trying to create peace or harmony with the natural world, we must use tea that is grown in a way consistent with this goal. Also, the way the tea is grown and processed, including the motivation behind it, will determine its ability to bring such harmony into our lives. Harmony starts on the farm. We've all tasted the difference between a store-bought, "conventional" tomato and one grown in a garden by someone who loves gardening. The latter is better in every way: flavor, aroma and the way it feels in our bodies. Even as hospitality, interest or hobby, tea that harms Nature and the lives of others is unlikely to result in connection between hearts, especially since it is a sense of distance and separation that causes many people to ignore the effects their purchasing decisions have on the ecology in Asia, as well as on the health and lives of local people.



Complaining about problems, agricultural or otherwise, is not the Global Tea Hut way. We'd rather discuss the solutions, or at least talk about the problems in light of change. There are four ways that we tea lovers can make a change in the world of tea, and perhaps in our relationship to Nature in general: choose only sustainable tea (obviously), use less tea, take care of the farmers and educate others. Each of these is worth discussing briefly as part of the eco-consciousness of our Tea of the Month, before we turn to the traditional processing and roasting by Tsai Ming Xun.

Choosing sustainable farming is the easiest and most obvious of the ways we can help. Don't let vendors convince you that this doesn't matter. It does. Most farmers are trying to make a living, and the larger and more influential the eco-centric tea market is, the more people will make

the switch. Why wouldn't they choose to grow tea in a way that is healthier for their land, their families and their customers? The only reason not to is if it is challenging to make a living doing so, or if they can earn more by increasing their production through agro-chemicals. By creating a greater demand for sustainable, clean tea and putting pressure on tea merchants to carry such teas, we can all create a market that encourages more and more farmers to make the change.

The second way we can help comes out of the first, though it may seem more philosophical and less practical. The fact is that we cannot move forward by exclusion. We have to include, remembering that farmers are the first victims of this kind of agriculture. They are the ones exposed to the chemicals in their strongest form, and often the first to suffer pesticide poisoning or cancer due to exposure. We cannot ask farmers





around the world to take care of the environment if they are not cared for. Due to centuries of feudalism, farming has become an undesirable career, without thanks or respect. However, we all need to remember that no matter what we do—doctor, lawyer or musician—we do it because of farmers. If we had to find/create all our own food, we'd have time for nothing else. Actually, farming should be the *most* respected career, as it supports and facilitates *all* careers. When farmers are cared for and their families have no financial needs, when they are respected and honored for their contributions to society—only then do we have the right to ask them to care for their earth. If farmers are struggling to make ends meet, discussing environmental issues is moot. This is why it is important for our tea to be fair trade, supporting and contributing to the lives of the farmers who create our precious leaves.

Tea merchants often promote tea, tea brewing methodology or even teaware that increases how much tea we use. Obviously, they want us to consume more. But the fact is that properly grown and prepared tea is very patient and a very small amount can satisfy you for a whole day. Just like food, if tea is grown and processed properly and with care and then prepared in like fashion, we don't need so much to stay healthy. A little tea medicine is enough for a day, just like a few vegetables grown properly and sustainably in nutrient-dense environments will satisfy most of our nutritional needs. Using less tea is probably the most significant thing a tea lover can do to influence tea's overall environmental impact. This means less each session and less throughout the month as well. When the tea is fine, and prepared properly, we don't need much. This is a good reason to cultivate one's brewing skills as well.

Finally, it is important for us all to spread this message to let more tea lovers know that their approach matters and that they can make a difference to the Earth, to the lives of farmers and even on agriculture itself! Recently, we went into a tea shop in the United States and our friend asked the clerk if their matcha was organic. The young woman answered the way she'd been trained to: ignorantly. She said, "No, but that is a good thing. Tea doesn't taste nice when it is organic." Though this was sad to hear, it was also a call to action. Education is needed, and it should be free of endorsement. They need a Global Tea Hut subscription at that shop!

Our Tea of the Month comes from one of a small, rare but growing kind of sustainable, natural tea farm in central Taiwan. Finding high-mountain oolong from places like Li Shan that is grown sustainably is still rare, but more and more such farms surface.

There was a time when we rarely—if ever—drank Taiwanese oolong tea. There was low-elevation tea, like the wonderful tea produced by Mr. Xie, and some farms in Sun Moon Lake were making red tea, as well as several farms in Pinglin that were making *Baozhong* tea, but finding clean tea from the central mountains was nigh impossible. The reason other regions had more sustainable tea is that such tea isn't as popular in the central highlands. The value and reputation of "high-mountain oolong" made large-plantation conventional farms too profitable for farmers to think about changing. The trend towards sustainable tea began because of a growing environmental awareness in Taiwan in general and also because lower-altitude regions, like Dong Ding, began using eco-conscious farming as a way to distinguish themselves and compete with higher-elevation farms. Nowadays, some farms are starting to make the switch and you can find the rare Ali Shan or Li Shan tea that was grown sustainably, like our beautiful Tea of the Month.

## Traditional Processing

To understand why traditional processing is rare, we have to once again review a short history of Taiwanese tea. There is a growing trend of traditionally processed oolong, which in some ways follows the organic trend—in that it also began as a way for lower-elevation regions like Dong Ding to compete in a market that was leaving them behind as well as in response to organic farming methods. This is because organic tea responds much, much better to traditional processing since the leaves are often bug-bitten and therefore oxidize differently than whole leaves that were protected by pesticides. Before we discuss the history of oolong in Taiwan, we should first explain what traditional processing is.

Oolong is a semi-oxidized tea. Don't be misled by this statement and start thinking that "all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the difference is in the processing," as many authors would

have you believe. We have been over this before: different processing techniques evolved over time to suit different varieties of tea. Farmers developed their processing skills to bring the best out of the local varietal(s) they worked with. Such improvements happened through innovation, insight and some trial and error. And while you can process a region's varietal(s) using the methods of another place, it won't be the same. And any tea lover will be able to tell the difference. That said, oolong tea is semi-oxidized and traditionally the range of semi-oxidation was much narrower. As we will discuss shortly, the range of semi-oxidation is much greater nowadays, so saying an oolong is "traditionally processed" means it falls into that narrower, higher range of oxidation, as oolong was processed for hundreds of years until the 1970s-80s. Simply put, traditionally processed oolong means higher oxidation and roast.

Oolong tea began some time in the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It is withered indoors and out, shaken, fired (*sha qing*), rolled and roasted. It is the shaking that really distinguishes oolong from other kinds of tea. (We'll discuss this in greater detail later.) This kind of processing went on relatively unchanged, with minor improvements, until modern times. It wasn't until Taiwan began modernizing that things began to change, influencing the entire tea world in many and varied ways.

In the 1970s, everything was "Made in Taiwan" the way it is all from China today. This industrialization brought prosperity to Taiwan. As Emperor Huizong said in the *Treatise on Tea* we published in April, it is only when the land is prosperous and peaceful that people can pursue art and culture like tea. And as the Taiwanese economy started expanding, and food, shelter and life were all abundant, the people started refining and exploring their rich Chinese heritage and culture, including, of course, tea, teaaware, brewing methodology, etc. There was a boom in tea culture, as demand went through the roof. Small, aboriginal tea farms slowly started changing into large plantations, owned by the families them-

selves or sold to larger corporations. This demand for greater quantities of tea drove oolong production into previously uncharted territory, creating new obstacles and challenges along the way.

Traditional oolong processing is the most complicated and skilled of all tea production. This is not to say that it takes little skill to make a fine green tea, for example. It takes a great deal of skill, in fact. But traditional oolong is more complicated and delicate and there's a narrower margin of error—misprocessed leaves are rigorously down-sorted (even more so in less-profitable yesteryears). It takes decades to master. In fact, it will be decades before a son is allowed to supervise an entire production with confidence. And one thing we all love about tea is that it comes to us as an unfinished leaf. So much of the quality is changed with brewing skills, in other words. Those of you with experience brewing traditionally processed oolong will know just how finicky, sensitive and ultimately unforgiving it can be. It requires the most skill (gongfu) to prepare well, and sometimes preparing it well makes all the difference between a glorious and sour cup! The fact that the processing takes decades to master and requires great skill, has a tight margin of error and requires brewing skills to make a fine cup was hardly compatible with the increased mainstream demand for tea that occurred at the time. Farmers needed tea production that was mechanized and easy to master, allowing employees to be trained in a matter of weeks; they needed a wide margin of error so that slightly misprocessed leaves would go unnoticed; and they needed the tea to be easy to prepare so that consumers could put it in a thermos, a tea bag, a mug or a pot and it would turn out fine. They needed lightly oxidized oolong.

Light oxidation and little to no roasting produces a greener kind of oolong that is easier to make, has a wider margin of error and can be brewed any way you like, maintaining a bright, flowery fragrance that appeals to the mainstream. This shift in tea production later moved to the mainland as well. This changed the tea





Though we can't send you all a 150-gram package of this month's tea, we can show it to you and celebrate that Mr. Tsai took the time to package this tea traditionally, just as it was processed. Because of the higher oxidation and roast, traditional oolong didn't need to be vacuum-sealed (a method that creates a lot of waste). It was wrapped in paper and would only get better with time. The paper let the tea age properly and was convenient for folding up and refolding the tea after each use. Watching old tea vendors quickly fold up 150-gram packages of tea is something every tea lover should witness! They deftly fly through the many folds, which result in a rectangular paper box that fits perfectly around the tea. It goes without saying that tea drinkers back then would have known how to refold their packages, though with less speed or skill than the shopkeeper.

Our Tea of the Month was wrapped by hand in a cool vintage paper with prints of traditional "Formosa" tea ads and a description of traditional processing. The vintage-style wrapping and print add nostalgia to the tea. Most of the time, packaging says little about a tea, and the more well-packaged it is, the lower the quality tends to be. As in all stages of tea processing, anything that stands out is probably distracting from or covering up a fault. But this is the exception, as the love and extra care it took to hand-wrap this tea is a testament to the way it was produced.

world, including teaware, tea brewing and even puerh production and scholarship. As a result of these changes, Taiwanese tea lovers began switching to puerh because they didn't like the domestic transition to lighter oolong. And their interest reinvigorated a deteriorating puerh culture, sowing the field that would grow into the vast garden of puerh we enjoy today.

While lightly oxidized oolong can be wonderful, it is often very fragrant without much body. It is also rarely produced in a healthy, sustainable way that is good for the Earth. Most of the time, it is more like a tasty appetizer than a good meal. You may have prepared a lightly oxidized oolong for guests and then looked around afterwards, wondering what tea to drink. Tea lovers are rarely satisfied by such a tea, in other words. (That also suits the producers, of course, since we then drink more tea.) There are exceptions to this, but usually traditionally processed oolong tea is richer, more full-bodied and satisfying to drink. There's a reason that farmers adapted

their processing the way they did: to bring out the best in oolong varieties. There's also a reason why it went relatively unchanged for centuries. Creating lightly oxidized oolong did breathe some fresh air into the oolong world, resulting in many new innovations and some wonderful new teas, but for a while, the new swallowed the traditional whole.

Due to marketing, the mainstream started somewhat mistakenly regarding altitude as equivalent to quality, and lower-altitude farms lost a lot of patronage. Some of these farms switched to organic and/or traditional processing to make themselves stand out from greener high-mountain oolong tea. As a result, traditional processing has once again become popular in Taiwan, which is a great thing for those of us who appreciate it more. No matter how you feel about lightly oxidized oolong, it is nice to have both. We just hope that more of the greener oolong producers will start making the switch to Earth-friendly agriculture, as it is definitely not a

genre known for clean tea (which is, of course, another reason we don't drink much of it at the Center).

Though lower-altitude regions like Dong Ding have begun processing oolong with more oxidation and roast to stand out, and that has meant that some higher farms have also made limited amounts of traditional tea, it is still rare to find tea from higher altitudes that has been traditionally processed. Usually, when this does happen, it is because a shop owner has ordered such rough tea (*maocha*) because he wants to roast it himself, like our Tea of the Month. And, we should remember, even so-called "traditionally-processed" oolong in Taiwan nowadays is nowhere near as oxidized nor as roasted as tea was before the 1970s.

Our Tea of the Month is very unique for being an eco-conscious high-mountain oolong, but also for being traditionally processed. Hopefully, you can taste how clean this tea is and why traditional processing suits oolong tea, especially when it is clean.



You almost have to process such tea with more oxidation and roast, since the leaves are often bug-bitten.

In traditional oolong processing, there is no stage more important than the roasting. The roast is what brings out the best flavor in the tea and it requires a high degree of skill. The master must understand each batch of tea and adjust the duration and temperature very subtly to roast (and often re-roast) the tea to perfection. Master roasting is hard to come by these days, which is another reason that many farmers turned to lightly oxidized, greener oolong. To complete the hat trick of sustainably grown and then traditionally processed oolong, our tea was superbly and skillfully

dried and roasted by Mr. Tsai Ming Xun, a true legend in the oolong roasting world.

### ***Tsai Ming Xun***

Tsai Ming Xun doesn't come from generations of tea processing, but he has started a legacy of his own. He was born in 1963 in Zhiayi, Taiwan. At a very young age, he fell in love with all things tea, teaware and antiques, saying, "I only loved the household items: the things that have really and truly been used." He opened a teahouse in 1985 at the age of twenty-two. He had gone down to Tainan for school and so chose

that for the location of his tea house. In those days, tea and all things cultural were booming and the teahouse thrived.

After ten years, the tea house craze in Taiwan started declining and the entire tea market was subsiding. Mr. Tsai carried on for another five years before making a decision to convert the teahouse into a shop and just sell tea for a living. He has carried on selling tea at the same location until now, making his tea spot more than thirty years old.

After the severe earthquake of 1999, much of central Taiwan was destroyed. Many tea areas were negatively impacted, and tea lovers of all kinds pitched in to help out in dif-





ferent ways. In a previous issue, we talked about how teaware makers like Deng Ding Sou gave free lessons to affected farmers to start them on a different career path. At that time, Mr. Tsai bought up three small tea farms to help give those families a chance to start over in the city. He worked together with other locals, but says that he gave up on that after a few years. “At that time, and sometimes still today, local farmers have a very different view of tea than us. They just see it as a cash crop, not knowing how much passion and culture there is in tea. They don’t love it the way we do.” For that reason, he started out making tea himself with the help of some employees he hired to help him main-

tain the gardens and to harvest when the time came.

As we have often discussed, tea production was different back in the day. Tea houses and shops would buy rough tea (*maocha*) from farmers and then roast it to suit their customers’ needs. Mr. Tsai roasted all the tea for his teahouse and then shop for many years and developed a reputation as one of the best tea roasters in Taiwan, winning competitions along the way. He told us that if you had asked him then, he would have said that roasting was the most important part of making fine oolong tea. But these days he feels otherwise: “Now that I have gone deeper into tea production and have my own gardens, I actually feel

that it is just the opposite—roasting is the last, and therefore least important stage.” He says that each step is more important than the next, so the terroir and garden (location) are the most influential factor in tea quality. “This is because each step determines what follows: the location/terroir will determine the best varietal of tea to plant. The varietal and weather of that season/place will then determine the harvest, which will determine the processing, and so on.” When we asked him how he became known as a master roaster, he said, “I think one reason I was so good at roasting tea back in the day is that I had a unique palate and knew how to choose tea that would suit my style of roasting.



完美芬芳

Looking back, I realize that I would turn down lots of *maocha*, saying, 'I don't want to roast that, but I do want to roast *that*.' This selection of the right tea is where more of the quality of a fine tea lies."

Mr. Tsai doesn't call his tea production "traditional," though he doesn't mind the term. He says that he thinks his tea is a synthesis of modern and traditional, since tea lovers and producers nowadays have a background in scientific research that traditional farmers didn't have, and they therefore understand the chemistry and soil in ways that are very modern. He hopes to combine modern understanding with traditional skills, in other words.

Tea back in the day was made on very small farms and processed in simple rooms that were part of the farmers' homes. There weren't any factories or processing facilities like today. He says that the demand and market have, of course,

lacked body. And they often leave the drinker uncomfortable. He said that many modern tea lovers do not want to learn all the details of the complicated tea world or understand the history, chemistry and all that goes in to tea. "They just want a tea that they can drink and feel comfortable, relaxed and bright—a tea that is delicious, fragrant and healthy." Added pressure from advertisements and dishonest merchants using stories to sell low-quality tea has also left a lot of customers jaded. Mr. Tsai said something akin to what Master Lin always says: "Without the need for words, they drink the tea and find its quality there." Master Lin's version is: "The truth is in the cup; tasting is believing."

Mr. Tsai went on to discuss the antagonism between lightly oxidized tea and natural, more sustainable tea production. He said that in order to make such fragrant, green tea in large quantities it is necessary to protect

microbial life and many other subtle influences we can't even begin to notice." He said that to master tea processing, one has to get in touch with as many of these subtle forces as possible—to study history and tradition, learning and honing one's skill, as well as modern science, which has revealed the workings of many of these subtle factors to us. In understanding one's tea, the master can adapt his processing to suit the tea and bring out its best quality. "A fine tea should be smooth and delicious and leave you feeling comfortable. If you drink a tea and feel uncomfortable in any way, that isn't the tea for you."

Our Tea of the Month was dried and roasted by Mr. Tsai quite skillfully indeed. The higher oxidation and roast bring out a nutty apricot flavor that is divine. They say that each stage in the tea processing should enhance the tea without leaving a trace of itself, so the roasting should not leave a roasty flavor, in other words. This tea is roasted superbly, with a strong and bright aftertaste that lingers in the mouth for many minutes after you swallow. We find the energy of Nostalgia to be uplifting, gentle and calming, even though it is quite yang. It fills you and carries you upward, but not forcefully. It is gentle, like a well-mannered lady of the Qing Dynasty. She plays you a *guqin* recital, comments on the sutras and makes you feel humbled by her magnificence.

Drinking such amazing oolong always helps demonstrate the power of human and Nature working together in harmony. The powerful terroir of the highlands of Taiwan combined with master craftsmanship results in something that transcends the world of human or Nature. In some ways, this is a metaphor for what it means to be human in this world, and certainly for everything great tea is about: Heaven, Earth and Human working together to co-create transcendence. See if you can taste the rocky, high-altitude grace of Nostalgia, as well as the superb skill of Mr. Tsai Ming Xun; and then see if, cup by cup, you and your guests don't start to taste what's beyond...

## **We find a place comfortable due to just a few factors, like that the weather is pleasant and the surroundings lovely. But trees are tuned into the minerals in the soil, microbial life and many other subtle influences we can't even begin to notice.**

negatively influenced Taiwanese tea quality. "Nowadays, a lot of tea makes you uncomfortable. Farmers can't wait for the right weather to pick or process the tea—not when their customer is anxiously waiting for their tea. They have to pick, even if it isn't ready or if the weather is not conducive to tea picking. And it takes a lot of skill to overcome those kinds of challenges." Mr. Tsai told us that his movement towards heavier oxidation and roast came because a lot of his customers, in China and Taiwan, are Buddhists and therefore vegetarian. "They are, therefore, even more sensitive to teas that make you uncomfortable." A lot of lightly oxidized, green oolongs are more astringent and less desirable to vegetarians.

Along the way, making more oxidized and roasted tea, he also found that the lighter teas were fragrant, but

the tea leaves from insects, as their bites would begin oxidation and make such tea production impossible. Therefore, higher oxidation and roast were traditionally suitable to tea production, as there was no way to keep insects away completely. It would require a lot of skill to process a tea well and keep it very fragrant and lightly oxidized if bugs had bitten the leaves. This means that this lighter-oxidized tea industry will never really be conducive to sustainability. "The market will have to decide if it wants such fragrant tea or if it wants environmentally conscious tea," Mr. Tsai said.

Mr. Tsai concluded by telling us that trees are much more sensitive than people. "We find a place comfortable due to just a few factors, like that the weather is pleasant and the surroundings lovely. But trees are tuned into the minerals in the soil,





## Nostalgia

*Like so many of you, we also sit down with friends to share the Tea of the Month. And though we drank Nostalgia 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:*

茶 Like a summer rain, She puzzles me. Slowly, drop by drop, this tea drenches the inside of my mind and tempers my spirit. Her wild travels are, nevertheless, incorporeal.

*-Jorge Garcia Colmenar, Spain*

茶 Lush moist green landscapes, subtle aromas of honey and spring, a perfect nutty roast. This tea challenges my breath and lifts my spirit from the mouth to my upper nostrils, swirling inside the cavities of my head and warming my whole body. A gentle and powerful Qi. I feel it is perfectly balanced.

*-Mia Maestro, Argentina*

茶 When I sipped the second cup, there were hints of cocoa that transported me into the lush Guinea plantations, together with an aftertaste of freshly cut leaves. The fifth cup awakened the roasted and honey tones that I smelled in the dry leaves prior to brewing and relaxed my mind into a gentle, meditative state.

*-Maria Palacios Felipe, Spain*

茶 Perhaps the name “Nostalgia” refers to a time when oolong was traditionally processed, but I’d like to think it refers to the dreamy quality of this tea, drawing us into pleasant memories. This oolong is beautifully balanced, filling the entire mouth with strong flavors of fresh grass and flowers. The long aftertaste lingers between cups, creating a bridge so that the state of being elicited by the tea expands throughout the session. The brew is clear and oily, leaving the mouth salivating.

*-Qing Yu, USA*

茶 From the very first cup, Nostalgia splashed up to my upper palate, centered my mind and gently warmed my body. These sensations unearthed a vision of a log cabin tucked away in the woods. It was a very full and abundant tea, as self-sustained as that cabin. It required little, but to sit and let cup after cup come to me. I didn’t need to concentrate on it in order to understand it.

*-Shen Su, Canada/Taiwan*



*Check out the video  
on brewing tips now!*

[www.globalteahut.org/videos](http://www.globalteahut.org/videos)







## Brewing Tips

**B**ecause of the great skill that goes into the production of oolong tea, it has always been more expensive. In the south of China, a new method of tea brewing developed along with oolong, called “gongfu tea.” Gongfu tea brewing was created by martial artists, and was therefore inspired by much of the same Daoist philosophy that informed those practices. By brewing the tea in small pots, with small cups, these masters simultaneously preserved this valuable tea and cultivated skills and refinement, grace and fluidity in concordance with their worldview.

If possible, we would always recommend brewing an oolong like this gongfu: with an Yixing pot, porcelain cups, a tea boat and kettle/stove. If that isn't possible, you can adapt this tea to any method of brewing or pot/cup/bowls that you have. Don't feel like you have to brew this tea gongfu or not at all.

A general rule for brewing oolong tea is to cover the bottom of the pot like the first, freshly-fallen leaves of autumn: covering the bottom, but you can still see it. This is important because ball-shaped oolong teas really open up a lot, and they therefore need the room to do so. Remember, it is always better to start with too little and add more than to use too much, which wastes tea. Give the tea a longer rinse, so that the balls can open a bit more before pouring. This helps ensure they won't get bunched up near the spout before they are fully open. The ideal is to get all the balls to open equally and at the same time, which will produce an ethereal third through fifth steeping!

# FORMOSAN Black Dragon

## A BASIC INTRODUCTION TO TAIWANESE OOLONG TEA

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*We'd like to start with a special thanks to Li Guang Chung, whose research was invaluable in creating this introduction.*

*Taiwan is truly a tea paradise, full of bountiful tea varieties, tea culture and events, teaware artisans and masters. A Chajin can turn any corner and find another tea lover to share another perspective over a cup or two. The island's wealth of tea is way beyond the scope of even an extended issue of Global Tea Hut. There is more oolong variety than we can explore, let alone all the other kinds of red and green tea the island offers. If you look at it, the island itself is shaped like a tea leaf!*

*Our journey through Taiwanese oolong will be geographical. Like all true Zen masters, Tea has always been known by the mountain She comes from, since She is one with Her terroir. A few of the teas shown on the map to the right are varietals/processing methods—Baozhong, GABA, Eastern Beauty and Tieguanyin—but the rest are locations. We will move from the general to the specific, starting with an overview in this article and then moving into the history of Taiwanese tea, changes over time, varietals and then some informative articles on specific oolong regions and farmers. So let Guanyin flick her magic waters on us and let's climb up on this black dragon. He's gentle, and will guide us well...*





# Wen Shan 文山 / Pinglin 坪林

Baozhong (包種)

GABA (佳龍)

Muzha 木柵

Tieguanyin (鐵觀音)

Beipu\* 北埔

Eastern Beauty (東方美人)

\*also found in Miaoli (苗栗)

Taichung 台中

Li Shan (梨山)

Da Yu Ling (大禹嶺)

Nantou 南投

Mingjian (名間)

Dong Ding (凍頂)

Shan Lin Xi (衫林溪)

Yu Shan (玉山)

Chiayi 嘉義

Ali Shan (阿里山)





Oolong is the richest and most refined of tea chests, filled with so many varieties and kinds of tea that you couldn't explore them all in a lifetime. It is technically defined by the fact that it is semi-oxidized, but that barely sketches an outline of this huge genre of tea—especially since “semi-oxidized” can mean everything from ten to seventy percent. When you add to that all the different mountains oolong tea comes from, the varieties of trees and variations in processing, you have a huge map, spanning Taiwan, Chaozhou and Fujian mostly. We'd truly need the “black dragon” this tea is named after to fly through the rich heritage, history and variety of oolong. But what a journey that would be!

When talking about genres of tea, it is always important to remember that the popular statement “all tea is one plant and the differences are in the processing” can be very misleading indeed. There is some truth in that statement, but authors who use it rarely qualify it as much as they should.

Different processing methodologies were developed locally over time and are as much a part of the terroir as the rain, sun or soil composition. And these regional variations in processing grew alongside certain varieties of tea. The masters who lived and worked with these leaves were listening to them, and that conversation was often responsible for the evolution of any given processing methodology. In other words, oolong processing was developed over time to suit certain varieties of tea because that is what brought out their greatest potential. The farmers mastered their craft by processing the tea the way it “wanted” to be—for lack of a better word, we use “want” to describe the nature of the tea. Just as water “wants” to flow downhill, these leaves *wanted* to be oolong. In that way, oolong is as much in the varieties of tea as it is in the processing. And that is true for most of the other seven genres of tea as well (red and black tea can be exceptions to this rule, but not always). While you could process tea

leaves from Wuyi mountain like a green tea or an artificially fermented black tea (not red!), they would not be nearly as good as green tea from a green tea varietal or Liu Bao black tea. Furthermore, they wouldn't be as nice as the oolong made from the same leaves!

And this evolution continues on in every tea-growing season, even now. If you travel to Wuyi, for example, and watch a true master make oolong tea each year, you will see a lot of variation from year to year. The overall methodology used to describe oolong production is as general and rough a sketch for what actually happens as any basic understanding of an artistic process is. In any art, the basic formula is always a very abstract and simplified explanation of what the practitioner knows much more intimately, subtly and with complex discrepancies. Similarly, when a beginner watches a master brew gongfu tea, he or she tries to grasp the basic steps of pre-warming the cups, showering the pot, steeping the tea, showering the pot again, and so forth. But to the master, there are great and very important subtleties that change these steps from tea to tea, like the height from which you pour water into the pot, for example.

The master farmers are changing the way they make tea each and every season. Everything from when they pick—which day and what time of day—to how long they fry the tea to de-enzyme it will change based on the weather and season and how the tea looks and feels to them. This means that their processing must suit their trees and terroir, and not as some fixed methodology, but rather as a changing and adaptable process that, like any skill, requires them to intuit and then modify their processing to suit the current leaves. In that way, oolong is as much the terroir and trees as it is the processing methods.

Oolong tea is the most refined and complicated of all tea production, requiring the greatest skill to make. The processing can refine or ruin a tea. Each kind of tea finds its quality in a ratio between these three things:

1. *The trees and the environment/terroir.*
2. *The farming methods, viz., organic or not, fertilized or not, irrigated or not, etc.*
3. *The processing/drying of the tea leaves.*

With puerh tea, for example, the quality is almost exclusively in the first of these—the trees and the environment. When producing a fine oolong, however, all three are equally important. It's not enough to have great tea in a nice environment, since the complicated processing will have as much to say as Nature. This is true of all tea, as a manifestation of Heaven, Earth and Human energies, but none as profoundly as oolong tea.

The basic steps that make up all oolong production are harvesting, withering, de-enzyming, rolling and roasting. But these steps are a part of almost all tea production. What really sets oolong apart is the withering/shaking. Because oolong is a semi-oxidized tea, it is withered in a very particular way—both indoors and outdoors. Oolong is traditionally withered on big, round bamboo trays that are stacked on shelves, allowing for airflow underneath. (Though production in larger quantities as well as more modern, mechanized processing, means that it is also often withered on large tarps outside on the ground.) As we discussed earlier, there are infinite subtle variables in the withering of fine oolong tea. We have even seen a master lick his thumb to feel the humidity during indoor withering, and then ask his sons to bring a can full of charcoal to place in the back right corner of the room where he felt the humidity was too high.

During the withering, oolong tea is also shaken. This shaking is the most distinctive feature of oolong tea processing. It helps to bruise the cells and further the oxidation of the tea. When you see a master pick up one of the big round trays and dance the leaves around with grace, you may think that it looks easy—





until you try it and toss all the leaves onto the ground (or in your face). Like all stages of fine tea, this too takes great skill. The best shaking will just bruise the cells at the edges of the leaf, which will be apparent when you brew the tea. When the shaking is done masterfully, there is a redness only at the edges of the tea, all around each leaf. Nowadays, in a world of quantity over quality, most stages of tea processing are done with machines. The shaking is done in a large machine that turns around on an axis and tumbles the tea, bruising it, but not with the precision that a master can manage by hand.

Oolong tea is either ball-shaped or striped, depending on how it is rolled. The rolling is done to further break down the cells in the leaf and to shape the tea. Striped tea is rolled flat across large, ridged bamboo mats. Ball-shaped oolong, on the other hand, is rolled in twisted-up bags. You can tell a lot about a tea by looking at the shape of the balls or stripes. Hand-processed tea, for example, will have a variety of shapes, sizes and twists in the balls or stripes, whereas

machine-processed tea will be much more uniform.

After withering/shaking, the second most important part of oolong processing is the roast. If a farmer is roasting their tea themselves (as opposed to selling *maocha* to a shop), they will usually just roast the tea dry—to arrest oxidation and stop the processing—until all the tea is finished that year. They don't have the time to keep up with all the tea coming in, and rarely sleep during harvests. After the picking and initial processing of the *maocha* is done, they will then roast the tea slowly and with care, knowing this is one of the most crucial stages in the production of fine oolong tea.

Traditionally, all oolong tea had higher oxidation and roast than what you see these days. The range of oxidation that defined the genre of oolong was much smaller for the first few hundred years of its development. Most old-timers can't stand the lightly oxidized, greener tea that is popular these days. Some say that "if it looks like a green tea and smells like a green tea, then, well..." That trend began in

Taiwan in the late 1970s and became predominant in the 1980s. And the shift toward greener oolong also had to do with terroir and varietal.

As we have discussed in previous issues, the majority of Taiwanese oolong tea is produced from *Ching shin* trees, which were brought to Taiwan from Wuyi. They are very sensitive trees, which get sick easily. As Taiwan started to develop infrastructure and prosper in the 1970s, tea culture grew in popularity and farming started to increase. Marketing moved production into higher altitudes where *Ching shin* trees thrive. Higher altitude farms receive less sunlight and the tea leaves therefore respond well to light oxidation. Again, the innovations in processing were a result of changes in terroir. This can't be stated enough, especially since so many authors mistakenly promote the idea that all tea is one plant and that the differences in kinds of tea are just based on the arbitrary decisions made by farmers who choose to process their tea as white, red, black, oolong, etc. And if you are reading between the lines, as good teawayfarers,



you can perhaps see the more profound truth hiding between the rows of tea trees: *there is no tea tree of itself.*

Saying that there is no such thing as a tea tree of itself seems obvious, but necessary to state. We so often forget to connect the dots because our rational mind is all about dissection and analysis, fragmentation and exploration of conceptually cut-up parts. There is no tea tree. Not really. Tea is an environment. Tea is the soil, the weather, the water, the rocks and mountain. Oolong tea is not a formula in a textbook. (Show me a farmer who uses a textbook to process his tea!) Neither is it in the leaves alone. *Oolong tea is a certain terroir*, one that includes a particular processing methodology that suits the environment, trees and leaves of that place. It is also the culture and heri-

tage that has been developed, refined and passed on that processing wisdom from generation to generation.

And so you can understand how traditionalists might not see tea in such simple categories as “oolong,” especially when the whole industry has so radically transformed in a single generation. Generally speaking, we find that most tea lovers will slowly migrate towards deeper, darker and more full-bodied teas over time. But that doesn't mean we don't enjoy a lightly roasted oolong now and again. They can be spectacular! But a nice heavily roasted oolong at the height of winter can change your day, and maybe even your week. There is a power and breadth to an oolong that has been crafted in the traditional way. It coats the mouth and throat and has a lasting *huigan*.

Lightly oxidized oolong teas, processed by machine, lack character. They are standardized and too uniform, season to season and cup to cup.

## **Background**

Taiwan has developed a reputation for the production of fine oolong such as *Bai Hao* (Eastern Beauty), *Dong Ding*, *Baozhong* and several other varieties of high-mountain oolong tea. Modern business practices and agricultural research have combined with Taiwan's ideal humid mountain climate to foster one of the most dynamic and influential tea markets in the world. This contemporary success story is built on a firm foundation, as the island has for centuries been an important hub for tea and





tea culture, though not without an environmental price. Its tea culture dates to at least the eighteenth century. Even classic Qing Dynasty Chinese books compliment Taiwanese tea production and mention its centrality to the people's way of life. According to one such record, there were wild tea trees in Taiwan as far back as the mid-1600s, though it was not until the Yongzheng reign (1723-1735) of the Qing Dynasty that the Taiwanese began to harvest and sell the tea from these trees.

However, the tea trees developed over the past two hundred years in Taiwan are not related to those native wild tea trees memorialized in such historic records. Most Taiwanese tea is instead descended from the plants and traditions of Fujian province in China's southeast, just a few hun-

dred kilometers across the Taiwan Strait. This is true of processing and of varieties. (The exception to the latter would be the Three Daughters of Taiwan: native varieties we will discuss in depth later on in the issue.) The ancestors of today's tea masters brought their trees from Fujian to the highlands of Taiwan, along with the skills and knowledge necessary to produce the fine assortment of oolong that has become so famous around the world. The processing methods found in Taiwan today can be divided roughly between the northern and central regions of Taiwan, corresponding to the proximate regions of northern and southern Fujian.

As mentioned before, the two main types of oolong in the world can be categorized according to the shape of their leaves, which are either

striped or ball-shaped. These two distinctive shapes correspond to the original birthplaces of oolong: the northern part of Fujian along the Danshui River for the long and thin striped oolong like Wuyi Cliff Tea, which is the very first oolong of all, and the southern tight ball-shaped oolong, which came after the northern striped tea, exemplified by *Tieguanyin* (Anxi Iron Goddess). The northern Fujian striped oolong migrated to the hilly regions of the northern half of Taiwan and the southern ball-shaped oolong was brought to the central highlands via Muzha in the north. This is a categorization based on processing, not varieties/cultivars, which we will discuss later on in the issue. (Most consumers are satisfied with understanding the processing and brewing of their teas and rarely explore varieties.)



With an understanding of the two categories of oolong based on processing (striped vs. ball-shaped), let's take a closer look at the types of Taiwanese oolong in those terms:

**Northern Danshui River Tea:  
Baozhong (or Pou Chong) &  
Bai Hao (Eastern Beauty)**

**Origin:  
Northern Fujian, Wuyi Cliff Tea**

**Date of Import to Taiwan:  
1810 AD (Qing Dynasty, Jiaqing)**

The oolong from the northern region of Taiwan is primarily stripe-shaped, consistent with the tea trees and processing techniques imported from the banks of the Danshui River in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most famous of these are *Baozhong* (*Pou Chong*) and *Bai Hao* oolong. (There is the exception of Taipei's Muzha *Tieguanyin*, which is farmed and processed in a more southern fashion. It is, in fact, where the southern-style tea landed in Taiwan, after which it spread to the central highlands.)

Taiwan began producing *Baozhong* as early as 1810 when immigrants from Quanzhou, Fujian cultivated tea trees to make flowered tea, like jasmine green tea, for export. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the export market collapsed with the chaos of World War II. Taiwanese tea producers shifted their focus to the domestic market, which demanded finer quality tea. This turned out to be a positive change, as it forced them to research and develop the skills to generate natural floral fragrances from tea without using actual flowers. Since then, *Baozhong* has been bred and processed to emphasize the aroma and complexity of its fragrance, with a flowery fullness as the goal of fine *Baozhong*. Of all the oolong Taiwan produces, *Baozhong* is the lightest in oxidation (sometimes as low as 5%). Its elegantly narrow and naturally curved shape reveals its Wuyi heritage, but unlike the heavily oxidized and roasted



Cliff Tea of Wuyi, *Baozhong* acts as a bridge between green tea like *Long Jing* or *Bi Lou Chun* and the versatile world of oolong. It offers a unique light taste, fresh and green, while at the same time presenting the floral fragrances of oolong. *Baozhong* is named after the packaging it was once wrapped in, which distinguished it from other Taiwanese tea.

Another famous Taiwanese striped tea is *Bai Hao* oolong (Eastern Beauty). Its distinctive flavor is a result of a natural chemical reactive process, borne of the interaction of the tea with its surrounding environment. In the summer, the population of leaf-hoppers (katydid, *Jacobiasca formosana*) reaches its peak, and most of the tender tea leaves are eaten by these insects. As a natural self-defense mechanism, the tea trees begin producing higher concentrations of polyphenols and tannins. These natural chemicals mix with enzymes in the insects' saliva, causing the tea leaves to begin oxidizing before they are picked, which produces a rich, fruity and floral aroma. *Bai Hao* oolong is further distinguished by the fact that it requires three to four thousand leaf tips to make six hundred grams of tea, where the same amount of another tea is usually made up of about one thousand. It is the most oxidized type of Taiwanese oolong (70-80%), and is only harvested in Hsinchu and Miaoli counties during the summer season.





**Central Mountain Area:  
Dong Ding Oolong &  
High-Mountain Oolong**

**Origin:  
Southern Fujian, Tieguanyin**

**Date of Import to Taiwan:  
Qing Dynasty, Kangxi Period**

The processing methods of southern Fujian's *Tieguanyin* arrived in the central part of Taiwan as early as the Kangxi reign (1661–1772). Its characteristic round shape comes from a special cloth-wrapped rolling that also imparts a unique aroma to the tea. The tight shape limits the surface area of the leaf that is exposed to oxygen, enhancing and preserving freshness. This is very important for high-mountain oolong. If it becomes stale, it loses its wonderful floral fragrance. The most influential examples of this tea are Lugu's *Dong Ding* oolong and high-mountain oolong.


*Dong Ding* oolong originally referred to oolong harvested from the three villages of Pin Ding (another name for Dong Ding), Yung Long and Feng Huang in Lugu Township, Nantou County. Since then, it has come to mean oolong from anywhere in Lugu. In the olden days, when farmers had to walk to the tea farms and carry the harvested tea leaves back on foot, they had to tighten their calf muscles as they hiked. In the Taiwanese dialect, “*ding*” refers to this action. Every day, they climbed up and down the constantly foggy, slippery and cold mountain paths. “*Dong*” describes these cold and slippery roads. Hence, the name of the tea, “*Dong Ding*” alludes to the mountain hiking the farmers did in order to bring this tea to market.

*Dong Ding* oolong has undergone some changes since the days when the leaves were carried up and down the mountains on farmers' backs. Traditional *Dong Ding* oolong was oxidized more (~60%) and roasted less than those we see today. This is because more oxidized teas have a more consistent quality. When walking was the only means of transportation, it was vital to process the tea with higher oxidation, as the leaves would start oxidizing the moment they were picked. Tea farmers and merchants could store this higher-oxidized oolong safely for

several years without the help of modern innovations like refrigeration and vacuum- or nitrogen-sealed packaging. Today's more lightly oxidized (30% or lower) and more roasted style of *Dong Ding* oolong was fashioned by and for the annual Lugu Tea Competition. The lighter oxidation allows the judges to more easily inspect the nature of the tea leaves. Lighter-oxidized *Dong Ding* relies on a heavier roasting to bring out its mellowness and complexity, which is unique to this tea. Recently, many farmers in Dong Ding have returned to higher oxidation as well.

“Formosa High-Mountain Oolong” is a generic name that refers to all oolong tea harvested from plantations more than 1000 meters in elevation. Such farms originated in the 1970s in Mei Shan, Chiayi County. Farmers in Mei Shan originally depended on dragon eye fruit (*long yan*) and bamboo farming. In the 1960s and '70s, they faced financial hardship when the demand for bamboo and wood decreased. Local governments noticed the achievements of the tea industry in neighboring Lugu County and decided to help local farmers plant tea trees and learn the processing skills needed to revitalize their economy. The higher elevation (Mei Shan: 1100m vs. Lugu: 700m) and humid and foggy climate made the oolong produced in Mei Shan an immediate success. Its thick, refined consistency and rich, refreshing floral aroma quickly won the hearts of many tea drinkers in Taiwan. Following Mei Shan's success, tea farmers have been continuously trying to develop tea plantations at higher elevations. Nowadays, the most famous high-mountain growing regions are Yu Shan (1400m), Ali Shan (1600m), Shan Lin Xi (1700m) and Li Shan (2500m). Higher elevations have become synonymous with higher-quality tea produced in more favorable and hopefully organic environments.





Master Lu Li Zhen  
roasting oolong tea.

## Processing of Taiwanese Oolong

From the ethereally fragrant *Baozhong* to the caramel *Dong Ding*, from the intoxicatingly fruity Eastern Beauty to the teas grown at heights of thousands of meters, the Taiwanese oolong family presents an enchanting and unique tea experience for all tea lovers. But its diversity can be at times confusing and daunting. Oolong tea is an art, requiring the most skill to make and brew, and should therefore be appreciated with an artistic mind. When we were discussing this month's tea with Mr. Tsai, he said that no two oolongs are alike, especially these days with a range of oxidation from as low as five percent all the way up to eighty with Eastern Beauty. "There are so many steps, and each one so subtle. Every time a hand or even machine touches a batch of leaves it does so differently. This influence results in a unique tea." Oolong is processed in

the following basic steps, each with infinite shades:

**Harvest/picking** (*cai cha*, 採茶)  
**Outdoor withering** (*shai qing*, 曬青)  
**Indoor withering** (*liang qing*, 涼青)  
**Shaking** (*yao qing*, 搖青)  
*(Shaking & withering are repeated)*  
**Firing** (*sha qing*, 殺青)  
**Rolling** (*rou nian*, 揉捻)  
**Roasting** (*hong pei*, 烘焙)  
*(Often repeated)*  
**Sorting** (*fan ji*, 分級)

To fully understand the diversity of oolong tea, one must understand the interplay of three factors that characterize each oolong: degree of oxidation, roasting, and age. Of course, the cultivar of the tea plant also plays a decisive role in the overall aroma and taste, which we will discuss in another article soon.

Oxidation is one of the defining elements of all tea. In general, people categorize oolong tea as partially oxidized during processing. On the oxidation spectrum, oolong tea traditionally spanned from 30 or 40% to 70%. However, nowadays the high-mountain oolong (for example, the Li Shan, Shan Lin Xi, or Ali Shan oolong of Taiwan) may have an oxidation degree below thirty percent. *Baozhong* certainly does.

Once you enter the oolong world through the oxidation window, you immediately face another two important factors: degree of roasting and age. Roasting and aging the tea can both be thought of as post-production influences. Though they are different in many ways, you can think of them as commensurate, so that aging a tea throughout the years is like roasting it for longer periods.





## ***Roasting of Oolong*** ***(hong pei, 烘焙)***

Taiwanese oolong tea masters have inherited the roasting skills so essential to Wuyi Cliff Tea and Anxi *Tieguanyin*. Proper roasting of an oolong should achieve the following goals: (1) stabilize the tea quality; (2) correct the aroma and taste; and (3) increase the mellowness and complexity. Traditional oolong roasting can be a very time-consuming and labor-intensive process, especially for oolong such as *Dong Ding* and *Tieguanyin*. Roasting was often done by hand over hardwood charcoal fire, and the tea had to be monitored constantly by sight, smell and feel. Even today, when modern machinery has mostly replaced roasting over charcoal fires, experience and patience still play vital roles in the success of oolong roasting. It is common for oolong such as *Dong Ding* to undergo several days of roasting, and *Tieguanyin* to take weeks.

Constant attention is required, as any negligence during the lengthy roasting may ruin the whole batch.

A good roasting not only achieves the three goals mentioned above, but will also leave the tea free from any sharp or harsh firing or charcoal/burnt/roasty flavors. Every stage of oolong processing should complement and encourage the potential of the tea without leaving any trace of itself. The ideal roasting retains the existing floral quality, adds a mature fruity aroma and blends the two in harmony. It enhances the taste to create a lingering and penetrating experience that not only entertains the mouth and throat, but resonates smoothly with the body, changing the way the tea enters the subtle body or flow of Qi. In general, oolong tea may undergo additional, heavier roasting steps, beyond the first, for the following reasons:

- 1. To lower the tea leaf moisture content to about three to four percent so that the aroma and taste remain consistent over a longer period of time.*
- 2. To remove undesirable smells, especially any grassiness, usually due to an insufficient kill-green (sha qing) process.*
- 3. The high temperature during roasting causes complex chemical reactions among tea leaf components. Two major reactions are (1) the Maillard reaction: the carbonyl group of the sugars reacts with amino acids, and (2) caramelization: the oxidation of certain sugars. Both reactions result in brown-colored and aromatic components, and hence the more amber-colored liquor with more complex aroma that comes from a more roasted oolong.*

As a general rule of thumb, the roasting degree usually aligns with the oxidation degree. A higher-oxidized oolong can undergo a higher degree of roasting to develop a robust and complex aroma and taste. A lightly oxidized oolong, on the other hand, is better with light or even no roasting.

Roasting decisions are also largely affected by the consumer market's preference. Take *Tieguanyin*, for example: Anxi of Fujian province in China and Muzha of Taipei city in Taiwan are both renowned for their *Tieguanyin*, but their styles are totally different. Anxi *Tieguanyin* has little to no roasting these days, as the market has shifted to a floral aroma from the cultivar, which came on the heels of Taiwan high-mountain oolong's success. On the other hand, the sourness and sweet, pungent aroma of Anxi *Tieguanyin* hasn't caught on in Muzha, which still follows traditional heavy roasting to caramelize and mellow the aroma into something more mature and fruity.

## Aging

Enjoying aged oolong is an unfamiliar experience for most tea drinkers. Puerh, we know, generally gets better as it ages, but fewer of us know that something similar actually happens to oolong. While lightly oxidized oolong tea is generally understood to be best when drunk fresh, it can also be stored for years and improve with time—even though they are not the ideal candidates for aging. We all have limited space to store teas, so it is often better to choose a more heavily oxidized/roasted oolong, such as *Dong Ding*, *Bai Hao* or *Tieguanyin* for aging.

We must distinguish between intentionally aged oolong and oolong that has exceeded its shelf life but is still left around. The latter accounts for more so-called “aged oolong” on the market. If a shop does not sell a tea and tosses it in the back, the conditions for aging will be less than ideal and the resulting tea will be inferior to a well-aged oolong. An aged oolong is the kind that has been carefully

selected and stored by the owner so that its aroma and taste will develop over a long period of time, maybe tens of years.

Aging an oolong can significantly improve its mellowness and develop more complexity in the aroma and flavor. Aging oolong is not like aging puerh, where biological activity plays an important role in the transformation of the tea. Puerh requires a certain degree of humidity and air circulation, but aging oolong, on the other hand, is best in an environment low in humidity and oxygen. This means that many of us in this community, who live in places that are less than ideal for puerh aging, can

**This means that many of us in this community, who live in places that are less than ideal for puerh aging, can still age oolong. Generally, a more robust oolong is selected and placed in a glazed, earthenware jar. It helps to completely fill the jar so that there is less oxygen inside.**

still age oolong. Generally, a more robust oolong is selected and placed in a glazed earthenware jar. It helps to completely fill the jar so that there is less oxygen inside. The jar is then sealed, often with wax, and stored in a cool place without sunlight or humidity. More oxidized or roasted tea is usually drier and therefore ages better.

## Past to Modern

Since early Chinese settlers brought tea plants and their processing skills to the island, the knowledge of oolong and tea horticulture has been significantly refined and improved. A thriving Taiwanese tea culture has arisen as a result of three factors: (1) Nature: the perfect growing conditions for tea trees and the rich geographic landscape of Taiwan itself; (2) Timing: the economic boom in Taiwan since the '70s fueled the domestic market's demand for finer teas, creating a competition

that forced farmers to improve their product; and (3) The people: the hard-working, honest and creative tea producers in Taiwan are always refining their skills.

Today Taiwanese oolong has become one of the hottest tea fashions in the world. Taiwan's precious high-mountain oolong has even had a large impact on conventional oolong production in mainland China. Still, Taiwanese oolong faces a formidable economic challenge in the global market. More and more teas that bear the name “Taiwan,” “Formosa,” *Dong Ding*,” “*Bai Hao*,” etc., are not really from Taiwan and only marginally resemble the original quality.

These forgeries abound in Asia and the West, promising tea at cheaper prices but without the quality for which the originals have become famous. To overcome this problem, Taiwanese tea farmers, producers and merchants must continuously strive to improve and refine the quality of genuine Formosa teas and courageously introduce them to the world market.

We also would like to see Taiwan shine as a bright example of organic tea farming. As an island, Taiwan is protected by the sea, and could very well become the first fully-organic tea region in the world. This would surely put Taiwan at the forefront of oolong production again!





隱  
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# HOW OOLONG

The old man sipped his tea. He had never grown weary of that flavor. His father had picked oolong tea, as had his father's father and grandfather. And his young grandsons would also one day pick tea just like his daughter did now. It all made sense in a comfortable kind of way. He was proud to be a farmer of oolong tea, and took pride in the fact that it was the best tea in all the Kingdoms. Even the great emperor, Lord of Heaven and Earth, was said to prefer the taste of oolong above all else. The old man nodded, agreeing with his own thoughts. He drained his cup and watched his two grandsons sprint across the yard towards the house, the

dying sun infusing the sky behind them in the same sweet amber liquor he'd just finished.

The village boys were only clean right after a bath, and even then but briefly. The old grandpa didn't mind having them on his lap, though. He loved the boys, as his grandpa had once loved him when he came home dirty and ruffled by a day of adventure. He too had once sat on his grandfather's bony lap and listened to stories. He smiled now at his own bony knees. It was a smile of contentment. He was a part of something longer and greater than himself. His reminiscence of his family's legacy in tea put him in the mood to share it with the boys. He poured them each a cup of tea and laughed at the awkward way they held the cups, smelling the liquor as he had once taught them. He ruffled little Chang's hair. "Do you know what makes oolong tea so special?" His bushy white brows flared askance.

"I do," said the older Chen, not waiting for recognition. "It's because of the shaking."

"That's good, Chen," he sighed patiently. He poured them each another cup. "Let me tell you about the origin of oolong tea." The boys ignored the tea and stared at him with

rapt, glimmering eyes. Grandpa's stories were the highlight of their evenings...

"Long, long ago, people here picked tea just the way they do now. And they fried, shaped and fermented it just the same, too. But they didn't know how to shake it the way we do. Oolong tea wasn't the great treasure it is today, and the farmers had a hard time selling it." He looked at the children in mock-seriousness. "And the children had to work all day instead of playing by the river." The older one moaned and the younger Chang gasped in disbelief. "At that time, there was one farmer named Wu Long Wang (王烏龍). He actually liked hunting much more than picking tea. He was young and loved to daydream, and rarely brought home his quota of leaves. And that was why he was nicknamed 'Wu Long' or 'Black Dragon,' because he always took so long to gather his leaves that he was tanned dark by the sun. His family was always complaining. No one thought any good would ever come of him. He did occasionally redeem himself, though, by bringing home a good catch to share for dinner. Wu Long Wang took his bow with him everywhere. He wasn't any good at pick-





# GOT ITS NAME

ing tea or farming, but he sure was a great shot with that bow. In fact, the village's annual archery contest was the only time everyone liked Wu Long Wang. The rest of the year he was a just a lazy dolt." He paused to remind Chen of the virtues of hard work.

"One day, Wu Long Wang's father told him that he had better bring back a whole basket of tea leaves or he'd break his bow over his head. Wu Long Wang worked hard all morning and afternoon and filled his basket with the best leaves he could find. Just as he was about to sit down and be lazy, he saw the biggest, plumpest rabbit he'd ever seen. It noticed him and darted away. Wu Long Wang sprinted after the rabbit, without even thinking of setting down the basket of tea on his back. Half of the leaves flew out behind him in a trail, but he didn't stop. He had to have that rabbit." The old man paused dramatically to let the boys imagine the chase. "Finally, after an hour or two, the rabbit grew tired and Wu Long Wang used his bow to shoot it. He was so proud, he didn't even stop to rest, but skipped merrily back to the village. He showed his father the rabbit, but his father only had eyes for the half-empty basket of tea. He grabbed Wu Long Wang's bow and—" the old man mimicked

breaking the bow over Chen's head and both the boys laughed. "Wu Long Wang went to bed with no dinner. He was very sad. For two days and nights, his father refused to speak to him. On the third morning, the village elders were all waiting for Wu Long Wang when he woke up. He thought he was in big trouble for sure. To his great surprise, they all shook his hand, congratulating him and asking him if he had slept well. He looked at them, confused.

"Wu Long Wang," they said, "the tea you picked two days ago was the best tea we have ever had. All of the elders in the village have tasted it and agree that it is heavenly. You must show us where you picked it." Wu Long Wang showed them where he'd found the tea, but they had picked that tea before. They asked him to tell them exactly what had happened that day." The old man set Chang on the ground next to his brother and leaned in. "And do you know what they found out?"

"I do, I do," said Chen excitedly. "All the running had shaken up the tea leaves and that's why they tasted so good. The tea was sweet and delicious just like yours is!" The children all sat beaming up at Grandpa like tea lovers waiting for the best steeping.

"Clever boy!" He patted Chen's head. "And from then on, we have always shaken the tea. The village elders were so happy with Wu Long Wang that they named the new tea "Oolong" after him. He was allowed to hunt and daydream for the rest of his days as he pleased. In fact, the village elders were so impressed with the tea that they elected Wu Long Wang as a chieftan to sit with them on the village council from then on!" He looked at the boys and asked, "Do you know the moral of the story?"

"Yes grandpa, I remember," replied little Chang. "Daydream a lot, but don't forget to jump at the rabbit when it comes!"

Taiwan Oolong

台灣烏龍茶的品種

# VARIETALS OF TAIWANESE OOLONG

茶人: Wu De

*Deepening our understanding of the cultivars and varieties of Taiwanese oolong helps us on our journey through Taiwan. Remember, the environment, the trees and the processing skill of the producer define the quality of an oolong tea. Different varieties relate to certain environments better, have unique characteristics and need to be processed accordingly. No journey through Taiwan's rich oolong heritage would be complete without a discussion of the kinds of trees themselves.*

In 1644, the Manchus once again conquered China, beginning the Qing Dynasty. Around that time, huge waves of immigrants moved to Taiwan to start new lives, often running from the economic/political problems resulting from such dynastic change. Most of these immigrants came to Taiwan from Fujian, one of the brightest leaves on the great tree of Chinese tea, for Fujian is the birthplace of oolong tea, as well as many other kinds of famous tea. Even today, it is a certain stop on any tea lover's tour of tea mountains, including Wuyi Mountain, where Cliff Tea (*Yan Cha*) is grown, Anxi, birthplace of Iron Goddess (*Tieguanyin*), and Fu Ding, where white tea comes from... It should come as no surprise, then, that the settlers from such a tea land would bring tea with them, hoping to plant it on the magical island they saw shimmering above the mist, rising out of the ocean like the great turtle their beloved Guanyin rides through the Heavenly waters.

The tea that those early settlers brought thrived in Taiwan, especially in the mountains. The soil is rich in volcanic minerals and the mists that

come in from the seas fill the valleys and highlands with the moisture that tea loves. The humidity, temperature, rainfall, mists and clouds as well as the gravelly soil are all ideal for tea growth—so much so that you have to wonder if the Fujianese found that out after they brought tea, or if they brought tea after they realized how suitable the island would be for its cultivation. Of course, the destiny of the tea trees was also rewritten by the journey across the strait...

One of the ancient names for tea is "Immovable." All the earliest tea sages had to find wild tea trees, gathering leaves like any other sacred herb. It took a long time for tea to be domesticated. For many thousands of years, tea trees were of the forest—a medicine that the shamans and Daoist mendicants sought out for its spiritual effects. Eventually, though, tea was domesticated, and then carried further by people than it could have spread on its own. Soon enough, tea was propagated on many mountains in China, and new varieties started to evolve, with amazing new characteristics, flavors, aromas and Qi. This rich diversity continues to unfold today.

Like many plants, every tea seed is unique, allowing it to rapidly evolve to 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, lived in biodiversity, grown without agrochemicals, not irrigated and were cultivated with respect. The early farmers quickly realized that when you moved tea to a new location, it changed completely to suit its new home. As such, you could say that tea becomes its environment, as the surroundings become the tea.

As a sacred herb, tea has always decorated Chinese relationships, from business deals to spiritual transmissions, offerings to the gods and even weddings. Even today, the Chinese wedding ceremony is centered around tea: the bride makes tea for the groom, and his acceptance of the tea into his body is an acceptance of his new wife. One of the other aspects of why tea was used in such relationships is precisely that they also hoped these commitments would be "Immovable."



超越







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 varieties naturally, but farmers begin to create new hybrids, researching the differences in search of wonderful new teas. They also adapt their processing methodologies over time, listening to how the leaves want to be dried. Great skill (*gongfu*) is always a listening to 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 vari-

etals 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 variety 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.

With the help of the Portuguese, Dutch, and later the Japanese, Taiwanese 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. With the help of local farmers, they formed the Taiwan Oolong Tea Research and Development Station 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 oolongs and also promote a greater resistance to pests, foreboding the detrimental effects pesticides could have on sustainable agriculture. They also brought large-leaf seeds from Assam to central Taiwan, creating the plantations near Sun Moon Lake that were later abandoned, after the Japanese left, and have recently been tended again to produce marvelous, wild red tea.

There is magic in the way tea trees have changed over time, evolving into new varieties based on their terroir. 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, for there is so much to learn, so many teas to taste and so many cups





# 品種栽培品種

## Varietal vs. Cultivar

The terms “varietal” and “cultivar” are used often in discussions of tea trees. “Varietal” is a more general term referring to any difference below the level of species, whereas “cultivar” refers to a man-made varietal. So a cultivar is a kind of varietal, in other words. Sometimes, in the West, any herb in hot water is referred to as “tea.” However, tea lovers like us will call an herbal brew “tisane,” and leave “tea” to tea, which is a group of camellia trees.

Botanically, all camellias are in the family Theaceae (which comes from the Greek “Thea,” or “Goddess”), along with other species like *stewartia*. Within that family of plants is the genus *Camellia*, which is then subdivided into groups, one of which is “Thea,” which refers to all camellia leaves used for tea (or Goddess worship, in other words). There are a couple dozen species in the group “Thea,” including *Camellia sinensis*, *irrawadiensis*, *taliensis*, and some others. All of the “Thea” species of camellia are considered to be tea.

A varietal or cultivar is a subdivision of any one of those species, with the vast majority of varieties/cultivars found in the species *Camellia sinensis*. Obviously, the world of tea trees is vast, and much more complicated than you’d think. There are more varieties in Yunnan, the birthplace of all tea, than the rest of the world combined. And many of those varieties are not cultivars, but created by Nature.

\* Left is Kingfisher Jade (Tsui Yu, 翠玉).

to share! Some of the famous varieties of tea are wild mutations, created by the energies of Nature and Earth, while others are 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.

When it comes to Taiwanese varieties, there is a lot of misinformation and debate about details. Much of what a farmer understands about the fine details of tea genetics, hybrids and varieties is uninteresting to us. Still, a basic understanding of the main varieties of oolong that have made Taiwan famous is worthwhile, especially the “Three Daughters,” as they are called. In exploring the amazing variety of tea that have 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.

Many of you will recall that there are two broad categories of tea trees, big leaf and small leaf. Big leaf tea trees are the original tea, born in Yunnan. They have a single trunk, with roots that grow deeper and more downwards. As tea traveled north and east, whether propagated naturally or carried by man, it evolved to suit the colder climates. Small leaf tea is more of a bush, with several trunks and, of course, smaller leaves. In fact, the further north you go, the smaller the leaves—until you get to Japan, where the leaves are so small they are like needles when they are dried and rolled. And all oolong tea is considered small leaf tea.

Oolong tea in Taiwan can be broadly divided into two main categories: the traditional varieties that were brought from the mainland and the

hybrids which were researched and developed specifically in Taiwan. As we discussed earlier in this issue, when we explored the Tea of the Month and in the introduction, the traditional, classical varieties were brought over with immigrants during the Qing Dynasty. The native hybrids, on the other hand, are the result of decades of research that began when the Japanese controlled Taiwan from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until WWII. The work the Japanese initiated, with the help of local farmers, continued after they left and resulted in the creation of the Three Daughters of Taiwan in the 1970s, all of which have contributed greatly to the success and fame of Taiwanese oolong. There are also many, many other cultivars that we won’t have time to cover, as they are not used often or are used to make red tea, for example. In order to better understand and appreciate Taiwanese tea, let’s explore some varieties.



## Traditional Oolong Varietals:

### Gentle Heart (*Ching shin*, 清心)

At the start of the Qing Dynasty, farmers transplanted several varietals to Taiwan, mostly bringing them from Wuyi. All the varietals that they brought were lesser-known and undervalued teas. The famous varietals, like the Four Famous Teas of Wuyi, were protected and weren't allowed to travel. Even within Wuyi, it isn't easy to get cuttings of first, or even second-generation *Da Hong Pao*, for example. Several of these varietals were later abandoned, found to be unsuitable to Taiwan's unique terroir, while others still thrive here—in new and bright forms only found on this island.

In Beipu and Miaoli, where Eastern Beauty comes from, they have *Huang gan* (黃柑) and *Ching shin da mo* (青心大有), the latter of which can also make a nice green tea. In Pinglin, and to a lesser extent in Beipu and central Taiwan, there is also the Wuyi tea varietal (sometimes called “*Da ye* (大葉),” which means “big leaf,” though that's confusing because it isn't a big-leaf tea tree; it merely has larger leaves than other varietals in Taiwan). There is also the legendary *Tieguanyin* varietal (鐵觀音品種), brought from Anxi, Fujian and cultivated primarily in Taiwan's Muzha region. The most famous of the tea varietals that were brought here from the mainland long ago, however, is *Ching shin* oolong, which means “Gentle Heart.”

Some say Gentle Heart oolong is named after the tenderness of the fresh leaves, while others suggest that the name refers to the fact that this kind of tea tree is sensitive. *Ching shin* doesn't do well at lower altitudes, since the trees can get sick easily, having delicate constitutions. *Ching shin* is by volume the largest percentage of Taiwanese high-mountain oolong, thriving at high altitudes where the air is fresh, clean and cool. This makes *Ching shin* unique. Of the four tea varietals we are going to discuss in this

article, *Ching shin* is closer genetically to Four Seasons Spring (*Si ji chun*, 四季春). It also produces the best and highest quality Taiwanese high-mountain oolong teas. With the right terroir and processing, a *Ching shin* oolong can shine brightly, indeed.

In order to distinguish these four teas, you have to look at the leaves, their shape, and most especially the veins. All tea leaves have a central vein that travels from the stem to the tip, but it's the branching veins that help determine the varietal. *Ching shin* and *Si ji chun* both have branching veins that join the central vein at angles from 30 to 60 degrees, while *Jing shuan* (金萱) and *Tsui yu* (翠玉) display veins that come out at an 80- to 90-degree angle (almost straight). You can then separate the pairs by looking at the shape because *Tsui yu* and *Ching shin* are longer and thinner shaped, while *Jing shuan* and *Si ji chun* are rounder. We'll highlight these characteristics again as we discuss each varietal individually.

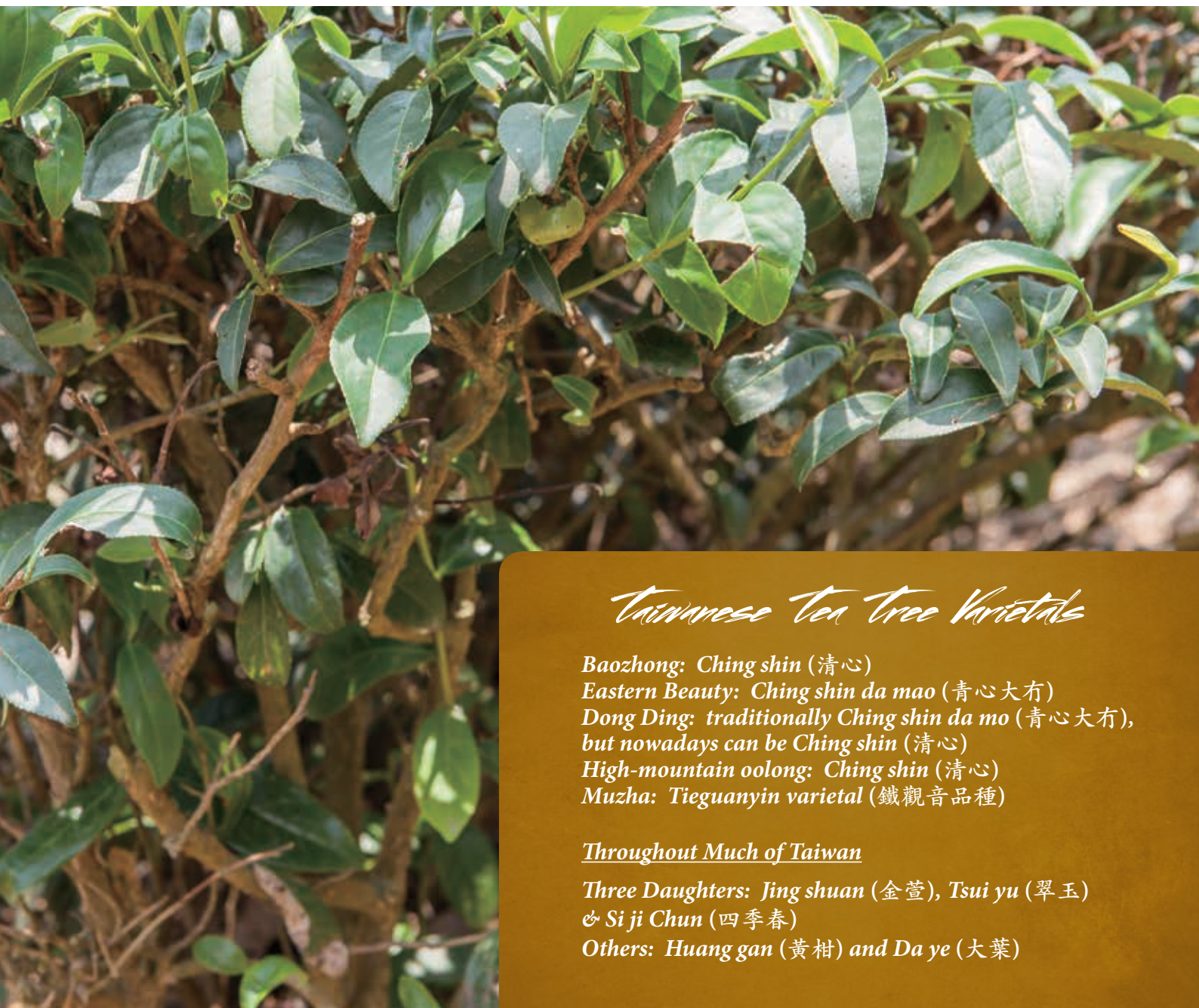
*Ching shin* tea has a dark green hue when viewing the bushes in a row, though color is never a clear determiner—not without analyzing the leaves. The foliage is also not as dense or vibrant as *Tsui yu* or *Jing shuan* cultivars.

*Ching shin* tea is often produced as lightly oxidized oolong nowadays. It has a refreshing flavor with a light liquor that tastes of flowers, green leafy vegetables or orchids. The light greenish-yellow to yellow liquor is clear and thin, with some bitter astringency at the front, and a lasting *huigan* (a sensation of cool, mintiness on the breath) when it is processed properly. The Qi is light and uplifting, cooling and breezy.





# 清心



## *Taiwanese Tea Tree Varietals*

*Baozhong: Ching shin (清心)*

*Eastern Beauty: Ching shin da mao (青心大有)*

*Dong Ding: traditionally Ching shin da mo (青心大有),  
but nowadays can be Ching shin (清心)*

*High-mountain oolong: Ching shin (清心)*

*Muzha: Tieguanyin varietal (鐵觀音品種)*

### *Throughout Much of Taiwan*

*Three Daughters: Jing shuan (金萱), Tsui yu (翠玉)*

*& Si ji Chun (四季春)*

*Others: Huang gan (黃柑) and Da ye (大葉)*



## The Three Daughters:

### Golden Lily (*Jing shuan*, 金萱)

*Jing shuan* oolong is a hybrid that was established in the 1970s. Its Taiwanese number is TW #12, though farmers often refer to it as “2027” or just “27.” These numbers refer to the process the Taiwan Oolong Tea Research and Development Station used to classify the teas as they were developing and testing them. As mentioned above, the leaves of *Jing shuan* are rounder while the branching veins come off the central vein at an almost right angle (80 to 90 degrees). From a distance, the bushes have a yellowish-green hue, which may also help distinguish this cultivar. *Jing shuan* tea is primarily grown on Mt. Zhu in central Taiwan. It doesn't thrive in the extreme cold of very high altitude gardens or plantations like *Ching shin*, but isn't as susceptible to cold as *Tsui yu*. When it is healthy, *Jing shuan* has more vibrant foliage than other varieties.

*Jing shuan* is one of the easiest of the four teas to distinguish. The dry leaves have a golden, yellowish-green hue, as does the liquor. *Jing shuan* is famous for its milky texture and fragrance—often referred to as “Milk Oolong.” There is misinformation in the tea world that this name is due to the use of milk as fertilizer, but the name actually comes from the tea liquor itself: *Jing shuan* is thick and creamy, and if the terroir is right, with more sun, and the processing has been done well, it has a definite milky aroma which is very pleasing. Its fame has resulted in fake “Milk Oolongs” produced in mainland China that are sprayed with artificial milk flavors post production, giving them a strong and unnatural fragrance of milk. (Yuck!) Real *Jing shuan* has only a subtle hint of a milky fragrance in the aftertaste. The thick, oily liquor coats the throat. It has a deep and lasting Qi that resonates inwards.



金  
萱





### Kingfisher Jade (*Tsui yu*, 翠玉)

*Tsui yu* oolong is also a hybrid that came to life in the 1970s, after decades of research. In the Taiwanese index, it is TW #13, though farmers often refer to it as “2029” or just “29.” Like *Jing shuan*, the leaves of *Tsui yu* have veins at 80- to 90-degree angles, though they are long and arrowhead-shaped. When you stand back from a field of *Tsui yu*, the leaves have a bluish-green (kingfisher) tint to them and they are more vibrant, with lush foliage than all the other four varieties we will discuss here. *Tsui yu* dislikes cold weather, so it can't be grown at very high altitudes. It is predominantly grown on Mt. Zhu and in the lowlands around Ming Jian.

*Tsui yu* has a flavor of seaweed, lima beans and often fruit. It is more famous for an aroma of wildflowers and an aftertaste of fresh fruit. Some say it tastes of lotus or lilac; others say cassia or peach. Much of this depends on the terroir, the season and the skill of the producer. The Qi is yin. It centers you in the heart.



翠玉



### Four Seasons Spring (*Si ji chun*, 四季春)

Though you could perhaps call *Si ji chun* a hybrid, it is a natural, wild varietal that arose in Muzha. Since it is a more natural varietal, it is heartier than the others. This is a testament to one of the principles we always promote in these pages when discussing what we call “living tea,” which is that the leaves produced by man will never compare to Nature's. It's possible to further distinguish man-made teas by calling them “cultivars.” These trees yield buds at least four times a year, which is where its name comes from. “*Si ji chun*” might also be translated as “Four Seasons like Spring,” referring to the fact that this bush can produce as much in other seasons as in spring. It is also thought to be the youngest of the Three Daughters, coming into commercial production in the 1980s. *Si ji chun* does not have a Taiwan classification number, since it evolved naturally. Of the four teas here, *Si ji chun* is more closely related to *Ching shin* than it is to *Jing shuan* or *Tsui yu*. The leaves of *Si ji chun* are round in shape with veins that shoot off at 30- to 60-degree angles. The leaves have a light green hue, with less foliage like *Ching shin*. The buds of *Si ji chun* are often a gorgeous reddish hue when they emerge, which is a common mutation for many varieties of tea around the world.

As some of you will remember from June of 2013 when we sent out this fabulous tea, *Si ji chun* has an exuberant, golden liquor that blossoms in a fresh, musky floweriness. It is tangy with a slightly sour aftertaste, like the *Tieguanyin* varietal it evolved from. Many Taiwanese compare the aroma to gardenias. Of these four teas, it has the most distinguishable flavor. The Qi is cleansing, pushing outward from the center. It rises up in gusts, and leaves you feeling refreshed.



四季春



# Gongfu Experiments

## OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES

### UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENT IN A CUP

茶人: Sam Gibb

*Refining our usual gongfu practice through understanding heat, brewing methods and teaware is great, but it is also nice to foray into the more subtle realms, like exploring sound/music's relationship to the cup as we did last month. Sam decided to continue that exploration, testing the role the environment plays in brewing the same tea: outdoors and in, here and there.*







We often say bowl tea is about returning tea to its essence: leaves, heat and water. One thing I love (and at the same time find incredibly frustrating) about Zen and Tea both is that there is another, outwardly contradicting side: the sensitivity to the physical. Gongfu tea is about distinction, as all improvement is a movement from the gross to the subtle. If we're too lost in the essence, we miss the world and our chance to work with it. We create space with bowl tea, and then fill it with gongfu tea. These two practices dance together—seemingly contradictory, but actually in perfect companionship that results in the growth of both.

The essence of Cha Dao extends far beyond the water, leaves, teaware or the brewing method (gongfu or bowl tea). At a fundamental level, Cha Dao is about seeing everything as serving tea. This is a stage we have to spend our lives working towards, and yet can only be achieved in the present, right now. Another way to frame this would be to say that this moment is the only opportunity we have to view our life as service. So, as we often hear, both spiritual work and our tea

practice are movements towards complete peace and clarity within the world of flow.

In the gongfu tea experiments, we often stick to seemingly gross elements: encouraging people to try different brewing vessels, ways of boiling water or brewing methods. These are the basics for us to begin experimenting with. These are the building blocks on which our gongfu tea practice is built. The basics need to be strong and re-enforced if our building is to last and continue to grow. “Advanced techniques are basic techniques mastered,” as Wu De often says. We must continue to retry our experiments from new levels of mastery and sensitivity, ever and always honing our gongfu, our skill. But that doesn't mean we can't step out of the ordinary boundaries once in a while.

This month's experiment is one such foray into the even more subtle, allowing us to dig a little deeper into ourselves and our practice, asking the very open question: “What is the impact of *location* on gongfu tea?” We wanted to explore the effect the place had on the tea, mouth sensations, the subtle body and the overall session

itself. In recent issues, Shen Su has been writing a number of articles on *chaxi* (the tea stage). As you may have read, the tea stage is much more than what is happening on the tea table or the runner you choose to put down. If you go to see a live play, the performance is more than what is apparent. Of course, we notice the actors, the costumes, the music and dialogue. But where does the stage end? Is the audience not part of the show, too? What about the environment where the play takes place? Maybe you go to see a play in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and then see the same show at the Margravial Opera House in Germany. Or how about the Minack Theatre in Cornwall, which was built into a cliff face overlooking the sea? Several tons of rock from the beach below were hand-carried up the cliff by a retired woman and her gardener! Would these not be different plays/experiences? If so, how? A place has a magic all its own from the love and skill that went into its creation and decoration. The same should be true for our *chaxi*. The location in which we sit may be as much a part of our experience as the pot.



Stillness helps us become more aware of what is happening around us and simultaneously inside of us. We have all experienced this. If you have been on a silent meditation retreat or even just woken up early enough, you know that physical stillness offers deeper connection to our lives.

I started with three different locations and drank the same tea, gongfu, at the same time of the day. I considered mouth sensations as usual, seeing if they changed in the different locations. The first was at the main tea table at the Center, which is surrounded by tea and is only used for tea ceremony. Second, I decided to compare the kitchen table. While we do drink a lot of tea there, it is not exclusively used for this. People often

walk in and out of the space, doing other things like making a snack or doing dishes! And third, I set up outside in the garden next door where we grow our food.

I brewed gongfu tea in each place, using the same three grams of a lightly oxidized oolong. I noted my general and specific impressions throughout the session, both emotional and mental—mouth sensations, the movement of Qi within my body and anything else I noticed.

This would be a great experiment to do with others. You can discuss the differences in being a host and guest in each location. There are so many variations you can try and elements with which to experiment. Start with focusing on gross differences such as

indoors or out, time of day, etc. Also, please share your findings with the community on our website or through social media. This way, we can all develop a deeper understanding of what harmony with our environment truly means, learning from not only our own experience but from our community's as well!



*All and everything in a cup of tea. How does the world change the tea? And the tea change the world?*





沒有改變的  
世界改變茶  
茶改變世界



# SOME HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON TAIWANESE OOLONG

It helps to have a historical context for Taiwanese oolong in order to understand how it got to where it is today. The changes in production have been at least partially market-driven. The art and spirit of tea production is something that is more difficult to find the ink for, and better left in the experience of drinking a magical oolong like our Tea of the Month. We have tried to express as much of the poetry, mythology, folklore and spirit of oolong tea as we can. This should be balanced, however, with some linear science and historical facts to ground our understanding of Taiwanese oolong, leaving us with a deeper and more holistic comprehension of this magical tea.



In the following section, we are going to explore the history of Taiwanese oolong from a linear orientation, focusing on the facts, the market, the people and events that are known to have shaped the direction of Taiwanese oolong, as well as the changes in production methodology over time. Again, we like a balanced, rounded approach to understanding tea. A good example of healthy and whole comprehension is how Ruan Yi Ming presents us with a very dry and factual account of how Eastern Beauty came about in the following section, while later in this issue (in the next section, called “Organic Farmers of the North”) we will read the legendary, poetic story of Eastern Beauty’s creation. Neither is more true or deeper. A tea lover is a *lover*, and a lover strives to know his or her beloved on every level: intellectual, historical, spiritual and creative through the art of tea.

It is important to start this tour through the history of Taiwanese oolong with a basic understanding of early oolong production, which, as we’ve mentioned, followed the same steps for centuries. There were of course different production methods to suit different varieties, but the general steps in traditional oolong production continue today. This basic formula for traditional oolong production is worth studying and learning, as it will form the basis for a deeper understanding of all types of oolong production. We covered the basic steps in the introductory article. They are summarized on pg. 23 of this issue. You should learn them before

traveling onwards. While knowing the basic stages in oolong production is great, we must remember that the master farmer is working on much more subtle levels than these basic steps. When we first start brewing tea, we learn to put some tea in a pot and steep it for so long, but those generalities quickly vanish as we move to subtler and subtler distinctions as our skill and sensitivity increase—what kind of clay, what size and shape of pot, which water, which fire, and so on. In the same way, each of these basic steps is full of infinite subtleties to the oolong master.

So far, we’ve learned how to categorize Taiwanese tea by processing method, which most basically is divided into the shape of the dried tea leaf: striped or ball-shaped. Then we learned the main varieties of tea trees in Taiwan and which type of tea they were traditionally used to make, like *Ching shin* for high-mountain oolong and *Baozhong*, and *Ching shin da mo* for Eastern Beauty and *Dong Ding*.

In the next article, Master He Jian gives us a clear, brief and very elegant summary of each kind of Taiwanese oolong, as well as how they have lost some of the traditional art and craftsmanship over the years. In the following article, Ruan Yi Ming dives deeper into the processing of Taiwanese oolong through historical records and experience.

Before moving on to a historical survey of oolong tea in Taiwan, we thought that you’d like some advice about aged and aging Taiwanese oolong. It is a question we get asked about a lot.



# AGED & AGING TAIWANESE OOLONG

The tradition of aging oolong is as old as oolong Herself. As with other types of tea, oolong was quickly recognized to improve with age. Cliff Tea was traditionally aged for a while before it was sold, and other areas of China have also intentionally aged oolong over the years. Today, aged oolongs are increasingly revered in Taiwan, where you can find oolongs more than 100 years old on occasion and more than a few decades old with relative frequency. Here, some oolong teas are marketed as “aged” after as few as six years, but most tea connoisseurs consider an oolong to be truly aged once it’s 20-30 years old. Unless they’re stored in poor conditions, most oolongs will become incredible if you simply wait long enough to drink them.

All other factors being equal, more oxidized, darker-roast oolongs have an advantage over the greener oolongs when it comes to aging. One of the key differences is moisture content. Traditional oolongs only have about two percent moisture content in the leaves (compared to five percent or more in greener, less roasted leaves), so they change and ferment more gradually and predictably. They are less likely to crumble into dust before their time or require excessive re-roasting to keep them from going all musty and moldy.

In order to have low enough moisture content for stable aging, oolong tea needs a longer “final roast” during its initial processing. This is a natural part of traditional oolong processing in Taiwan and it is still practiced in some parts of China, too. This

is why oolong traditionally didn’t require vacuum sealing, or all that extra machinery and wasted packaging. A stable roast meant the tea could be wrapped in simple paper and preserved that way indefinitely. Although a solid final roast and good storage are enough to keep the tea aging well for many years, many tea masters also like to re-roast the tea to keep the moisture content low during aging. Some do this several times a year, or every five years or at other intervals, and it’s common to light up the charcoal fire pit or switch on the electric roaster upon discovery of an accidentally aged tea. However, we belong to another school of oolong aging when it comes to roasting. More specifically, we don’t re-roast our oolongs at all. We find that it makes aged oolongs taste more like *roast* than *aged* tea, and that the tea doesn’t respond well to the inconsistencies of roasts (which are often done by different people using different roasting techniques over the years).

The instability of oolong teas that are not roasted enough is why many people say that they are not ageable. Since they are unstable, their flavor, aroma and Qi will fluctuate drastically over the first ten or even twenty years of aging, often passing through awkward phases. Eventually, Time stabilizes all things, including awkward tea (and teenagers), but for some time the tea will not be as nice as it was when fresh, nor as nice as a well-aged tea. This is actually true of all green teas, certain puerh and other teas that you would not ordinarily think of as good candidates for aging.

Because oolong doesn’t require moisture or oxygen to store, like puerh does, you can age oolong anywhere. Puerh really is best stored in humid environments, especially if you plan to age it for longer periods of time, but oolong will happily transform wherever you live. Simply fill a jar to the brim, which reduces oxygen in the container, and seal it with wax. You’ll want to put a string in the wax so it will be easy to open. If you want to check on it more regularly, you can forgo the wax, but remember that every time you open the lid you are exposing it to unwanted air and moisture—disturbing the tea’s meditation. It is best to leave the tea alone, disrupting it as little as possible. Resist the urge to check on it, open it or shake it to smell the leaves inside. Every movement will change the way it tastes years later. The more hermetic the seal is for the entire duration of its storage, the better the tea will be in the end.

A fine aged oolong often has a clear surface and a color like amber, notes of prune and Chinese medicinal herbs in the flavor and aroma, and a balancing, powerful Qi. It feels silky in the mouth and smooth in the throat. It has *huigan* (a minty-cooling sensation in the mouth and throat after swallowing) and a sweetness that lingers almost as if it is being exuded from the throat. You’ll know when you’re brewing it well because the leaves will begin to murmur to you of their past, present and future, speaking kindly of their many years spent circling the sun, all the while whispering hints of the illusion of Time...

Taiwan Oolong

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# THE LOST ART OF OOLONG

AN INTERVIEW WITH HE JIAN (何健),  
OWNER OF THE YEH TANG  
TEA CULTURE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

茶人: Yan Jie (顏婕) Donated By Wushing

*He Jian is one of the most influential Chajin (tea people) in Taiwan. He has been promoting tea culture for more than thirty years. He is one of the world's leading experts on Yixing teapots. His humble demeanor and love for kindness have made him a very important teacher to us. His perspective on Taiwanese teas is invaluable and we are honored to introduce him to our tea community.*

Imagine yourself savoring a cup of aged Wen Shan *Baozhong* tea from 1979. The tea leaves have witnessed the passage of more than thirty years to bring you this sweet, mellow tea liquor with its warm, clean fragrance. As you breathe in, your nostrils are filled with the scent of tea, soothing away life's stresses and anxieties. Our search for this traditional Taiwanese oolong flavor brought us to the Yeh Tang Tea Culture Research Institute on Taipei's Yongkang Street, where we listened attentively over the teacups to veteran tea master He Jian as he tirelessly recounted the stories behind Taiwan's traditional oolong tea varieties: Wen Shan *Baozhong*, Muzha *Tieguanyin*, Dong Ding oolong, and Eastern Beauty. His passion was contagious, and we fell in love with tea again. Master He's tea and stories did more than inform us; they left us inspired. Through his words, we were carried along on a journey through time, following the rise and fall of that traditional oolong

flavor, in pursuit of a fragrant curl of steam that wafted, dreamlike, through history.

## Wen Shan Baozhong (Pou Chong) 文山包

Wen Shan is situated in the southern and south-eastern regions of the Taipei Basin and was Taiwan's earliest tea-growing area, with tea first being cultivated there in 1810. Wen Shan *Baozhong* tea originated in Taipei's Nangang district in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its founding fathers were two natives of Anxi County in Fujian Province, Wang Shuijin (王水錦) and Wei Jingshi (魏靜時) who immigrated to Taiwan. They established a tea plantation on a hillside of Neihu Village in the Qixing region (near the old Nangang Village), and started to produce tea. From that point on, two distinct styles of *Baozhong* tea gradually developed: Wen Shan style and

Nangang style, each very different from the other.

Of the two tea growers, Wang Shuijin represented the Wen Shan *Baozhong* tea-making method, using a technique borrowed from Wuyi tea that involves twisting the tea leaves. With the existing Wuyi method as a starting point, he developed a process with a more thorough oxidation and roast, resulting in a stronger fragrance and a deeper, reddish-colored liquor. Because of its distinctive flavor, some people are still quite enamored of this stronger-scented, Wen Shan-style *Baozhong* tea. Wei Jingshi, on the other hand, modified the Wuyi tea-making method used for the Wen Shan style, changing the whole process right from the withering stage to produce a more lightly oxidized tea with a greener liquor and a lighter, sweeter fragrance. This was the Nangang style of *Baozhong* tea—the predecessor of the Wen Shan *Baozhong* tea that is commonly seen today.



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The term “red water” (referring to the color of the liquor) that dates back to the period of Japanese occupation was in fact used to distinguish the Wen Shan style from the Nangang style of processing. In 1921, the *Baozhong* Tea Institute was established in Nangang to promote tea production and pass on knowledge of tea-growing and manufacturing techniques to the local tea farmers. At that time, the bulk of the tea leaves were exported, together with those produced in the neighboring areas of Pinglin, San Xia, and Da Dao Cheng, with whom Nangang enjoyed close and mutually beneficial business ties. Later on, due to several factors such as mining and urban development, tea production in the mountains of Nangang slowly began to decline. The center of Nangang *Baozhong* tea production gradually began to shift toward Pinglin, where the environment was more favorable. From 1975 onward, the tea market gradually became geared toward domestic consumption, and these two villages that had sprung up because of the tea industry—Nangang and Da Dao Cheng—slowly went into decline.

*Baozhong* tea has a light, elegant flavor and a distinct fragrance, and is well-regarded in the market. Furthermore, the price of *Baozhong* tea is completely determined by the quality of the tea itself. The difference is obvious, unlike tea leaves from most tea regions where the price is relatively uniform and there's no way to distinguish the quality. In my opinion, *Baozhong* tea's distinctive flavor makes it the most classic example of Taiwanese tea, and one of the best teas to represent the small and refined character of Taiwan.

## Muzha (Mucha)

### *Tieguanyin* 木柵鐵觀音

During the period of Japanese rule, tea masters Zhang Naimiao (張迺妙) and Zhang Naigan (張迺乾) imported *Tieguanyin* tea seedlings from Anxi and planted them on Zhanghu Mountain in Muzha District (also called “Mucha”). Due to



*Eastern Beauty after heavy oxidation.*

the favorable soil quality and climate, the area of the plantation expanded rapidly and Muzha became a *Tieguanyin*-growing region. The main features of the manufacturing process included using leaves from the original *Tieguanyin* bush varietal, followed by relatively heavy oxidation, repeated cloth-rolling, and hand-roasting. This created a unique flavor with a rich, strong fragrance and a hint of tart fruitiness, and led *Tieguanyin* to become famed as a regional specialty tea that's representative of the traditional art of Taiwanese tea-making.

In recent years, the characteristics of *Tieguanyin*, from the aroma to the mouthfeel, have all changed a lot from that early style. So what were the main factors that contributed to the evolution of *Tieguanyin*'s flavor? The external factors include the development of tea plantations in Maokong in the 1990s that were aimed at sightseers. After Maokong became a tour-

ist attraction, many businesses sprung up in the area, and the influx of labor and resources changed the face of the local industry, causing the tea industry to decline. The main internal factor, on the other hand, was that as farmland was passed down through generations of tea growers, it was continually redistributed and divided into smaller and smaller sections, dramatically decreasing the area available for planting. Because of these core external and internal influences, it was inevitable that *Tieguanyin* would undergo a fundamental change.

In addition, the advent of tea competitions had an influence on the flavor of *Tieguanyin*. The authorities hoped to stimulate the tea economy, so from their perspective, the more tea varieties entered in the competitions, the better. In order to keep the competitions running, they needed to expand the area of origin of the raw tea leaves, so tea growers moved to





Pinglin to grow their tea, and started to make *Tieguanyin* using tea leaves from the Pinglin region. *Tieguanyin* teas from areas of mainland China also entered the arena alongside Muzha *Tieguanyin*, slowly diluting the distinctive traditional flavor of *Tieguanyin*.

I believe that the rarer the production of traditional *Tieguanyin* becomes, the more we need to highlight the few remaining great tea artisans, tea bush varieties, and tea-making methods, to set a benchmark for the industry. I hope that this high benchmark will become the pride of Taiwan and set an example for Anxi, so that once it has gained prominence, its uniqueness will be better recognized. To truly capture the “Guanyin spirit” that is so sought-after in traditional Muzha *Tieguanyin* tea (named for Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Mercy), you really need the genuine *Tieguanyin* varietal, plus the tradi-

tional manufacturing method. If we can promote the proper appreciation of *Tieguanyin*, then people will recognize its true rarity and worth and there will naturally be a market for it. Once demand is established, it will have a stimulating effect on the wider industry.

### *Eastern Beauty* 東方美人

Eastern Beauty tea is also called “*Peng Feng* tea,” or “*Bai Hao* (white tip) oolong.” It’s mainly produced in the Taoyuan, Hsinchu, and Miaoli areas of Taiwan. Its most recognizable characteristics are its delicate, lingering honey aroma, and the way it combines the traditional taste of oolong with the richness of red tea—of all the oolongs, it’s the closest in flavor to red tea. In 20<sup>th</sup>-century England, Eastern

Beauty’s distinctive taste and vigorous, energizing liquor was received with great enthusiasm and became very popular.

Eastern Beauty can only be produced in one season of the year (global warming has caused the quantity they are able to produce in winter to diminish). This makes it very difficult for small-scale tea farmers to make a living from growing it, and the production of Eastern Beauty tea in Taiwan is gradually decreasing. The tea plantations are small and the resources concentrated, which makes it relatively easy to hand-select the choicest tea leaves that have been bitten by the small green leaf-hoppers whose saliva gives the tea its characteristic sweetness. Because of this, the same few people tend to take the top prizes in the tea competitions. Add to this the importing of teas from outside Taiwan (and other factors) and the result is that over time,

this type of tea has also lost some of its unique characteristics. The level of oxidation has become lighter and lighter, and environmental changes have meant that the unique quality resulting from the green katydid's saliva is less and less prominent. The tea that is now produced can easily fetch ten to twenty thousand New Taiwanese Dollars per half a kilogram, yet the brewed tea is a very pale golden-yellow color and lacks the traditional amber color and robust flavor it had in the past. So the fundamental quality of the tea has slowly changed. How could we allow such a distinctive tea to simply disappear, being among Taiwan's most recognized specialty teas and an important Taiwanese export, with a flavor appreciated by even Queen Victoria of England? Though we may not have the opportunity to experience Eastern Beauty as it once was, we cannot lose sight of its worthiness of our appreciation.

## Dong Ding Oolong 凍頂烏龍

*Dong Ding* oolong is produced in Lugu Township in Taiwan's Nantou County, at an elevation of 500 to 800 meters above sea level. It's quite heavily withered and oxidized and goes through several rounds of rolling in cloth bags to give the leaves their ball-like shape (one of the traditional skills involved in making *Dong Ding* oolong is rolling the tea with one's feet). After that, it's slowly roasted over a charcoal fire to give the tea its characteristic rich, mellow fragrance. The craftsmanship involved in making the tea is very delicate and complex, representing the art of Taiwanese tea-making at its finest.

The Lugu Township Farmers' Collective that sprang up around *Dong Ding* oolong tea made a very significant contribution to the local industry: the volume of tea that they submitted to annual competitions represented two-thirds of the total volume of all entries. Every year, the volume of spring and winter tea samples that they submitted to the competitions totaled several thousand *dian*

(a measure equal to 11 kilograms). This had a big influence on the tea industry and established *Dong Ding* oolong as the leading player in Taiwanese tea competitions and the most well-known and influential of Taiwan's traditional oolongs.

These days, a situation worth pondering is this: in the competition categories for such a large-scale tea as *Dong Ding* oolong, the majority of the best-performing teas are in fact made from raw tea leaves sourced from very high-elevation tea plantations and not from *Dong Ding* itself. Of course, this is because highly elevated plantations have particularly favorable growing conditions, so the tea they produce has a pleasantly soft, sweet taste. But because of this, the original purpose of holding a competition for local tea varieties—that is, to promote and bolster the local tea-growing regions—has been lost. To draw a comparison: in a sporting event, athletes should be judged by their skill on the sports field, and not forced to dress up and enter a beauty pageant instead! Although the high mountain teas are indeed very sweet and fragrant, *Dong Ding* has a richer, more full-bodied taste and deserves to shine on its own stage. When making tea, it's important to work with the natural character of the tea. Only then can you achieve the traditional local style and flavor that *Dong Ding* oolong should display.

I truly hope that the *Dong Ding* tea region will be able to slowly recover, and that after the ecosystem and soil have been sufficiently cultivated, it will once again look just as it used to. Unfortunately, though understandably, no-one is willing to reproduce that traditional flavor of days gone by because of the time and effort involved—the road to the past is a hard road to travel. Some time ago, I had the chance to go to the mountains and experience tea-making for myself. You couldn't even go to sleep at night because you had to get up every two or three hours to process the tea—it was very hard work! Throughout the tea-making process, every time you turn the tea leaves over, every time you gather them up and spread them out, you can feel the subtle changes in the tea—in

its appearance and scent; it's a moving experience. How many tea lovers get to experience that these days? It's become very rare. Now you just put the leaves in a tea-turning machine that rolls them for you. Likewise, after washing machines were invented, you rarely see anyone hand-washing their clothes, and we all use electric rice cookers to make dinner—the taste of that crunchy rice you fondly remember eating from the bottom of the pan is now just a childhood memory. You can't go back. These days, tea lovers are even more sincere and profound in their interest, and more numerous than we were back then, but there are so many things that they have never had the chance to experience, and probably never will. It really is a great pity.

真理在杯裡





## *The Small but Beautiful Culture of Traditional Taiwanese Oolong*

The most outstanding features of Taiwan are its beauty and small size. In the past, our greatest source of pride was the purity of Taiwanese tea: the entire process from production to export and local consumption, the development of tea from an everyday drink to one of life's most refined pleasures... every aspect of this development has been very complete, and has established a very high standard for tea in Taiwan.

Take the sudden rise of aged puerh, for example. Aged puerh tea had been around in Hong Kong for a very long time and was a dime a dozen there; however, once it reached the palates of the Taiwanese people and they recognized its excellent qualities, it soon became very valuable. Taiwan had a taste for puerh tea, Mainland China had the capital, and Hong Kong had the goods—so aged puerh really highlighted the characteristics of all three places and created a fully formed supply-and-demand relationship. When others provide a market, we need to establish the right standards for appreciating tea, instead of just blindly swaying with the market. Once we've really mastered this "small and beautiful" quality and established our authority in appreciating and critiquing tea, we'll have a much bigger platform to make our voices heard. This will bring about many positive changes and enable Taiwan's traditional oolong tea to forge its own path in the world.



*Master He Jian.*

Taiwan Oolong

台灣烏龍茶歷史

# A HISTORY OF TAIWANESE OOLONG

茶人: *Ruan Yi Ming* (阮逸明)

*Donated by Wushing*

*Such comprehensive exploration of the history of Taiwanese oolong has never before been translated into the English language. This issue once again demonstrates our commitment to traveling deeper into the tea world than any publication ever has, exploring tea in all its facets. We hope this article, along with our Classics of Tea series, begins a new trend of making such works available to a Western audience.*

The earliest techniques used to make Taiwanese oolong were adopted from Fujian oolong production methods imported by Chinese settlers. Consequently, early Taiwanese oolong possessed characteristics of Fujian-style Wuyi Cliff Tea (武夷岩茶): a rich, savory aftertaste and reddish color. During the Japanese occupation, Taiwanese oolong continued to be produced using Fujian-style techniques and started competing with Fujian oolong (福州烏龍) in the international market. In the 1920s, the international oolong market experienced a downturn and the Japanese governor-general of Taiwan took steps to diversify Taiwan's tea trade by actively promoting Taiwanese red tea production. Under the guidance of the government-supported Pingzhen Tea Manufacture Experiment Station (平鎮茶業試驗支所), the development of lightly withered, lightly oxidized, fragrant *Baozhong* tea and heavily withered, heavily oxidized Eastern Beauty oolong (槺風茶) was initiated. These products eventually

became some of Taiwan's most famous specialty teas.

After the liberation of Taiwan from Japanese rule, *Puzhong* tea (埔中茶) from Mingjian, Nantou (名間鄉) and *Dong Ding* oolong (凍頂烏龍茶) from Lugu, Nantou (鹿谷鄉) continued to be produced with a technique similar to southern Fujian-style Iron Goddess oolong (*Tieguanyin*, 鐵觀音烏龍茶). This method involves repeatedly kneading the tea leaves inside a special cotton satchel and slowly roasting the tea, traditionally over coals. The roasting process is what creates the tea's distinctive aroma and aftertaste and the reddish color of the liquor. By the end of the 1970s, tea lovers in Taiwan began referring to this type of tea as "red water oolong (*hong shui*, 紅水烏龍茶)" in order to distinguish it from other products in the oolong market. Using a combination of literature and personal experience, we can attempt to explain how *hong shui* oolong gained significance in the development of Taiwan's tea industry.

## *The Origin and Development of Taiwanese Oolong*

### *Tangshan Tea Cultivated in Taiwan*

The first Chinese to cross the Taiwan strait in order to cultivate the island predominately came from the Fujian and Guangdong areas of China. These first-comers called mainland China "Tangshan (唐山)," a phrase taken from a combination of the Chinese words for "Tang Dynasty (大唐)" and "country (江山)." According to historical records, tea plants have been cultivated in Taiwan for over 200 years. Most oolong tea produced in Taiwan today is harvested from varieties that were originally brought to the island by early settlers from Fujian. These settlers also imported their tea production techniques alongside the tea plants. Thus, the methods used to create oolong and *Baozhong* teas in Taiwan today really originated in Fujian.



# 茶史





In *History of the Development of Taiwan*, author Daxue Cheng states, “In the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign (1684 C.E.), settlers from Guangdong province began arriving in Yingge Stone Village (modern day Yingge Township (鶯歌鄉) in southern Taipei County) to cultivate and develop the land. After an armed conflict between settlers from Fujian (the Hoklo) and Guangdong (the Hakka), the Hakka were removed and the Hoklo were permitted to cultivate tea in Chashan.” If Cheng’s account is true, it can be inferred that Taiwanese tea cultivation began during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799 C.E.), which is when the armed conflict between the Fujian and Guangdong peoples is recorded to have occurred.

Su Wen Ta’s (蘇文達) *A Brief History of Dong Ding Oolong* posits, “Su Dong Ding’s family genealogy, recorded in their Su family ancestral records, began with two Su nephews who crossed the strait to Taiwan during the Kangxi period. Su Tan (蘇坦) guided the development of Dong Ding Mountain until his son, Su Quan (蘇泉), began cultivating the tea plants growing on the mountain. Their children and grandchildren continued living in Dong Ding, earnestly manufacturing tea and farming new ground on Dong Ding Mountain. Their descendants Su Hui and Su Ru, as father and son, decided to completely leave the ancient farms and gardens to buy and sell contracts (leaving behind their moderately established, century-old location).” According to the above, the Su family also estimated that *Dong Ding* oolong was originally cultivated during the years of Emperor Qianlong’s reign.

Another generally cited source is Heng Liang’s (連橫) chronicling in *General History of Taiwan*: “During the reign of Emperor Jiaqing (1760–1820 C.E.), a man named Chao Ke (柯朝) brought Wuyi (武夷) tea plants from Fujian into Taiwan and planted them in Jieyukeng (傑魚坑), where they matured extremely well.” W. H. Ukers, who authored *All About Tea* in 1935, believed tea cultivation in northern Taiwan began in the fifteenth year of

Emperor Jiaqing’s reign (1810 C.E.). Chinese settlers from Wuyi mountain in Fujian began to sow tea seeds in Jieyukeng (modern-day Ruifang District (台北縣瑞芳地區) in Taipei County); others interpret this area to have extended from the Shiding (石碇) maple forest to the Tuku area of Shenkeng (深坑土庫地區) in New Taipei City.

In northern Taiwan, tea plantations developed along the Danshui River basin and the tributaries of Xindian Creek, Keelung River, and Dakekan Creek (now called Dahan Creek (大漢溪) of Hsinchu and Taoyuan counties). The land developed for tea cultivation comprised modern-day New Taipei City (formerly Taipei County) and Taoyuan City (formerly Taoyuan County) and expanded out to Yilan County, Hsinchu County, and Miaoli County. Expanses of high elevation cannot be found in the topography stretching from Yilan to Hualian, over to Miaoli and down to Taichung in central Taiwan. Consequently, during both the Qing Dynasty and subsequent Japanese occupation, the government categorized the cities of Taipei, Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Miaoli, and Yilan into the same tea district. It was understood that the entire tea district used identical tea production techniques and cultivated tea belonging to the same Wuyi Cliff Tea varieties/cultivars. *Peng Feng* tea (極風茶, also referred to as “Eastern Beauty, 東方美人” or “white tip oolong, (*Bai Hao*, 白毫)”) was later initiated in this area, eventually turning into the renowned specialty teas of Ermei (峨眉) and Beipu (北埔), Hsinchu and Toufen (頭份), as well as Miaoli. This masterfully crafted tea was transformed from Wuyi Cliff Tea (the original oolong tea) into a new tea of its own.

Another important birthplace of Taiwanese tea developed along the Choshui River valley. The craftsmanship of *Song Bai Keng* tea (commonly referred to as *Puzhong* tea (埔中茶) back in the day) from Mingjian, Nantou and *Dong Ding* oolong (凍頂烏龍茶), manufactured in Lugu, Nantou was derived from south Fujian-style oolong, which is very different from north

Fujian’s Wuyi Cliff Tea. The use of a special cloth sack roller (布球揉捻) (also called a wrapped cloth roller (包布揉) by some tea makers), a rolling cloth sack (揉布球), and a ball rolling machine (團揉) during the manufacturing process is what creates *Dong Ding* oolong’s distinctive fragrance and partially balled shape. The craftsmanship of neighboring Zhushan township’s Shan Lin Xi high-mountain oolong (衫林溪高山烏龍茶) also originated from this manufacturing process. Besides the aforementioned Danshui River tributary system, Lugu’s *Dong Ding* mountain also had an important and far-reaching influence on the Taiwanese tea industry, yet its tea appears to have its origins in *Tieguanyin* oolong (鐵觀音烏龍茶) from Jhanghu Mountain in Muzha, Taipei, and Harbor tea (*gan kou cha*, 港口茶) in Manchou, Pingtung.

Muzha’s Iron Goddess oolong (Muzha *Tieguanyin*, 木柵鐵觀音烏龍茶) originated from Iron Goddess oolong in Anxi, Fujian. During the final years of the Qing Dynasty (when Japan occupied Taiwan), Iron Goddess tea was brought to Taipei by tea master Zhang Nai Miao. His hard work, perseverance, and zeal built the reputation of Muzha Iron Goddess oolong (*Tieguanyin*). The secrets of its cultivation were then passed down to locals in Muzha. Later, the Zhang Nai Miao Memorial Hall was established to commemorate his contribution to the development of Muzha’s Iron Goddess oolong.

In the first year of the Qing Emperor Guangxu (1875 C.E.), the county of Hengchun, Pingtung, appointed its first county magistrate, Zhou Youji (周有基). Zhou’s affinity for tea and support for its cultivation in Hengchun facilitated the planting of tea in southern Taiwan. In 1894, Hengchun county records state, “Luo Foshan tea (羅佛山茶): Thirty kilometers northeast of the county seat, there are towering mountains and precipitous ranges. The county magistrate, Zhou Youji, purchased tea seeds and taught the local people how to cultivate the plants... Their tea tasted very pure and had a red color... Every







*Traditional and modern, lightly-oxidized oolong*

year their tea production amounted to less than five kilograms.” The county records also say: “Harbor tea (港口茶): Twenty kilometers east of the county, a place named Linhai (臨海) also produces a small amount of tea that is similar to Luo Foshan tea in color, fragrance and taste.”

I first witnessed the traditional production techniques used to create Manzhou, Pingtung’s Harbor tea, in 1973. Produced purely and simply by hand, the tea is curled, rolled and dried from within the same tea wok. The tea wok kneading process necessitates an exacting technique, giving the tea leaves their green-gray luster, tightly knotted cord-like shape, and an upward bend which resembles an eyebrow. With an outward appearance almost analogous to Chinese Eyebrow tea (*mei cha*, 眉茶), we can speculate that Harbor tea’s craftsmanship originated in the Zhejiang region of China using the same production techniques as Chinese Eyebrow tea. Although the

production of Harbor tea gradually became mechanized after the 1970s, it still retains its gray-green luster and its characteristic cold, raw taste, like a densely concentrated pure white frost. Harbor tea plantations, though small, still retain a special status in Taiwan.

### ***The Birth of Formosa Tea (Taiwanese Oolong)***

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong gradually began expanding the cultivation of tea in northern Taiwan. By the 1850s, the northern Taiwan tea plantations that followed the hilly terrain of Danshui River and its tributaries were everywhere. At that time, much of Taiwanese tea was coarsely manufactured on the island before it was transported to Xiamen, Fuzhou, and other places, mainland China to be refined (sorted, blended, roasted) for

sale and exported under the name “Fuzhou oolong (福州烏龍).”

In 1860, the Taiwanese port cities of Anping and Danshui opened for trade with foreign nations and foreign businessmen leapt at the opportunity. In 1861, Robert Swinhoe, stationed at the English consulate in Taiwan, was the first to point out the excellent quality of Taiwanese tea, the close proximity of tea mountains to the port of Danshui, and the potential for developing a tea trade. In 1864, the Englishman John Dodd went to Taiwan to investigate the potential for investment in camphor trees along the Danshui River. During his inspection, Dodd realized that the Danshui River basin was more suitable for growing tea. In 1865, he encouraged local farmers to produce tea, and in 1866, he established Dodd & Co. With the assistance of a man from Xiamen, Li Chensheng (李春生), Dodd acquired Taiwanese tea to promote his new tea enterprise.

In 1867, Dodd transported Taiwanese tea to Xiamen to be finished (roasted, sorted and packaged) and successfully distributed and sold the refined tea in Macao. In 1868, Dodd established a tea facility in what is the present day Wanhua district of Taipei. Aside from the tea transported to Xiamen and Fuzhou for refinement and export, Taiwanese tea also began to be sold directly to the United States in 1869, initiating the “Formosa tea (福爾摩沙茶)” and “Foochow tea (福州茶)” markets. Since then, “Formosa tea” also started being called “Taiwanese oolong,” becoming internationally renowned for its excellent quality and distinct flavor. Consequently, British and American businessmen began coming to Taiwan one after another to participate in the growing Taiwanese oolong trade. By 1872, five Western companies—Dodd & Co. (寶順洋行), Tait (德記洋行), Boyd & Co. (和記洋行), Brown & Co. (水陸洋行) and Ellis & Co. (愛利士洋行)—successively arrived to set up offices in Taiwan.

### Taiwanese Oolong Manufacturing Methods During Japanese Rule

Taiwanese oolong manufacturing methods during Japanese rule followed the production methods used under Qing Dynasty rule, except the production was made more scientific by the replacement of manual labor with machines, which increased output. For example, when using sun withering to reduce the moisture content in tea leaves, a 10% water loss rate is appropriate (i.e., the weight of the raw leaves is reduced by 10%).

In the year 1905, the research and development of tea processing machinery was initiated, and by 1912, its use was popularized, ultimately replacing manual shaking during indoor withering. In 1911, the Japanese introduced the oolong tea rolling machine (望月式揉捻機) to replace what they saw as an “unhygienic” practice of using the feet to knead the tea leaves. In 1912, the use of a machine to break up clumps of rolled

tea (解塊機) was popularized and in 1915, the field-side pan-fire drum (田邊式釜炒機) was invented, replacing the manual pan-firing of tea leaves in woks. In 1927, the use of the Type II Drier (乙種乾燥機) became widespread as well. The complete mechanization of oolong production resulted in a number of processing changes that standardized oolong production, but at the cost of traditional craftsmanship. The tea leaves experienced a more prolonged withering period, a reduction of shaking, and an efficient drying without simultaneous water accumulation and moderate oxidation. These processes maintained the fundamental elements of Fujian-style Wuyi Cliff Tea, producing the characteristic green leaves inlaid with red veins. The increase in efficiency meant that in 1915 12,000 metric tons of Taiwanese oolong were exported for the commencement of sales on the international market.

### Eastern Beauty Oolong (The Beginning of Peng Feng Tea)

In 1920, Taiwanese oolong export sales fell by more than half of their original volume. This development prompted the international tea market to turn its attention toward red teas. The Ping Zhen Tea Manufacture Experiment Station responded to the trend of the times accordingly. The Station contrived the heavy withering and heavy oxidation processes which created the gorgeous color, aroma and taste of Eastern Beauty (*Peng Feng*).

This amazing tea is sun withered until a 15–35% rate of water loss occurs, almost double the 10–15% rate of water loss in Fujian-style oolong. The front end of the indoor withering and tossing process employs light tossing and a prolonged withering time, eliminating excess water in the tea leaves and creating ideal conditions under which the leaves can be evenly dried. The color of the tea gradually deepens to green-gray and the leaves give off a unique fragrance. In the final processing stage, the tea leaves are more vigorously tossed,

inducing a higher oxidation level. After three to seven minutes of tossing, the leaves shimmer in both fresh green and gorgeous red tints respectively; different from Fujian-style oolong’s green leaves inlaid with red veins.

After pan-firing, a distinctive process takes place in which the leaves are placed inside a compression vessel and left to rest for 10–15 minutes. This stifling environment causes the leaves to again become pliable and deepens the level of their oxidation. Once that process is finished, the leaves present a beautiful copper brown color. They are then lightly rolled in order to avoid breaking off their white tips. These improved manufacturing methods resulted in the most successful foreign sales to the United States in 1923, where it would become Taiwan’s most recognizable oolong. This special tea is generically called “*Peng Feng* tea,” “Eastern Beauty,” or “*Bai Hao* (white tip) oolong.” Immediately after Taiwan’s liberation from Japanese rule, when people said “oolong,” it specifically referred to this kind of heavily withered, heavily oxidized tea, distinct from Fujian oolong.





“*Peng Feng*” literally means to exaggerate or tell a tall tale. The tea was called this, as the story goes, because other farmers couldn’t believe that their neighbors were able to sell a tea that was decimated by insects for so high a price. This tale probably has some truth to it. (Of course, insects do play a role in this tea’s production, but I have chosen to focus instead on the lesser-known history of its production method.)

## ***The Origin and Development of Taiwan’s Baozhong Tea***

The tea initially manufactured in Taiwan was Fujian-style oolong. In 1869, English businessman John Dodd’s successful export and sale of Taiwanese oolong to the United States raised its international profile. Foreign businesses leapt at the opportunity to purchase tea, and farmers fell over one another in their eagerness to open new tea plantations, resulting in unbridled tea production on the island. In 1873, when the Tai-

wanese oolong market began to slow, tea merchants took the unmarketable oolong and transported it to Fuzhou for scenting with flowers. This process resulted in *Baozhong* tea, and somewhat eased the hardship facing oolong tea businesses. In 1881, Taiwanese *Baozhong* tea production began in earnest when tea merchant Fuyuan Wu (福源吳) from the “Yuan-Long Hao (源隆號)” tea company in Quanzhou city, Tongan county, Fujian came to Taiwan to produce *Baozhong* tea.

The *Baozhong* tea initially manufactured in Taiwan was largely unrefined oolong and was used as an unfinished raw material for scenting with flowers. The flower tea varieties included Jasmine (茉莉), Orchid (樹蘭), Chamomile (黃枝), etc. It was in 1912 that what we think of as *Baozhong* tea began.

There were two striped oolongs in the beginning. According to books and related documents published by the Taiwan Governor-General Production Office, the difference in manufacturing methods between the tea used in green, light *Baozhong* tea and Wuyi Fujian-style oolong can be summarized as follows:

*1) The raw material tea used in making light Baozhong tea takes terminal-facing tea leaves that are two-thirds open at a suitable plucking period. For the most part, the suitable plucking period for oolong tea leaves happens about a week to ten days earlier.*

*2) The rate of sunlight withering as compared to Fujian-style oolong is reduced by half. Generally, the rate of sunlight withering for oolong is approximately 10%, but the rate for Baozhong tea is only 5%.*

*3) The indoor withering time is extended, but the tossing procedure is comparatively more gentle. This means that the oxidation level of light Baozhong tea is only about half that of Fujian-style oolong.*

*4) The tea is pan-fired at a higher temperature for a shorter duration, speeding up the drying process and giving the finished tea a dark forest-green luster and a golden-yellow brew. This is different from Fujian oolong tea’s gray-green luster and reddish liquor.*

*Very old oolong; some from Taiwan.*



Sometime around 1921, Wang Shuijin (王水錦) and Wei Jingshi (魏靜時) of Taipei's Nangang Dakeng district created new technologies for the manufacturing of *Baozhong* tea. After successfully researching and developing green, fragrant *Baozhong* tea, they found that *Baozhong's* sweet, flowery fragrance naturally arose from proper withering and shaking without having to be scented with actual flowers. This discovery revolutionized methods for manufacturing Taiwanese *Baozhong* tea. Starting in 1922, the new methods for manufacturing fragrant *Baozhong* tea began to spread, promoted through tea seminars. As a result, under Japanese rule, two types of *Baozhong* tea existed. One type was created in China, a flower-scented *Baozhong* tea, and was mainly exported to Java, Indonesia and Manchukuo. The other variety was Taiwan's distinctive naturally flower-fragrant *Baozhong*, exported mostly to Vietnam and Thailand. Owing to its unique aroma, taste, and specific production technologies, fragrant *Baozhong* turned into an internationally-renowned tea that was characteristically Taiwanese, becoming even more recognizable than other Taiwanese oolongs of the time.

Hsinchu province in northern Taiwan originally relied heavily on manufacturing oolong, but the oolong export market fell into a slump and the active spread of fragrant *Baozhong* tea production began in the 1920s. However, the majority of tea plant species in the province were *Huang gan* (黃柑) and *Ching shin* (青心) varieties of tea, which were not suitable for the production of fragrant *Baozhong* tea. So, a switch began to the development of red tea and heavily withered, heavily oxidized Eastern Beauty tea.

### **Shifting from Baozhong to Partially Balled Baozhong Tea And Then to Modern Oolong**

Under both Qing Dynasty and Japanese rule, manufactured *Baozhong* tea and oolong were both categorized as “striped” or “twisted (條形茶).” In 1929, the Pingzhen Tea Manufacture Experiment Station director,

Ainosuke Tanimura, and assistant engineer, Bokuni Inoue, jointly managed research to improve the shape of *Baozhong* tea. Using woks slanted at a 60-degree angle, the *Baozhong* tea was fired and then rolled into the same ball-shape of Iron Goddess oolong. The tea was then roasted in a bamboo baskets until it was sufficiently dry. The production of ball-shaped *Baozhong* tea was considered less difficult, and by 1930, tea seminars began lectures on managing spherical tea production. However, before the liberation of Taiwan, *Baozhong* tea and other Taiwanese oolongs were still classified as striped teas.

According to the Taiwan Tea Manufacturers Association (台灣區製茶工業同業公會), cloth-rolling technology was developed after the retrocession of Taiwan to China. Their 2004 publication, *Taiwan's Tea Industry: Fifty Years of Development*, outlines the history of cloth-rolling in Taiwan: “Cloth-rolling technology was introduced in Taiwan in 1939 by Wang Youtai (王友泰) from the Fuji Tea-shop in Taipei and Wang De (王德), both expats from Anxi, Fujian. This cloth-rolling technique from Anxi—the traditional way of making ball-shaped Iron Goddess tea—was introduced to the tea industry in Mingjian, Nantou and Muzha in the north. Later, when Wang departed Mingjian in 1941, that processing methodology was transported to Dong Ding, Lugu, and the cloth-rolling technique was taught by Eitakashi (永隆) until 1949. In the early 1950s, Mingjian, Nantou began producing cloth-rolled *Baozhong* tea, and starting in the 1970s, the technique gradually spread to other tea regions.”

In 1973, Lugu Township's Murachin Eitakashi (永隆村陳) successfully researched and developed a cloth-rolling machine. The cloth-rolling machine could knead four cloth sacks at one time, but manual labor was still required to bundle each of the cloth sacks, which weighed 1-1.5 kilograms after rolling. In 1984, Mingjian's Chen Qingzhen (陳清鎮) successfully developed a cloth sack bundling machine and the weight each cloth sack was able to contain increased to 3.5-4 kilograms. At this



weight, the cloth-rolling machine could knead three cloth sacks at one time. By 2000, the weight each cloth sack was able to contain increased to 7.5-10 kilograms, and the cloth-rolling machine could knead two sacks at one time.

The invention of the cloth-rolling and bundling machines one after the other meant that machinery could take the place of people in the cloth-rolling procedure, saving labor, increasing output and reducing costs.





*Traditional basket for carrying tea utensils, stove for heating water for gongfu tea and a personal roaster for waking tea up before brewing, which was common at the time. These date to the mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).*

After the mechanization of cloth-rolling, the tea's shape also evolved from the partially balled shape of manually cloth-rolled tea to the ball-shaped tea produced by machine. For the most part, tea districts in Taiwan today produce either partially balled or ball-shaped *Baozhong* tea (which is now marketed as "oolong," of course), except for the Wen Shan and Nangang tea districts, where striped *Baozhong* tea is still skillfully produced to this day.

In recent years, the cloth-rolling and bundling machines have been replaced by the development of a pressing machine. Although the pressing machine's high speed saves time and produces tea with an emerald-green luster and a refined fragrance, because the tea does not undergo cloth-rolling, its body is weak and it is not patient enough. If we aren't going to return to traditional hand-processed tea, then more consideration should be given to pair-

ing the pressing machine, cloth-rolling machine and bundling machine together in today's oolong production process. That way, function, ability and cost-efficiency can come together without sacrificing the distinct aroma and flavor characteristic of Taiwanese tea.



# ORGANIC OOLONGS

If you have followed us thus far on our journey through Taiwanese oolong tea, you are starting to get the lay of the land—at least as we see it. Of course, any attempt to explore such a vast topic as Taiwanese oolong tea must make editorial decisions. There are a tremendous number of perspectives we could cover, from linear information to history and from processing to individuals who are important in Taiwanese tea culture. When we started producing this issue, we weren't sure where this would lead. Like you, we started with a bit of wandering so that we could find the structure in the maps we're making, which is why we chose to have these map-like sections

in the issue (with Guanyin watching over the seas we travel).

As we began down this road, we knew that we wanted to introduce the general background of Taiwan, its rich tea heritage, the varieties and kinds of oolongs and where they are produced. As we explored those basics, the same themes started surfacing in our own understanding of Taiwanese oolong, the discussions we had with tea masters as well as in exploring the history of this magical tea. You may have already noticed the two leitmotifs woven throughout our journey so far: environmental sustainability and the loss of / nostalgia for / revival of traditional processing methods.

Modern innovation and a movement towards lighter, greener oolong production has indeed resulted in some amazing, bright and delicious new teas—teas that we love and drink often at the Center. We hope that you don't find this whole Extended Edition to be antagonistic to such tea. However, there is a real magic in traditionally processed oolong tea. Remember, oolong processing didn't change much for hundreds of years (other than the evolution that occurred in response to new varieties and the small adaptations that happen each season due to the weather

and rainfall). While lightly-oxidized oolongs can indeed be fragrant, floral and a tremendous joy to drink, they often lack the body of traditionally processed tea, are less ageable and therefore need to be consumed more quickly (while fresh), require more packing and were primarily created and encouraged by an expanding tea market that needed mass-produced tea. Such tea was invented and driven in large part by quantity, not quality.

The point of discussing this issue is not to be too harsh on modern farmers or on lightly oxidized oolong. We don't want to hurt Her feelings. But there is a growing nostalgia for traditionally processed oolong tea in Taiwan that is creating many new and amazing innovations, as well as resurrecting some very amazing old teas. Traditional processing, with more oxidation and roast, is growing. The more awareness there is surrounding this issue, the more we can move towards a market that offers us the choice of light, green, dark, full-bodied or even aged oolong. The other important reason to raise awareness concerning traditional processing relates to the other theme of this issue: environmental sustainability.

As Mr. Tsai said in the article on the Tea of the Month, sometimes we





# OF THE NORTH

have to choose between fragrance and sustainability. This depends on the location and varietal, of course, but it is often true that producing lighter, greener oolong means that insects must not bite the leaves, which would cause unwanted oxidation. One solution to this, of course, is to use natural pest deterrents, like essential oils, predators, etc., but that requires more effort and expense on the part of the farmer. The average cash-crop tea farmer won't be willing to do that. Lighter, greener oolong also introduces more machinery and packaging to maintain freshness and promotes increased consumption, since you feel pressured to drink the tea sooner rather than later. Traditional processing suits bug-bitten leaves—of course it does; it started before the invention of pesticides. It can also be stored as long as you like, and in simple packaging like our Tea of the Month. And more important than purchasing organic, or even living tea, the best thing a tea lover can do for the environment is to consume less. When we drink a lightly oxidized oolong, we are rarely satisfied (although there are exceptions). It often is like having an appetizer, and we quickly move on to other teas afterwards. That, coupled with a desire to drink it fresh, means

we have more than we need, or even want to.

We always make a strong effort to overwhelm any discussion of the problems in the tea world, environmental or otherwise, with solutions. We believe that change happens through inclusion, through example—through the heart! We wanted to save some space, therefore, for some of the brighter examples of proper tea farming in Taiwan that we have covered over the years, echoing their stories forward because those who care for the earth matter. We decided to stick to the northern part of the island since we have limited space (even in an extended issue), and because the north has had a greater concentration of environmentally-conscious and sustainable farmers, and for longer. There is a shift happening in the central highlands—one we hope continues. But that will have to be a different story for another issue of Global Tea Hut.

Onward, then, through a journey of some of the brightest farms and tea masters in Taiwan. Most of these were published before any of you were members—back in the days when this was just a newsletter with a few dozen readers. Their stories are worth renewing, though. In Sanskrit, the word

for wisdom is “*prajna*.” “*Pra*” means “before” and “*na*” is “knowledge,” so wisdom is that which is before knowledge, or the “beginner’s mind,” as it is often translated in Zen. We try to avoid saying “repeat” here at the Center and focus on “renew” instead. That way, there is always more to learn, greater skill to master and new mountains of tea to explore!

Some of you will be meeting these tea masters for the first time and others of you once more. Either way, let us learn from them: their approach, method and, of course, their tea. Deep bows to Masters Yu San He, (余三和) Gu Shen Chien (古乘乾) and Gao Ding Shi (高定石).

# RESPECT FOR GREAT NATURE

✪: *Dan Smith*

**P**inglin is a township about a half-hour's drive east from downtown Taipei. But once you're there, it's hard to believe that it's so close. It seems to be another world, with beautiful rivers and stunning views down green mountain roads. Traveling there is like stepping back in time to a wilder Taiwan of five hundred years ago.

About two years ago, I was very fortunate to have been introduced to a wonderfully honest, down-to-earth tea farmer, whose tea gardens thrive there. Master Tsai introduced us on a day trip to Pinglin. Many of you have probably read about our dear tea brother, Master Tsai, in these beautiful Global Tea Hut envelopes. (If not, I recommend reading about him in the back issues, which are posted on our website for free!) And if you have visited Taiwan, you may have already met him in person. Master Tsai has done so much for organic tea awareness in Taiwan. Recently, he's also begun to influence tea production in mainland China and Japan. Everyone involved with the Tea Sage Hut sees him as a brother on the same course towards promoting sustainable

organic plantation tea, or living tea. He kindly and proudly looks at us in the same way, too! It's broad smiles and tea brotherhood whenever we're together.

It feels great to connect with the brotherhood and sisterhood at the center in Miaoli, and it's remarkably easy to connect with people and their communities worldwide while staying there, as you have already experienced through reading this magazine and being a part of Global Tea Hut.

It was such a beautiful and memorable weekend when Master Tsai introduced me to the producer of this month's tea, Mr. Yu San He. At that time, Antonio from Barcelona was enjoying a long visit to the Center, and he came up to stay a few days with me in Taipei. We joined a group of Master Tsai's students on a day trip to Pinglin. Antonio and I were very glad to go along, and we both felt fortunate to be part of the group. Antonio and I had already become fast friends, and that camaraderie was felt throughout the whole group, crossing the language and culture barriers between Master Tsai's Taiwanese students and us.

Just a ten-minute drive outside of Pinglin town, but it already felt like we were far into beautiful, undeveloped Taiwan. Antonio and I were all smiles. And it seemed the land was smiling back at us, thanking us for caring so much about it. We explored the small gardens, breathed in the fresh air, smelled the earth and quieted down to connect with the space. Then we met Mr. Yu San He, who has become such an important brother to us.

Like us, Mr. Yu is a meditator and a vegetarian. He's a very rare kind of tea farmer, too. From the first, he shines with a kind of directness, looking you right in the eyes in a way shier Taiwanese won't, and there's kindness in those eyes as well. He's quick to laughter, like any healthy person, but there's also a solid foundation of quiet pride and confidence that comes with following Nature's calling in being a responsible steward of the Earth. It's so great to have a genuine relationship with this man and his tea gardens. There are others like Yu San He creating another movement of tea culture here, but meeting such bright and shining examples of



# MASTER YU SAN HE

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how proper tea production should be conducted leaves you with a sense of hope. Sometimes, tea lovers who care about the Earth can get downhearted. When I feel that way, I find solace in Mr. Yu's bright smiles, the devotion he has to his tea and land, and of course, the stunning gardens themselves.

The land around Pinglin is beautiful. This area lies in the northern foothills of the high-altitude Xue Ba Mountains of northern Taiwan. It's a mountainous area with no highways or train routes that stretches southeast to Yilan and Hualian, and borders Hsinchu and Miaoli counties to the southwest. Rivers roll down through the area on their way to the ocean; they're charged with the high mountain energy. Most rivers in Taiwan are dammed and hardly recognizable, but here, they're still teeming with life. You also quickly realize just how much tea is grown in this area. There are tea gardens of various sizes around every corner. The small winding roads reveal one after another at almost every turn. If you take a walk through Pinglin Town, you are sure to see many shops, with a few grandmas and aunts sorting through tea

leaves—discarding the more mature ones and pulling off the larger stems.

“*Baozhong* (包種)” tea is by far the most common type of tea produced here. Though the name “Wen Shan *Baozhong*” is famous locally and internationally, most *Baozhong* tea comes from Pinglin and Shiding. “Wen Shan” is the name of the district which also contains Muzha (famous for *Tieguanyin*) and it's right next door to Pinglin, Shiding and Taipei City.

*Baozhong* oolong is a northern Taiwanese tea that dates back to the Qing Dynasty. The name “*Baozhong*” refers to the traditional paper packaging of the tea leaves that was used in sale and export. It also represents a well-known name for this regional tea. There is no true *Baozhong* tea from anywhere other than northern Taiwan. There could be some people that make or sell tea from another part of Taiwan and call it “*Baozhong* Style,” but I think locals probably feel that there's something wrong in doing so. It is characterized by a light withering (oxidation) that produces pronounced yet pleasant, natural floral, cool and vegetal fragrances and flavors.

Though it was more oxidized in the past, the modern-day processing style could be described as the greenest of the oolongs—falling somewhere between green and oolong tea. Though traditional *Baozhong* was most always more heavily oxidized and roasted, there may have been some very green batches in the early days too, as it has been described as a “*qing cha* (青茶)” or “blue-green tea,” since the Qing Dynasty. It is a striped oolong, originally processed much like a Wuyi Cliff Tea until the shift to lighter, more floral *Baozhong* happened. *Baozhong* is the oldest oolong in Taiwan.

Pinglin and its tradition of *Baozhong* production have influenced Yu San He. He very much sees a heritage in these traditions. The greatest portion of the tea he makes is *Baozhong* and his long experience of making it enhances all the red, green, *Bai Hao* oolong (Eastern Beauty) and GABA tea he makes. He is very connected with his tea and the land in Pinglin, northern Taiwan. His tea fields are just a few kilometers away from the largest natural water reservoir serving Taipei.

Mr. Yu has been growing tea organically for more than ten years, but the vast majority of the tea farmers in the area haven't been. Great amounts of pesticides and chemical fertilizers are sprayed there, to the detriment of the ecosystem and the future of tea production in the region. He decided long ago to stop being a part of this problem, and has since become a bright example of someone who can produce fine tea without polluting the environment. He's also become rather well known nowadays, with several magazine and newspaper articles covering the positive impact he's having on the region.

Mr. Yu proudly refers to his tea farm as "Respect for Great Nature Farm." After getting to know him and this amazing farm,

**Mr. Yu's bright spirit shines through his land and tea. It is a beautiful demonstration of how tea is a merging of Heaven, Earth and Man. Walking through his gardens, you can feel the influence that the farmer has on the land he stewards.**

which is indeed filled with a reverence for Nature, I broached the subject of donating to Global Tea Hut and his eyes lit up—smiling on their own just moments before his mouth followed. A few weeks later, Wu De, along with all the residents and guests at Tea Sage Hut, came up to meet Mr. Yu. As usual, he served us a delicious meal of organic vegetables from his garden just outside his centuries-old traditional Taiwanese courtyard home. We drank tea through a pleasant afternoon, smiling and laughing like old friends. Mr. Yu was so happy to see the previous issues of this magazine, and proud that so many people around the world would share his tea. He said he felt supported by the fact that so many people believe in what he's doing!

We took a drive up to see the gardens. Mr. Yu is always happy to share information about how the weeds, vegetables, insects and worms of the natural ecosystem are enriching the land. And, of course, he and Wu De hit it off and spent hours talking together about Tea.

One noteworthy factor about his growing methods is that he doesn't use any organic fertilizer or irrigation. This is one of the characteristics of Living Tea, referred to as "*ziran nongfa* (自然農法)" in Chinese (literally, "natural agriculture method"). It's based on a philosophy of letting the tea bushes struggle on their own, helping them as little as possible, and letting the weeds grow up around them. This encourages the trees to weave themselves into the local ecosystem without any foreign agents, and grow stronger through it. I like to refer to such farming as "beyond just organic." It is much closer to Living Tea—full of vibrancy and harmony. I've been living in Taiwan for about five years now, and his teas are a few big, solid step above any other organic teas I've experienced here.

As many of you know, we need some tea produced at higher yields

so that everyone can have tea. That means compromise. Organic plantation tea serves a very important function, producing larger quantities of tea so that everyone can share in this medicine. Not all tea can be Living Tea, in other words. But it is also nice to see the emergence of this middle ground, which we call "ecological gardens": tea that is constrained and compromised in some ways, but less so than most plantation tea, including organic ones.

Mr. Yu's bright spirit shines through his land and tea. It is a beautiful demonstration of how tea is a merging of Heaven, Earth and Man. Walking through his gardens, you can feel the influence that the farmer has on the land he stewards. Tea is a conversation between Man and Nature,

and Master Yu's tea is a beautiful discussion about gratitude and love. I hope you feel Mr. Yu's spirit in this tea, and through it connect to some of the vibrancy and natural power of Taiwan's rolling northern hills...



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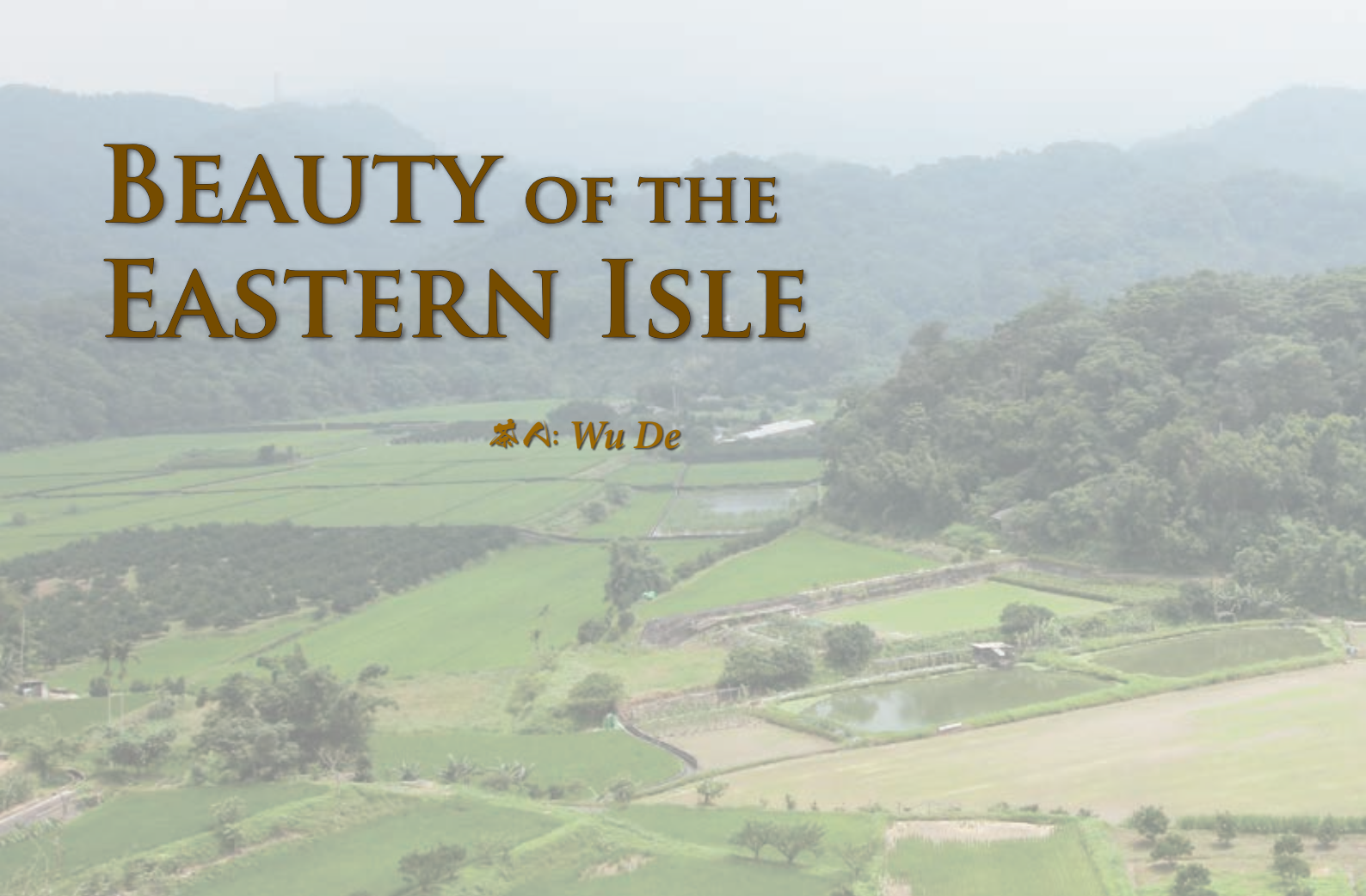






# BEAUTY OF THE EASTERN ISLE

茶A: Wu De



**B**eipu is a gorgeous valley in the northwest of this Formosa, covered in green fields and rice paddies set off by the occasional white crane soaring up from that brighter green to the dark green of the surrounding mountains. The mists are channeled into this valley daily, and the loose soil is rich in nutrients. It's no wonder that early tea farmers chose this special place to grow tea, knowing that the terroir here would produce a unique and amazing tea, but they couldn't know just how special it would be...

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many immigrants were crossing the strait from Fujian to start a new life in Taiwan. Many started growing tea for export, primarily to sell to famous merchants like John Dodd. At that time, there weren't yet any commercial plantations up in the high mountains that would later make Taiwanese tea so famous. Most of Taiwan's tea at that time was exported and was grown in the lower, flatter areas of the northwest, like Beipu. Here, they could have larger plantations and higher yields. It took some time to craft a tea that met the high standards of foreign

merchants like Dodd, but eventually they achieved success and Formosa tea went on to international renown.

Like any and all of the sane centuries before this one, the farmers of Taiwan of course grew all their tea organically. Unfortunately, a lot of the valleys here that are perfect for tea production—with excellent soil, humidity and a rich and diverse ecology—were also perfect for Nature's manifold insects. Most bugs, however, are not particularly fond of tea as it is bitter and produces tannins to protect itself. Also, tea mountains are usually at high elevations where insects are less of a threat. In Beipu and some other regions, however, there are large populations of leaf-hoppers that will eat tea in the late spring and summer months. For that reason, the farmers found their crops decimated every summer, and came to rely solely on the harvest of other seasons.

They say that one legendary farmer refused to give up, and taught us all one of the pivotal lessons of a life of tea, whether it be farming, producing or preparing tea: all mastery of any art comes in doing that thing the way it wants to be done, rather

than how we feel it should be done. Rather than telling your tea how you want to prepare it, see how it wants to be prepared. This is indeed a way to master life as well. This mythical and unknown master didn't quit; he adapted his production to Nature. Rather than complaining, or using chemicals to tell Nature what he wanted it to do, he adapted his processing methods to suit this bug-bitten tea. This is, in fact, how all the world's traditional tea processing evolved. It wasn't invented; it evolved in response to new varietals of tea. Real farmers commune with the land and converse with Nature. They listen to the tea trees, communicating with them each and every day. They adapt and learn, growing and mastering their processing techniques in response to trees each and every season. (Even Mr. Gu Shen Chien himself, a modern farmer who masterfully produces beautiful Eastern Beauty tea, has changed and adapted several processing steps to suit the tea of this particular age.)

After some experimentation, our legendary Qing Dynasty farmer developed a new and exciting kind of





# MASTER GU SHEN CHIEN

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oolong that was processed in a way that enhanced the bug-bitten summer leaves. While other farmers were throwing away their crops, he sold it all to John Dodd. As legend has it, this amazing tea was so good that it reached the august hands of Queen Elizabeth II, who was herself a great tea lover. She reportedly favored the tea above all others and named it “Eastern Beauty.”

In the 1970s, Taiwan’s booming economy shifted from agriculture to industry and technology. As the quality of life rose dramatically, people moved from rural places like Beipu to cities like nearby Hsinchu. More and more people became interested in culture as they grew more affluent. High-mountain oolong from central Taiwan grew in popularity throughout the island and beyond, so much so that most people think of such tea first when they think of Taiwanese tea. The dwindling of land for tea plantations, migration to the city and the aging of the tea farmers themselves threatened the very existence of Taiwan’s Eastern Beauty. There were some families who carried on, nonetheless.

Mr. Gu is a fourth-generation Eastern Beauty farmer who has, like his father before him, worked incredibly hard to preserve this amazing tea culture. They worked hard and expanded their traditional holdings to a neighboring field. With increased savings and years of hard work, they were able to revitalize Beipu’s Eastern Beauty production. In 2000, Mr. Gu’s Bao Ji Tea Company bought back several abandoned Eastern Beauty farms, cleared several hectares and planted saplings there. They have thrived and are beginning to produce tea again.

Mr. Gu’s son has this year begun to take an active role in the family’s production, ensuring a future for Eastern Beauty and a fifth generation of magical Bao Ji tea. It is returning to popularity and more people are discovering or returning to this amazing tea.

Mr. Gu’s organic Eastern Beauty is a real treat, as is any time in his company. He does a lot to promote sustainable agriculture that protects Nature and traditional culture. He is simple, genuine and giving, and he enthusiastically leapt at the opportunity to donate some of his tea to our

Center. His face lit up when we told him people around the world would have a chance to appreciate his tea as much as we do. We hope that any of you who visit Taiwan get a chance to visit with him and share a traditional Hakka meal and some amazing tea. His tea center also does a lot to promote and preserve other aspects of Hakka culture like food, ground tea (*leicha*), pomelo tea, vinegar production, regional art and music and even bamboo tea utensils carved by hand. His son is actually also quite famous for making amazing tea utensils.

The magic of Eastern Beauty starts with the leaf-hoppers who bite the leaves in the early summer. They usually eat the first flush and then the plant responds by producing a second flush with more tannins to discourage the insects. When these little green friends return, they often only bite part of the leaves before moving on to less bitter plants. There are enzymes in their saliva which cause the leaves to begin to oxidize before they are even picked, turning red around the edges and growing at a crooked angle from the stem. These unique leaves are the ones used for Eastern Beauty.

Eastern Beauty oolong production involves many unique steps not found in other teas, one of which is that the tea is actually sorted as it is picked, which requires a slower and more involved picking process. The highest grades are all bug-bitten leaves, and exclusively one bud with two leaves, as it is with most high-grade teas. This requires a much more careful and arduous tea-picking. The pickers must carefully select only the best bud-leaf sets and pick them one by one. This is, of course, only for the highest grades of Eastern Beauty tea. At Bao Ji Tea, Mr. Gu and his team produce five levels of tea. The lower grades can actually be picked at a normal speed relative to other hand-picked tea in the world.

Don't assume that just because these katydid are an essential part of Eastern Beauty production that all such tea is organic. Actually, very few Eastern Beauty farmers are organic nowadays. They have perfected the art of spraying their trees at the right times to prevent and allow bugs, and many still use chemical fertilizers and weed-killers as well. Mr. Gu's method is special and his organic tea is rare and clean. He has recorded more than twenty species of insects that interact with and affect his tea, not just the jassids that bite the leaves. Real tea production involves an entire ecology.

Eastern Beauty is the most oxidized of all oolong teas, in part because it begins oxidizing on the tree before it is picked, and in part because of the arduous withering process that begins as soon as the tea reaches the tea processing plant from the field. Mr. Gu, his son and a helper sleep but a few hours during the three weeks of annual Eastern Beauty production, as is the case with most traditional oolong producers who still follow Nature and harvest but once a year, as their entire year's income is dependent upon this tea.

The tea is spread out on sheets to wither for a long time. Eastern Beauty tea will be oxidized to around 80% by the time it is done. The initial withering (*shai qing*, 曬青) is done for about fourteen hours on a covered, sunlit roof and sometimes indoors, depending on the weather and the



grade of the tea (higher grades are done indoors and monitored much more carefully). On the roof, they have black cloth with holes that can automatically cover the entire area—rolling out like a garage door on electric shafts when needed. They shade the tea during the noon hours, and then retract the slightly transparent black cloth when it isn't as bright. All of this requires careful observation and great skill. After the tea is adequately withered, it is laid in a long pile to be shaken. The higher grades of tea are shaken entirely by hand, while the lower grades are tumbled in a machine for twenty minutes and then shaken by hand. As Mr. Gu says, "the machines cannot be trusted with our precious tea." This shaking stirs the tea up and exposes every leaf to more oxygen. You can grab a handful of the tea Mr. Gu has shaken and another from the part of the pile that

is yet to be shaken and smell the difference between them quite distinctly: the previously shaken tea is much more full-bodied, richer and more fragrant. The tea is then spread out once again to be withered even more. It will eventually go through four cycles of withering and shaking, though only the first is so long.

At the end of the withering and stirring/shaking, the tea is piled (*jing tze*, 靜置/*wo dui*, 臥堆) to further oxidize it. It is piled on a round bamboo mat and covered with a cloth. Nearly all Eastern Beauty farmers use wet piling and withering throughout their tea production, as this is quicker and more convenient. Mr. Gu says it could increase their production by as much as 30%, but he doesn't believe that quantity is as important as quality and therefore uses a completely dry process, even drier than what was ever done traditionally. He says these adap-





tations are his own, and they are what separates his tea from other Eastern Beauties. When the tea is piled, it is usually around 60% oxidized. It will then complete the other 20% in four to eight hours of piling, depending on the weather and the grade of the tea.

After the tea is fully oxidized, it is fired (*sha qing*, 殺青). This stage, literally called “kill-green,” destroys enzymes that make tea bitter and arrests further oxidation. It is done in a gas-heated tumbler that is heated to around 280 degrees. After just a few minutes inside, the tea is then rolled into a ball inside a wet cloth. The cloth is damp only because Mr. Gu’s special tea has up until this point been withered, shaken, piled and fired in a dry way—very unique for Eastern Beauty production. This stage of Eastern Beauty production is also very unique. The tea will rest in tight balls, which are bagged and placed

in crates for around twenty minutes before being rolled (*rou nian*, 揉捻). The rolling breaks down the cell walls of the tea and releases the juices. Mr. Gu reminded us once again that he doesn’t trust the machines with his heritage, and therefore rolls his tea three times, twice by machine and once by hand. When the tea emerges from its rolling, it is at its most fragrant, and a handful is enough to send you to the fabled Heavens Chinese people once believed existed across the strait and up Taiwan’s cloud-enshrouded mountains.

After the rolling, the tea is once again piled (*wo dui*) for twenty or thirty minutes. At this time it is roasted gently at low temperatures for around three hours. This first roast is called a “water roast (*shui pei*, 水焙).” It’s done in a large oven with trays that are inserted horizontally, like shelves. It is not a real roast, but just

to dry the tea and put it in stasis—a limbo that will last until the end of the growing season. Roasting oolong tea is the most difficult and potentially dangerous aspect of tea processing. Roasting secrets are guarded both in Taiwan and China, and often only known to the father and son. As the roast takes days and requires constant monitoring, there is no time to roast all the tea during the growing season. The need to have the tea processed by day’s end consumes all the farmers’ time. Consequently, tea is always roasted briefly to arrest oxidation and dry the leaves sufficiently for it to sit in bags for the remaining weeks of the growing season. Then, after the season’s tea has all been processed, the farmers can catch up on some much-needed sleep and get started roasting the tea properly. That way, the roasting is done carefully and slowly, as it is an important step.



Before the final roasting the tea must be sorted (*fan ji*). The tea is first sieved through bamboo to remove all the fannings, which are later used in tea bags. The larger leaves are then spread out on large tables where they are sorted by size and quality by hand. This is necessary at this stage because different grades of tea are roasted in different ways. Usually, lower grade oolong teas have always been given a heavier roast to cover up the defects in the tea. In places like Wuyi—and here in Beipu as well—lower grade tea is also often a blend of different kinds of leaves and cultivars, so the roast helps bring a kind of uniformity to these teas. The highest grades will be composed exclusively of buds.

The final roasting is divided into three stages. It is done in large, round bamboo roasters with electric elements underneath that are meant to mimic the heat of charcoal, which was used traditionally. Mr. Gu would love to use charcoal to roast his tea, but recently the prices of hardwood charcoal have risen dramatically. Taiwan has a very unique kind of smokeless charcoal made from dragon eye trees. We actually use it here at the Center to heat all our water. It is renowned worldwide for the amazing influence it can have on roasting oolong tea, but the tree grows slowly and over-harvesting has driven the prices beyond what most farmers can afford. Mr. Gu therefore roasts his highest grade

Eastern Beauty with charcoal and uses electric roasters for the four lower grades.

The first roast is only two to four hours long, and is called the “*zhou jing pei* (做驚焙).” It awakens the tea from its slumber. Then there is a second roast called the “*pei ze di* (焙之蒂),” which begins to enhance the tea and bring out its unique flavors. It is “roasting the body” of the tea. The final roast is where the real favor is enshrined into this amazing tea, is called the “*pei xiang wei* (焙香味),” which means that it locks in the fragrance. This is the point at which Mr. Gu uses charcoal for his highest grade teas.

The tea is then sorted once more and packaged for sale. It should rest for some time, usually at least a few months, to let the roast settle down and leave the tea. Otherwise, this will be the only recognizable flavor. They say that a good roast enhances the tea without leaving any trace of itself.

As you can see, a tremendous amount of effort goes into the production of this amazing tea: billions of years of evolution, a glorious dance of Nature between the tiny jassids and enzymes in their saliva, hours of sweating in the summer sun to clear abandoned farms and replant this tea, shirtless and sleepless weeks on the roof of the tea processing center withering, shaking, piling, firing, rolling and roasting, and of course doing it all with great skill and a bit of gratitude, which Mr. Gu definitely manages. This wonderful collaboration between Nature, from Heaven to Earth—and from the tiniest insects to Man—is an inspiration that concludes in your soul, from sip to sip...



*Eastern Beauty has much more shaking and tossing than other oolongs, which is one of the reasons it is the most oxidized of all oolongs. This process of turning/tossing the tea as it oxidizes is called “lan qing (浪青).”*

## Making Eastern Beauty

- 1) Picking (*cai cha*, 採茶)
- 2) Indoor and/or covered withering (*shai qing*, 曬青/  
*wei diao*, 萎凋)
- 3) Shaking—machine-tumbling or by hand in long piles  
(*yao qing*, 搖青/*lan qing*, 浪青)  
—Four cycles of withering shaking—
- 4) Piling for oxidation (*jing tze*, 靜置/*wo dui*, 臥堆)
- 5) Frying to kill green enzymes and arrest  
oxidation (*sha qing*, 殺青)
- 6) Rolling to break down cells (*rou nian*, 揉捻)
- 7) Piling for a short time (*wo dui*, 臥堆)
- 8) Initial “water roast” to arrest the tea in stasis until  
season’s end (*shui pei*, 水焙)
- 9) Sorting (*fan ji*, 分級)
- 10) Final roasting stage I: awakening (*zhou jing pei*, 做驚焙)
- 11) Final roasting stage II: roasting the body of the tea  
(*pei ze di*, 焙之蒂)
- 12) Final roasting stage III: sealing the fragrance  
(*pei xiang wei*, 焙香味)
- 13) Final sorting and packaging







# BEYOND THE ORGANIC WORLD

✪✪: *Steve Kokker*

**W**e are about an hour out of crazy-hectic central Taipei, Taiwan's super-modern capital of Eight-million-plus. It couldn't seem further. This is truly lush, thick Nature. We drive up a steep and winding road through ever-smaller villages and into ever-thickening forest and sweet air. I'd like to imagine that the aroma comes from the tea trees I've come to see, but I can't be certain.

We get out of the car on a particularly tricky turn of this road, which has been carved through the forest and rock, and wait for Gao Ding Shi to arrive. I'd been told that he is a true proponent of a natural, wild tea farming technique dubbed "*shengtai*," or "arbor," and that to meet him would be... *an experience*.

Waiting, we look around us: there are enormous butterflies, baseball-hat-sized marvelous beauties; there are small snakes disappearing as if from nowhere into the shrubbery. When standing in the sun, the heat is uncomfortable. Today is about 38 degrees Celsius. *Again*. In the shade by the side of the road, however, the air is suddenly cooler, and the sweetened moisture from the trees provides embracing umbrage. My guides explain that Mr. Gao might take a

little while. "He likes to do things slowly, to take the time needed to do them." We wait patiently, drinking in the Nature around us. The constant, rhythmic sound of crickets sets the brain waves to alpha. One of us goes off looking for multi-colored caterpillars.

I wasn't expecting someone as young and lively as the handsome, affable man who eventually drives up to greet us. Mr. Gao has considerable presence and seems to be deeply comfortable in his skin. He looks us over, nods, smiles and suggests that my thin sandals might be good for a day at the beach but not for where we're going. He opens his car and pulls out a mud-lathered pair of thick rubber boots, knee-high, and hands them to me. "I wouldn't want a snake to snap at you."

## *This Is a Wild Tea Garden*

His neighbors think his patches of land are ugly—unruly, unkempt, bug-ridden... and not even producing much tea at that; a waste of land.

We walk to the most accessible of his tea gardens; the others would be an hour's uphill hike. We need to push through the thicket of leaves

and bushes, be wary of our footing, be careful not to walk into spider webs the size of my torso, and keep an eye out for snakes. The tea is in the form of trees here, much taller than the meter to meter-and-a-half high bushes most of the world's tea plants are artificially kept. There are palm-sized, bright green frogs at first indistinguishable from the tea leaves on which they placidly sit. God is indeed the DJ here; the soundtrack is wall-to-wall crickets interspersed with bird-song.

This is not really a garden, nor certainly is it a plantation. It is simply a hilly area on which tea plants are growing wild, into trees, and from which Gao Ding Shi plucks and processes his fine teas. There are *Camellia sinensis* here, certainly—everywhere—but not only. Other types of foliage grow exuberantly. "Whatever belongs here is welcome," says Mr. Gao with a smile, "whatever wants to grow here, please grow!"

That philosophy doesn't end with foliage; there are worms and bugs that want to live here, too, and munch on the tea plants, and to that Mr. Gao says, "Please, let them come. If bees wish to make their hive in one of the trees, beautiful! If the worms and bugs





# MASTER GAO DING SHI

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are happy eating from the trees, let them eat. I also wish to drink from the tree, why shouldn't they?"

He bends close into the shrubbery, turns up a few leaves and branches before finding what he wants to show me. Turning over a leaf with one hand, he beckons me closer with the other. "Look at this." At first I make out nothing: large tea leaf with thick veins running along its underside. I squint but still don't see anything out of the ordinary... until his calm smile and focused gaze lead my eyes to one thin, unusual, vein-looking bulge, very slight, the thickness of a pin—the home of a little bright green pin-worm.

Indeed, the tea plant is favored by many bugs, some of them seemingly out of Star Trek. There's another worm that lives inside the branches, one that looks like a crawling piece of fluff, a kind of caterpillar that lives inside the vein of tea leaves, and another worm which imitates the look of a small branch. There are even tiny, scampering green bugs called jassids that are allowed to bite into the leaves, as the chemicals produced by the plant's natural defense mechanism lends a uniquely sweet aftertaste for us tea drinkers—that is the unique

case of *Dong Fang Mei Ren* (Eastern Beauty), a famous Taiwanese oolong tea. "In any case," says Mr. Gao with a shrug and grin, "that bug eats only the bud and first two leaves. That means he has good taste! And he helps me make delicious teas!"

Indeed, bugs and the tea plant have lived in symbiosis for millennia and tea has been humankind's best friend all along. Before mass-production came along, bugs were either not feared as much, or controlled using natural methods. In Mr. Gao's case, they are not such a problem that he can't process his tea; there are plenty of leaves left for him. But that leads us to another philosophical aspect of the small-scale organic tea farmer, a mindset more environmentally friendly than any organic farming technique: enough.

## *Enough*

It's a concept I came across several times on my recent journey to Taiwan in meeting small-scale tea farmers and their families: the desire to have just enough, not more.

Some of them lived right next to other tea farmers with much larger aspirations, who paraded garish post-

ers advertising their teas ("the best," "the rarest") outside their homes in otherwise unobtrusive, bucolic villages. Those posters bespoke a desire to redo their homes, add another car to the newly-constructed garage, perhaps get an alarm system to go with the solid electric gates they had recently installed to protect their assets. Nothing wrong, perhaps, with wanting to improve one's lot, but this striving comes with consequences: when we reorganize our priorities, the structure of our lives changes accordingly. If you're a tea farmer, you might start to make compromises in how you make and produce your tea—you will want more—not necessarily better, but more. And to get more, you need to harm the soil and the tea plants (and ultimately yourself) by using fertilizers and pesticides.

When one is instead guided by the principle of "enough," there are also consequences. You live in more harmony and cooperation with your surroundings and are not tempted to make compromises. Gao Ding Shi produces approximately 40kg of tea per year, a little more if the weather cooperates, sometimes much less if it doesn't. This is a laughably minuscule amount in the tea market,

where tons are the usual unit of measurement. The tea he makes, however, he makes with great pride, with great care, and with love. This transfers so evidently into the leaf, and the cup, that his customers gladly pay the 50-euro per 50 grams he charges for it.

This high price ensures that this tea, when purchased for individual consumption, will be cherished, enjoyed fully, with confidence that it is an unblemished gift of Nature delivered via caring human hands. It's as close as the tea lover can get to the ancient tradition of Man-Nature interaction.

If a tea merchant buys this tea, he or she can almost certainly never resell it for a profit, and so thoughts of gain dissipate. Instead, the tea will likely be shared, and often for free with good friends and/or valued customers. The focus here is on the Leaf, not the coin—as it should be!

In any case, when one buys tea from someone like Mr. Gao, one is focused on supporting the principles embodied before you—not only to acquire superlative tea. It's a vote of confidence for a lifestyle and approach to Nature all too rare in this age of "more."

Mr. Gao wishes only to have enough—to keep his children in school, to live comfortably, to continue this lifestyle for his family and himself. Selling all of his tea allows this, and even to accumulate small savings. He could easily think, "Hmmm, if 40kg brings me this much, if I were to just double it to 80kg, still not much, I could get a better car and more satellite channels and take extra trips..." However, to achieve this, he'd have to do many other things: change the way he works, hire new people, make structural changes to his very simple processing space; start using some form of pest control; think more of how to market his teas, maybe develop a web site and hire someone to run it for him... These would be lifestyle and philosophical changes he is not ready to make. He knows that the seed of desire sprouts double-edged swords as buds. It's not possible to have one thing (lots more money, say) without a lot of other things, and he knows

with great certainty that he does not want those other things.

"To truly live the simple life," he tells me while steeping one of his teas for us to taste, a *Baozhong* he calls "*Wan Xiu*," "you must be ready to put down many things: money money money, name name name. In the end, 'I am nothing—that's important to remember."

Every small-scale organic tea farmer I encountered who worked in collaboration with the Earth (versus forcing it to provide what he wanted from it) espoused the same philosophy—of living as simply as possible while remaining comfortable and desiring only that which is needed. On top of that, none want to endanger their own health by living near chemicals.

### *Running the Family*

If big profits are not his motivation, what fuels Gao Ding Shi's dedication to natural methods of tea farming? Indeed, Mr. Gao has great reason to be sensitive to this issue: personal tragedy.

Along with tens of thousands of other migrants from China's Fujian province, just 180km across the Taiwan Strait, his great-great-grandfather arrived in these parts from Anxi, the mountainous county renowned as the homeland of *Tieguanyin*, perhaps the world's most famous oolong tea. These mountains reminded him of home. He had grown tea in Anxi, and so when they moved to Taiwan looking for a better life, they grew tea there, with the clippings they'd brought from the mainland. The family's next generations continued growing tea; technology and the commercial tea market changed alongside them. By the time his father took over tea production, Taiwan was in an exportation boom and volume was therefore highly valued. Pesticides were commonplace, often cheap ones banned already in the developed world. His father died young and painfully of cancer, and other members of his family developed cancer and crippling diseases which by all appearances seemed directly related to living alongside chemicals.



This loss, and seeing his family suffer from needless poisoning, left huge emotional scars in Mr. Gao (his eyes well up quickly when speaking of his beloved father) and served as the catalyst for major life—and business—changes.

"The tea trees are my brothers and sisters," he says, "members of my extended family. They have fed and protected my own family for generations and I wish to return the favor."

### *And Then, the Rains*

Gao Ding Shi's tea processing house lies at the bottom of a winding road cut through thick swaths of trees and has a terraced view overlooking valleys. One feels embraced by the mountains, a welcome visitor in their realm. The processing area itself is really just a concrete house, half of which is living space for his aging mother, who spends most of the day





peeling vegetables, making food and sleeping while her son, other family members and a few hired helpers carry on making tea.

This is not what many readers might have in mind when thinking about a tea processing plant; this is real life. There are bugs and flies coming in and out of the open doors; the floors are far from spotless; a friendly dog wanders about; laundry hangs next to baskets of drying tea. In short, nothing *Better Homes and Gardens* would aim their cameras at.

Yet this is *artisanal* tea production, not sterile factory tea production. Life happens here, and in the best sense, we can taste it in the tea. Mr. Gao washes his sturdy hands, which are thick from hard work—barely calloused despite the almost constant work he does—yet as elegant as a cellist's, and opens a pack of *jiao tai*, the green tea he produces.

Luckily, it starts to rain. Heavily. The transformation from sunny day to

stormy lasts but a few minutes. Soon, relentless vertical curtains of water are falling across the outside landscape. The morning harvest yielded five bamboo baskets-full (each the width of outstretched arms) of tea leaves of the *Qinxin Heimien* cultivar and they were left to wither in the sun outside. With the first drops of rain, though, Mr. Gao scurries to bring the baskets inside and place them on racks to wither there. He planned on making some *Dong Fang Mei Ren* from those leaves, but this slight change of procedure makes it more appropriate to make red tea from them. Man plans, God laughs. And man needs to quietly, humbly adapt.

I say “luckily” about the rain. Had the day remained clear and dry, Mr. Gao would have been too busy with his tea leaves to attend much to us. Making *Dong Fang Mei Ren* takes more time and effort than red tea, foreign guests or none. But now he had some time to sit with us, pour us

some tea, and chat. Somewhat unusually, he steeps his green tea for four minutes at 40C, water quite cool. “A good tea is good at any temperature,” he says gently. He steeps and pours his tea calmly, slowly, one thing at a time. A lovely peace falls over the place, nestled as it is in the forest and now caressed by the lulling sounds of rainfall.

Before the weather clears and it's time to say goodbye, we have the luxury of spending a few hours in Mr. Gao's calm company. Even aside from what I know of his commitment to Nature and Tea, I have the feeling of being in the presence of a truly beautiful soul, someone living in total flow and happy with the easy partnership he has with life.

“Tea has taught me humility, to be humble towards Nature. When we want to smell tea leaves, we bow down to them, we don't keep our head held high.”



Taiwan Oolong

傳統  
烏龍  
茶的  
歲月  
時光

# TRADITIONAL OOLONG NOWADAYS

AN INTERVIEW WITH MASTER LU (呂禮臻),  
PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE  
PROMOTION OF CHINESE TEA ART

茶人: Zhang Yun Ying (張芸瑛)

Translated by Lucas Ledbetter

*In January of 2015, we introduced you to Master Lu Li Zhen, who is one of Taiwan's wisest and most important tea masters. We recommend that you re-read that article so that you will have a context for just how relevant his commentary is, as he has literally affected every one one of us and our tea appreciation. He's made tea history, in other words.*

Over the years, Taiwanese tea has been deeply impacted by society and history. At the beginning of 1971, vigorous tea exports were diverted down more delicate domestic trade routes. Following the elevation of the fragrance and flavor of oolong, tea gained the affection of more and more people. The number of people drinking tea gradually increased, but at that time, *Dong Ding* oolong tea, also known as “traditional oolong tea,” received the most attention in Taiwan. Traditional oolong tea led the way to the highest domestic peak in Taiwanese tea's history.

## Properties Derived from the Environment

A plant should be in accord with the environment in which it grows, as that determines the substances and subtle elements contained within the tree and also leaves. Just as “terroir” is stressed in red wine, so should the climate, soil, weather, etc., determine how to create a balanced tea. Fine tea is always made in harmony.

The varietal, region and production method of a type of tea all result in variations, and all influence the flavor of a tea. But the environment is the most important of the three. Take Muzha *Tieguanyin*, for example: its environmental characteristics are a northerly latitude and an elevation of about 350 meters. Since it receives long periods of sunshine, the caffeine and tannin content of the freshly-picked leaves is quite high. The tea has a heavy quality on the tongue, and the bitterness and astringency are strong. However, *gao shan* tea's (high-mountain oolong) growing environment is greater than 1000 meters above sea level. Atop the mist-shrouded peaks, it often gets foggy in the afternoon. The duration of sunshine is short, and the caffeine content of the fresh leaves is therefore low. The leaves are juicier, highly aromatic, and the pectin content is high. The tea's bitterness is slight when brewed, and it has a pleasant sweetness as well. The mountain environment gives the tea nourishment for growth, but is also its Achilles' heel when it comes to processing. Due to

insufficient sunshine, there are often problems with the fresh leaves during withering. There isn't enough moisture removed and the tea's raw flavor is often over-pronounced. Some tea merchants attribute these raw flavors to the alpine air, and pass such misinformation on to the consumer, but this is misleading.

From all this, we can see that there is a difference between the actual effects of the environment and processing of tea and the consumers' knowledge of it, which wasn't there in the past, and that the teas produced traditionally and nowadays themselves form the fault line between the two.

## Processing: The Missing Link

What we normally call “traditional oolong tea” refers to tea that is heavily oxidized during processing, for example, Muzha *Tieguanyin* or *Dong Ding* oolong teas. In earlier times, *Dong Ding* oolong tea was highly oxidized and roasted and is in relative contrast to the “flavor” of present *gao shan* tea.





In 1971, the traditional oolong tea produced by tea farms underwent withering in the sunshine for oxidation. A preliminary roasting, shaking, and other processes made the tea highly oxidized; during rolling, it was pressed in cloth by hand or foot. The tea took on a ball shape and was called “balled oolong.” In withering this tea, masters would wait until the raw tea flavor had left the tea leaves, and then perform the next step. The process was adjusted in accordance with Nature, echoing changes in rain-fall, temperature, humidity, etc.

These complicated but reliable production skills lowered the moisture in the tea leaves to an appropriate degree. Not only was the aroma stabilized in the process, but the mouth-feel, flavor and heartiness (body) were also greatly increased. Moreover, such teas were suitable to be drunk right away or stored for later.

Let’s look at another example: Due to the growing conditions and characteristics of traditional Muzha *Tieguanyin*, it is intrinsically rather bitter. Thus, tea farms used a relatively high degree of oxidation, the tea was rolled

quite a few times and the roasting period was fairly long. In the end, that tempered the varietal and environment’s “aggressive” flavor, transforming its shortcoming into its specialty.

High-mountain oolong tea currently undergoes light oxidation, and most of the stages of processing are done by machine. What’s more, some people believe that small farmers using traditional production techniques should be phased out and that large-scale mechanical tea production methods should be adopted instead, for example, factory-farm cooperation (small farmers don’t have to set up factories; they just provide *maocha* and the processing is done by large factories). This method not only can save on wages, but can mass-produce tea, which is advantageous to the development of the tea industry, market, and economy. However, when tea leaves are machine-processed, they do not acquire natural flavors. Manufactured tea is only mediocre and lacks any special characteristics. It cannot be adapted to the varietal, climate or environment and lacks craftsmanship and character.

I think the key to high-quality tea lies in letting the nature of tea “reveal itself.” This doesn’t just refer to the degree of oxidation we’ve been discussing, but to every phase of the production process. Traditionally, oolong masters tried to avoid creating tea with raw flavors. If you let oolong reveal its potential, it won’t have a green tea or fresh-off-the-tree flavor, and as such, it will be more conducive to tea craftsmanship—in the processing, roast and even brewing skills.

Asides from letting the tea “reveal itself,” there is another key point, which is the tea’s dryness. The moisture content must be less than 5%. When the tea liquor has a freshly-picked, raw green flavor, that indicates that the tea leaves have a high moisture content, and the tea will be bitter when drunk (the surface of the tongue will have a slight astringent feeling), and it will not be suitable for aging. Processing an oolong the way it wants to be processed, revealing its true potential, and making sure it is adequately dry will make a fine oolong that is pleasant to drink and worth aging for some years as well.

## Roasting Preserves the Aroma

The main reason that nowadays tea mostly undergoes light oxidation and is not thoroughly dried is that at present, the “aroma” of the tea is emphasized. There are crude teas and raw teas that have a very apparent aroma when smelled. One could describe this type of fragrance as “charming.”

Then how to stabilize the aroma? Tea that hasn’t been sufficiently oxidized can be roasted directly after drying. The tea’s fragrance will change with the high roasting temperature and will be preserved layer by layer. This changes the “evenness” in the original aroma into “heartiness.” In other words, it reduces the shortcomings of the tea, decreases the acidity, and increases its supple smoothness. Tea that has not been roasted can be likened to a gorgeous woman who is uncultured, left alone on an island: she is beautiful, but not as beautiful as she could be. Similarly, fine tea from a fine source and location is great, but it won’t reach its full potential as oolong without the roast.

Thus, when a tea farmer roasts a tea over a long period, the aroma is transformed from an obvious, charming flavor into a mellow and complex poem, deeper and more profound. Take Li Shan spring tea as an example (like our Tea of the Month): it has a clear floral fragrance as raw tea, but after roasting, it is transformed and reveals a mellow floral and fruity fragrance, which smells gentle and pleasant. The tea then seems to cling to the mouth, adhering everywhere and lingering on. This takes the experience to an even higher level.

I think the true quality one experiences when drinking tea is more holistic than just a pleasant aroma. In the past, we often talked about a tea’s ability to “rhyme (*cha yun*, 茶韻).” In the old days, tea was produced “in concordance with the Heavens,” and it was good for aging as well as drinking.

I have some Taiwanese oolong tea here from the year 1916. The depths of the tea liquor have a burgundy translucence. After the tea enters the

mouth, the sweetness instantly floods your whole mouth. There is a slight, pleasant bitterness in the sweetness. Different levels and flavors dance upon the tongue in tingling sensations, melting the body and mind. Only vintage tea can offer such an experience. It is like the qualities of the tea are fulfilled by the aging. And that is an experience which light, raw tea with only a pleasant fragrance can’t ever compete with.

## Industry: Things Are No Longer As They Were

To date, along with changes in technology and the environment, people’s demand for tea has also changed. The market has been influenced by these changes. For example, because modern people drink tea with increasingly light flavors, lightly oxidized teas have gradually gained popularity, as have the newer cultivars, like *Jing shuan* or Four Seasons Spring.

In addition, tea information is basically controlled by tea merchants. When consumers don’t have access to objective information that can help them develop discernment, it’s very easy to feel that a certain tea suits you, and to then grow a preference for it—after a while, you become accustomed to this type of flavor. (Magazines like this can obviously help!)

There are also many challenges in the sales of Taiwanese teas, such as that Taiwanese teas have a low profit margin. Sometimes, without any mark-up, even after twenty years, a tea is still sold at a comparable or even lower price as it was back then. These issues are not guided by a reasonable system, resulting in a chaotic market and tea farmers who can’t earn a livelihood.

Taiwanese tea’s specialty lies in its high quality. If quantity is demanded, how do we preserve and maintain that quality? Traditional craftsmanship pushed Taiwanese tea toward a peak and offered people memorable flavors. The modern market, on the other

hand, has a very different attitude towards tea.

This topic can’t be covered in so few words. Based on my years of experience, many people like Taiwanese tea after coming into contact with it. I believe that with the right attitude, Taiwanese tea can achieve another peak, maybe even higher than the previous one.





“ Taiwanese tea’s specialty lies in its high quality. If quantity is demanded, how do we preserve and maintain that quality? Traditional craftsmanship pushed Taiwanese tea toward a peak and offered people memorable flavors. The modern market, on the other hand, has a very different attitude towards tea. ”



# 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 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 Caitlin Mercado.*

She came to me (in her ceremonial form) almost three years ago in a warm desert tipi amongst women who had gathered from all over the world to connect in subtle, ancestral and spiritual ways. Inside this desert tipi sat our beloved tea sister Tian Wu, in service. The space was dressed with much aestheticism, a tangible representation of the reverence held for what was to occur. Why would something so simple be dressed so beautifully? We silently settled into our cushions gathered around the *chaxi* listening to the hum of the kettles. Tian served the liquor with so much transparency and ease, as if she too had evaporated with the steam from our bowls. We were completely mesmerized by the leaf and its company of beautiful accoutrements; all elements together as one to become the gift of plant medicine lovingly gazing back at you from a bowl. As we sipped bowl after bowl, you could feel a presence of serenity fill the tent. Some sat with smiles on their faces and eyes softly closed, others poised and stoic, and then some, like myself, with dewy tears on their cheeks. To witness Her becoming in that ceremony triggered something deep within the center of my being. A remembrance as if I had been in that seat before... I left that tipi with a heart reaching for more.

After that first experience with Tea in this new and profound way, I joined Global Tea Hut eager to learn more about all Her shapes and forms and how she's touched others the way She touched me that early desert morning. My first visit to the Tea Sage Hut came in the months following. And I have been fortunate to have just spent a month at the Center with the tea brothers who so lovingly surrender to serve and care for the Hut and its guests and generously share in the Tea Way. Hugging them was easy.

Tea, as I'm sure it did for many of you, arrived at a fortuitous time for me. After an imperceptible slowing in my yoga practice and experiencing realizations about my intentions behind "practice," I think I had been consciously/subconsciously seeking a new path. And what was this? Tea as the most beautiful conduit for meditation. Of the earth and for the earth. Tea began to fill all spaces in which I would normally be mindless... I wanted to know Her more, connect more deeply with her and by doing so connect more deeply with the earth beneath my feet. What I love most about tea is how



every person served, no matter their practice, is receptive to Her meditative properties. We all experience this longing of connection to the Earth, to each other and to ourselves. And She stimulates this so well within us. As time passed and I developed a more intimate practice with Tea, I found Her as a deeply healing sister/mother/friend in whom I was able to take refuge in during life's worldly challenges. A space to be held in Her warm embrace.

When I was asked to be wayfarer, I was more than a bit nervous... How could I possibly put to words the gifts She has given me? And to do so with an eloquence so worthy of Her beauty? Many have already done so long before me. But I suppose the only true way to know is to sit and let the leaves show you. Just as Her leaves open to unfurl within the earthenware, let that happen within yourself. Let Her sweep you off your feet.

I am currently in San Diego but will travel for tea! If you ever find yourself in Southern California, I would love to meet any fellow tea brothers and sisters. May all cups be filled with the leaves of loving kindness!



# Inside the Hut

Because of the large number of tea sessions happening around the world, we are going to post about them on our website 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 website 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!



The 2016 Light Meets Life Fundraiser is now in full swing, and all our 2016 teas are in. Check the site today to get some amazing tea and support the building of Light Meets Life. Also, we are transparent, so feel free to ask about our costs and your contributions.



We have a new page for Wu De's teaching events around the world. Many of you are always asking for updates, so we thought it was about time to share them: <http://www.globalteahut.org/wude teachings>.



We have started broadcasting live videos at the beginning of every month on our Facebook page. This is a great way to connect with us, learn together and ask any and all questions. Check it out!



The October issue is going to be all about Elevation, which was a kind of initiation for so many of us sitting for tea together here. We are asking the community to submit Elevation stories and photography. Chosen submissions will get free tea!



We are giving away two cakes of Ambrosia each month until the end of the year. All you have to do to be eligible is take a picture of yourself serving Global Tea Hut tea and post it on Instagram with the hashtag #servingglobalteahut. We have already given the first few away! Don't miss the chance!



Wu De will be facilitating a six-day retreat in the Spanish Pyrenees. It will be a Zen & Tea One Flavor retreat focusing on the connection between meditation and tea. Participants will gather fresh spring water, meditate a few hours a day, learn chanting and have tea as well as Zen discourses throughout. It will be a rare chance to deepen your practice and learn tea at the same time. And, if that wasn't enough, it is being held at a gorgeous venue in the mountains of rural Spain. This event will run from October 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>. If you are interested in attending, please check out the website: [www.casacuadrau.org](http://www.casacuadrau.org).

Wu De will also be traveling in Germany and the Czech Republic after the retreat, sharing tea and teaching Cha Dao. Events are already posted!

## Center News



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



We are looking for help with farming, photography, video and web design. If any of you have experience in these things and are interested in staying at the Center to learn Cha Dao, with free room and board, contact us!



We have started gathering money towards offering one annual scholarship to fly someone to the Center each year. Once we have enough, we will let the community nominate candidates. Let us know if you want to contribute to help make this happen!



We have started a daily inspirational video series, where we will share small clips of joy in the life of the Tea Sage Hut!

## September Affirmation

*I honor my inadequacies.*

*Can I see that the vision of my character defects and inadequacies is a gift? Without guilt, can I take a moral inventory, recognizing that the mind that sees the mistakes is not the mind that made them? Diagnosis is the beginning of all healing.*



# 福爾摩沙島



[www.globalteahut.org](http://www.globalteahut.org)

*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.*

**GLOBAL TEA HUT**  
Tea & Tao Magazine

