

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

September 2018

EXTENDED EDITION

PURE TEA



SUSTAINABILITY 

LIVING TEA 

ORGANICS 

TASTING CLEAN TEA 



SUMMER WIND

Month in and month out, we always recommend environmentally sustainable, clean teas. It is past time we took an extended trip through this topic, as it is perhaps the most important tea discussion of them all, and maybe the most important for humanity as well. And we need a special tea to drink along the way, of course.

*Love is
Changing the world
Bowl by bowl*

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From the editor

In September, the heat in Taiwan starts to break and we enter one of the best tea-drinking periods in the year, where we can enjoy long morning sessions, late afternoon sessions and, of course, evening sessions—maybe even outdoors if we can make space between ten-day courses! The autumn means roasted oolongs, aged oolongs, our beloved Cliff Tea from Wuyi, lots of boiled tea and we start opening jars of aged puerh, especially those with some older, more mature leaves in the blend (*huang pian*, 黃片). These teas align us with the season, and help bring Nature indoors: through the doors of the Center and those of our being to help uplift our hearts.

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

Though it means a lot of extra work, this is one of our favorite times of year. This 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 one of the largest English-language publications on puerh tea. Then, in 2015, we translated and annotated the entire *Cha Jing* (茶經) by the Tang Dynasty tea scholar, Lu Yu (陸羽). The hundreds of annotations alone have made the translation a much-needed contribution to the scholarship of tea. In 2016, we released the largest English-language publication on Taiwanese tea, and in 2017 we achieved the same unprecedented coverage of Yixing history, lore, science, craft and art.

This year, we decided to boil a deep and long cauldron on sustainability and tea, pouring many bowls on this most-important topic. As all of you know, we are committed to clean, environmentally-friendly, organic and sustainable tea. All of the teas we send to you are free of agrochemicals. We seek to support farmers who are going against the current of industrialization and destruction in the name of profit, those who continue traditional ethics, philosophy, skills and production methods out of a love for tea,

rather than pure consumerism. One of our goals for when our future, bigger Center, Light Meets Life, is built is to host annual gatherings for organic tea farmers throughout Asia. We will sponsor their trip to Taiwan, host them and allow them to hold a three-day forum, which we will then record, video, photograph and write about, lending them a microphone to the world. This is just one way out of many that we are committed to healthy tea that is good for the Earth, good for the farmers that produce it and also good for us who drink it!

We have chosen to go with the term “pure” as opposed to “organic” for the title of this issue, which is a very important choice. There are many levels of pure, clean tea, and organic is just one. Organic certification has issues, and ultimately is not advanced enough when it comes to making tea truly pure. But we also need clean tea in many qualities and amounts, so that tea lovers around the world can have access to healthy tea at various price ranges for different uses, all of which is good for the Earth, for farmers and for those who consume it. And each of these levels has its own criteria determining what is “pure,” which we shall discuss in great detail throughout this issue!

In most issues, we take for granted that you are all on board for clean, chemical-free tea and just lightly touch these issues, usually in the Tea of the Month article. Now we have a huge volume of pages where we can discuss these topics in greater depth than ever before, gathering together years of articles and writings, along with new interviews, translations and research into the topic. Hopefully, this work inspires you all to value the importance of your purchasing decisions even more, and also motivates the farmers to continue their work or change their ways if they are wandering destructive paths. This is for the good of all beings who share this planet, our beloved home!



—Further Reading—

This month, we recommend rereading the September 2016 Extended Edition issue that was all about Taiwanese tea, which was the same as last month's extended reading. We also recommend the Tea of the Month from May of this year. All the past issues are now up in both .pdf and .html versions on our website!

TEA OF THE MONTH



Our Tea of the Month, Summer Wind, is an exceptional Eastern Beauty (東方美人) from the birthplace of Eastern Beauty in Northern Taiwan, Beipu (北埔). Eastern Beauty is also known as White Bud Oolong (*Bai Hao Oolong*, 白毫烏龍) and sometimes “Liar’s Tea (Peng Feng Cha, 膨風茶). This is one of those amazing months you’ll be talking about for some time, and a big part of what makes this Global Tea Hut so special. It is great to connect people from all over the world to such amazing teas and farmers as this, and to see how they in turn light up at the opportunity to share their craft with the whole world—bright honest smiles, and a true and humble gift to our cause, and to you all, given from as pure a heart as there is. If you wonder what this hut is all about, have a drink of this tea. And if you then lean back into a quiet satisfaction, we’ll meet there and have a smile with Master Gu Cheng Gan (古乘乾). Master Gu is one of the kindest and most skilled tea producers we have ever met.

The first time we sent out Master Gu’s tea in 2012, we visited him afterwards and he had a friend over for tea. He turned to his friend after introducing us and with moist eyes on the verge of tearing up he said, “They are drinking my tea in Spain!” He was blown away by this community and by the fact that his tea had traveled around the world—something he couldn’t have seen in his wildest dreams. Imagine, then, how thrilled he was this year, now that Global Tea Hut has expanded to more than sixty countries!

The magic of Eastern Beauty starts with the leafhoppers who bite the leaves in the early summer. There are enzymes in their saliva which cause the leaves to begin to oxidize before they are even picked, turning red around the edges of the bites and growing at a crooked angle from the stem. These unique leaves are the ones used for Eastern Beauty. The plant responds by producing aromatic compounds that protect it, which also change the aroma and flavor of the leaves. This complex dance between environment, insects, tea and human is amazing, and one of many awe-inspiring aspects of the tea world! We think it is the perfect tea for this month’s special issue.

The production of oolong tea is the most complicated and skillful of all tea production on Earth, and Eastern Beauty has the most steps of any oolong, perhaps making it the most difficult tea on the planet to produce well. Because there are so many steps, there are many areas where mistakes can make the difference between a very fine tea or a mediocre one. This is why there are more than twenty grades of tea at Master Gu’s factory. Starting right from harvest, the different types of leaves are separated based on the quality. At various stages of the processing, any number of changes can make the difference between the very peak grades and a high to average tea. We will discuss all the steps in Eastern Beauty production starting on the following page in our Deeper Session section.

Eastern Beauty is the highest 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.

Summer Wind is a magical tea. Because of the dance between weather, mountain, insects and plant, it is the perfect tea to accompany our Extended Edition on the environment and clean, organic tea. It is a very rich tea, combining the energy of plants and ecology, insects and the skill of people. The fragrance of Eastern Beauty is otherworldly. The flavors of this tea are also very complex, and different brewing methods produce very different teas, which means there is a lot of room to explore this magical tea. Also, our Tea of the Month is actually from 2013, which means it is also aged, adding depth and complexity to an already-rich tea experience!

The energy is also rich, reflecting the rich ecology and insect-plant-human relationship, which is there for all organic teas, but more pronounced in this one. We recommend drinking this tea outdoors, especially this time of year.

- ☉ Summer Wind (夏風)
- 🌐 Beipu, Taiwan
- ☉ Eastern Beauty Oolong Tea
- ☉ Hakka
- ☉ 200-500 Meters



A DEEPER SESSION

Further Exploration into Our Tea of the Month

 ver the course of this amazing month of clean tea, from organic to living tea, we will be drinking one of the most marvelous and magical examples of Nature, Heaven, Earth and Human working together to craft the Leaf. Eastern Beauty (東方美人), also called “White Bud Oolong (白毫烏龍),” is a rare and precious tea that has a flavor and fragrance like no other. It is one of those magical teas that is so delicious it inspires people to become tea lovers. And the story of its creation is intriguing and magical. We also love Master Gu and his work, which was just the inspiration we needed for an issue devoted to Mother Earth. He loves Nature and tea, and works tirelessly to create healthy tea farms and support tea culture and his Hakka heritage. This will be an exciting tea for many of us, and one you will certainly appreciate more after you read a more in-depth account of Master Gu and this month’s tea.

As do most of you, we at the Hut approach tea as an aspect of self-cultivation, using the mindfulness of our tea practice to live more peacefully and true to our guiding principle. We also focus on tea as a Way (Dao, 道) of finding harmony within and without; connecting to Nature through the mountains, rain, wind and sun in the leaves; and connecting to others through our service. But just because tea is primarily an aspect of our spiritual practice does not mean we do not thoroughly, completely and fully enjoy

the sensual side of tea—exploring all the wonderful flavors, aromas, mouthfeel and even Qi (氣) of all the teas we drink. In fact, we think that since our Tea of the Month is amongst the most delicious teas on Earth, it is worth discussing just how profound the sensual pleasures to be had in tea are in the life of a Chajin.

First and foremost, aroma and flavor are part of our practice as they connect us to our bodies and therefore to the present moment. The quieter we are, the more Tea rewards us. That may sound like a funny way of saying this, but what we mean is that the more focused and sensitive one is, the more one experiences when drinking tea. In other words, if you increase your sensitivity, then you taste, smell and feel more. This connection to the sensations in the body can be very grounding, helping us to escape the endless stream of distracting thoughts we all face, not to mention the distractions of our lives, careers, etc. When the mind is quiet, the tea tastes richer and you notice subtle nuances you may have never tasted before. And the tea also helps us quiet down, relaxing us and taking us inward from smell to flavor, from mouthfeel to gross sensations and then on to the subtle body, or energy, of the tea. This creates a loop where you quiet down and the tea helps you quiet down more, and so on...

We also find it very profound that Nature has created something so attuned to our senses as to bring bliss to our bodies. This is a communication

from Nature. The plants create fruit so that animals will eat it. The fruit is a sweet message designed for the bodies of the animals that are attracted to eat it, spreading the plants’ seeds around in gratitude for the nourishment given. There are many instances of such symbiosis in Nature, where plants attract animals or insects with something they need, some message created for their bodies, in exchange for propagation. And we are also a part of this great exchange, encouraging more tea lovers to drink tea so that farmers plant more tea trees, and also devoting entire magazines to better and healthier agriculture so that Her descendants can thrive in gardens that are happier and healthier for them. It is no coincidence that tea is delicious and fragrant. It was engineered to reach us. The sensual pleasure evolved to attract us. This is a part of Her language to us. It is through these senses that She communicates to us, as other plants do to animals and insects, reminding us of the Su Dongpo quote: “It is an exceedingly useful plant. Cultivate it and the benefits will be wide-spread; drink it and the spirit of animals and Nature will be lively and clear.”

Master Gu Cheng Gan

Master Gu Cheng Gan (古乘乾) is a fourth generation Eastern Beauty farmer who has, like his father before him, worked incredibly hard to preserve this amazing tea culture. Master



Gu was born in the Year of the Rooster, 1969. He grew up amongst tea, harvesting and processing from an early age. He is a Hakka, and much of his life's work has been to preserve Hakka culture. With the proceeds from his tea, he promotes food, traditional crafts, music and the preservation of the Hakka language. Hakka people are one of the reasons that Wu De chose Miaoli as home, and why the Center was built here. They are very hospitable, kind and simple people, with a history of farming, and a love of the Earth and each other. They really treat guests with sacred hospitality, which is the spirit of tea and our Center. And their story is a big part of Master Gu's own story.

As many of you know, our Center, Tea Sage Hut, is located in Miaoli, a small town in northern Taiwan which is home to one of the largest concentrations of Hakka people in the world. Hakka (客家) are actually Han Chinese, mostly from Guangdong and Fujian. Their legends say that they came from the Yellow River Valley originally, but Hakka people have been rather nomadic for many centuries, migrating throughout China and abroad. They are actually the largest diaspora of Chinese people in the world, settling Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore and the West. Traveling the world, they came to call themselves "Hakka," which literally translates to "guest families," even after they've stayed in one place a long time, like Miaoli and Hsinchu.

The Hakka language and culture are rich. They were one of the first groups of Chinese to migrate to Taiwan, coming in waves at the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), and then throughout the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) as well. Today, they make up almost twenty percent of Taiwanese people, the second largest ethnicity. They were the first ever agriculturalists in Taiwan, as the aboriginals were hunters and gatherers. They settled in Miaoli and Hsinchu at that time because the land was wild and free for settlers.

In the 1970s, Taiwan's booming economy shifted from agriculture to industry and technology. As the quality of life rose dramatically, people shifted 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, like Master Gu.

Master Gu and his family 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, Master Gu's Bao Ji Tea Company (寶記) bought back the first of several abandoned Eastern Beauty farms, cleared several hectares and planted saplings there. They have thrived and are beginning to produce tea again. In 2006, they increased their holdings to four large ecological gardens. They tend these gardens with great care even today. In April, they make green tea and a striped oolong that has only slightly been bug-bitten, like Nantou's "concubine tea (*gui fei cha*, 貴妃茶)," which Master Gu says was developed through studying Eastern Beauty in Beipu. From May to August, they make Eastern Beauty followed by red tea. Master Gu says that red tea is easier to make, so they produce it when they are tired from hard work and little sleep many days in a row, as well as at the end of the season when the tea quality drops.

Master Gu's son, Gu Yi Ping (古亦平), was born in the Year of the Monkey, 1992. He has begun to take an active role in the family's production, ensuring a future for Eastern Beauty tea and a fifth generation of magical Bao Ji tea. It is returning to popularity, and more people are discovering this amazing tea.

Master Gu and his son are incredibly devoted to preserving the environment, tea and traditional tea processing, as well as Hakka culture. Their four farms are all organic, and run with sound ecology and vibrancy that borders on living tea.

Master 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 project and share it with all of you. 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. As we mentioned above, his tea center also does a lot to promote and preserve other aspects of Hakka culture, like food, ground tea (*we have a whole article about this in the January 2017 issue, leicha, 擂茶*), pomelo tea (red or oolong tea stuffed in pomelos and aged; it is boiled with pieces of the dried fruit as a throat medicine), vinegar production, regional art and music and even bamboo tea utensils carved by hand. His son Gu Yi Ping is quite famous for making amazing tea

utensils. They are gorgeous scoops and teapot picks crafted by hand from old Japanese and Taiwanese bamboo.

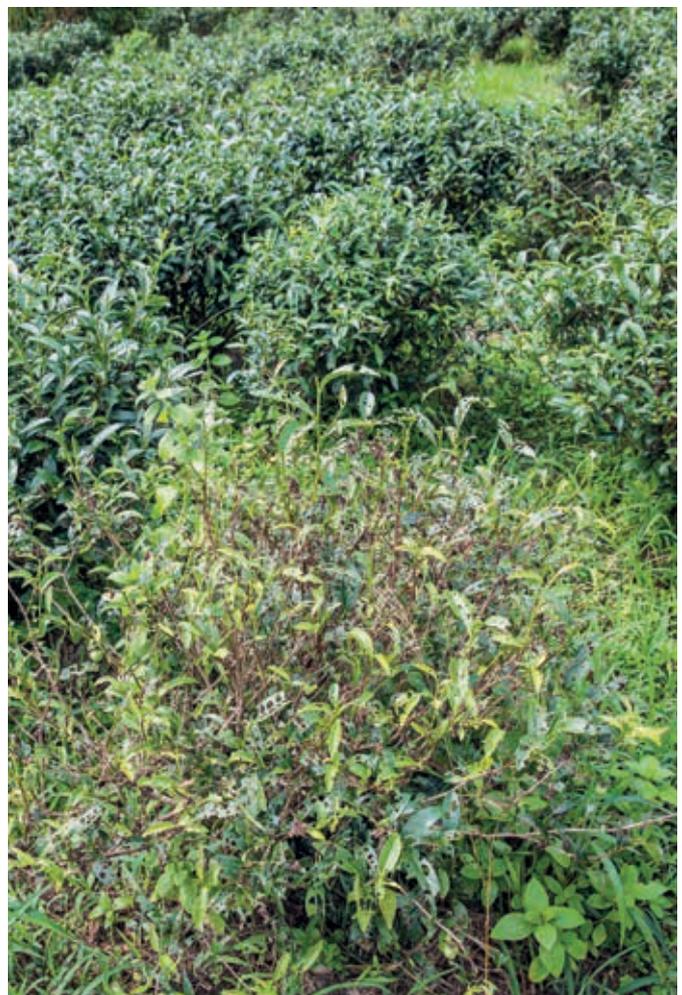
Beipu

Beipu 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 nineteenth century, many immigrants were crossing the strait from Fujian to start a new life in Taiwan. Many started growing tea for export, primarily to famous merchants like John Dodd. At that time, there weren't yet any commercial planta-

tions 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 all of the agriculturally-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 leafhoppers (茶小綠葉蟬,



jassids, *Jacobiasca formosana*) 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 varieties of tea. Processing and varietal go together.

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 Master Gu himself, our modern farmer who masterfully made this month's 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 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." They say that the farmer's neighbors couldn't believe that he was able to sell the late-flushing, bug-bitten tea,

let alone sell it for more than regular spring tea, so his tea was called "Liar's Tea (Peng Feng Cha, 膨風茶)," which is still one of the common names used for this magical tea.

Eastern Beauty: Cultivation

Most oolong in Taiwan comes from the Gentle Heart (Qing Shin, 清心) varietal, which was originally brought to Taiwan from Wuyi. In the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), when many Fujianese people were migrating to Taiwan, it would have been dangerous to cut or steal seeds from one of the famous varieties in Wuyi Mountain. Some trees were literally protected by law and others by custom and mores strong enough to deter a thief. Therefore, lesser known varieties like Gentle Heart were taken. Qing Shin has since disappeared from Wuyi. Though it was born abroad, its destiny and home was across the Strait in Taiwan (like us). In Beipu and Miaoli,



茶 Master Gu has purchased several abandoned tea gardens and allowed them to be free, ecological and completely organic. The bottom far left is a garden he recently purchased, and just in a couple years one can see tons of life returning—as the bushes grow up, the undergrowth thrives and an ecology returns to balance. He showed us a tree that had been decimated by bugs and assured us that the roots were healthy and the bugs would move on, leaving this tree to recuperate in a year or two. In a balanced ecology, heavy insect populations attract predators, and the ecology balances itself over time. If you think in years, there is always balance. Below is the leafhopper responsible for the magic of Eastern Beauty tea. Its bites begin the processing of this magical tea. Left is the perfect bud set: bitten, curled and already oxidizing.



where Eastern Beauty is grown, two main varieties are used, and both are related to Gentle Heart: Huang Gan (黃柑), which literally means “Yellow Mandarin,” and the more popular Qing Shin Da Mo (青心大有), which is “Gentle Heart Big Nothingness.” They are both related to Qing Shin.

Much more of Eastern Beauty comes from Qing Shin Da Mo. This hearty tree produces the best quality, and flushes in late spring/early summer in Beipu, which is ideal for Eastern Beauty. It is a clonal cultivar, meaning that it is manmade, and was cultivated by the Tea Research and Extension Station (行政院農業委員會茶業改良場) in their cultivar series that began in the 1960s. Most of their early research predated agrochemicals and was oriented towards creating heartier, insect-resistant trees that also had strong and high yields. Through the process, they also discovered unique trees with special qualities and/or flavors, and these were also favored in certain areas of Taiwan. Originally it was pronounced “Qing Shin Da You (same characters: 青心大有),” which means “Gentle Heart in Abundance,” and the later, more popular “Big Nothingness” may be a quip, like calling this tea “Liar’s Tea (膨風茶).” Qing Shin Da Mo flushes powerfully and more often, especially in low-altitudes like Beipu. It’s a vibrant tree, with larger and juicier leaves if all things are equal (meaning healthy environments).

Master Gu told us that the Qing Shin varietal that was brought from Wuyi is actually not ideal for Taiwan’s terroir. He said that most farmers don’t realize this, but rather just carry on what they think the market wants. Qing Shin Da Mo is a descendant of Qing Shin that was born out of and raised within Taiwan. “It has all the qualities of Qing Shin, but is suitable to Taiwan. It is stronger and more vibrant, with healthier trees and juicier leaves. It can make better green, red and oolong tea than Qing Shin.” He thinks that farmers would benefit by cultivating more of this amazing tree.

In tea production, the previous step always informs the next and is, therefore, more important than the proceeding one. This means that the type of tree determines the harvest, the harvest the withering, and the wither-

ing the firing, etc. Ultimately, this also means the foundation of all tea is the environment. As we will discuss often in this issue, Wu De often says: “The leaf is the tree’s expression of its relationship to its environment.” In order to make fine Eastern Beauty, the ecology must be especially vibrant. This is due to the insects involved.

Master Gu’s trees are far apart, with lots of healthy undergrowth. The trees are mostly around thirty years old, but he says the oldest ones are seventy to eighty years old. A rich ecology filled with tea trees always feels different. This may sound like rhetoric, but it is true, nonetheless. A recent guest to the center who is a very down to earth man commented that it would be hard to feel the same about a conventional plantation ever again after visiting an old-growth ecological garden. You can feel the difference energetically, taste it in the leaves, smell it in the aroma of the tea and the soil if you bring it to your nose (clean farms smell dense and loamy, alive, while inorganic soil is powdery and has little to no odor), hear it in the sounds of life all around and, of course, see the difference in the abundant vegetation all around as well as the richness of the tea trees and the moss, ferns and mold that cover the trunks and branches.

Eastern Beauty starts with the bite of a tiny green leafhopper. There are actually many species, but *Jacobiasca formosana* and *Empoasca onukii* are the most common. These insects are so small that you cannot see their bites. They do not make holes, but rather little pricks that allow them to suck the juices out of the leaves. Their bites affect the leaves in three ways: 1) they begin oxidation; 2) they cause the tea to release defensive chemicals that change the nature of the leaf; and 3) the tree also releases airborne compounds that change the fragrance/flavor.

The bites begin oxidation, as the holes are now exposed to air. Enzymes in the saliva of the insects encourages oxidation. This is a part of the reason why Eastern Beauty is the most oxidized of all oolong tea (around 80%), though more of this heavy oxidation has to do with processing. Remember, the bites of these katydids are very, very small, so the oxidation is therefore minor. This doesn’t mean it should be discounted altogether.

*Summer Winds
Carry me away
Over sea and mountain
Past the stars
To bring back hope*

*I'll plant my hope
And let it grow strong
Let it flush with leaves
Of inspiration and joy*

*I'll die into my hope
Offering my body
To be medicine
For the hearts
That live
Past the stars*

—Wu De

To protect itself from the bites, the tree also releases chemicals, some of which are within the leaf to discourage the insects from taking too much, while other compounds are airborne and aromatic. Some researchers are now suggesting that these aromatics actually attract spiders, which, of course, reduce the population of katydids and help the trees find balance. This demonstrates how deeply connected all the organisms in a healthy ecology are, and how tampering with Nature’s balance has upsetting results that often ripple further than we foresee. You can smell the bug-bitten trees in the garden. The smell is very lovely and inviting. Chewing on these leaves is powerful, especially when the garden is ecologically sound, as with Master Gu’s farms. The leaves are rich and juicy, and the bitterness and astringency quickly give way to a lasting sweetness and *gan* (甘). Master Gu told us that farmers often eat them to quench thirst on a hot day, as this tea is picked in summer (Taiwan can be sweltering hot in June).



Beipu (北埔)

As with all things tea, the ideal for Eastern Beauty means not too little or too many bites. Too many insect bites and the tea over-produces defensive compounds like tannins and the tea becomes overly bitter. There must be the right amount, so that the tea is sweet and fragrant. This is only possible in a healthy ecology. “Conventional farmers are constantly battling the very insects that make their tea unique in the first place,” Master Gu says. “If they let the ecology balance itself, over time the tea will be great more often than not.” We saw a tree in one of his garden that was completely decimated by bugs. We asked if it would die, and he said that it would not because the remaining insects would move to another tree and this one would recover. Also, he said that having lots of undergrowth and a rich, dense ecology means that insect levels may spike one year, but that just attracts more predators and then the ecology balances itself out. This theme comes up a lot in the production of healthy tea, which is allowing balance to happen over the course of

seasons, as opposed to forcing something out of the tea in any given year. Nature can balance the ecology on its own, in its own time frame, and always with better results than our meddling. Master Gu makes a great point: “Conventional farmers have good and bad years due to over-population of the katydids and are constantly arguing with their gardens, whereas we always have high-quality tea every year, though the amount may vary, and do so on Nature’s terms. This always ensures a better product in the end.”

Don’t assume that just because these jassids 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. Master 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 jas-

sids that bite the leaves. Real tea production involves an entire ecology.

The buds start to curl up after being bitten and turn a yellowish-white color. The further down the stem the yellowish-white color goes, the higher quality the leaf. The absolute highest-quality bud sets include a tiny, bitten bud that has curled completely over next to two opened leaves that are also slightly bitten, with yellowish-white color far down into the stem—below even where the tea will be picked. Master Gu says that the best buds flush only in the period which is called “*Mang Zhong* (芒種)” in the Chinese solar calendar (corresponding to June 6 to 21). The buds will then turn white as a result of the unique processing this tea goes through, which is why this tea is also called “White Bud Oolong (白毫烏龍).” It is also called “Five Color Tea (五色茶)” as there are five colors in the leaves: black, brown, red, yellow and white. This makes it amongst the most beautiful dried tea leaves on Earth, like Nature-paintings that show us diversity in color and fragrance.



精



Eastern Beauty Processing 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. 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, Master 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.

One thing we find common to high-grade tea throughout China and Taiwan is a move away from paying pickers by weight, which is the typical method. When you pay by weight, pickers are unscrupulous and pick into

the tree faster and deeper to increase the amount in their satchels/baskets. Master Gu, like many fine tea producers we know, pays his workers by the day. This means that the sorting of the grades of tea already begins on the farm, and the pickers are happy to move slowly, carefully and pick whatever is required of them.

Harvesting Eastern Beauty at the right time of year and the right time of day, which is early in the morning, is another method that farmers use to make sure that there are neither too little nor too many bug bites on the leaves. Catching the leaves at the right time ensures their quality. When you couple this with a healthy ecology, strong trees and the right weather patterns, then you have the raw material needed to create the finest qualities of tea: as always, Heaven, Earth and Human. With such raw material, the tea can now be handed over from Nature, insects, sun, wind and water to the

masters who will transform it into the dried leaf before us.

After the tea returns, it 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/*wei diao*, 萎凋) 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 (*lan qing*, 浪青). The higher grades of tea



OUTLINE OF MASTER GU'S EASTERN BEAUTY PRODUCTION

古大師東方美人製作工序

- 茶 Picking (*cai cha*, 採茶)
- 茶 Indoor and/or covered withering (*shai qin*, 曬青)
- 茶 Shaking—tumbling or by hand in long piles (*yao qing*, 搖青/*lan qing*, 浪青)—four cycles of withering/shaking
- 茶 Piling for oxidation (*jing tze*, 靜置/*wo dui*, 臥堆)
- 茶 Frying to de-enzyme (*sha qing*, 殺青)
- 茶 Oxidation in the wrapped-up ball
- 茶 Rolling to break down cells (*rou nian*, 揉捻)
- 茶 Piling again, for a short time
- 茶 Initial “water roast” (*shui pei*, 水焙) to dry the tea
- 茶 Sorting (*fen ji*, 分級)
- 茶 Final roast I: awakening (*zhou jing pei*, 做驚焙)
- 茶 Final roast II: roasting the body (*pei ze di*, 焙之蒂)
- 茶 Final roast III: sealing aroma (*pei xiang wei*, 焙香味)
- 茶 Sorting & packaging (*fen ji*, 分級/*bao zhuang*, 包裝)

are shaken entirely by hand, while the lower grades are tumbled in a machine for twenty minutes and then shaken by hand; as Master 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 Master 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.

The indoor withering goes on for around six hours, during which it is shaken four times (sometimes this is adapted to suit the leaves). The shaking gets more vigorous each time. They increase the effect of the shaking by

putting more force into the lifting, shaking and dropping/scattering, as well as increasing the duration each time, thereby moving into heavier oxidation and bruising with each shaking of the tea.

At the end of the withering and stirring/shaking, the tea is piled (*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. Master 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 whatever was done traditionally. He says these adaptations are his own, and besides being organic and hand-processed, 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 fried (*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 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 Master Gu's special tea has up until this point been withered, shaken, piled and fried 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 to thirty minutes before being rolled (*rou nian*, 揉捻). This oxidation within the ball shape of the tight bag further breaks down the cells,

bringing the inner juices to the surface and taking them to a higher degree of reddish brown. The warmth and tightness inside the bag is incredibly catalytic, causing even deeper changes in the tea leaves.

The rolling breaks down the cell walls of the tea and releases the juices. Master 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 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 a 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.

Before the final roasting, the tea must be sorted (*fan ji*, 分級). 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 hand, according to size and quality. 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 final roasting is divided into three stages. It is often done in large, round bamboo roasters with electric elements underneath that are meant to mimic the heat of charcoal, which was used traditionally. Master Gu would love to use charcoal to roast all 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 (*long yen*, 龍眼) trees. (We actually use it here at the Center to heat all our water.) It is renowned for tea roasting, but the tree grows slowly and over-harvesting has driven prices up. Master 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 tze di* (焙之蒂)" which literally means to "roast the body" of the tea. This begins to enhance the tea and bring out its unique flavors. This roasting matures the aromatics and flavors of the tea, so it starts to glow in the cup. The final roast is where the real favor is enshrined in this amazing tea, called the "*pei xiang wei* (焙香味)," which means that it locks in the fragrance. This is the point at which Master Gu uses charcoal for his highest-grade teas.

Roasting techniques are very secretive. The methods are only discussed in general with the likes of us. Details like temperature, rotation and other subtleties are often kept within the family. Master Gu is not oriented like that, and is happy to discuss every aspect of his tea with us, but like many skills in tea production, his answers often orbit some form of "it depends," meaning that the production of tea is done through careful handling of the tea—smelling and touching it and adapting it accordingly—rather than a recipe or formula. This is true of most arts. Artists become their medium over time, letting form go. Mastery can look like bungling to the untrained.

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.

There are more skills, techniques and steps in Eastern Beauty production than any other tea we have witnessed. In order to photograph the whole journey, we had to spend an entire day with Master Gu, from the early morning until almost midnight. And that doesn't even include any of the roasts! We left as the first drying roast was about to begin... Master Gu jokes with us that farmers and tea makers come from Nantou to learn about Eastern Beauty production, hoping to create concubine (貴妃茶) tea, and that they never last the whole day. "They are lazy. They always leave in the early afternoon," he smiles. "Making Eastern Beauty sure is hard work!"

As you can see, a tremendous amount of effort has gone 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, frying, rolling and roasting, and of course doing it all with great skill and a bit of gratitude, which Master 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...

茶 *It took a full day, from early morning until late at night, to get the tea ready for its first roast. After the last, short oxidation in the cloth, the gorgeous ball of tea was opened. The fragrance was outstanding, filling the room with tea and causing exclamations all around. The tea had five colors. At this stage, the roasting begins...*



夏風東方美人烏龍茶



Brewing Tips 茶

冲泡技巧 完成好茶

One of the many beautiful qualities of our Tea of the Month, Summer Wind, is that it can be brewed any way. You can put these magical leaves in a bowl and watch them twirl, creating a light and deep bowl. They also make for a magical session in a sidehandle as well. Should you wish to, this tea is great gongfu. It can also be brewed in some other magical ways as well.

Often times, tea vendors over-simplify tea brewing in some ways that can lead a Chajin astray. One of the big misconceptions we find throughout the tea world is that all light teas, like green teas, need to be brewed using lower temperature water, while darker teas like shou and traditionally-processed oolong should always be brewed at higher temperatures. In general, we advise avoiding such vague practices as applying brewing techniques, methods or approaches to whole genres of tea at once, and instead work with specifics. Brewing each tea specifically is a much better approach. By developing sensitivity to the nuances of every tea you brew, your ability to appreciate all the subtleties of tea will increase, and you will also develop the ability to brew any tea well—even if someone hands you a tea you are unfamiliar with.

These too-broad sweeps of suggesting certain temperatures for certain categories of tea are a bit like telling someone visiting a foreign city to always turn left. Which way you should turn depends on where you want to go. Saying that all green tea should be prepared at lower temperatures is misleading, if not wrong. As you get to know a tea, you may find that there is an ideal temperature for brewing it—one that brings out all its best qualities, enhancing the flavor, aroma, energy and patience of the tea. For some teas, this ideal temperature might even be very specific, down to the thinnest of lines—one side being too cool and there is some loss of aroma, for example, while just the other side of the line scalds the tea and it becomes astringent. But don't ever assume that this should then be applied to the whole genre. As you brew a tea and become friends with it, you will find that the tea isn't better at a particular temperature, but rather different—not different in terms of quality, just plain different.

Not only can you brew Summer Wind leaves in a bowl, sidehandle or gongfu, you can also boil it or even steep it for a long time in a large pot. You can make a completely different tea by brewing it at a cooler temperature versus hot temperatures. It has depth and power in both forms. When it is brewed cooler, it is more fragrant, with a long-lasting honey fragrance. When brewed hotter, it has more depth and force, with a nice aftertaste and mouthfeel. In fact, you can also make some of the best iced tea you have ever had with this tea.

If you do want to make some of this tea into a cool summer treat, we recommend sun brewing. Put some of the leaves in a glass jar (like a mason jar) with room-temperature water. We recommend using the best spring water or bottled water you can find. This is a high-quality tea, so it is worth getting some great water. Leave the jar out in the sun for around two hours. The times will create different teas. In Taiwan, we often do 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. You may want to experiment. If it is not so hot, you may have to leave it out longer. You can taste it to see if it has steeped enough. After that, you can refrigerate the tea and serve it with or without ice. It is deep and fragrant, and extremely refreshing on a hot day. Master Gu often serves Summer Wind this way when guests come to visit.



Gongfu



Sidehandle



Leaves in a Bowl

Water: spring water or high-quality bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: try different temperatures

Brewing Methods: gongfu, leaves in a bowl, sidehandle or sun tea

Steeping: flash, flash, flash and longer

A few stripes in a bowl if brewed that way

Patience: 15 to 20 steepings / 7 pours

茶 Try brewing this month's tea at different temperatures to see that it doesn't necessarily mean a better tea, but rather different. Try sun brewing, by putting the tea in a glass out in the sun and then refrigerate.



A background image of a tea plantation with green leaves and brown branches, slightly blurred to make the text stand out.

Pure & Clean Tea

Many times guests come here and see how much work goes into the normal issues of Global Tea Hut and exclaim, “How do you find the energy to produce this every month!” What they don’t understand is that making this magazine is a great joy. Nothing brings us greater joy than writing about, photographing and sharing tea with you! It is not hard to find the energy to talk about what you love, or share it in the form of writing, photography, artwork, etc. We have a great love for tea; a deep passion informs these issues. We also love this community. The greatest friends we have ever made are through tea—friendships to last many lifetimes. And so even the tedious parts of producing this are actually joy-filled, as we think of all your smiling faces when the envelopes arrive, as you read and learn or share these teas with your friends or family. The production of this magazine is an honor and a great joy to produce. We feel blessed to be able to serve in this way.

As a result of this feeling of being honored to be of service in this way, contrary to what you may think, these

Extended Editions are not an annual chore. We honestly feel excited about the extra real estate to explore the topics we love in greater depth. The truth is that most months we have way more articles, ideas and photographs than can fit in an issue. Last year, when the Extended Edition on Yixing came out, Wu De literally danced around the Center in glee because it was the first ever issue of Global Tea Hut to have a binding with words along the spine. He was overcome, singing and holding the issue aloft in glory!

There is no aspect of tea that we do not love sharing, from history to folklore, science to production, from the ethnography of tea villages to teaware, and from sharing the preparation methods of our tradition to using tea as an aspect of self-cultivation, Cha Dao. But there is a topic that trumps all of these, and in some ways makes them all moot. And it’s about time we spent an issue devoted to it, especially an Extended Edition! There is nothing more important than the environment, in terms of tea quality and in terms of the human experience full stop. *We are* this Earth; we don’t walk upon it. It is

our home, our mother, our bodies and our experiences. Without a healthy world, we have no experience.

And so, while we love talking about tea roasting, teapots or translating classical tea texts and writing commentary on them, without tea, all these topics become absurd. When your child is sick, the conversation you have as parents isn’t about what kind of haircut they should have, which clothes to wear or whether they should study piano or violin. When your child is sick, the only conversation in the house is medicine, doctors and healing. And our child, our beloved Tea, is sick.

This analogy may be stronger than necessary, but it makes a point: that maybe we don’t need to stop talking about roasting and teapots altogether, but we should also spend some time talking about the sustainability of tea or there won’t be any leaves to put in our teapots, which means magazines on Yixing will be lost records of things that once were, like an article on phones with rotary dials. We truly stand at a precipice, brothers and sisters, and tea can be the focus of larger, global issues concerning the environment and

Organic

純淨有機茶

human health. It seems curious to us that with all our brilliance and innovation, we have created a world that is so ill-suited to human health and happiness, with one million suicides a year—one every forty seconds.

The fact is that the agro-chemical industry is new, beginning in the 1950s, and we don't really understand its long-term environmental effects, though signs are not good when it comes to tea. Many tea farmers in Taiwan report that tea trees are living significantly shorter lifespans, and that yield is decreasing in the life of each tree. Some people don't care; they've grown used to ingesting chemicals of all kinds, from dyes to artificial flavors. But these trends should be worrying to you, no matter how you feel about your own body and health, as they have the potential to make long-term tea production unsustainable, forcing us to drastically reduce the quantity of tea in the world. If that happens, many future tea lovers won't be able to afford tea. This means traditions will die. Traditions of tea production, teaware crafts, brewing traditions like ours—all will erode or even be lost.

Down in this precipice, the tea lovers of the past who devoted their lives to passing these traditions on look down at us in askance, while the other side of the cliff is equally crowded with future tea lovers who stare down at us with furrowed brows, wondering why we would make such poor choices leading to no tea for them. And tea is just one of many ways our future descendants will look back on this "Carbon Age," aghast at our unskillful management of resources, and how we foolishly ignored signs that should have caused us to pause and think, change our ways.

But the future tea lovers will know that some of us did stop and think; some of us were with hope. We choose to see a brighter future full of grateful tea lovers, smiling at all the wonderful, healthy tea choices they have. They are happy they understand the importance of environmental awareness and human cooperation with Nature. They are excited for their future.

We sincerely hope that this issue inspires you. We do not want to come off preachy. We are passionate in our love of Tea and the Earth, but our efforts are honest. We do not want to os-

tracize anyone. We believe change happens through inclusion, not exclusion. We want to start dialogue, discussion and even healthy, friendly debate so that these issues can be moved forward towards a healthier, greener Earth for us and our descendants. We also dream of a world in which all tea is delicious, green and wonderful. We long for a return to the days when tea lovers could pair waters from streams, rivulets, springs or even snow or rain with particular teas, without worrying about pollution, let alone lethal toxicity.

In Every Way, From Every Approach

We recently saw an article in a major online magazine talking about tea "myths" that needed "debunking." Some were good, like that certain teas need to be brewed at certain temperatures every time. But we were shocked and saddened to see that the author felt that organic tea was one such "myth" that he needed to save us from, as if Nature and Tea have no relationship.

Granted, his reasons had to do more with the certification process and some of its problems, vis-a-vis cost of tea, but frankly, some of the reasons he listed for why certification is an issue were also “myths” and not backed up by real data, statistical or otherwise. In another article, we will discuss the problems with certification in greater detail.

For now, let us be clear at the outset that we intend to focus this issue on what we call “pure” tea, as opposed to organic certification, which is different in different countries and subject to all the issues that any government regulation is. Of course there is corruption. Also, different countries test for different pesticides, and it is nigh impossible to test for them all. They also have different stringencies, especially since farmers cannot always control what their neighbors do, and spray may contaminate their field. Different countries also require different amounts of time to pass so that previous residues subside to certain degrees. However, all of this does not mean we should abandon or ignore the certification process. Of course our society needs laws governing the production

and trade of organic produce. In general, this is a good thing, despite some outlying issues. Tea vendors who make excuses based on certification processes are just distracting you from the real issue, like a magician who uses one hand to get your attention while the other does the trick. The real issue is always profit margins and the ability to find organic teas at prices that allow them to make their bottom line.

To us, however, the issue is much larger than the term “organic,” and certification issues are only one type of discussion within a much larger topic, which is how do we grow tea in harmony with Nature—in a way that is sustainable, healthy for the environment, healthy for farmers and healthy for our bodies, as we drink the tea. This discussion is much bigger than organic plantations, certification, government regulations, corruption or other dishonesty or even the market itself. We need healthy tea at all quality levels, from high-end, old-growth tea trees from forests (what we call “living tea”) to mid-level teas from healthy trees in manmade gardens, and from eco-gardens left in complete biodiver-

sity to high-yield plantations. For each of these, the criteria of what is “clean” is very different.

In this issue, we are going to talk to Mr. Xie, a low-altitude, high-yield plantation owner who uses “organic” farming methods to balance sustainability and health for the environment, his family and customer with increasing productivity. For him, all of the issues relating to certification are valuable discussions worth exploring. We will also talk about “living tea,” grown in forests, which has its own criteria that are worlds away from what Mr. Xie is dealing with. Finally, we will meet Mr. Gao Dingshi (高定石), whose eco-garden tea is something above organic, and an example of “living tea.”

For each of these teas, “clean” is a whole different thing, and all of this transcends legal issues. Let us remember, then, that our exploration of these topics transcends any of the legal or market ramifications of “organics,” though that certainly will be a chapter in a much larger book. In other words, “organic” is just one provisional way to heal our balance with Nature.



Suffice it to say, there is no approach to tea in which these issues do not matter. Setting aside sustainability and how our agricultural methods will impact future people's ability to grow tea at all—especially since we really don't know enough about the long-term effects of agrochemicals—there is no approach to tea that is not impacted in some way. Whenever we are asked to speak on tea in public, we always leave our listeners with these questions: How do you love a leaf without loving the forest? How do you love the forest without loving Nature? No matter what you love about tea, it is impacted by the tree's environment; of course it is.

The leaf is the tree's expression of its relationship to its environment. Tea is terroir. The soil, climate, rocks, other plants and life are all the characteristics that make a tea what it is, and make it unique from other teas. You cannot take the environment out of the tea. A tea tree cannot be healthy in a lab. It needs sun and mountain air, rain and minerals. And if any of these are missing or unhealthy, the tea will also be. If tea is a hobby or a beverage to

you, then you should care because tea grown without agrochemicals tastes better and has a fuller body. It is more patient, which means more steepings so your dollar goes further. It is also better for your body and will support a healthier lifestyle. When the leaves grow slower, they are thicker and juicier and have a much better aroma, fragrance and flavor.

When the tree takes in the minerals of the mountains and the natural fertilizers of other organisms in a healthy soil, it creates rich and delicious leaves. It is common for true farmers to look on leaves with bug bites and smile, knowing that the environment is vibrant and so will the tea be. When you use chemical fertilizers, you are feeding unnatural food from another ecology (laboratory) to the trees, and they aren't eating the mountain. When you irrigate, they aren't extending roots down to grow strong and healthy drinking mountain water. When you add pesticides, you drive away not only insects, but the organisms that eat insects and the animals that eat those animals, and all their feces and dead bodies which in turn fertilize the soil. You are tak-

ing away the terroir, in other words. You take away everything that makes tea special, bringing the mountain to the city. The farmer may advertise the sunrises of the glorious mountain on which they grow tea, and talk about how special it is, but what does that matter if the trees are grown in sterile beds without the influence of that environment?

If tea is a Way, a Dao, then how can you cultivate peace if the instrument of that peace is incongruent with Nature? How do you find harmony in disharmony? How can you cultivate yourself when, just like such inorganic trees, the fertilizer of your practice is toxin? All the fresh water we drink comes from the plants of this Earth, as does all the air we breathe and the food we eat. Whether you are vegetarian or not, ultimately we all consume plant energy. We are our environment. We move with and through the same energy and life as the plants. What we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves. We are the Earth. We are the land. We are the trees. And this is our one and only home forever. We are eternally bound to its destiny...



There really is no way to approach this without coming to some common-sense conclusions: that we have to stop allowing greed to motivate our relationship to our earth, and start promoting, discussing, learning about (and then passing on our education to others) healthy forms of agriculture that support our environment and our own health.

Global Tea Hut Itself

Before we put a kettle on and start sharing some bowls, we wanted to share with you our environmental commitments here at Global Tea Hut, starting, of course, with the teas we share each month. Not all the teas we send out in Global Tea Hut are certified organic, but they are all certainly agro-chemical free. They are all “clean” in whatever tier they find themselves. We only choose sustainably produced tea to send with these issues and also for our Light Meets Life fundraisers.

We don't want Global Tea Hut to just be about big philosophical ideals, either. We have chosen to make a difference in the life of one great farmer who has sacrificed a lot for his love of the Earth. The only tea we repeat every year is our Sun Moon Lake Elevation, produced by Mr. Su Shui Ding (蘇水定). This allows all of us, you and the servers here, to make a difference in the life of one man, his family and the plot of earth he stewards. The reason we send his tea each and every year is that we made a commitment on behalf of this community to purchase whatever tea he has left unsold at Chinese New Year each year, allowing him to focus on farming and not have to worry about selling his tea. This would be too much tea for us anyway, though we do drink a lot of Elevation around here, so sharing it with you makes this a communal influence on a down-to-earth, real, in-the-life-of-one-person way, and not just armchair dreaming about a better Earth for us all.

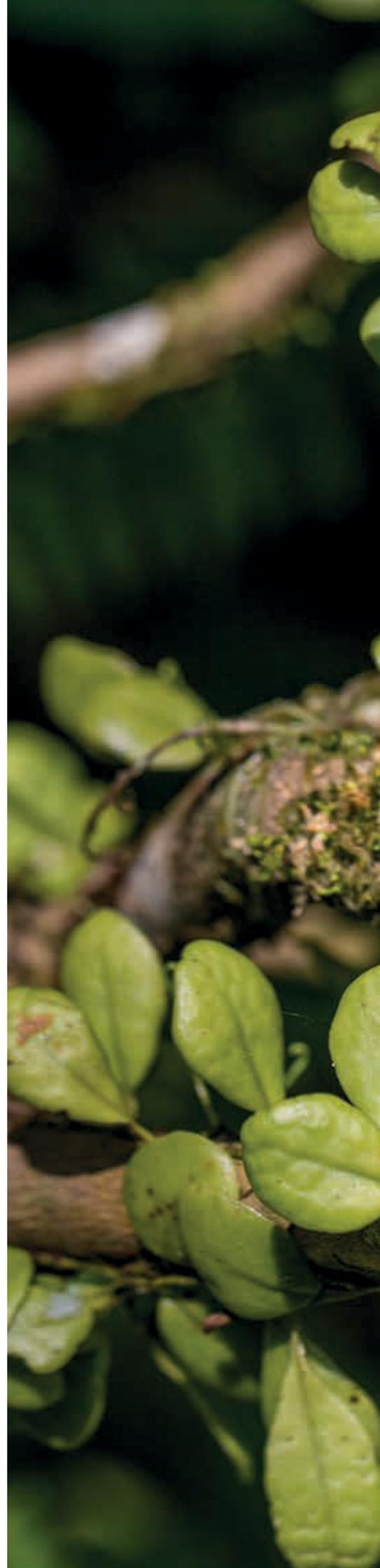
Sometimes there is an argument that we should all switch to electronic reading, which could, potentially, be great for the environment. However, this is often propaganda for publications to decrease costs. This really depends on what kind of device we use to do the reading, and how long we

keep it for. The components of most tablets are far more gnarly than paper, especially if we upgrade every year. However, just so you know, you can request an electronic version of Global Tea Hut instead of the print one, and we will just mail you the tea and gift, emailing the issue in a timely way. Also, Global Tea Hut magazine itself is printed on 100% recycled paper using non-GMO soy-based ink, and so has very little footprint. We also do our best to do the same with all the other packaging, including our new envelopes which have more environmental printing (they have always been recycled paper), and we are also switching to new tins with flat tops that screw on. These tins are also recycled and recyclable, but we are hoping that with the more convenient screw-on lid and the ability to stack them, since they are flat, more of you will re-purpose them after the tea is gone!

Finally, once we build our future Center, Light Meets Life, we plan to host annual conventions for organic farmers, where we pay to fly them to Taiwan, host them, feed them and give them space to network and hold seminars and round-tables about issues that are important to them. We can then record for future issues of the magazine, videos, podcasts, etc. So this issue won't be the last one we publish on the environmental aspects of tea, which will make you happy if you enjoy discussing the Earth and Nature-love as much as we do!



茶 Within the boughs of healthy, living tea, you find a whole world of organisms. There are often dozens of species of mold on a single tree, not to mention beneficial ferns like those shown here, which do not harm the tree. Of course, there is also a whole host of insects living in and around these trees.





THE IMPACT OF MODERN AGRICULTURE

現代農業的影響

Before we start discussing tea and the environment, we thought we would research some so-called “conventional farming,” and the impact of synthetic agrochemicals on the environment and human health. We know this may be a controversial topic, but it is worth understanding some of the details as a context for our exploration of what pure, clean tea really means. Shen Su has a background in agriculture, as well as lots of hands-on farming experience, so he was excited to research this topic.

(The footnotes refer to reference #s at the end of the article.)



茶人: Shen Su (聖素)

In a world of 7.6 billion people—projected to reach 10 billion by 2055—food safety and security and clean water will continue to be the most important topics to discuss for our growing human population. The way we approach agriculture on large and small scales will play key roles in addressing these topics. We do not live in a time, nor have we ever, where we can collectively sacrifice the environment for the sake of personal pleasure and comfort. It is now recognized that Nature is not an optional “luxury”—but an essential foundation for human well-being and sustainable development.⁴ In fact, we must address the range of issues that affect food from farm to table in order to reduce hunger and poverty while safeguarding our environment and natural resources. In order to have a sustainable agriculture system, it is our responsibility to consider the systems already in place and act from there because there is room for improvement and/or the implementation of completely different systems altogether. In this process of analysis, it is most important to address the root cause of the problems we face today in industrial agriculture, and to ask why some of the generally accepted solutions are not good enough or simply don’t work, especially in the long term. We have to return to our roots, literally.

It is amazing but true that the way humans farmed food, tea and other agricultural products for millennia is

now considered the exception, while modern, industrial farming is called “conventional farming.” From our viewpoint, this new, destructive agriculture should bear the burden of being “unconventional.” But, for the purpose of this article, we will follow the modern trend.

Conventional Farming

Conventional farming is defined by systems that include the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and other continual inputs, genetically modified organisms, heavy irrigation, intensive tillage, or concentrated monoculture production.¹² Conventional farming methods are promoted as being essential to produce enough safe food for our growing population. It is true that current conventional farming methods have temporarily increased the carrying capacity of the Earth for humans, but they also are slowly destroying the long-term carrying capacity of the Earth, which necessitates a shift to a sustainable agriculture.¹³ Farming on large, industrial scales, especially monoculture, creates certain imbalances because it is opposite to the biodiversity and equilibrium of Nature. The response to this imbalance can be seen in an increase of certain pests that are often viewed as problems. “Pest” means any species, strain or biotype of plant, animal or pathogenic agent injurious to plants

and plant products, materials or environments and includes vectors of parasites or pathogens of human and animal disease and animals causing public health nuisance.⁵ It would be more accurate, however, to view the response of pests as a symptom of the root of the problem, because without such an imbalanced environment, such pests would never arise. This is where the arsenal of chemicals comes into play to ostensibly control the symptoms of the problem. At this point, a snowball effect sets into place to try and maintain such an unnatural system, predicated on the promoted assumption that conventional farming is the only means by which to feed our growing population. It is true: most of the meat, dairy, eggs, fruits, and vegetables available in supermarkets today are produced using these methods of conventional and industrial agriculture.¹³ But, are these facts, which point towards quantity over quality, really justifiable to continue with these methods? What are the implications on humans and the environment when pesticides and other chemicals are misused and abused over time? Are full supermarkets worth the sacrifice of our health? What is the line to draw between quantity and quality, and have we crossed it?

So, is conventional farming really the path forward? Have we exhausted all other solutions? This is where we must proceed with caution. As author Ursula K. Le Guin so wisely said, “That which we resist, persists.”

To accept things as they are with objective clarity and understanding and then make educated decisions is the skillful path forward. This may be particularly challenging to accept in the world of industrial agriculture, because conventional farming methods are so heavily relied upon and yet are so detrimental to the health of our environment and ourselves. Therefore, it is all the more important to assess the systems in place and work towards a future vision of the world that sustains a quality of life for all of us, now and into the future.

Pesticides

For the purpose of this article, I'll define "pesticides" as any synthetic substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying, repelling or mitigating any "pest," including insecticide, herbicide and fungicide.¹⁰ While pesticides may actually be synthetic or extracted from plants, the synthetic ones are the more detrimental of the two, and often consist of hundreds of active ingredients.^{9/14} If we are to increase yield with monoculture, developing some plant-based, sustainable insect control may be necessary.

With millions of tons of pesticides manufactured each year, they are responsible for a billion-dollar industry. Pesticides, by definition, are meant to be efficient against target organisms and safe to non-target organisms and environments. At the same time, when improperly used, most of them are highly toxic to humans and the environment.

So, when used properly, pesticides' agricultural function is to protect crops against the symptoms of the conventional farming method and to increase crop yields in order to ensure food safety. However, studies have shown that intense use of pesticides to kill resistant pests induces more resistance until further increases in pesticide use actually reduce agricultural yield.⁹ Damage of an ecosystem from an overdose of pesticides can lead to reduced agricultural production, decreased health of the environment, and also economic loss. Though the definition is clear and objective, the results of using pesticides in agriculture can prove quite different from their intended function.

Pesticides in Agriculture

Technically, inorganic chemicals have been used to control pests since the eighteenth century, though early examples weren't really what we think of as a pesticide today, and were limited to rare instances of chemicals like soap. Then, of course, the insecticidal potential of DDT was discovered after the Second World War. Since the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of pesticides have been developed¹⁰ to protect crops affected by different pests, and in the last five decades, chemical control of pests aimed at minimizing crop losses has been introduced throughout the world.¹⁴ Countries such as China, the United States, France, Brazil, and Japan are among the largest pesticide producers, consumers and traders. In the developing world, where a quarter of pesticide consumption takes place,¹⁴ the use of pesticides is still poorly regulated and often dangerous, especially through certain types of exposure which will be reviewed below.

The annual impact of our current agricultural systems is responsible for billions of tons and billions of dollars of food waste, as well as millions of tons of manufactured pesticides which results in millions of cases of pesticide poisonings, hundreds of thousands of deaths, and negative impacts on our soil, food and water—not to mention that half a million tons of obsolete pesticides are improperly stored and scattered throughout the developing world, leaking into the soil and water.

There are "beneficial" effects of using pesticides to minimize crop loss and increase yield, but in general, we have done a poor job striking the balance between those gains and the negative side-effects which pose serious health risks to the general population and our environment. Many publications (*See references: 4, 7, 8, 9 and 13*) point towards increased regulation and education to solve the many problems associated with pesticide use, but perhaps completely alternative solutions (of which are there many) should be further explored and promoted. As a billion-dollar industry, however, the first and most realistic steps towards a chemical-free agriculture system will be at least to both increase regulation and education surrounding the use of pesticides while at the same time tak-



ing strong actions towards clean, sustainable, traditional, eco-friendly and other alternative methods of farming, which will be briefly mentioned below.

Exposure to Pesticides

Human exposure to pesticides can be acute or chronic, occupational or non-occupational, intentional or unintentional, accidental or incidental. Within each type of exposure can be oral (by mouth), respiratory (by inhalation), or dermal (through the skin).¹⁴ The most at-risk population are agricultural workers who apply pesticides, and other people in the immediate area during and right after the pesticides are spread.¹ Exposure through skin absorption occurs especially to workers in developing countries where safety equipment is not available or not used because it is expensive or impractical to use in the humid tropics.^{9/14}



Due to poor regulations, lack of education, ease of access and financial pressures, pesticides are also popularly used to induce self-harm (suicide), a form of intentional exposure, which can account for a staggering percentage of overall pesticide poisonings. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that three million pesticide poisoning cases occur worldwide every year, with 220,000 deaths, some of which are intentional.⁹

The general population is more likely to be exposed to pesticides through residues found in food, water, air or skin absorption through direct contact. And with the increase of intense pesticide use, the costs on our health are becoming more evident. Symptoms range far and wide, from diarrhea, external chemical burns, behavior changes and effects on the immune and reproductive systems, to skin damage, neurological effects and possibly even cancer.

Since most of these chemicals are very modern, we won't know what long-term effects their ingestion has until many more decades have passed and more studies done.

Effects on the Soil

Soil is often deliberately treated with certain pesticides, but is also exposed to as much as 50% of sprayed chemicals on crops that miss the target and fall to the soil surface¹⁴. Research on the effects of pesticides on soil are surprisingly limited, namely because soil microorganisms are so diverse and soil fertility is so complex. However, there is clear evidence¹¹ demonstrating that certain pesticides stimulate the growth of microorganisms while others have depressive effects creating an unnatural balance at the microscopic level. Moreover, there are guidelines for the approval of pesticides that re-

quire the determination of the effects on soil microorganisms and soil fertility. This is an important part of pesticide risk assessment¹¹.

It is well documented that some pesticides vaporize quickly, thereby not affecting the soil at all, while others can persist in the soil for years.¹ These persistent pesticides can contaminate water supplies, or be taken up from the soil by crops and then ingested by animals further up the food chain.

Alternative Solutions & the Path Forward

With so many devastating facts, it is clear that better agricultural practices are in order. The sources of the problems are well understood and adequately researched. There is no doubt that conventional farming is harmful for the Earth and for our health.

Lack of education and enforcement of legislation, industry corruption, improper labeling, etc., are all responsible for the millions of pesticide poisonings each year, as well as the contamination of our environment.

The introduction of major educational and preventative programs, compliance with available guidelines for the safe use of pesticides from WHO and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), enforcement of regulations, government initiative and quality control are all important measures to take to realistically work towards solving the problems we have created. But, many of the solutions and alternative strategies for pest control are aimed at mitigating the risks to human health and the environment by continuing to use chemicals. At this stage, and with such staggering numbers documented, mitigating the risks is no longer enough, especially when there are approaches that go far beyond mitigation and, in fact, improve the health of our population and the environment. This is obviously the skillful path forward.

Pesticides can prevent large crop losses and will therefore continue to play a significant role in agriculture.¹ They have the potential to protect or increase yields and the number of times per year a crop can be grown on the same land. The FAO predicts that by the time the population reaches ten billion, the majority of food production to feed that many people will come from increases in yield as opposed to the expansion of farming land. Is proper education, enforced regulations, and the use of minimum amounts of pesticides to protect crops really the extent of the response we need, or is a bigger shift in order? Is improving pesticide use the answer, or removing pesticide use altogether a better ideal to work towards?

It is well recognized that food can be produced on a large scale without the use of pesticides altogether. There are countless alternative farming methods that have clearly demonstrated their ability to grow food on a large scale in a natural, balanced, sustainable way that protects food security without the use of chemicals. The most obvious trends in this direction are certifiable organic farming methods. Beyond organics, there are other

methods such as Biodynamic farming, Biointensive farming, Fukuoka's Natural Farming and plenty of other farming associations and cooperatives that put the environment and people before profits. Beyond that still, there are modern agricultural practices designed after traditional ways of farming, most notably, Permaculture design, an actionable idea of a permanent agriculture ecosystem founded on an ethical basis of care for people and the Earth, intended to be sustainable and self-sufficient. These, and other related methods, will be the sustainable path forward.

Just as growing one crop on a large scale is not the long-term solution to food security, the method of chemical farming alone is not the solution either. And just as Nature maintains balance through biodiversity, it is through a diverse number of sustainable farming methods that will meet the needs of our current and future population. Therefore, we must fearlessly work towards the ideal of a clean, sustainable future of farming.



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IN AN

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A scientific approach to agriculture is an important lens for understanding our impact on the environment and for developing tools to solve our agricultural need in a growing and developing world. However, these issues are also of the heart. It is important that we face them openly and compassionately. In this article, Wu De addresses many of the arguments vendors give us for why their teas are not sustainably produced, and asks that we face them all with the love. There is no easy way forward, but we do have the power to change this world.



茶人: Wu De (無的)

In an awakened heart, the consequences of one's choices are never ignored. Some of our actions have apparent effects, while others create invisible results—too distant or subtle to be obvious. Though much of what we do is bound up in the apparent consequences of our choices—the day-to-day challenges in our immediate environment—the compassionate and awakened heart also takes responsibility for the influence she has on distant situations, being conscious of how her choices affect tea growers on the other side of the world, for example. It is our responsibility to rest in the truth that our choices impact the world, encouraging others to see their connection by consciously acting on ours. If you love tea, and we know you do, you *want* to recognize the impact your tea drinking has on the world, big and small, positive and negative. When you live in California and are enjoying some tea grown in a small village in China, it is no longer possible for you to deny the global connectivity that humanity has achieved. And if you really love that tea, you also cannot ignore the simple fact that *you care*; you really do!

The compassionate heart doesn't seek to fight or exclude people. Recognizing our connection to Nature and each other, we also realize the fundamental truth that we are all in this together. Every being on this planet has an equal stake in its fate. We cannot let our hearts get angry. We mustn't

judge people, no matter how horrible their behavior. We solve our issues with patience, heart and cooperation. At the same time, that doesn't mean we cannot or should not stand up against behavior that so obviously leads to the success of some few individuals at the expense of whole species, or even our own future generations. Sometimes you have to make a choice, but that doesn't mean you are unforgiving of the ones participating in that activity. As I used to tell the kindergarten students I taught, "It isn't you who are naughty. You are good. It is *what you are doing* that is naughty!" And we have to wake people up to that—to their connection to others and to the world—while at the same time standing up for what is right. William Faulkner said it quite poignantly:

Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash. Your picture in the paper nor money in the bank, neither. Just refuse to bear them.

Still, the "refusal" Faulkner mentions need not be charged with negativity. Too much resistance only causes people to dig in their heels. It disconnects us and moves us further apart. I'm sure you have had the experience of

arguing with someone when you absolutely know you are correct. The harder you push, the more it seems they retreat into their unreasonableness, and though you may "win" the argument, you feel worse than when you started, and more disconnected. That you had logic on your side is little consolation. It is only with compassionate understanding as well as mutual goals that we can effect real and lasting changes in the world.

With such a light of understanding, I would like to illuminate some of the challenges I see amongst tea vendors with regards to a global movement towards organic and sustainable tea production. Of course, there are the big companies, primarily producing tea bags, whose problems are more obvious to the tea lover. They are also more challenging to address. Few of us around here are purchasing much of that tea anyway. But I want to address the merchants who honestly do love tea and care about the loose-leaf teas they sell. If they don't recognize or care about the environmental impact their company has on Nature and the tea industry, we can only do our best to help them feel the truth in such connections. Meanwhile, we can also express our dissatisfaction kindly and use our buying power to make wiser choices that support those who are awakened to the importance of sustainable agricultural practices. Vote with your hard-earned money!

If you search around the Internet, you will find more than a few tea vendors who have overtly addressed the issue of organics. Others will if you ask them. The arguments that they give for why their teas *aren't* organic are usually one of these three (or some combination thereof): 1) Organic teas aren't good enough quality; 2) Many small farmers are organic, but cannot afford certification; or 3) The certification process itself has issues, including, but not limited to, corruption. I think it is important to address these ideas, and understand why we as tea lovers must refuse to stand for them.

The Arguments

Organic teas aren't high quality.

Though this seems to me the most foolish of the three arguments, it is the one you hear most often. The first problem with this idea is that all teas produced for thousands and thousands of years were organic, and if you have ever tried some of the old, vintage tea that is still around (like a very old puerh), you know that those teas are amazing. In fact, a part of why aged teas are so desirable is that they come from a world before agro-pollution of any kind. High quality teas were sent as tribute to the emperors for centuries, and the poetry that eulogizes such amazing brews is not suggestive of low-quality tea. Therefore, it is important to recognize that we do have the capability to grow better, more delicious crops organically, and that amazing teas were produced that way for centuries.

Still, even if the organic teas produced nowadays aren't as good as their counterparts, this argument creates an inescapable catch: if no one supports organic farmers, and organic processes do not succeed in the market, how will the quality ever improve? In order for the production skills, effort and care of organic tea to improve, more people will have to start supporting organic endeavors. As demand increases, farmers and tea producers will invest more in creating higher quality organic teas.

Also, this argument really only applies to teas that are available in mainstream tea markets. If you know where

to look, you can find amazingly delicious organic teas like the ones we find for you every month. Nevertheless, recognizing that quality is determined by flavor brings us to the final issue we have with the argument that organic teas aren't as good.

We must rethink what we want. Our value systems need to start including provenance. In other words, how a tea is produced should be as relevant to its quality as how it tastes. We no longer have the luxury of enjoying personal satisfaction at the expense of environmental destruction. Better to have a tea that tastes worse than one that destroys Nature, just like it's better to eat a blander dinner that's good for us than to eat unhealthy junk food that tastes "better." Some of the so-called "good" flavors in junk food don't even taste very nice once you realize where they come from. Looking at fresh, green rows of chemical-laden tea is akin to looking at a really buff guy on the cover of a magazine who only looks that way because he took lots of steroids that are bad for him—doing irreparable internal damage. Is the surface really the end of our value system? Is a good taste all we want from tea?

I have been trying for years to practice not saying that any tea is "crappy" or "low-quality," which is a promise I often break in casual conversation. After all, when we leave tea alone in a forest, it turns out just fine. Though human skill is important in tea quality, both in the processing and brewing of fine tea, Nature has done most of the work: creating these amazing trees over billions of years, and providing the water, sun, mist and minerals they need to be strong. There is a powerful teaching I often give:

The leaf is the tree's expression of its relationship to its environment.

The terroir creates the tea, in other words. A tea is a product of the environment in which it grows. The healthier the environment is, the better the tea will be. There is no low-quality tea, only low quality agricultural methods or low-quality skills in processing. And in 999 out of 1,000 cases, the true cause of a so-called "low-quality" tea isn't truly a poor environment or a lack of skills, but rather an improper orientation towards tea production.

In order to make fine tea, the farmer must be working in harmony with the weather, the mountain, the season and the varietal. And he must be doing so out of a love for tea. When he is motivated solely by money, he will never create fine tea. He will instead make volume his priority; held far above quality, quantity will rule his production. Without heart, there cannot be fine tea.

In the old days, stacks of puerh would come with what is called a "large trademark ticket (*da piao*, 大票)" attached to each *tong* (seven cakes wrapped in bamboo skin) or *jian* (12 *tongs*). We have an old one from the Tongxing Factory (同興號) framed on the wall at the Center, as it was one of the first that included English for export, and it also has a line in its advertising that we like a lot. It says of the tea leaves in the cakes: "Those made by human labor cannot compare with them." It is the height of pride to think that we can outdo Nature, especially since we ourselves have been created by Nature. The great Japanese farmer and philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka studied biology in college and had a professor who used to scold him, warning that "philosophy and religion have no place in the world of science." Some years later, in a field of conventionally-grown, monocultured barley, Fukuoka remembered this and exclaimed, "Science has no place in the world of barley!" Just because we understand a few of the myriad connections, subtleties and relationships of growing living plants, that doesn't mean we understand the environment, especially since our perspective is so myopic compared to the long lens of Nature. Fukuoka was criticizing monoculture, in which we strip an ecology down to single crops to produce larger quantities of nutrient deficient crops.

To me there is no substance to an argument that organic tea is of lower quality, as it is, in essence, an argument that the health of an environment and the trees growing in it are dependent upon human intervention in the form of chemical fertilizers, weed-killers and pesticides. This makes no sense, since the most abundant, thriving forests and plants are found in habitats that are left wild and free, where humans do not interfere. Also, plants lived and died in perfect health long before



humans walked the earth. The only arguments for monoculture and agro-chemicals that hold any weight are all about increasing yield, and therefore necessarily about quantity over quality.

Deforestation and weed-killers means insects have no choice but to eat tea, and bugs that otherwise would rather eat other plants, since tea is astringent and produces tannins and other chemicals to protect itself, are forced to eat tea. When a farmer sprays pesticides, you obviously deter insects, which then also drives away the insects that eat those insects, the animals and birds that eat them, not to mention the poo and dead bodies of all these organisms. When a farmer uses graftings/cuttings and irrigates to increase yield, the trees do not grow deep roots and do not live long, developed strength and character. They never absorb the deep mountain water or minerals from the soil, instead gathering nutrients from fertilizers that are made from ingredients sourced in other distant places and trucked in by people. What is the point in even comparing this to wild, vibrant forests of tea trees? And the rest is just a scale of compromise from gray to black.

Of course, not all tea in the world can be living tea, grown wild or in eco-gardens. There simply would not be enough tea for everyone. We have to compromise. We have to increase yield for everyone to have tea. But if we use unsustainable methods, this means everyone who wants tea *now* gets some, but future tea lovers will have none. That's not the "everyone" for whom I want to compromise. We can produce tea in larger quantities *and* do so in a way that is good for the earth.

Some vendors claim that their tea makers can sell their tea easily, as it is crafted well and in small quantities and that only low-quality tea needs certification, since the producers of such organic tea are using "organic," rather than quality to sell their tea. Sure, there is a market for inorganic tea, and yes, it can be well-processed by skilled farmers and roasters. But just because there is a market for something doesn't mean it is good or even quality. In fact, some of the most popular markets in the world are full of the lowest quality goods, like fast food, for example. This is kind of the point. The education of the average consumer is way too low, and the influence of their purchasing

decisions on the lives of other beings and the environment are too distant. It is easy for vendors to distract and use other spiels to deflect this issue when it is never about that for them. They are interested in the bottom line, just like the farmers that made their tea. And great tea cannot be made by those whose primary motivation is financial reward. Like all art, a love of the craft itself creates excellence. Of course, a farmer has to make a living, but if they put their heart into their craft and create tea out of a love for tea, tea lovers will always appreciate their tea and they will be supported.

Similarly, if a vendor is truly interested in supporting the environment, there is *always* a way! Our Center is full of great quality organic teas. We have faced difficulty in finding them sometimes, but with some commitment and a heart full of love for tea, you can find tons of like-minded farmers who are protecting the earth and do what they do for the love of tea.

There may be some farmers who do choose organic certification as marketing, maybe because it is a niche that allows them to make a living. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.

It doesn't mean that their tea is necessarily inferior, and if you include environmental impact in your value system, such tea may even be better. Since ancient times, tea quality has always been defined as the perfect cooperation of Heaven, Earth and Human. "Heaven" means the weather, the seasons and some of the great Mystery that creates all life—the Source. "Earth" means the terroir, the trees and their health. And the "Human" part is the skills to craft and finish the tea. Of course, such a scale requires that the tea be organic, or the Earth part of the tripod is missing and quality topples.

In the end, if "organic" is just a marketing gimmick for low-quality tea, we tea lovers have to ask ourselves why this is the case. Does the average tea bag or bottled tea drinker in the supermarket care more about the earth than a tea lover? If a so-called conventional farmer is making great tea that sells easily with inorganic methods, imag-

ine how much better that tea would be if it, too, was organic! Wouldn't it be even better? And if that farmer really cared about quality, wouldn't he do anything to improve quality, even if it did require more work?

Many tea farmers are organic, but cannot afford certification.

Organic certification can be expensive in some places, but it is becoming more and more affordable, and, once again, where there is a will, there is a way. As our technology and efficiency in testing improves, costs go down. Also, this argument never, ever applies to Taiwan. If a vendor argues this in regard to Taiwanese tea, raise your hand and halt them because that is an absolute fabrication. In Taiwan, if a farmer passes the certification process, the entire cost of certification is reimbursed

to them by the government. In fact, the government reimburses their renewal test and fees every year, making organic certification free for Taiwanese tea farmers (so long as they pass the tests).

Also, some groups have begun helping the farmers that cannot afford it to get other types of organic certification (beside the government's). Most often, these groups were formed by conscious tea merchants who care about the environment. They recognize that if the farms whose teas they sell have certification, it also benefits their business; therefore, they raise money to help the farmers achieve that. Master Tsai Yizhe (蔡奕哲), who has shared teas with Global Tea Hut in the past, is a shining example of that. He has raised money from events and drives to help certain farmers make certification more affordable. This is an excellent way for a merchant who cares about the environment to get involved.



Rather than complaining that many farmers don't have certification, a conscious vendor of their teas should work towards helping them achieve that—to the mutual benefit of the farmer and vendor alike. Furthermore, we find that most of the vendors who use this argument do not, anywhere on their websites, provide examples of farms which produce tea organically but are not certified. In other words, they say they don't sell organic tea because small farmers cannot afford certification, or the process is complicated internationally, but then don't offer a link or an explanation as to which of the teas they stock fall into this category. Does lack of certification make a tea inorganic? If you have teas that are clean, though the small farmer cannot afford certification, why not tell me so? I recognize that claiming a tea is "organic" is illegal without certification, but they could show pictures of the farm and farmer and discuss the

fact that his farm is small, and that he adds no agrochemicals, concluding with full disclosure that the tea is not certified organic. Several of our Tea of the Month teas fall into this category. What we find, on the other hand, is more of an attitude of "small farmers cannot afford organic certification; therefore, we don't carry organic teas."

The certification process itself has issues, including, but not limited to, corruption.

There can be truth to this argument, actually. Not only can certification be relatively expensive in certain countries, but there is no global certification process, making it impossible for a local farmer to get certified in all the countries his tea may wind up in. Also, the standards aren't universal amongst the different tests, so while a

farmer may be certified by the Mokichi Okada Association (MOA) in Taiwan, he won't necessarily meet the more rigorous tests of the European Union, especially if some of his neighbors aren't growing organic tea. Some small farmers in Taiwan, for example, are only interested in the local market. They don't grow enough for international business, and don't speak English anyway. It would consequently be a waste for such a farmer to apply for USDA organic certification, even if he was interested in certification. And different tests also test for different types of pesticides, as well, further confusing the certification process.

There is a lot of corruption in the world, but that is no reason to give up! Some certification processes, like MOA, are more reliable, and others less so. This is why it is important to choose vendors that you trust. We need more honesty and integrity in the tea market, as we do in the world.



🍵 *Celebrated philosopher and farmer Masanobu Fukuoka said that when he was studying biology in college, he had a professor who always used to tell the students that philosophy and religion have no place in the world of science. Years later, walking in a field of conventionally-grown barley, Fukuoka said he realized that science has no place in the world of barley! We think we can control some of the factors in an environment to our ends, but in Nature, no species is unwanted—everything plays a very essential role in the overall health of the ecology. There are no "pests" in Nature. Every species has its place. Meddling has severely disrupted our place in this global ecology. Species are going extinct, which is sad, but also a symptom of our disruptions. We need to move forward, advancing our agricultural science, but do so along a healthy path—a path of heart!*





雲女神

A vendor who encounters this problem may want to join one or many of the movements towards more rigorous certification standards, recognizing that there will always be corruption in such processes as long as humans are willing to sell their connection to Nature, not realizing that the loss “over there” which resulted in their personal profit “over here” still affects them, their world and future generations of their family.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter that there is corruption, as intention is what marks the merits of our actions. If you donate 500 dollars to an orphanage and the manager steals 200 of those dollars, that isn't your problem. You freely and open-heartedly gave to charity. That charity has a problem. The manager has a problem. The mistake is his, not yours. If you find out, you may not want to support that charity in the future, or make your experience public so as to influence a change in the management of that orphanage. Either way, this is no argument to stop giving to orphanages altogether. Similarly, corruption isn't an argument to give up trying to support sustainable tea production.

The whole concept of “organic” and the certification process that surrounds it has some flaws. At the same time, it's the best we have at the moment. We should support it, help it iron out its problems and use it to educate people towards better quality, environmentally friendly agro-products, including tea. It would be great, though, to transcend the need for “organic” or “certified,” in any way—to reach a time when all agro-products are produced without genetic modification or chemicals which harm humans or Nature!

There is a saying: one should not interrupt the one trying to do something with complaints that it cannot be done. Telling a farmer that his neighbors' spray will end up polluting his own crop; or complaining that some people use the organic certification process in corrupt ways, leading to a breakdown in the term “organic;” or any other excuse for not getting involved, not caring and not voting with your dollar are all nay-saying that gets in the way of the real tea-loving, Nature-loving farmers and tea vendors who are in the fields working hard to make sustainable, healthy tea for us

and for the Earth. Certainly, the certification process can be improved, and certainly some people will abuse it, but the intention that started it—which is to verify healthy products that are good for the Earth and for us must be fostered—while we also address the underlying problems in the human heart that would have us grow food for profit and sell unhealthy products to our brothers and sisters in the first place.

If a farmer produces only a small amount of tea and does not require certification, since the quality of the tea is high and it sells easily, more power to him or her. We do not feel that certification is the only road, or even necessary. The issue for us is not a legal one. We are talking about clean, sustainable tea, whether it is certified or not. It is grown with or without agrochemicals, and that is true whether it is certified after the fact or not.

That said, having certification processes helps maintain social order. Without it, we would have unlicensed doctors practicing medicine in hospitals without any training and causing havoc as a result. The argument that some people abuse the law and therefore the law should not be, is silly. Arguing that because certification has limitations, therefore, it doesn't matter is also absurd. It is helpful, as part of a growing change in the consciousness of humans. We move towards creating lifeways that are healthy for us and recognize that our own health and happiness is wrapped up in, contained within and dependent upon the health of our environment. After all, our bodies are made of water and food. We put our environment into ourselves. As the leaf is the expression of the tree's relationship to its environment, so are we. This realization undercuts greed—the mind that sees natural processes like food, tea or minerals as “resources” to be exploited. “Organic” is, indeed, a limited concept, and the certification of it is flawed, but it is a cooperative force that helps us make a greater shift away from environmental destruction towards environmental harmony and cooperation, creating the foodstuffs we need to support ourselves in a sustainable way that enriches the Earth, which is very possible. It has been proven that organic methods are capable of producing high yields.

We need stepping stones; we need building blocks; and we need flexible thinking to work together towards a brighter, greener future for ourselves and our descendants. Compromises may play a large role in our work towards a brighter future. Again, the way forward is through the heart—through inclusion! We must work together and learn to cooperate if we are to resolve these challenging issues.

At the Hut

Here at the Hut, we try to remain optimistic and promote positive change in the world. It doesn't really matter why a vendor says they don't carry organic teas, or don't do so exclusively, because if you are actively looking for a reason to give up hope, you'll find one (or many). Furthermore, the honest truth, which they think would cause the loss of our respect, is that they don't carry organic teas for financial reasons—either they don't sell as well, aren't as available or don't offer the same profit margins. I, personally, would respect a vendor more if they were open and forthright about the financial motivation behind their unsustainable teas, rather than sugar-coating the issue with pseudo-arguments.

Anyway, it isn't the vendors' responsibility. It is ours. We are the ones who can make a change in global tea production by taking a stand for organic tea. If the tea isn't certified, fine, but is it clean? Clean and lacking any agrochemicals isn't something that requires a piece of paper to prove. The tea is or is not produced in a way that is harmful to people and/or Nature. And as you drink more and more teas, you can begin to notice the effects such chemicals have on the tea, especially when they are used heavily.

If all of us start demanding this, the merchants will have to follow the demand, and you will see a rise in organic teas across the board, as well as more informative descriptions that state the tea's origin, farmer and philosophy. We believe that this is what the intelligent consumer wants. And it leads to a more awakened, connected and compassionate world—one in which tea consumption in California has a positive effect upon a farmer's life in China.

When you bring this up with tea vendors, they squirm. That is a good thing. There is no excuse for ignoring the environment. There is no real profit in making a living from environmental destruction, unsustainable agriculture or agrochemicals that endanger the lives of farmers and often the consumer as well. In the end, no matter what a vendor says, the truth is very basic and always very street: either they do not care about organics and the environment, or they do but were not able to find the teas they want or need to support their business and/or not at a cost that allowed them the profit margin they require (full stop).

Whenever I am invited to speak at a tea conference, I always leave the listeners with this question: “How do you love a leaf, without loving the forest? How do love a tree, without loving Nature?” No matter whether you love tea as a beverage, hobby or Dao, we all love this plant. And the tea traditions of the past, as well as all the tea lovers of the future, are both staring down at us and wondering why we made decisions that threatened the sustainability and quality of the leaf we all love.

The Quest for Organic Tea

The question that always follows is how to source organic tea. People want specifics, but we’d rather teach them how to tell if a tea is clean, which we do on p. 91 of this issue. We have a saying in our tradition, which is: “As the person seeks the Leaf, the Leaf seeks the person.” We think it is always better to let tea find you. Teas have their own destinies. When you stop seeking, fine teas will find you. Trust us. Also, when you stop questing for certain teas, you relax and problems related to clean versus unclean teas ease up. Let’s talk about what gets easier, and then what you can do to help Tea find you.

Around twenty years ago, I made a commitment to only support sustainable tea production. I haven’t looked back. And I have never been without tea. The Center is filled with hundreds of clean teas. But I have gone periods without *certain* types of tea. When I stopped seeking certain teas and let fine tea find me, I stopped craving par-

ticular types of tea (other than healthy, clean tea). Things get a lot easier when you stop seeking/craving certain teas that you may not be able to find clean versions of. Some genres of tea are harder than others. Mainstream, industrially-produced teas, like certain Chinese green teas or lightly-oxidized oolong in Taiwan, are mostly grown with agrochemicals, so these are genres that we drink less often. Occasionally clean examples find us, but we are never lacking in fine tea to drink.

We have noticed that two shifts in orientation can help fine tea to find you. The first is in your approach to tea. We do not believe that tea must always be self-cultivation. Tea is not a spiritual elixir *or* a beverage; it is both. If you only drink tea ceremonially, you miss out on half of what tea is: time with friends, healthy gatherings, comradery and loving-kindness through tea. And if that is all there is to tea, you also miss out on the other half of tea: the ceremonial, meditative side. There is nothing wrong with putting tea in a mug and watching TV. However, if you do that, the kind of tea that will find its way into your life is the kind that belongs in a mug when someone watches TV (which is to say low-quality tea). If you want fine tea to find its way into your life, you will have to honor tea, making space in your day and in your home to fully appreciate Her. When you respect tea as a medicine, a plant teacher, finer teas will find their way into your life, we promise. Often, they come from the most unexpected sources—maybe even right around the corner from your home!

The second shift you can make to have more fine tea find its way into your life is to stop orienting towards ownership or hoarding. Tea is a leaf from a forest; it has no value. It is priceless. She does not belong to you. You cannot hoard Her. Tea is to be shared. Cultivate a real love for sharing tea, as opposed to collecting tea. If you pay attention to your tea practice, you will find that sharing tea is far more enjoyable than owning it, or even drinking it alone (which can also be wonderful). Sharing tea is where the greatest joy in a tea practice is to be found. When you break the dam of hoarding property, and cultivate an experiential love for sharing, fine tea will find its way into your life. Instead of buying on impulse,

trying to scratch that itch of lack and fill it with more consumerism, I found that I started valuing tea and teaware for the sharing. I would ask how this tea or teaware helped me to serve better, as this was what really brought me joy. And even if you do drink more tea alone, which is also wonderful, you can think of this in terms of what the Tea wants: which pot will take the tea to its fullest potential, in other words. As you walk the path of Cha Dao, service grows in your heart.

Respecting tea as a living being, a plant teacher, and creating a dialogue with Her will alter your practice, your relationship to tea and, of course, the quality of tea you source. You will find a mystical relationship between your relationship to Tea in general and the quality of tea you find. This is something many Chajin have verified to us. Try it yourself and see what happens. You may be blown away!



茶 In our tradition we follow the saying that as the person seeks the Leaf, the Leaf seeks the person. Let Tea find you and relax into the process. You may not always have a certain kind of tea that way, but you will always drink healthy, clean and pure tea that is good for the environment, the farmers and good for you as well.



TO TASTE THE SWEET,
WE MUST FIRST
WELCOME THE BITTER

THOUGHTS ON ORGANIC TEA

未見甘心氏先迎苦口師



Many of you who have been to our Center know about the great influence Master Tsai Yizhe (蔡奕哲) has had on all that we do. He is a teacher, a brother and a great tea sage. He shares tea and wisdom with a spirit of hospitality that most tea lovers have encountered, freely given the way tea trees open their crown and offer leaves to passersby. His work to protect the environment of Taiwan has earned him awards. We recommend reading his story in the January 2016 issue to provide some context for this amazing man and this article.



茶人: Tsai Yizhe (蔡奕哲)

Not counting the early days when I first learned to drink tea, I have studied gongfu tea and tea tasting for more than thirty years. The first time I heard of organic farming was in 1988, and in 1996 I threw myself into the vocation of promoting organic tea in Taiwan. I have now been doing that, too, for over twenty years.

When we first started promoting organic tea, the farmers toiled hard to produce it, but consumers still didn't understand the reasons for drinking organic tea. On top of that, Taiwan's tea merchants, who had a vested interest, either watched from the sidelines or actively hindered our efforts. Just like tobacconists selling cigarettes, they insisted that pesticides and chemical fertilizers didn't have any negative health effects, justifying their beliefs on the grounds that we weren't able to produce any valid data to prove otherwise. They stopped at nothing to block our attempts to promote organic tea. The two phrases that we heard most often were: "Our master says organic tea doesn't taste good," and "Taiwan doesn't have any real organic tea."

Later, consumers came to gradually accept organic farming and became willing to assume the higher cost of organic produce—including tea—for the sake of their health. At first, we took this outward result as a sign that our promotion of organic tea had suc-

ceeded, but soon the tea merchants began to exploit this achievement for their own gain. Of course, if the merchants were to sincerely get involved in the business of organics, that would be a great thing; however, all we saw were a lot of marketing slogans and deceptive advertising, with the result that consumers no longer trusted that true organic tea really existed.

How could we identify a genuine Taiwanese organic tea? Sometimes, although the tea companies would emphasize the importance of not using chemical fertilizers or pesticides, in reality they still allowed the use of some trace elements and other pest and disease control substances that came from naturally occurring minerals or other sources that they deemed reasonable. In other words, they lowered their standards for financial gain. They marketed the products of these methods under various names, such as "alternative farming," "sustainable farming," or simply the even vaguer "non-toxic farming." They believed that as long as they weren't destroying the soil or the surrounding ecosystem, it was still acceptable to use certain chemical fertilizers and low-toxicity pesticides. This fallacy pervades most agriculture throughout the world, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake that may take centuries to clean up. According to the Taiwan Organic Crop Cultivation Standard (台灣農作物有機栽

培實施準則), which was drawn up by the government of Taiwan in 1997, the definition of "organic farming" is as follows:

Organic farming is a production method that uses no chemical fertilizers or chemical pesticides, or that uses them as little as possible. To increase the viability of cultivating organic crops, this production method relies on the use of many types of crop stubble, poultry and livestock waste, green manure plants, oil meal and other uncontaminated waste products from farmland or elsewhere, as well as compost made with nutrient-rich minerals, to improve the land and provide nutrients to the crops. For prevention and control of disease, insects, animals and weeds, it is strongly encouraged to use plant cultivation techniques, natural materials and physical or biological control methods. These measures are important in preventing harm to the soil, water sources and surrounding ecosystem, as well as maintaining sustainable production and providing safe, healthy and high-quality food products. In other words, operating an organic farm requires the maintenance of good environmental conditions, and the air, soil and water sources must be free of pollution.

According to the organic farming standard, "pure organic farming" allows absolutely no use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides,



whereas “standard organic farming” allows some use of chemical pesticides in the early stages of cultivation. However, no matter whether it is grown using the “pure” or “standard” organic farming methods, the final product must contain no detectable traces of agricultural chemicals when tested.

In addition, many tea farmers in Taiwan still adhere to the principles of “natural farming,” also known in Chinese as the “*xiuming* farming method (秀明農法),” advocated by Mr. Mokichi Okada (1882–1955) of the Mokichi Okada Association (MOA). This approach favors the strictest of organic farming methods; as well as disallowing the use of any chemical substances or pesticides, it also forbids the use of human waste or any other potentially contaminated organic substance, as well as poultry or livestock manure

that has not undergone composting. Of course, genetically modified crop varieties are even more strictly prohibited, as are those produced using cell fusion technology. Of all the farming methods, this is the one I respect and admire the most.

According to Taiwan’s Enforcement Rules of the Act Governing Food Safety and Sanitation, the inspection authorities will designate an “allowable chemical residue level standard” using the positive listing method. This means that any chemicals for which a standard is not listed must not be detected at all. But because of the chemical detection methods used, the minimum detection limit of the equipment will be set at the officially allowable standard. Since it looks like some of the standards for agricultural chemical detection may be relaxed, there has recently been a lot of

heated discussion of chemical residue testing standards among tea circles in Taiwan. Tea merchants, however, have seized the opportunity to oppose strict standards, obscuring the facts with spurious theories and dealing a serious blow to the morale of those who devote themselves to organic, toxin-free farming. I find this situation very sad.

From a consumer point of view, there are a lot of questions: What are water-soluble chemicals in pesticides? And what about lipid-soluble (fat-soluble) chemicals? How strong of an effect do they have on the human body? Are lipid-soluble chemicals truly not at all water-soluble? What is the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI)? And what are Maximum Residue Limits (MRL)? What does toxicity mean in the context of the human body? And in the



茶 Master Tsai's sponsorship model is transforming the tea world. Farmers are paid to steward land regardless of the amount they produce. A collective pays them, no matter the yield. Participants get great, clean tea, with a cool story, and farmers are respected and well-paid—this is a win-win situation! The tea lovers are also required to visit the farm regularly and lend a helping hand, which helps validate the farmers' efforts and provide encouragement to continue their tireless efforts.

context of the environment? How can we understand the difference between the residue level of a certain pesticide in a plant (tea), and the total residue level in the body of an animal that consumes the contaminated plant? (The total residue level includes the pesticide residue itself plus any metabolites produced during metabolism of the pesticide.) The current non-expert online debates do not provide an avenue for rational discussion, and are really of no use at all.

Then, there are proponents of chemical-free tea who claim to be able to tell whether a tea was grown with chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides just by drinking it. Some people believe them, while others are skeptical and put it down to manufacturers making grand claims to swindle consumers, so it has created some

controversy. So what is the truth of the situation? Can we modern humans have become so saturated in a miasma of smog, melamine, chemical fertilizers and pesticides that we have lost our sensitivity, become numb, been soaking it up for so long that we no longer notice it? When we first started promoting organic farming, we had to overcome obstacles from all sides, and now we are faced with debates over the authenticity of organic produce. If consumers don't trust the authenticity of organic products, and organic farmers have to deal with doubt and mistrust on top of all their hard labor, they may well lose their will to carry on. So, we need to think of another way forward, one that can ease the suspicion between the two parties. As a result of this situation, I decided to change my approach and follow tea

back to its origins, starting by preserving the tea mountains. In May of 2010, I established the first natural farming tea mountain conservation station at the Fujian Wuyi Mountain National Nature Reserve. I created the "sponsorship and partnership" model of tea mountain conservation and began to promote it in collaboration with the tea farmers, and in 2012 I established the Tea Mountain Preservation Association (茶山保育協會) in Taiwan.

This "sponsorship" model means commissioning the output of a tea plantation at a high price that exceeds the predicted regional tea leaf prices for that year, allowing the tea farmers to employ natural farming methods to plant the tea and look after the plantation. This period of sponsorship lasts for at least five years, which is the time it takes to start seeing results.

During this time, no matter how small the plantation output, the tea farmers will receive an income that is equal to, or even slightly higher than, the income they would have made using traditional farming methods. We have to remember that tea farmers rely on tea to make a living, so if we want them to use natural farming methods to manage their plantations, we must guarantee that it will be of benefit to them, and also make sure that they accept the reasoning behind it. Tea plants generally reach at least waist height, so when the tea growers are spraying them with herbicides or pesticides, the chemicals come into contact with their bodies. This means that the farmers on the front lines are at high risk for cancer. Therefore, we tactfully let the farmers know that adopting organic farming methods is beneficial for them and their descendants, as well as for the soil, water, environment and ecosystem.

That said, there are also many practical difficulties in promoting natural farming to preserve the tea mountains. First of all, if only one family of tea growers agreed to the system, we wouldn't get anywhere, because each tea plantation adjoins other people's plantations. So even if that one family stopped using pesticides, contamination from the neighbors would still make its way over on the wind and in the water. Also, the more famous the tea grown in a certain area, the harder it is to implement natural farming methods. The significant drop in production capacity during the transition years is off-putting, and the tea growers' parents and elders are often opposed to it; sometimes even their wives and children are against it, too. In some regions, the government is also working hard to implement change, providing free natural fertilizer to encourage tea growers to transition to organic methods, although these cases are still a minority.

If the model only consisted of the sponsorship component and the tea growers were left to deal with all the ensuing challenges of the transition process on their own, then the arrangement wouldn't be any different from a regular business contract. If the growers are constantly worrying that the sponsor will wash their hands of any further responsibilities, then they nat-

urally won't have much confidence to persevere in the whole enterprise. As a result, an even more important component of this tea mountain conservation model is the spirit of "partnership." With this model, we break the mold of the aloof, uninvolved consumer; the tea mountain sponsor must roll up their sleeves and genuinely accompany the tea farmers in their work, must kneel with them in the soil of the plantations as they tend the tea plants together. Our tea mountain preservation sponsors come from many different industries and professions, and there is no shortage of tea specialists among them. When we personally participate in work—such as weeding and clearing the tea plantations—the shared labor allows us to gradually deepen our bonds with the tea growers and build a relationship of mutual trust.

The first year of natural farming is the hardest; many of the tea plants wither and die because they are unable to adapt, and some that remain are more dead than alive. At the beginning, the lack of pesticide results in plagues of insects who eat more tea leaves than they leave behind. In the worst cases, entire tea plantations are annihilated. But this is a process of metamorphosis that each plantation must go through—slowly, the natural predators of the insects will also grow in numbers, and those predators' predators will start to appear, too: earthworms, butterflies, dragonflies, bees, ladybugs, mantises, spiders, rodents, birds, frogs, snakes and even eagles. Thus, the food chain will gradually recover its health, and the tea will regain its vitality.

Laozi (Lao Tzu, 老子) has a saying that goes: "People follow the law of the Earth, the Earth follows the law of the Heavens, the Heavens follow the law of the Dao, and the Dao follows the law of its own Nature!" We appealed to a group of people who didn't want to be deceived by a whole lot of advertising slogans, but simply wanted to drink real, clean tea. They became our tea mountain conservation partners, who work alongside the tea growers to implement the correct methods for ecological tea cultivation. As well as considering the natural ecosystem, they also work to improve the tea plants' ability to grow and survive in natural conditions. Only with this

approach can they achieve a triple win in the areas of production, consumption and environmental protection. We look forward to a day when humans no longer destroy the beautiful mountain tea forests with chemical fertilizers and pesticides, all in the name of increasing output. Good mountains, good water, and human hearts free of greed: these are what we need to supply our wonderful tea sessions with a cup of good, clean, truly moving tea!



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茶 When you walk in a garden of living tea, the difference is so obvious. You can smell, hear and see the vibrancy. And, of course, you can taste it in the tea. When we tea lovers start to demand living tea, and take the issue of environmentally sustainable tea seriously, things will shift, since in this world supply follows demand.



PEOPLE AMONG PLANTS

REFLECTIONS ON TAIWAN'S ORGANIC TEA

人在草木間



We translated this beautiful article from Pan Meiling's new book "Taiwan Tea (茶知錄)." It is a beautiful article on the positive changes happening in Taiwan, as well as the issues that we still need to focus on improving. Her writing is gorgeous, and the book itself is stunning. We hope to translate more of it in future issues, as there are other sections on other topics that are equally rewarding and inspirational. The more we educate ourselves, the more positivity we can encourage through our choices. In this time, making good choices is instrumental.



茶人: Pan Meiling (潘美玲)

A top a blue bucket, two emerald green tree frogs sit in piggy-back stance, playing their roles in Act One of the great theater of life: fertilizing eggs. The female frog hangs on to the edge of the bucket with her forelegs, while the smaller male clings to her back; beneath them they release a continuous stream of white foam, the eggs hidden within. Inside each egg, the beginning of a small tadpole is just about to form. Thus, the great circle of life quietly plays out in a Pinglin tea garden.

Suddenly, the cicadas, not wanting to be left out, erupt in an almighty clamor. As if amplified through a Dolby sound system, they noisily proclaim to humankind: "Summer is here! Summer is here!" The chirping calls of the bamboo partridge echo back in response. The presence of emerald green tree frogs is an important indicator of the health of protected water sources. For the organic tea authentication personnel who vote with their footprints, the existence of these noisy living creatures is, in some sense, an assurance that the purity and biodiversity of this natural resource remains preserved, bringing peace of mind to the humans who tend it.

The "Cluster Effect" in Organic Farming

It's the spring tea season, and we are paying a visit to Mount Lala in Taoyuan. We meet with technician Wang Junmin (王俊民), a newcomer to tea cultivation. His great love of tea led Wang Junmin to roll up his sleeves and rent a plot of land to grow some tea of his own. Rainfall has been scarce this year; many tea growers call this type of weather "endless bitter days." Wang Junmin's harvests have all reduced in volume by one-third due to the weather, but the tea plants on his two hectares of organic plantation still appear surprisingly lustrous and healthy.

"The only thing that's not great is that this year there have been water shortages all over, and the weather keeps fluctuating between cold and hot. It's made the tea buds grow irregularly, so we've had to harvest several times to pick them all." Wang Junmin chats with me beneath a tall tree, looking every bit the carefree farmer in his conical bamboo hat and gloves. An-

other side of him, though, is anxious about how to handle the harvesting.

The tea plantation is situated on the upper reaches of the Shimen reservoir. Looking down from the plantation, the winding Kala Creek (a tributary of the Dahan Creek) looks as if it were just in front of our eyes. If Junmin were to use fertilizer on the tea trees here along the upper reaches of the reservoir, the fertilizer would be washed down the slopes, causing eutrophication (excessive plant and algae growth due to an overabundance of nutrients) in the water of the reservoir and contaminating the water supply for the people of Taoyuan.

"This slope over here is quite steep," he says, gesturing off to the right, "so the water retention isn't good—but look how well the tea plants are growing. If we'd started frantically spreading on fertilizer at the beginning for fear that the moisture and nutrients wouldn't stay put, then the roots

would never have reached down into the soil to find their own nutrients and wouldn't be as deep as they are now. Stick it out for a while, and things will change."

"We put on a real banquet for the stink bugs with last year's winter tea!" Only fifteen kilograms of tea was salvaged from the two main plantations, and all the rest was completely eaten up by the bugs. "To grow organics, you need to be able to endure a lot!" declares Wang Junmin, releasing his tension with an ironic laugh. To endure declining crop output; to endure the bugs and resist exterminating them: organic farming operates according to a completely different philosophy than conventional agriculture. Organic farming doesn't just focus on benefiting humans, but also on benefiting the land, allowing all living things the chance to go on living. This creates balance and a healthy ecology, not just for us, but for the Earth as well.



☞ *Tea farming is a lot like child-rearing, and many tea farmers throughout Asia speak of their tea trees as blood, especially those who are following natural farming methods. To the right is the “Thousand-Island Lake” area of Pinglin (坪林) in northern Taiwan. It is located near the Bei Shi River (北勢溪). As with the reservoir in Taoyuan, discussed in this article, if this tea farm used any agrochemicals, it would destroy the water for surrounding towns. Photography by Yan Songbai (颜松柏).*

On Mount Lala’s forty hectares of tea plantations, Wang Junmin is the only tea grower to be certified by the Tse-Xin Organic Certification Corporation. Under his influence, one or two of the neighboring tea farmers have also slowly converted from their former conventional farming methods. Wang Junmin realized that “organic farming can’t be done alone—you need a group of people to work together.” An organic farmer’s biggest concern is contamination from the neighboring plantations; only if everyone pools their strength and works together can organic farming be successful.

Taiwan has a small land area and a dense population, with the area of tea plantations across the whole island only totaling 14,000 hectares. The small-scale farmers each have their specialties, producing a diverse array of crops. In the last few years, as well as feeling the effects of global climate change, Taiwan has been heavily affected by monsoons, resulting in extremes of wet and dry weather (wind, fog, rain and ice). The micropollutants resulting from this environment are impossible

to avoid, so few people dare to officially declare their products organic. As a result, the “organic” label has come to represent something of a rare treasure with a glowing halo around it. Lu Meiyong (吕美莹), the director of the Jingyuan Tea Factory, believes that rather than encouraging the establishment of new organic tea farms, it’s more productive to encourage existing tea farmers to convert from conventional to organic farming methods. With everyone working together, it’s much quicker to restore the land to an organic state.

Soil = Life

Zhang Haoyan (张颢严), who graduated from the pedology (soil studies) major program at the National University of Taiwan’s Department of Agricultural Chemistry, recounts how the very first lesson of the program left the deepest impression on him. Facing all the new students sitting in the lecture hall, the teacher posed a big question: “What is soil?”

The answer was very eye-opening: “Soil is a living entity.” It really isn’t the lifeless, inorganic substance that many of us imagine it to be.

Curious, I looked up “pedology” in the dictionary, and discovered that it has two definitions: one is the study of soil, and the other is the study of children. Could there be a connection between the study of soil and the study of raising children?

In my experience of interviewing tea growers in the last few years, I’ve noticed that when talking about their tea plants, nearly all of them personify the plants and adopt a sort of concerned, affectionate tone, almost as if they were talking about raising their own flesh and blood. It’s funny how a conversation about organic planting and natural farming methods can sometimes start to feel like a discussion about child-rearing.

Zhang Haoyan uses his own tea plantation as an example of how the soil has changed: in the days when his father began planting tea, the soil was still made up of 19% organic matter, whereas the figure is now only about



4%. In some areas the topsoil layer is only about 30–40 centimeters deep. When the tea trees start to deteriorate, all you can do is wait—even though, in today’s world, waiting represents a very significant cost.

In pedology, the proportion of organic matter in soil can be thought of as an energy source, comparable to fat in the human body—having either too much or too little is not good for the health of the person (or soil). Applying too much fertilizer hinders the soil’s ability to breathe and digest. To continue the comparison, tea plantations on flat land are often “underweight,” while mountain tea plantations usually suffer from “soil obesity.” Soil fertility has always been a major worry to farmers, who tend to irrigate and fertilize for all they’re worth for fear that the soil won’t be fertile enough otherwise. Using fertilizer to squeeze out more output may be quite effective in the short term, but if you take this approach, there will be bigger problems waiting for you down the line.

Soil can also be thought of as a source of fossil fuel energy. These rich

and varied elements come from hundreds of thousands of years of accumulation and erosion, yet in the brief 200 years since the Industrial Revolution, humans have managed to almost completely exhaust the planet’s supply of fossil fuels. Zhang Haoyan uses the following allegory: The Earth was once like a wealthy person with billions of dollars in assets. At that time, getting a loan of one million dollars (in other words, getting results with just a little bit of fertilizer) was very easy. But now, after all that money has been squandered (the soil fertility has been depleted), it’s impossible to get enough mineral nutrients from the soil, no matter how much fertilizer you use. It wasn’t until humans started hungering after high-profit mass-production that we needed the assistance of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Who could have guessed that we would end up at the mercy of these “assistants,” making matters worse than before?

After graduating, Zhang Haoyan worked as an environmental engineering consultant. His main focus was rehabilitating contaminated land; in oth-

er words, he specialized in cleaning up the aftermath of over-exploitation. In terms of agriculture, he is an advocate for “going with the flow.” He has come up with a simple principle regarding balance when dealing with insect and disease damage on tea plantations: “If you use too much or too little fertilizer, the nutrients (trace elements) will be out of balance, and the tea trees will suffer from disease. If the ecosystem is out of balance, the trees will suffer insect damage.”

In early August, just after the end of the Dashu (大暑) or the “Great Heat” solar term, the hillside surrounding Nantou’s Zhenshan Village is alive with greenery. As I step foot onto the grassy path of the tea plantation, a great crowd of the local “tenants” flee the scene in fright: grasshoppers and other unidentified jumping insects, giving me a “green carpet” welcome. When I first set eyes on the tea plantation, I get quite a surprise to see that the weeds are just as lush as the tea trees, and the two are growing mingled together. If it weren’t for my years of experience visiting mountain tea plantations,



I probably would have simply concluded that the plantation belonged to quite a lazy tea farmer! Far from it: it turns out that the Qingxin Oolong variety, originally adapted to high-altitude regions, actually grows extraordinarily well here on this low-altitude hill of just 400 meters.

“To help it withstand extreme weather, I let the tea take shelter in the weeds to escape the heat.” Zhang Haoyan confidently explains how in the current sweltering heat, underground soil temperatures can reach 40°C. He enthusiastically expounds on the three functions of wild grasses and weeds: improving drainage, increasing moisture retention and lowering temperature. He also tells me that the weeds provide a food source for the insects: “With tender weeds to eat, the bugs won’t eat the tea.” These unremarkable weeds growing in front of us—“two-ear grass,” “bamboo joint grass,” and white-flowered *Ageratum conyzoides*—are, in fact, excellent assistants in managing the plantation.

In the past, farmers saw weeds as a thorn in their sides and got rid of them as quickly as possible. Now, however, some organic farmers have not only stopped pulling them out, but have even started planting them intentionally. “*Lei gong* (雷公) root and runner peanuts are both good for fixing nitrogen, which helps the tea leaves grow, and globeflower is a type of repellent plant, which keeps away the bugs... Different weeds have different benefits. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are each effective for aiding growth in the leaves or roots of the tea plants.” From the chemical to the biological, the mutual benefits of growing weeds and tea plants together are very clear.

Weeds: A “Household Revolution”

Chen Junda (陈俊达), the erstwhile assistant director of a Taipei-based refrigeration and air conditioning factory, decided to return to his home village seven years ago to be a good filial son to his aging parents. He never suspected that he would clash with his father so many times over their conflicting farming philosophies that he would start to feel like a rather unfilial son instead.

Visiting the tea plantation that he took over, it’s true that the weeds are very lush and the tea seedlings sparse. The seedlings were planted over a year ago, yet their stems are long and thin and surrounded on all sides by weeds and vines, like “communist grass” and velvet (or “tiger-claw”) beans. He is determined not to trim them, and with good reason.

He is hoping to wait a year, until the root systems of the seedlings have grown more robust and extended down into the soil. The conventional wisdom regarding tea planting is that the root system will grow downward to the same length as the height of the tree above ground. So, if you prune the tea seedlings too soon after planting them, the root system will grow horizontally outward instead. Although this encourages rapid leaf growth after fertilizing, it also means missing the opportunity for the root system to grow deeper.

“*The conventional wisdom regarding tea planting is that the root system will grow downward to the same length as the height of the tree above ground. So, if you prune the tea seedlings too soon after planting them, the root system will grow horizontally outward instead.*”

The older generation of tea farmers like to compare their plantations to each other’s, so they disapprove of letting weeds grow. In their opinion, only a neatly pruned and weeded plantation is the badge of a good, hardworking farmer. Chen Junda’s natural farming methods, in which he uses no fertilizer or pesticides and does little weeding, result in a lower production output, and he has been subject to a lot of concerned finger-pointing from family and friends. They even came close to barring him from signing up for the rural social pension plan because of the “terrible” appearance of his tea plantation. After the inspectors from the farmer’s cooperative first saw his plantation, they declared that “this person is not a real farmer,” and decided they weren’t going to let him pay into the plan. They just couldn’t understand what he was up to.

Another young farmer who has recently returned to the village is Chen Shifeng (陈世峰), who also decided to grow tea in his first year back. After three years, everyone was stunned at the quality of his tea. The older farmers from the neighboring plantations were especially curious about one thing: Chen Shifeng didn’t use pesticides on his plantations, so how come he wasn’t overrun with insects? His response: “All I did was do nothing!” But the neighbors just thought he was bluffing in an effort to hide his trade secrets from them. He explained that if you let the tea plantation find its own ecological balance, Mother Earth’s own Divine power will take care of things.

The young farmers who have returned home to practice natural farming do not focus on output, but rather the health of the land. “As long as there is a harvest, we’re happy. We’ll harvest as much or as little as the Heavens offer us.” The two young farmers, Junda and Shifeng, pool their knowledge and even exchange free labor during the busy farming season. Another neighboring natural-method farmer often comes to the two with questions, and they share as much as they can with him too. So, it’s almost as if both farming methods and interpersonal relationships in the region have experienced a return to bygone times, regaining their former simplicity.

Day-to-day work on the plantations mostly involves pulling off the vines that entangle themselves around the tea trees. Only when harvest time arrives are the plantations weeded, and sometimes the weeds are purposely not cleared too thoroughly. “There’s a certain amount of science behind the weed-cultivation method; we don’t just let them spread wildly all over the place. For example, we don’t let one type of weed take over, or let the weeds grow taller than the tea plants. We’re constantly observing the plantations, managing them and making adjustments.” People generally just focus on the appearance of the plantations, and all they see is a lazy person’s methods—but what they don’t see is that “lazy” person’s true intentions.

Chen Junda is certainly very earnest, and has suffered from these perceptions. His intentions and heart are pure, and his outlook and methods are actually quite admirable.

His well-meaning but stubborn father, afraid of the neighbors' gossip and unable to change his son's mind, snuck into the plantation while Junda was away selling goods at the Saturday market in Taipei, and secretly "helped" clear away the weeds.

Although his friends and family don't understand, the way Junda sees it, if he didn't stick to the natural farming methods that he so firmly believes in, then returning to his hometown to grow tea would be a meaningless enterprise.

Organic Farming: A Beautiful Dream?

Visiting each family's plantation and hearing the farmers talk about "raising" their tea was a very interesting experience. Planting tea really is like raising children: each family's child-rearing methods have their own merits.

Since the advent of organic farming, many terms can be heard in circulation: natural farming, the *Xium-*

ing (秀明) natural farming method, non-toxic, permaculture, ecological and even the "wild" tea growing method. The word "organic" is particularly disputed, with many conflicting opinions about its definition and differences between what people say it means and how it is implemented in practice: there's "organic farming" that insists on zero contamination, "organic farming" that uses organic materials and even "organic farming" that uses traditional farming methods. This debate about the definition of "organic" isn't limited to tea farmers—consumer sentiment toward organic produce also tends to be quite polarized. Some people refuse to drink anything but "clean" organic tea, while others think that high-priced organic teas are just a rip-off, and still others dislike the "holier than thou" image of organic tea.

It has been more than twenty years since organic farming was introduced in Taiwan, yet organic farms still only make up less than 1% of farmland. So, where does the problem lie? Has the development of organic farming been prevented by the environment itself, or restricted by legislature?

According to research associate Chen Jieting (陈玠廷) from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences' Agricultural Policy Research Center, the land area used for organic farming reached a plateau in 2012, and it currently still only constitutes 0.7% of total farmland, or about 6784 hectares. In September 2017, the government invested a budget of 1.2 billion NTD (six times the previous organic farming budget) into reducing the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on the island of Taiwan by half over the next ten years, and expanding the area of environmentally-friendly farmland.

Chen Jieting emphasizes that "environmentally-friendly farming" should not be considered inferior to organic farming; it is simply a different farming model and subject to more relaxed inspection standards. The important thing is trying to shift the mindset of consumers from simply valuing "edibility" (focusing solely on food safety), to broadening their focus to include the ecological and social impact of what they consume. This is a broader concept of what organic farming is about.



In fact, a group of organic farmers who want to benefit nature with their methods has existed in Taiwan for a long time, but it was practically impossible for them to fully comply with government policy and receive official authentication. As one tea grower put it, “Taiwan’s legislature surrounding organics has been ‘written to death,’ which is why most people tend to just go with natural farming methods.”

“The national organic farming standards are all conceived around the consumption phase; they haven’t given serious consideration to the production phase,” says Wang Junmin. He can understand the government’s standpoint on protecting consumer rights, but all the emphasis is on prevention and restriction, with none on encouraging the producers to adopt organic methods. Over the long term, this approach isn’t likely to benefit anyone.

Organic farmers have also pointed out that overseas, organic certification inspections have about a 5% pass rate, whereas in Taiwan the regulations remain rigid and monolithic. If organic tea growers in Taiwan display the slightest non-conformance in one

small area of the inspection, then the whole inspection is voided, and their produce is all returned; there’s no room for flexibility. In terms of climate and environment, everyone realizes that weather extremes resulting from global climate change have presented challenges for farmers, but society’s demand for zero pesticide detection still leaves no margin for error.

In 2007, when the organic farming legislation was being drawn up, the standards were required to be as exacting as possible. Although this is an admirable approach, they failed to consider the realities of agricultural production, and the implementation of these organic farming standards was liable to become a beautiful but unattainable dream.

Good bugs? Bad bugs?

We often hear the phrase “people eat whatever the bugs have left behind.” Is this just empty talk? How does one achieve organic farming without killing any living creatures, without eliminating any insects?

Ideally, organic farming should involve low-density planting, rather than chasing the highest profit. The most important cost consideration is the cost to the land, and the focus is on environmental sustainability rather than financial gain.

The Xiongkong organic tea plantations at Sanhsia town lie at an altitude of 700 meters, and are open for tourists to visit. Wandering through the plantations is a delightful experience; even with the hot sunlight shining on your face, the wide valleys still provide a cool, gentle breeze and a panoramic view. Of the 168-hectare estate, only six hectares are planted with tree seedlings; the rest of the area provides space for other plants and animals to live in harmony.

“With traditional farming, it’s a very competitive red ocean situation, whereas with organic farming it’s a much more harmonious blue ocean,” says Deng Zhimin (邓志民), the manager of the tea center at Taiwan’s Council of Agriculture. Ten years ago, the Council of Agriculture began implementing organic growing methods on some of their tea plantations.



茶 Above, you can see the ground beneath some organic trees. Healthy tea trees seed more often, and the farmer has allowed the seeds to fall on the ground, decomposing into excellent fertilizer and demonstrating the cycle of life. To the far left is the Ciji (慈濟) tea plantation of Sanyi, in Miaoli County. They are a beacon of healthy farming and an example to others. They always come to trade shows to promote natural farming in Taiwan and abroad. To the left is a wonderful photograph of our old friend the leafhopper (*Jacobiasca formosana*), helping our Tea of the Month, an Eastern Beauty, as well as the “Concubine Oolong (*gui fei*, 貴妃)” of Nantou. Photography by Yan Songbai (顏松柏).



For the first few years, they suffered serious insect damage; because they couldn't use herbicides or pesticides, they sent workers to go and catch the insects by hand—arduous work which incited a lot of grumbling! These days, the rich ecosystem, with its many plants and animals, has become the most eye-catching feature of the plantation. Aside from providing city-dwellers with a place to relax and de-stress, it's also a great place for family holidays and ecological education initiatives.

The green leaves of the tea plants are veiled in a layer of finely woven spider's web; from a distance it looks a bit like fluffy cotton padding. Department head Guo Zhangxian (郭政宪), who is leading us on our tour, tells us that in the beginning they saw these webs as an eyesore and wanted to clear them off right away. Later, they realized that the webs belonged to hunting spiders, which are a natural predator of tea mosquito bugs (*Helopeltis fasciaticollis Poppius*), a major pest in the tea plantations. So, in our constant struggle to eliminate pests, we humans secretly owe a debt of gratitude to the spiders.

When wasp nests were removed from the plantations for fear of stings,

it resulted in a plague of tussock moths, instead. In the natural world, each link in the food chain is inseparably connected to the next; the moment this delicate ecological balance is upset, it can trigger a butterfly effect of unimaginable proportions. Looking back on our history with insects, we've gone from screaming at the sight of them and going to great lengths to destroy them, to trying to understand the reason for their existence. With the concept of organic farming, humans have slowly learned to coexist in harmony with Nature. Research associate Zeng Xinguang (曾信光) from the Tea Research and Extension Station, who specializes in pesticide-free pest control, says that “the more complex the array of organisms, the more balanced the ecosystem.”

Bad bugs? Good bugs? In reality, these are all descriptions imposed from a human point of view. If an insect jeopardizes our own goals and desires, we call it a “pest;” whereas if it helps us satisfy our needs, we call it a “beneficial insect.”

Zeng Xinguang uses the smaller green leafhopper as an example. This insect feeds on the tea leaves, causing the leaves to secrete a chemical

compound that unexpectedly created the honeyed fragrance of Dongfang Meiren (“Eastern Beauty”) tea. So, this story that began with a pest infestation caused by hot and humid weather concluded with a happy ending, and brought great benefit to the Taiwanese economy. That being said, the smaller green leafhopper is still considered a serious pest in the southern parts of Taiwan. In the north, tea farmers wish for these bugs to live, and in the south, they wish for them to die—there's a distinct border between love and hate.

People vs. Nature: Who Takes the Lead?

In the Ciji (慈濟) tea plantation in the township of Sanyi, Miaoli County, white cattle egrets follow closely behind the farmers as they weed the plantation, awaiting their opportunity to scavenge the prey exposed in the loose soil. Their feathers glow snow-white in the sunlight, a picture of tranquility. In the past, this plantation was farmed using traditional fertilizers and pesticides and the trees were over-harvested, resulting in infertile soil. After



茶 *The Ciji (慈濟) tea plantation, begun by the well-known Buddhist charity, strives to have as little environmental impact as possible, making use of whatever they are given. They have increased the vitality of the land and set new standards, creating a desirable tea from a year of frost. Photography by Yan Songbai (顏松柏).*

the plantation changed hands, a new approach to farming methods restored the vitality of the land and the richness of its ecosystem. In 2016, the plantation was certified by the Tse-Xin Organic Certification Corporation.

One official from the Tea Research and Extension Station who visited the Ciji Sanyi plantation several years ago praised the plantation as an example of “people prevailing over Nature.” Truthfully, though, the secrets behind the plantation’s success are treating the Earth well, respecting Nature and following its lead.

The plantation covers nearly thirty hectares. Aside from the fact that the land is completely self-contained and doesn’t have any secondary pollution, the growing conditions are not that great. The plantation is not very high in altitude, the soil quality is poor and precipitation is low. During the winter and summer, droughts have been known to last twenty-three days in a row without a single drop of rain. The hard, dry soil doesn’t retain water well, so the tea growers just have to hope that the Heavens are feeling generous, or rely on planting trees to trap in the fog in winter, finding ways to survive by following the natural conditions.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen (證嚴法師), an influential Taiwanese Buddhist nun, has expressed the hope that tea plantations will reduce their carbon footprints, so the plantation owners have never considered channeling water up the hill for irrigation. The only artificially added nutrients on the plantation are soybean meal and liquid enzyme fertilizer. They even insist on not using any animal by-products as fertilizer, meaning they can completely avoid introducing any antibiotics or heavy metals, faithfully sticking to the tea-growing methods of their ancestors long before them.

Chen Zhonghou (陳忠厚) from the Ciji Sanyi plantation often likes to say: “Organic farming is a concept, not a method.” From firsthand experience of the challenges of organic tea growing, he understood that the environmental conditions are different everywhere, so it’s not possible to simply take a method that works in one place and copy it somewhere else. Transplanting even the most brilliant of techniques to the wrong place can render it useless. He jokes that the Sanyi plantation is like the “dummies’ class” at a school: they’re not aiming for first place, not looking to imitate the revered terroir

of mountain tea, but rather, to identify the tea’s innate strengths, then grow and nurture them.

It has taken eight years to nurse the land of the Sanyi plantation back to health, and now that it’s back in good condition, all that it needed was for opportunity to come knocking. With well cared-for soil, the chance of failure is naturally reduced.

During the spring tea harvest of 2016, specifically on January 20th, there was a heavy snowfall. All the viable tea shoots, rearing to go after hibernating all winter, got completely frostbitten, as the temperatures hit an unexpected low of -3°C. The tea farmers were at a loss; all they could do was complain that it seemed the Heavens weren’t feeling generous this year. Although Chen Zhonghou felt anything but reassured, after three days, he made a prompt decision to act: they would prune off the spring shoots. This decision entailed a certain risk, he says: if temperatures continued to drop, not only would they be unable to save the tea shoots, but all their time and effort would be wasted, too. But rather than resign himself to his fate, he decided to take the gamble, trusting in the good karma of their work.

Fortunately, the temperature soon rose back above 10°C. Although the remaining volume was not high, they were able to harvest those tea shoots that had survived all the hardship, and took the opportunity to make them into a lightly-roasted oolong which they named “Xue Cang Cha (雪藏茶),” or “Concealed in the Snow Tea.” This tea enjoyed an unexpectedly good reception on the market. Consequently, this reversal of fortune was a result of both experience and courage.

“This poem is definitely talking about organic tea, because good, clean organic tea will make your body more and more relaxed as you drink it. Although the flavor of the first few brews is quite ordinary, in the latter brews the true flavor comes out; by the third and fourth brews the flavor keeps getting better... But if you entered this slowly-developing tea in a competition, it would certainly be wiped out in the first round.” We’re sitting in Zhang Haoyan’s living room in Zhushan Township, Nantou County; the walls are covered with his grandfather’s calligraphy and paintings. We are tasting several organic teas, all made with different methods, and discussing the importance of a balanced ecosystem for creating truly organic produce. We conclude that in the era of the poet, Lu Tong (who lived during the Tang Dynasty, 618–907), the environment would certainly have been pure and harmonious, which is why the tea had this kind of flavor and effect. Only a great terroir could make such a tea.

I also finally get to meet Zhang Haoyan’s mother, Ms. Gui Chun (桂春), who is petite in stature with determination written across her brow. Zhang Haoyan’s father, Zhang Hengcheng (张恒诚), belonged to Taiwan’s first generation of organic tea farmers, and the Hengcheng Farm that he started is quite famous in the surrounding area. The names “Hengcheng” and “Gui Chun” have become inseparable partners in the business of organics. Although organic produce had a very good reputation in those early days, the reality was that they were often unable to make ends meet and were forced to spend what they didn’t yet have. Gui Chun was determined to support her husband’s organic enterprise, even if it meant taking on all sorts of jobs to help bring in money.

As Nantou’s first pioneer of organic farming, over the last twenty years Zhang Hengcheng led the way for a group of local organic farmers, planting nearly fifty-six hectares of organic tea. Unfortunately, because of his vigorous dedication to his job, he suffered a serious stroke from overexertion. His son, who had been working in Taipei, had no choice but to leave the excitement of the big city behind and return home to take up the baton. Despite his initial reluctance, four years on, Zhang Haoyan is enthusiastically working to bring together his fellow farmers to establish a model for organic farming. His past resentment has given way to gratitude to his father for leaving him this small piece of paradise.

For today’s organic farmers, the biggest challenge is how to stick to organic principles and still make a living. Producing a reasonable output while honoring their commitment not to harm the soil. Is having the best of both worlds simply an impossible dream? This predicament has been emphasized time and time again, and has started to seem like an unsolvable problem. “If we look at it from the perspective of one person’s lifetime, then perhaps it is (unsolvable). But if we look at it from the limitless perspective of all life...” These wise words from Gui Chun provoke a sudden moment of enlightenment...

I immediately think of the advice that Chen Junda often hears from his elders: “If you stick to planting tea this way, the current generation certainly won’t get to enjoy the results—but your children and grandchildren will!” Isn’t this exactly what he aims to do—build a dream that will stay alive through the generations?

Leaving a clean piece of earth for future generations, and a stirring cup of tea just like the tea Lu Tong drank in his poem: who could say these dreams are anything but admirable?



“Seven Bowls of Tea”

A poem passed down through history

The first cup moistens the throat;

The second shatters all feelings of solitude;

The third cup purifies the digestion, re-opening the 5000 volumes I’ve studied and bringing them to mind fresh;

The fourth induces perspiration, evaporating all of life’s trials and tribulations;

With the fifth cup, the body sharpens, crisp;

And the sixth cup is the first step on the road to enlightenment;

The seventh cup sits steaming—it needn’t be drunk, as one is lifted to the Abode of the Immortals.

—From the poem “Seven Bowls of Tea (七碗茶诗)” by Lu Tong (卢同), abridged; translated by Wu De



Living Tea

安溪鐵觀音

茶人: Connor Goss

It is time that we explore an incredibly important topic for anyone who has a connection with Tea, and that is living tea. Many of you who have read this magazine for some time, or even perhaps followed from afar, will know that we are passionate supporters of organic or better yet, living tea!

Living tea represents something beyond organic. In Chinese it is called “real tea (*zhen cha*, 禪茶)” or “ecological tea (*shang tai cha*, 生態茶).” We choose “living tea” instead, as we feel it captures the essence of what this tea is in English. There are many levels of purity in tea. On each level, there are different criteria for what it means to be “clean.” On the level of organic plantation tea, this means that the tea is free of agrochemicals. But there are levels above that as well. Living tea is what we seek as Chajin. The medicine of tea shines through living tea. This doesn’t mean we don’t support organic plantation tea, however. There is a place for all kinds of tea, from healthy beverage to self-cultivation.

There is a magic found in the leaves of a living tea that stretches farther than language, farther than any form of communication or expression. It is a magic that is steeped in the unknowable. Anyone who has sat for a few

bowls of even a very simple living tea, perhaps a few leaves of a wild puerh from deep in the mountains, will testify wholeheartedly to these words. It is ultimately something that can only be understood experientially, by actually drinking the tea—as with all things really. If we do not know from our own experience, then, there are no true roots within our soul to speak of these things. Luckily this month you will have the opportunity to try a truly fine example of a living tea!

The Leaf is the tree’s expression of its environment. It is the terroir, the soil, water, air and sunshine that make up a place. It is the meeting of all of these. Living tea is the convergence and transformation of them into this magical Leaf that we receive as medicine.

There are six main characteristics that define living tea. Each of these characteristics cannot be undervalued over the others; they are inseparable from each other, and all of vast importance. We have written about living tea quite a number of times over the years of Global Tea Hut; however, as this is our first issue fully and wholeheartedly dedicated to pure tea and organic farming practices, what better a way to brush up on our understanding of the different ways of defining tea, wheth-

er that be plantation-grown tea with conventional chemicals and pesticides, organic farming methods, or living tea, etc.

I. Seed-Propagated

The first characteristic is that it is seed-propagated. Tea is a sexual plant. It has evolved over vast stretches of time, over millennia, to develop sexual cross-fertilization. It requires an immense amount of energy for the tree to reproduce through sexual cross-fertilization. As with all beings who reproduce this way, there is a great ocean of diversity and uniqueness which arises, with two tea seeds not being alike, even on the same mountain. Even if they both inhabit the same environment, they will differ. This allows for Tea’s incredible ability to adapt to new environments with each tea being an expression of that particular environment.

It is unfortunate that now, as more and more tea is grown in plantations, that we humans have sacrificed such vast diversity and unknowing in favor of greater control of production, fulfilling quotas through taking cuttings of tea and in essence cloning them to yield greater uniformity in what



is grown and offered to the consumer. In growing tea that is no longer seed-propagated, the cloned tea trees live shorter lives, sometimes for less than twenty years, though usually between thirty to fifty years. This is incredibly saddening when one then learns that seed-propagated trees can live for hundreds of years if they are small-leaf tea trees, or thousands of years if they are large-leaf tea trees! The contrast between seed-propagated and cloned is undeniably clear.

II. Space to Grow

The second characteristic of living tea is that the tea trees have space to grow. How can anyone grow up properly and be healthy if there is not enough space to unfold fully? Tea trees require sufficient space to grow, spreading their roots deep into the earth. If allowed to grow untended by humans, tea trees know which soil is best for optimal growth, where are the most nutrients for them, and where the earth is depleted of nutrients. They will then grow where is best for them, which is not in neat rows, but rather sparsely or densely scattered around their environment depending on what exists for them to live and prosper from in har-

mony with their environment. Nature has been doing this for countless eons. She knows experientially within her bones and marrow what is needed. The more that we attempt to tinker with the process, the more the process goes off in the wrong direction. Though, ultimately it will correct itself one way or another—that simply requires humans to step back for a moment and recognize the inherent wisdom in the trees, in the mountains, in the earth. That can only occur when we surrender to our own spheres of influence.

In journals of his travels, Robert Fortune was asked to evaluate the new plantations the British had created in the Himalayas. He criticized the local plantations based on his travels through China, arguing that the Chinese always leave several feet between trees.

Tea trees require space to grow upwards too, reaching their trunks and branches up to the sun, extending their crown to meet the sky. The larger the crown, the deeper and farther the roots will stretch beneath the earth, absorbing nutrients and energy from deep within the mountains where the tree grows, and those carry with them a powerful magic that can be experienced when drinking an old-growth tea from trees that have seen civiliza-

tions rise and fall and the stars spin around their skies countless times over the span of their lives.

Whereas with plantation tea, especially more commercially oriented plantations, the tea trees are pressed into neat rows, into uniformity that allows for greater yield and efficiency in picking the leaves. They are pruned regularly into shapes from which leaves are easier to pick. With limited resources, each one competes with the others for survival in this soulless approach to farming. What do you think the end result is? Simply drinking two teas, one from trees that has freedom to grow and the other from plantation tea trees, will offer all the understanding you need. There is no need for words, then, as experiential understanding blossoms.

III. Biodiversity

The third characteristic of living tea is biodiversity. It is often overwhelming, in the most wonderful of ways, to realize the infinite and immeasurable connections between all living beings. Each place has its own tapestry of aliveness, of living connections between everything found within that unique environment.

And if even one thing is changed, if one being falls into sickness and decline, then the entire environment suffers. Tea helps us to understand this fundamental truth, that we are inseparable from Nature, and that everything we do influences Nature as a whole—which includes us, whether that be experienced directly in this moment in time, or by future generations who inherit our mistakes in tinkering with something beyond our fathoming.

We must ultimately ask ourselves: Why do we want to try controlling something that is already functioning perfectly? As we surrender more to what exists beyond our control, Tea shows up more, doing what She does best and has for countless centuries.

IV. No Agrochemicals

The fourth characteristic of living tea is that it must be grown without the use of any agrochemicals. The use of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers that are inundating the world today only bring with them suffering. They affect the health of everyone, from the tea trees, to the farmers, to the consumers and the planet as a whole. In using various cocktails of chemical fertilizers for tea trees, they then do not receive any of the rich nutrients of their environment. They grow to become completely dependent upon humans for their survival, as they do not know anything other than this reality. And, as the tea is grown on mountains, the chemicals will be washed down into lower lying areas, getting into the water that then affects the health and well-being of countless beings. Not only does the use of agrochemicals negate Tea as being a plant medicine, it also harms the farmers who are in direct contact with these poisoned environments.

V. No Irrigation

The fifth characteristic of living tea is that it must not be irrigated by humans. This one is incredibly easy to understand, both intellectually and experientially. Of course, no being who is nourished completely by external sources will grow to be healthy and resilient, rather than relying on their

own talents for survival. Tea trees that are irrigated will never grow strong roots deep into the earth; instead they will remain shallow, just beneath the topmost layer of soil, sometimes even exposed completely to the sky above. When tea trees are not irrigated, they are forced into digging into the mountain where they live, deep into the bedrock for nourishment. Some will die. And those who survive will grow to be strong and resilient, drawing rich minerals, water and energy from the earth, creating within their lives powerful medicine for humans.

In Robert Fortune's nineteenth century journals, when once again criticizing the Indian plantations, he also mentions that the Chinese "never irrigate their tea." This suggests that irrigation was known to create weaker tea trees that live shorter lives and create less vibrant leaves.

VI. Dialogue with the Farmer

The sixth and final characteristic of living tea relates to the dialogue between humans and Tea. Over the passing of time, the changing and evolution of this magazine, we have spoken many times about how Tea was made to be human. Tea listens and responds to humans. This is a timeless conversation that stretches far back into the history of this world. It is a conversation between humans and Nature, finding a way of living in harmony together. The ways we orient ourselves to tea influence how the tea grows or does not grow. Long before humans began to cultivate tea in plantations, replacing true dialogue with numbers and analyses of soil to determine what fertilizers to give the tea, humans were making offerings to the tea trees. I distinctly remember on my first Global Tea Hut trip to China, visiting Yunnan, and seeing firsthand the ways humans make altars beneath the old tea trees, making offerings and paying respect to these wise elders. It left me profoundly changed. And those were just the practices that have survived the rampant growth of the mechanical worldview. Ultimately, the amount of tea we receive is decided by Nature. All we should do is offer gratitude for the

times that are abundant. And the times where there is less? There are great joys and lessons to be found in those as well.

A World of Compromise

Now that we have touched briefly upon each of the six characteristics of living tea, I am sure many have questions of what can one do now then? There exists the inescapable truth that if we were to only grow and produce living tea, then there would not be enough tea for millions of people around the world. So many people would not experience the beauty and joy found in tea. We must then compromise, in this time when sacrifices must be made so that all beings may enjoy tea. When compromising, it is important to understand where to draw the line, knowing what it means to make these compromises. For us, compromising means that there will be plantation tea alongside living tea. Many of the characteristics of living tea are sacrificed in compromising for some plantation tea: there will be less space for the trees to grow, some pruning, less biodiversity, irrigation where necessary, and likely some cloning. This is as far as we will compromise. There is nothing more than this that we are willing to sacrifice. That means no agrochemicals, pesticides or chemical fertilizers. The tea grown in plantations must be organic! In making these compromises, we are allowing the possibility to exist that there will be enough tea for everyone now, and also helping to preserve tea for future generations. Of course, we want our descendants to be able to enjoy living tea, just as we want them to be able to enjoy Nature, to feel comfortable in holding their heads up high in Nature, knowing that their ancestors made the right choice in shifting their orientation towards balance.



🍵 We have a whole podcast devoted to this topic. Our podcasts are on Soundcloud and other sites.



ORGANIC CHANGES

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AN INTERVIEW WITH XIE YUAN ZAI

人在草木間



Xie Yuan Zai (謝元在) is a very important part of the scenery at our Center, and will be very important for many of you as well, because so many of our visitors come here with a curiosity about how tea is processed. It is very important to experience just how difficult it is to make tea, so that in your own soreness you will develop a tremendous respect for the Leaf. This respect isn't just in the billions of years of evolution, the wind and rain, sunshine, mountain and water; it is also in the blood, sweat and tears of generation after generation of farmers.



茶人: Wu De (無的)

There comes a deep reverence in seeing just how much mastery, skill and art goes into the crafting of the Leaf. And so, with great joy, we take as many of our guests as possible to a few different farms to try their hands at tea processing. It is amazing to make your own tea and then take it home with you. If you didn't have enough reasons to come stay with us, here's another: Mr. Xie has formally invited each and every one of you to come to his farm and make tea, eat a nice lunch and take the tea you picked and crafted home with you! Every ten-day course at the Tea Sage Hut includes a day-long visit to Mr. Xie's farm to meet this amazing member of the Hut and his tea!

Since we knew we would be sitting down for this long tea session to discuss organics and other topics surrounding sustainable tea, we knew we had to interview Mr. Xie. We wanted to explore the topic in greater depth than ever before, so we packed the car full of photography gear, grabbed a notebook and filled our thermoses with red tea, and drove to Mingjian to sit down with Mr. Xie for the day. Of course, we did so knowing we would be bringing you all along with us.

We wanted to discuss some very specific things with Mr. Xie, deepening our understanding of organics from a more industrial perspective. Not all tea can be living tea, grown from seed-propagated trees deep in forests. If all tea was made in that way, there wouldn't be enough tea for everyone in the world. We need sustainable, clean tea produced on all levels, as beverage,

hobby and deep medicine. Each of these has a different orientation.

Mr. Xie is a plantation farmer in Mingjian. Mingjian is lower altitude, in the foothills of the central mountain range. In the last few decades, such lower altitude tea has been adumbrated by the popularity of the teas grown higher up. Though areas like Hsinchu and Miao Li counties—where Eastern Beauty is grown—have struggled since high mountain oolongs have come to dominate the market, Mingjian has prospered by providing lower-priced teas for export, or large-scale production for the bottled tea market (often called “Ready to Drink” or “RTD”). Mr. Xie's family has grown small scale productions of oolong tea through three lifetimes, since before the higher teas even existed.

Mingjian has six harvests a year, due to its low altitude and temperate weather, and almost all the tea is machine-harvested and also machine-processed, which makes it much more affordable than other Taiwanese teas. Each level of tea has its own definition of clean and sustainable. At the highest end, we have wild, living tea, which we will discuss later in this issue. Then there are ecological farms (*shang tai*, 生態) that are somewhere in between wild and plantation tea, but still fit into what we call “living tea.” Finally, there is plantation tea, which is intended to increase yield. Mr. Xie is a shining example of the latter. This means his perspective on healthy tea is *healthy plantation tea*. This is a very important perspective, as this will most likely always represent the majority of

tea on this earth, so we need to understand how to create it in a way that is healthy for the Earth, for farmers and for us the consumers. In the realm of plantation tea—Mr. Xie's area of expertise—the defining concept for any discussion of sustainability and “clean tea” is “organic.”

After sharing some tea, we started our conversation with Mr. Xie. We wanted to know about what, specifically, are the detrimental effects of inorganic farming on the Earth, for farmers and us. We also wanted to discuss what changes occur when a farmer switches to organic methods, and how they would go about making that change. We asked him to describe the changes in fields over time, since he has witnessed many fields change from inorganic to organic. And perhaps most importantly, we wanted to discuss what we as consumers can do to help. This article is a record of that interview. But before we pour some bowls of these topics, we should first introduce Mr. Xie for those who haven't met him before.

Xie Yuan Zai (謝元在)

Mr. Xie is a third-generation farmer in Mingjian, Nantou, Central Taiwan. When we discuss organic farming and the need to make changes in tea farming (as well as other kinds of agriculture) it's important to remember that the farmers are always the first victims. It is they who handle the agrochemicals in large amounts, and most directly, affecting their health.



茶 Mr. Xie loves the Earth and loves making simple, healthy tea. Every guest at our ten-day courses visits his farm to make tea and learn to respect tea farmers, understanding fully how much work goes into the production of all the tea we drink. To the left and above, Mr. Xie shows us a really cool bug that builds a home out of various bits of plant matter and carries its home with it on its back wherever it goes. To the right, you can see how healthy the soil is on Mr. Xie's organic farm. Though this is not living tea, and certainly compromises to increase yield and decrease cost, it is still sustainable and healthy for the farmers who make and for us who drink it. You can see the vibrancy all around: in the soil, the undergrowth, the plentiful insects all over the place and the thick, juicy tea leaves that flush much more fully and with thicker bud sets than nearby conventional farms.

Furthermore, it is only by humanizing and befriending them that we can bring about change. We must include rather than exclude, educate rather than ostracize.

Like so many other farmers, Mr. Xie started to get the coughing-wheezing feeling that these chemicals were harmful to his family, his community and his land. When his wife almost miscarried their second child in 1997, he had had enough. We find it interesting that the doctors in rural, tea-growing areas are able to recognize when miscarriages are caused by exposure to agrochemicals. Mr. Xie assured us that they can, especially when it happens more than once. But this also implies that misuse of these chemicals, improper safety measures and perhaps overuse are causing such health problems regularly. Despite opposition from friends and family, Mr. Xie made a commitment to become an organic tea farmer, no matter the cost. His first course of action was to attend some organic farming classes held by the MOA organization.

From 1997 to 2000, Mr. Xie and his family struggled to maintain their principles. His tea was sub-par and he lost most all his customers. His father, who had been worried when his son suggested upsetting the status quo in the first place, was very critical of his decisions. Organic farming is difficult, and it requires a radical change in farming and processing methodology—changes that would take time to learn. Rather than give up, as many would have done, Mr. Xie got a part-time job as a painter and carpenter, working day and night—either painting or farming—to keep his family afloat. Finally, in the early 2000s, his acumen for organic farming improved to the point that he was able to take his teas to market again. Since then he has gone on to win awards, been featured on television and has even heard his father, now a sprightly eighty years old, bragging to others about how his tea is organic and good for the environment.

Mr. Xie's work hasn't stopped with his own farm. He knew that he would have to keep improving his skills,

creating new and better teas, and help show his neighbors the value of organic farming, especially since their land and his are close enough to influence each other. He formed a co-op with other farmers and began teaching locals to shift to organic methods, offering them equal shares in their combined enterprise. As more people have joined this local group, the incentive to do so has also increased. To date, several farmers in the Mingjian region are organic, including Mr. Xie's immediate neighbors.

Mr. Xie's kind heart shows in his teas. He cares deeply about tea and the Earth. He produces green tea, large and small leaf red tea, as well as several kinds of oolong, and all with great skill. He's generous with his tea, supporting our efforts selflessly. To us, he is an inspiration and a kind of hero—the kind not talked about enough these days. It's easy to follow the crowd, maintain the status quo, or to say: "I am just one person. What can I do?" It is difficult to face criticism from family and friends and stand up for what you



believe to be right. The problem is that it is too easy for farmers to make more money with agrochemicals, and to do it with less work. And that's also why so many of them are over-using the fertilizers and pesticides, reducing the average life of a tea bush to fifteen years, all in the name of personal gain. Many of them get cancer from improper exposure to such chemicals, themselves victims as we mentioned above. Mr. Xie is a man who has seen a different way, and more inspiringly lived that way and taught others to do so. And that is the spirit of tea.

Sustainability

Mr. Xie is very down to earth, and orientated towards a scientific approach to producing clean, healthy tea that doesn't involve dangerous chemicals that could potentially harm his family or customers. But we wanted to know about the long-term effects agrochemicals are having on the land, especially since the catchy terms these

days are "sustainable" versus "unsustainable" agriculture. Will the use of fertilizers, pesticides and/or weed-killers prevent a farmer from growing tea in future generations? Mr. Xie told us that he honestly has no idea. "Agrochemicals are frankly not old enough for us to really understand their long-term effects. Research into the creation of pesticides began in the middle of the last century, and mainstream use of them didn't really reach Taiwan until the 1970s. What will happen after a century or two of use is really hard to say." He did say that there was one disturbing trend that farmers in Taiwan have noticed, which is the rate of yield for tea trees.

Within traditional tea production, tea is seed-propagated and the trees are left to grow up. This is, in fact, one of the criteria of what we call "living tea." True agriculture is not based upon demanding something from Nature, but rather accepting whatever is given with gratitude. Seed-propagated tea trees will grow deeper roots, require more room and have a much lower yield,

producing leaves more slowly, though they are thicker and more vibrant. But there is also the need to increase yield to satisfy the demand of the modern world and population.

We have to compromise in this day and age for everyone to have food/tea. In the case of tea, that means using cuttings in rows that are fertilized to increase yield. Cuttings reach a height from thirty centimeters to a meter and flush more often, with shallower roots. This means that grafts are taken from previous trees and sprouted when the yield of the "old" bushes decreases below what the farmer considers to be acceptable. This may be measured individually, tree-to-tree, or by the overall output of the entire field. Mr. Xie said that "tea trees were living thirty to forty years on average with a high-yield during the 1970s and 1980s. In recent times, that time has decreased to ten or fifteen years." This means that the trees are living shorter lives. The yield is half or less of what it was thirty years ago. He believes that this may be due to the use of agrochemicals.

“This may be the beginning of a downward cycle, because it means changing over the whole field much more often. Leaving a field alone for thirty years in balance is much better than replacing all the tea trees every ten years because their output has decreased enough to warrant doing so. Will this upset cause an even quicker turnover, and so on?”

We wonder if the fields will one day be fallow, incapable of producing any tea at all. To us, this overturns any desire we, as tea lovers, should have for compromise. After all, the only justifiable reason for compromising is to increase yield so that more people can have food/tea. If we increase yield for a few decades only to drastically ruin our ability to make tea—meaning that future tea lovers don’t have any—we aren’t really compromising for a real benefit.

This argument also doesn’t apply equally for tea as it does for food. In ancient times, tea was regarded by Chinese people as one of the “seven necessities,” including oil, salt, rice, wood, vinegar and soy sauce. These days, however, it is hard to argue that tea is a “necessity,” no matter how much we love it; it is more of a luxury. And if there ever was a time when we could afford luxuries that harm the earth in any way, this is not that time. If ever there was a time to take a stance against environmental destruction, for the sake of all future generations of humanity, now is that time.

Politicians want us to argue about “climate change” and “global warming,” but these topics aren’t the point. No matter how you feel about “climate change,” the fact that our industrial processes are having a detrimental effect on the earth, ecologies and other species is obvious, and so is the very real fact that this will bite us later on. The details aren’t as important as the acceptance of the problem, and the consciousness that caused it, as well as solutions.

Mr. Xie told us that industrial companies are constantly struggling to innovate new agro-products that solve problems caused by previous agrochemicals, which made us think of the pharmaceutical industry, which follows a similar trend, creating medicine to heal side-effects of previous medicines. He said that in lowlands like Mingjian, where the tea yield is

highest, pesticides don’t really work. The small katydids that eat tea (*cha xiao lu ye chan*, 茶小綠葉蟬) develop resistance to a certain pesticide over just a few generations, forcing farmers to increase levels beyond dangerous, which Mr. Xie said very few farmers do these days. “They may have done that in past, but the dangers of increasing residue are now well-known. These days, they just switch pesticides every two to three years as the insects grow resistant.” We laughed, finding this perspective of a battle with “pests,” which requires new weapons every few years, to be quite absurd.

After we both laughed and drank a few more cups of tea, Mr. Xie said that in Mingjian, which is low altitude and prone to insect infestation, the use of pesticides is less effective over time than organic farming. Yes, you heard that right: pesticides are *less effective than organic tea!* Mr. Xie explained that he has not done extensive research collecting data from the entire region, but that his experience, coupled with the experience of other farmers in his co-op, proved that yield increased after around five years of organic farming. He wanted to be clear that this is only in relation to these katydids, which do not affect high-altitude farms as much. He said that the best defense against the katydids is a healthy ecology, which allows for balance over time as there are plenty of organisms that eat the katydids, reducing their population to a manageable size. “They are quite small, and so long as there are not too many of them, they will not destroy a tree or decrease yield significantly. But when the ecology is unbalanced, they infest and farmers are forced to keep switching pesticides as they develop resistance.” Therefore, for these species, organic farming will result in a greater yield over time. “People use pesticides because they are following a trend and are unaware of this fact. Of course, agrochemicals are also marketed to them, advertised like any other product,” Mr. Xie said.

One topic that comes up a lot in our conversations with farmers producing clean tea, as it did with Master Gu in our Tea of the Month article, is balance over time, as opposed to achieving desired results in terms of weight within any given year. Nature balances itself, but does so in its own

time frame. Letting the ecology find harmony takes time, but it does a way better job than we can, if we have patience and let it find its own rhythm and balance.

The Changes

The topic we spent the longest time talking about was the changes in a farm as it switches from traditional, organic farming to the use of agrochemicals, and vice versa—when a so-called “conventional” farm returns to organic methods. We started by laughing at the modern practice of calling industrial farming with agrochemicals “conventional,” while the way that farmers grew things for ten thousand years prior to the invention of agrochemicals is now the exception. Humans can be very myopic! With a bit of perspective, one can easily argue that the less-sustainable modern industrial agricultural practices should really bear the burden of being “unconventional.”

After switching teas and drinking some more cups, Mr. Xie spoke to us about the four big changes that occur when moving in either direction—towards or away from—natural farming: ecological vibrancy, the earth/soil, the leaves and the tea quality. Each of these is worth exploring in detail.

The Ecology: This is the most obvious change. When you stop spraying pesticides, insects return. This attracts the larger insects and other organisms that feed on those smaller insects, and so on. Mr. Xie said it takes a few years for the ecology to return. “Spiders are a good sign that the change is taking hold, as they only come when the ecology is healthy.” The effects of a vibrant ecology are profound and difficult to measure.

The infinite web of life is far more delicate than we can possibly measure. As time goes on, we begin to discover subtler and subtler ways in which various lifeforms are connected. There is evidence, for example, that birdsong may, in fact, influence the vibrancy of plants, which is a very minute factor. We cannot really understand every aspect of every connection in any given ecology, other than to know for certain that no organism exists in that ecology without playing an important role that

will influence every other organism. The ripples of any given organism's influence may be very faint or very great. The higher up the food chain, the greater the influence tends to be.

Scientists use the word "tropism" to define the change of all or part of an organism in a particular direction in response to an external stimulus. The reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park, for example, had a huge impact on every species and even affected the geology when the grazing habits of deer were altered by the wolves; that, in turn, caused new forest growth, which moved the banks of the rivers.

The changes that having a vibrant ecology introduces may each one be too small to notice, record or study, but the overall influence of many organisms living in balance versus almost none, save tea, is extremely apparent! As I often say, the leaf is the tree's expression of its relationship to its environment. If the environment is rich, so will the tree be, which means the leaf will also be vibrant.

The Earth/Soil: Mr. Xie told us that the use of agrochemicals will always change the soil composition, pH and even appearance. Tea grows better in lower pH soils, which tend to be gravelly and yellowish or reddish in color. In Mingjian, for example, the soil is high in iron and therefore reddish. With the use of agrochemicals, the earth gets harder and more powdery. This means that when it rains, less water can enter the soil, and the roots of the trees often grow up out of the ground over time, seeking water to drink. The excess water on the surface means that moss often grows all over the ground on conventional farms. This blue-green moss is usually a good sign that the owner is using agrochemicals, especially if there is also a lack of vibrancy in the ecology, i.e., insects and other plants growing around or in between the tea bushes. The moss also takes away nutrients and moisture. In natural ecologies, as part of a balanced system, moss can play a vital role in healthy ecology. But in a conventional tea farm, this type of moss is a sign of imbalance.

Mr. Xie continued: "When there are very heavy rains in some areas of Taiwan, the water company sometimes has to shut off the water, as the city is

in a valley and all the mountains surrounding it have conventional farms. Since the soil cannot absorb the water, it runs off at a high velocity, sometimes causing mudslides, which are dangerous. Also, since the run-off contains such a high amount of agrochemicals, the water treatment plants can no longer clean it safely and are forced to dump their supply, meaning that the area has no water for some period. This even happens in Taipei, actually." Mr. Xie said, shaking his head. He later showed us how powdery soil on a conventional farm is, without any depth, loamy quality or any of the life we associate with healthy soil. Rubbing it between his hands, it appeared to be dust and had no aroma at all.

Mr. Xie said that "conventional farms produce around double what natural trees can produce. Some of that can be mitigated through organic fertilizer, but the leaves themselves will still be thicker, juicier and more vibrant the less flushes there are."

Tea Quality: With the vibrancy of the ecology and thicker leaves, it is obvious that the tea will be more patient, which means more steepings than the conventional alternative. Mr. Xie said that as far as local Mingjian tea goes, he feels that organic, healthy farms produce tea that is at least one-third more patient. "In Mingjian, the presence of the green leafhoppers means that organic tea here often has a sweet, honey

"The rate of growth of organic tea is, of course, slower than those that are fertilized chemically. Even organic fertilizer isn't as effective. The slower growth rate means that the leaves are thicker and juicier. An experienced farmer can tell organic plants by the thickness of the leaves."

The Leaves: "The rate of growth of organic tea is, of course, slower than those that are fertilized chemically. Even organic fertilizer isn't as effective. The slower growth rate means that the leaves are thicker and juicier. An experienced farmer can tell organic plants by the thickness of the leaves."

Organic tea flushes less in a year. Naturally, most tea only flushes in the spring. There are exceptions to this, like in some areas of Yunnan which also have a vibrant autumn harvest due to the climate, or other areas that have summer harvests. Most of the time, however, harvests outside of spring are due to fertilization. Having a single harvest every year will always be better, as this means that the tree will have absorbed a whole year's worth of nutrients to unfurl in the leaves. The more the tree gives, the less the leaves have in them. Since organic tea flushes far less than conventional tea, a farmer can have more tea through conventional farming, which is, of course, the reason why farmers make this choice. But the increase in quantity decreases quality.

flavor and fragrance due to the chemical changes caused by their bites." He said that this adds depth and complexity to organic tea, which he prefers. We tasted some teas and also felt that the fragrance was deeper, bolder and more full-bodied. We felt that the fragrance and the flavor of the organic tea was longer-lasting and that the mouthfeel (*co gan*, 口感) was also better in all the ways covered in the *Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea*. For us, the difference in quality is obvious. For Mr. Xie, who has worked with both conventional and organic leaves, he said that at every stage in the processing he can smell and feel the difference in the leaves' juiciness and vibrancy. When he said that, we were reminded of a spring in Wuyi Mountain when the day's batch of tea came in and was withering outdoors. We noticed a lot of bug bites in them and asked the old master about this. He said, "It will be a good year, indeed!" and smiled. Later, his son explained that the insect bites signified a thriving ecology, which means that the leaves would also be effervescent.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

When we turned our discussion to the process of change, Mr. Xie first spoke about the heart (there is no word for “mind” in Chinese, only “heart, (心).” He said that the first thing to change is the psychology of why. He said that most farmers think in terms of weight. They measure success in quantity. Their heart isn’t in their tea production and the final quality, but rather, always in the bottom line. This reminded us of Buddhist practice, which always starts with what is often translated as “arousing the mind” or “the will to truth,” which means that we must first orient towards change. True change must first start with a willingness to change, in other words. “When farmers stop thinking in terms of what weighs the most, the quality of tea will improve greatly, and, of course, its environmental impact will decrease as well.” He also mentioned that most farmers are too short-sighted, and will prefer the proverbial handful of leaves

now to two later on. They would prefer a bigger profit now that results in less over time, in other words, than thinking long-term and the amount of income that will result slowly over time—even if it is more.

Assuming that a farmer does want to make the shift, Mr. Xie assures us that there are plenty of resources and training options available, and many are free. He said that many farmers, unfortunately, turn around even if they get to this stage, because they will most likely not be able to sell their tea for around three years, waiting for certification. In the meantime, the tea is neither here nor there and it won’t be very good quality. “They have to have a savings or alternative income to make it through this time. I worked as a painter, actually.”

Mr. Xie said that some kind of motivation is necessary to make the change since yield will decrease, the tea will pass through an awkward stage

where it may not sell at all and, finally, organic farming is more work. “Of course, they will have to be motivated to make such a change and work harder. Take weeding, for example: even with a weed-wacker, it will take a half a day to a full day to weed a tea field. With chemicals, this can be done in an hour.” Indeed, the argument that certification is abused as a marketing tool only really holds up if it is corrupt. For if the tea is truly organic, it takes time, patience and a tremendous effort to get it to that state, let alone to keep it there and create nice tea that can actually sell for *more* than the “conventional” alternative—more because there is less of it, so it has to cost more for the farmer to maintain a similar quality of life.

“The first step is to examine the farm,” Mr. Xie went on. “We have to check the health of the soil and the trees.” If the soil and trees are healthy, the farmer can just stop spraying cold turkey and go one year without



☞ Looking above, we asked Mr. Xie to grab a handful of soil from beneath his tea trees (left) and he came up with leaves, organic debris and loamy, rich soil that smelled of earth. Later, at a conventional farm, we asked him to do the same, and there was only dusty, pebbly powder. His hands were covered in it like chalk after he dropped the handful of dry earth. To the right is a look between the rows of a conventional tea farm. Compare this with the photograph on the previous page, and you can see which one is more vibrant. You can see the roots coming up out of the ground, as the plants cannot drink from the powdery soil. The sterility was obvious, and when standing in both gardens the same day, we feel there is little argument that can be made in favor of so-called “conventional” farming. The differences really are that obvious when you are there.



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harvesting any leaves at all, allowing the ecology to balance a bit. If the trees and/or soil are not healthy, then the process has to happen more slowly—over the course of two to three years—with a slow reduction of spraying from two to three times the first year, one the second and then stopping completely the final year. (You aren't alone; this does sound like chemical dependency and rehab to us as well.) Fermented milk is sprayed around the unhealthy trees to fertilize them and help them through the transition. It is also common to cover the ground between rows with an organic, black mesh that looks a bit like plastic. This prevents weeds and other undergrowth that the tea cannot compete with in this unbalanced state. Otherwise, constant weeding will be necessary.

Basically, the process is based on decreasing pesticide use and slowly switching to organic fertilizers and harvesting the field much less often for

around three years, until the ecology starts to balance and the trees find their stability. “The soil starts shifting and absorbing more nutrients. Water also passes through it better, so the roots of the trees anchor themselves better. All kinds of wildlife start returning, starting of course with the smallest insects, but then those bugs attract spiders, lizards, snakes, etc. Eventually, farmers may decide to let some of the other plant life return as well, watching how this influences their tea trees and overall yield.”

Mr. Xie took us to three farms after we were done with the interview: a “conventional” farm; one that he purchased six months ago that is in the process of switching to organic; and, finally, his fully organic plantation. All of us were certainly able to feel the difference. Amazingly, the trees, other plant life and wildlife (flora and fauna) even changed the humidity and freshness of the air, which is certainly

a tropism—when species change even the geology of a place. Energetically, even with eyes closed, hands to the trees, everything felt much more alive and vibrant. “Sterile” was the adjective we all agreed upon when it came to the two “conventional” farms.

Interestingly, we passed down a road where water runoff came down into a ditch from two farms, one organic and one not. The telltale moss grew around the “conventional” farm, on the stones of the wall. The water beneath the inorganic farm was full of algae, whereas the organic runoff wasn't. Curiously, all the human litter from the road had also collected beneath the “dirtier” farm, as if it had been attracted there. It was as if the human garbage and chemical pollution were attracted to each other. Of course, this might just be a coincidence, but it did seem to be sign that represented overall the lessons we had learned about change on this day.



茶 Side by side, you can see which leaves are organic and which are “conventional,” especially when they are twisted like above. The leaves flushed at the same time, as they came from within a kilometer of each other, but the organic leaves are bigger, thicker and juicier. We tasted both as well. The organic leaves were much more full-bodied, coating the mouth. The astringency and bitterness also transformed into a sweet aftertaste, whereas the conventionally-grown leaves stayed tart, astringent and bitter and left the mouth dry and uncomfortable after chewing.

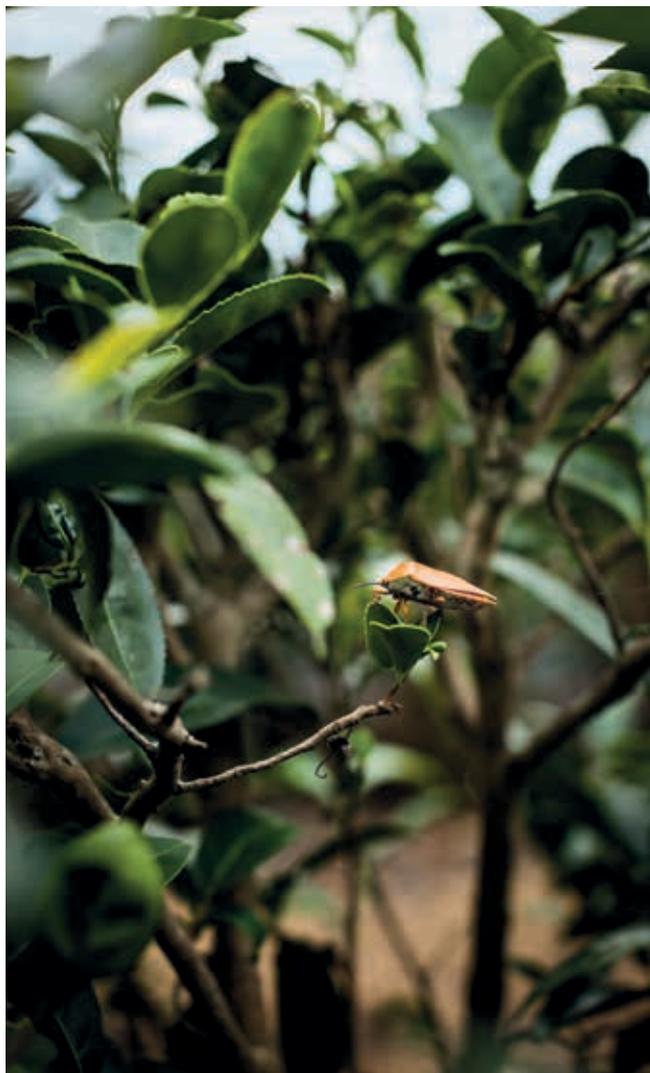
WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

For us, the most important question of the day came last. It was the one starred and underlined in our notebook, even before we arrived: *What can we do to help?* It is important to explore the philosophy of environmental sustainability and clean, healthy agricultural practices, but a lot of this is day-to-day economics and affects the real lives of real farmers around the world. Armchair ideas only go so far. How can we make a *real* difference, other than publishing magazines about organic tea? (Global Tea Hut is printed on 100% recycled paper using non-GMO soy-based inks!) We are sure that many of you feel like we do. We were curious about what Mr. Xie would say. First, we shared with him one of our ideas, concerning how farmers are treated.

For thousands of years now, since the stratification of society and division of labor that large-scale agriculture allowed for, farming has steadily become a menial job, valued beneath others. It is now unconsciously assumed that farming is for the less-educated and is not a desirable career. But actually, one could make a strong argument that farming should be the most-valued, highest job. After all, without farmers there could be no other jobs. A doctor or tea magazine author couldn't do their work if they also had to grow all their own food. We all survive due to the hard work of farmers. And it seems disrespectful to tell them how to do their job unless we value them in the first place. If farmers are not respected in terms of their esteem in society and their financial compensa-

tion—which should be commensurate to other jobs, not less—then do we really have the right to tell them how to farm? If they aren't making ends meet as it is, how do we ask them to farm in the way we want them to? Shouldn't we honor them first, and only then make demands of them in terms of sustainability?

We shared all this with Mr. Xie, and he said these ideas are indeed true. He also agrees that farmers should be taken care of. In an ideal society, farmers would be paid not for the weight of their produce, but as stewards of the land. As long as they work honestly and keep the land healthy and producing, they could be paid a salary to do so, no matter what the land produces any given year. Though Mr. Xie agreed with us, and in an ideal world where



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everyone had a great work ethic this would be possible, he said that realistically there are only two ways for things to change on a large scale: the government or the market.

The first way that farming could go organic is if laws were passed making agrochemicals illegal. “That would be that,” Mr. Xie said with a gesture of washing his hands free of pesticides. Alternatively, governments could follow Denmark and invest funds in supporting organic farmers. Some provinces in China are offering a tax-exempt period to farmers who switch to organic, which incentivizes change. In Taiwan, the certification fee each year is subsidized by the government, so the entire cost of certification is returned to farmers each year once they pass their tests. “There are a lot

of ways that the government can get involved in making change a reality, from outright ending agrochemicals, which is highly unlikely, to incentivizing change, which many governments are doing these days.”

Mr. Xie told us in a conspiratorial tone that he believes the government knows a lot more about the negative impact of agrochemicals, and that in Taiwan at least, they prevent research on its environmental impact as well as the influence consuming such products has on human health because they are afraid of social unrest. He reminded us of how politicians in the West murk the waters of environmental change with debating research about climate change. First of all, that casts doubt on whether global warming is happening at all; and secondly, it distills

the whole problem down to one issue: so-called “climate change.” Actually, our environmental impact is manifold, and we are damaging many ecologies in many different ways. So, whether or not global warming is real, the fact that human industry is destroying the earth in terrible ways that will eventually impact our quality of life, if not our very survival, is so obvious.

We guess that what Mr. Xie was implying as the first thing we can do is actively pursue governmental change in various ways: voting for politicians who care about environmental issues, writing the government, speaking one’s mind and/or influencing policy in whatever ways are open to you in the place where you live. Also, Mr. Xie told us that it is important to stay positive and not get discouraged!



茶 There was a vibrant ecology at Mr. Xie’s farm. We saw worms in the soil, bumblebees and wasps, various beetles and all sorts of other insects. Mr. Xie said there are also predatory insects like praying mantises, as well as frogs and the occasional snake or lizard. The caterpillar above and directly left, makes a cocoon that is made of sticks and leaves to camouflage itself as it gestates. Almost all the leaves have bug bites, which Mr. Xie says lends his tea a fruity, honey fragrance. Traditional tea-processing methods were designed to work with bug-bitten leaves. In fact, oolong processing evolved out of leaves that had begun to oxidize, as they were halfway or fully open and therefore exposed to insects longer. Green, white and yellow teas traditionally used fresh and nascent buds, and therefore avoided this. Since oolong was a processing method that evolved to suit varietals that have richer bud sets when half- or fully-opened, and, of course, bug-bitten, these insects also played a role in the development of oolong tea. The best teas are always made from the cooperation of Heaven, Earth and Human—every tea farmer repeats that.



Mr. Xie said that the more obvious way of making large-scale and meaningful impact is happening right now. He smiled and said: “You are already doing it! This is why I support you as much as you support me!” We were blown away by this, but confused. He explained, “It is great to respect farmers, and create programs to do so. It is also wonderful if the government takes action against agrochemicals, perhaps fining farmers who use or abuse them, or maybe incentivizing natural farming in various ways; all that is great, but we shouldn’t count on that. There is an easier and faster way to change. Don’t worry about the farmers or the government—educate the market! The market is where real change can happen. And you are already doing that.

Do it louder and more often!” Mr. Xie said that the world works on supply and demand. We vote with our dollars. When people start demanding organic tea, and stop supporting farmers that use agrochemicals, farmers will change, and quickly. “They will have to in order to make a living. Farmers are resilient. They will put in the work and make the change when the market demands it.”

Mr. Xie paused for a few cups of tea and told us that the more educated the consumer is about the effects agrochemicals have on the environment, locally and in general, as well as their influence on farmers’ lives and health and, of course, their own bodies, the more they will make the obvious choice. The more people who

make that choice, and do so loudly, the more the market will shift in that direction. As demand shifts that way, so will supply. “Magazines and other forms of positive media like you are the solution, not farmers like me,” he said with gratitude. “You take my tea and my voice and amplify it. Through you, more people can realize that their choices impact the lives of others, sometimes even far away.”

We were deeply humbled by Mr. Xie’s words and spent a few cups absorbing them. What he said made us feel both inspired and empowered, but also, we felt the weight of a great responsibility. It was actually at this very moment that I made the decision to shift this year’s Extended Edition from a topic I had previously chosen to the



one you now hold, feeling like Mr. Xie had deputized us to speak on behalf of the insects, birds and water; to speak on behalf of the people among those the World Health Organization says that “worldwide, an estimated three million cases of pesticide poisoning occur every year, resulting in an excess of 250,000 deaths.” In turn, we pass the baton on to you now. The interview, Mr. Xie agreed, should turn in your direction now.

If tea is to be a peaceful activity, to encourage harmony with self, others and Nature, the instrument of that practice cannot be made in a way that is violent to Nature. Even if you connected to Nature through such tea, what would the message be? Help? What is a tolerable level of poison in

your loved one’s food? Can you sit at peace in a beautiful tearoom with nice teaware when pesticides are causing a quarter of a million deaths a year? If Nature and human life is lost in the pursuit of tea, is it a peaceful pastime anymore? Aren’t our pieces of teaware then weapons? Hasn’t our love of tea turned sour if it impacts the earth or our fellow man in a negative way? And most important of all, how do you love a leaf without loving the forest? How do love the forest without loving the Earth?



茶 As the rains approaches, there is a strong sensation of shifting weather and a growing sense of being a part of the environment. You can breathe and feel how the sun, sky, weather, soil, animals, insects, tea and humans all share this inter-connected world. The rain will soon be part of the tea, which will soon be part of us. This sensation begs us to be responsible and upright in our choices. We must work to create a world we are proud of, where we can hold our heads up high and walk in dignity, a world where our descendants look back on us with honor for what we have left them. We are the beginning of a new future! Be the change you want to see in the world!

SLOW IS THE WAY

AN INTERVIEW WITH GAO DINGSHI

慢工出細活



Gao Dingshi (高定石) is a hero in Taiwan. After his father passed away as a result of pesticide poisoning, he became one of the world's greatest advocates for clean, pure tea—taking “organic” beyond the confines of the usual definition, allowing his gardens to grow wild and untouched by human intervention. His tea and way of life are incredibly inspiring. In this rare interview, Ci Ting (Steve Kokker) allows us a window to look into the life of one of the greatest living tea masters, inspiring us all to be more of an instrument of guardianship.



茶人: Ci Ting (慈聽)

A curious thing happened as I sat in front of my computer, preparing notes for this article and transcribing my recent interview with Gao Dingshi. In order to be as deeply inspired as possible, I had prepared myself some of his tea. (Yes, I'm lucky enough to have the remnants of four bags of his teas.) These are some of Taiwan's hardest to access teas, and I shook my head slightly in disbelief at my lucky life circumstances, which found me with a selection to choose from. They are incredibly rare in a myriad of ways: only a few dozen kilos are produced per year; they are out of almost anyone's price range; they are not on sale anywhere other than through Master Dingshi himself and now they are often bought up by affluent Chinese mainlanders. They are also among the most “living” of all the living teas I have ever experienced.

Yet, as I gently reached into a bag of Hong Mei (紅玫), his red tea, and pulled out the fine strands of robust yet delicately, almost aesthetically twisted leaves, I reminded myself that they are also rare for the integrity that stands behind them. A firm yet effortless (effortless, that is, after many years of hard work and endurance) integrity with regards to the environment, ecology and to that vast space where the very edges of the Self brush up against the borders of the Infinite; the integrity which comes with a firm resolve to orient the self towards mastery: This is, perhaps, what Cha Dao is about.

Curious, however, was what happened to me while drinking the tea. Something which has occurred but three or four times while drinking tea. At some point after an hour of drinking, my body started to spontaneously move rhythmically, seemingly of its own accord. At first, some gentle undulations of the hips began, as if I were trying to draw circles on my chair with my sit bones. They began before I became conscious of them, still concentrating on transcribing the interview. And as I was alone with no need to control motions that would be deemed odd by onlookers (even the super chill and open-minded tribe I hang out with), I gently kept this observing self in the background and let the body do what it seemed to “want” to do on its own.

As soon as I allowed the process to continue, the movements started getting wider and wider until my torso and neck were also involved in a snake-like stretch-dance which felt marvelous, releasing stiff holding positions I had kept myself in while sitting, all the while remaining seated. It felt like there was a life force moving through me that was temporarily stronger than any willful restrictions my mind could impose on it, and it was bringing me to a place of balance and harmony, allowing the body to do what it felt most right doing.

Such is the power of the purest of teas—the tea plant in its most unbridled, direct connection to Great Na-

ture, or so it felt. This is the wisdom of plant teachers, and in all the thousands of cups I have been honored enough to experience, this sort of overwhelming (inter)connection has happened but a few times.

This article is about the man who nurtures this kind of powerful tea, a man who lives the tea life in a full and beautiful way. It's about a man I am happy to call a role model and friend of mine.

It is also not an exaggeration to call him Taiwan's most famous tea farmer, and he has recently also become among Mainland China's most recognized Chajin. He first coined the term “wild tea (*ye cha*, 野茶)” in 1992 to describe the kind of tea he wanted to produce; beyond just organic, beyond clean and pesticide-free, but truly wild, untouched. At the time, and even to some degree today, this concept was odd, strange, and at best, most certainly impractical.

Now, he has become a sort of ambassador for wild tea. He is invited to give lectures, workshops and trainings in China, and he has students both there and in Taiwan. He trains farmers in the difficult adaptation towards an approach of letting go, and trusting Nature—as well as tips at how to handle the inevitable meager, difficult years of transition where yearly output might dramatically drop. For Gao Dingshi, this meant a decade of struggle and near bankruptcy. Strength is forged in adversity, though.



This kind of eco-tea might represent something less than 1% of Taiwan's total output at the moment, but interest in it from consumers, and therefore producers alike, is growing year by year.

Gao Dingshi is not just well known in the tea community. Thanks to television interviews and articles in online magazines, he is a distinctive figure to mainstream tea lovers as well. An interview with him published on *Chayu*, China's largest online tea-related site, has attracted 1.5 million readers, massive even by China's standards, to become the site's most-viewed article. It has been reprinted in other mainstream Chinese sites as well. In it, he speaks of his life and dedication to Nature and natural living, of bugs and worms and topsoil, of his quiet and clean life of the last few years. That this

topic has touched a heart (or nerve) in even mainstream China speaks volumes about what they feel they have lost, yearning for something purer.

We Meet in Taipei

For our interview, we meet at Wistaria, Taipei's premier tea salon, and likely the only place where people with no personal connection to Master Dingshi can enjoy his tea (there are two to choose from on their regular menu). We sit in a sectioned-off room, after sharing some time with the salon's owner who rather casually invited us to join in sampling a *Tong Qing Hao* puerh from the 1930s. (I know! That was exactly my reaction.)

The previous time we met, a year earlier, we met at his home, the place

of his birth, and where he cares for his tea gardens and hand processes their leaves, some 30km away in the Shi Ding Mountains (石碇山). It was from this house that the young Gao used to walk through forest trails (there were no paved roads at that time) two hours to school every morning, and two hours back in the afternoon. In the winter, he had to light his way home with fire on the end of a stick. These walks gave him much time to become deeply enchanted with Nature, to have conversations with snakes and birds and bees, and to feel that the forest was his protector, his friend, his home.

Though Dingshi has an apartment in Taipei where his wife and children live, he spends most of his time in Shi Ding. He cares not only for his family's ancestral tea gardens (his predecessors were from Anxi, Fujian, and moved to



Taiwan around 1800, setting up small tea gardens with seeds and saplings they brought with them), but also for his aging mother and disabled brother who live there. On the top floor of the simple concrete structure, he is halfway through building a Zen temple-like space to enjoy tea in while looking out at the lush mountain range in which he is nestled.

Dingshi wears only natural fabrics. When he moves, actions happen with a certain grace of being that is at once humble and quiet, yet proud—like watching meditation in motion. Despite a gentleness of being, he is also a man of action, and a laugh is never far away. He does not take life too seriously (always a good sign). He's been vegetarian for a few years, and tries to be as conscious as he can in everything he does.

That top floor of his house is also his sanctuary, where he chants Tibetan mantras (usually the Heart Sutra) almost every morning as part of a practice he has dedicated himself to more and more in the last several years. It is where he refines his tea preparation skills. His close friend, Lin Pinghui, founder of the paradisiacal Zen-styled restaurant Shi Yang Shan Fang (食養山房), has been helping him build this space.

The Four Principles

Dingshi lives by four principles: *Qing, Jing, Ding* and *Man* (清, 靜, 定 & 慢: roughly, “Clean, Quiet, Still and Slow”). He tries to infuse every action in his life with these four qualities, and uses them as guiding principles.

“These words to me reflect a move to balance my emotions,” he says, “and to balance my body with a more spiritual aspect of being.” Although he's a practical and organized person, those near him do tease him for his slow-paced approach and for how long it takes him to do what others get done more quickly. He simply prefers to allow actions to unfold at a pace natural and respectful to them. “When I slow down my pace in making tea, for example, every step I take offers a space to open up a dialogue with Tea. In my life, this pace opens up a dialogue with life itself. But yes,” he laughs, “I can be a bit too slow sometimes for others' liking!” He wasn't always like this.

“Have I changed?” He asks me this each time we have met in the last three or four years, slightly anxious to hear the reply.

While I tend to notice and savor the changes and developments in people over time, I also see the continuing evolution of a being as one naturally flowing gesture, no part in particular vastly different or disconnected from another. Many times, then, I don't register such changes as surprising. Despite that, in Dingshi's case, the changes are remarkable. I recall that when we first met on a stormy afternoon in his mountain tea sanctuary in 2011, he was slightly fidgety, skittish, not easily sitting still. He made tea with the reverence and heart of someone handling his young baby, but not with the particular elegance or focus of someone who studies tea as a Dao. The inner seas of silence and calm were evident in his eyes, but they had not yet spilled fully out onto the canvas of his everyday life. Every photo I took of him was slightly blurry as he would rarely hold himself still.

"Even tea was at some point something more superficial for me, even ten years ago, more a way of life which has

supported my family for generations, something even commercial. But over the last decade I have let tea deeper into my heart and soul, and wish only to give thanks to Nature for this gift-giving and deeply spiritual teacher. My approach to life has gelled slowly over the years, and I've been lucky to be able to allow it to do so."

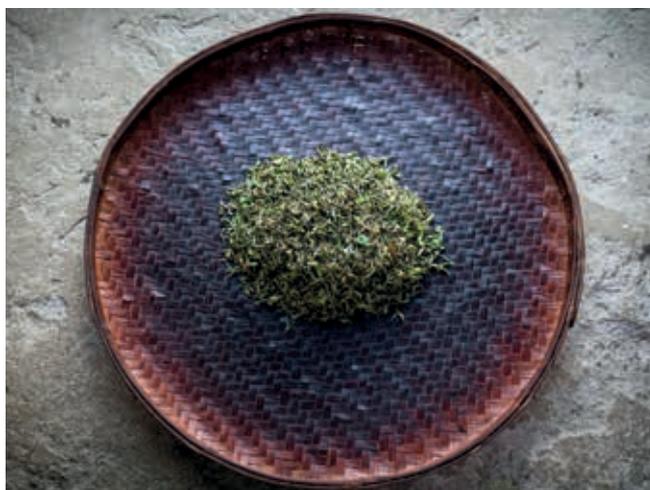
His friend Pinghui introduced him to some Buddhist teachings and mantras at the right time. They grew on him slowly. "I went to some meetings, listened, but it was a very slow process. I never joined any association, just educated myself bit by bit. And after years of incorporating this way of life and thinking of my four guiding words, I forged this way of life. I had some guidance, but mostly I tried to follow the signs of life and recognize the need to change myself."

The signs were not always easy going. A turning point came one spring right before harvest when his sister decided to go abroad for work. She had been his one and only help to pick his

tea leaves (he employs no one, not even to pick the leaves, preferring to keep this process an intimate family affair; either he or another family member picks leaves). He found himself completely alone, with his mom almost dying and needing hospital treatment twice a week, with two young children, and his brothers needing constant attention. While difficult to navigate this period, it pushed him to change his orientation to life. He had always been self-reliant, but here he realized with no further doubt that there is no relying on anyone else. The keys to self-mastery lay in his hands alone.

"I never thought I'd be a meditator or a vegetarian," he smiles. "And now I begin most mornings chanting along with the Heart Sutra. At first, I was overly enthusiastic and played it very loudly; now I play it as softly as I can. While I pluck tea leaves, I also hum chants. This helps me to keep focused."

His very name, "Dingshi (定石)," means something like "solid rock" or "settled rock." Gao is solid rock



on high. Over these last few years, through diligent work, perseverance, practice and patience, he has stepped into his own name, his own destiny. He lives out the prophecy of his own name. When I suggest this thought, he just says humbly, “Whatever I have received from my parents is natural and good.”

Wild Tea Is Born

Despite the impact on his life from the huge responsibility he has assumed in taking care of family members, the single biggest life event which marked him and changed the course of his life and approach to tea forever was the illness and then death of his father. Dingshi was twenty-six then. His father contracted cancer from exposure to the chemicals and pesticides he had been using all his life on his tea fields.

In his father’s generation, the idea of having a tea business without agrochemicals was unheard of—a crazy

thought and certainly a death wish for your business. Even now, the majority of farmers still use chemicals to ensure steady, voluminous production. The young Dingshi had tried to convince his father to stop using pesticides through his years of declining health, but to no avail. Watching all this, and seeing the impact of toxic chemicals on health, as well as their destruction of the environment, all strengthened his growing resolve to do things differently.

He announced that he would stop using chemicals, and grow “wild tea.” He would try a different business model: instead of producing high volume which would be cheaply sold, he would live more humbly with producing less but at a higher cost. This was 1992. He became the object of ridicule in his family and in his community.

For many years, it seemed that his detractors were correct. He lost most of his harvests in the early years to pests during the slow healing and conversion of the garden from chem-

ical-laden to pure. At one point, he needed to sell his father’s homes just to stay afloat and keep his vision alive. Many a time, he felt alone and struggled with self-doubt, but an inner fire fueling a certainty that he was doing what was needed kept him going.

“It took me a long time to get this structure into place, to get my finances in order. Only then was I able to also build myself more solidly as a person in terms of my philosophy and lifestyle, in a way to attain a balance.”

While you are invited to read the interview I did previously with Gao Dingshi (which appeared in the September 2016 issue of Global Tea Hut), where I delve more into his philosophy and farming methods, a brief recap is in order. What then is “wild tea?” Wild tea is seed-propagated, living tea, cultivated with as little human intervention as possible, leaving the trees to themselves. Ideally, wild tea also refers to the fact that some or most of the trees propagated themselves naturally, as opposed to being planted.



茶 We spent a full day with Master Gao, from the wild garden to his simple home, watching him process and prepare tea for us as we waited for the leaves to wither. It really took the whole day, with the final steps done as the sun was setting. In all that he does, from harvest to roast, and from leaf to teapot, he moves slowly, deliberately and with a grace that transcends the ordinary. His tea reflects this. It is lush and vibrant, with a fragrance that lasts well beyond the table.

“Basically, if the weeds in the garden are not higher than the tea tree itself, I ignore them,” he says. “As long as a weed is not starving a tree of all nutrition, I leave it alone. These different plants and ferns and moss all live in symbiosis. And if bugs and animals and insects wish to live in the trees, I welcome them! Please, come live here!”

During a recent trip with Master Dingshi through the dense canopies of tea, pine, fern, wild azalea, wild peony and acacia trees which inhabit his jungle-like garden, he points up to a bee’s nest, and down to where snakes and bugs and worms crawl, and then towards the undersides of leaves where bugs of various colors live as unhurriedly as Dingshi himself. He is genuinely delighted when he sees other living creatures among the tea trees.

“Enjoy life! And more important than anything else which helps you to enjoy life is the temperature of your heart!”

All the tea he makes is processed completely by hand. All the leaves are sun-dried only, then charcoal-baked, some up to six times. He goes out to the gardens every day, to just be with the trees; in this sense, it’s somewhat of an oversimplification to say that he “just” does nothing to his trees. The depth of nurturing and care he shows them with looks much like a form of silent, direct communication from the side. Gao Dingshi has a deeply intimate connection with his tea.

Inner Transformation Transforms the Tea

And in their steeping, too, this intimacy continues. Watching him prepare his own tea is like watching a sensual dance. Rarely has tea preparation looked so beautiful and refined, the body angles during pouring oh-so-symmetrical. His style looks well practiced, yet not florid nor showy, no move extraneous. He uses his own porcelain set, uses a fairness cup, and has a habit of pouring a small amount

of each steeping together so that his guest’s final cup is this mix of all the steepings together. Little remains of the former serving style of the farmer with beautiful, calloused hands, hunched shoulders and an even sweetly casual, lightly awkward approach who first served me tea seven years ago—only the gentle fire behind the eyes.

“You have transformed yourself inwardly and outwardly so thoroughly in the last years,” I offer. “Do you feel that this has affected your tea at all?”

He takes a moment to reflect, while pouring hot (not boiling) spring water over his Baozhong leaves for perhaps their ninth steep. He smiles and tilts his head. Bites his lip too. It’s a habit he has when feeling suddenly self-conscious, upon hearing a compliment or receiving sudden attention. An endearing moment floats in the air. “I feel...” he begins, “that the tea has more tranquility in it. There’s more balance and harmony in it.” He speaks of his tea as of himself. For the two, in essence, are one. “I changed myself, and then the tea changed from that, it always starts with the self.”

He adds that with each passing season that the land has had to bask in its fully natural state, the more “natural” the tea tastes and feels. “And I change all the time too. I cannot stay in the same place. Actually, I need to catch up to my tea. I see and taste that the tea trees are improving year after year, and so I know I must match this improvement. Tea whispers to me: ‘I am improving; I’m healing; come on, you too must.’ The tea offers me a gentle reminder to always become a better person.”

One outlet Dingshi has found for this process is becoming a teacher. He teaches tea processing in a trade school in Taipei, instructs farmers in both China and Taiwan on how to convert their fields and business to organic or totally wild gardens, and hosts some workshops in China.

Though not old, he is already thinking of the future beyond himself, especially as his own children are not so interested so far in the tea life, being more city-oriented. He tried to straddle both worlds, living in the city and returning to the mountains for tea. “But I cannot make the same tea if I am living in the city. The city life has never called me.”

“When my children were young, they’d play around with tea leaves in their cups, and I used to be so strict, so serious. I’d stop them and scold them. Only later I remembered that I too as a child, of course, played around with tea leaves with my grandfather, and that he never scolded me for it; he just let me discover my own pleasure in them. Now my kids are grown up, and I hope I didn’t stifle their interest in tea by stopping them from being natural with their tea. Perhaps in the future they will come into some understanding or interest in tea themselves, at their own pace, if it happens at all.”

Any advice for a younger person seeking balance?

“Become excellent in whatever you do. Just focus on what you do, become excellent in it and then see how the rest of life falls in line with this. Whatever level you are at now in any field is okay; just keep at it and make progress on your own pace. Make whatever you do your Dao.”

He also emphasizes that above all it is important to understand that things take the time they need. There is no use to force or insist—the self or others. Yet it is important to keep making slight adjustments for the better all the time.

As we get ready to leave after our six heavenly hours at Wistaria, we stretch, laugh, slightly tea drunk and filled with Nature-goodness. I ask if there is anything else he would like to tell people. His eyes light up yet again. A flash of that smile. “Enjoy life! And more important than anything else which helps you to enjoy life is the temperature of your heart!”



茶 The human, also, is natural—as natural as any other creature. We can live in harmony with our ecology. Such harmony is part of our make-up.



DISCUSSIONS OF PURE TEA

FOUR EXPERT VIEWS ON ORGANICS & CLEAN TEA

We asked four of Master Tsai's students—two Mainland Chinese and two Taiwanese tea experts—for their opinions on organics and clean tea: Li Xingyao (李星瑤), Snow Yang (楊雪花), Chen Yuting (陳鬱婷) and Luo Huaikang (羅懷慷) all share their experience in the tea world, the negative effects of so-called “conventional farming” and solutions towards a better and brighter future for tea farmers and the tea lovers who drink their products.

FOR A CUP OF CLEAN TEA

茶人: *Li Xingyao (李星瑤), Yunnan*

Chasing profit and neglecting to take care of the tea itself is extremely dangerous for the long-term development of the tea industry. Growing up on a tea mountain, I have personally experienced every change the land has been through. As I write this article, my heart is heavy, because I know better than anyone the problems that the tea mountains we rely upon for survival are now facing. Yunnan has suffered heavy droughts for many years, and at present there still hasn't been any real relief.

Once, the area surrounding Qianjia Village (千家寨, “Thousand Families”) was covered, from the foot of the mountain to halfway up its slopes, with distinctive terraced fields belonging to

the Yi and Hani peoples. Every family drank fresh water drawn directly from the mountain streams, and the forests flourished with lush green vegetation. This idyllic picture of life has already long since ceased to exist. The way of life that people had established deep in the mountains at Mount Ailao, where humans existed in harmony with Nature, was already destroyed long ago by the utilitarianism of the outside world.

Because Qianjia Village is situated in a high, cold mountainous region, the rice crops that grew there produced a meager harvest and weren't very good to eat, and therefore weren't economically efficient. Many of the rice paddies were consequently replaced with other crops like corn, flue-cured tobacco and walnuts. In the past, whenever it

rained, the rice terraces acted as vessels to contain the water all year long; they were of great importance in conserving the mountains' water supply. These days, however, even the smallest bit of rain flows away down the rivers, carrying the mountain's earth and stones with it as it goes.

On one hand, I've noticed that since the “farmland reforestation” policy was put in place many years ago, the mountains are indeed greener than before, and it's now rare to see the yellow soil exposed by deforestation for new farmland. But on the other hand, many of the trees that have been planted are actually fast-growing timber varieties such as pine and eucalyptus. In this type of forest, which lacks other species of tree,



the sun shines directly down onto the yellow soil and causes the moisture in the forest to evaporate quickly, making this type of forest very ineffective for retaining water or fixing the soil. The residents of the mountain still don't have a sufficient supply of water, even though there are forests everywhere. In order to preserve a water source, a forest needs symbiosis between many different species of plant. Only the combined presence of trees, bushes and herbaceous plants is enough to decrease surface runoff and prevent the layer of decaying plant material that has accumulated over many years from being washed away.

When the surrounding environment is damaged, the old-growth tea trees and terrace tea plants cannot help but be influenced. For thousands of years, our ancestors planted their tea around their houses, intermingled with fruit trees; on the ground below, they planted crops such as soybeans or corn. In this way, the tea trees formed part of a natural ecosystem with the other trees, bushes and grains. But in more recent times, people began to

place more and more value on tea as a cash crop, so terrace tea plantations emerged as a way to increase output and manage production more easily. Entire forests were hewed down and replaced with a single variety of tree. Add to this the abuse of herbicides and chemical fertilizers, and over time, "terrace tea" became synonymous with "poor quality." The direction the tea industry was developing in was clearly at odds with the market demand for a "good, clean cup of tea." Fortunately, some tea growers, merchants and enthusiasts, through their own motivation or prompted by others, have started to do the work of preserving the tea mountains.

The approach of single-mindedly pursuing output volume is on its way out, and admiration for old-growth tea plantations, with their complete ecosystems, is growing. Because of this, many terrace tea plantations are being transformed according to various criteria to make them eco-friendlier. Many of the terrace plantations at Qianjia Village are regaining their biodiversity through measures

such as extensive planting of shade trees, lower-density tea planting and forest-floor crop cultivation. Ecologically diverse tea plantations help preserve water resources, maintain soil fertility and reduce disease and pest damage. I have faith that the better the environment our tea trees have to grow in, the more abundant a return they will be able to give back to humankind.

In my fourth year on my journey of tea practice, you could say I grew up alongside the tea leaves of Qianjia Village. Together, we experienced the good and the bad along the road to maturity. It's very fortunate that I chose to return to the place of origin of Tea; I have been able to listen carefully to information from many people, from many perspectives and on many levels, and to absorb from this all the "nutrients" I need to grow. I hope that I can share these nutrients with the tea trees of Qianjia Village, so that every cup we receive is a cup of clean tea!



茶 Qianjia Village (千家寨) is gorgeous, with lush green mountains, waterfalls and old-growth tea forests, with many ancient trees like the one shown above. We must make efforts to protect this gorgeous landscape for future generations of tea lovers. Above, the author poses with Auntie Ai, a true environmental guardian, creating some of the purest puerh tea we have ever tried. Our visits to her home and mountain have always been deeply inspirational, leaving us with a hope for a better future where people and Nature live in balance, and every cup or bowl of tea is a clean, healthy one!

SPRING BUDS OVERSLEEP

茶人: Snow Yang (楊雪花), Yunnan



On the tea mountains of Yunnan, March and April are an important time of year for harvesting and processing. Within less than two months, the highest-quality spring puerh will set out from Yunnan and make its way all over China and to many other corners of the world. As most puerh tea enthusiasts probably know, there are two general categories of puerh: “raw” *sheng* (生) puerh; and “cooked” or “ripe” *shou* (熟) puerh. Put simply, shou puerh leaf undergoes fermentation in piles, while sheng puerh is not artificially fermented, but rather naturally over time. In terms of color, dry sheng puerh leaf tends to be a dark green or greenish-black, and its liquor is a clear, delicate yellow. Shou puerh leaf is reddish-brown with a clear, rich red liquor. I particularly love sheng puerh, especially if it comes from old trees growing in a healthy ecosystem. Due to environmental degradation, in recent years more and more people have begun seeking out old-growth tea. Many puerh drinkers love old-growth sheng puerh.

As one of the world’s major tea-producing regions, Yunnan is abundant in old-growth tea trees and has more tea trees aged over a hundred years than anywhere else in China. Despite this, old-growth tea only makes up a very small portion of the tea market as a whole. Tea vendors are wont to use phrases such as “hundred-year-old trees,” “thousand-year-old king of tea trees” and the like; in reality, many of these are simply fake—the puerh tea market is vast, and real old-growth tea makes up less than 10% of annual production. The commonly encountered genuine old-growth puerh teas on today’s market come from trees that are between one hundred and three to four hundred years old, with the majority around two hundred years old. Anything older than that is not readily available on the market; it is most likely to be made into very expensive single-tree tea, or else kept as a treasure in

the private collection of the tea maker and only shared with a lucky few. (There are exceptions, of course.)

When I returned to Kunming for the Spring Festival, I began preparing myself to head up the mountain for the tea processing season. I went to bed early and got up early, ran and exercised to improve my strength and stamina; all of these were important tasks to maintain an optimal physical condition. I took out several old-growth teas that I’d tried in the last year, which had been grown in good ecological conditions, and tasted them again one by one, comparing the tea liquor in terms of aroma, flavor, density, sweet aftertaste and the effect it had on saliva production. I also compared the color, luster and pliability of the brewed leaves. From these features I determined which teas were superior, in order to re-confirm which teas from which specific mountains I’d want to buy this year.

In Yunnan’s tea regions, the old-growth tea from each mountain and each village has its own unique charm. To an extent, perhaps this is exactly where the charm of puerh lies! Many well-known teas are named after the places they come from, including Banzhang (班章), Yiwu (易武), Jingmai (景邁), Bingdao (冰島) and Xigui (昔歸). The puerh teas produced in these places each have their own distinct characteristics: a certain tea might be particularly rich and robust, or go down very smoothly, or have a sweet mellow liquor or an outstanding fragrance.

This year, right at the beginning of March, I got a phone call from some tea friends in Beijing to arrange a time for us to meet at the tea mountain. Based on previous years’ experience, we decided on late March through to early April. These friends are a tea-loving Beijing couple by the name of Xing whom I met quite by chance up in the tea mountains last year. Beijing’s air quality has been worsening

in recent years—even the ability to breathe freely outdoors has become a luxury, which is probably why they fell in love with Yunnan and its puerh tea. We’d really only spent a little time drinking tea together, given that Beijing and Kunming are some 2000 kilometers apart, but they would come and drink tea with me every time they visited Kunming, and I was very happy to share the old-growth forest tea I had made with them. For digestive reasons, they only drank red tea and shou puerh. I’m completely the opposite: I seldom drink shou puerh. Living in the birthplace of puerh, I am very aware that truly great shou puerh teas are few and far between; my main criterion for choosing a tea is the quality of the environment it was grown in. So I did my best to steer them towards old-growth sheng puerh. A clean sheng puerh grown in a good natural environment will bring the drinker a feeling of good cheer and physical comfort, and isn’t liable to irritate the digestive system. It seems they trusted me, because they tried my old-growth sheng puerh and were surprised to discover that it left a very pleasant feeling in their mouths, and their stomachs weren’t irritated at all, but felt quite warm instead. This experience changed their understanding of sheng puerh, and they became very interested in my forested tea mountain.

It’s a pity that none of us could have predicted the old-growth spring tea shoots would be so late this year—from the state of the shoots, it looked like the harvesting season for my Mount Wuliang high mountain old-growth tea wouldn’t arrive for another half month. By the time their vacation was coming to an end, the old-growth trees had only put forth little pointed shoots one or two centimeters long, so all the Xings could do was pack up their disappointment and obediently head back home to their jobs. It was really sad to see them go, but such is life. They’ll be more tea later.

Come March, the old-growth tea in Xishuangbanna is always harvested the earliest, and the tea in other regions, like Lincang and Puerh, is usually ready about a week later; the wait in between goes by very slowly. On April 7th, I got a phone call from one of the tea growers up on the mountain to tell me that the old-growth tea shoots were coming along very well and would be ready to harvest in two or three days. It felt like every cell in my body had suddenly been activated. I jumped on a bus first thing the next morning, and after a winding journey of eight hours, I arrived at Wenlong Village in the Puerh City District. Far off in the distance, I could see the tea farmer with his motorbike parked at the entrance to the bus station, waiting for me. His home is in Bangwai Village (邦崴), which would be a forty-minute ride on a motorbike.

“What do we mean by ecological? In terms of tea plants, it means the tea grows in natural soil, in a natural environment, and according to its natural process, without too much human interference and without the use of any chemical fertilizers, pesticides or growth regulators. This also means respecting and adapting to Nature’s changes, and bringing out the innate power of the soil.”

To tell the truth, I was a little apprehensive; it was the first time I had collaborated with this tea farmer, and I was arriving by myself. Since there weren’t any guesthouses in the area, I would have to stay at his family’s house, and none of us knew each other very well. I’m not really sure where I got the courage to come here: I had drunk the tea the family made, and the quality and growing environment were both pretty good; I’d looked at photos of the tea trees and the mountain, and decided to come.

The Bangwai township is composed of twelve small villages, with a population of about 300. Here, every household has a mountain, and every family grows tea. Walnuts and tea are the main sources of income in the area; on average, each family makes about 40,000 to 60,000 yuan per year from walnuts and 10,000 to 20,000 from tea. Apart from their own tea moun-

tains, the local families are often contracted to tend several old-growth tea mountains in the village area with very good ecological conditions, so this allows them to make some extra income. The tea grower and his family have a tea plantation of about three or four thousand square meters on the outskirts of the village, where tea and walnut trees grow mingled together. The branches, leaves and roots of walnut trees secrete a kind of chemical called “juglone” which is poisonous to all the other trees, bushes and herbaceous plants that grow around it. The bigger the walnut tree, the more it secretes. The tea that grows in this environment is worth less the older the trees get and is not at all what I wanted. The tea farmer told me, “Don’t worry, I know what you’re looking for. I’ve put aside that stretch of tea on the Mount Wuliang Nature Reserve for you,” he said.

“The environment over there is great.” We set out first thing the next morning to look at the tea mountain. The going wasn’t easy—after riding the motorbike for a while we had to get off and continue on foot. As we entered the forest, our eyes were met on all sides by jade-green trees. We had to watch our feet on the steep mountain path; in some places it was only wide enough for one person, and we had to turn sideways to pass through.

The tea trees grew on a slope halfway up the mountain, surrounded by forest; it looked to be at least three or four thousand square meters in area. In the distance, I could see a light-green tree with a thick, sturdy trunk, full of life and surrounded by lots of naturally growing weeds and ferns. I sniffed gently, smelling the scent of grass and earth in the air. At that moment, the cells in my body were already telling me that they liked this environment.

Out of habit, I picked a couple of fresh tea buds and chewed them. The flavor was fresh and clean, quickly making my mouth water and leaving a sweet aftertaste. Based on all the tea samples I had tried before, I was full of hope and confidence that we could make a good batch of tea from these leaves.

The character of a tea comes from the care that goes into every step of making it. Much of the good-quality leaf grows deep in the mountains, in hard-to-reach places. After the fresh leaves are harvested, they are often left sitting at the garden for long enough that they are already oxidizing and turning red by the time they are transported out. The tea farmers I was working with have a big, united extended family; no sooner had we finished our morning of observing the tea mountain than all the relatives arrived at midday to help with the harvesting. They all went by the picking standard of “one bud, two leaves” or “one bud, three leaves,” each one was a seasoned picker. Their hands flew up and down, and in less than an hour they had already harvested two big bags of tea. Without delay, the tea farmer and his family took the tea back home. They were fast walkers; a journey that would take me an hour on foot only took them half an hour, and they made several trips back and forth.

I was in charge of separating the leaves and spreading them out to air dry. After that came the kill-green stage, which uses high temperatures to deactivate the oxidizing enzymes in the leaf, as well as to evaporate some of the moisture and soften the leaves, preparing them for rolling and shaping. At present, many tea regions and mass-production tea factories have begun using kill-green machines with revolving cylinders. Naturally, I like the traditional kill-green method, which is done using a large iron wok. You heat the wok over a wood stove, and when it’s hot enough you pour in the fresh tea leaves. Because the buds and leaves are big and plump, they have a high water content, so it’s important to shake the leaves around to distribute the moisture, heat them thoroughly and evenly, and avoid scorching any leaves. This is easier said than done, and requires a lot of skill to do well. When the leaves no longer smell grassy, the kill-green is complete.

I always thought of kill-green as a technical task, but after having tackled it myself, I realized that it is more a matter of physical strength. I was originally planning not to take on the challenge of kill-green, partly because I thought that such specialized tasks were best left to the professionals, and partly because it involves very high temperatures, and I didn't want to end up serving tea to my guests with a pair of scalded hands. However, my specialty is knowing exactly how much kill-green will give the best result, how long is long enough for air-drying, how much rolling is optimal for the leaf. So when the tea farmer had burned three pans of leaf in a row, yet the tea stems still weren't done, and no matter how many reminders I gave him from the sidelines he still hurriedly flung the leaves around in the way he was used to... well, at that point, I had no choice but to join in myself—we couldn't waste such good tea leaf like this. The pan was extremely hot, and every so often my gloves would fill up with steam. I let my palms gradually get used to the temperature and tried my best not to touch the bottom of the pan. Slowly, I found my own rhythm. When we took the leaf out of the pan, it had some little burnt spots, but it was much better than the first three batches. From the second panful, things began to go more smoothly. The tea farmer was very surprised: was this really my first time doing kill-green? I remember my teacher, Master Tsai, repeatedly practicing this process; it seems it infused itself into my thoughts and feelings in a way that routine tasks do not. It must be said that from an objective point of view, my tea-firing technique was not particularly good and couldn't compare to that of a seasoned tea maker, but it was our best option given the circumstances. The volume of finished tea was less than half of what we had expected, only around thirty-five kilograms. Looking at this sheng puerh *maocha* that I had pan-fired myself, I gained a new appreciation of the difficulty of tea making.

Many people who go to the tea mountains to buy tea have no idea how to distinguish its quality; they really just go so that they can tell other people: "I went to the tea mountains." Making good tea takes more than just showing up at the mountain or pick-

ing leaves from the old-growth trees; it's not as simple as that. The important factors that determine the quality of the tea are the ecological conditions, the processing technique and the age of the tea trees.

So, what do we mean by ecological? In terms of tea plants, it means the tea grows in natural soil, in a natural environment, and according to its natural process, without too much human interference and without the use of any chemical fertilizers, pesticides or growth regulators. This also means respecting and adapt-

ing to Nature's changes, and bringing out the innate power of the soil. During these few years that I have spent on the tea mountains, I have become deeply aware of the true rarity of clean, flavorful old-growth tea. For this experience, my heart is filled with gratitude.



茶 *Snow in the forests of Yunnan.*



ORGANIC & ECOLOGICAL TEA

茶人: *Chen Yuting (陳鬱婷), Taiwan*

I come from a small village. Most of my friends and neighbors from the village grow fruit and vegetables for a living. In my earlier years I used to help them spray pesticide on their vegetable gardens, never once thinking there was anything wrong with it. Although everyone knew pesticides were toxic and was unclear about the harmful effects of weed killers, consumers were used to choosing the best-looking fruit and vegetables when they did their grocery shopping. If everyone stopped using pesticides, then the fruit and vegetables would all become pitted and lumpy and very ugly indeed; then there would be no chance of anyone choosing them and they would be impossible to sell. So each farming household simply kept aside a small plot of produce for their own family to eat, and didn't use pesticides on it; for any produce they were going to sell and not eat themselves, there was never any question of whether or not to use pesticides. They thought that as long as their family didn't eat produce which had been sprayed with pesticides, they wouldn't suffer any ill effects on their health. They didn't give any consideration to the harmful effects that these chemicals might have on the environment, because in the past, people believed that "illness enters through the mouth." According to this mindset, if the earth or the environment fell ill, this was of no concern to humans. It didn't occur to them that human health could be affected by the destruction of the surrounding environment. As long as they were careful about what their family ate, they would be all right. Now, I understand that this way of thinking is a mistake, because humans and the environment are inseparable.

Later on, I moved to the city for work and began to study tea. In those days, not just the students, but even the tea master, had no concept of "organic farming." Everyone was just focused on surface-level techniques, like how to brew tea elegantly and achieve

a good flavor. It wasn't until I met and began to study with Master Tsai Yizhe (蔡奕哲), who was a great proponent of organic tea, that I stepped foot onto the path toward clean tea, under his guidance. Because I was studying the concept of organic farming, I even began choosing to eat organic foods on a daily basis; I no longer simply chose produce based on its appearance.

If we count carefully, my journey from when I first started studying tea under Master Tsai to becoming a tea art specialist myself, as I now am, has taken more than eighteen years. I have gone from admiring tea from the sidelines to helping promote organic tea; I have seen farmers and consumers go from knowing nothing about organic farming to actively resisting it, then slowly beginning to accept it and change their thinking. This journey has been a very difficult one. Having promoted organic tea all these years, we are now witnessing a period of flourishing growth. Although the world of organics is not yet completely mature, the general public is now able to accept and engage with the concept. Even the well-known bottled iced tea brands all prominently emphasize the word "organic" in their advertising. All of this makes me very happy.

From the point of view of a tea art teacher, there are many advantages to using organic tea that has not been grown using chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers. Aside from lasting through more steepings than tea cultivated using standard farming methods (patience), organic tea can also withstand higher brewing temperatures and is less likely to release any substances that might cause physical discomfort or harmful effects to one's health after drinking it. However, I personally know that organic tea cannot compare to the even more environmentally-friendly, or "ecological tea." This is because ordinary organic tea still requires a lot of human influence and management, so in terms of the feeling you get when your

body absorbs it, I prefer ecological tea (living tea), which is grown without even using organic fertilizer, nor pheromones for biological pest control.

Since I began studying the concepts of organic and ecological farming, my body has become more sensitive, and I can recognize which foods are not good as soon as I put them in my mouth. Aside from becoming more selective about what foods and drinks I put into my body, it has also made me sharper in my other studies, particularly since I specialize in a field that involves the senses of taste and smell. I can sense the differences between flavors and the subtle changes in my body even more acutely, and my physical sensations are heightened. Sometimes I also deliberately switch to a vegetarian diet for a while, and during those periods I can feel even more strongly the adverse effect that drinking non-organic tea has on my body.

Sometimes, I meditate while drinking tea, keeping my whole body relaxed. At these times, I can feel the effects of the organic tea in my body even more clearly, I can feel how it is circulating inside me. At these times, it's clear to me that tea is more than just a drink.

In the ancient practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine, tea is considered a medicinal drink whose most important function is to "detoxify." But if tea is grown using industrial pesticides and fertilizers, how can this toxic tea possibly help us to detoxify? So, when we drink tea, we should at least choose organic tea grown without these pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. And if we can go one step further and choose completely ecological, living tea, then naturally, this is even better, both for our health and for the environment.



茶 *Yuting visits an organic farm.*





ORGANIC TEA DISCOVERS ME

茶人: Luo Huaikang (羅懷慷), Taiwan

To say that tea was a turning point in my life would not be an exaggeration in the slightest. Flipping through my old photos, my eyes light on my fluffy, languid curls, my face a perfectly made-up mask; at each party I am clustered in an intimate group, arms around each other, smiling sweetly for the photo. Being part of the fashion world is something that many young women dream of; by some fortune I had found myself right in the middle of it, working as a fashion editor for the Chinese edition of an international magazine. I wore all the big icons; I drank the latest trends; at every turn I soaked up the endless luxury. I clinked glasses with artists and celebrities, reveling in the feeling that I had made it to the top. Little by little, I forgot my true self.

Gradually, this whirlwind left behind it a hollow wormhole that sucked up my feelings and left an empty, meaningless void. The feelings of frustration, the disputes at work, all built up until this great mudslide of emotions finally broke down its dam. All I could do to hide it from people was to put on a cheery mask and continue playing the part. I went on living like this for quite some years. Then, in 2010, since my mother was up north visiting and I didn't want to leave her with nothing to do except wander round the shops, I made a reservation to visit a tea house with her on the recommendation of a friend. Little did I suspect that I would fall in love with the tranquility of this place, with the feeling of ease radiating from the tea master.

Not long afterwards, my mother wanted to buy some tea, so we visited again. That day, there was another guest there for tea who seemed quite agitated, repeatedly singing to himself a line from a pop song that was big at the time: "If I had an AK right now, I'd send you to join your ancestors." The host, perhaps sensing this hint of

gunpowder in the atmosphere, took out a tea with tiny little leaves, cuter than a springtime tree frog, with a liquor as clear as pale ice jade and a fragrance reminiscent of new tea shoots in a fine mist. When the tea permeated my senses, that faint ache in my chest, that feeling of anxiety, all disappeared. Once I discovered that tea like this existed, I wanted to know more, to taste more, to experience more of that calm feeling. So it was that I was admitted to the Long Cui Fang tea studio and became a student of Master Tsai Yizhe (蔡奕哲).

One of Master Tsai's teachings is "from the inside out," which he teaches each student according to their existing progress. This phrase instructs us how to live according to the saying that "a noble person practices self-restraint, even in private." To me, this doesn't just mean good behavior and moral conduct, but rather how to become aware of your own true nature throughout the course of a tea session and to eliminate unprovoked distracting thoughts. I found I no longer needed makeup or excessive amounts of perfume and accessories, and instead I turned my energy toward exploring the world of others who were different from myself. The biggest shock I got in this process was when I learned about tea mountain conservation.

Getting up early to go and visit a tea mountain was torture enough for a night-owl such as myself; but for the city girl that I was, who shrieked when she spotted a spider and felt faint upon seeing a moth or a slimy amphibian, helping pull up weeds on an organic tea plantation, grimacing as my hands got covered in mud, was truly a test of my limits. But at some point (I'm not sure exactly when), I began to be able to distinguish the smells of the soil. I grieved over the stink of traditionally-farmed soil and the hardening of the topsoil; the deathly, inauspicious silence of the tea plantations,

the rice paddies, the orchards rendered me silent in response. A grand chorus of singing birds, chirping insects and croaking frogs is what Nature should truly sound like; the bagworm moths should be able to hide under their leaves for as long as they want, attempting negotiations with the caterpillars in hopes of convincing them not to eat up all the new shoots. Real soil is soft and moist, mingled with the scent of roots; real tea is grown without fertilizer to hasten its sweetness, nor the over-protection of pesticides. This kind of tea, with its clean flavor that emerges from the right production methods, is the only kind that doesn't harm the human body or ruin the soil; what it does have is the power to truly touch people's hearts.

It turns out that neither people nor tea need all these additives; what we do need is to rely on our own strong roots and shared kindness, care and empathy toward other beings, both human and non-human. In the process of filtering out impurities, we gradually discover the natural cycle of our own conscience. This path may be filled with conflict and doubt; it may feel like a never-ending journey; and yet, two dots can always find each other and form a line. With true kindness, we can keep drawing until those lines form a plane, keep stacking until those planes transform into a solid shape—all we must do is keep going, and never give up.





How to Taste Clean Tea

如何品嚐乾淨的茶

One of the questions we get asked the most is if you can learn to taste the difference between clean, chemical-free tea and tea with agrochemicals. The answer is yes, though there are some caveats. Some teas use low-residue pesticides in very low amounts, and so learning to taste them can be very difficult, requiring a high degree of sensitivity. In most cases, however, you can learn to tell the difference, especially when you have an organic version to compare. It is therefore best to start with side-by-side comparisons of two teas that you can be sure are clean and not, organic and with pesticides.

This is a very important skill to have in the arsenal of any tea lover committed to environmentally-friendly tea, which we hope you are (or become after reading this issue). Unfortunately, there is a lot of dishonesty and mislabeled tea in the world. Sometimes vendors just repeat what they were told (innocently), but what they were told was dishonest. You have to be skilled to make healthy choices. You have to know the difference to some degree, in cleanliness and quality. Also (if that wasn't bad enough) for now, lab tests for small batches of tea are still too expensive for the average consumer. If more technology companies were devoted to the environment, someone could probably create a machine for us to test our own food and tea on the spot, which would be awesome. In the meantime, we will have to rely on our own skills. You can develop the ability to taste unclean tea within some margin of error that will be good enough to navigate your tea purchasing.

As with gongfu experiments, it is helpful to not eat anything too flavorful within a couple hours of your test, and nothing spicy that whole day. Start with some clean, clear water, ideally from a spring, but nice bottled water will do. Use the same water you are planning to use for the taste, and gently rinse the mouth out. Good waters do not have any flavor, so pay attention to the sensations in the mouth. See how it coats the mouth and throat. Move it around the mouth and see how the water stays together, is smooth and milky or oily. See how it travels to the back of the mouth on its own and swallows easily without any kind of pinching sensation in the throat. Notice how it causes saliva after it is swallowed. Also, pay close attention to how long the mouth feels coated and wet after swallowing (you can even use a timer). A fine water will last a long time. And even after the water is gone, swallowing your saliva should also be comfortable, without any pinching sensation. With your water as a reference, you can now move into trying to distinguish the two teas.

LEARNING TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE

學習辨別不同

Dry Leaves: We have found that in some cases, inorganic tea tends to mold when left out wet, whereas clean teas just dry out. There are some exceptions to this. We do not know the science behind this, but find it curious because Mr. Xie told us that the soil under trees that are sprayed is often moldy, since the earth becomes more powdery, can't drain properly and then becomes too moist.

You can actually already start with the dry leaves, by learning to smell the difference between various teas in terms of quality and, of course, whether they are clean or not. To do this, you need to practice focusing on the physical touch and sensations of the inhalation, as opposed to the fragrance itself. This is just like the way we need to learn to focus on mouthfeel rather than flavor as we do gongfu experiments. It may help to smell the two teas a few times back and forth with a blank mind, not labeling or judging. This helps us get used to the aromas in the tea and focus on the touch of the breath—the physical sensation.

First of all, do not shake the tea. This is a bad habit that *way* too many tea lovers indulge in. Shaking tea so that you can smell it breaks the leaves, knocks fragrant oils and crystals off the tea leaves and disturbs them energetically. It also means that the tea will become less and less aromatic each time it is shaken. Worst of all, shaking the tea is an attempt to make the tea's aroma stronger so that you can smell it more easily. This means that you are in essence bringing the aroma up to your level, which means you aren't learning to grow more sensitive and go down to its level. You won't increase your sensitivity in this way. Instead, take a few deep breaths, calm down, center yourself and only then approach the tea. Learn to increase your sensitivity and go down to the tea's quieter frequency as opposed to shaking it up to your speed.

Inhale very gently and slowly. It is very important that you breathe *very* slow and as deeply as you can! Pay attention to the sensation of the air in your nose as well as the depth of the breath. A clean tea will cause no discomfort, entering smoothly and finely. It will travel further down into you, towards the center of your diaphragm. Very fine teas will fill you up quick and smooth, almost pushing the breath down to the diaphragm (*dan tian*, 丹田), leaving you with a feeling that you could have inhaled much more if you could only hold more breath. This is akin to the feeling of smelling a spring forest, in which there are way more aromas than you can possibly take in (even your dog cannot smell them all, and she can smell way more than you can).

A tea with pesticides, on the other hand, may cause a slight pinching sensation in the nostrils. The breath will also stutter, and you will have to push it onwards. You won't be able to fill your lungs, let alone reach the diaphragm (*dan tian*, 丹田). It is not uncommon for people to feel a slight headache, discomfort or a general sense that the body is rejecting the pesticide-laden smell. We have even encountered teas that were sprayed heavily enough that you could actually smell the pesticides themselves, which, if you have ever

been near a farm spraying, is very intense; it is not an odor you soon forget: pungent and deathly, the stink of pesticides really makes you cringe. Learning to sense whether a tea is clean, or whether it is high or low-quality using aroma is very subtle, but the practice is well worth it.

Tea Liquor: Normally, in gongfu experiments, we use tea we are familiar with and brew it light so that the flavor and aroma won't distract us from the physical sensations, which are more important for such experiments. This is similar to the focus on the touch and quality of the aroma we mentioned above. However, for this experiment, you may want to brew the two teas a bit stronger than usual to make the sensations more pronounced. (Don't go overboard or the astringency and flavor will be overwhelming.)

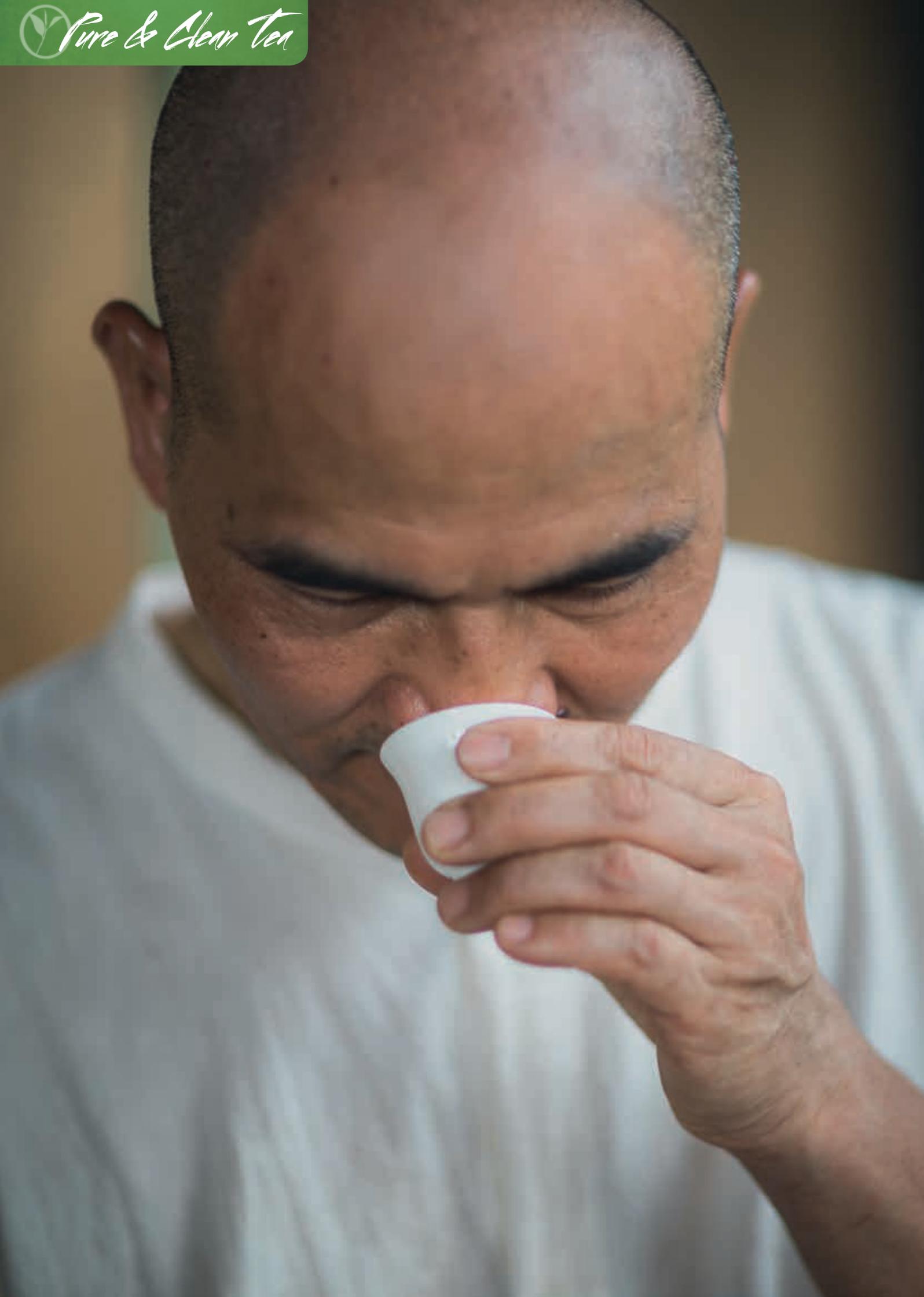
Try drinking the two teas back and forth, with a cup in each hand. You may also want to do this blind after you have done so while looking. Pay attention to the physical sensations of the liquor, especially compared to the high-quality water you used as a baseline before brewing—the same water in the two cups. (You may want to leave a cup of the hot water next to the two with tea as a reference.)

Many people experience a numbing on the tongue when drinking unclean teas, or if it is strong, maybe all throughout the mouth. This may even feel like the tongue has been burnt. For most teas, however, this is a sign of agrochemicals. Other times there is a rough scratchiness when drinking unclean tea, especially compared to the water. The liquor crashes apart and scratches the mouth. Oftentimes, it also dries the mouth and throat, cutting off saliva flow and leaving us parched. The most common sensation, though, is a pinching sensation in the throat when swallowing, often accompanied by a tightness or even pain as it goes down. Some people again have a sense of rejection when drinking unclean tea.

Clean tea, on the other hand, should coat the mouth and throat, as the fine water did, cause salivation and go down smoothly, without any pinching sensation. It will cause saliva flow, which will also be comfortable in the mouth and upon swallowing. The throat will feel coated and eased by the tea, as opposed to scratchy and uncomfortable. Fine tea should make you relaxed and comfortable. In fact, if the tea is fine enough, it will even help you to sleep better, even if you drink it in the evening!

Many of these criteria can also be caused by other factors, especially when it comes to puerh tea. You have to be careful with the numbness, for example, as there are certain old-growth sheng puerh teas that also numb the mouth, whether they are grown with agrochemicals or not. Tea from Mengkku, for example, often has this effect. Also, pinching in the throat and dryness can also be caused by unclean storage, in which case the effects would wear off in later steepings. There is still merit in learning to experience these differences.





The Body: From the body to the subtle body (energy, Qi, 氣), many can tell the difference between clean and unclean tea after it is ingested. The effects in the body often differ greatly from person to person, with varying degrees of sensitivity. Some people feel a headache or a stomach, often growing over time. Other times the sensations in the mouth or throat we discussed above linger, even for hours after. Wu De says that he always notices stronger pesticides in the temples, as a kind of pulsing. We have met some other tea lovers who report similar sensations. You may feel the tea in your Qi channels, if you are sensitive to the subtle body. Otherwise, you may only feel grosser effects of the chemicals.

Pay attention to your body after drinking the unclean tea. Learn to listen to your body's wisdom. If you can, pay attention to the subtle body as well, and the flow of energy through your core and extremities. Often, the Qi will stutter and flow in an irregular way. The grosser version of this is a fluttery heart, anxiousness or even nausea—all of which we have experienced drinking unclean teas. Some sensitive people may feel energetic disruption all throughout the day. When a tea is particularly “dirty,” we often feel uncomfortable until we get something to eat. (This may also be caused by pairing the wrong kinds of teas together in a single session, resulting in nausea.)



Organic Conclusions

Once you have experience drinking clean teas for some time, these sensations do become easier and easier to sense. Wu De often says that since all puerh was clean when he began drinking puerh in the early 1990s, the chemicals are like someone adding a synthesizer track to your favorite song—the one you have listened to thousands of times. He means that the added frequency is obvious. As you drink more and more clean tea, and you become more familiar with teas of various kinds and qualities, you will find that smelling, tasting and feeling pesticides will become easier and easier.

Many people report that in the beginning they were skeptical of these qualities we have discussed here. Way too many people in the modern world are far too used to having chemicals in their body from junk food, soda, etc. Therefore, a healthy diet and proper exercise will certainly increase your sensitivity to unclean tea. Obviously, the purer your body is, the more easily recognizable toxins will be. This is a challenge in this world of readily-accessible tasty treats, and in general we prefer the “middle way.” But it is always worthwhile to make goals and strive towards more optimal health in diet and movement (one of the Eight Bowls in our tradition). The healthier you are, the easier it will be to sense unhealthy things, like a non-smoker smelling smoke.

Meditation is also a wonderful tool for increasing sensitivity. Actually, this is more to do with quieting the internal noise. The noisier our thoughts, the more our mind wanders, and the less sensitive we will be to a subtle experience. The quieter you are, the more Tea rewards you: you begin to taste more, smell more and, ultimately, enjoy more. Learning to quiet the mind increases our sensitivity to pesticides, high- and low-quality teas and also increases the dimensions of our experience drinking tea. We begin to notice aromas and flavors in teas we thought we knew well, because we are paying more attention.

Just as we have found that many people start out skeptical, if you do continue to experiment with side-by-side tests of clean versus unclean tea, we also have found that most everyone shifts from healthy skepticism, without experiencing any of these effects, to slowly experiencing one or two and eventually finding that it is easy to spot tea with pesticides. We have members in this community who have even verified their experience with lab reports, and the results were consistent, even when done blind. It is, therefore, very possible to learn to discriminate between clean and unclean teas yourself, within some margin of error that is good enough to make wise purchasing decisions.

TeaWayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you 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 Kristina Clark.

I sit to write this, the story of how tea found me, on the summer solstice, on the anniversary of when my Tea Journey began. One year ago, I was sitting under a big tree in Prospect Park, Brooklyn with thirty other people drinking “Enlightenment” served from Wu De’s magical twig-handled pot.

I first found Wu De through the Rich Roll Podcast, which a friend had recently turned me on to. For the first time I thought, “hmm, maybe there’s more to tea than it being what non-coffee drinkers have to settle for,” and I felt intrigued by the reverence he held for the Leaf. I subscribed to Global Tea Hut, but felt the tea was too special for me to brew without more basic knowledge.

By the time Wu De arrived to New York, my life had utterly fallen apart. It had become necessary for me to leave the dance I had dedicated my life to. Not only was I leaving behind something that had once been incredibly important to me, something I had invested my time and effort and sweat into, I was departing from my tribe, my community, my friends. I was hurting from the things that led to my departure, and I was hurting from leaving. To top it all off, my boyfriend left quite suddenly. While in retrospect I can say that was a good thing, at the time the timing was horrendous, and I felt abandoned and drowning in a well of depression.

At the solstice, I began my “homework,” three bowls of Tea in the morning, in silence, every day, for a week. What happens? Probably the most major immediate change was that I actually gave up drinking coffee. There were slower and subtler, and more profound changes as well.

At this time I was still in a dark place, and I felt very isolated. There was a lot of hurt, there was anger, there was heartache and heartbreak, there was doubt, there was loss, and I was lost. I found no joy in anything. My intuition had been eroded. I had no self-esteem.

Yet, there was a slender silver thread that I was able to cling to. I inquired of myself: what did I want to do, what did I feel like doing, was there anything at all? The only thing I wanted to do, that I began to look forward to in the morning, was to drink those three bowls of Tea. In this way, Tea saved my life. Little by little, bowl by bowl, the darkness lifted.

After Wu De’s class, I felt I had more of a base of understanding and I began to read the magazine, and try some of those Tea tins out. I wrote to Shen, who was knowledgeable, generous, and helpful answering my beginner questions. I couldn’t remember how long it had been since I had been around people who openly shared their knowledge, and answered questions in a way that didn’t make me feel stupid or put in place, and it touched me deeply.

I knew I needed to go to the Tea Sage Hut, but I had to wait for the universe to open the doors of the wait-list. In the meantime, I went to “Tea School” every day by myself, even if I couldn’t be at the Hut yet. I watched Global Tea Hut videos online. I read articles. I was thrilled to go through all the discussions on the newly released App, even if I felt too shy and too new to interact yet myself. I made personal Tea ceremony a daily practice.

While I was there, Shen and Wu De invited me to join the annual trip to China. My higher self said “YES! Go!” Three weeks after



茶人: Kristina Clark

I returned home from Taiwan, I boarded a plane to Asia again. The trip was an educational, culture-crossing field trip. We became ambassadors for Tea as much as our hosts were, sharing with them that there are people all over the world who love Tea, while they shared more technical information with us.

I felt a precious connection with nature, quite clearly, in ways I haven’t been able to here in NYC. The mountains were calling to me, the ferns were begging me to get lost among them, just for a little while—they had secrets to tell me. I shared a profound moment with an old wild Tea tree, on a misty mountain in Anxi. I asked Her if She recognized Herself in me, and She replied, “Do you not recognize yourself in me?” I shared this with our host Master Chen, and he understood the depth of this silent conversation, and he wept as well. I felt bound to him in a way, and to our trip.

At home now, after both of these back-to-back journeys, I am piecing together my new life, as a Chajin. I feel such gratitude for my new Tea brothers and sisters, for the friendships we’re forging, and for the lessons I’m learning from this community and from Tea Herself, the great healer. I am maintaining an hour-long meditation practice every morning, followed by Tea ceremony. Mornings are reserved for this cultivation. After seeing all the farmers who work so hard to pick and process the tea we drink, I feel the enormous responsibility of being human. How can I best honor all the sacrifices and work that brought this Tea liquor to my lips? My life must be my answer. How can I honor that which saved my life? I serve Her.

My soul signed a contract with a mountain when I wasn’t looking. I am being called back to nature, back to the threshold of the two trees. I’ll find you there. And we’ll share some tea, with peace, joy and grace.

Inside the Hut

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茶主题: Masterpiece Era Puerh



We have a tremendous amount of content beyond this issue you hold now. All of our past issues are available in .pdf or .html on our website. We also have monthly live broadcasts, dozens of videos on all things tea, a blog and a podcast called "Life of Tea," which is on Soundcloud and iTunes. As all of these are for you, our beloved tea brothers and sisters, please let us know via email or social media about the topics you would like us to cover in our videos, writings or podcasts. We would love to create for you!



Check out our new "Brewing Tea" video series on our YouTube channel, where we explore the philosophy, history, practicalities and experiments involved in improving your tea practice.



The 2018 Annual Photography Contest is underway. Submissions are not limited to Global Tea Hut members, so tell your friends. The winners will be published and receive gifts of tea and teaware.



We have created a vast array of teaware for this community, both for bowl tea and gongfu tea. There are also some amazing Light Meets Life teas this year, including a gorgeous shou puerh, some dian hong cakes, a sheng puerh and two aged Liu Bao teas!



Our third annual Zen & Tea Retreat in Spain is coming up from October 1st through the 9th. For those of you who have never attended, this is a superb chance to cultivate yourself, deepen your meditation and grow your tea practice, all in the gorgeous Pyrenees Mountains. We practice silent walking meditation down the trails every day and do a day-long hike in silence in the middle of the retreat. You can read about previous retreats in the Feb. 2018 and Feb. 2017 issues, or learn more at: www.casacuadrau.org

Center News



Before you visit, check out the Center's website (www.teasagehut.org) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. Make sure you apply early for courses as they fill up fast. This is why we need a bigger, more awesome Center.



We have opened all the ten-day courses to service! This is exciting for those of you who have already taken a ten-day course and want to come serve one. You can apply on the website. This is also another way to visit if a course is full!



The first-ever Old Student Course was amazing. This will be taught once a year in four-year cycles, creating teacher training for members of this tradition to help tea lovers around the world. It was a magical time of deep connection with these teachings.



We are saving up to buy or lease a van to drive you around during service periods and to take you to the tea farm and mountain to fetch water during courses.

September Affirmation

I feel my influence

Do I connect the dots? Do I make decisions that encourage happiness in the lives of others? Do I purchase products that are good for the Earth and for my fellow humans? Am I compromising consciously or unconsciously?

天地人



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