

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

March 2019

皇太子的森林

老班章

LAO
BANZHANG



FOREST PRINCE

Lao Banzhang is the most famous, pricey and controversial region in Yunnan, and a must-see stop on the journey of any puerh lover. We are very excited to dive deeper into this important region, all the while sipping from strong cups of one of the best, most valuable puerh teas that we have ever shared!

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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Frederik Wallin, Sweden



* ancient tea roots found
at the Tian Luo Shan site



森林王子



recycled & recyclable



Soy ink

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From the editor

In March, the weather in Taiwan starts to warm up, and though it does rain a lot in the end of the month, the temperature is wonderful. The world comes alive at this time, and everything blooms and blossoms island-wide. Taiwan is very vibrant in this month. We really feel the shift from the cool, dark Yin of winter to the Yang of spring starting after the Lunar New Year in February. Of course, those who live in areas with four seasons feel this shift much more pronouncedly, but this is really the only seasonal transition we have in Taiwan: from warm to the cool of winter and then back in the spring. This means we start drinking young sheng from last year, tasting the age. We also like white and green teas now and again, as well as lots of oolong.

This year's Annual Global Tea Hut trip is right around the corner, from April 14th to the 24th. We are all super excited to gather with tea lovers from around the world and travel through the history of tea, walking in the footsteps of the "Tea Saint," Lu Yu. We will be traveling from Shanghai to Zhejiang, and to Yixing as well. As usual, we will do our best to take all of you along with us for the ride, capturing video and photographs, writing articles about the trip and thinking of all of you who wanted to join us, but couldn't, by saying prayers and raising bowls of tea for you as we go.

I wanted to use this forum to make a plea to all of you for the coming year(s) of our shared Global Tea Hut experience: please participate more! Of course, this means sharing tea and sharing the word about this magazine. (Do you know that if everyone in Global Tea Hut got just one friend to join, and we therefore doubled in size, we could start building Light Meets Life right away?) Many of you are already doing this, and we are so incredibly grateful. Let us know if there is any way we can help you spread the word, like using our photography, writing, extra magazine copies and sometimes we can even send extra tins of tea you can use. Let's all work together to grow the membership of Global Tea Hut this year like never before! Help us with our social media campaign and with word of mouth so that we can continue improving the magazine with more travel, better teas and more translations. Also, our ultimate goal is, obviously, to build *your* Tea Center, Light Meets Life: a place where you can come and study tea. It will be a flag for all Chajin around the world and for future generations of tea lovers to use as well.

Beyond just spreading the word about Global Tea Hut, one of the ways that you can participate is by writing for the magazine. We really, truly and absolutely *do* want to hear from you. Throughout the years, at least half of my personal top ten articles for this magazine are from what we call "Voices from the Hut," which means articles submitted by the readership on all kinds of topics. I genuinely am inspired by them and learn a lot. I think that maybe some

of you feel like you need to reach some level of expertise to share your experience, but nothing could be further from the truth—we are *all* students here, and all beginners. And as such, we can all stand to benefit from the beginner's perspective. You may not be able to write a scholarly article about some very specific aspect of tea knowledge, science or history, but you can share your experience and wisdom serving tea, learning about tea, fostering community, the effects of tea on your self-cultivation, on your career or romantic life and so on. You do have a voice, and you do have experience, strength, wisdom and hope to share! And we *do* want to read it! It would mean a lot to me if more of you submitted articles this year.

This month, we are going to dive into a very important topic for anyone who loves puerh tea: Lao Banzhang, a mountain/region in Yunnan where very fine tea comes from. As a result of the unique character of the tea from Banzhang—which is very strong, vibrant and full of energy—the area has achieved great fame. The tea is superb to drink and wonderful to age, leading to a great demand for Banzhang tea that far exceeds what the small area can produce. As a result, prices have skyrocketed. And with that fame have come all kinds of challenges, including fake tea, environmental issues, decreases in quality due to the fast growth and tremendous influx of money and many more issues. Though there still are stunning tea trees at the center of the whirlwind that is now "Lao Banzhang," it is easy to get lost in all the hoopla. We hope that this issue will help you to begin exploring this magical region of Yunnan and also be a warning about some of the problems that great demand can cause to natural resources. And (we can't believe it), we will be drinking a Lao Banzhang tea throughout our journey!



—Further Reading—

This month, we highly recommend re-reading the special Extended Edition from September 2014 (the first-ever Extended Edition), which is jam-packed with information on puerh tea. You can find past issues archived on the website with an easy-to-use search function!

TEA OF THE MONTH

Over the course of this month, we will be exploring the Lao Banzhang region of Yunnan, which means the “Old” Banzhang Village (there is a “New” one as well). Lao Banzhang produces excellent old-growth *mao-cha* every year and has for centuries. In modern times, it has become incredibly famous and extremely valuable (the most expensive puerh each year), which has caused a lot of challenges for local tea producers, as producers all over Yunnan fake Lao Banzhang tea. They say that Lao Banzhang can only produce roughly seven tons of tea annually, but more than 3,000 tons of tea labeled as “Lao Banzhang” are sold every year in the largest puerh market in Guangzhou, called “Fangcun Market (芳村市場).” The village has had to erect a wall and build guarded gates to prevent people from bringing in tea from other regions to sell as “Banzhang” tea, and has taken other steps to prevent forgery. In all of this noise, some of the quality of the tea has sadly been disrupted, as have the lives of the villagers.

Despite all the chaos and market demand (which far exceeds production) there is real quality behind Lao Banzhang tea. There is a reason it became famous in the first place, in other words. Like many tourist destinations, the tourism the natural beauty attracts can destroy the very charm that people want to visit.

Banzhang Tea Mountain is located in Banzhang Village of Bulangzu Township, Bulang Mountain, Menghai County. It is located 63 km from the Menghai county seat. Bulang Mountain’s Bulangzu Township covers an area of 1,016 square kilometers with a population of only 18,000 people. Mountains cover 93% of its land area. The elevation of this area ranges between 600 and 2,100 meters. Two thousand years ago, Pu people were already living here (the Pu were the earliest indigenous people in Yunnan). The ancient Pu people were the earliest settlers of Yunnan and the first to cultivate, produce and drink tea. Banzhang is just a simple village, but the tea it produces possesses overpowering Qi and intense huigan (returning “gan,” which means a minty coolness of the breath—in this case lingering after the tea

has been swallowed). As a result, it has become famous throughout the world. To tea lovers, Banzhang Village has become one of the holy places of puerh tea.

For a long time, we have wanted to translate some articles about Lao Banzhang, but we were unsure of how we could ever share some tea with you since the prices are so astronomical. We let all of our friends and tea family know that we were interested in anything remotely affordable even years ago, knowing that there was a growing body of great articles written by puerh experts that we could translate at any time. Eventually the wait paid off: Forest Prince.

Forest Prince is certified organic tea from Lao Banzhang, grown in an eco-garden, which means rich biodiversity. It is much more affordable than the best Lao Banzhang tea, however, as it is produced from young trees—averaging thirty to forty years old. But even with the great discount, it is still expensive relative to other young sheng puerhs, which are all expensive nowadays. This is one of the most valuable teas we have ever shared in Global Tea Hut, and it would not have been possible without the kind generosity of a dear friend here in Taiwan, who wishes to remain anonymous.

Our Tea of the Month, Forest Prince, is both bold and assertive and soft, elegant and refined. Lao Banzhang tea is famous for being a great candidate for storage: strong Qi, bitter, astringent and incredibly vibrant. It is all of these things, but genuine Lao Banzhang tea is also smooth and fragrant with a nice splash to the upper palate. You will want to have time to enjoy this tea, and brewing will matter—right amount, water, temperature, etc.—if you are to bring out the best Forest Prince has to offer.

Spend a morning or afternoon with some true tea lovers, and enjoy a few dozen cups of this potent tea. Prepare for a deep and powerful journey if you drink this tea in a ceremonial way, surrounding it with some silence and depth. This is a tea worth savoring. The breadth of the Qi is amazing and lasts throughout the day. We love the bitterness and sweetness combined, in the powerful way that only a genuine Lao Banzhang tea can do.



Forest Prince (森林王子)



Lao Banzhang, Yunnan



2018 Sheng Puerh



Hani Aborigines



~1200 Meters



A DEEPER SESSION

Further Exploration into Our Tea of the Month

 ver the course of this month, we will be drinking a Lao Banzhang “*fangcha* (方茶),” which is a type of square brick tea. Square bricks have been famous for some decades. We thought that before we dive into the issues surrounding Lao Banzhang, we could use our deeper dive into the Tea of the Month to explore the history of puerh tea bricks, which is a very interesting topic. We would like to thank Liao Yi Rong (廖义荣) for contributing his knowledge and wisdom to this exploration. It is such an honor to be able to translate and offer Chinese tea wisdom to the Western world!

Tea bricks are an essential part of daily life for people of many different ethnic origins throughout Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia and the surrounding regions. Puerh tea in particular represents a significant proportion of the tea that people drink from day to day. This ar-

ticle presents a specialized account of tea brick culture over the past century, from the late Qing and early Republic eras up until modern times.

Puerh begins as loose-leaf *maocha*, before being steamed and compressed for ease of storage and transport. Because of this method, it is known as compressed tea and is categorized according to the shape of the tea cakes: these include *bing* (饼) or disc shapes, rectangular *zhuan* (砖) or tea bricks and *tuo* (沱), which are shaped like little bowls or bird’s nests. Puerh becomes more aromatic with age, due to the “post-fermentation” (oxidation/fermentation) process that occurs when the tea comes into contact with the air, stimulating degradation in the leaf, which makes the tea sweeter and mellow. Its value increases with age, and it’s very popular—both of which have resulted in dwindling supplies of old puerh, and it has become a rare and valuable treasure.

Aside from the aboriginal wisdom and experience in aging puerh tea, the market learned about it large-scale during the late Qing and early Republic of China eras. At the time, Yunnan’s Xishuangbanna region was known as “malaria country;” disease spread fast in the humid climate, and people from outside the region didn’t dare to set foot there in summer or fall. Tea produced at that time couldn’t be shipped out for sale until the winter or spring season, so it would be left to age in storage while awaiting shipping. During this storage period, it would inevitably undergo oxidation/fermentation due to the humidity and high temperatures. On top of this, the tea then had to make long journeys on horseback to be transported along what is now called the “Old Tea Horse Road;” eventually, all these factors evolved into the “post-fermentation” process. This long process of post-fermentation reduces the irritating quality of newer puerh,



giving it a rich, mellow liquor with a sweet aftertaste and a delightful aged flavor and aroma. This results in a unique tea that becomes more fragrant and more valuable with age.

In the recorded history of tea bricks, there is probably only one tea still in existence that dates to the period before the China Tea Corporation was established in 1938: the classic Ke Yi Xing Tea Bricks. Ke Yi Xing Tea Bricks are well known to today's puerh tea enthusiasts, with their glowing reputation as the "King of Tea Bricks." The owner of the brand, Mr. Zhou Wenqing (周文卿), is also somewhat of a legend; he and another of the previous generation of puerh tea professionals, Hou Xing Tea Shop owner Mr. Li Fuyi (李拂一), were both influential figures in the modern history of puerh tea in China. Among all the countless tea bricks that we have had the chance to taste, not one can compare to Ke Yi Xing Tea Bricks. Most notable is the extremely

uniform aging of the tea. The other Antique Era teas cannot compare in terms of quality, energy or flavor; Ke Yi Xing bricks have earned their nobility. It's just a pity that there are probably no more than a few dozen bricks still in existence today; the market price is approaching that of Fu Yuan Chang, a tea that has borne the "King of Teas" title for a century.

To celebrate the unique value of Ke Yi Xing Tea Bricks, members of the Taiwanese tea industry made a historical replica tea, specially producing a batch of 24,000 tea bricks to commemorate the tea's 80th anniversary, using manufacturing techniques equivalent to those used for the original version. Such replicas were common in the early 2000s.

After the China Tea Corporation established the Fohai Tea Factory, there were very few tea bricks produced. Some of the more well-known brands on the market include:

茶 *The Cultural Revolution Committee Bricks made by the Hai factory during the 1960s and 1970s (sheng tea)*

茶 *The Cultural Revolution Committee Bricks from the '70s (shou tea)*

茶 *The Date Fragrance Thick Bricks of the '60s and '70s (shou)*

茶 *The Li Xing Long Tea Bricks of the '70s (shou)*

茶 *The 7581 Tea Brick series from the 1970s*

茶 *'73 Thick Bricks*

茶 *'73 Bricks*

茶 *Cultural Revolution Yellow Paper Bricks*

茶 *Cultural Revolution White Paper Bricks*

These varieties were clearly already very numerous in the 1970s, not to mention the 1990s, by which point at least several hundred new types had emerged.

In the following pages, we will take a closer look at ten of the most popular brick teas on the market.

Date Aroma Thick Bricks

Some people claim that this batch of tea bricks was made in '57, others say '67, while still others say '77. But are they talking about years on the Roman calendar, or the Republic of China calendar? (This calendar, largely used in Taiwan, counts years from the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. So, for example, the 56th year of the Republic would indicate 1967). It's unclear which calendar they mean, and the two calendars differ by eleven

years, so it seems that the exact production year is fated to remain a mystery. When we went to the inaugural International Puerh Tea Expo in Taipei, the tea connoisseurs present, who were mostly from Taipei, were almost unanimous in their praise of these tea bricks. With their gentle, smooth liquor, the absence of any bitterness or astringency and their rich date aroma, they are a favorite with everyone. They are considered the most representative example of shou tea bricks. However, Date Aroma Thick Bricks are now very scarce. In 1999, they had already reached a price of 3,000 New Taiwan Dollars (NTD) per brick, and the prices have just kept rising due to the imbalance of supply and demand. In the year 2000, one brick fetched 5,000; in 2001 it had reached 8,000; and by 2003, when they were becoming truly scarce, a single brick was selling for 13,500 NTD. Of the reserves of more than 10,000 Date Aroma Thick Bricks

that existed in 1997, there were probably fewer than a thousand still in circulation by the early 2000s.

Li Xing Long Bricks

Some of the history of this batch of tea is recorded in a tea book called *The Origins of Round and Square* (方圓之緣). We will share some of our experience of this tea. At the time of the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, it was generally perceived as "border tea (邊境茶)" (tea from Laos, Vietnam or Myanmar or near the border, which is often regarded by tea lovers as inferior in quality) and wasn't held in very high regard, much like the bitter Fu Lu Tribute Tea of the same era. However, touched by its innate quality and character, people began to recognize it for the excellent brick tea that it is, just like the ugly duckling transforming into a beautiful swan.



茶 Ke Yi Xing bricks (可以興茶磚) are the most famous puerh bricks of all time. This is the Antique Era (pre-1949) brick that everyone knows and wants. It was created prior to 1938, but the exact date is unknown. Ke Yi Xing Tea Bricks are well known to today's puerh tea enthusiasts, with their glowing reputation as the "King of Tea Bricks." The owner of the brand, Mr. Zhou Wenqing (周文卿), is also somewhat of a legend; he and another of the previous generation of puerh tea professionals, Hou Xing Tea Shop owner Mr. Li Fuyi (李拂一) were both influential figures in the modern history of puerh tea in China. This tea most likely came from the Yiwu region. It is most certainly old-growth, and from a time when the environment was truly pristine. This is one of the greatest teas we have ever drunk, and amongst the best that the Antique Era has to offer. The liquor is dark, spicy and earthy, with a Qi that lasts all day. Sadly, they have grown extremely expensive and rare. Even if one had the money, it would be very difficult to find one at all. They really are that rare. May you all try some one day!

可以興茶磚



Each Li Xing Long Tea Brick weighs 300 grams rather than 250, much like Fu Lu Tribute Tea Bricks, which each weigh 390–400 grams rather than 330–350 (in other words, both kinds are a bit heavier than the norm). Why is this? It may have been to distinguish them from other teas, or perhaps it was due to some factor unique to the Fengshan tea region (鳳山茶區); further research is needed to confirm this. Due to large-scale consumption, any remaining Fu Lu Tribute Tea and Li Xing Long Bricks are on the verge of becoming the only teas of their kind. In 1999, Fu Lu Tribute Tea sold for 3,000 NTD per brick; these days the price is twelve times as high. As for genuine, 300-gram Li Xing Long bricks, in the past six years their price has risen dramatically. In terms of flavor, Li Xing Long is a very patient tea with no bitterness or astringency; it is mellow with an aged aroma—smooth, sweet and refreshing on

the palate. The liquor is a bright, clear, red color. It's a great choice of tea for those who like shou puerh.

七三厚磚 '73 Thick Bricks (7581)

This batch of tea bricks is a mainstay of the puerh market. It's an old tea and features several dozen different types of packaging, including waxed paper and yellow, white and mustard-yellow colored paper. Then there are also a number of dry-stored teas that lack a particularly attractive appearance but were stored in good, clean conditions; these storage conditions have brought out aged, ginseng and date aromas in the tea. Each individual drinker perceives this aged tea flavor slightly differently. These tea bricks vary in thickness by about three to five centimeters depending on how tightly contracted the leaf is; this variation was likely caused by the weight of the molds

used to compress the tea and by how tightly the leaf was packed during the post-fermentation process. Each brick is unique; the looser tea bricks produce a sweet liquor but are not very patient, while the more tightly compressed bricks have a strong character and are very patient. The thicker bricks display a strong date fragrance, while the thinner ones have a rich ginseng aroma.

The market price of '73 Thick Bricks has changed significantly in the last twenty years; a brick that previously cost only a few hundred New Taiwan Dollars could sell for more than 10,000 even in the early 2000s, and much more now. The prices of these teas vary, mainly based on the thickness and condition of the tea brick and the color of the characters on the packaging. Of all the brick teas, '73 Thick Bricks have the most inconsistent pricing, mainly because there are so many imitation products out there. Finding the real thing will likely require some skill.



Our advice is to first have a sniff of the outer wrapper; after unwrapping the tea, only those teas whose fragrance lasts about an hour are worth tasting. These bricks are a good representative for teas made using the *wo dui* (渥堆) heaping process, with a sweet liquor, a strong aged aroma and no bitterness. They are a fine choice for those who enjoy shou teas.

尔草磚茶 Cultural Revolution Tea Bricks (7581)

The Cultural Revolution in China lasted for ten years—from 1967 to 1977. Most of the tea bricks from a period of around fifteen years encompassing that decade are called “Cultural Revolution Bricks.” There are nearly a hundred different variations in packaging, including early-period, mid-period and late-period variants. Within each of these categories, the aroma of the teas also varies, from an “aged” fragrance, to aromas of ginseng, dates or lotus. We can share the most

classic example of Cultural Revolution tea bricks. The differences in flavor and price for this batch of tea bricks are due to the quality of storage conditions. In Hong Kong’s underground warehouses of that era, the conditions varied wildly depending on whether the tea was stored at the bottom, middle or top of the warehouse, so it’s important to be aware of this when choosing tea to purchase.

The most popular of these bricks on the market are probably the 7581 Bricks from the mid-to-late Cultural Revolution era. Of all the brands from Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China and Macau, there are probably very few that can beat these bricks in terms of quality, price, or its aged, fragrant character, flavor and spirit. This is because although this tea was produced in large quantities towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, it was kept in exceptionally clean storage conditions; so in terms of character and flavor, it can be considered a representative tea of its era. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, the price even comes close to the price of ‘73 Thick Bricks; in Shanghai and

Fangcun, Guangzhou Province, it even exceeds it. This reflects a prevailing attitude of valuing aged teas very highly; the general opinion seems to be that old, well-preserved teas are the only truly great teas.

七五六一三 7562 & 7563 Bricks

There is a detailed account of 7562 Bricks in Professor Deng Shi Hai’s (鄧時海) famous tea book, *Puerh Tea* (普洱茶). But because there are so few authentic 7562 Bricks left, there’s a huge number of imitation versions on the market. According to our observations, authentic 7562 Brick teas probably make up less than 1% of the teas being sold as such! In 1995, it sold very cheaply, so much of it was drunk shortly after being released. By 2002, when the Chinese market began to heat up, there were probably scarcely a few hundred bricks left in reserve. In 2001, the price for one brick was 6,000 New Taiwan Dollars, and by 2004 they were selling for more than 12,000 a piece. They are crazy-expensive nowadays! From our experience with 7562 Bricks, we would describe them using two words: *highly variable*.

Then we have 7563 Bricks, which have one of the most entertaining backstories of all the teas on the market. The story of this tea’s packaging became the source of great mirth around many a tea table thanks to a blunder by a Hong Kong tea merchant by the name of Mr. Wang.

The number 3 at the end of the 7563 Brick serial number represents the Xiaguan Factory; however, in 1993, Mr. Wang had no idea of this, given that knowledge of puerh in Hong Kong was limited prior to the handover back to mainland China in 1997, at which point Taiwanese merchants began sharing their knowledge in Hong Kong. In 1993, the market was just beginning to take off, and Mr. Wang was promoting a tea called Tender Bud Golden Bricks (at the time, one of these bricks cost 200 Hong Kong Dollars; by 1997 the price had reached 1,000 HKD a brick; and by 2002 in Taipei they were selling for nearly 20,000 NTD). Thinking he was making a clever move, Mr. Wang removed the original wrappers from

茶 *These '73 thick paper bricks have been a mainstay of aged puerh lovers for decades. They used to be very cheap in Taiwan, but have grown expensive, like all aged tea. There are several dozen different types of packaging, including waxed paper and yellow, white and mustard-yellow colored paper. They are often great choices for the shou lover.*





茶 The uppermost brick shown here is a Jiangcheng tea brick, as discussed on p. 13. The lower right bricks are more modern, wild sheng puerh teas from Yiwu Mountain. The left two wrapped bricks are Xiguan bricks as discussed on p. 12.

his reserve of several thousand bricks that were similar to the Tender Bud Golden Bricks, and replaced them with the 7563 wrappers that we see on the market. Not long afterwards, Mr. Wang told me that he had made a big mistake in doing this, as right around that time the price of tea bricks from Taiwan in their original packaging had risen to around 300 Hong Kong Dollars a brick, but since he had removed the original wrappers, no one wanted to buy the tea bricks anymore. So he put the bricks back into storage, and the whole situation turned out to be a blessing in disguise; after the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, he was able to sell the bricks for nearly twice the original price. To commemorate this tea, he simply named it “7563;” in his words, this tea had even greater “depth of spirit” than 7562 tea, so it was quite logical to add one to the last number of the code and call it “7563 Tender Bud Golden Bricks.” At the International Puerh Tea Expo in 2002 they fetched a price of 2,800 New Taiwan Dollars, and recently in mainland China they

have just about reached the equivalent price in Chinese *yuan* . They produce a mellow and refreshing liquor that appeals to lovers of both sheng and shou puerh, since it combines the fresh camphor fragrance of a sheng tea with the sweet smoothness of a shou tea.

外銷法國會磚 French Export Bricks

Puerh tea has a long history of export sales in France. In 1985, a French medical team conducted clinical trials involving puerh, which goes to show that this tea already had a certain amount of influence in the daily lives of the French. These bricks are most likely the only exported puerh bricks still in circulation. Because these teas have spent a long time in storage and traveled long distances, there is some variation in the colors of the outer boxes. There are six different brands that can be found on the boxes, probably due to differences between tea batches or the agents who were involved in their sale. The colors of the paper

wrapping include white, yellow, mustard-yellow and brown. Some versions have horizontal stripes, while some have vertical ones. There are certainly some imitation versions, and these teas can also be classified into early, mid and late-period. However, no matter the age or the authenticity of the tea, tasting the tea is really the only proper way to evaluate it. Our suggestion is to first open the box and have a sniff of the tea; it should have a strong aged aroma reminiscent of ginseng. This indicates that it’s a good tea and worthy of a test brew. When you do the test brew, the flavor and fragrance should have a natural grace to them, and the liquor should be a bright, clear red with a strong ginseng aroma and a pleasant, long-lasting aftertaste. (Also, see our *Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea*.) It’s a great choice of tea for those who like shou puerh. In 2004, in Shanghai and Guangzhou these French-boxed tea bricks were selling for around 1,200–1,800 Chinese *yuan* . Nowadays, they are much more. (We quit checking prices on aged bricks in 2004/5.)

Fangcha 方磚

In the late '70s and early '80s, the Menghai Tea Factory started producing 100-gram and 250-gram Square Bricks. These teas are mostly made from sheng puerh. They are stamped on the front with the characters for "Puerh Square Tea (*puerh fangcha*, 普洱方茶)" and on the back they are stamped with a nine-square grid pattern (giving them the nickname "chocolate bricks") as well as the Eight-Zhong tea logo. The bricks that are currently held in the highest regard are the 100-gram Square Bricks produced

in 1992, which come in several versions: the Square Tea edition, the Peacock edition and the Blank Space edition. When choosing one of these teas, it's best to taste a brew before buying.

Another type of Square Brick tea is the large 250-gram bricks produced in 1987, which are on par with the 1992 Square Bricks. There are a huge number of teas out there similar to these two; there are some shou teas that crop up, as well as some second-rate teas put into storage for aging and some imitation teas packaged in genuine boxes.

The most distinctive characteristics of these two batches of tea are that they retain a subtle bitterness and astringency; the liquor is a yellowish-red (due to the dry storage conditions during aging), and after brewing the leaf remains red with a hint of green. It's bursting with the liveliness of a sheng tea, and it has a vegetal aroma with a hint of camphor. This tea is a future star and is worth keeping in storage for further aging. However, these teas are getting better every year, and many people are starting to break into their stashes.



茶 Above are more '73 Thick Paper bricks and a Cultural Revolution 7581 on the right side with the darker paper. In front is a French Export Brick. To the left is a 1980s fangcha we have here at the Center, surrounded by our Tea of the Month, which is a fangcha as well. The cake shown in front is what is left of the 1980s version. It is amazing! To the right, from top to bottom, we have the Wild "Native" Tea Tree Brick 250-gram, and beneath it the 500-gram version. Then we have the 250-gram and 100-gram fangcha bricks discussed above. The brick on the left side with the nei fei showing is the Youle brick discussed on the following page. These are all amongst the most famous aged bricks of puerh to be found in the markets of Taiwan, Hong Kong and China.

The Xiaguan Series 下關磚茶系列

These tea bricks come in “net content (淨含量)” and “net weight (淨重版)” editions. The difference in character between the two versions is quite significant due to the quality of storage conditions during aging. Those stored in clean conditions have a bright, clear red liquor with a strong camphor element to its flavor; it has a very sweet aftertaste and stimulates plenty of salivation. The tea leaves post-brewing reveal that this tea is made up of grade 2–3 brick tea, and they are even smaller, thinner and firmer than

the leaf of Menghai teas. There are a countless number of such late-period teas on the market, so the only way to make sure you choose a top-quality product is to taste a lot of them. Another batch of tea bricks that are very representative of the Xiaguan Tea Factory’s brick teas are Baoyuan Tea Bricks (寶源茶磚), which are a single-leaf blend made from old-growth tea. This tea was taken out of storage at the time of the Hong Kong handover in 1997, and there was only quite a small volume of it. In our experience,

this tea has a stronger, purer camphor aroma than the two aforementioned teas. It’s a smooth, patient tea with a quickly emerging sweet aftertaste, and it stimulates a lot of salivation. The outer packaging already bears traces of aging, and every brick contains a *nei fei* (內飛) or “inner trademark ticket.” According to Hong Kong’s tea merchants, it was sold all over the world, with the largest volume going to Canada, the second-largest going to South Korea and a small amount making its way over to Taiwan.



透過時間和空間茶傳承下來

友誼之磚鋪路

江城興磚 Jiangcheng Tea Bricks

Whether or not Jiangcheng Tea Bricks actually come from the place named “Jiangcheng (江城)” is an ongoing mystery. In the 1940s and 1950s, Jiangcheng Tea Cakes (round, disc-shaped *bing*) began to circulate; by 1999 they were selling for 18,000 New Taiwan Dollars a cake, and by 2000 this had risen to 22,000 NTD. In 2003, when there was a collecting frenzy among South Korean monks, the price in Taiwan had risen to 60,000 NT a cake—this was enough to make many people in the industry reluctant to buy them. On April 15th, 2004, in Fangcun, Guangzhou, a Jiangcheng Tea *Bing* weighing 316 grams sold for the grand total of 23,000 Chinese *yuan*. It remains unknown whether Jiangcheng Tea Bricks and Jiangcheng Tea *Bing* were both being produced during the same period; however, according to our experience, and the opinions offered in various books, we do know that Jiangcheng Tea Bricks were likely produced after the 1970s. When brewed, this tea has a rich, full-bodied camphor aroma and a translucent reddish liquor whose color is quite reminiscent of barbecue sauce. After brewing, the leftover leaf is quite uniform, with large, plump leaves. There is a wide variety of similar large-leaf tea bricks on the market, so when choosing a tea to purchase, be sure to have a smell of the tea first. It should have a pure aged tea aroma, and the leaf should be fully oxidized/fermented. Jiangcheng brick tea has a lovely, long-lasting fragrance when brewed, enduring whether the tea is hot or cool.

原生種喬木系列磚茶 Wild “Native” Tea Tree Brick Series

Production of “Tea Tree” bricks didn’t begin until the post-’90s era. After the puerh boom began, many industry professionals threw themselves into producing tea bricks using traditional methods. There were tea bricks of all shapes and sizes, ranging from 50 grams, 100 grams and 250 grams, up to 375 and 500 grams. (Most of them were sheng tea, and emphasis was placed on old growth trees.) From our experience traveling extensively

throughout Yunnan, can be difficult to produce a fine tea, especially an organic one. However, mindset is an essential part of tea making; provided that one is personally involved in the whole process and really immerses oneself in it, producing tea using traditional methods can be a joyful experience. Some of the better-known examples of these tea bricks include 50-gram “Chocolate” Bricks, 250-gram Yiwu Wild Tea Bricks, Jin Wang brand Youle Bricks and the 2003 Wild Tea Brick series, mostly from the Old Six Great Tea Mountains. The main characteristics that these teas have in common are that they are limited in quantity, pure in flavor and are not yet in circulation.

Because these are masterpiece-level teas, the majority are snapped up by collectors as soon as they hit the market. While we’re on this topic, by the way, old-growth tea bricks are generally very popular; we believe that most savvy tea collectors share the opinion that stockpiling tea is even better than saving up money. This is because we are now living in an era of low inter-

est rates, and with the whole of China developing so rapidly, commodity prices will certainly continue to rise quickly. In addition, the Chinese policy of transitioning from state-owned to privately-owned enterprises will undoubtedly influence the economy, and we are bound to see even greater fluctuations in commodity prices in the near future. Based on our rough analysis of the data, the privatization of China’s industries has certainly resulted in worker salaries increasing under the influence of the price index, so it goes without saying that the cost of production and materials has likewise been affected.

The ten teas that we have chosen to highlight above are simply a representative selection of tea brick trends, and not in any way exhaustive. We certainly hope that others will point out and forgive any omissions or differences of opinion. Our hope in sharing this is simply to share our firsthand experience with tea bricks and tea brick culture in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau.

*Bricks of hearth and home
Compel the long ride
Across windswept prairies
To warm yurts
And a steaming bowl
Welcoming you home...
Bricks of peace
In bamboo forests creaking
While monks chant the pines
Wandering inner fields...
Bricks of inspiration
Watched over idly
By top-knotted scholars
Debating the sagacity of old
Contemplating the brushstrokes
Of landscape scenes
Reflected in this very bowl
And the bricks of friendship
That have been shared
Along this ancient road...*

—Wu De



7581

純生態 無污染

Brewing Tips 茶

冲泡技巧 完成好茶

Lao Banzhang tea is notoriously strong, vibrant and full-bodied with a slightly sweet aftertaste. This month's tea is astringent and bitter if you steep it too long or put too much leaf in the pot. Of course, the best of this tea will shine when brewed gongfu, but you can also brew it sidehandle to great effect. Just be conscious of how much you add, knowing that less is more. You can always add more leaf, but it's a waste to take some out, so try putting in less than what you are used to (unless you like your puerh strong).

This month, water will also be paramount to making this tea shine. You will want to use the best water you have access to—preferably spring water you gather yourself, but you can use a fine bottled water as well. Try tasting a few different types to find the best if you haven't already. Water that is good for tea should have a pH of around 7 and also include some minerals, though ideally not too hard with limestone or calcium, which influence the tea and also build up on one's teaware. The best water for tea is smooth in your mouth like almond milk. When you roll it around your mouth, it should stay together and have a nice viscosity. It should not pinch the throat when it is swallowed, and should coat the mouth and throat, leaving your mouth comfortable after swallowing. The best spring waters also quench thirst very easily. Even on a hot day when we hike up the mountain to get our spring water for tea, a small metal cup's worth is more than enough to quench the thirst. Guests at the Center are always amazed by this, and by how sensitive they are to the way the water fills the body. Many say that they can feel their cells taking it in.

With good clean water and some nice teaware, you can make an excellent and vibrant cup or bowl of this month's amazing tea. But you will also have to pay attention to steeping time. In the quick tips below, you will see that many months we talk about "flash" steepings. A flash steeping is an instant one, where you decant the tea as soon as possible. There is a general formula—which only goes so far, of course—that the first steeping is longer to let the leaves open, followed by a flash steeping, and then increased duration throughout the rest of the steepings of the session. With fine teas, you can get two or even three flash steepings after the initial slightly longer one. Some very excellent teas even go so far as four or five flash steepings. We can get four out of our best cake this year, Righteousness, for example. With our Tea of the Month, we recommend doing a longer rinse before you even start steeping, as the leaves are tightly compressed and the tea is strong.

Some tea lovers suggest not rinsing tea, especially fine teas, as they feel it wastes the first steeping. Rinsing the tea cleans off the dust of its journey—both literal and energetic. Like all things Tea, it has both practical and ceremonial significance. It purifies the Tea for a ceremony as water does for people before entering ceremonial space. Perhaps the ceremonial significance of this is not so important to you, and you don't mind the literal dust and dirt of the farm and journey to you, and you would rather skip this step. For us, the ceremonial significance is very important.

Rinsing the tea also wakes the leaves up and prepares them for steeping, making the first steeping better for your guests. With a fine tea, the practicality of this may be mitigated by the preciousness of the tea, in which case some people may choose to forgo the rinse. However, aside from the fact that we greatly value the ceremonial significance of purifying the tea, so to speak, before the ceremony begins, we also like the first cup to be great, starting the session off right from the get-go. Awakened, opened leaves release their fragrance and aroma much better. Also, if you think about it, the awakening and revivification of the tea leaves also has a deeper meaning, and can therefore be a part of how we think of this step ceremonially.



Gongfu

Sidehandle

Water: spring water or best bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: hotter, fish-eye, roughly 90–95 °C

Brewing Methods: gongfu or sidehandle tea (both are great)

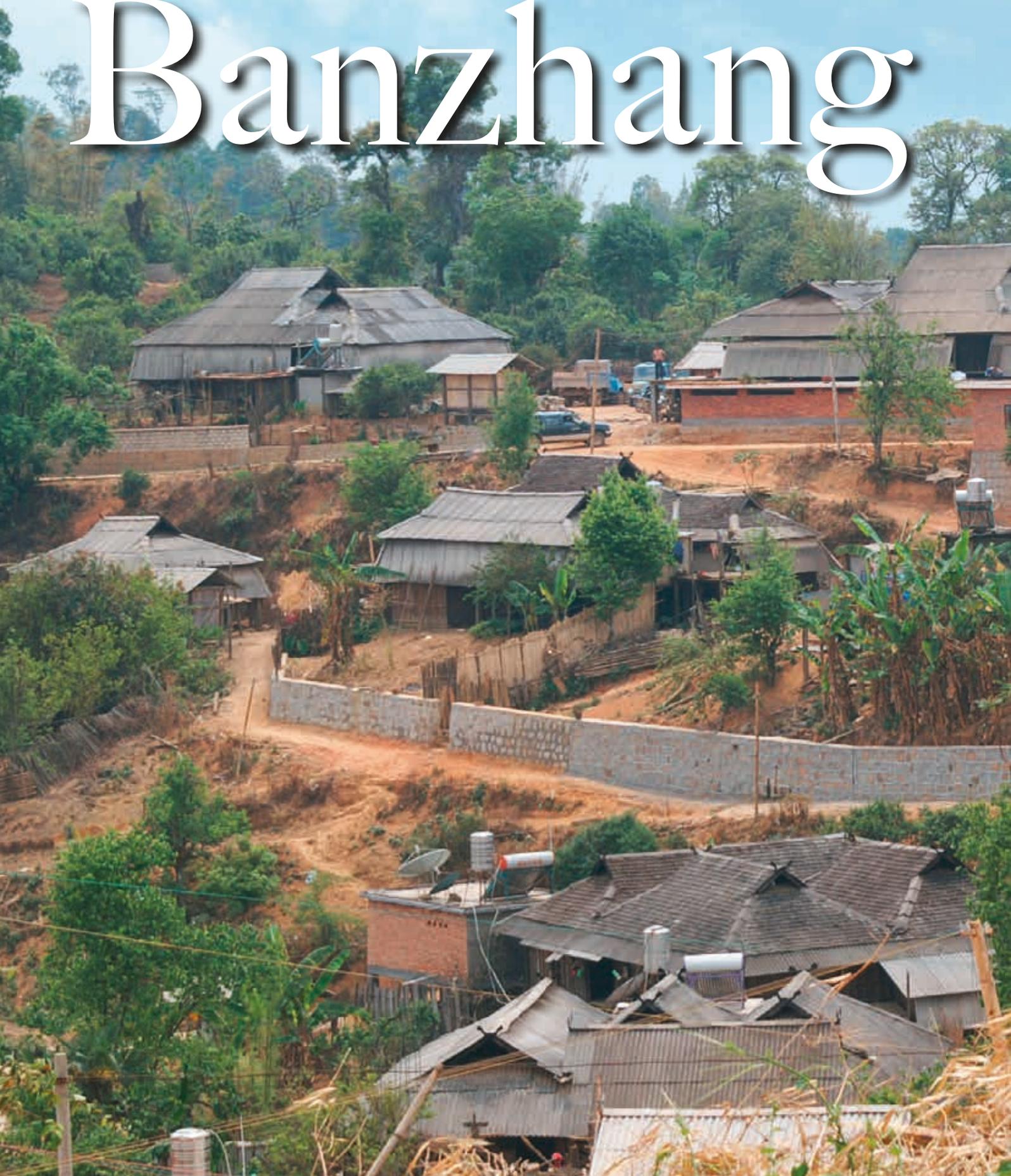
Steeping: longer, flash, flash, flash; then increase (you may flash once for sidehandle)

Patience: twenty to thirty steepings

茶 Be very careful of amount this month. Forest Prince is very bold, astringent and bitter. Less is more! You can always add more leaves if you like your tea stronger, whereas taking them out is a waste.



Lao Banzhang





老班章

THE PRINCE OF YUNNAN

严禁采摘
违者重罚

Lao Banzhang puerh tea has become synonymous with puerh tea itself. The village itself has been affected by tremendous change more than any other region in Yunnan. What was once a simple, inaccessible mountain village has been ushered into the modern age at an incredible velocity. The positive and negative impacts of this rapid growth are a lesson for all tea lovers, as we are, in the end, the ones who consume the tea and drive the market. We have to protect the tea trees, the farmers and the culture of the regions where our beloved Leaf grows.



茶人: Luo Ying Yin (羅英銀)

Back in the year 2000, Lao Banzhang tea only cost eight *yuan* per kilogram. Since then, prices have been steadily climbing; in 2007, the price had risen to 1,800 *yuan* per kilogram before falling somewhat. In the intervening years it has more or less doubled each year; this year's spring tea reached a price of 12,000 *yuan* per kilogram. In the space of about fourteen years, the price of Lao Banzhang tea increased a thousand-fold. The prices of other teas haven't even come close to this astonishing increase: not Red Mark, not the '92 Square Brick tea, nor the '88 Green Cakes. And when tea prices climb to the sky, visitors climb the tea mountains. In this small village of about 500 Hani people in 120 households, the villagers experienced a massive change in lifestyle due to this unexpected windfall of wealth, with the substantial change in material conditions putting their spirit and values to the test.

There's a saying that goes: "With wine, we talk about the vineyard; with puerh, we talk about the mountain." The concept of terroir or *shan tou* (山頭)—literally "mountaintop"—when discussing puerh has slowly become more clearly defined since the year 2000. Yunnan's unique geography and climate give puerh tea its own special

flavor, as does each mountain within Yunnan. Thanks to Lao Banzhang's robust and distinctive old-tree character, it has been hailed among all the puerh tea mountains as "King Banzhang." Just as Longjing tea has come to represent green tea in general, and Da Hong Pao is the embodiment of Wuyi Cliff Tea, so too has Lao Banzhang become a synonym for puerh tea on today's market.

Everyone eagerly trumpets the name of Banzhang tea, but where should we draw the line in determining its actual place and village of origin? Some people take a broad view and call all tea from Mount Blang Banzhang tea; others also use the Banzhang name for tea from Lao Man'e, while some call the tea from Weidong Village Dong Banzhang (East Banzhang) tea. Banzhang belongs to a group of villages situated on Mount Blang in Hai County, part of the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. It comprises two villages inhabited by the Hani people, Xin (New) Banzhang and Lao (Old) Banzhang. As well as these two villages, the local village committee located at Xin Banzhang Village also has jurisdiction over three other villages, namely Lao Man'e, Kalong and Ka'nan. Hence, any tea from within this region is called Banzhang

tea. In 1988, the Hai tea factory planted more than 10,000 *mu* (around 667 hectares) of tea in Ka'nan, and in 2005, the same factory produced a special batch of Banzhang "Seven Sons" tea cakes (*Chi Tze Bing*, 七子餅).

Ever since the market began hailing Lao Banzhang as tea royalty, villages with historical connections to the tea also began to bask in the reflected glory. It's said that in 1476, the Aini people—the ancestors of the Hani inhabitants of today's Lao Banzhang—migrated there from Mount Gelanghe. At the time, the Lao Man'e people were living there; in other words, members of the Blang ethnic group had already been living in the area since the year 300 CE, planting forests and tea trees and cultivating the land. Later, this piece of land was ceded to the Aini people. This is why, from the time that the Aini people built their own village there until the late 1990s, each year the Aini people would give grain and livestock to the people of Lao Man'e Village as a fee for leasing the land, and to express their thanks for the Blang people's kindness. This also explains why the village of Lao Banzhang is only around 500 years old, while some of the old tea trees are over one thousand. These old trees are why this place is so special and well known.



☞ *The upper left is an old film photograph of the gate to the entrance of Lao Banzhang village from the early 2000s, with a dirt road and very simple surroundings. The author gave us this quaint photograph to suggest change. Above is Lao Banzhang maocha drying in the sun as you see in any village throughout Yunnan. Nowadays, much more of the tea is processed in the factory. To the left is a large one-kilogram ball of Lao Banzhang tea Wu De picked up when he went there in 2005. Large balls like this were common in ancient times, but require too much effort to make nowadays, as the tea has to be dried and compressed in stages so that the inside does not rot. The Starry-Sky pot gives a sense of scale. To the right, a Hani elder picks tea from one of the 800-year-old tea trees that surround Lao Banzhang, and from which its fame is derived.*

Lao Banzhang has gone through two significant migrations throughout its history. The first was around sixty years ago, when part of the population moved about seven kilometers, settling at “Xin (New) Banzhang,” while the original village got the name “Lao (Old) Banzhang.” Then, around forty years ago, part of Lao Banzhang Village split off into another village around forty kilometers away, named “Weidong Village” (which is governed by the Kan Village committee under the Ang Village government office, and was also called “Kan” in the past.) Because tea trees were not worth much at the time and the new settlement was a long way away, the people of Weidong Village gave up their tea gardens at Lao Banzhang and planted new tea near their new home, where it was easier to harvest.

The landscape of Mount Blang features tall mountain ranges crisscrossed by deep ravines; ease of transport became the driving force behind progress for the mountain villages. In the early days, the people of Lao Banzhang were quite isolated from the rest of the world; following the construction of a road connecting the village to the outside world in 2002, the villagers who once remained hidden away deep in the mountains all year long gradually opened up a new path for the local tea industry. The unique character of the tea also gained recognition in the outside world, and its value gradually became apparent. In 2008, the Chen-sheng Tea Factory invested one million *yuan* to improve the main road into Banzhang Village for about eight kilometers, making the route to and from the village even smoother than before.

From that time, the price of Lao Banzhang tea expanded along with the road, surging along wave by wave just like the traffic.

The people in those fleets of cars that wind their way along the hills are all attracted by the distinctive boldness of Lao Banzhang tea, or by the sweet aftertaste that emerges from its bitter flavor. I think Chinese people are quite fond of flavors that combine bitter and sweet, such as green tea. For this reason, northern China has become a major new market for puerh tea; people are already accustomed to the bitterness of green tea. As for Lao Banzhang, after its initial bitter flavor, as the tea liquor slides over the tongue and toward the back of the throat, an enchanting sugar-sweetness emerges. This is also what makes this place so special and the tea so great.





According to surveys, Lao Banzhang's old tea trees cover a total area of 4,490 *mu* (close to 300 hectares). Around 80,000 of the tea trees are more than 100 years old; 27,664 trees are more than 500 years old and 9,412 of them have lived for more than 800 years. In 1999, all the old tea trees were divided among the local population according to the 117 households living there at the time; on average each person was allocated around 100 old trees. The thirty or so areas of old tea trees border the main road that circles the village for a distance of about eight kilometers. With the old village nestled in the middle, it makes for a beautiful tea mountain scene. This has changed, with wires now criss-crossing the landscape.

I've been going to Lao Banzhang every year since 2007; at the time of the puerh tea crash, in the early years, I watched the Chensheng Tea Factory head back to the village to purchase tea at a guaranteed price. I remember the warm hospitality of village heads San Pa and Yang Weijie as they personally cooked a meal for the guests. In 2009, the Chensheng Tea Factory built a primary processing facility at Lao Banzhang, guiding processing techniques in the right direction and improving the quality of primary tea processing in the village. People came from all over to harvest the tea, and with the increased standards and learning that resulted, the Lao Banzhang tea buds grew plump and sturdy, the shape of the processed leaves neat and clearly

defined. The unique, old-tree aroma of Lao Banzhang propelled it to the top place in the market.

This year when I visited Lao Banzhang again, young village head Gao Xiaocheng pointed out that the village is currently home to 128 households, a total population of 540. Around seventy of the households have been contracted by the Chensheng Tea Factory for five consecutive years. One person can harvest 20 kilograms of tea, so a family of four would take in a total of 80 kilograms of raw leaf. He also related that he feels somewhat helpless as the village head, because he has to spend every day accompanying guests; they get a lot of politicians visiting, which means that they also have to gift a lot of tea in the name of public



relations. This means that out of every 100 kilograms of tea produced, there are usually only about 30 kilograms left to sell. He also added that these days, the villagers would barely bat an eyelid at a windfall of 7,000 *yuan*; if they make 70,000, they might feel some small satisfaction. The income from one year of tea sales is enough to buy a house in Hai County, and people are now used to spending money without thinking, buying clothes for their children anywhere that seems expensive. It was impossible to recapture the simple joy of his childhood, when they would throw on any old clothes and go out to tend the cattle. “Things were simpler then,” he says. “We may not have had so much, or been so rich, but I am not sure all this prosperity has

brought real happiness. I am worried about the future generations.” As this involves all Chajin who love puerh, I couldn’t help but feel the same way, wondering what I would find when I visit Lao Banzhang in ten years. Will the people have any of their culture left? Will the next generation make better tea, or worse? And will the hospitality be gone from these mountains? What about the trees themselves? Will any of the old trees that have afforded the villagers their wealth remain or will they be forgotten or even lost in all the clamor?

“Green gold” has brought the people of Lao Banzhang stylish villas and their children brand new clothes and shoes. On the other hand, the bright gazes of the villagers and the simple yet

peaceful village houses of dark-colored wood are now a thing of the past. Tea once gave soul to their ancestors, but will it also steal away the souls of their descendants? What I do know is that these days when you enter the old village, the coldness of the atmosphere spreads over the whole valley; no longer can you hear the warm voices of times gone by, calling out to cordially offer a cup of tea.



Xin “New” Banzhang

茶人: Luo Ying Yin (羅英銀)

新班章

Time changes all things. In recent years, puerh tea prices have been on the rise; for the villagers of Xin (New) Banzhang, this stirs up a host of emotions. Half a century ago, they left their original homes in Lao (Old) Banzhang and settled near the local government offices at Mount Blang Village in search of more convenient living conditions and better transport access. Everyone in the area knows Xin Banzhang as the location of the local village committee, the seat of the administrative district that governs Lao Banzhang and Lao Man'e. But when it comes to puerh tea, Xin Banzhang is a long way from catching up with the glorious reputation of Lao Banzhang and Lao Man'e.

Standing at the edge of Lao Banzhang's glowing aura, Xin Banzhang only fetches half its price on today's market. It's very uncommon to see the characters “Xin Banzhang (新班章)” printed on the packaging of brand-name round puerh tea cakes. Rather, most of the raw leaf is marketed under the name of “Lao Banzhang (老班章),” or simply “Banzhang.”

The villages of Xin Banzhang and Lao Banzhang are both inhabited by the Hani people, and are situated about seven kilometers from each other. The old-growth tea tree communities spread out densely across the slopes alongside the old road to Lao Banzhang. The tea plants cover a total land area of around 1,300 *mu*

(about 87 hectares). The tea gardens grow intermingled with the broad-leaf forest, which provides plenty of shade cover, producing plump, glossy leaves. The village of Xin Banzhang has about 400 residents, making up seventy-odd households.

The twofold price difference between tea from the Xin Banzhang and Lao Banzhang Villages does carry a sense of disparity for the people of Xin Banzhang. Whenever outside visitors come to the village, the residents of Xin Banzhang throw themselves enthusiastically into recounting the eventful history of New and Old Banzhang. According to records, The ancestors of the Hani people first settled in the area in 1852, though the Hani say their ancestors, the Aini, arrived in the fifteenth century, as I mentioned in the previous article. They would go on to endure natural disasters and the chaos of wartime, settling in some thirteen different areas including Shuguo Village and Maya Village before finally ending up in Zhinian Village, which is the same place that we now call Xin Banzhang.

Later, in 1943, the Hani people began a new migration, with a small part of the population moving to Zuo-ban Village, which is what we now call Lao (Old) Banzhang Village. According to the village elders, today's Xin Banzhang Village got the “Xin” (“New”) part of its name from a final wave of migration in 1968, where part

of the population once more moved from “Old” Banzhang back to what is now “New” Banzhang (which was still called “Zhinian Village” at the time). So, as the village elders like to point out, although Xin Banzhang Village has “New” in its name, when you look at the relevant history, it is in fact older than the “Old” Lao Banzhang Village.

Aside from Xin Banzhang and Lao Banzhang, there's another nearby place called Banzhang Old Village (*Banzhang Laozhai*, 班章老寨). The tea mountain there is called “Guxiang Village Tea Mountain (吉祥鋪存茶山).” In 1968, the population of Banzhang Old Village moved to Xin Banzhang, and from that point the tea mountain that they originally tended belonged to the people of New Banzhang.

There are no written records of all this; the people of Banzhang rely on the spoken word to pass down their history through the generations. These snippets of history, such as the veritable word game behind the names of New and Old Banzhang, sketch the outline of the long history of the Hani people. It's a good thing that the rising prices of Banzhang tea have drawn the attention of outside enthusiasts and tea experts; without their interest and research, who else would have brushed the dust off these fascinating oral histories and brought them into the view of the world?





Gongfu Teapot

功夫茶壺

THE SHAPE OF THE TEAPOT

茶人: Shen Su (聖素)

This month, I wanted try a new experiment. Noticing the unique shape of this month's tea brick, I thought it would be fun to experiment with the shape of teapots. I always knew that the shape of a teapot was relevant when making tea because I've compared a porcelain teapot to a porcelain gaiwan, made of exactly the same porcelain. In fact, they were fired in the same kiln at the same time! The only difference, therefore, was in the shape because the material was the same. Furthermore, any differences in the tea were therefore due to that difference in shape. For this experiment, however, I wanted to test different-shaped gongfu teapots made of the same purple-sand clay. Fortunately, we have such teapots at Tea Sage Hut!

As always, we like to remind the reader that gongfu tea experiments are very important in this tradition of tea. They are largely responsible for the pu-

riety in which this brewing method has been handed down from generation to generation. When we say "gongfu tea," we are referring to a regional tea brewing tradition in the south of China, primarily from Chaozhou. This will help us distinguish it from very different methods of brewing tea that adhere to the same name, which is confusing in conversation, so we make this clarification to communicate more clearly. By doing experiments, we build an evidence-based foundation and begin to understand why we are doing what we're doing, and that meaning connects us to each step. It also prevents us from randomly changing any steps of this roughly three-hundred-year-old brewing method because it's clear from the experiments (and the tests of time) that they are here for a good reason. A deeper lesson here is that any time we get closer to the source of something, we feel more connected to it, and are

more likely to protect and respect it—be it tea, water, food, family heritage, etc. So, in doing experiments, we develop respect for this rich brewing method. As a result, we greatly benefit from everything gongfu tea has to offer in its pure form and feel a great sense of responsibility when passing it on or sharing it with other tea lovers. As well, as an individual, you can learn to refine your palate and appreciate the subtler qualities of a fine cup of tea. This heightened sensitivity and refined palate help you to connect to tea through yet another avenue.

On a final note, from a deep respect for this brewing method, there really is no excuse to make random changes to such an old tradition. Of course, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to make tea. Tea should ultimately be enjoyed as a leisurely activity that brings you joy and a moment's peace in a day, and that can be achieved with



the simplest of teaware and an open heart. However, because our primary approach to tea is as a Dao or Way of Life, and because we are lineage bearers, it is also our responsibility to teach gongfu tea as it was handed down to us. Many good adaptations have been made to this brewing method over time, but what does “good” mean? It means an adaptation that facilitates the function of the brewing method itself. In an educational setting, it is safe to say that the function of gongfu tea is about brewing the finest cup of tea possible. But what does “finest” mean? That is based on the *Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea*, covered in many previous Global Tea Hut issues. Therefore, any changes that do naturally arise (as they should in a living tradition) should go towards making a better cup of tea, and the only way to discern that is through experimentation and more importantly, decades of dedication to

this brewing method in its pure form. Changes to a three-hundred-year-old brewing method that make a better cup of tea will only arise from a deep connection to the Spirit of gongfu tea. More important than the change is the deep connection. In such a pursuit to deeply connect to tea, let this experiment be one of many steps to come as we walk this path of tea together.

At our school of tea, we are quite abundant in tea and teaware to use for educational purposes, such as these experiments. It was no problem, then, to find three pots made of the same clay but which are very different in shape. You are welcome to perform this experiment by using your own pots of a different shape to see what the effects are. Usually we don't give away the results in our conclusion because we feel it's important and fun for each individual to carry out the experiment and observe the differences themselves,

within the framework of their own body. However, because you will likely be using different pots than the ones we are using, we will reveal our results in the conclusion.

As I said earlier, we don't ordinarily discuss the conclusions to any experiments we offer in the “Gongfu Teapot” section of the magazine, as we want you to do the experiments yourself rather than taking our word for it. Experiential understanding is important. These rare instances where there is a good reason to show you our observations and conclusions are also useful, however, as they give you a glimpse into the things we are looking for when conducting our experiments. You may or may not want to structure your notes as I have, but I do recommend creating a system of some kind and then following it throughout the experiment, and from experiment to experiment if possible.

THE SET UP

For this experiment, I used three purple-sand clay teapots: the “*Duo Qiu* (掇球),” or “Chopped Ball” teapot, the wonderful “*Ju Lun Zhu* (巨輪珠),” or “Wagon Wheel” pot and the “*Meng Chen Pear Style* (孟臣梨式),” all of which can be seen in our September 2017 Extended Edition on Yixing Teaware. Each teapot rested in a purple-sand clay tea boat. You likely won’t have these exact same pots, so as mentioned above, please use any pots with differing shapes that you have access to. It is important to note that the clay of these pots is the same, meaning that it is the shape that is responsible for any observable differences. This is relevant, of course, because gongfu tea is in large part about brewing the finest cup of tea possible, and if shape can be considered to make a better cup of tea, then it should be!

I used one of the Light Meets Life kettles to boil spring water over an infrared heat source. I weighed three grams of this month’s tea per teapot and used modern porcelain gongfu cups for tasting the tea.

PROCEDURE

There are at least two ways to conduct this experiment. The easiest way would be to steep the tea in each pot separately and focus on one pot at a time by drinking the tea from one pot, taking notes and then repeating with the second and third pot. But I wanted to drink the tea from all three pots at the same time. This method took some timing to get it just right. I needed a stopwatch to time it accurately, to make sure each pot steeped for exactly the same amount of time.

I discovered that knowing how long it takes in seconds to shower the pot, steep the tea, and post shower the pot was most relevant for timing accurately. I found that it took precisely eight seconds to do this with these pots. This will vary slightly based on your kettle and pots and comfort with pouring. I gave myself four-second pauses between steepings and pours, which was just enough time for “in-between” movements. As can be seen in the table below, the first pot was showered and steeped during the first eight-second interval, plus a four-second pause, and then the second pot was showered and steeped during the next eight-second interval (twelve seconds to twenty seconds) and so on.

Just three seconds after showering and steeping the third pot, I poured the first pot into one medium-sized cup. The pour also took about eight seconds. Then after another four-second pause, I poured the second pot and so on. Once I finished pouring all three pots, each pot had steeped for exactly forty-three seconds. At that point, I began to drink the tea from all three pots back and forth as many times as necessary. I repeated these steps three times and recorded my observations during each round.

It was really fun to conduct the experiment this way, and drinking the cups side by side yielded a lot of insight. I would actually do it again using the other method of focusing on one pot at a time to see if the results are the same or similar.

	Shower/Steep Shower (seconds)	Pouring Time (seconds)	Total Steep Time
Teapot 1	0-8	35-43	43
pause...	4	4	
Teapot 2	12-20	47-55	43
pause...	4	4	
Teapot 3	24-32	39-67	43



功夫茶



CONCLUSIONS/OBSERVATIONS

As mentioned above, normally we talk about the conclusion in general, but leave the specific results up to you. After all, it's important to speak from your own experience by carrying out these experiments. That is the empowering quality of doing gongfu tea experiments. Instead of speaking only from intellectual understanding based on something you read in a book or heard in a talk, you can speak confidently from your own observations, from within the framework of your own body. Not to say that intellectual understanding isn't important; rather, it is compounded in strength when coupled together with experiential understanding. However, because we have such a unique set of pots that likely can't be replicated, we'll discuss our specific observations below.

As with all of our experiments, we focus on the *Ten Qualities of a Fine Cup of Tea*, as described in previous issues. These are more objective qualities than flavor and aroma, for example, which can be very subjective and personal. These ten qualities help us define and communicate what constitutes a fine cup of tea because they are more objective, whereas flavor and aroma are not good measures by which to discuss fine tea because they are too subjective. We aren't simply throwing out flavor and aroma, mind you, only temporarily setting them aside.

I steeped the tea three times, making observations in three rounds. There was consistency between my observations in all three rounds, so I will discuss the results together. The *Ju Lun Zhu* (巨輪珠) "Wagon Wheel" offered a more pronounced flavor profile—without saying what the flavors were (because that's subjective), but that the flavors were stronger and more noticeable in comparison to the other two pots. This was consistent in all three rounds. The *Duo Qiu* (掇球) "Chopped Ball" teapot liquor was less pronounced in flavor, but demonstrated more noticeably the sensations in the mouth, like the way it coated the mouth and throat, the smoothness, movement and the splash to the upper palate. When drinking tea from this pot, my attention immediately went to the mouth sensations. Not to say the *Ju Lun Zhu* didn't also demonstrate these qualities, but they were more evident in the *Duo Qiu*, and the flavors and aromas were more subdued. The *Meng Chen* (孟臣) teapot liquor was, in my experience, the best of both worlds, balancing the sensations in the mouth with the flavors and aromas of this tea. It was noticeably more enjoyable to use a pot that brought together all the qualities so harmoniously.

This was my first time conducting this experiment, and I definitely look forward to doing it again. I was surprised at how distinguished the differences were based on shape alone. I found the results to be very inspiring and practical because I can immediately apply the results when brewing tea. For example, if I have a particular tea with a strong and enjoyable aroma or flavor profile, like some oolong teas or Evening Sky red tea, I might consider the *Ju Lun Zhu* teapot to highlight those qualities. Or, I could choose the *Duo Qiu* for those same teas to balance the mouth sensations with the already strong flavor profile. More generally speaking, however, it's great to know that shape alone influences the tea. Because gongfu tea is about making the best cup of tea possible (based on the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea), I can more confidently take into consideration the shape of the pot when buying or choosing a pot for brewing tea.

In this experiment, I focused on the influence the shape of the pot had on the tea liquor. There are also practical aspects of shape to consider, of course, which are more obvious. For instance, if you are using a pot for long and delicate striped leaves, like a Wuyi Cliff Tea, for example, a pot with a larger opening will make placing the leaves much more convenient. Other examples include a filter inside, which is convenient, but not ideal for tea preparation. The size of the pot relative to the number of guests at a session would be another example of a practical factor.





THE CHANGING MARKET OF LAO BANZHANG



Though we usually don't publish articles concerning the changes and flow of the tea markets in the world—not because of any moral high ground, but rather just because we prefer the historical, artisanal and spiritual sides of tea—no issue on Lao Banzhang would be complete without a discussion of its influence on the puerh market. This issue is very profound, and there are many lessons to be learned, especially concerning the influence that we tea lovers have on the lives of distant peoples, for better or for worse.



茶人: *Lin En Zhao* (林恩照)

Lao Banzhang prices have risen again! And this time it's not just by 5% or 10%—this time the prices have increased by a full 50% right from the raw leaf stage. Once upon a time, large and medium-sized tea enterprises played the role of middlemen in this process; nowadays, they have almost no suppressing influence, and all they can do is buy and sell at market prices. Visiting merchants from all over China are streaming into the local tea mountains and villages—old hands and novices alike. All are eager to take some sample tea away with them to make the trip worthwhile. All of these merchants buying tea samples are just like ants toppling an elephant; each of their individual actions have contributed to pushing spring tea prices higher and higher. But how long can the current high prices be sustained? Will the ants keep coming? Will Lao Banzhang tea, which has enjoyed so much attention in Taiwanese tea circles, continue to sell? What about puerh tea in general?

Changes in the production & sales model

If we look at the current situation, circumstances are even more extreme than they were in the mid-2000s. There are four main observations that we can make regarding the

tea production locations, outlined below. The major factors involved are changes in both the production model and the sales and operating model.

An economic model to serve mainland China's enormous domestic demand

Since puerh tea doesn't spoil and only improves with age, becoming more fragrant and more valuable, it is seen as a low-risk investment, purchased using futures contracts (when the price is agreed upon at the time of the contract and the goods are delivered and paid for later). As such, when brands such as Dayi, Chensheng or newcomer Yulin Gucha are bought and sold, the physical object purchased is an invoice or goods order rather than the tea leaf itself. Here in Taiwan, on the other hand, our tea merchants and companies still tend to trade the old-fashioned way, dealing in the tea leaf itself.

More cross-industry capital enters the tea market

Aside from little known government-related funds that view tea as a new tool for hedging against risk, there are other strategic cross-industry investments such as those from Lenovo

Technologies and Jack Ma's Taiji Chanyuan brand. These can all be seen as efforts by these enterprises to position themselves to coordinate with China's policy objectives of developing cultural industries. The operating model for the wholesale market is changing along with the rapid development of communications, and the traditional puerh wholesale market is in a state of flux. Tea shops, the main endpoint of sales, have begun heading straight to the tea regions to acquire the goods themselves, disregarding the once-important role that intermediary merchants played in quality control.

Changes in the operating model of the consumer market

Puerh is an important element of mainland China's domestic tea industry. Aside from traditional tea shops, the "teahouse union" model has also appeared, unifying the diverse range of sales methods and supply channels, along with the marketing of other tea culture-related products such as tea ceremonies, teaware, tea garments and incense. This has improved business for both high-end teahouse complexes and private tea enterprises and has carried puerh tea into the ranks of high-price tea products. Again, one has to wonder what the long-term effect of these changes will be.





So, following from this rough analysis of the current state of the market in mainland China, some careful reflection is needed in the Taiwanese tea world. Due to the impact of these economic factors, the raw tea leaf market has undergone external changes as well as internal changes because of the quality of the leaf. Examples such as Lao Banzhang are a timely reminder that we must think about the future path of the tea market in Taiwan. The number one factor impacting the current tea market is the skyrocketing prices of raw puerh leaf, which are headed sky-high and show no signs of turning back! This is an external change. But another, undoubtedly more serious change is that the intrinsic quality of the tea is rapidly deteriorating under the influence of these economic factors. To put it simply, even though one must pay a higher price with every passing year, this higher price can only buy increasingly inferior tea!

Just as “Da Hong Pao” (“Big Red Robe”) has become synonymous with Wuyi Cliff Tea, “Lao Banzhang” has also come to represent puerh tea as a whole, and is no longer just seen as some kind of unique or outstanding example in the genre. This is a reality that we must come to accept in Taiwan’s tea circles. In recent years, with regard to the tea producers who have been busily rushing around on the front lines in Yunnan’s major tea-producing regions, I have already stopped paying Lao Banzhang tea any kind of special attention, since it has already changed so much!

It’s no longer the old friend it once was; now, it is simply one of a list of standard tea products that must be manufactured each year. Lao Banzhang tea has not been Lao Banzhang tea for quite some time.

In my opinion, there are two questions that the tea world should be focusing on regarding Lao Banzhang tea. The first is this: as tea prices have been driven up by the multitudes of “ants” buying their tea samples, has the intrinsic quality of Lao Banzhang tea also been affected? If so, has it improved or deteriorated? The second is: supposing the equilibrium between price and quality has been lost, should consumers support the tea industry’s response of adjusting tea prices? Do we really want high-priced, low-quality tea?

Within the current sales-oriented operating model, the record high prices of Lao Banzhang tea are beneficial for promoting sales, even for other tea products from other regions. This phenomenon is certainly applicable to today’s market in mainland China, as these days tea sellers in the mainland don’t place a lot of emphasis on tea knowledge. Taiwan’s tea market, on the other hand, remains relatively conservative and traditional. When we market tea, we also market the attitude and specialized knowledge of the Chajin. The Taiwanese consumer market tends to lag behind in terms of knowledge of places of origin of the raw leaf due to the limitations imposed by physical distance. That said, rational consumer habits in Taiwan tend to prevent the phenomenon of consumers blindly chasing the latest craze in tea.

Recent changes in Lao Banzhang Village

In recent years, five main elements of Lao Banzhang Village tend to surface in popular discussion. The first is that the villagers have all been building brand new houses and processing facilities, with an average area of more than a thousand square meters per building (according to the estimates of the village committee). The second is that China Mobile installed internet connections especially for Lao Banzhang, and now every household in the village has a computer. The third is that a bank branch has been opened in the village. And the fourth is that almost all of the storefronts in the Hai County town have been bought by people from Lao Banzhang. The last is the ever-climbing price of Lao Banzhang tea.

At the same time, increased contact with Lao Banzhang tea seems to have left an impression of high demand, instability and deteriorating quality, leading to an overall climate of doubt and conjecture.

For example, increasing numbers of tea merchants are stationing themselves in the village itself, so they can personally oversee the whole production process. Should we see this trend as positive or negative? It is really hard to know what to think about all these drastic changes.

For one thing, people from Lao Banzhang have contracted most of the tea-producing land of neighboring Banpen Village and built on-site processing facilities. However, you never hear of people from Lao Banzhang selling Banpen tea—you'll always hear them stress that they only sell tea from Lao Banzhang. Although Lao Banzhang tea appears to be produced in a strictly-controlled environment, has all this effort actually led to an improvement in the tea? The answer to this remains hazy and uncertain. According to popular impression, Lao Banzhang tea hasn't just changed in terms of outward appearance, becoming less visually attractive, lacking in fragrance and harder to find, but the flavor has also become weaker, and the spirit of the tea seems to have been lost. On the whole, in addition to the observable changes in the quality of Lao Banzhang tea, it seems that the attitude of the people of Lao Banzhang has also become more focused on the economic benefit of selling the tea as opposed to

the qualities that made the tea famous in the first place.

Based on statistics from 2012, Lao Banzhang Village was home to 127 households at that time. According to Director Yang of the savings unit at the Zhun Bank (准銀行) rural credit union, from the first of March when the tea harvest began until the end of March, the village had collectively deposited 25 million *yuan*. From the first of April onwards, about 1 million *yuan* was deposited each day! The farming households and the savings unit made an agreement that the funds from March tea sales would be deposited to the sum of more than 30 million *yuan* in cash, while the tea merchants withdrew a sum of more than 7 million *yuan*. By way of comparison, village head Ge Sanyi (戈三以) was making a daily income of 50 to 70 thousand *yuan* a day from tea sales, while his friends and relatives were bringing in 30 to 50 thousand a day. It's estimated that during the month of March, the villagers probably each made anywhere

from 1 million *yuan* on the lower end to nearly 2 million on the higher end. These figures are enough to understand the continually rising tea prices, a great pillar supporting the financial might of Lao Banzhang Village.

In recent years, the people of Lao Banzhang have taken to repeating that "Only the tea sold by Lao Banzhang Village is Lao Banzhang tea!" As for all the merchants who flock from afar to Lao Banzhang Village, are they spending these considerable sums to buy Lao Banzhang tea because they know in their hearts that it's good tea? Or simply because it's adorned with the shining reputation of the tea village? Is "don't buy the 'right' tea, just buy the most expensive!" in fact the truest picture of today's puerh tea market?



茶 The upper left shows the brand new bank that was built in Lao Banzhang Village, which is extremely rare for villages (maybe the only of its kind at the time of this publication). Above, a Hani elder sits and casually sifts withering maocha outside their brand new, huge and freshly-tiled house. Most of the villagers have built new houses, which is a good thing. We wish them prosperity, but the "Green Gold" rush may not bring them happiness. To the right, two young boys return home after helping pick tea leaves, and learning how it's done—each with a sack of tools and herbs they gathered in the forest.



The Elixir

of Life

長生丹

茶人: Wu De (無的)

More than anything else, people ask, “Why tea?”

Since ancient times, the Zen ideal has been to seek liberation in “daily life”—finding meaning in the ordinary dapple of sunlight on the table, the golden ring that flutters on a flower, work, sweat, digestion and sleep. This is Zen through an intermediate. Remember, as we discussed in last month’s Zen & Tea issue, the word “Zen” means the meditative mind, and because “Zen Buddhism” can get in the way of transmitting this mind as often as it helps, Zen masters have through the ages sought other, nonverbal ways and means of communicating the Zen mind. The meditative mind, which is therefore Zen, was cultivated through an intermediary: martial arts, a *gatha*, a poem, calligraphy, a mantra or an ordinary activity.

But why highlight the tea cup of all these ordinary objects on the table? Why promote this Leaf and not the cabbage soup that came with lunch? Did it not speak of Nature as deeply? Why not put a walnut in your pocket? Again, why tea? Sometimes when people ask this question, it isn’t so deep; sometimes people just want to know why and/or how we “got into tea.” Those questions are best answered casually, with a bit of backstory.

It is important for us to know what it is we want from Tea, as this will guide our journey and inform our choices in tea, teaware, teachers and insight. For some, tea is just refreshment—a beverage. They enjoy drinking it when they are thirsty and nothing more. Others view tea as a kind of hobby or art, with creativity in the teaware and its arrangement. This is all fine; people need recreation. Hobbies are healthy ways of diverting attention, relaxing and curtailing stress. It’s been proven that retired people with hobbies live longer. If you find yourself more passionate about tea, however, there may come a time where you see yourself moving beyond this stage. Hobbies that consume too much time, energy or money are obsessive and lead to unhealthy lifestyles. If your tea is a casual recreation, then maintain a casual attitude and enjoy its relaxing properties as such. We all need time away from the bustle of daily life, enjoying the freedom to be ourselves. In this way, tea can also create a calm center around which social constrictions are lifted and we have great conversations, or in which we find a mindset that is conducive to other creative projects like composing poetry, painting or calligraphy. That’s why so many of those who mastered those fields were also tea lovers.

When many people think of tea culture, they invariably think of either the industrial farmers who grow tea for money, or the tea shop owners who sell them tea. A tea master is similarly someone who sells tea for some time or farms it for money. Many tea lovers who get passionate about tea, developing their ability to drink and be affected by the tea, want to move beyond the hobby. They then feel that entering the tea business world is the only route. And yet, for thousands and thousands of years, tea was neither bought nor sold, though great tea masters haunted all the great mountains of China. And the higher levels of mastery in tea, as with any art, cannot be achieved when financial motivation is involved. To paint for the love of ink is the only real mastery. It is indeed possible to make a teahouse or shop purely for the love of tea, and maintain that passion throughout a long career sharing great tea and Cha Dao with others. Still, the Chinese have a saying that the “front of the shop never resembles the back.” And once you’ve hung around the back of the shop long enough, it’s hard to keep up your integrity, passion and truth—especially in times of financial hardship. But it can be done, and many shopkeepers are stunning examples of this.



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For me, drinking tea has little to do with hobby, art or business. I drink tea the way the ancients did: as medicine and as religion. As religion, it is a direct communion with the tea and teaware, fully and completely. It is a discipline of living beauty in daily life. As the great Soetsu Yanagi said, “Tea is a religion of beauty. It can claim to be called the Way of Tea only when it is exalted to a religion. Until the mind is ready, we cannot hope to enter the sanctuary of Tea.” To the novice, tea is a pastime or plaything. To the Chajin, tea is a Dao, for through self-discipline the master learns to become the moment, purify the spirit and transcend the self to living expression of beauty. This is a Way because it becomes a lifestyle, extending beyond the tearoom

to all areas of life. We learn to walk, talk and breathe our tea. Mindfulness is not something added onto the moment, but rather the moment experienced more fully.

Healing Service

Whenever anyone comes to our Center to learn this Way of Tea, we always emphasize that in this tradition we are not learning how to *make* tea, but rather how to *serve* it. We cultivate and express a way of preparing tea that promotes an awakening of the heart and is therefore a part of the greater shift of consciousness and healing that is happening globally. All of the skill (gongfu) and mastery we

learn through (and from) tea should be applied towards the awakening of others, for there is no mastery without such devotion and selflessness. It is paradoxical, but there really is only so far you can travel before your own growth, learning and improvement must involve sharing, which becomes the lesson itself. It is only in service of humankind that we find purpose, in other words.

Of course, it isn't selfish of a doctor to focus all his time, energy and money on himself while he's at medical school. An uneducated doctor can be of service to no one, and you can't loan me twenty dollars if you only have ten. We must therefore begin our tea journey by cultivating our own skills. But we shouldn't ever forget our aim,



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which is to give/share any and everything we cultivate—just as the medical student shouldn't forget that one day she will be a healer.

At our Center, we generally divide learning into three stages. First, a student of the Leaf should learn to drink tea. Before you can make tea for others, you must learn how to be served yourself. Accept the tea from another, watch how it is done, and learn to communicate with the tea and the Nature that flows through it. In connection, we find ourselves. This first stage is learning to speak the language of tea. For this, it is often best to take out the human elements in tea preparation—descriptions, skill and expertise—and return to just leaves and water in a bowl. You don't need to classify

or comprehend the tea. It doesn't need to be named or categorized, and you don't need to understand all the details of its processing. It will tell you its story: where it comes from, what kind terroir and even the wisdom that was handed down to it through its genetic heritage, and from the sun, moon, stars, mountain and water. It may also tell you some of the more personal wisdom it has cultivated as a living tree, though it rarely speaks from a sense of "self" that would distinguish it from Nature. But none of this is "spoken;" the language of tea is one of sensation and impression. The connection must be deeper. And having lost much of our connection to Nature in these mind-made cities, we must relearn how to communicate with it.

The second stage of learning involves a lot of participation in the brewing process. There are lifetimes' worth of skills to be learned: how to gather water, which is best for tea, how to lay and maintain the coals, how to boil the water, which pot to use and how, etc. All of these skills should become second nature to you. It is important that you develop a great acumen with the way the tea is prepared, as well as allowing the teaware to be an extension of yourself. It is only when tea preparation is truly a part of who you are that you will be able to focus completely on serving your guests (even if that guest is you). Otherwise, you will be too focused on not spoiling the tea and handling the teaware properly to pay much attention to your guests.

When the skill (gongfu) of tea preparation has become an unconscious flow, it then comes out of your own spontaneous nature and is free to align itself with the Dao of the moment, and you can focus your energy on other things, for the most part.

The final stage of development in this tradition is to study the shamanism of tea, which means a focus on the underlying energy work. Tea and water are both some of the most sensitive media in the world for energy work. Water takes the shape of anything you put it in; it is incredibly malleable on the energetic level, and very pronouncedly influenced by the energy of its environment. Similarly, tea is a very sensitive and energetically supple plant. The Qi of tea will be greatly affected by the energy of the place it is stored in, as we have realized through countless experiments. Even physically, tea shouldn't be stored in the kitchen, for example, because it absorbs the odors of whatever is around it. Tea and water together respond to the brewer, and can be coaxed into various energy frequencies, which will then influence the drinkers. This is why we say that the brewer (host) is completely responsible for the energy of the tea space. We can communicate much of where we are in this moment through tea, and in a way that is more intimate than words could ever be. And that is why masters have so often used tea to communicate a nonverbal wisdom of Zen and Dao, deeper and more lasting than words.

The two main aims of sharing what we cultivate through tea are first to promote a turning inward for our guests—to introduce them to themselves, and to the connection with Nature that lies therein. There is great and profound healing in such an experience, as so many of you already know. We utilize tea to return to our bodies and then souls; as the Sage said, “the Dao is a returning.” In this way, tea is a powerful spiritual aid for those whom we meet in the tea space. We, as hosts, facilitate growth in our guests, allowing them the solace from the world that they so desperately need. We instill quiet and presence in the tea, so that our guests turn inwards and meet the tea in their own bodies. This is tea as meditation. Prepared from a still center, it leads others to the stillness at their own center...

The second aim of expressing this tea is to find a meeting of our true selves in the tea space. This is how guest and host find that they are one. When we rest inwards and meet the tea together, we find that it is so much easier to let go of our ego masks: our social statuses, sex, race, etc. and just be in our true selves. We start to communicate as spirits, rather than egos or bodies. In this tradition, we call this energy “calm joy.” Sometimes it takes the form of a casual conversation about spiritual matters. “Drink tea and discuss the Dao” is a Chinese saying that is older than the word “tea.” And just about every spiritual conversation that has ever happened in Asia these many eons has happened over tea.

In all the different forms of Cha Dao, from China to Japan and Korea, there has always been an emphasis on creating a space in which guests and hosts can find one another and rest in their true nature—the space deep down in us all where we find that the tea, each other and Nature are one. And as we are finding in this global hut, it isn't always necessary for us to be sharing the tea in the same time and space for such a magical connection to occur. The world is, after all, round.

In creating and facilitating such civilized peace, our roles of guest and host evaporate, and we can smile and rest in our mutual connections. In cultivating such spaces, we also grow ourselves spiritually. And more importantly, we make lasting connections that are deeper and beyond the egoic relationships we usually foster. When we serve our guests completely, in the spirit of their higher good, we find our own higher self growing as well—for it is consciousness itself that is evolving through us all. This is also a kind of medicine.

Tea as Medicine

Many books begin with a chapter about how tea was medicine to Chinese people for thousands of years. That is true, but “medicine” can be a misleading word. In the modern world, it refers to something that we take to treat or prevent disease. We think of medicine as a restorative treatment to “get back to normal” when our patterns are disrupted.







While that is a part of what tea has meant to Chajin (people of tea) past and present, it falls short of what “medicine” meant to our ancestors. Tea was “medicine” to Chinese people in the Native American sense of the word, as in “medicine man” or “medicine stone.” Health and healing to our ancestors was as much spiritual and psychological as it was physical. Tea, and the rituals that surround it, was therefore a part of daily physical, mental and spiritual cleansing. Our bodies accumulate toxins, and tea has always been heralded for its ability to cleanse the system. This medicinal effect isn’t meant to be a health gimmick of the kind used nowadays to sell tea—using sometimes-sound/sometimes-sketchy medical research to argue that tea

cures cancer, etc. Saying that tea was medicine to ancient peoples isn’t a marketing ploy. Drinking tea makes us healthy, ridding our body of some accumulated toxins.

More importantly, we all have deeper poisons and pollutants in our psyche—deep in our hearts. Tea, as an aspect of a spiritual life, can also help ameliorate these poisons. This is by far the more important of tea’s properties and why it has always been a special herb to spiritual practitioners: first in the medicine pouches of aboriginal shamans, then the bowls and pots of Daoist mendicants, and finally in the bowls of Buddhist monks—the world’s first tea farmers. In this way, tea was but one ingredient in a life of purification; or another way to look at this, as

some of the Japanese tea masters did, is to say that the life of tea has little to do with the tearoom, and that the Chajin is all day preparing tea: when she eats, dresses and in the way she interacts with her companions as well.

To the modern mind, the tales of miracle recoveries—like the way some Wuyi Cliff Tea saved an emperor, or legends of enlightenment brewed into a draught that granted the drinker sudden communion with the Dao—these stories seem to be mere fables and nothing more. After all, tea is the world’s second most consumed beverage, so why aren’t these millions of people healed? Why aren’t there more masters walking around? While some such stories may be metaphors, meant to inspire us with a more poetic



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approach to life—or perhaps didactic stories passed on to students—the fact is that if you’ve ever experienced the deeper properties of tea, you know, as I do, that these stories aren’t so far-fetched, for such teas do indeed heal the body and soothe the soul. Why were Chinese doctors utilizing tea to heal spirit and body, when some modern doctors are encouraging Asians to drink less tea?

Unfortunately, the soul-healing properties inherent in tea don’t radiate from most leaves these days. In ancient times, there was little processing and little need for “gongfu tea,” as preparation methodology wasn’t very important. People weren’t drinking tea for flavor. Flavors are fleeting, and the pleasure they bring is illusory. Expe-

riencing exotic and interesting flavors can’t bring about lasting peace. As a medicine, tea is drunk to soothe the body and soul. In such unpolluted, pristine mountains, little was needed. One simply sought out some wizened tea tree—hundreds of years old—plucked some leaves, roasted them a bit or sundried them, sprinkled them in a bowl and added some water from a nearby mountain spring. The first domesticated tea trees, grown by Buddhist monks, were also tended in as natural a way as possible, and little was needed to coax the spirit out of those leaves either. And contrary to any assumptions you may have, this approach to tea has not died out, and is very much alive today. The spirit of tea flourishes, even in 2019; it’s just not as

easy to find, and you have to understand a bit more about the tea world in order to find the teas that instantly cleanse the body and clear the mind, allowing spiritual insights to flourish on their own.

As we drink tea to heal our bodies, minds and spirits, in this day and age, it is primary that we remember that poison cannot flush poison. How can you possibly cleanse your body of toxins or purify your heart when the medicine itself is poisonous? There is no healing when the medicine is sickness. For that reason, the most primary criterion in the search for quality tea is that it is organic, grown with a respect for Mother Earth and in recognition of the ancient heritage of tea as a medicine. Then only will it be healing.





As medicine, we don't need an excess of tea. We don't need such rich, chemically-enhanced, over-genetically-modified flavors. When you look at a tea plantation and see the beautiful green hedges of tea, it is like looking at an actress with hours of makeup and special lighting on her normally blemished face, or like looking at a body builder who has been using steroids for the last few years. Of course he's buff and she's beautiful, but this beauty is surface only, and artificial. It is coarse, unrefined beauty of the gaudy kind. A walk through such a garden is like a trip into the dirty backroom of the shop—the place where smiles do not prevail and all is not as it seems: the over-harvested, chemical-covered plants are dying. They are actually being replaced every ten to fifteen years when they die. The Earth is hard and has no smell—no life, no richness. The roots of the trees are curled up out of the ground, searching for nourishment. The agrochemicals and deforestation of the local environment to create this commercial farm have had a dramatic ecological impact—expanding outwards in rings, as the lack of insects also destroys those that consume them and so on, as well as the run-off pesticide and fertilizer that travels down the mountain in underground streams that pollute the groundwater, harming people and animals. After some thirty to fifty years, such land can no longer grow tea, and the farmers then plant betel nut or some other such crop, moving on to other as yet undiminished mountains.

These shocking truths are what the businessmen don't wish to discuss. But the worst part about getting into show business is seeing all the stuff that goes on backstage, including the way the actors behave out of the spotlight and the way they really look without their makeup on.

If tea is to help heal our spirits, connecting us to Nature—sun and mountain, river and sky—we have to be careful that it comes from a wholesome source and that its production didn't harm the Nature that bestowed it on us in the first place. Chinese people used tea medicinally for thousands of years, and farmed it for hundreds without ever upsetting the balance of a single ecology anywhere, while so-called “modern” and “scientific” ag-

riculture is in some places destroying mountains and ruining ecologies in the name of quick money.

One of the great clashes between European and Native American cultures was the way in which they viewed the earth. More and more as we move into an age of looming environmental crises, we have to respect the Native American perspective: that the earth does not belong to us; we walk upon it. The lines we draw on maps aren't real. No one can own a land. How do you own the sparkle of sunlight on a pond or the wind through the grass? If a rich man knocked on your door and offered you wealth for five of the stars in the sky, how would you respond? You either honestly wonder if he's okay, asking how you could sell the stars? No one owns the stars. Or perhaps you take advantage of him, scoffing at how a fool and his money are soon parted. The Native Americans responded in just these two ways when the Europeans came trying to buy land that they felt was equally un-ownable, and beyond possession. Unfortunately, even when they were honest and said no one could possibly own this land, the Europeans misunderstood that to mean it was free for the taking.

The future of medicinal, healing tea depends on us, my readers and friends. Most farmers will understand if you sit them down and explain that they are able to earn money today because their ancestors cared for this land and these trees. As Chinese people, they have a deep respect for their ancestors and concern for their descendants. When you explain to them that if they continue, their great-grandchildren will have no security, no land to till, they can understand and will agree on principle. The problem is that while their principles dictate organic, sustainable farming, they feel it is impractical. Like most people, they have financial stresses. Others have a car and they feel they need one too. Their neighbors have TVs and so their wife wants one, too—not to mention the cost of their children's education. Our job is to make them understand that their role is more that of a caretaker than a producer. Without the spiritual, medicinal aspect of tea, it is just so many ounces and grams, a superficial materialism and nothing more. Seen as weight, Nature is always harmed.

We have successfully converted several farmers in Asia by setting aside the weight of the tea, and even offering them more than its value per gram to let them know that there are plenty of tea lovers whose view of quality isn't about mere flavor or pleasure of the mouth—that we would love to spend our money on clean, organic, healthy, medicinal tea produced in traditional ways. We want the farmer to have a car and a TV, and we want his children to go to a nice school. We are willing to pay for these things, but not for so many ounces and grams of tea. We are, instead, paying him to be a steward of this land and care for these trees the way others did before him.

In centuries past, tea trees were all seed-propagated rather than genetically-cloned as they are in many places today, making them each unique. Older trees that helped a family were often given the same surname as the family, along with a unique name to show that the tree was indeed a part of the clan. If more of us realize that this kind of tea is just better in every way, the farmers will see that they don't need to compromise their principles in order to be successful.

A sustainable tea future is an epitome of all the challenges the survival of our species depends upon. We have to recognize our connection to each other and this world before it's too late. It is very important for us to shift our entire value system, so that the quality of any product is as much determined by its production methodology as it is by its usefulness. Something that can bring us pleasure at the cost of natural destruction is low quality. Obviously, drugs can bring such physical pleasure, but at the cost of a loss of health, sanity and spiritual purity—ultimately leading to annihilation. Similarly, poisonous agriculture and consumption are at the heart of our environmental problems.

In the nineteenth century, scientists and philosophers presumed that viewing the world around us as alive and intelligent was primitive. They called it "animism" and looked on it as a "primitive" worldview based on a mistaken anthropomorphism of unintelligent objects. They reasoned that we should remain "objective" and distance ourselves from the world. Though our science has transcended

mechanistic worldviews, the popular common sense still has little to do with our modern quantum physics.

The organs of your body are a necessary aspect of who you are. If your heart is removed, you cease to exist. In the same way, the air and water of this world are also essential aspects of being human, without which we would die. Even when we leave this Earth, we must can up its environment and take it with us into space. We did not come here from another world, in other words, but grew out of it. We are an expression of its energies. Environmental destruction, however, can only happen when people view themselves as distinct from their environment, as an object in an environment. When we realize the truth that we are a part of the environment, as it is a part of us, it becomes quite obvious that harming it is suicidal. Tea is one of the medicines that can re-establish this feeling of connection with Nature.

Our ancestors lived in tune with Nature, but they did so naïvely. They farmed in ecologically sound ways, but there wasn't any choice. We have the tremendous power to move forward into an enlightened future in which we create sustainable, glorious tea gardens, while fully conscious of our decision to achieve balance. The innocence and spontaneity of the child is a wonder to behold, but it doesn't compare to the innocence and grace of the master who has tamed a life of ego and returned to Nature fully aware of herself!

Tea can indeed heal, and beyond a hobby or an art, its medicinal qualities are so much more important in this sick age. If you haven't ever asked yourself why tea, perhaps now is the time to begin doing so. If you're interested at all in the Leaf, you begin to listen intently to what each cup is telling you: but it isn't a scream or a bang; it's a whisper. As you hush up, going deeper into the sensations of your teas, you one day hear it: the voice of Nature. What's it saying to your spirit? To me, it whispers hoary tales of bearded men who roamed craggy mountains with a romance in their heart, searching for a certain serrated Leaf that could be alchemically roasted, boiled and poured with a golden-ring shining bowl: the Elixir of Life.



超越星星的永恒

打開所有門



THE “ORIGINS” OF TEA

茶人: Sam Gibb

*There is a lot of debate about when the relationship between humans and tea began, though we know that *Camellia sinensis* and its cousins evolved after an ice age around one million years ago. The first humans to drink tea are mythic, however, and maybe that is for the best. We need to discuss what understanding the past means before we get into the details about what we know so far along with some of the myths of tea's origins.*

History is a bleary-eyed old man, weary of looking on our comings and goings for so long he's become too myopic to see. The further back we travel into the written record of human life, the more distorted the scene becomes, eventually trailing off into myth and legend. The accounts and perspectives of any given event trail off the further back in time we go, in direct proportion to the number of pens or brushes set to paper. When the printing press was invented, hardly anyone was literate. The ability to read and write our account of what is happening around us is a skill we all take for granted these days, though much of humanity's experience on this earth has been left unrecorded since all but a very few could write.

Not only are we left with a more and more limited account of what has happened, but the perspective narrows along class lines. It was the upper class who were literate; so what we read is often their perspective, and their perspective alone. And they are not known for telling the truth. In fact,

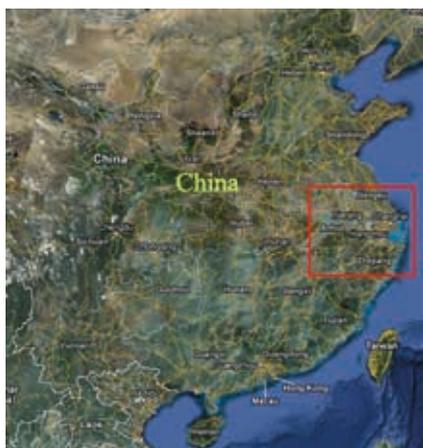
one of the most laudatory historians in ancient China, named Wei Zhao (韋曜), has been so respected all these centuries precisely because he is said to have written the truth of what happened in the Three Kingdoms period (220–280), risking his own life, as well as the lives of his family and friends. Royalty and nobility made historians write what they wanted written for posterity, in other words, not the truth.

History is a narrative. It is the story of humankind, or perhaps more accurately, it is the story of the humans who recorded it. This means history is always presented through a series of lenses, of perspectives. Those with the pen always have the final say on “truth” and “significance,” which are the two spectrums on which we weigh historical facts. Ambrose Bierce defined history as “an account, mostly false, of events, mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers, mostly knaves, and soldiers, mostly fools.” While this may be considered the definition of a fabulist, there is some truth in it. If history is a story, it is one we

can never have all the chapters of—pages are missing, forever so.

We must also reflect on who is telling us the story when examining historical evidence. While this is not an issue with primary sources, history is almost always told through a storyteller. And those storytellers run along the lines of gender, education and class. History is written predominately through the eyes of the wealthy, well-educated males. Even five hundred years ago, the literacy rate in England was only 5%. As we travel back in time, this number gets smaller and smaller, and so does our scope of perspectives. We also need to consider that much is lost in the translation from academics to public knowledge. Complex issues are broken down into sound-bites and pieces of information that are easily digested. None of this is to say we dismiss history, but understanding its limitations when investigating it is healthy, as with any field of inquiry. As Plutarch said, “So very difficult a matter it is to trace and find out the truth of anything by history.”





茶 Above and to the left are maps and photos of the archaeological excavation at Tian Luo Shan (田螺山) that began in 2001, wherein tea roots were discovered in 2004. (We will discuss the dig in the coming pages.) Tian Luo Shan is located in Zhejiang Province. The dig was to uncover the remains of a village of Hemudu people. In 2008, it was confirmed that the plant matter found at the dig was, in fact, rhizomes, which are roots from the Theaceae genus *Camellia*. The plants were in rows, which has led some of the scientists to argue that the plants were even domesticated. They also found the pottery shard shown to the right, which has what looks like a potted or terraced tea plant, decorated ceremoniously. This evidence pushed the concrete date of human tea use back to the fourth millennium BCE, which is the Neolithic Era in China. But this location in Zhejiang is very far from the birthplace of tea in Yunnan, which suggests an even earlier date.

History can, sometimes, appear to be neatly wrapped up, with everything having a clear beginning and end. This methodology has also been applied to the relationship between humans and tea. Some people believe it began in the latter part of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE); others point towards tea's mainstream consumption in the Tang Dynasty (618–907); while a smaller portion suggests it was the Neolithic period of human evolution. History isn't our only window into the past, though. Archaeology is his fickle daughter who often comes to our aid. For though we do make discoveries based on insight, most of what we find is accidental. We have to wait for the Fates to shed some light on the skewed records of the rich.

History is very much a conversation between the past and present. However, we should keep in mind it is an ongoing conversation, one that is constantly changing and adapting. Because of this, we must still consider historical evidence through the filters, not only of our rational mind, but also our heart: Never drawing definitive lines in what we believe to be true. "No frozen rigid opinions," as we say in Zen.

The origins of tea lie up a foggy, hazy mountain, above the clouds where the Daoist hermits were said to walk. The historical record of tea is but the faintest of sketches. Archaeology adds a splash of color, and a study of the myths and legends provides the faintest of backgrounds. But all the detail has to be filled in by the spirit. And so much of what tea is about, from ancient to modern, water to leaves to liquor, takes place deep inside us where words can never hope to reach anyway. The all-too-often-forgotten prehistory of tea is just as important, if not more so, as the time it captured the attention of the literati. Though we may not know all the details—the names, dates and places—we can perhaps use what knowledge has been left in the form of so many pieces of art, texts and legends as a kind of unsharpened, rough bit of charcoal to sketch out tea in ancient times; and then, drinking tea with meditative stillness, use our spirit to fill in the rest of such a drawing.

On May 1st, 1965, Chinese geologists who were studying the strata of rocks in Yunnan discovered the remains of an ancient hominid, which they named "Yuanmo (元谋)." Con-

sensus dates Yuanmo to the Middle Pleistocene period, which is from 126,000 to 781,000 years ago, making him the oldest hominid ever discovered in China. Some scholars even believe that Yuanmo inhabited the area earlier than this, and some new dating techniques using rocks found around the site date him to the Early Pleistocene period. Yuanmo was a type of *Homo erectus* called by paleoanthropologists "*Homo erectus yuanmouensis*." These hominids are named for their upright bearing and the development of their frontal lobes and handicrafts. *Homo erectus* emerged around two million years ago. Early specimens have been found in West Africa and Asia, so there is an active debate amongst scientists as to whether *Homo erectus* emerged in Asia or Africa. Another example was also found in the north of China, in the 1920s—famously called the "Peking Man." *Homo erectus* eventually went extinct around 100,000 to 140,000 years ago, evolving into other descendant species of hominid and coexisting with still others. It was amongst the longest-lived species of hominids, existing well over one million years (way beyond *Homo sapiens*)!



There is no consensus about the relationship between *Homo erectus* like Yuanmo and modern *Homo sapiens*. Are the Yuanmo and other *Homo erectus* our ancestors, or another type of hominid that lived alongside our ancestors? Either way, their discoveries influenced our evolution and development.

Since tool use first developed more than 2.5 million years ago, Yuanmo was already well versed in the creation of tools, artifacts and even rudimentary shelter. They were also amongst the first to control, tame and harness fire, which was one of the most important developmental stages in our evolution. *Homo erectus* species like Yuanmo were the first hominids to live as hunters and gatherers, with a developing language and culture, communicating in what paleoanthropologists call “proto-language,” as they were incapable of the range of sounds we use to communicate. This is something between our complex languages and the nonverbal gestures chimpanzees and other great apes use to communicate. They were the first hominids to form tribes, hunt and gather communally and pass on the skills and wisdom of these activities as culture to their descendants. They

were also the first to care for the infirm, elderly and weak, bridging the animal and human realms. This implies that they also had abstract values, ideas and possibly even rudimentary cosmological and mythological ideas, as well as ceremonies, rites and rituals in basic forms—both for connection to each other and the handing on of traditions, and also for funerals, recognizing the loss of spirit in deceased loved ones.

Yuanmo is especially important for us Chajin as there is a very real potential that these early hominids were the first humans to discover tea, pushing the use of tea back many millennia if this were true. So far, all the evidence suggesting that tea was a part of Yuanmo’s life is circumstantial, but more research may indeed uncover a relationship. All the *Homo erectus* throughout Africa and Asia were nomadic, and often hiked for many kilometers a day in search of food to gather and/or animals to hunt. In other regions, there is evidence of early hominids chewing on caffeinated plants to energize their long hikes. Since Yuanmo inhabited most of Yunnan, from the Himalayas down to the Lincang River, it is likely that they encountered tea. Tea was

born around a million years ago in the Five Mountains of central Yunnan, as current genetic research is proving (Ming Feng, 鳴鳳; Mang Fei, 忙肺; Mei Zi Qing, 梅子菁; Wu Jia Zhai, 武家寨; Da Xue Shan, 大雪山). By the time Yuanmo was thriving in various tribal groups wandering this vast swath of mountains and jungle, tea trees were abundant, and it is very possible that these early hominids chewed the leaves as they hiked, or even boiled them for nourishment.

Anthropologists studying more modern hunter-gatherer societies have found that they have a very clear, and often nutritionally accurate, hierarchy of food sources, so that they will always make intelligent choices about what to gather on any given day and in what order. If three food sources are available at that time of year, for example, they will manage their time so that they gather the rarest and most nutrient-dense food first, only then moving on to the next and so on. This nutritional wisdom surprised the anthropologists, since the people did not pass on any overt oral tradition to their children about what foods to gather and in which season to do so.

Children learned from watching their parents. They also participated in the gathering. Part of this wisdom is, of course, learned through experience, passed on through trial and error and a growing body of innate cultural understanding from generation to generation. But the lack of overt communication suggests also an intuitive connection to Nature that is more spiritual than intellectual.

Oftentimes, modern researchers get stuck in approaching our ancestors and their cultures through the lens of “we are so clever, and they were not.” Of course, the brutality and certain other ideals in ancient societies makes this easy to do. There is truth in it, but it is also misleading. There are ways in which our ancestors would find us to be stupid as well. For example, imagine setting up a stall to sell bottled water in some ancient Chinese village. People would consider you mad. And isn't it madness that our bodies are more than half water, and we have polluted the drinking water to the point that we cannot consume it anymore? Of

course, our intellectual and technological advancements have allowed us to explore this universe in ways our ancestors could not imagine. We understand a lot more about our world and how it works, and do not rely on metaphoric or mythological explanations to understand natural phenomena. We can use empirical observation and create testable models that not only help us understand our world, but also work with and develop this knowledge in application to our lives. However, there are other types of intelligence that we have lost in exchange for this great intellectual prowess.

Besides the possibility of Yuanmo drinking tea or eating tea leaves, the first few thousand years that tea was drunk are all prehistorical. There aren't any written records about this time, only legends. For the most part, it would not be until the Tang Dynasty (618–907) that the story of tea comes into focus, and from that point on develops into the story so many wonderful books have described. Prior to that, however, tea is but mentioned here and

there through scattered texts dating back all the way into the Zhou Dynasty (circa 1122–256 BCE). But what of the thousands of years between the time that tea was first discovered and when it was first written, traded, recorded and made popular? Wu De has often said that the use of tea extends far back beyond what we could ever imagine, though the historical record trails off much sooner.

All disciplines, philosophies and systems of thought have their limitations. We could say “all systems leak.” History is no different. Within each moment, there is more happening than could ever be described or known if you had all of eternity to expand upon it. Our filters and ways of thinking change the way we interpret the writings of others, just as their record was filtered through their own perspective. This is even more true when we look at prehistory, which is even more open to interpretation. Without evidence, we return to mythology and write the story as we see fit. The cave paintings of Yunnan are a good example of this.





神農的落葉

此為藥中之王



Shennong

They say that Shennong, the “Divine Farmer,” went to the woods to learn more about herbs. Shennong was part man and part Nature. He had horns like a goat and wore a coat made of leaves that would change with the seasons—turning golden red in autumn, falling in winter to be replaced by coarse vines that kept him warm, and then sprouting again in the spring, flush and green. They say Shennong could antidote poisons with his internal alchemy and make his stomach transparent to watch the effects of the herbs he was studying.

Like most days, Shennong was soon lost to the morning mists, traveling deeper into the mountains, up past the clouds. Cloudwalking for most the day, he soon grew weary and sat beneath the canopy of an ancient tree to boil some water. As he was waiting for his hot water, he drifted into a trance, communing with the spirits of the forest. In response to his fey conversations, a breeze picked up and two small leaves of the old tree shook, rattled and fell free of their stalks, drifting back and forth like feathers, only to land in the cauldron of water. When the water boiled, the old sage opened his eyes and saw the dark concoction. He took it as an omen and ladled himself a bowl. After a deep draught, he drifted into a deeper trance than he had ever been in, feeling himself like roots of old trees, speaking slowly over thousands of years with all the beings of the forest. “This,” he exclaimed, opening his eyes, “is the Empress of all medicinal herbs!”

Shennong is a mythical emperor who ruled for a thousand years (a time meaning “long-term” though not quite endless, which would be 10,000). He is called “Divine Farmer” because he is credited with giving Chinese people agriculture and civilization. He is also the founder of herbal medicine. What he in fact represents is all the collective tribal wisdom of the pre-civilized chieftains, shamans and their cultures, who of course gave civilization to Chinese people through the evolution of time. This story highlights Tea’s desires to become human, and the preordained affair that would ensue: millennia of ongoing love that continues to deepen as we speak...

The leaf that falls into the bowl signifies Nature’s efforts to communicate with human beings. It is the forest’s cell phone call, so to speak. Tea wants to be human, in other words. She longs for our bodies the way we long for ours. You could say that this herb is benign and suits the human body well—a powerful symbiosis born of Nature. It should also be noted that it is quite powerful for the legendary founder of all herbal medicine in China to proclaim tea the greatest of all medicinal herbs!

There is another version of this story in which Shennong eats a deadly poison called “Dead in Seven Steps,” which he cannot mitigate with his internal alchemy. Knowing that he will die in a few minutes, the old sage decides to learn one more lesson (in an echo of old Socrates’ legend). Seeing a nearby tree that he has never encountered before, he decides to see what it does. Plucking a few leaves, he chews on them while meditating deeply. Amazingly, the leaves flush the deadly poison from his system, and he is saved. After offering prayers to the old tree, he begins a lifelong study of its healing powers. Of course, the tree was tea. This story highlights Tea’s ability to flush toxins from our systems—toxins of the body, and, more importantly, toxins of the spirit and mind as well.

The Jinsha River Rock Art (金沙江岩画) in Yunnan are 3,000 years old. The paintings are thought to be produced by an ancient, now lost and mysterious nomadic tribe of aboriginals. Little is known about these people, but like Yuanmo, they lived in the birthplace of tea, surrounded by ancient tea trees. Most of the paintings are of hunting and warfare, as well as village life. Some scholars have interpreted some parts of the village scenes, as well as tree worship, to be in reference to tea. There is, of course, no evidence that this is true and may be wishful thinking. One imagines that people living around and through a tea forest would be called to the medicine of this plant in the way that we are.

“ Within each moment, there is more happening than could ever be described or known if you had all of eternity to expand upon it. We have only a small splinter of understanding of the past. Our filters and ways of thinking change the way we interpret the writings of others, just as their record was filtered through their own perspective. This is even more true when we look at pre-history, which is even looser and more open to interpretation. ”

Turning to more concrete data, in 2004, tea roots were unearthed in a Neolithic settlement near the eastern coast of China at a site in Tian Luo Shan (田螺山). Digging began there in 2001 to uncover a farmer society called the “Hemudu” who grew rice and raised animals. The tea roots were arranged in a regular pattern, with other agricultural crops around them, suggesting they were domesticated, though scholars have not reached a consensus about that. In 2008, Japanese scientists did confirm that the roots were *Camellia* genus, and most scholars and scientists agree that they are *Camellia sinensis*, though there is not an absolute consensus on that. This evidence moved the date of tea drinking back into the late Stone Age, around the fourth millennium BCE (3526–3366).

Still, we have to cast our minds beyond this discovery. How long did tea and humans have a history together before this? How long had humans been planting tea trees? And before

they even began planting these trees, how long had they been using them in the wild? After all, the site at Tian Luo Shan is a great distance from the origin place of tea in Yunnan. Was it brought there by people? How long would that take?

These people must have had a strong understanding of this plant’s medicine. It was brought with them, over an unknown number of generations, from its place of origin, Yunnan. As well as this, Neolithic life was one based on survival, and so they would not have exerted energy and resources into aspects of life that were not necessities. Even from this one discovery we do not find closure. Good science also always ends in questions.

If we looked solely to the historical facts for our understanding of tea, we would find the first unambiguous textual reference being dated at 59 BCE during the Western Han Dynasty. Widespread usage of tea by the northern and western Chinese people is generally attributed to the Tang Dynasty, and the oldest physical evidence of tea, previously, was from the Song Dynasty, which was between 960 and 1127 CE. But here we must pause for a moment and reflect on the fact that when we study the “History of China,” we are actually studying the “History of the Han Chinese.” The Han Chinese are an ethnic group making up over 90% of the population of mainland China today. Their ancestors are the Huaxia people who lived along the Huang He or Yellow River, far away from the forest of Yunnan, where tea comes from. There, aboriginal tribes have lived for millennia, developing cultures very different to their eastern cousins, with a deep connection and dependence on their environment. Here in the birth-

place of tea, one can only imagine how long the children of those forests had a relationship with this precious leaf we all love. Just months ago, many historians might have scoffed at the claims that tea’s heritage should be measured in thousands, if not tens of thousands, of years. But a recent archaeological discovery has changed that. The finding of the oldest physical example of tea to date requires us to consider what this really tells us about the consumption of tea in the past, and the length of time it has been used in humans.

This long-winded history lesson was meant to encourage us to consider this latest discovery with more balanced eyes—not seeing it as pointing to a “starting date” for tea and human relations, but another splinter of the past that can deepen our understanding of the connection shared between these two species.

At another site, located along the northern banks of the Wei River, just outside the city of Xi’an, lies the Han Yangling Mausoleum—built for the Jing Emperor Liu Qi (188–141 BCE), the fourth emperor of the Western Han Dynasty, and his wife. It is surrounded by eighty-six outer burial pits. Between 1998 and 2005, the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology excavated one of these sites, and what they discovered was noteworthy for any tea magazine! Inside they found a number of decomposed plant remains, including millet, rice and chenopod. However, one sample appeared to be made of plant leaves pressed into a dark brown brick shape, which may sound familiar to some of our readers! Dating the sample placed the plant material at $\sim 255 \pm 80$ BCE, but due to decomposition, structural analysis was impossible. The material did appear to be made up of tea buds. “Imperial tea” normally contains only tea buds and, sometimes, one or two of the closest leaves. This was considered preliminary evidence suggesting it may have been tea worthy of royalty and their journey into the afterlife.

Further chemical analysis was required before any conclusions could be reached. Tea is the only plant that has both theanine and caffeine occurring in it. These two chemicals actually have a magic when combined. Caffeine is never naturally found in isolation, which is often not realized by most tea drinkers nowadays.



神农氏

Tea History

It was first extracted in 1819 by a German scientist named Friedrich Runge. Theanine is known to increase the brain's levels of GABA, the calming neurotransmitter, as well as increasing alpha brain waves. These two synergize when they are together, allowing you to feel both calm and awake. Laboratory studies have shown that the combination leads to a reduced susceptibility to distracting information in memory tasks, an increase in both speed and accuracy in attention-switching tasks, faster numeric working memory reaction time, faster simple reaction time and improved sentence verification accuracy. It also decreases any "negative" effects of each chemical taken in an isolated form. Side effects such as headaches and tiredness have both been shown to decrease in studies, while alertness ratings increased. So you can tell that to the next person who asks if your tea contains caffeine!

Because tea contains these two chemicals, the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology was able to use biomarkers to identify the plant

matter. Here they found a significant abundance of both theanine and caffeine in the archaeological sample. On top of this, the phytoliths and calcium oxalate crystals were also analyzed and matched the genus *Camellia*. With these three pieces of evidence (caffeine, theanine and calcium phytoliths), they were able to confirm they had discovered the oldest physical example of tea to date!

While we know humans have drunk tea for at least thousands of years, most likely tens of thousands of years, it is nice to have these tangible examples. They inspire our love of the Leaf, knowing so many went before us and encourage us to steward the practice for those is the future. We can also imagine what it would be like to take a few of those leaves, place them in a gongfu pot, and sit alone while our soul is transported to another place in time, sharing tea with those long faded into the veins of the Leaf.

The true origins of tea are mythological—always have been and always will be. Whether it is Bodhidharma's

eyelids or the leaf that fluttered into the great mythical emperor Shennong's bowl, the beginnings transcend rational thought—just as the experience does. The story highlights Tea's medicinal, religious or meditative qualities and is a metaphor for a beginningless beginning, which connects our tea practice through this very bowl to all the bowls that have ever been held with reverence, in sanctuary—all the way back to the bowl that transcends our abilities to record. Since so much tea was unrecorded, enjoyed in silent bamboo groves by men and women lost to history, it is fitting that the beginnings of tea and human relationships should slip beyond the grasp of the intellect and reside in the realm of myth and metaphor, where gods and immortals roam lonely paths through mist and waterfalls, looking for cloud-hidden spots to set their wind-in-the-pines stoves a-simmering...





達摩眼臉

被喚醒之佛法和光的液體

Bodhidharma

The great leonine sage of sages, Bodhidharma, had trekked over the Himalayas with the diamond mind of Zen. Finding no one receptive to his unorthodox and irrational teachings, he decided to rest in meditation. Like all sages before him, he found a trail leading nowhere and followed it up through the mists to cloudwalk the peaks. The bushy-browed old sage eventually found a cave to meditate within, staring at a wall for nine years in deep trances of emptiness.

During the second year of his long retreat, the old sage began to grow weary and bleary-eyed. He wasn't the first meditator to face drowsiness. The Buddha himself had enumerated sleepiness as one of the "Five Enemies" of the meditator (the others being restlessness, worry, craving and aversion). But Bodhidharma was the paragon of discipline, strength and a spiritual warrior's energy. This sleepiness he could not stand! With a deft swipe, he took off his own eyelids and tossed them over his shoulder, vowing to never sleep again. They say that the following spring the eyelids sprouted shoots and began to grow green towards the sky. As the old sage sat, the tree grew and grew, and by the time his nine years of peace were through, the two trees were fully grown. It is said that any who drink the leaves of this tree will be free of sleepiness and have access to a bit of Bodhidharma's meditative determination. To this day, the Leaf is sometimes referred to as "Bodhidharma's Eyelids" or "The Eyelids of Awakening."

This old story may seem gruesome, but isn't meant to highlight the macabre. Zen practitioners were obviously honoring tea as having originated from the very body of their own patriarch. The sacrifice of the body for Dharma (the truth or light) is a common theme in Zen. In fact, Bodhidharma's first student, Huike, had to sacrifice his arm to even get the old grump to teach him anything. These allegories remind us that the body is impermanent and the teachings essential. Of course, this story also celebrates tea's power to keep us awake and calm, much akin to the mind that is sought in meditation. Any student wishing to trace the history of tea must follow through trails that lead past Zen monasteries, as it was through the monastery that the mainstream of China was first introduced to tea. Zen monks and nuns were among the first, if not *the* first humans to domesticate tea...

Bodhidharma is actually the twenty-eighth teacher in a line of teacher-student links traced back to the Buddha himself. They say that Bodhidharma came to China because Buddhism was ending in India, and the soil was more fertile in China (though the soil would take some time to till), as the story goes. Though he lived fifty years in China, there is little by way of history surrounding the old sage. He is always depicted as uncouth and rude, representing determination and discipline, which are at the core of Zen practice.

The scene of Bodhidharma wasting away in his cave without food, drink, nor sleep (as his eyelids had been discarded), became a popular symbol of determination, integrity and uprightness. This led to the creation of Daruma dolls, which are weighted egg-shaped toys that cannot be knocked over (a bit like the old Weeble Wobbles that "can't fall down"). Though mostly lost to China, the tradition of making Daruma dolls continues in Japan. It is not uncommon to find them missing their eyelids as well (as those are found in the tea section of the store).

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 Frederik Wallin.

I was traveling up to the northern part of Sweden together with my uncle (who also is a member of this beautiful Tea community). Yes, my Tea story begins with snowboarding. I had been a skier since the age of four. My uncle had convinced me that skiing was silly, and that snowboarding was where the magic happened, so we were on our way for a full week of him teaching me how to snowboard. On our way up, he mentioned a podcast from Rich Roll, a triathlon and ultra-marathon athlete, and said he had two important episodes that we could listen to in the car.

He couldn't keep it to himself, though, and told me about the second one, including a crazy Tea monk called Wu De and a recipe of drinking three bowls of tea in the morning before doing anything else for at least a week. Since we were away for a week, we thought it an excellent idea to try this tea together, and so we did.

The following week, we sat in the morning, drinking three steepings of a bag of Lipton in a mug in silence each and every day. But I think the real transformation happened on the way back to Stockholm when we listened to the podcast with Wu De. I was very intrigued and curious about this Way of Tea, as I have always been interested in meditation.

This was in January, and the following month I had my first Global Tea Hut envelope in my mailbox. I was astounded at all the wisdom and information. What better way for me to start my journey than that?

The tea that was with the magazine was "Earth's Treasure," a Five Element blend that both my uncle and I wondered a million times what was so special about this particular tea. It was earthy and tasted of hay, weird and dark and not at all what we were used to. Nevertheless, the magazine was amazing, so we waited until next month and got to try Ruby Red, and this was a lot more relatable to our very Western experience of drinking tea.

Since these first encounters, I took the ten-day course at the Tea Sage Hut, loving every microsecond of it. The gentle hearts that serve there inspired my own practice, and my world has changed immensely since going there for the first time. Since then, I have been sharing tea at least once a week with my dear friends here in Sweden. Every moment of those sessions teaches me something, often basic, "step one" things that I foolishly thought I already knew or had under control. Tea has of course taught me to take a step back to gain perspective and that you can never go back to step one often



茶人: Frederik Wallin, Sweden

enough. There is always something new to learn at the foot of the mountain, no matter how many times you climb it.

I was so excited about my first visit that I also came back this last November to serve two courses for some beautiful guests at the Tea Sage Hut. Diving deeper into the practice of Tea and bringing more of it back home, once again transformed me. I feel lucky to have encountered this tradition, a tradition of Tea that has become my Dao. Every day I wake up and drink some tea in silence—often together with all of you in spirit, serving you a bowl and raising it to the sky, thinking of all the beautiful Tea-siblings whom I have not even met yet.

Nowadays, Earth's Treasure is one of my favorite Teas, since that was my first connection to this Way of Tea, and I sincerely hope that if you haven't already, you will all get to try it someday. Or hey, why not swing by Stockholm, Sweden, and I will gladly serve it to you myself! Please do get in touch via the app if you are ever around, as I am always prepared to serve a bowl or cup of Tea to Chajin!

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We need your help to get to a place where we can build your permanent Center, Light Meets Life. (And we do hope that you feel that our Center is yours, not ours.) If everyone in this community helped us find just one friend or a loved one to join Global Tea Hut, we would be looking for land and be breaking ground soon! We really are that close! Please help us spread the word about Global Tea Hut, sharing tea and love with your community in person and through social media. Also, let us know if you need any help in that!



Wu De will be in New York this coming June. We hope to see some East Coast friends at these events, which will be in the second half of the month. Stay tuned to our website for details!



Check out our live broadcasts on Facebook, Instagram and soon YouTube, which we do every month. Also, check out our "Life of Tea" podcast on Soundcloud and "Brewing Tea" video series on YouTube!



The annual trip is open for applications. If you were a member throughout the entirety of 2018, join us for another epic voyage to China, this time walking in the footsteps of the "Tea Saint," Lu Yu, with Master Tsai. Find out more on the website!



We wanted to remind you to use the app to set up your local community, to ask questions and share your daily tea. The more of us who use the app, the better it will be. And if you use it regularly, you can also form a community with local Chajin and build a beautiful tea family wherever you are. There are currently thriving tea communities with weekly gatherings all around the world. This rich sharing is the spirit of Tea and the essence of what Cha Dao is about. Let the app bring us all together, even from a distance!

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.



The schedule for the first half of the year is full. However, you can put yourself on a waiting list, and there is still a chance you will be selected if there is a cancellation. Also, if you have taken a ten-day course before, you can apply to serve a course, which is also a wonderful experience.



As long-term volunteers come and go, we thought it worth reminding you that you can apply for a one-year stay at Tea Sage Hut if you have taken a course (and preferably served one as well). Contact us through the Tea Sage Hut website to learn more.



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.

March Affirmation

I am young and playful

Age is a state of mind. Stay young at heart. As they say, we don't stop playing because we grow old, but rather grow old because we stop playing. This spring, I remember to blossom like the flowers, to laugh and play more, smiling at the sun!



www.globalteahut.org

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

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