



Here are four ancient principles in Gongfu tea, which we may discuss in another article at some time, and the first is the only one that deals directly with external aspects of tea preparation. The rest are much more internal. The first principle of Gongfu tea is to maintain temperature from kettle to drinker. This is easier said than done. It is useful to understand this principal on all levels, and therefore do as many experiments with temperature as you can.

You can first try and see what happens when you pre-warm your teapot and what the tea is like when you don't. Next, experiment with showering the pot during steepings. There are four different kinds of showers: Don't shower at all, shower only before steeping, shower only after steeping and shower both before *and* after steeping. What is the difference in the tea? Is the flavor different? How about the mouthfeel? Does the Qi move through your body differently? Work with these differences in temperature and how they affect your tea.

After working with your pot, you can then turn to the cups. The best way to do this experiment is to have two identical cups. Try preheating one and leaving the other alone. When you compare them hold both cups in your hands and sip back and forth, testing the difference between the preheated cup and the normal one. The difference should be radical indeed. But which one is better and why?

Try and see if you can come up with any other experiments that deal with temperature in Gongfu tea. The obvious one is to experiment with different heat sources themselves, seeing what (if any) difference there is when we use charcoal as opposed to an electric or gas stove. There are many other experiments as well. As you delve deeper into the relationship fire has in the alchemy of tea, you will uncover many general axioms, and develop an appreciation for the first principal of Gongfu tea beyond tradition and honor.

Remember, Gongfu tea is about experiential mastery. It has to be in your hands. You can't read about it or pick it up at the local tea shop. You have to practice, and the more the better. Also, don't be afraid to repeat experiments you have already done, as the outcome may change or you may pick up on things you weren't able to before, as your sensitivity grows.





*Weng Ming Chuan's handcarved bamboo tea utensils*

