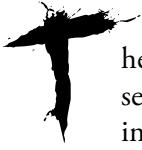


## YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, OCTOBER 2012

2012 Summer “Mi Xiang” Oolong, Ming Jian, Nantou, Taiwan



The most important role this Global Tea Hut serves is the friendships we broker between incredible tea producers and all the people gathered here each month. If you didn't know, all the teas we share with you each month are graciously donated. The farmers and vendors who give us tea to share know that we are a non-profit tea school devoted to sharing Cha Dao with the world, but that isn't the primary reason why they share their tea with us. All of our classes and publications are free and all the guests who stay here do so completely free, so without the gifts of tea these supporters donate to us, we wouldn't make enough from this monthly sharing to pay our bills. The farmers know that their tea supports us in this way, and of course think it is nice, but again it isn't the real motivation for their gifts: you are!

All of the amazing farmers who support us with their hard labor—tea is one of the most labor-intensive crops on earth—do so to share their tea with twenty nations. I have seen two tap their chests with a tear-jerking pride and tell a friend how, “Our tea, yes, *our* tea is being drunk by someone in Spain!” They want to connect their heritage, culture, art and work with the world. Any artist could relate. I certainly wouldn't turn down the chance to have my book read by people worldwide, even if it was for free! And with so many environmental problems in the tea industry, and all agriculture for that matter, it is very important that these organic farmers who are creating sustainable teas have such an amplified voice. So you might say that we at the Hut are the microphone, and you the audience.

Some people in their urban offices or at bars declare that “global warming is a myth” or debate whether the changes in the environment are “real” or “true”. But no farmer, living and working in concordance with the climate, denies the changes of late. Tea just isn't as good as it was even ten years ago. And when you ask the farmers, they all tell the same story: It doesn't rain enough; it's cold when it should be warm or warm when it should be cold; the mists aren't coming the way they once did in early spring, etc., etc... When you add to that smog, water pollution and over-use of chemicals, you have a dreary painting indeed. But wait, look there! Where? Just there, in the back of the painting—behind all those grays. There is still some green. Some hope. There are the seeds of change, already growing—thriving in a renewed soil based on community, sharing and a view to the future.

As many of you who have been to our center know, one of our modes of service is to set up our tea service at parks, trails or gatherings and serve free bowls to passersby. We do so without any agenda or teaching—simple tea in a quiet space of presence and loving-kindness. Tea is the great connector, connecting us to Nature and to each other. We blaze right past each other all the time, with more modes of communication than ever before, and yet less human connection since creation. We offer people a bit of humanity, a smile, a chat or even some silence to get in touch with themselves before they move on. We do so at a variety of venues, including our monthly service at Hope Market in Taichung.

Hope Market is a group of organic producers who work together as a model for a sustainable future. It is mostly farmers, though there are producers of recycled clothes, jam, miso, etc. They hold activities every week, including courses conducted by various farmers in which the public can come and learn to make tofu, honey, organic fertilizer, etc. There is no currency exchange allowed within the Hope organization, rather trade and barter. If a soy bean farmer wants some honey, he trades tofu for it. There is also a wonderful exchange of work as well, which means that if that same soy bean farmer needs some help harvesting he asks his brothers and sisters in Hope and they all come to help, knowing that he will also help them if and when they need him to. It goes without saying that they will also help us build our permanent center to replace the temporary space we are in now. Every month Hope also holds a market in a beautiful garden, with rivers, koi fish and lotus ponds. As members, we have been given a permanent booth in the market. We don't use tables like the others, though, instead setting up on the ground and serving tea to the guests that come to buy vegetables and other organic products. Next to sending out this Global Tea Hut, Hope Market is the highlight of our month here.

It was at Hope that we met the amazing Mr. Xie Yuan Zhai, whom we of course gravitated to immediately because of his organic tea. He came to the center a few times and we started visiting his farm. It was so easy for a friendship to develop (organically of course). He is kind and joyous, with smiles that fill a room, not to mention incredibly knowledgeable about tea. He's made every kind of tea you could imagine at some point, and has decades of experience.



Aside from providing this month's tea, which you are sure to love, Mr. Xie is a very important part of the scenery at our center, and will be very important for many of you as well, because so many of our visitors come here with a curiosity about how tea is processed. It is very important to experience with your own hands just how difficult it is to make tea, so that in your own soreness you will develop a tremendous respect for the Leaf. This respect isn't just in the billions of years of evolution, or in the Nature we always wax poetic about: the wind and rain, sun and moonshine, minerals, mountain and water that flow from roots to crown. It is also in the blood, sweat and tears of generation after generation of farmers. And there is a deep reverence in seeing just how much mastery, skill and, dare we say, art in the crafting of the Leaf. And so, with great joy we take as many of our guests as possible to a few different farms to try their hands at tea processing. It is amazing to make your own tea, and take it home with you. If you didn't have enough reasons to come stay with us, here's another: Mr. Xie has formally invited each and every one of you to come to his farm and make tea, eat a nice lunch and take the tea you picked and crafted home with you!

Mr. Xie is a third generation farmer in Ming Jian, Nantou, Central Taiwan. Ming Jian is lower altitude, in the foothills of the central mountain range. In the last few decades, such lower altitude tea has been adumbrated by the popularity of the teas grown higher up, as we discussed with regards to our Oriental Beauty from Beipu County a few months ago. Though areas like Hsinchu and Miao Li counties, where OB is grown, have struggled since high mountain Oolongs have come to dominate the market, Ming Jian has prospered by providing lower priced teas for export, or large-scale production for the bottled tea market (often called "Ready to Drink" RTD). Mr. Xie's family has grown small scale productions of Oolong tea through three lifetimes, since before the higher teas even existed.

When we discuss organic farming and the need to make changes in tea farming—as well as other kinds of agriculture—it's important to remember that the farmers are always the first victims. It is they who handle the agro-chemicals in large amounts, and most directly. Furthermore, it is only by humanizing and befriending them that we can bring about change. We must include rather than exclude—educate rather than ostracize.

Like so many other farmers, Mr. Xie started to get the nagging (coughing, wheezing) feeling that these



chemicals were harmful to his family, his community and his land. When his wife almost miscarried their second child in 1997, he had had enough. Despite opposition from friends and family, Mr. Xie made a commitment to become an organic tea farmer, no matter the cost. He first attended some organic farming classes held by the MOA organization, which we discussed in April with regards to the Qing Xiang Oolong we sent at that time (as it was MOA certified). In case you've forgotten, here is the MOA story again:

MOA stands for "Mokichi Okada Cultural Services Association International." It was created by Mokichi Okada (1882-1955), who started three great projects in his lifetime: a "Mokichi Style Detoxification Treatment" for land, "Natural Agriculture, Drinks and Food" and "Fine Arts and Culture". These three projects created affiliated groups of people with common goals to help each other. His overall aim was "to allow humanity to expand and flourish, helping create healthier people, families, regions, countries and culture". His Japanese NPO natural agriculture culture movement created the *Da Ren* farm in 1982, and then in 1991 developed standards for healthy, organic agriculture. They began to set up branches and create a social system for theory and practical cooperation amongst farmers in Japan.

In April of 1990, a group of people who cared about Nature and were concerned about environmental pollution wanted to change the situation in Taiwan.

They joined the Japanese MOA International Association and created a sister organization to educate farmers and legally certify organic foods and drinks. This Taiwanese foundation was formed to explore and seek health and happiness for mankind and to guarantee environmentally sustainable MOA natural agriculture, expecting this ideology and the sustainable agriculture techniques behind it to spread all over the world.

MOA certification is rather rigorous and they do a great job of ensuring sustainable, organic agriculture without much of the bureaucracy or financial interests that trouble a lot of organic certification worldwide. Watching for the MOA certification on teas is a good way to enter the world of organic Taiwanese teas.

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

heard his father, now a sprightly eighty years old, bragging to others about how his tea is organic and good for the environment.

Mr. Xie's work hasn't stopped with his own farm. He knew that he would have to keep improving his skills, creating new and better teas, and help show his neighbors the value of organic farming, especially since their land and his are close enough to influence each other. He formed a co-op with other farmers and began teaching locals to shift to organic methods, offering them equal shares in their combined enterprise. As more people have joined this local group, the incentive to do so has also increased. To date, more than twenty farmers in the Ming Jian region are organic, including Mr. Xie's immediate neighbors.

Mr. Xie's kind heart shows in his teas. He cares deeply about tea and the Earth. He produces green tea, large and small leaf red tea, as well as several kinds of Oolong; and all with great skill. He's generous with his tea, which is why we've all gotten an extra share this month. To us, he is an inspiration and a kind of hero—the kind not talked about enough these days. It's easy to follow the crowd, maintain the status quo; or to say that “I am just one person. What can I do?” It is difficult to face criticism from family and friends and stand up for what you believe to be right. The problem is that it is

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

*Your tea of the month, a Mi Xiang Oolong from Ming Jian, Nantou*

This month's tea is one of our favorite teas from Mr. Xie. It is called “Mi Xiang Oolong”, which literally translates to “Honey Fragrance”, and you'll soon see why. It is completely organic, although it's plantation tea. It is a small-leaf varietal. As we discussed in April, if all tea in the world were grown as it should be—harvested once a year, allowed to grow up with room between trees, etc.—there wouldn't be nearly enough tea in the world. In this age, we must compromise. Mr. Xie's amazing story, and his great teas make that easy to do.



## Tea of the Month, October 2012

6

The tea has a honey fragrance because it is bug-bitten, much like the Oriental Beauty that we sent you in June. As more tea farmers have gone organic, they have had to come up with ways to cope with the katydids that come and eat their tea, especially when neighbors use pesticides and all the bugs come to their fields. Allowing bugs to bite the tea, and then processing it accordingly, began with Oriental Beauty in Beipu County, but has recently spread to Nantou as well. The resulting hybrid is sometimes called “Concubine Tea”. This month’s tea is a newer, more unique kind of tea: processed more like a traditional Oolong, with less oxidation or roast than either Oriental Beauty or Concubine Tea.

The bugs bite the leaves and their saliva reacts with the compounds in the tea to start oxidation before the leaves are even plucked. This happens in the summertime, usually between June and August. When the tea is less oxidized, the end-result is a musky, honey fragrance that lingers in the back of the mouth.

The tea is bug-bitten, plucked, withered outdoors and then indoors, shaken and mixed in piles (*jiao ban*), withered more, pan fried (*sa cheen*) to arrest oxidation and kill green enzymes, rolled to break down the cells and further oxidation, as well as to shape the tea (*ro nien*), and then roasted twice—once to dry the tea and then for a longer time to add flavor and fra-

grance. It is a semi-oxidized Oolong, lighter than traditional Oolong though darker than much of the green, light teas produced nowadays (like April’s tea).

The Qi of this tea is uplifting, sweeping upwards. You will feel elated drinking it, perhaps like us feeling the joyful toil Mr. Xie has impressed upon it. There is a great fellowship in this tea, between our fortuitous meeting at Hope Market, the many cups we’ve shared with Mr. Xie and now in the passing on of his kindness to you. He gave us all some extra tea, to drink a few times—spreading the love to a few of your friends as well...

*\* As a special treat, we will be putting up a video of Mr. Xie making tea right about the time you’ll be receiving this envelope and reading these very words. After you’ve drunk a cup or two, head over to the Global Tea Hut website and take a look at the video, so you can see his skill for yourself. If that doesn’t seal your plans to visit us, we don’t know what will!*

*\*\* As we mentioned in previous months, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized.*



