

# TEA OF THE MONTH



Over the course of this issue we'll be exploring tea and meditation pretty thoroughly, so we thought it would be a great idea to delve more deeply into red tea and dian hong in particular, so you can also have a healthy dose of tea information this month to go along with all the meditative peace. We've devoted whole issues to red tea in the past, but never dian hong specifically. Before we brew a thick, malty bowl of this month's Vitality, however, let's cover all the red tea basics.

I know that many of you have heard all this before, but we have to start by correcting the black tea/red tea mistake. (*Beginner's mind!*) Yes, what is called "black tea" in the West is actually red tea. The reasons for this mistake are manifold, having to do with the long distances the tea traveled in chests to Europe, and even more importantly with the general lack of information there for the first few hundred years that tea was traded. Another layer of the confusion comes from the fact that the Chinese have always categorized tea based on the liquor, while Westerners named tea for the color of the leaf itself. The difference between black and red tea is much more obvious in the liquor than in the leaf, though the leaf is also slightly red to our eyes. Europeans weren't allowed inland in those days, and never saw the tea trees or the processing either (except some roasting). Buying tea through middlemen in broken Pidgin English, you could see how easy it would be to spread mis-

information. We repeat this every time we send a red tea, because it is an important mistake that we tea lovers have to correct in the world, so that the real black tea can have its name back!

Nowadays the term "dark tea" is used by some tea vendors and authors to describe black tea, rather than correcting the mistake. However, we still feel that when a culture misappropriates or mistranslates a concept, category or idea from another culture then it is the foreign culture's responsibility to correct the mistake, demonstrating a respect and honor for the "host." Honoring the proper Chinese terminology is honoring the farmers and tea masters who have handed the genetic lineage of trees, the brewing methodologies and the spiritual practices down to us. We are not trying to correct the mainstream habit of saying "black tea." What we are doing is correcting this mistake amongst those who care—amongst our community of more conscious, heart-centered Chajin, allowing all of you to better communicate with those who produce and sell tea at its source.

The issue is, ultimately, a minor one, but here's an example of the effect that honoring tradition and correcting this mistake can have: last year, we met with two farmers from Liu Bao in Guangxi, and they were so happy with our efforts to honor and respect true black tea, returning it to its proper place in the West, that they broke out a celebratory fifty-year-old Liu Bao tea and congratulated us again and again,

cup after cup! And their gratitude was definitely sincere, as is our respect for black tea producers.

## Understanding the Genre

Red tea is unique in another way. One of the other common mistakes that is published in English is that "all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in genre are all in the processing." Correcting this misinformation is actually paramount to an understanding of red tea. Actually, both points of this widely published idea are technically not correct. Firstly, all tea is not *Camellia sinensis*; there are actually a couple dozen species of camellia used to produce tea. (We have shared some other species throughout the years.) Traditionally, the cluster of species with caffeine that has been used to make tea was called "*Theaceae*," which comes from the Greek "*Thea*," after the Titan goddess of clear vision. (There are even more species in the *Camellia* genus that have been used to make tea throughout the millennia that humankind has partaken of the Leaf, if you include those without caffeine.) Tea was, in fact, often called "Thea" before it was called "Camellia." There are also more kinds of trees to be discovered and/or speciated. For example, the tea that we used to produce Mountain Gate last year, from Ai Lao, is a very unique kind of tree that has a different appearance, leaf and flavor from all tea we have ever tried.





Vitality



Big Snow Mt., Yunnan, China



2016 Dian Hong Red Tea



Wa Aborigines



~1800 Meters





The trees are taller and do not branch until much higher. The tea is sweet, sour and pungent, light and fragrant in a way unlike all other kinds of tea. We suspect that once biologists get around to studying the tea in Ai Lao, it too will be classified as a unique species of “Thea.”

The second half of the misstatement that “all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in genre are all in the processing” is actually the part that is more relevant to a discussion of red tea, which will lead us to dian hong. It is important to remember that processing methods developed over time in response to certain varieties of tea, which in turn evolved in response to a particular terroir. Farmers were learning, honing their skills through some trial and error, as well as through a deep connection to a life of tea and intuition/insight. In other words, they innovated over time to bring out the best in the tea trees that were local to them. It would not be correct to say that oolong, for example, is just a method of processing tea, because that processing was developed to suit certain varieties of tea. And as oolong varieties have changed, moving from place to place (whether naturally or carried by people), so too have processing skills evolved, creating a whole array of different oolongs. So you could say that oolong is both a processing method and a variety (or more correctly varieties, as there are now many).

Nowadays, there is a lot of experimentation, processing teas from one region in the way that they are made elsewhere. Like many things in the modern world, this fusion is due to faster communication, more access to information, easier travel and the greater connection to the rest of the tea world that modern farmers enjoy. And a lot of that is great. People traditionally only ever bought tea from tea shops, but nowadays many people can purchase directly from farms, often resulting in fairer prices for the farmers themselves. And some of the new experiments do result in amazing teas, like the purple red tea from De Hong many of us know and love (Evening Sky). But the majority of such teas don't turn out well, as with the modern attempts to cultivate Taiwan's Three Daughters, as well as *Ching shin*

oolong in Vietnam and Mainland China. No matter how nice the trees or how great the skill of the farmer, you can't find the same quality elsewhere. In other words, a Taiwanese tea processed like a Wuyi Cliff Tea might be a nice tea in its own right, but it will never compare to a real Cliff Tea, at least not by Cliff Tea standards. And anyone (we do mean anyone) with some experience drinking Cliff Tea will know that this tea is *not* from Wuyi. Also, anyone who has ever been to Wuyi will stand up and testify to what an immense role the unique terroir there plays in the creation of Cliff Tea (it's called “Cliff Tea,” after all). There really is no place on Earth like Wuyi, and so no tea could ever mimic that environment, which then informed the variety, which influenced the evolution of processing, and so on...

As another example, the tea buds in Fuding have white hairs on them as a natural deterrent to insects. Local farmers found the thick buds hard to process, and also beautiful when dried, so they developed a unique kind of tea processing to suit this variety of tree, which came to be known as “white tea.” White tea processing has changed, evolving significantly since the early days of the Tang and Song dynasties when tea was processed into powdered cakes (as we covered in April 2016 when we talked about Emperor Song Huizong), but the variety and those changes have grown together. The evolution of processing was motivated by this unique tree. And while you could dry other tea like white tea, and this may create new and interesting results, if it is not made from a variety that has white buds it is technically not a “white tea.” Therefore, white tea is also both a kind of tree and a processing method.

How many of the albums in your collection are cover bands? Probably not many, and for good reason. There may be some cool cover bands that produce interesting music, and we can even think of a few good reasons for having a cover band, but at the end of the day if that cover band can produce music that is good enough that a fan of the original band will like it, then they are also good enough musicians to produce *their own music!* This is analogous to tea. There is no way a Taiwanese farmer can make a Cliff Tea that

could convince an experienced Cliff Tea drinker that it is from Wuyi, but he could make a replica that was interesting and delicious. But, a tea lover is then left wondering the same thing as with music: “If you can take this tea from a completely different terroir and impress me, a lover of Wuyi Cliff Tea, then you obviously have the skill to stop copying and produce this tea in a way that is in harmony with its terroir and essence!” Why not process the tea in the way that brings out its best qualities instead of making cheap copies of another region's heritage and skill as a gimmick?

The conclusion is that the genres of tea are not “all in the processing.” The reality is far more complicated than that: each genre of tea is as much a terroir and the local varieties of tea as it is the processing methods used there.







# 最優良的茶花品種

## Species of *Camellia*

These are some of the known species and varietals of *Camellia* used to make tea. These are all natural varietals, and do not include “cultivars,” which are manmade varietals.

茶 *Camellia crassicolumna*:

\*var. *crassicolumna*: S.E. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

\*var. *multiplex*: S.E. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

\*var. *shangbaensis*: S. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia grandibracteata*:

W. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia gymnogyma*

\*var. *gymnogyma*: S.E. Yunnan, S.W. Guangxi, S. Guizhou; broadleaf forest or scrub

\*var. *remotiserrata*: N.E. Yunnan, N. Guizhou, S. Sichuan; fir forest or broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia kwangsiensis*:

\*var. *kwangnanensis*: S.E. Yunnan; broadleaf forest

\*var. *kwangsiensis*: S.E. Yunnan, W. Guangxi; broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia purpurea*: S.E. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia sinensis*:

\*var. *assamica*: Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Hainan, Vietnam, Taiwan; evergreen broadleaf forest

\*var. *dehungensis*: S. Yunnan, S.W. Yunnan; under forest or scrub

\*var. *pubilimba*: S.E. Yunnan, Guangxi, W. Guangdong, Hainan; broadleaf forest

\*var. *sinensis*: S. China, S.E. Tibet, S. Japan, N. Myanmar, Korea, many other countries around the world, often where tea was propagated by Western traders, including Indonesia, Africa and even the U. S.; sparse forest or scrub

茶 *Camellia tachangensis*: E. Yunnan, S.W. Guizhou, W. Guangxi; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia taliensis*: W. Yunnan; sparse forest or scrub

茶 Various kinds and ages of dian hong

In fact, some authors include culture and processing methods in the very term “terroir,” which is an insight that we appreciate, since it acknowledges and celebrates the very natural part that humans play in Nature and in tea. If the tradition of tea processing is indeed evolving and improving based on the idea that “better” processing brings out the natural highlights of the trees and leaves, then you could say that farmers who process in this way are as natural a part of the life of that tea as the sun or rain. There are also deeper and subtler implications in including processing methods in the word “terroir,” beyond just climate, weather and all, since doing so testifies to the fact that humanity *is* Nature. These days we feel disconnected and separate from the world, even though we are as ingrained as any species of Thea,

and our influence can be just as natural and harmonious or as destructive as any other force of Nature. So, it is worth repeating that the differences are *not* all in the processing. The next time someone tells you white tea, oolong or puerh is a processing method, you should raise a finger in protest.

And this brings us to red tea, which is actually the exception to this rule. Of the seven genres of tea (white, green, yellow, red, black, oolong and puerh), red tea is the only one that is truly “all in the processing.” In other words, you can take tea from any varietal and terroir and process it like a red tea. And it is often nice. We’ve had great Taiwanese high-mountain oolong (*Ching shin* varietal) processed like red tea; the “gongfu reds” are essentially all-bud green teas processed like red; and, of course, where this discussion is head-

ing this month—puerh raw material processed like red tea, called “dian hong.”

Understanding that any varietal can be red tea is also illuminating when it comes to understanding just how the misconception that differences in tea are “all in the processing” became so widespread in the Western world. Red tea (mistakenly called “black tea”) is the most consumed and produced tea in the West. Almost everyone in the Western world who drinks tea, drinks red tea. And since it is true that “the difference are all in the processing” for red tea, you could see how this would be mistakenly applied to other kinds of tea, on the assumption that this principle is as true for green or oolong tea as it is for red (which it clearly is not). Consequently, red tea is really the only genre of tea we can say this about.



One of the characteristics used to evaluate red tea is its clarity—finer red tea does not have any cloudiness in the liquor, so it is important that we have taken a few bowls' worth of time to clear up this misunderstanding. As we travel further into our session, we'll have to do so with the understanding that red tea is unique amongst all kinds of tea since it has no terroir or varietals to call home. This means that a discussion of any given red tea will have to include the varietal which is used to make it. In our case, we will have to discuss dian hong as coming from puerh, since it is essentially puerh tea exposed to red tea processing. But before we turn to dian hong specifically, let's review some history, as well as the general steps of red tea production, which are even more essential since they literally define this genre of tea.

## Red Tea History

The Ming Dynasty saw many developments in tea processing, including oolong tea, flower-scented tea and red tea. Later, in the Qing Dynasty, many of the teas developed during this age of innovation evolved further.

As with any timeline detailing groundbreaking developments, there is some controversy over when the first red tea appears. Accordingly, there are several origin stories about red tea. Some claim that the appearance of Wuyi Cliff Tea (which was also mistakenly called “black tea,” even though it is actually an oolong) in the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century heralded the age of red tea, while others credit it to the appearance of *xiao zhong* (“souchong black tea” in the West) in Fujian around 1730, or to various red teas that were developed in Qimen in the 1700s. Later, around 1875, the technique for making “gongfu red tea” was introduced to the Anhui region, a major producer of Qimen (Keemun) red tea to this day.

Ultimately, which tea was the “first” red tea didn't matter much to the local tea drinkers of the time—in general, red tea wasn't very popular with them. However, from the early 1800s, the export markets in Europe, the American colonies and the Middle East couldn't get enough red tea. Some attribute the international popularity of red tea in particular to red tea's shelf

stability (a necessity during long ocean journeys), while others say that it has more to do with the compatibility of the bold flavor profiles of red teas with the cuisines of Germany, England, France and other nations where red tea has become the default tea type.

It was this popularity that led to large-scale production of red tea in China, and to the eventual theft of tea seeds, tea plants and tea production techniques, which were taken by Scottish and English adventurer-entrepreneurs and transplanted to India and other colonial territories (such as modern day Sri Lanka and Kenya). These entrepreneurs took their limited knowledge of tea production and used it to fashion machines to replace the handmade aspects of tea processing. The availability of cheap red tea fueled its popularity as a tea type further, making it the most popular category of tea in the West to this day.

Today, red tea is produced using this machine-driven approach in many countries, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. More recently, machine-made red teas have appeared in Japan (where they are called “*Wakocha*” or “Japanese red tea”), and machine-made red tea has even made its way back to China.

Meanwhile, green tea and oolong remain the most popular types of tea amongst tea drinkers in China. However, in recent years the interest in handmade and more traditionally made red tea has seen a resurgence in China, Taiwan and elsewhere, resulting in a wider availability of handmade red teas from China and Taiwan (including our tea of the month). For this and other reasons, the characteristics that red tea drinkers in China and Taiwan prefer tend to be different from those preferred by the typical tea





drinker in the West. Instead of looking for a dark color in the infusion or boiled liquor and a bold flavor that can handle milk and sugar, these tea lovers seek out beautifully shaped leaves and infusions that are best savored without any additives. Also, while most red tea drinkers steep their leaves only once, those opting for more traditionally made red teas prefer to let the leaves open up gradually with many short infusions, savoring their tea's patience and their inner spirit rather than gulping tea from a to-go cup while eating a pastry on the way to the office.

## Red Tea Production

When it comes down to it, red tea is the last stop on the oolong line. This is another reason that the confusion of calling red tea "black tea" began in the first place, since it hadn't yet distin-

guished itself as a kind of tea in its own right when European traders started exporting red tea to the West. Oolong is semi-oxidized tea, and red tea is very heavily oxidized (sometimes people say "fully oxidized," but that isn't really possible). In other words, red tea was considered a kind of very dark oolong in the beginning. In fact, all semi-oxidized teas were called "red" by some dynastic tea authors.

The main feature that distinguishes red tea is a very heavy withering, often with as much oxidation as possible. This heavy oxidation is achieved during the processing/drying stages of the leaf. Oxidation is an enzymatic process: basically, cellular breakdown due, of course, to exposure to oxygen, like when a banana or an apple turns brown on the counter. Oxidation can be spontaneous or controlled and can have a positive or negative influence on the quality of a tea. The change in

the leaves after harvest is spontaneous oxidation. In green tea production, the goal is most often to arrest this as soon as possible. Controlled oxidation happens during the withering, rolling and piling phases (not all red tea is piled). Proper oxidation in tea production requires an abundance of moist, oxygen-rich air. For red tea production, oxidation rooms (or long vats with fans and/or heaters) must provide ample humidified air to promote heavy oxidation. The polyphenols in the leaf (tea catechins) bond to oxygen molecules during the early stages of oxidation.

The intentional, controlled stage of oxidation begins after the harvest, which could be by machine or by hand, when the raw leaf is sent to the processing facilities for withering. When tea leaves are picked, they are too brittle to process, and would crumble as a result. It is essential, therefore,



After being rolled, dian hong is either withered again, often overnight, or sun-dried. The dried tea is then swept up into piles for sorting and packaging. Throughout this heavy oxidation, dian hong will turn from bright to darker shades of green, red to maroon and then ultimately chocolaty brown with golden buds. The liquor becomes sweeter and malty. Throughout the process, the tea smells of wintergreen.

## THE PROCESSING OF DIAN HONG

採摘  
Plucking

萎凋  
Withering

揉捻  
Rolling

萎凋  
Withering

晒干  
Sun-drying

分級  
Sorting

包裝  
Packaging



to evaporate some of the moisture before processing. (The exception to this rule is all-bud green or yellow teas, which are always firm and never withered.) These days, the withering of red tea most often takes place in long troughs that have fans which blow warm humid air over the leaves. However, in Yunnan, farms are often still very simple and lack machinery, so the tea is often just left on the ground in a pile to wither. If a farmer is going to wither without machinery, it is ideal to pile the tea on round bamboo mats held up on racks, as this will allow more air flow from underneath.

There are many chemical reactions that comprise oxidation. The oxygenation of polyphenols starts a series of chemical reactions that change the flavor of the leaf more towards that of red tea. Tea expert and Global Tea Hut member, Robert Heiss describes these changes better than we can: “The enzymes polyphenol oxidase and peroxidase act on other polyphenols to produce theaflavins. These red-orange compounds then react with more polyphenols to produce thearubigins, the chemicals responsible for changing the leaf’s color from green to golden, coppery or chocolate brown. The thearubigins, meanwhile, are also busy reacting with some of the amino acids and sugars in the leaf, creating the highly polymerized substances that develop into the various and distinctive flavor components that we expect in red tea. In general, theaflavins contribute to the brisk and bright taste of red tea, while the thearubigins are what provide strength (depth or body) and color. If the temperature of the leaf is allowed to rise too high, the controlled oxidation will rage out of control; and if it falls too low, oxidation will cease.” Usually, the pile of withering tea is stirred to control the temperature and degree of oxidation.

The oxidation of the tea then continues into the next stage of rolling. Rolling can be done by machine or, more rarely, by hand. This breaks the cell walls down and releases the essential oils that make red tea darker, allowing oxygen to interact with these otherwise trapped chemical components. Rolling also shapes the tea, so the method of rolling will determine the final shape of the tea. For most red teas, this is done for up to nine-

ty minutes, but experts will of course judge when the tea is ready by looking at and smelling the leaves. One year in Ai Lao, Auntie Ai had us roll for more than ninety minutes, but then last year we only rolled for around thirty to forty minutes, so it really depends on the leaves and their moisture content.

In the case of CTC (Cut, Tear, Curl) tea, rolling is combined with additional steps, which involve chopping the tea leaves into tiny pieces, causing them to quickly oxidize, and then rolling them into pellets as the tea is further oxidized and dried. CTC processing is an efficient and cheap means of tea production, so CTC tea is commonly used in teabags and in less wealthy tea-drinking countries, such as India and Sri Lanka. CTC tea is intended to release all its flavor very quickly; it usually lasts only one infusion or two to three boils.

Optionally, red tea is then piled again after rolling to increase oxidation, usually on round bamboo mats, to a thickness of twenty centimeters or so. This additional oxidation results in further changes in the tea’s flavor, aroma, color and impact on Qi when drunk.

Finally, red tea is dried. Most red teas are baked dry in ovens, as we showed in October’s issue about Elevation, Sun Moon Lake red tea. However, dian hong is more often sun-dried like puerh. The baking arrests the oxygen and finishes the tea. Some areas will also include sorting at various stages of the processing, but usually after the tea is dried to remove mis-processed or broken leaves before final packaging.

## ***Dian Hong***

“Dian” (滇) is an aboriginal word for “Yunnan” and “hong (紅)” is “red,” so this term applies to any red tea produced in Yunnan. It may surprise you that Yunnan produces red tea, since it is famous for puerh tea. Actually, throughout the twentieth century, Yunnan produced much more red tea than puerh, until the boom in the early 2000s. In the late nineties, there were hardly any puerh shops in Kunming and the locals drank much more red and green tea. Now, of course, there are puerh shops everywhere, including the airport.

As we discussed earlier, any tea can be processed like a red tea, and while the process may seem complicated when you include all the chemistry we have discussed this month, it is actually one of the simplest kinds of tea to make: *pluck and oxidize heavily*. Since dian hong starts out as puerh raw material, its quality is determined in much the same way, which means that terroir and the age of the trees play a huge role in evaluating dian hong. Some of you will remember our discussions of trees and gardens in Yunnan, in which we said that, like most things in the tea





茶 *Big Snow Mountain in the morning, as the trees awaken.*

world, there are no standard ways of discussing tree ages or garden types (and like most things tea, the trends that do exist are often misleading and/or incorrect).

Understanding the age of the tree, the mountain the tea came from and the kind of garden it grew in are essential in puerh tea. Most teas have a ratio between the terroir/trees/raw material and the processing skills that create the final quality. This ratio is different for each genre. With oolong, for example, half of its quality comes from the raw material, half from its processing. But

with puerh and dian hong, as much as ninety percent of the quality of any tea is in the raw material—the terroir. We call trees above one hundred years “old growth” and trees around one thousand years old “ancient.” We then divide gardens into three main categories: “plantation,” which are industrially grown, rarely sustainable rows of cuttings; “eco-arboreal,” which are semi-wild, seed-propagated gardens that are on the edges of villages, between the forest and homestead; and “forest gardens,” which can be wild or manmade, but are in the jungle proper

with all its biodiversity and life. While there has been a lot of plantation red tea produced in Yunnan for centuries, the old-growth dian hong are the best examples of living dian hong.

Dian hong is distinct from other kinds of red tea in the same ways puerh is distinct from other kinds of tea. Puerh maocha is unique because the firing (*sha qing*, 殺菁) is done at a lower temperature for a shorter duration so that the heat-resistant spore colonies essential to the post-production fermentation will survive the firing to form new colonies afterwards.



The tea is then sun-dried so that the light and heat will reactivate the microbes and fermentation will begin. Dian hong has no firing stage, no de-enzyming, so the microbe-dense leaves, which are covered in hundreds of species of molds and bacteria before harvest, are even more active. Like puerh, dian hong is sun-dried, which gives the tea a unique flavor and leaves the microbes active.

Dian hong is most often malty and rich, brisk and energetic. The color of the leaves ranges from dark, bluish black to bright gold, and it can be made of buds or sets of leaves and buds. The liquor often brews a dark or bright red and can be cloudy due to a lack of skill and quality control in Yunnanese tea production, especially if the tea is made simply in the village. But no one drinks a dian hong looking for refinement; if you are seeking that in a red tea, drink a “gongfu red tea (功夫宏茶)” from Anhui or Fujian. Dian hong is strong and vibrant. It moves the Qi as briskly as any genre of tea. And our Tea of the Month, Vitality, is amongst the strongest of all dian hong! The flavors and aromas feature the same complexity as puerh, with added sweetness and maltiness from the extra oxidation. And though dian hong teas can be hard to palate when they are produced from plantation tea, covered in chemicals and misprocessed; when they are produced from quality raw material from old trees, they are most often loved by everyone and are therefore go-to choices for those starting their tea journeys.

## Ageability of Dian Hong

The best qualities dian hong has to offer are in many respects similar to puerh: old trees and deep Qi with a strength due to the heavy oxidation, which releases the deep energy of a dian hong in the same way aging puerh tea does—only aged puerh is yin and red tea processing results in yang tea. You could think of dian hong as the counterpart to aged puerh. Both release more of the deeper, dark essence of the tough, large leaves of Yunnanese species, but dian hong does so through oxidation during processing, making it vibrant and young, while the slow and graceful aging of sheng puerh releases

the same depths more softly and gently. And energetically this is also true: dian hong is vital and strong and aged sheng puerh is deep, soft and soothing in a feminine way.

People often ask about the ageability of red tea in general, and then follow that question with many more about whether you can age dian hong and how. All tea gets better with age—*all tea!* You should be clear on that to start with. Though that is a very true statement, there are some caveats and conditions regarding green, yellow, white and lightly oxidized oolong teas. We wouldn't call these light teas exceptions to the rule that all tea gets better with age, but there are some things you need to understand about aging them. First, there is a magic in the freshness of light teas that will, of course, be lost; and second, these teas will pass through an awkward stage that can last as long as fifteen to twenty years. This happens because the moisture content is too high, so the teas need to dry out. Storing them in a drier environment for a while is therefore paramount. And since space is limited for all of us, one could make a convincing argument that light teas aren't worth storing long-term. Indeed, most well-aged light teas were accidentally left around rather than intentionally stored (though they are wonderful). Consequently, traditionally processed oolongs, sheng/shou puerh and black teas are the best candidates for aging. Red teas like dian hong fall somewhere in the middle.

Like light teas, red teas were rarely intentionally stored. But they don't have as much of an awkward stage throughout the beginning phases of aging. If the red tea in question is a dian hong, however, and it was made from good trees, it will age spectacularly. And, what's more, you can age them in drier conditions than puerh tea, which means that many of you can age dian hong where you live. This will result in a different kind of tea than those aged in humid places, but the quality won't deteriorate as heavily as with sheng puerh. Still, it is ideal to have some humidity around your dian hong. As with most kinds of tea, we recommend storing your dian hong away from other kinds of tea, as it will definitely influence them negatively, especially sheng puerh and oolong.

Most of the same principles we use to age puerh apply to dian hong as well: it ages better in a cake than as loose leaf and it requires some air and humidity (though much less than sheng puerh). However, it doesn't take as long to age, and can be wonderful even after ten or fifteen years. It kind of dries and mellows out the way a heavily fermented shou puerh does, as we discussed in last month's issue. Dian hong can also have a bite to it, and can be strongly tannic, bitter, astringent and rough on the mouth. These qualities all soften with age and the tea will grow sweeter and more billowy in the mouth, all of which is great! Even a year or two can make a difference with dian hong.

We have found that if one is intentionally producing dian hong for aging, one should consider oxidizing the tea less, creating a more sheng puerhy kind of dian hong, which will damage the Qi of the raw material less, and provide more opportunity for the tea to change over time. Such greener red teas are not as sweet, but make up for it in Qi and ageability. We often prefer these teas more when young as well, willing to give up sweet flavors for a stronger presence of Nature in the body.

✿ *Tian Wu with a huge pile of dian hong that we met on our annual trip last year. More than a hundred kilograms of Daughter of the Forest dian hong from old trees had just been dried that morning and everyone in the group immediately rushed over to enjoy a deep smell of the glory.*







## Vitality

Vitality comes from one of the Five Mountains where all tea was born, Big Snow Mountain (大雪山), an area of Mengku in Lincang. (The other four are Min Feng (鳴風), Mang Fei (忙肺), Mei Zi Qing (梅子菁) and Wu Jia Zhai (武家寨), which are all also in Lincang.) Big Snow Mountain is a high-altitude area that's home to many tea gardens, including lots of clean eco-arboreal gardens and some ancient gardens in the forests as well.

Vitality was processed with care from first flush of Spring 2016 Assamica tea leaves harvested from younger eco-arboreal gardens near the village. This affordable red tea is amongst the best we have ever created. It comes from the same organic, eco-arboreal farm as August's Tea of the Month, Forest Song came from. When we found out that we could get extra of this amazing tea, beyond what we pressed into Light Meets Life cakes, we jumped at the opportunity to share this amazing tea with the community. (Also, this will give those of you who have a cake of Vitality the opportunity to compare the loose-leaf versus cake versions!)

Vitality has a bright and crisp maroon liquor that invigorates you. It is sweet, malty and delicious. It is truly amongst the best dian hong teas we have ever tried! It has a sweet, rich and bright liquor that is one of the reddest red teas we have ever seen—red like rubies thrust towards the sky. It is thick and complex, very interesting and patient as well. The Qi is vigorous and strong, yang and rising. It is great in the morning, especially if you want some calm force to start the day right. It is also one of the best teas to help you have a clear meditation session, which is why we chose it for this particular month. May you all find clarity and serenity in this month's session!

*With every sip, I feel myself straightening up,  
and my roots tapping into the Earth even deeper.  
This tea whispers to me, asking me to open  
up my pores and let the Earth's forces be soaked  
up by my body. Vital vibrations coarse through  
my veins, filling up my chest and widening my  
eyes. As I look into the deep, amber-to-red tea,  
bowl resting in my two hands, I see a stronger me  
reflected in the liquor. The longing for sleep has  
disappeared altogether. I feel awake!*

—Jing Ren

Vital to the forest  
And the blood  
Vital to the rain  
And the flow  
Vital to the air  
And the movement  
Vital to the charge  
And the energy to let go  
Of vitality

—Wu De



Leaves in a bowl



Sidehandle brewing

**Water:** spring water, gathered or bottled

**Fire:** coals, infrared or gas

**Heat:** hot, fish-eye, just before a full boil

**Brewing Methods:** leaves in a bowl  
or sidehandle

**Steeping:** duration to taste

**Patience:** 7–10 with leaves, more in  
a sidehandle

茶 Dian hong is often nice when it is brewed strong. Be sure to make this month's tea into a bright, ruby-red liquor.



A traditional sidehandle teapot, likely made of unglazed ceramic or stoneware, is shown in profile on the left. It has a long, slender spout from which a stream of amber-colored tea is being poured. The teapot has a long, thin handle made of a light-colored wood or bamboo. In the foreground, two shallow, wide-mouthed ceramic bowls are positioned. The bowl on the left is the primary focus, with the tea being poured into it. It contains some tea leaves and liquid. The bowl on the right is partially visible and also contains tea. Both bowls have a rustic, slightly weathered appearance. The entire scene is set against a dark, solid background, which makes the light-colored teapot and the golden tea stand out. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the ceramic and the wood.

## Brewing Tips

This month's tea is much better as bowl tea. You can brew these leaves in a bowl or with a sidehandle pot. If you are starting your tea journey, or want to make your foundation stronger, you can follow along with the first of our tradition's brewing methods, leaves in a bowl, which we are going to share in detail for the first time in this issue of Global Tea Hut!

Since this month is all about the meditative mind, we suggest focusing the powerful and awakening energy of this month's tea on having a focused tea ceremony, without any distraction. This starts with the right intention, sitting down with the time and space for tea, removing clutter and making a chaxi. You should wear loose, comfortable clothing and definitely turn off your cell phone or any other distractions. You may want to play some soft, unobtrusive music to help calm you down. Try to have a few bowls in quiet, if not the whole session, allowing the meditative energy of this tea to inform the space. You will find that any tea is much more rewarding in quiet, as you can then sense the subtler aromas, flavors and energy of the tea more clearly. In fact, some aspects of any tea are too subtle to notice when we're talking. This doesn't mean every session needs to be held in silence—conversation is better with tea, and the two have gone

together for millennia. But sometimes a bit of quiet can enhance a tea. If you do have the opportunity to enjoy Vitality in the morning quietly, you'll meet a very different day as a result!

We have one more suggestion for creating a very mindful and meditative session that we have also never shared in these pages: keep your hands in the center at all times with the strong hand on top. This is a deeper, more advanced extension of the first of the Five Basics of tea brewing: to divide the space in half and do all actions with the corresponding hand. (If you need to review those, you can watch our video on them or review past issues. We will put some up on our blog in the Further Readings section this month.) In tea brewing, we often only use one hand at a time to perform actions, though there are times for using both hands together. In such cases, it is very helpful to keep whichever hand you aren't using on the ground in front of you or on the table, front and center. This helps to center the whole space, keeps our mind focused on our actions and the teaware, and helps to root you during the times when you do have to lean in one direction or cross the line, like when pouring with a sidehandle pot, for example.