

TEA OF THE MONTH



Over the course of this issue, we are going to be exploring Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) tea, from powdered tea, like the cakes which were popular in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), to the eventual ban on powdered tea that created a resurgence in steeped tea, which had previously been a local, rather than national, way to enjoy tea. From dynastic China to the present day, most people have enjoyed drinking green tea, but we wanted to create something extra special to commemorate our third issue in this Classics of Tea series, so Wu De and Mr. Xie got busy sending samples back and forth, chatting and tasting, sipping and slurping their way to this amazing Tea of the Month. We're all in for a real treat this month: something elegant and graceful to sip as we read the ancients' tea wisdom.

Many of you ask us why we don't send out more green tea. We'd love to, but the first issue is that green tea is suitable only for certain seasons. It is more astringent and cooling, and therefore better for the late spring and summer time. Also, since green tea is the most popular tea in China, it is often difficult to find organic, sustainable examples of this kind of tea, since more of it is produced via mainstream, so-called "conventional" farming, and on a large scale that is not always conducive to quality. And when we do find organic Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese or Chinese green tea farmers, our experience is that the hard work involved in making organic green teas can make

them more expensive than we can afford for Global Tea Hut, unless the farmer is very generous (and they can't always afford to be, sometimes because there is only a small amount and at other times because they need the revenue that the tea brings them).

Since green tea is one of the most popular teas in the world, with very old traditions spanning China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan, its processing is very complicated, with great differences in production methods from place to place. The ideal, though, is always to create a delicate, fresh, vegetal liquor, often with floral notes and a color that can range from bright green to yellow or white. And don't be fooled by the fact that it is the most-produced and consumed kind of tea in Asia: green tea can be one of the most difficult to make well, and there are incredibly skilled green tea masters producing some of the best tea on earth by hand in small batches. Such hand- and master-made green teas are growing rarer these days, however, replaced by machine-made, mass-produced varieties that are far less interesting. Before discussing this month's unique green tea, let's review green tea, perhaps unpacking some new areas of this tea to refine our understanding.

Large & Small Leaf Trees

We have to start with an understanding of the two main, most generalized categories of tea trees: small-

and large leaf. The original ancestor trees in the birthplace of tea, which is Lincang in Yunnan, were large leaf. Separating the kinds of tea trees by leaf size can be tricky, though, because the size of any given leaf won't tell you whether it is from a small leaf or large leaf tree. Large leaf trees also produce buds, which start out tiny, and small leaf bushes also have leaves that grow up, so any given small leaf tree's leaf maybe bigger than one from a large leaf tree. However, standing back and looking on at the garden from afar, you will understand why Chajin of the past chose to categorize tea trees in this way, because once the leaves are fully grown, large leaf trees have much larger leaves than small leaf trees. Another way to think about this is to say that the large leaf trees are able to produce much larger leaves.

Large leaf trees are more easily distinguished by their trunks, which usually branch about a meter from the ground. Some varieties branch much higher. The trees in Ai Lao, for example, have trunks that stretch several meters into the sky. This has to do with the genetics of the varietal (or species of *Camellia*, since tea is made from several species), as well as the forest environment in which the varietal or species evolved. Large leaf tea trees also have deeper roots that often extend at a downward angle. As tea moved further north from its home "South of the Clouds," it evolved into a bush, branching from the ground, with a wider, shallower root structure.





Heavenly Blossom



Mingjian, Nantou, Taiwan



2016 Green Tea & Blossoms



Taiwanese



~500 Meters





These small leaf bushes would then develop a smaller average leaf size the further north the tree found itself (whether naturally migrating or carried by humans) in response to the colder weather. The further north tea went, the smaller the average leaf size. The leaves of small leaf trees in Japan are so small that they look like needles after they are dried.

Tea is an evergreen, staying bright and green all throughout the year, which is why the climate has such a strong impact on the varietal that will develop in different regions. Incidentally, the weather in any given growing season also impacts the flush of tea leaves much more significantly than it impacts other nearby plants. Tea is sensitive! This is one of the magical qualities of the brew we all know and love: each bowl or cup is filled to the brim with the weather of the mountain ecology from which it came, bringing all that Nature to you in every steaming draught!

While there are some large leaf green teas, mostly produced in Yunnan, and some of them can be quite nice, it is fair to say that the best and most famous green teas are made from small leaf varietals/cultivars. Small leaf tea trees usually flush more often and are less brisk, bold and astringent, with sweeter buds—all of which is more conducive to green tea production. Still, we have to take that statement with some bitter astringency of its own, as there are a lot of different green teas in the world, and just as many varietals and cultivars used to make it. In fact, green tea might just be the vastest genre of tea, with the greatest variety of difference in varietals/cultivars as well as production methods.

Green Tea Processing

Usually, when discussing the production of green tea, we have to start by saying that green tea is processed

with the goal of arresting oxidation completely. As we have discussed in previous issues, oxidation is an enzymatic process: it is basically cellular breakdown due, of course, to exposure to oxygen, like when a banana or apple turns brown on the counter. While that works as a general description of green tea processing, the truth is much more complicated, like most things in tea. To start with, it is actually impossible to prevent oxidation in tea. If bugs bite the tea leaves—and let's hope they do, because otherwise it means our tea was made with pesticides, which are unhealthy for the environment, the farmers and us tea lovers—the tea starts to oxidize, and once the leaves are plucked, they will also oxidize some. Even if the pickers ran at a break-neck speed to rush each and every leaf to the processing facility one by one in an absurd attempt to prevent any and all oxidation, the leaf would *still* oxidize some before it reached the heat that would eventually arrest the oxidation.

What Makes a Genre of Tea Unique

One of the other popular mistakes published in English is that “all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in genre are all in the processing.” Correcting this misinformation is paramount to an understanding of red tea. Actually, both points of this widely published idea are technically incorrect. Firstly, not all tea is *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 containing caffeine that have been used to make tea were 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*.”

The second half of the mis-statement that “all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in genre are all in the processing” is to do with processing. It is important to remember that pro-

cessing methods developed over time in response to certain varietals 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 a deep connection to a life of tea and intuition. In other words, they innovated over time to bring the best out of the tea trees that were local to them. It would not be correct to say that Long Jing green tea, for example, is just a method of processing tea, because that processing was developed to suit certain varietals of tea. And as green and other tea varietals have changed, moving from place to place (whether naturally or carried by people), and human-made cultivars have been developed, so too have processing skills adapted and changed, creating a whole array of different green teas. So you could say that any traditional green tea is both a processing method and a varietal (or, more correctly, varietals, as there are now many).

Nowadays, there is a lot of experimentation in processing teas from one region using another region's processing methods. Like most of the modern world, this fusion is due to faster com-

munication, 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 a 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, like 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 the skill of the farmer, you can't find the same quality elsewhere. In other words, a Taiwanese tea processed like a Bi Luo Chun green tea might be a nice tea in its own right, but it will never compare to a real Bi Luo Chun from Jiangsu. And anyone (we do mean anyone) with some experience drinking Bi Luo Chun will know that this tea is not from Jiangsu. (Good cover bands, with skilled musicians, should make their own music!)

✿ Mr. Xie holding some of the tea blossoms that are in our Tea of the Month.

Consequently, saying that green tea is “unoxidized” isn't really accurate.

Some authors then choose to say that green tea is defined as “un-withered,” since withering is the stage in which most oxidation occurs in tea processing. Withering traditionally meant spreading the leaves out on round bamboo trays suspended from a rack so they had upward air flow from beneath, but nowadays large-scale mass-produced tea is often withered on the ground (or even the road) on large plastic tarps. Saying that green tea is un-withered is a bit more accurate than saying it is unoxidized, but it still doesn't complete even a basic, general understanding of green tea production. For that, we have to make another distinction of our own: all-bud versus bud-and-leaf green teas.

This distinction is important because all-bud green teas are indeed un-withered, while green teas made from buds and leaves require some withering. Green teas made exclusively

from buds can go straight from harvest to the heat that will arrest oxidation, but if there are leaf sets with the buds, the leaves will have to be withered to reduce their moisture content. Freshly-plucked leaves, full of water, are brittle and would crumble if processed immediately, so they have to be withered to withstand processing. Most often, all-bud green teas are also shaped in the firing, but bud-and-leaf green teas also undergo rolling to break the cells down more and shape the tea.

All Buds vs. Bud & Leaf

The distinction between all-bud and bud-and-leaf green teas also opens the door to some interesting quality discussions with regards to green tea in general. Some people might dismiss bud-and-leaf green teas, thinking that they are later, market-driven innovations introduced to increase quantity, and therefore retreat to the idea that

true green tea is un-withered, but that would be misleading. It is true that in many kinds of green and white tea, a demand for greater quantities of famous teas has resulted in the production of lower grades of the same tea that include leaf sets—so the best grade will still be all-bud, in other words, while some cheaper grades made with leaves, and often from later flushes, are also sold alongside the traditional tea. However, there is a big “but” that we have to place rather emphatically next to this statement. *But* not all bud-and-leaf green tea is produced just to increase quantity and/or profit margin. There are also bud-and-leaf green teas that have always been made that way, because the varietal demands that it be so.

It is important to remember that in tea production, the previous step is always more relevant to the overall quality of the tea than the following step, especially when the tea is made with skill by those experienced in tea.



茶 Bud-and-leaf green tea needs to be withered, like our Tea of the Month shown here. The withering is necessary to reduce moisture in the larger leaves so that they can be fired and rolled, which will shape them. It is, therefore, not true that green tea is un-withered, nor is it true that all-bud green tea is always better than green tea composed of leaf and bud sets. There are exceptions.

In mastered tea production, the earlier stages will determine how the later stages are done, if at all, to bring out the best in the tea. Ultimately, this means that the terroir will *always* be the most influential factor in determining the quality of a tea. Like all plants, tea is a product of its environment: it is the sun, the mountain, the fog and mist and the weather, so the better the environment, the better quality the tea. And the terroir will determine the varietal most suitable to grow there, which is always going to be the varietal that evolved naturally to suit that environment. (Farmers in Pinglin can grow nice Tieguanyin varietals, for example, since the environment is slightly better than Muzha, but such tea will always lack the “Muzha character” that makes Muzha Tieguanyin special.) The varietal will then determine the harvest time, which will determine the next stage, and so on. What this means in

the end is that the ideal tea processing is one in which the terroir, varietal and weather/harvest time determine how the tea is best processed to bring out its natural qualities. And sometimes, with some green teas, this means that the tea is actually better as bud-and-leaf sets than it is as all-bud tea.

It is true that all-bud green teas tend to be higher quality, as the buds of most small leaf varietals are sweeter and far less astringent, having less chlorophyll and tannins. Such teas are also more valuable, as they demand hand-picking so that the buds are not damaged, and it usually takes thousands or even tens of thousands of buds to make a single *jin* (600 grams in Taiwan and 500g in China). In general, all-bud teas are much more conducive to better green and white tea production, but there are natural exceptions like our Tea of the Month, which we’ll discuss in a bit. We say “natural” because, once again,

the best teas are always made in harmony with the nature of the leaf. In other words, the best tea is always made in a way that brings out the inherent qualities in the varietal of tea used, which was in turn “chosen” by Nature Herself, which means that it evolved by and through the environment in which it is found.

The famous Anhui green tea *Taiping Houkui* (literally “Peaceful Monkey Chieftain”) is a great example of a green tea that is better as a leaf. In fact, the leaves are left to grow quite large in this unique green tea. Traditionally, *Taiping Houkui* is grown in valleys, which means that the tea trees receive less sunlight and therefore produce much less chlorophyll, which means the larger leaves are still quite sweet and lack the astringency and bitterness of most teas. This unique green tea is also made from a large- or medium-leaf varietal called “*shi da*.” The leaves of this amazing and rare tea are also quite beautiful, especially since they were traditionally produced by hand one leaf at a time (yes, every single leaf). When you find some authentic *Taiping Houkui* (there are oh-so-many fakes), steep a few long leaves in a dark rabbit’s fur bowl and you’ll have found one of the many doorways to the Heavenly realms through tea!



茶 Taiping Houkui

After discussing terroir and varietals, as well as understanding oxidation in green tea and the differences between all-bud and bud-and-leaf green teas, we can turn to heat, which is where the greatest differences between the processing of green tea lie, from China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan. As we said earlier, all-bud green teas aren't rolled, so the heating process is often how and when the tea is shaped, like pressing down and flattening the famous green tea Long Jing (Dragon Well) as it is pan-fired. In modern times, green tea can be sun-dried, basket-fired, charcoal-fired (with or without a pan), steamed or oven-fired. The differences in the drying process really distinguish each shape and kind of green tea. Ultimately, this topic exceeds the scope of this article, so we will just explore the processing involved in our Tea of the Month, Heavenly Blossom, later on in this article. (We will put some of the articles from our May 2016 issue about green tea up on the Further Readings section of the blog so you can explore these differences more deeply. Alternatively, you can read the entire issue on our website for free!)

chances that one of them will survive are high. Unfortunately, very little tea in the world is seed-propagated. The reason, of course, is industry and the commoditization of tea. Sadly, tea faces many of the problems that all agricultural products are haunted by. Most tea plantations use cuttings from a tree, planted to produce another. These are, in essence, clones. Farmers do this to achieve uniformity of flavor. Also, with a few hundred or even thousands of different trees, all with different needs, the farmer would potentially have a lot more work to do. Clones are easier.

Like all sexual plants, *Camellia sinensis* undergoes an alternation of generations. In tea trees, the production of what botanists call "sporophytes," which are the spore-producing generation of a plant, having two matching chromosome sets, represents the dominant stage in the life cycle of a tea tree, while the production of what are called "gametophytes," which are the male and female cells is the minor stage. Through cell division (called "meiosis"), the sporophyte creates a gametophyte, which is then fused through cross-pollination with that of another

plant, with the help of either insects, like bees, or pollen spread by the wind. After the gametophytes are fused, a zygote is formed with chromosomes from both the male and female plants. Then, through "mitosis," which is also a kind of cell division, this new plant will grow to maturity. This is how tea is naturally propagated, in scientific terms.

It took millennia for trees like tea to develop sexual cross-fertilization. It is also tremendously difficult for such trees to fertilize one another, since the mates cannot move towards embrace in the way that animals and people can. As a result, plants have developed magnificent ways of fertilizing each other, enticing insects to pollinate them, using the wind, etc. There is a reason for all this. Carl Sagan said that the evolution from asexual to sexual reproduction on this planet was as significant as the beginning of life itself, as it allowed for all the creative power in Nature to assert itself in such myriad forms of trunk, branch and leaf. There is something deep and powerful missing when a plant cannot cross-fertilize according to its nature.

Life Cycle of a Tea Tree

Before we turn to our Tea of the Month, Heavenly Blossom, we thought we would discuss the life cycle of a tea tree, especially *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis* (small leaf tea trees), since our tea has flowers in it. We've never really talked about this before. Most plant books use a lot of botany jargon, which we will try our best to unpack using layman's terms so we can understand the life cycle of our beloved "Thea" a bit more, as well as her rare flowers, which some of you may have never seen.

Tea is a sexual plant, which means that it is cross-pollinated. A tremendous amount of natural energy goes into the creation of a tea seed, including bugs and forest, sun and sky. Each one carries great energy within it. And no two tea seeds are alike. They will each produce a completely unique tea tree, which is why tea has done so well traveling to different climates. If you plant a thousand seeds, the



茶 *Camellia* are close cousins to tea. Tea is a cluster of species in the *Camellia* family, traditionally called "Theaceae."

The variety in Nature is magic, just as in humans. Every tree is different. Sure, they share some similarities due to common genetic heritage and similar *terroir* (climate, soil, etc.), but like people, they each have their own medicine, their own perspective, experience and wisdom.

The difference in power and healing between seed-propagated and cloned tea is obvious. As we discussed earlier, there are essentially two main varieties of tea trees: large and small leaf. Large leaf tea trees can live thousands of years. The oldest one we've dated is 3,500 years old! (The trunk is about seven people around.) There are probably older ones out there, or at least there were in the past. Small leaf tea trees can live hundreds of years, and some are many centuries old. But here's the punch line: the clones on plantations typically live only thirty to fifty years. And more than a few farmers have told me that they aren't living as long anymore, sometimes as few as fifteen to twenty years.

Our attempts to interfere with Nature rarely take into account all the biodiversity and infinite, immeasurable connections between species. We take control of an environment and monocrop it, controlling a few factors in a huge web of symbiosis. As we've done this to larger and more diverse areas, our meddling has begun to have a global impact, changing the Environment (with a capital 'E') rather than just the places where we farm.

Nowadays, most tea is made from cuttings, and because it is so heavily pruned, it will never pass through its natural cycle and flower, which is why many tea lovers have visited tea farms in the past without ever seeing any tea flowers there—many plantations don't blossom, in other words. The “natural” growth of new leaf shoots occurs in successions, called “flushes,” that are almost always altered by the harvesting and pruning of humans. However, the relationship between tea and human beings (as a natural animal species) is ancient, and need not be seen as “unnatural,” especially when the trees are honored as living beings, rather than as commoditized “property,” and grown sustainably with the health, happiness and quality of the tree as viable concerns. Human beings need to learn that

the quality of life of our food, plant or animal, very much *is* the essence of its nutritional quality for us!

No matter the varietal/cultivar, all healthy shoots on a tea tree will form leafy growth in spring. Terminal buds then become dormant as the season progresses. Certain areas and varietals also have growing seasons in the summer, autumn and sometimes even winter as well. Dormant terminal buds will shed bud scales in some varietals, leaving scars on the stems that may represent leafless flushes, which often occur at the same time as the flush of new buds. The flowers are formed in the autumn, usually from October to November. Flowers appear in the space between the leaf and stem where the terminal bud starts growth for the next highest flush. The gorgeous flowers of a tea tree form with a large mass of yellow stamens, often blossoming two or three together on short branchlets. The white or pale pink blossoms of Camellia tea trees appear on drooping stalks, usually between two and four centimeters in diameter. They form from five to nine petals, which are round, concave and often fall off quite quickly. The petals are surrounded by five sepals arranged in a tile-like pattern described by botanists as “imbricate.” These casings are smooth and round. It then takes from a few months to a year for the tree to be cross-pollinated and bear fruit. The fruits (seeds) of the tea tree are smooth with flattened, round capsules that are usually split into five chambers, each with one solitary seed. It is not uncommon for two seeds to form fused together.

Before the two-legged animal came to share in the protection and propagation of the genetic heritage of tea, ensuring that Her genes would spread all across this great Earth, She required the help of mice and owls to propagate Herself, as have many trees before Her. Mice gather the protein-rich tea seeds into caches, sometimes far away from the mother tree, and then owls eat some of the mice, who never return to their cache that is then free to sprout. And it is a good thing there are many seeds in the cache, because tea seeds don't sprout with much consistency. (We have planted many at the Center, and talked often about them with Mr. Xie. Our experience is that as little as

one-quarter sprout.) In this way, the tea trees can actually migrate hundreds of kilometers over long periods of time, though much further carried by humanity's love for the Leaf.



茶 The delicate flowers are an essential part of the life cycle of a tea tree, but you rarely see them on plantations, as the trees are harvested or pruned too often. The cloning of tea trees, adding chemicals to their growth cycles and over-harvesting result in an unnatural and unhealthy plant, which, of course, cannot bring healing to us.



Heavenly Blossom

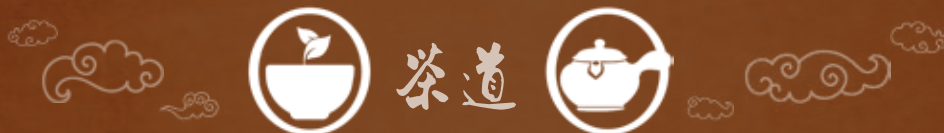
Heavenly Blossom is the second tea Wu De and Mr. Xie made together. It took around six months to create. First, the trees had to be left un-pruned so that they would flower in the autumn of 2016 and Mr. Xie could collect and sun-dry the tea blossoms. Then, after trying some samples, Wu De and Mr. Xie decided to use the more delicate, later winter flush of leaves from *tsui yu* (kingfisher jade) trees to make the blend we call “Heavenly Blossom.”

Carefully picking the autumn blossoms by hand is quite difficult, as they fall apart easily and have to be caught right when they open. They are then dried in the sun. Since Wu De and Mr. Xie knew there would not be many of them, they suspected that spring green tea would overpower the very subtle and soft flavors of the blossoms. Sure enough, all the spring flushes of each varietal rendered the flowers tasteless and odorless. Mingjian is low-altitude and therefore receives much more sun, resulting in earlier, harder spring harvests, as well as more flushes overall throughout the year (up to six). This means the tea develops an astringency and bitterness relatively quickly, and even the first flush of tea will be rather harsh if processed into green tea, lacking the delicacy that Wu De imagined for blending with autumn tea flowers.

The tea was picked, withered, pan-fired, rolled into balls because of its delicacy (even though Wu would rather have had striped tea, it can only be made from spring flushes), and then oven-dried. As we discussed earlier, this type of green tea is an example of one that is much better with some leaves mixed in with the buds, lending the tea more depth, fragrance and breadth. There are other all-bud green teas from other regions that would also have gone well with these tea flowers, and Wu De looked into that possibility as well, but it was difficult to find an organic and/or affordable example. In the end, he wanted to keep the whole tea process with our beloved Mr. Xie, so opted for this bud-and-leaf ball-shaped green tea.

Heavenly Blossom is a soft, crisp and fragrant winter green tea with a very slight astringency when brewed properly. The energy of the flowers is profound. If you are sensitive, you will notice the uplifting force they bring to what would otherwise be a very simple green tea. If you can remember the May 2016 Tea of the Month, which was a simple, spring green tea from Mingjian, you will be able to contrast it with the presence of these flowers in the tea. The Qi is much more airy, rising under the arms and carrying you like a soft breeze away from your session.

Drink this tea in the very early morning (dawn) or mid-afternoon, surrounded by some nice sunshine and natural scenery, and you'll feel the breezy Qi of the sweet tea flowers blowing through your soul. Perhaps this tea helps to capture the elegance and grace of dynastic tea, which we are going to turn to now in the coming pages. It was easy for us to raise our bowls and with each sip see the clothes of our guests slowly shift into flowy, embroidered Ming robes, and watch as their hair pinned itself up in topknots, as they flicked their long, silken sleeves off their wrists and picked up their bowls, commenting with nostalgic charm about how the whole of Nature twirled around and through the blossoms floating there...



Leaves in a Bowl

Sidehandle brewing

Water: spring water, gathered or bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: cooler, crab-eye, roughly 70° C

Brewing Methods: leaves in a bowl or sidehandle (leaves in a bowl is better)

Steeping: long or short, to taste*

*especially if you're brewing leaves in a bowl

Patience: five to ten steepings

茶 Green tea like this month's is better brewed at a lower temperature. Bring the water to a boil and then let it cool back down.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a long, thin tea branch (likely a side-handle pot) over a dark, textured side-handle pot. Steam is rising from the pot, suggesting tea is being brewed. The background is dark and moody.

Brewing Tips

While you certainly can brew this glorious tea in a side-handle pot, you will miss out on watching the glory of the floating, opening tea blossoms, which is why we would emphatically suggest brewing this tea leaves in a bowl. The traditional Chinese character used for appreciating tea, “pin (品),” is literally three mouths, which represent the three main senses we use to appreciate tea: our taste, smell and sight. Most often, flavor and aroma are going to play a larger role than the visual appreciation of dry or wet leaves, but with Heavenly Blossom we could present a convincing argument that watching this tea open will bring you as much joy (or more) than tasting/smelling the leaves and liquor.

Heavenly Blossom is a green tea, which means we have a nice opportunity to talk about water temperature with regards to lighter teas: lightly-oxidized oolong, green, white or yellow tea.

The common information copied and pasted from website to website and company to company is that such light teas need lower-temperature water, with desirable temperatures often listed as anywhere from sixty degrees Celsius to the high eighties. Since such information is rarely based on experience (or experimentation) and more often just repeated, it is also often misleading. First of all, fine and well-made green tea from nice, clean environments can always handle higher temperature water, or even gongfu brewing. What results is not necessarily inferior, but simply different. The tea can also be more patient as a result of such brewing. The lower the quality of tea, coming from less natural environs and more human-made cultivars propagated from cuttings, the more rough any kind of tea will be when prepared with hotter water, which will draw out more of the tea's essence.

That said, many light teas do offer more fragrance and demonstrate their delicacy more clearly when they are steeped in cooler water. Since Heavenly Blossom has tea flowers in it, it will also be better with slightly cooler water. We have found that it is still always better to bring the water up to at least “crab eye” bubbles and then let it cool down, as opposed to stopping the water earlier, though you can go to “fish eye” also and then let it cool down. The best way to let it cool is to just wait patiently, meditating for a few moments as the water reaches the desired temperature. (If you absolutely must be scientific about it, shoot for 70° C, but please try to abstain from using a thermometer.) This lower temperature will allow the green tea to remain soft so that the blossoms will shine through.

Also, whether leaves in a bowl or sidehandle brewing, you will have to be more skillful this month in choosing the right amount of leaves to add, for the same reason a lower temperature is needed: to preserve the delicacy of the tea so the blossoms shine through. Use roughly two to three grams if you are brewing leaves in a bowl and have ordinary-sized tea or rice bowls. (It is hard to give a specific amount without knowing the size of your bowls or teapot.) This will give the leaves and blossoms more space to dance, and ensure that the liquor reaches the softness and delicacy that will bring out its best qualities, lightening your body so the wind can pick you up...