



REFLECTIONS OF OUR 2017 TRIP

茶之旅迴響 PART II

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Even though Wu De forewarned us that the Annual Global Tea Hut trip was certain to be epic, I really hadn't the foggiest notion what that might mean for me personally. On the first day, as we awaited the high-wire cable car that would swiftly and silently lift us half way up Yellow Mountain, Wu requested I write something about this trip to share with all of you. I joyfully assumed this task of bringing you along for the ride, often jotting down minimalistic blurbs of impactful moments, precious sceneries, memory-bound sounds, stories and legends, inner teachings, bubbling emotions and blubbering—absurdities now set in the fonts of a rippling eternity! But how can I possibly make sense of these notes and convert them into some kind of meaningful narrative? What's the thread? What's my angle?

I laugh at the possibilities: Should I just export this into a bunch of Gonzo storyboard chapter headings? Circum-ambulating the circumstances, dabbing these typewriter keys in a dubious palette of words, sans syntax?

Example:

Chapter 1. Yellow Mountain.

Cloud Walkers—Gongfu Cups (Crack of Dawn)—White Monkeys—Da Hong Pao Posse—Misty Morning Muse—Polished by Adversity—Rock me Mama like a Wagon Wheel—Hard Beds & Hot Springs!

Sure, that's a nice sketch! I could now go in and expound, fill in the finer details, complete the impressionist painting. But, I'm sorry. I am truly not up to this task. Feeling overwhelmed, I realize it truly is beyond me! The course of my emotions is diverting the stream of thought, filtering the facts, now a heavy undertow is pulling me, and I've lost my ground entirely.

Make a complete sweep. Wipe the slate clean! So what then? How to proceed? For all the places we visited and for all we saw (and we saw a lot), this trip was actually less about the places and events as the people assembled. Shall I say, "to my surprise?" Well, yes and no. I should have known better.

But did I? How could I? I've never traveled in a group or associated myself with an organized trip before. Clearly, a group of Chajin following a schedule prepared by Global Tea Hut would suffice for me to make an exception. But how would I navigate that on a personal level?

On day one, Wu De threw the gauntlet down: He explained how on previous trips the group only began to click and merge as a family unit on day three. He challenged us to make the shift from day one, so from that moment: shift-click-boom—family vibe on! I knew I had to make an effortless effort and just flow. I had to be the vessel, the teapot. My cup was empty (you are Chajin, you understand the symbolism).

And yet, despite my introverted tendencies, bouts with individualistic independence and general uneasiness in groups larger than four, I barely had any issues. After all, this family was forged long ago in our passion for the Leaf. This Global Tea Hut is steeped in community, and so to meet and re-



meet such incredibly generous, loving, talented and funny brothers and sisters I've long heard about from others, contacted over social networks, read about as TeaWayfarers or already shared wonderful intimate moments with over tea was as good as it gets for a Chajin. And then sprinkle in a steady dose of improvised magic along the way and you may begin to get the feeling. This trip was incredible; this family, pure fantasy bonded by our love. It won't be repeated. *Ichigo ichi-e*. I have so much gratitude for all of you who shared so much with me. I returned to Barcelona full, brimming, overflowing and sharing the bounty—re-energized with purpose and love. I love you all for just being.

So what more should I add? Does this article have any add-ons? How can I rig this thing into something more insightful? I see this article (this reflection of the trip) failing, but its failure is a holy failure, because the trip was a holy trip—a pilgrimage for a Chajin. But wait... I just caught a glimpse of a memory I'd like to share:

The tea fields were peopled with Global Tea Hut, their upper bodies scattered among rows of tea bushes; their hands concentrated on a steady leaf-pluck of one tender bud, two leaves; their eyes attentive and avoiding spider webs, deftly filling their little baskets with the freshly-picked flush; their ears and hearts open, their mouths mostly silent, leaving just enough room for meaningful words.

I see a brother approaching without a basket; he has but a small bunch of leaves in his hand. He adds them to my basket. I see him move off and look for where to pick next. He's still looking. After a few minutes he adds, "it's all been picked here." I recommend he come over to my side. I'm picking away, humming a melody, finding a groove (left hand gently holds the stem, right hand softly pinches); after a few minutes my right hand is a bundle full of leaf sets that I gently place in my basket. I look up and now he is standing almost right beside me. He has a single bud and leaf set in his palm but his face displays massive contentment.

I playfully ask him if he's found an area he can pick. And you know what? He surprised me saying: "Yes, I did. But it takes me a long time to pick a set. I really like to quiet the mind and think of the person who will be drinking this tea."

"Ah, gotcha." I nod, blown away.

Then he continues, bud and leaf in hand, feeling his way through the bush, feeling his heart for presence and intention... You may recall, just a little while ago, I said I felt like this account of the trip was a failure, in that conveying something insightful was beyond me, and this memory either refutes or corroborates my point. I mean, I could brew tea for you. (In fact, I'd love to brew tea for you and tell you all about the trip.) But if we do in fact meet, we are more likely to spend our time talking about our lives, present and future.

When I face the prospect of failing to convey our trip to you, this "holy failure," I do so devoid of any kind of woe-is-me feeling. No, there certainly isn't any sense of futility or ineptitude.

There is just a sense of gratitude and a magnification of what I've already said: For me, the greatest part of this trip was the sense of community and the people who shared their hearts and their days with me. I returned to Barcelona full, charged, determined, open, loving and generous.

When I endeavor to recount the particulars, my heart swells, images gush out: portraits, landscapes, sounds and silences. What should I tell? Doesn't that have to be experienced? For instance, our tea sessions... Many of us poured our hearts with our brewing whether as brewers or as *cha tong*,

and those being served were also exemplary and a host's humble dream come true. It was so gratifying and inspiring to see so many brothers and sisters step up and share the Dao they've been cultivating! And how can I begin to go about describing the ambiance? And what about the incredible selection of teas we were honored to share without a sense of prudence and containment. Suffice it to mention names like Dragon Horse Star Dust. But what does that tell you? *There is no better cup than this one. Right here. Right now.*

As I wind down this reflection, I take away memories of mist, trails, aged

teas, gongfu brewing, shared meals, bowl tea sessions, smiles and laughter.... Fade out, with a soundtrack culminating in "Funkytown," to Shanghai traffic lights.

I aspire to express the deeper teachings of this trip in my day-to-day living, in my tea and with the greater community. And I really look forward to the new app, which will make it so much easier for us tea lovers to meet as we travel about. (As you read this, in fact, the app will already be out and we will most likely all be chatting away!) Definitely get in touch when you come to Barcelona!

