



REFLECTIONS

OF OUR 2017 TRIP

茶之旅迴響 PART IV

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My mind circles back to gather moments: At first broad-sweeping, as sounds, colors, smells and feelings return, bringing a deep exhale and smile to my face. My focus refines, moments become articulated, and I begin to recall the beautiful details of a journey I will never forget...

Immediately, I want to take you there with me, to feel the way it felt on Huangshan Mountain that early evening after entering the park for our first full day: How we had somehow, in natural rhythm, split off into groups that afternoon, finding different routes up the mountain, one-by-one appearing and climbing up to a spot on top of a giant rock; how the excitement and anticipation had built up inside of me, waiting to share tea together in silence after a long day of climbing, un-climbing and climbing, step after step after step; how although the wind had become cold, I could feel that the same sun that had spent hours shining light and warmth into us throughout the day had also shone on this great rock; how leaning back to meet that great ancient granite backbone to mine, with my bowl and a few leaves, I felt as though I could dissolve and

return unnoticed back into the mountain, just as the heat of the sun seemed to slowly recede and draw back into the heart of the Earth; how it took more than a moment to peel myself up when it was time to go; and how it was the sound of dear Max's mouth-harp—that hypnotic buoyant drone, that called me back, reminding me there were miles yet to go.

I can still see the outlines of new friends just a few steps ahead of me as we walked towards our hotel through that milky white mist that carried the smell of all things earthen and green and left glistening drops on our hair. And those trees—those trees that exposed a new rhythm to me. I swear I saw chords written out in the dark sparse branches and foliage, black notes intentionally placed in high contrast against all of that white. That mysteriously placed basketball court we discovered on the other side of all of that mist in front of our hotel. Watching some of my tea brothers run out to play a quick game of hoops. The sound of the basketball bouncing and sneakers squeaking on concrete against the backdrop of those ombré mountains on the far horizon, appearing and

disappearing like ghost ships. I was instantly drawn back to the basketball courts on Houston Street in lower Manhattan, where my father would take me as a little girl to watch “real” basketball being played. Antonio said he remembered those basketball courts too from his days in New York, further amplifying the feeling of memory working its magic, the way worlds collide to illuminate the close connections between people and places, even in a surreal and far away place.

Fifty to sixty percent chance of seeing the sun rise on that next cloudy morning, one hundred percent chance of being blown away by some kind of beauty on the walk to the peak, where the birds sang their crystalline otherworldly tunes. We sit quietly watching clouds roll and change shape and form and give rise to a new day. Mia shares raw chocolate and tea. I wonder if the white flowers blooming behind her were in fact magnolias like the ones that were just starting to bloom in my neighbor's yard back at home.

Time passes and I notice how easy it feels to be with these new friends. How conversations do not seem to begin or end. How we have traveled



from mountain to hot springs to farm, in what feels like weeks, years, and somehow only a few days. Then I find myself at the table of two tea brothers, Shen and Ming, at the Qimen Tea Factory and Museum. Shen serves my first cup of 1930s Liu An so generously shared with us by Mr. Liang. A second, a third, a fourth and so on... I can feel it and I can feel me. And then, at some point I can no longer distinguish myself from this tea, from this moment. Each day feels more and more like this. The me I was when I started the journey is no longer there, and I like the sensation of getting to *unknow* myself through this kind of full immersion and moment-to-moment presence.

In the coming days, without struggle, I *became* those farms in Anhui: the vibrant buds and leaves I picked between thumb and forefinger; that lunar white furry caterpillar I watched crawl along from leaf to leaf; the noodles that were made for us by the women in that small village; the vegetables grown right there in that very soil; the charcoal that withered the tea leaves; the pink-cheeked smile of the mother who held her baby out for me to tickle her small toes; even the spoken-word

jam that Ivan unleashed while Andy, Ming, Felix, Steve, and Antonio played percussion with chopsticks (on rocks, tea bowls, and even on each other's heads) near the river where old shards of blue and white pottery lay scattered.

In Yixing, we watched Master Zhou demonstrate the stages of a pot and witnessed the seeming effortless-ness of creation that comes from a lifetime dedicated to one true thing. His body seemed an uninterrupted flow, so loose and at ease, to which the block of clay responded, becoming an exquisitely precise vessel. (Or was it Master Zhou who was responding to the clay and becoming an exquisitely precise vessel? Like most things, I imagine it is both.) I thought of Tian and the other Chajin, and the gongfu session just a few hours earlier. What is this relationship between tea and body? All I know is that my body has been quietly making connections throughout the week as we journey through the landscape. I experienced so much unexpected intimacy with this country that had once seemed so far, distant, and abstract. Having the opportunity to see the place the ore was harvested: the clay, the maker, the vessel and the

tea opened a labyrinth of orphaned thoughts. I learn in this way, by following a root back to the roots.

I turned thirty-eight that day. That evening, I was surprised with a cake at dinner and surrounded by my dear friends, while several rounds of "Happy Birthday" were sung around me in everyone's native tongue. The overwhelming offering of love all at once changed me. I remembered part of a story Wu De had shared about a tea-storing test. The same tea had been divided and stored in a few different settings to determine if the location and energy would affect the tea. I cannot remember exactly how and where the other two were stored, but I do remember that the one stored in a cave where monks chanted was easily singled out in a blind tasting by each participant. I think about this story often and the effect that this kind of love and care has at a cellular and energetic level. That night, I felt like that tea, and immediately felt the responsibility of this kind of love. This kind of love isn't like an article of clothing that can be laid down, it is the ringing and chanting of the bones that, once awakened, echoes on and on...

I have mentioned a few friends by name, but truly I wish I could share with you something beautiful I saw and learned from each one: A moment of kindness witnessed, a look, a touch, a reaching toward, an offering... Do you know what Angela dreams about? Can you believe Andy gave me an acupuncture treatment on a moving bus? Have you had a chance to be hugged by Steve? *These humans in this Global Tea Hut community are exceptional!* All I want is to get to know them more. And I have a feeling if you were there I would be saying the very same thing about you, and hope one day soon to have that opportunity. Each of these new friendships felt like the embodiment of the patience of the Leaf that has so much yet to share and give. With some it felt as though I only had a few moments of exchange, yet was touched so very deeply. I feel the purpose of this kind of journey is not

to travel farther away from but rather closer and deeper into all of life. And deeper in, for the purpose of feeling that beating heart more, so that the beat can be remembered and carried back to life and shared with one's community. Even now, taking these few still moments to sit together in this shared space while miles apart, feeling into that resonance that pulses through and between us all, together touching this incredible aliveness.

In what seems like the blink of an eye, I found myself back in my studio in Salt Lake City serving tea to a group of gorgeous women. My neighbor is yelling at his dogs, the lawnmowers have started (not quite the same sound as Max's mouth harp), our house is up for sale and we're not entirely sure where we are going or what comes next. Should I close the sliding door, so we don't hear my neighbor's awful music blasting? A smile comes over me. This.

Just this. These women, this tea, this house, this valley... It may seem easier to have found peace on Huangshan Mountain, nestled in close to my loving Tea sister Raneta, but can I settle in and find the peace already present here in this moment on Spring View Drive? This right here is Huangshan Mountain. This is watching Petr's hands pick tea leaves in Anhui, knowing the pot I'm serving tea from in this very moment was made by those same hands. This is Master Zhou's focused calm cadence as he trims the pot lid. This moment is Neil's laughter and Yuliya's palpable passion for life. It is the heartbeat of these five women that are gathered here to share sacred moments together with this sacred medicine in this sacred valley. This moment is enough in every way. This trip helped remind me of that.



茶 This is the pot Masters Chen and Zhou made for all of us; it's a replica of a Ming Dynasty pot.

