

Global Tea Hut



NEWSLETTER #6, JULY 2012

The old, worn bowl covers his face for a moment as he drinks the last of the steaming draught—drinks it in deeply, beyond the body. He sets it down with two hands, gently and with great reverence as he was once taught. The old bowl has been more than just a friend; it has come to be a talisman of peace. It shows up at the in-between moments, when his work is done and there is time to sit and be. But today is different, and he knows it the moment he adds more water. He watches the old leaves dance in twirls around the bowl and imagines the orbits this tea has made, and is making: from years of earth and sun, moon and stars to tree and life. And even now, he looks into the slowing leaves and sees all the others out there. He can feel them sharing the same tea. He can feel the community building through this shared love of the Leaf...

Outside of time, there is this month-long tea session. We meet together here and share some tea, sipping our respective bowls on all sides of the globe. And it's hard to believe that we've been meeting here half a year already! As the circle grows, so does the magic and inspiration.

It's often all too easy to write off the ordinary moments of our lives, and forget the simple gifts. We want to say "just" to so many things: "just" a meeting or "just" another meal or bowl of tea. But, in the end, our life is almost exclusively made up of all these discarded "justs". Rather than dismissing the ordinary, we must learn to celebrate it. There is great power in the simplest things, as even a single atom can power a city. We hope that this tea hut is such a place, where we can meet and celebrate a simple bowl of leaves and water together.

In ancient China, there were forest monks who wandered the mountains above the clouds. People sought out their huts for the solitude and peace of Nature and for a bit of wisdom and guidance from the sages who dwelt there. And often when they'd come, the old master would serve them tea, having nothing else to give. We are very much carrying this tradition on, only the hut has grown so much larger. The world is connecting in marvelous ways, through technology, travel and increased information. Tea understands this

and is also seeking new ways to connect with people. This hut is another new way that this connection is being awakened.

Find yourself some good mountain spring water, toss these leaves in a bowl and join us in this hut. Invite over some friends or loved ones, or maybe they'll join us from afar. Celebrate the ordinariness of it all. There's just this packet of tea, scribbled writing on the outside, a shoddy black and white newsletter, you and I. It's just a packet of some papers and a bit of leaves. But the tea inside was donated to you; it's connecting you to an organic farm that's probably on the other side of the globe. The farmer was thrilled to give it to you, hoping to spread the changes he's a part of, and proud that his tea is bringing joy to a brother or sister as far away as you are. And this gift and newsletter were also donated with great honor and love. Your money, too, is connecting you to a living tea tradition, funding our free center, school, publications and roadside huts. The other members of this hut around the world would love to meet you and share some tea. You could probably stay in most of their homes, if you happened to find yourself nearby. They are wondering about you as you sit and drink your tea, just as you think fondly of them. All of this in a simple packet of tea!

It's amazing that so many connections arise out of the steam of this one steeping of magical tea—connections to our center in Taiwan and all the people that are coming to visit and/or stay, connections to tea farmers and connections to others through this growing tea gathering. And this is as it should be: Nature is gathering us in. The Leaf is showing us the vibrant earth we grew out of, and within it we find a reflection of our life and soul, our joys and sorrows. It is a medicine that cures the disconnection—from Nature, each other and from ourselves. And there's much more healing power in sharing it with others.

He slowly picks up the bowl again, as the sentiments and words inside of him vanish with the curls of steam. He holds it for a while, feeling the warmth in his hands. There's nothing to say about the bowl of leaves anymore...

YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, JULY 2012

2012 Spring Sencha, Kyushu Japan

Article/Photos by Steve Kokker

The majority of our brothers and sisters around this tea-drinking globe are enjoying warm temperatures while reading this newsletter, so we thought to offer a kind of tea that's one of our summertime favorites: a splendid Japanese sencha tea. Japanese green teas are treats when it's hot outside, as they have a refreshing, cooling effect. They also provide a pleasant boost and seem to mirror the light-headed happy feeling long, sunny days give us.

We hope you will like this month's special treat, an organic sencha produced with loving care by the Morimoto family of Miyazaki, on the southern island of Kyushu, Japan. This green splendor was brought to our attention by two German fellows collectively known as "Marimo", who are dedicated to supporting small organic farmers in Japan and introducing fantastic, clean teas to tea-lovers in Europe. The tea is comprised mainly of leaves from the *Okumidori* cultivar (see below: *Let's Talk Varietals*), with some *Okuyutaka* expertly blended in. Picked and processed in 2011, it was packed im-

mediately to preserve freshness, though it has also had time to settle and develop a deeper taste-profile.

The Morimoto family have been tea farmers since the 1970s. At first, they used the conventional farming techniques employed by everyone else but quickly noticed that every year extra chemicals and pesticides were becoming necessary, and felt uncomfortable with this. Raising young daughters, health concerns became primary in their lives and they decided to make a concerted change in their lives, first and foremost to ensure their family's future well-being. From the early 1980s, the Morimotos have been employing organic farming techniques; at first they were pioneers, now they are an example to others.

They live in a simple wooden house surrounded by their tea fields; the Pacific ocean is visible in the near distance from some of the fields. The air is sweet from tea, with an echo of fresh, salty air. The couple is dedicated to preserving the environment as well as their customer's health, and working with the land in as much harmony as they work together.





This *Okumidori* is processed in a similar way to most other Japanese sencha teas. Freshly plucked leaves are brought down from the fields to the processing farm as quickly as possible and go through the kill-green stage (with no withering) to preserve color, freshness and a lightly bitter ‘bite’. This enzymatic deactivation is done primarily by steaming in Japan (see below: *What’s Your Mushi?*). Ironically, the word ‘sencha’ literally means ‘roasted tea’ but this refers historically to older methods of processing Japanese leaf tea, versus the ground, or ‘mo’, tea (*matcha*), which had been part of Japanese culture for centuries before steeping leaf tea became popular in the 17th century. The processing of *sencha* (see below: *One Category, Many Differences*) was developed in the 18th century. By steeping leaves, tea was brought into the houses of the common folk and could finally be an everyday experience, or at least not a luxury to be experienced rarely in formal ceremonies or almost exclusively by the ruling classes.

Your July *Okumidori* is a blend of two cultivars (see below: *Let’s Talk Varietals*) – chiefly *Okumidori* (itself a blend of second and third harvests, that is harvests from both June and August), as well as some third harvest *Okuyutaka*. These leaves are evidently flat and on

the large, thick side—one way to spot that they are not spring plucks (which would be more tender and small). The tea is *Asamushi*, which you can tell from the general scarcity of small, broken bits, with the second harvest teas having received a slightly longer steaming than the third harvest teas. This is because the second harvest leaves are slightly thicker than third harvest ones as the Morimotos cut back the tea bushes slightly after the second harvest to ensure relatively tender shoots during a third harvest. This makes their method of farming not completely wild (which would allow the tea bushes to grow as they like and be plucked when ready) but in the Japanese context, their method of farming is considered noninvasive.

For those worried about possible radioactivity from the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, Marimo has each of their teas specially tested for radionuclides, and the reports are available online. There was not a trace of radioactive material in tests done both in Japan and Europe. The team is so thoroughly dedicated to offering organic teas to people, they as a matter of responsibility do all they can to ensure their teas’ complete safety.



Brewing Tips

This *Okumidori* is not quite as fragile as some other Japanese green teas, where the difference of just a few degrees in water temperature or a difference of a few seconds can make the difference between paradise and mouth-puckering intensity. Still, we recommend relatively cooled (ideally spring) water (70-75C), with a proportion of 4-6g (a heaping teaspoon) per 225-250ml of water. Steepings can be 45-60s for the first, 30-45s for the second, over a minute for the third. With this and other teas, do experiment with brewing times and water temperatures. For example, many Japanese teas are delightful when steeped in cold water, with a slightly higher leaf per water ratio and left to steep for 10-12 minutes. You'll never need to buy commercial iced tea again!





Let's Talk Varietals

A little look at Japanese tea cultivars would be instructive at this point. As domestic consumption of tea started to soar in the 1970s, Japanese tea farmers looked for a way to reduce dependency on importing tea from elsewhere and increase domestic production. The *Yabukita* varietal at this point became king and even today, some 75% of all teas produced in Japan are made from *Yabukita* leaves. This particular strain offered a pungent and pleasant umami taste profile and proved high-yielding and relatively easy to cultivate. Eventually, however, having such a one-variety dominance led to immunity problems and *Yabukita* became susceptible to pests and diseases which in turn required a large amount of fertilizers and pesticides to be used. Other varieties were then developed, and today there are over 50 official cultivars classified in Japan, though the real number may be infinite—only Nature truly knows.

Yabukita, which was developed from an indigenous wild variety of *camellia sinensis* growing in Shizuoka, still dominates production, but let's look at a few other varietals currently being farmed in Japan:

Yutakamidori

A distant second to *Yabukita* in terms of volume of production, and mainly grown in Japan's southern Kagoshima and Miyazaki regions.

Okumidori

Noted for its mild, slightly smoky notes, this tea was developed in the early 1970s as a cross between *Yabukita* and another *Shizuoka* variety. This variety is often used in gyokuro and matcha processing, along with the equally revered *Samidori* varietal.

Okuyataka

This is one of the newer varietals in Japan but quickly gaining popularity for its sweet aroma and deep, rich notes. It is also used in *matcha* production.



What's Your Mushi?

The kill-green (*shaqing*) process (to kill enzymes in the leaf which would otherwise lead to oxidation) in Japan is almost always done by steaming (versus by frying, as is the common rule in China). “*Mushi*” means steamed. Just how long the leaves are steamed, however, can affect the resulting green tea massively. In addition to knowing when your Japanese tea was picked, from which region, and whether or not it was shaded, you also want to know the tea's mushi-ness.

As with all categorizations, this one is also illusory in that teas rarely sit neatly in one category or the other. Think of this as a continuum rather than as strict categories. Also, the definitions of these categories has changed somewhat over the years as teas in general are being steamed for longer than they were traditionally. This has to do with the changing palate of consumers but also because extremely short steaming produces teas best drunk after having ‘sat’ for several months; the modern market demands more ready to drink teas. That's why most current Japanese teas don't age as well as they used to and are best drunk within a year or so of production (with notable exceptions).

Asamushi (Short steamed). This is the most common form of steaming, and the resulting leaves tend to be longer, intact, with fewer small bits of leaf visible. The liquor is quite clear, often a transparent green-yellow, and the taste is lighter than that produced by other steaming methods; many people like this as it tends to preserve the leaf's fresh, vegetal taste. Almost all *shincha* (early Spring pluckings) are *Asamushi* to emphasize their gentle nature. The taste is refined, elegant, crisp and clear.

Fukumushi Those stepping into the Japanese green tea world tend to go wild over *Fukamushi* (deep steamed)

teas. These teas are often quite intense in taste, but very sweet as well; *umami* and bitterness are backgrounded to a very full-bodied experience, which appeals to those who haven't developed a palate for Japanese teas yet. These teas are not subtle (as evidenced by the cloudy, thick appearance of the liquor) and not known for delicacy, but quite often the first two steepings can be intensely delicious mouthfuls. Their appearance is easy to spot: lots of small leaf pieces, as if they've been finely chopped. The wet leaves clump together in a paste-like glop that's fun to mix with soya sauce after steeping and eat up! Legend has it that the deep steaming process was developed about thirty years ago to compensate for declining water (or tea leaf) quality—the more intense taste masked any other present defects. Low-grown teas (versus high mountain grown) are better suited to becoming *Fukamushi*.

Chumushi Not much to say here, as these ‘medium-steamed’ are predictably in-between the other two extremes, exhibiting characteristics of both. It is sometimes hard to visually discern a *Chumushi* from some *Asamushi* teas.

We talk about shorter and longer steepings, but how long is long? It's hard to give a precise definition as the length of steaming depends on the leaf and climatic conditions, but very generally, *Asamushi* usually means a steaming of up to 30 seconds, *Chumushi* around 45 seconds and *Fukamushi* up to 90 seconds. Some teas are given up to 2 minutes of steaming, and some rare teas go through a two-step steaming. The difference might not seem long to us, but these few seconds make all the difference to your drinking experience!



One Category, Many Differences

Although Japan produces almost only green tea, the difference between the kinds of green tea processed can be staggering. Here's a very brief introduction to some of the different kinds of green teas you may find in Japan:

There are four main categories of Japanese green tea: *bancha* (late-harvest, or common tea), *sencha*, *gyokuro* and *matcha*. *Sencha* accounts for over 80% of all tea produced in Japan, *bancha* about 10%, *matcha* about 1% and *gyokuro*, which can be among the world's most expensive teas, about 0.3%. Both *matcha* and *gyokuro* are made with so-called shaded leaves—entire plantations and tea gardens are shaded from the sun from a few days to several weeks before harvesting. This causes numerous changes in the leaf, which increase *umami*, sweetness and intensity.

Other kinds of teas include:

Houjicha - roasted *bancha* with twigs and leaves.

Kukicha – made from *sencha* or even *gyokuro* twigs.

Karigane - blend of high-grade *sencha* or *gyokuro* stems plus leaves.

Genmaicha – a blend of *sencha*, roasted brown rice and popper corn!

Kabusecha - shade-grown tea, usually taken from first pluck of season.

Tamaryokucha – a specialty from the Kyushu region, a rolled and sweet tea.

Shincha – the first plucking of the season.

Kuradashi - aged *sencha*.

Konacha – green tea fannings or fine particles, used for tea bags.

Sobacha – not a tea really, but an infusion made from roasted buckwheat.

THE LEGEND OF SHEN NONG

How it all began

They say.

That long, long ago there lived a great scholar, wiser and older than the craggy mountains he dwelled upon. Many feared him and stayed away. They said he could bring down those mountains if he wished. And when they suffered drought or rain they said it was his magic cursing their lands from above. Some went to him for advice. Some went in desperation, as it was said that with his power to bring misfortune, he also had the power to restore life. Those that returned sometimes did with stories of miracles, while others were unable to find him. And when the people needed advice, they would elect a group of representatives to make the journey up into the mountains to seek out his advice, for whatever else he was, he was their emperor, Shen Nong.

One young monk was said to have spent an entire season with Shen Nong on his mountain. He told the people that the emperor conversed with Nature, that he knew the names of the trees and plants, animals and birds. The people say that when the monk returned, he was crying. He had scrambled down the mountain, tearing his robes and sullyng his face and hands everywhere but the four lines that the stream of tears had washed across his cheeks. "What has happened?" asked the gathering crowd. Another pool of tears welled up just under the young monk's eyes; his eyes wavered like his voice: "Our great emperor is dead," he whispered. Perhaps the villagers were too shocked to share his sadness. Maybe they stood in awe as he gently reached into his robe and pulled forth a single branch holding five perfect leaves and two seeds. Could the monk have then placed the branch in the hands of the new leader, gently curling his fingers over the treasure?

The monk's story would be told again and again for the eons to come, the shadows growing that much longer with each recount. Shen Nong, at one with Nature, had spent his days walking the mountain paths near his home, meditating beneath favorite trees, or maybe stopping at some poignant landscape long enough to be the subject of many generations of painters. He taught the young monk the names of the animals and plants. He showed him what he could eat, and what was for the Earth. His life was truly in harmony, they say. And that was why he was the ruler of all rulers. He had no greed. No stake in the outcomes of the world below, just the answers of the Earth, sky, sun and stars.

During the colder months, Shen Nong would boil herbal drinks for the monk, warming him through the cold watches of the night. It was maybe during one such night, possibly when the moon was full and the sky clear, that they sat in the forest listening to the mountain and the sound of the water cooking on a nearby fire. A serendipitous breeze stirred. Imagine, just a simple breeze. Was it chance? Did destiny reach out and pluck that leaf from the tree, and in the form of wind let it fall into the boiling water below? Who can say? But Shen Nong was never one to question the gifts of Nature. The monk and himself drank the broth of those leaves steeped in that water, and because of that even all these ages later, we sip our own bowls and wonder if the moon was bigger on those distant nights so long ago.

Of course the boy and his wise companion knew at once that the liquor they drank was special.



Shen Nong's meditation that night spoke with the Leaf, telling countless tales of enlightenment, courtly pride, weddings, cutter ships from lands beyond the ends of the earth, and countless other tales of life, death and all that comes between. This tree had a story longer and brighter than his own. She told Shen Nong that she actually didn't belong up here on this cold mountain. She said that this would be her final crown of leaves, and that her spirit must return home or perish on the mountain alone. She had chosen that pot of boiling water, asking him to please give her spirit to the people that lived below and bless her on her great journey over continents of land and spirit both. Maybe Shen Nong laughed when he heard the tree's story, and of course the young monk wouldn't have known what he was laughing about, but having drunk the same broth, and having felt the elation it brought to his own spirit, he of course would have answered with a great guffaw of his own.

That winter they say the young monk grew deathly ill. Shen Nong tried everything to save the boy. He had made a promise to the tree, but the illness was too strong. One morning, possibly when the sun was shining brightly over the snow swept mountain, Shen Nong rose and went out into the forest. The boy and he had harvested a whole canister of the tree's leaves and dried them in the sun. Every night, Shen Nong would boil water with the leaves in it and serve it to the weakening young monk. And each night, he would tell the boy the tree's story. He would tell him about how it would be there with and in all the emperors of the future. He repeated that the tree wasn't meant for these isolated peaks. It had only come up here to meditate for some centuries, and having done so, the time for it to return to the world below had come. He told him of the weddings and meals, the friends and foes that would drink it for ages and ages to come. And as he repeated the story each night, Shen Nong slowly—yet naturally—slipped into the first person: "And remember young one" he would say with one hand behind the young monk's head and the other guiding the bowl

of broth to his lips, "I will be drunk by all the monks. I will write a thousand, thousand poems. I will make friends of enemies, and enemies of friends. And I will live on in each of my selves.....in every sip." 8

That winter day, when all seemed lost, they say Shen Nong walked into the forest. No one speaks of what happened that day, and neither did the young monk. But when the sun had risen the next day, the young monk was better. He could even brew the leaves himself. Somehow, it's better to imagine him contented, perhaps the sadness hadn't yet sunk in. Did he know deep down that his master wasn't coming back? Hard to say.

When the boy was well enough, he left the hut to find out what had become of his great lord and teacher. He of course knew which direction to walk. His feet carried him to the same ancient tree, older than his teacher even, of which Shen Nong had so often talked. When he got there he found Shen Nong resting comfortably against the foot of the tree. Somehow the young monk knew that he had left this world and began to cry. He came back later in the day and buried Shen Nong right where he had laid down with such a satisfied look on his face.

The young monk cried and cried. He contemplated leaving the world to help carry his master's belongings in the hereafter, but he remembered what Shen Nong had told him about the tree and its story. He decided to return to the world below and announce the passing of their lord, so that proper rites and ceremonies could be observed everywhere in the kingdom.

Before he left, he made one final stop at the great tree—now a reliquary to his master. He bowed down and prayed for his teacher's peace. When he looked up, we can only imagine the great surprise that came over his young countenance as he found that a single branch covered in leaves and seeds was hanging down from the otherwise barren tree, perhaps catching the sunlight just so...

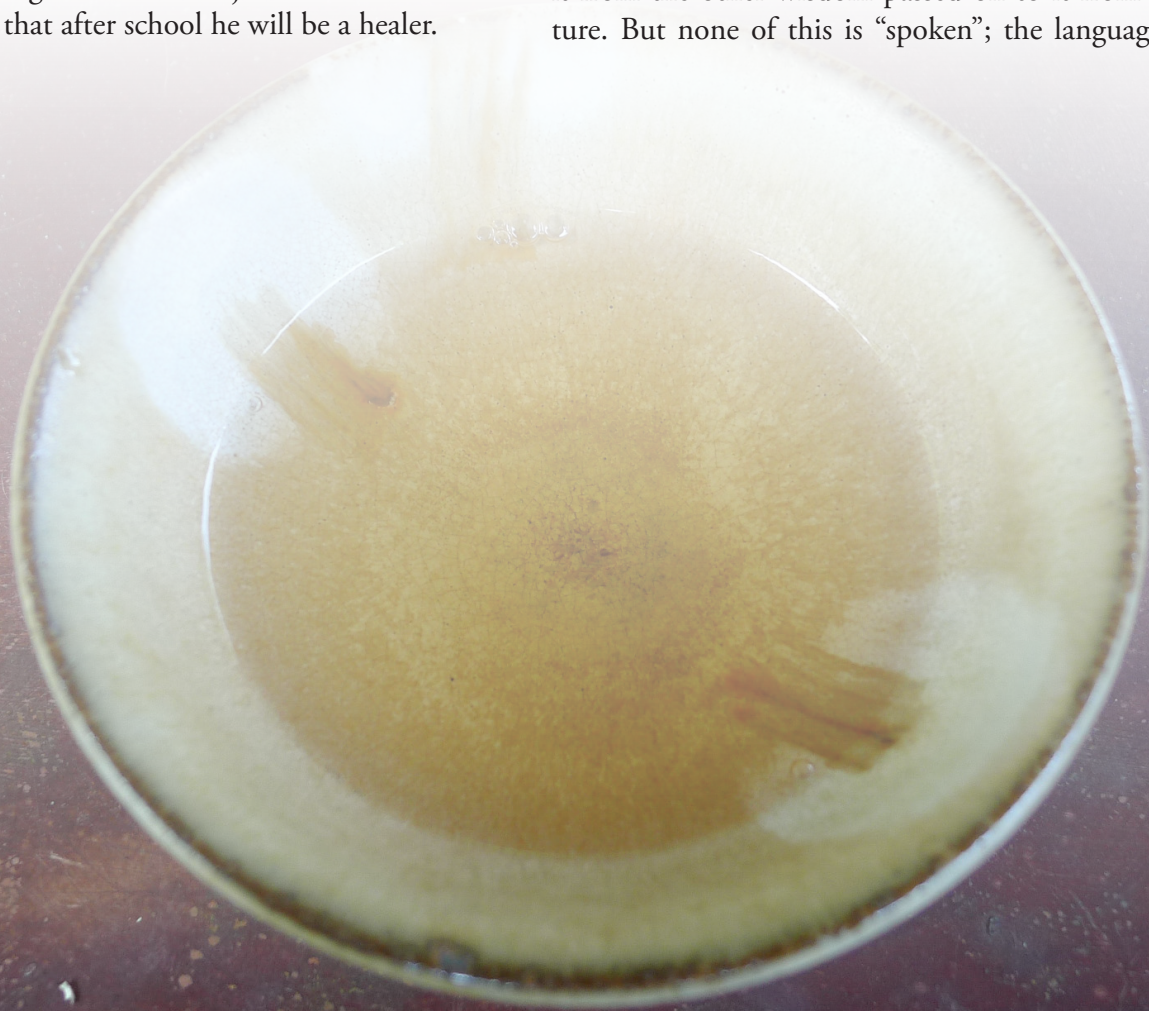
THE GUEST & HOST REALIZE THEY ARE ONE

Serving tea to yourself

Whenever anyone comes to our center to learn this Way of Tea, we always emphasize that in this tradition we are not learning how to *make* tea, but rather how to *serve* it. We cultivate and express a way of preparing tea that promotes awakening of the heart, and is therefore a part of the greater shift of consciousness and healing that is happening globally. All of the skill (*gongfu*) and mastery we learn through (and from) tea should be applied towards the awakening of others, for there is no mastery without such devotion and selflessness. It is paradoxical, but there really is only so far you can travel before your own growth, learning and improvement must involve sharing, which becomes the lesson itself. It is only in service of mankind that we find purpose, in other words.

Of course, it isn't selfish of a doctor to focus all his time, energy and money on himself while he's at medical school. An uneducated doctor can be of service to no one; and you can't loan me twenty dollars if you only have ten. We must therefore begin our tea journey by cultivating our own skills. But we shouldn't ever forget our aim, which is to share any and everything we cultivate—just as the doctor shouldn't forget that after school he will be a healer.

At our center, we generally divide learning into three stages: first, a student of the Leaf should learn to drink tea. Before you can make tea for others, you must learn how to be served yourself. Accept the tea from another, watch how it is done, and learn to communicate to the tea and the Nature that flows through it. In connection, we find ourselves. This first stage is about learning to speak the language of tea. For this, it is often best to take out the human elements in tea preparation—the words describing it and all the skill and expertise—and return to just leaves and water in a bowl. You don't need to classify or comprehend the tea. It doesn't need to be named or categorized and you don't need to understand all the details of its processing. It will tell you its story: where it comes from, what kind of mountain and environment, the *terroir* and even the wisdom that was handed down to it through its genetic heritage, and from the sun, moon, stars, mountain and water. It may also tell you some of the more personal wisdom it has cultivated as a living tree, though it rarely speaks from a sense of “self” that would distinguish it from the other wisdom passed on to it from Nature. But none of this is “spoken”; the language of





tea is one of sensation and impression. The connection must be deeper. And having lost much of our connection to Nature, in these mind-made cities, we must relearn how to communicate with it.

The second stage of learning at our school involves a lot of participation in the brewing process. There are lifetimes worth of skills to be learned: how to gather water, which is best for tea, how to lay and maintain the coals, how to boil the water, which pot to use and how, etc. All of these skills should become second nature to you, if you are to master this Way of Tea. It is important that you develop a great acumen with the way the tea is prepared, as well as allowing the teaware to be an extension of yourself. It is only when tea preparation is truly a part of who you are, that you will be able to focus completely on serving your guests (even if that guest is you). Otherwise, you will be too focused on spoiling the tea and handling the teaware properly to pay much attention to your guests. When the skill (*gongfu*) of tea preparation has become an unconscious flow, it then comes out of your own spontaneous nature and is free to align itself with the Dao of the moment, and you can focus your energy on other things, for the most part.

The final stage of development in this tradition is to study the shamanism of tea, which means

a focus on the underlying energy work. Tea and water are both some of the most sensitive media in the world for energy work. Water takes the shape of anything you put it in, and as we discussed in our Five Element series a few issues ago, it is incredibly malleable on the energetic level, and very pronouncedly influenced by the energy of its environment. Similarly, tea is a very sensitive and energetically supple plant. The Qi of tea will be greatly affected by the energy of the place it is stored in, as we have realized through countless experiments. Even physically, tea shouldn't be stored in the kitchen, for example, because it absorbs the odors of whatever is around it. Tea and water together respond to the brewer, and can be coaxed into various energy frequencies, which will then influence the drinkers. And this is why we say that the brewer (host) is completely responsible for the energy of the tea space. We can communicate much of where we are in this moment through tea, and in a way that is more intimate than words could ever be. And that is why masters have so often used tea to communicate a nonverbal wisdom of Zen and Dao, deeper and more lasting than words.

The two main aims of sharing what we cultivate through tea are first to promote a turning inward for our guests—to introduce them to themselves, and

the connection to Nature that lies therein. There is great and profound healing in such an experience, as so many of you already know. We utilize tea to return into our bodies and then souls, and as the Sage said, “the Dao is a returning.” In this way, tea is a powerful spiritual aid for those we meet in the tea space. We, as hosts, facilitate growth in our guests, allowing them the solace from the world that they so desperately need. We instill quiet and presence in the tea, so that they turn inwards and meet the tea in their own bodies. This is tea as meditation.

The second aim of expressing this tea is to find a meeting of our true selves in the tea space. This is how guest and host find that they are one. When we rest inwards and meet the tea together, we find that it is so much easier to let go of our ego masks: our social statuses, sex, race, etc. and just be in our true selves. We start to communicate as spirits, rather than egos or bodies. In this tradition, we call this energy “calm joy.” Sometimes it takes the form of a casual conversation about spiritual matters. “Drink tea and discuss the Dao” is a Chinese saying that is older than the word ‘tea’. And just about every spiritual conversation that has ever happened in Asia these many eons has happened over tea.

In all the different forms of Cha Dao, from China to Japan and Korea there has always been an emphasis on creating a space in which guests and hosts can find one another and rest in their true nature—the space deep down in us all where we find that the tea, each other and Nature are one. And as we are finding in this global hut, it isn’t always necessary for us to be sharing the tea in the same time and space for such a magical connection to occur. The world is, after all, round.

In creating and facilitating such civilized peace, our roles of guest and host evaporate and we can smile and rest in our mutual connections. In cultivating such spaces, we also grow ourselves spiritually. And more importantly we make lasting connections that are deeper and beyond the egoic relationships we usually foster. When we serve our guests completely, in the spirit of their higher good, we find our own higher self growing as well—for it is consciousness itself which is evolving through us all...





Serving tea



At the end of the Song Dynasty, the empire had collapsed financially. The first Ming emperor was a farmer's son, and quickly initiated several economic reforms, one of which was outlawing powdered tea, which was an extravagancy that cost twice as much effort for half the yield. He demanded that all tea be steeped loose, much as it is today. As a result, all the major kilns in China began competing for the attention of tea lovers, producing pots and wares to steep tea in the new fashion. Very quickly, all the kilns went back to producing what they had been prior to the Ming decree: plates, bowls, dishes, vases, etc. And in one of those cities every man, woman and child became involved in the production of teapots, from mining ore to transporting it, processing clay to producing pots—the whole city became known as the “Teapot City”. That city is Yixing.

The reason why Yixing superceded all the kilns has to do with the magic properties of its clay. As we spoke about in last month's Five Elements series, all teaware is stoneware. Yixing, too, is an ore mined from deep in the earth. And tea lovers, then and now, could discern the drastic effect it had on the tea they drank—a marriage ordained in Heaven. Some say it's because Yixing has no lead and is therefore unglazed and porous, so the oils of previous sessions stay in the pot to benefit later tea. Others say it's the high amounts of iron and other minerals, which help preserve temperature. Still others say it's because Yixing pots are slab-built, rather than thrown on a wheel, which preserves the structure of the clay, including the pores. But really there is no “why”; it just is. Yixing makes the best gongfu tea. When asked what teaware to use in gongfu tea, Master Lim always says: “There is Yixing and there is no second.”

There are three families of clay from Yixing, *hongni* (red clays), *zisha* (purple clays) and *duanni* (yellow/gray clays), each with several sub-categories. It is purple-sand clay (*zisha*) that made the city famous. In fact, it is also called the “Purple-sand City”. This is the clay that displays the most magical effects on gongfu tea preparation.

If you can get your hands on a purple-sand teapot, try some experiments. Put 3 grams of the same tea in a porcelain pot or gaiwan and an Yixing purple-sand pot. Steep them with the same water and see the difference when poured into identical cups. As we have discussed in this section before, pay attention to the mouthfeel, and how smooth the tea is going down. What effect is the Yixing having? How is the tea different?

An alternative to this is to brew the tea in a gaiwan and then use another gaiwan/porcelain pot as well as an Yixing as pitchers. Pour the steeped liquor into both and then from there into identical cups. This makes the preparation a bit more equal and might further clarify the differences between the two. You could use glass or other kinds of clay instead of porcelain. Similarly, you could pour directly from a porcelain or glass pot into a cup and then into a purple-sand pot before pouring into the second cup. Using the Yixing as a pitcher in that way may help you clarify the differences...





Zisha, Purple-sand

Duanni, Yellow Clay



HARMONY THROUGH ALCHEMY

We will continue this series until completion

“To know harmony is to know the Eternal,
To know the Eternal is to cultivate insight.”

—Lao Tzu, *Dao De Ching*, Verse 55—

Harmony through alchemy has always been central to the aesthetics and philosophy of tea culture, whether clearly expressed by ancient Daoist mendicants, or left unstated, yet recognized by the modern tea drinker who intuitively knows when a tea set functions well, when a tea is brewed properly, or when something in the process is off. The mixing and blending of figurative and material elements in tea truly is alchemical—both externally in the way the leaf, water, fire and teaware combine to form the liquor; and internally in the way we use the tea session to create peace, quiet and a stillness that inspires dialogue with Nature and the Dao. And harmony has always been the guiding principle of these processes, for it is the harmony of a tea set that makes it beautiful and functional, the harmony of a tearoom which inspires relaxation, and even the harmony of the leaf, water and teaware which combines to make the best liquor. In the exploration of tea and our own development towards mastery, harmony is the ideal that we must seek out, just as masters past and present have always done.

The best teas are those which are brewed in a place where all the elements are in harmony together. This needn't mean anything magical or difficult to understand: “harmony” might just refer to the way that the proper water, at the proper temperature, combines with the right kind of leaves in the right amount, all in the best teaware, etc. What could be more alchemical? More and more modern tea farmers, artists that craft teaware, and even tea drinkers are beginning to understand that harmony must guide their tea. In exploring the elements that go into a fine cup of tea, and the way in which a more harmonious approach can be achieved, we can learn not only how to develop and progress in Cha Dao, but how tea can be a part of a healthier, calmer and more productive lifestyle.

Since ancient times Chinese sages and seers have separated the material world into five elements called “*Wu-shing* (五行)”: wood, earth, water, fire, and metal. These principal elements are extremely complicated, influencing all aspects of Chinese culture, philosophy and spirituality—from Daoism to Buddhism, Feng-shui,

medicine and even tea. Lu Yu himself inscribed symbols representing the *Wu-shing* on all of his teaware, and spoke of the way they all combined fluently in the brewing of tea.

Traditionally, these elements represented much more than just material aspects of the universe. They were also processes, with fire representing temperature and earth representing yin energy for example, and much more. They guided the selection and construction of buildings, understanding of the seasons and agriculture, spiritual work and meditation as well as Chinese medicine.

For tea brewing, it isn't important that one understand the library of concepts and ideas behind the *Wu-shing* or even recognize all of the phenomena that these concepts refer to as they occur in Nature. In order to grow in tea and develop in Cha Dao, we only need to understand how each of these elements combine to make the greatest cup of tea, and the way they come together in our spirits so that drinking fine tea daily can become more than just a beverage or refreshment, but a Way of living in concordance with ourselves, with nature and ultimately with each other as well.

As an ongoing column, I thought that each issue we could explore one of the *Wu-shing* as it pertains to Cha Dao. One should remember that the elements flow in and through each other, so the earth and water are in the wood, the fire in the water, etc., and we're just separating them conceptually for the sake of discussion. In understanding each of these elements, we might begin to see how they can either make or break the overall harmony of our tea session and our approach to tea as a time for relaxation, quiet, insight or even just the desire to share good tea with family and friends.

Last issue, we discussed Earth. Let us now turn to Wood...

Pointing us down the road of the other elements, there's a wooden sign where this Way begins: the tea itself. As we mentioned before, all the elements are in the others, and a tea tree is brimming with earth, water, temperature and metal. The elements also cycle into one another, as fire consumes wood into ash, which returns to the earth, becomes metal and also gathers water to course through wood again. The patterns are endless, and regress into one another infinitely.

Out of Nature came this amazing signal, and a medicine powerful enough to tell us of our own origins. And it is with this plant that our mastery begins, and that we live a life of tea and Dao. Native American shamans believed that the medicine of any plant could be found through any other plant, so that one could access the healing properties of goji berries through tea, for example. This is because the plants are connected, not only to each other and the earth, but also to what is beyond through the photosynthesis of starlight.

Imagine being born with all the collective wisdom and memory of your entire ancestry. It is thus for tea, bringing genetic light from the other side. It speaks for the entire plant kingdom, and beyond the conceptual boundaries we call "plant", because these beings—these portals—don't distinguish between themselves and the water; they are the water. They don't call the mountain

"other than" their roots. They are the mountain. And this connection and completion is the healing they bring us: for when we drink tea, we also erase these imaginary boundaries and take into our bodies water and leaves, and all they are connected to.

Living teas are a hazing of the boundaries between us and Nature, as well as between each other. You could say that they are a walk in the forest; and then we are the forest, as much a part of it as any other animal in it. Living things go with their environment; and a study of a river, for example, is also a study of the beings that inhabit it. Anything the fish who live in that river do affects their environment, and is registered as a change in the environment by the biologist studying it, and vice versa.

To understand tea you must first learn to connect to it. Then it will tell you its story. Beyond count, we have witnessed tea masters tell us the season, mountain and weather just from sipping a tea. It told them its story, and without uttering a human word. This is because they learned its language, and are then translating what it said to us. And you needn't have studied tea for long to do this. We were once astounded by a sensitive woman who had never drunk tea before, and yet when asked to comment about the tea she was drinking began by saying, "I see a..." and then went on to describe in miraculously



17 accurate detail the environment the tea came from. It had “told” her of its home and heritage. Tea can also speak volumes of wisdom, too—even about being human, as it has thousands of years of experience doing that as well.

In this tradition, we always say: “as the man seeks the Leaf, the Leaf seeks the man.” It’s about letting the right teas find you, and about respecting that they have their own destiny and power, and can seek out the time and place they want to become human. Living teas have a way of showing up, and at just the right time and place. Let the best teas find you, rather than straining for certain flavors or kinds of experience. And that is a powerful lesson for how to live life, in general!

That said, if you are looking for elemental purity to complete the alchemy that transmutes tea into the Elixir of Life, you should understand living, “real” tea. Living teas come from seed-propagated trees, born and grown naturally. They are given the breadth and space to grow organically. Such tea trees are left to develop a relationship with their environment: wind and water, mountain and plants, sun, moon and starlight. In that way, they receive a genetic light from the seed, which whispers into the tree billions of years of life on this planet and beyond. And from their connection to the mountain, the tea’s wisdom extends that healing power, becoming a connection to the heart of this Mother Earth.

Twisted away from its nature, tea becomes a human commodity: bought and sold, discussed and debated in hedonistic terms and ultimately with much less healing power. Bushes are cloned, chemicals used and the environment destroyed—the teas’ only nutrients then become the chemical ones the farmer feeds it. It then loses the connection to its genetic heritage, having been cloned rather than birthed in soul as it was intended to be. And without a connection to living soil, mountain and other plants and animals—without a seat in the give-away council it should rightly sit upon with all the other local plants and animals—without any of that, its spirit voice is weak and muted (though not gone completely).

All living things are a part of this globe, and the energies beyond it. We all give and take from each other. The plants and animals understand this give-away and always maintain balance, rectifying disharmony in council. Much of humanity is now one such disharmony—one that will eventually be balanced, one way or the other. From a higher perspective, even the warps and woofs we call “disharmonies” are all part of a greater musical bal-

ance, the way the twists and turns of a river straighten out when viewed from the eagle’s height, or soaring on the back of the black dragon.

You will know when a tea is alive, for it will freely and unconditionally give all its energy and life to you when you drink it. All that it has accumulated from the mountain, water, sky and earth will drain into you. It doesn’t hesitate in this giving, not even for an instant and not ever with any sense of self. Just as it was connected in the receiving of life and energy from its environment, so too is it connected in the giving of all that it has to you. Your body will awaken to it. And if you are listening, it will share its spirit with you as well.

We have talked at great length in these newsletters about tea’s connection to the earth, and beyond to the stars through photosynthesis, but not much about the other end of this exchange, which is just as important: the giving. The vastness of this plant’s receiving, from its genetic heritage and from its environment would never allow it to hoard this wisdom. Its purpose is in sharing. Tea is meant to flow and be served. Nowhere does Nature accumulate and hoard energy forever—even the sun dies. Energy is accumulated so that it can be shared, and that is the secret to immortality. You don’t live forever by hoarding up energy, or empowering yourself—physically or spiritually. You live forever by giving away all that you are to something else, unconditionally. In that way, the same energy transforms and goes on and on. In your body, if you look closely, you will see in your very hand an unbroken movement of energy that extends back and back to the very star out of which this whole earth was born. Of course, tea understands this and gives all that it has accumulated, as all and everything in Nature has been taught to.

When we constrict, all suffering becomes a privation to be borne by ourselves alone. But when we connect, we share our suffering with all that is; and the dance goes ever on. Our energy and life then lives on in other forms, other dances—perhaps to and from the trees. So much of spirituality is about an allowing: Allow the tea in; receive it the way it receives its environment—sun and moon, mountain and water. In that way, the connection goes on in you. And then, thoroughly steeped in liquor, you will turn and pour it for another. In a flash—quick enough to tear your eyes—it will be you passing the bowl you once received to another with eyes just as eager as yours are now...





For hundreds of years teaware has been the principal method and passage through which the art of tea is expressed. The vast array of cups, pots, decanters, kettles and utensils has spawned thousands of artists, small and large, using many different media to capture their understanding of tea. From Calligraphy to painting, ceramics to metallurgy, artists have found ways to enhance the beauty of the tea ceremony.

In the Tang Dynasty, tea masters like Lu Yu favored green/blue celadon because it highlighted the natural brightness and verdure of their boiled liquor. In the Song age, teaists switched to darker brown or black bowls, which brought elegance to the green of their whisked teas; and in the Ming, when tea was steeped whole-leaf, as it is today, there was a return to porcelain cups, ever smaller and thinner, which enhanced the appearance, aroma and texture of the liquor. This vast tradition need not be at odds with Cha Dao, either. In fact, the art of tea can, and does, capture the essence of the Dao and express what could otherwise not be said, even in its more physical aspect as teaware.

And if teaware be true teaware, in this pure sense of art as transcendence, beyond form, then the viewer finds within the piece symbols that help him or her connect to, interpret or even transcend the ordinary world. In that way, our teaware and the way we arrange it might be thought of as a Mandala, which the Hindus and Tibetans define as any kind of geometric pattern that expresses an aspect or the totality of the cosmos itself, a symbolic meditation of transcendence. They also taught that objects of beauty could be great encouragement for spiritual development as long as they were used and appreciated without desire and craving. Perhaps this is what Lu Yu meant by devoting so much time to the proper creation, organization and expression of one's tea set; what the Buddhists in China and Japan later formed into the tea ceremony: its tea houses, paintings and flowers; and even what we may achieve today with the organization of our own tea sets, as expressions of our own inner nature.

The ancient Daoist sages lived simple, clean and pure lives. In their forest hermitages they practiced meditation, *Qi Gong*, and other methods of connecting to the Dao, including tea. In such an environment, the simplicity of bowls and hot water is enough—the pure mountain water and the essence of the Leaf were sufficient for people as sensitive as they were. Many tea sages and tea ceremonies in the modern world could be equally simple, though for some of us calming down and finding that connection to Nature beyond ourselves is difficult.

Beyond just satisfying the collector's passion in us, teaware can improve our ability to relax, and help inspire our connection to our tea ceremonies. When we are in a beautiful setting that inspires calm, it will be easier to find the quiet place that Cha Dao flourishes in. Some might argue that the unassuming practice of the ancient tea sages better exemplifies ideals like renunciation and purity of mind, but we think that like all ideals, these take place on the inside. One can be attached and affected as much by a worthless stone as one can by a solid gold throne. The simplicity, renunciation and even unaffectedness must all take place within the breast of the person walking the road. If calmness, presence or renunciation are only external symbols, they are as hollow as a rich man's outer garbs meant to distinguish him from others. There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says "it is easy to be a sage in the peace of the mountains, more difficult in the city; while the deepest of saints can live unaffected in the palace."

Finding teaware that improves the sensations, flavors and aromas of our teas will help inspire us to delve deeper into the world of tea and tea culture. Many of our cups and pots will become like brothers, supporting us as we journey through tea. Our love for them can help connect us to the ceremony, igniting the understanding, connection and even transcendence of the ordinary moment just as well as the leaves themselves can. Our most prized possessions are the different teaware, and just by looking on them we find an expression of the calm joy we are sometimes able to find in tea. They are a representation of the silence and peace we find each day in the tea room, and sometimes just in handling one of our pots we can catch a glimpses of that energy.

As we have discussed elsewhere, we believe that the worlds of art and spirit have always been aligned, and though art is capable of expressing a terrific variety of meanings, within that list is the articulation of spiritual principles and experiences that are otherwise ineffable. And though art, even at its best, can never be equal to the experience of being with tea, it can help those who have had such experiences to rekindle them, not only by inspiring them to have more and varied tea sessions, but also by relaxing and connecting their spirits to the ceremony itself. Grasping in pleasure a Qing Dynasty cup—knowing its energy is stronger, the flavors of the liquor within more effervescent and joyous—this all helps increase the degree to which one participates in the tea ceremony, and that is what Cha Dao is all about. The more we participate and involve ourselves in our tea, the more



it consumes the moment. We find ourselves emptied, lost in a blissful stillness. Through that, transcendental wisdom is possible.

The aesthetics of tea équipement

Most tea lovers find that as their experience, discrimination and understanding of tea grow, they invariably start leaning more towards simplicity and function. Teaware becomes a matter of which cup, pot, kettle, etc. can enhance the flavor, texture or aroma of their teas—which are also becoming more refined, rare and often expensive. Of course no amount of function can outshine the skill and focus of the person through which the ceremony flows. Tea brewed ever-so-simply by a master will still be more delicious than that brewed by a beginner with the best of teaware. The conduit through which the water is held, poured, steeped, poured again and served is the most important part of the ceremony in every possible way. After all, it isn't the cup experiencing the tea; the pot doesn't pour itself and no amount of silver can gather and carry the mountain water that will be heated in its kettle. Understanding the human role in the Way of Tea is important if one is to progress, and in order to do so there must be a balance between the aesthetic and functional sophistication of the ceremony and the teaware we use in it.

The role aesthetics play in the enhancement of tea, both in flavor and in the experience as a whole, should not be underestimated. Even if one's taste remains simple, one shouldn't ignore the influence beauty has on the most important element of the tea ceremony, which contrary to the obvious is not the Leaf, but the person. Arranging the teaware, flowers, cushions and artwork of the tea space are all aspects of the expression that has ever made tea an art form. Not only do they allow for creativity and intuition, they create an environment of comfort and calm relaxation. The best teahouses, tea-rooms or even tea spaces in a house are the ones that immediately relax you as soon as you arrive. Even before the tea is served, one already feels outside the busy flow of the ordinary world, comfortable and ready to enjoy. This will directly affect the experience of the tea itself. It is a well-known fact that different people are all bound to taste, smell and feel a variety of different experiences when drinking the same tea—as even a cursory survey of tea reviews will demonstrate—but even our own experiences change over time and space. Why then is the same book so much better when read on a vacation at the beach? Why do restaurants devote as much attention to ambience as they do to the menu?

Learning about the various roles that teaware plays in the creation of the best cup is exciting and adds to the passion of tea. Tasting the water heated in different kettles, for example, is so insightful and often improves

21 the way tea is made thereafter. It is, nonetheless, important to maintain a balance between the teaware that will improve the ceremony functionally and that which will inspire the one making the tea aesthetically.

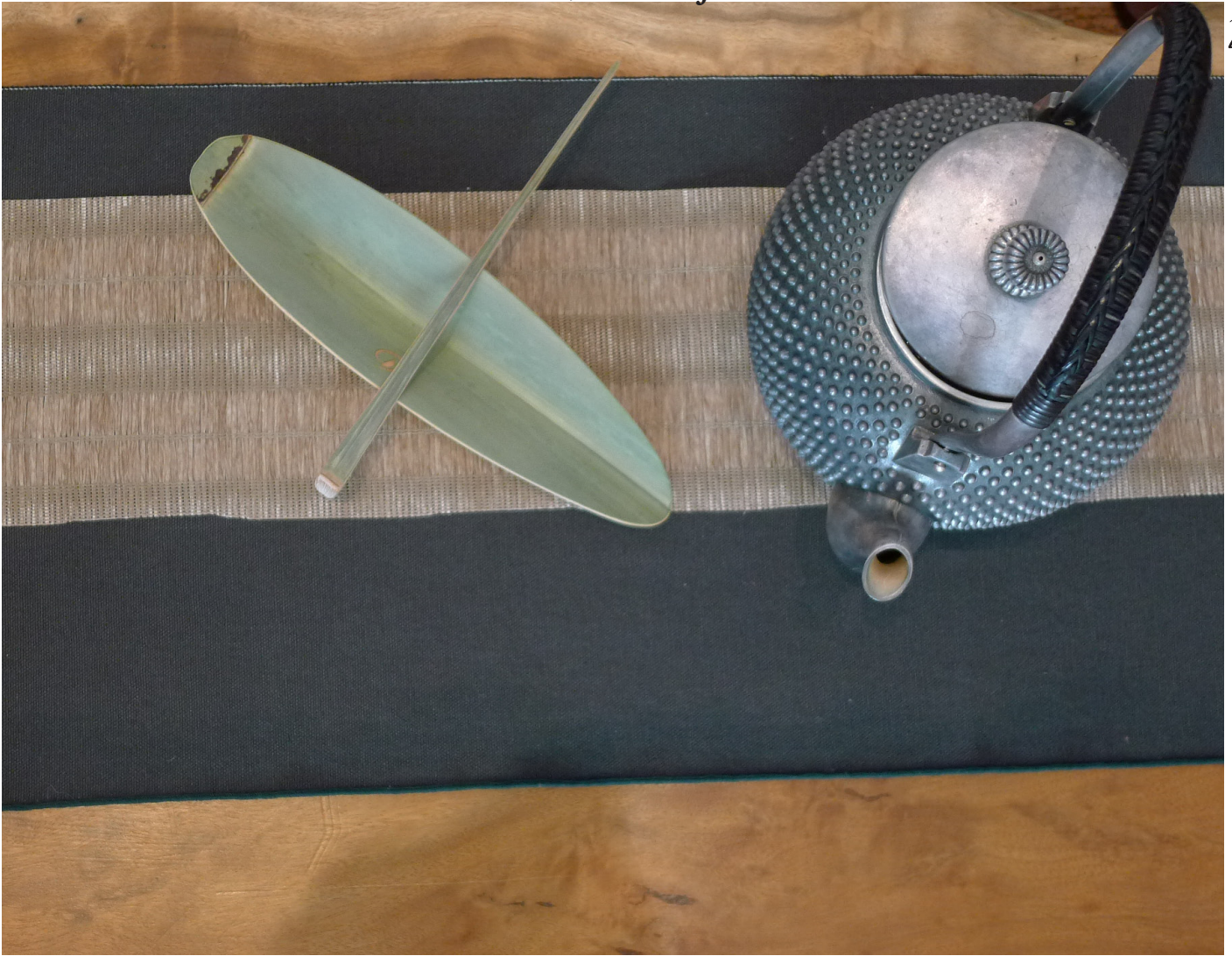
The process of creating the tea space and ceremony are very personal and the aesthetic design need not follow any other pattern than the one that will motivate the person who brews the tea—he or she is the master in that space, and unless it is a tea house with a steady stream of guests, then his or her feelings and intuitions are the only ones that really matter. A teapot with excellent function that doesn't at all inspire one may not be as good of a choice as one that functions a little bit worse, but is gorgeous. Again, balance is the ideal. In speaking about how the ambience of a tea session can at least result in quiet, deep relaxation and at best spiritual change or transcendence, John Blofeld remarked in his own book on tea that it was no wonder the Zen masters always ended conversations with tea, or answered particularly abstruse questions with "Have a cup of tea":

"On discovering that tea fosters the special attitudes involved in following the Way, we shall want our tea sessions, whether solitary or in company, to be set refreshingly apart from more humdrum activities. Since appropriate objects, surroundings and atmosphere all help emphasize that feeling of withdrawal into a world of beauty, some expenditure of time, thought and money on collecting a heart-satisfying set of tea-things would seem to be exceedingly worthwhile."

He then goes on to say that the great Tang and Song tea poems are indebted to the surroundings and ambience those ancient tea sages traveled to in order to enjoy tea; and we also can achieve that by occasionally "choosing an ambience of pine trees, curious rock formations, mountain streams, sparkling sunshine, sunset clouds or moonlight", conjuring the same poetic atmosphere of lost ages. More than any other topic, Lu Yu also constantly reminds us to 'spice up' our tea sessions and life with harmonious decoration. As Francis Ross Carpenter says in the introduction to his English translation of Lu Yu, "The environment, the preparation, the ingredients, the tea itself, the tea bowl and the rest of the equipage must have an inner harmony expressed in the outward form."

Achieving harmony without helps foster harmony within, but we must never lose touch with the *beings* at the center of the tea session—the people here, host and guests, are most essential. Even within the preparation of tea itself, so much is dependent upon the energy of the one doing the brewing. If they are cheap and focused on getting a lot for a little, if they are a businessman focused on selling tea, or if they are rich and trying to show off their Ming Dynasty teapot, all of these factors will show in the tea ceremony, resulting in a different cup. There is no scientific objectivity in the world of art, only taste. There are those that write books on form and function, conduct experiments on water temperature and get busy recording notebooks full of tea reviews, but as such they will never progress to the level of artist or master—a level





based not on the intellect but on intuition. Measuring, analysis and recording data play no part in experiential growth. One cannot record data and fully experience at the same time. Anyone who has experienced trying to review a tea, with written notes and all they incur, has already recognized the difference between these sessions and the more relaxing, personal ones. And anyone who has ever meditated or sought connection through calm knows the importance of shutting off the mind and its internal dialogue.

True enjoyment must be just that. This is why tea is made “*gong fu*”, because it is a skill, an intuitive mastery. Cha Dao must be free and loose, open to exploration and responsive to the idiosyncrasy of every beautiful moment. And there is much to be said about brewing with a clay kettle rather than a plastic one, a beautiful Qing Dynasty cup rather than a cheap one; it’s not just the ware itself, but also the fact that the one brewing isn’t reading a digital temperature on his or her kettle, analyzing the ratio of leaves to pot size, etc.—he or she is intuitively dancing a flutter of leaves from the scoop to the pot, gauging the water temperature with a gentle touch, and steeping with all the relaxation of the timer

built in his or her heart. Does that sound corny? Perhaps it is, but after enough tea houses, shops, teachers and enough sessions, most people would agree that the best cups they ever had were poured by people such as this. In the hands of an artist, even the simplest lump of charcoal and torn cardboard can become a masterpiece; likewise, a cup of tea brewed by the hands of a master can hold worlds of flavor, aroma and even peace just over the cusp of its rim...

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

By the Extraordinarily Superb and Effervescent Kaiya

I'm sure that if you had asked any of my teachers in high school, confidentially, what profession they guessed I might take up, none of them would have suggested that I'd become a teacher, and rightly so. Excellent teachers, after all, must also be excellent students. Although students as bad as me must have existed, it would have been difficult to imagine worse, short of those who simply didn't show up at all (which I didn't always do either). I could go on and on with details and examples that might leave you shaking your head in disbelief, but in the end it was all really rooted in a single characteristic: a lack of humility.

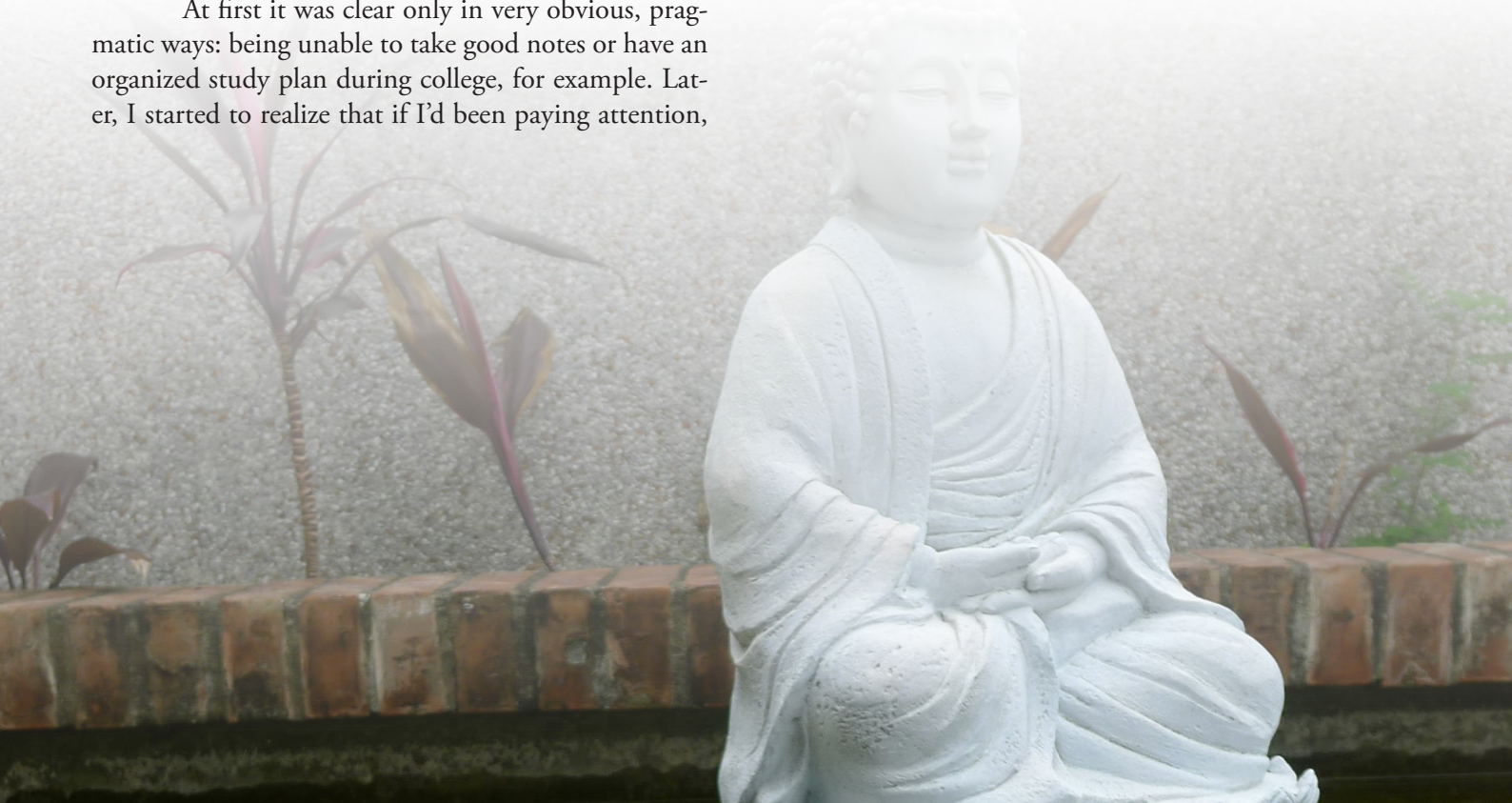
The truth is, actually, I was even worse than an absentee student. Unlike a student that simply chooses not to interact, I was showing up and making a scene, to the greater detriment of not only myself but the other students as well. I was enrolled in an international program which involved its own particular set of final examinations in the Senior year, and I was of the opinion that I could already pass them at the beginning of my Freshman year. As it happened, high marks on these exams overrode anything other than a failing GPA for the purposes of entry to University. As such, I showed up each day and made a show of not studying, taking notes, doing homework, sleeping, etc., all the while bragging of how I was too good for it all.

Although I did indeed pass the exams (with just-middling marks), it wasn't until the years began passing that I started to realize the extent to which I had really failed.

At first it was clear only in very obvious, pragmatic ways: being unable to take good notes or have an organized study plan during college, for example. Later, I started to realize that if I'd been paying attention,

there was actually a lot of interesting information I had missed out on and found myself wishing I had learned it simply for learning's sake. Still later, I began to see that I had had a chance to develop a positive relationship with several interesting and often wise people: my teachers. It seems so ridiculous now that I chose instead to create constant strained and strife-ridden drama between us. And beyond those obvious relationships, I can now finally see and hear my fellow students, the ones who were studying hard and paying attention and doing all the work, many of them substantially more intelligent than me, undoubtedly even more capable of passing those exams without working so diligently. I scorned them and would roll my eyes when they would complain about me in class or even sometimes would confront me face to face about my bad attitude; I didn't have even an inkling of the compassion for their positions that I have now.

So here I am today in the most unexpected role of a student again. I'm also, coincidentally, an English teacher by profession, as I study Cha Dao here in Taiwan. I feel very fortunate that my students are children, because in general, it's their nature to completely empty themselves and unquestioningly accept everything I teach them; even when I tell them all the chocolate in the world is made by a tribe of little orange African people called the "Oompa Loompas." In essence, they are incredibly humble, and one of the amazing side-effects of this is that they are willing to allow their en-





tire picture of the universe to shift tremendously at any given moment. My teacher says that the master's innocence is more powerful than the child's, for the child will soon grow into an ego and lose such unconscious innocence and grace, while the master has earned his with awareness; and it's true; the more we cultivate a return to that child-like state of humility, the faster we too will learn from our teachers and find our awareness returning to recognition that the universe is indeed ever-changing and awe-inspiring, never to be caught in our static, conceptual, 'adult' nets of pride.

So today, thankfully, I've finally found myself developing as a student of Cha Dao. I do my best each day to take a reminder from the empty cups. Yet still there is that voice inside that is always waiting to speak up with an "I know that" an "I doubt it," or some other such objection which has the potential to even lead to an argument; and is, of course, the vocalization of a refusal to learn.

Fortunately, I can now bring a bit of awareness to that voice inside my head—that part of me that is actually convinced that I'm being threatened by the suggestion that I could improve myself in some way by learning the lesson at hand. I'm the one threatening myself, because the deepest part of me wants to improve, and I'm getting in the way. I can see that I'm disconnecting from my teacher and fellow students, forcing others who were eagerly drinking to wait on my stubbornness. But the greatest loss of all is the ability to see the world as it really is; beyond the grasp of my knowledge and understanding, a mystery of blinding beauty. Of course, these sorts of thoughts and realizations are a long way off from the natural state of a child, but old habits die hard; ultimately, I have faith that if I as a child could begin to lay those bricks one by one until they towered above me, I can now knock them back down until I can stand free of them again.

AN EXPERIENCE AT THE TEA SAGE HUT

*This article is by our very own
Shane Marrs, this month's Teawayfarer!*

In my final two weeks in Taiwan, searching in darkness for the true light of tea, I found such a beacon of light—and I went towards the source. I arrived at the Tea Sage Hut.

Here in Miaoli, Taiwan, is a center of tea wisdom, expressing the communion of Tea and Spirit, Cha and Dao. This center is called Tea Sage Hut. It is a space dedicated to community, connection, sustainability, the environment, development of skill, unconditional kindness, mindfulness, laughter, meditation, and awakening to harmony through the wisdom of tea and service.

It is here at this wayside hut where enthusiasts of Life, Spirit, and Nature (and absurdity!) can honor a bowl of tea in a constructive environment; where tea can be shared in its highest regards; where we can bestow upon it the respect it deserves; and where we can walk the Great Way, guided by the wisdom of the Leaf and the teachings of the Dao—though, not at the expense of healthy humor and freedom to express yourself. Seriousness has its place, as does hearty laughter, which we thoroughly employ here at the hut!

It's quite special: the way tea is sourced, prepared, and served here. The water comes from a spring in the mountains. The teacher and the students gather the water once each week, hiking to the source. Back in the hut, the water rests in a clay pot in the meditation hall, receiving the energy of Metta generated there. After being carefully and mindfully ladled into a tetsubin, the water is patiently brought to boil using coal. I've read about the effect water can have on a cup of tea, but only after coming here did I come to experientially understand the significance behind that effect. In fact, just the heated water alone (without any leaf) is full of energy and a pleasure to imbibe. So too, the tea is alive with organic energy. It comes from soil thriving with natural cycles of life and death. It comes from farmers who care about tea and the environment. In line with all this, the tea is prepared and served in a like manner. But these

are only constituent parts of the whole experience. The margins of space between these paragraphs are so great that what is left unsaid is all. This Cha Dao experience in its entirety lies in the communion of all parts in the present moment. That's the beauty and mystery of tea: a simple concert of liquor and leaf offering a symphony of complex sounds, silences, and sensations—and it's available at the Tea Sage Hut.

When you come here, you are welcomed as if at home, along with all of the other tea brothers and sisters who pass through this sanctuary. Unlike home, however, where rent might be expected, everyone here is welcome free of charge, which includes tea, wisdom, room and board, and a moving experience. It is the donations from those who wish for others to receive the same wisdom through Cha Dao that they freely received, which keep this center open, operating, and thriving.

Here you can connect with tea brothers and sisters from around the world, and two amazing teachers: Wu De and the Leaf. In my short time at the Tea Sage Hut, I communed with the most amazing people from Russia, Canada, Estonia, and the US. Together, we engaged in sharing bowl tea, supporting organic farmers, meditating, laughing, preparing healthy meals, and all in the name of Cha Dao.

It really is amazing that such a place as this exists. This is a space I've always been looking for, as I think any enthusiast of tea and spirit is. A place to drink high-quality tea from high-quality ware; a place to cultivate spirit in the company of brothers and sisters; a place of solace and sanctitude; a place in tune with Great Nature; a place free of charge, open to all, and offering movie-night on Fridays! Before coming here, it really was only a distant fantasy that this wayside hut existed; something I could only ever have read about in books or seen in videos; a point in time I would have only imagined to exist. But here I am, right now in this moment, at this very center experiencing this dream....



Why this Leaf

*Why this Leaf, and not some Other?
Why this Plant, and not its Brother?*

*Why this Petal, White Soft and Yellow?
Why this Brew, Bright Smooth and Mellow?*

*Why this Water, Nurtured by Gaia?
Why this Ware, made of Earth and Fire?*

*Why this Taste, Returning and Sweet?
Why this Wind, Beneath my Feet?*

*Why this Nectar, Drunk by the Sages?
Why this Sharing, Passed on over Ages?*

*Why this Concert, of Liquor and Leaf?
Why this Music, of Silent Relief?*

*Why this Seed, Sown Green and Brown?
Why this Way—Cha Dao?*

*Why this Attraction, Drawn Towards Tea?
Won't You Receive this Bowl and See?*

When you begin down an Eastern path, and Cha Dao mostly heads East, you quickly realize the important role language can play in our thinking, and consequently our insights. For the most part, we come to love the ancient spiritual words in languages like Sanskrit and Chinese—for their subtlety and breadth. There is one English word we’ve come to like better than its Eastern equivalents, however: “Enlightenment”. When most people think of “Enlightenment” they see in the word the “light” and are reminded of the light in us, which we all travel towards. But “light” in English has another meaning: not heavy! Being enlightened means, literally, lightening up! Don’t take yourself serious, or anything else for that matter. There is an old Indian saying: “beware the spiritual/religious man that takes himself seriously!” And many of you know how we here do so love laughter and humor. We thought that these newsletters might be getting a bit heavy and that we would enlighten them up.

Are you tired of people holding you responsible for your actions?

Have you always had the feeling there should be some way to blame someone else? Are old familiar lines such as “*It’s not my fault; it’s your fault!*”, “*I did it, but you made me do it!*”, or the classic “*I did it, but I remember a time when you did something similar!*”, starting to lose the luster and oomph they had in the past?

Have we got a product for you: **Blame Kaiya™**

That’s right, with this ingenuously future-thinking product, designed specifically with the needs of today’s modern consumers in mind, you’ll never have to take the blame again!

Blame Kaiya™ can be used at any time, in any situation! If nobody saw who did it, you can *blame Kaiya*! If someone catches you doing it, you can say that Kaiya made you do it!

Your subscription includes not only a free membership card which you can show to those doubters who may need evidence, it also includes a 24-hour telephone service! That’s right, at any hour of the day or night, you can actually call *Kaiya* on the phone and he will admit his fault to your accuser!

If so desired, you can text in our special code and he will be notified that he should not only take the blame but also backtalk, insult, or curse as he does so for greater authenticity!

WE know that you’ve never been wrong in your life, but you’re surrounded by stupid jerks who don’t! Let us help you set the record straight!

**For a limited time, now including free photoshop services! Let us photoshop Kaiya into any of your embarrassing or potentially incriminating photos. Call now and receive this added bonus free of charge!!*

Call now: 1-800-BOOBERY



Blame Kaiya™

Call now: 1-800-BOOBERY

Your membership card will look like this:

A man in a grey polo shirt is making a "stop" hand gesture with his right palm facing forward. He has a slightly mischievous or defiant expression. The photo is framed by a yellow border with red polka dots.

Blame Me!
It's all my fault!
I did it all!

This card demonstrates irrefutably that (Your Name Here) is not to blame at all in this, as it was entirely and completely *Kaiya's* fault. He did it, so go talk to him about it!

Contact Kaiya and he'll be happy to tell you he did it, and that you, sir (or madam), are a MORON!

From now on, we plan to introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you each month in these newsletters. We hope that this helps us all get to know each other better. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and tea are becoming, as the tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of the tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to show you some glimpses of such beautiful people and their tea. Since he's so amazing and soon to live here at the center, we thought we'd introduce you to Shane Marrs.

My name is Shane Marrs. I grew up in Vernon, British Columbia, Canada. After graduating with a science degree in mathematics I took a break from the academic life, went tree planting in B.C., and decided to travel thereafter. Influenced by my university exchange to Japan, I found myself living and working at a Shinto Shrine in Washington State as a student of Shrine Life and Aikido.

My next excursion took me to Costa Rica, where I would offer my support on a ranch in return for food and shelter. Getting back to the land was a very moving experience. Now in love with farming, and already well in love with tea, I thought of a way to bring those two aspects of my life together, and that took me to Hawai'i.

It was on the Garden Island of Kaua'i and the Big Island of Hawai'i where I would first encounter tea in the flush. Again, I would volunteer my time on farms in return for the bare necessities and an opportunity to live out my new dream: tea farming. That dream, like a tea bud unfolding only to present another, would last for six months across two islands on three different tea farms. I also learned about Organic & Natural farming, Permaculture, sustainability, and self-sufficiency, thus reigniting my family's green-thumb tradition in farming, and also starting a green-tongue tradition of my own.

My interest in the roots of tea, both metaphorically and literally, took me to Taiwan for three months. I would learn about all aspects of conventional tea farming, Oolong processing, and life in a tea village. I stum-

bled upon a very special place during that time: the Tea Sage Hut, where I plan to return and live a life of Tea and Spirit, Cha and Dao, in the company of so many amazing tea brothers and sisters.

For now, I'm headed back to Costa Rica to intern on an organic farm at a rainforest eco-lodge. You can follow my travels at:

www.tealoveandcare.wordpress.com.



The Global Tea Hut website now has a forum up, where we can all discuss this month's tea and ask or answer questions, as well as share our experiences. It is a great way to meet some of your brothers and sisters in the hut. Come and join us:

www.globalteahut.org/forum

(We are also on Facebook and Twitter now!)



We have launched the new video series! The first video is an introduction to this Global Tea Hut. You can visit our Youtube channel via the GTH website or watch the video on the new page at our site. We will be launching regular videos starting in August, with tutorials, interviews, introductions and much more about this love of the Leaf!



There are currently 85 people in Global Tea Hut from all around the world: countries like Spain, Russia, Estonia, Australia, New Zealand, America, Canada, USA, the U.K. and Taiwan. Our accountant, Kaiya the Magnificent (and Merciful) says that once we get to around 100-120 people all our financial worries will vanish and we'll live happily everafter, forever and ever...



If any of you are interested in seeing these newsletters in color, you can read them on the Internet at the GTH website, under the link for 'newsletters'. Some of the photography is worth taking a peak at.



You are all welcome to visit our center in Taiwan. All classes, as well as room and board are completely free of charge. We have tons going on. You can read more at:

www.teasagehut.org

We have used some of your contributions to buy an amazing 100+-year-old matcha grinder. We are experimenting with grinding several kinds of tea for boiling and whisking. We've ground an aged-oolong matcha so far and are doing an aged Puer next. We plan to share some of this magic with you all soon!



We have given out 3 scholarships for a free year of GTH to people who want in but cannot afford the cost. If you know anyone else interested, please let us know. It is a great joy to expand this community!



Wu De will be in Estonia this September/October! We are doing some amazing tastings and workshops there. Come and join us if you are nearby.
Contact Steve for more information!



Let us know about what you think of Global Tea Hut so far, either by contacting us or expressing your thoughts on the new forum. We would love to hear your comments or criticism. We are here to serve and make this experience better for everyone, bringing us all closer together.

www.globalteahut.org
www.teasagehut.org
www.the-leaf.org

Be happy!



TEA SAGE HUT PROJECTS

Our center

- Expenses (essentially covered by local donations and Global Tea Hut)
- Food and entertainment, trips and gas for visitors who wish to see Taiwan
- Bowls and tea for every guest to take home
- A Puerh Cave on the third floor
- A library of vintage teas for future students to study from
- A Large collection of various teawares to learn from

Future Center

- Mountain land (probably around 200,000-300,000 USD for the size we need)
- Building (expenses unknown at this point)
- Gardening (both landscaping and vegetables for eating)

Publications

- *The Leaf, Tea & Tao Magazine* (Online and free at: www.the-leaf.org)
- Translations of some Chinese texts for free distribution
- Printing of pamphlets and introductions for free distribution
- The purchase of copies of Wu De's books: *Faces of the Master*, *Tea Wisdom*, *Way of Tea* and *Zen & Tea*, *One Flavor* for free distribution at our center

Videos

- We still need around 500 USD worth of equipment
- We are also looking for a way to better host/share the videos