

# Global Tea Hunt

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2014



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# February 2014

**I**n February, we start the Year of the Horse. This has been an incredible journey, watching Global Tea Hut grow. Until now, the primary focus of these monthly envelopes was to support our shared desire to maintain our current free tea center, Tea Sage Hut, and build the future, bigger center, Light Meets Life. For most of you, the fact that you get a magazine, tea and a gift is a bonus. Most of our members are people we've met who believe in our vision. They signed up for Global Tea Hut to support our work. But we hope to reverse the focus this year, so that everyone will feel that the magazine and tea themselves are central, and the fact that it supports a non-profit an added bonus. If you are here primarily for the tea and magazine, and less to support our non-profit work, you will still find that the improvements along the way will make this experience more and more rewarding!

As Global Tea Hut emerges from its cocoon this year, shaking the moisture off its full-color wings, it will have a greater power and influence over the tea world in two very significant ways: firstly, we are going to start growing away from the themes we've focused on in these "newsletters" up until now. In fact, we think you will find the shift in topics to be great enough that we can no longer call them "newsletters" anymore—they are "magazines" from now on! Most of our articles to date have focused on the personal tea journeys of GTH members, a spiritual approach to Cha Dao and community news, of course. We would never take that out from the magazine, as it is a big part of what defines this tradition. However, we plan to reduce such themes to approximately 25% of any issue, utilizing the remaining 75% of the space to inform you about tea: learning about history, translating Chinese articles, travel pieces about tea regions, teaware artisans, tea processing, more brewing methods, etc. Don't worry, this doesn't mean we are going to bore you with facts and move towards an intellectual approach to tea—far from it! We hope to cover the full spectrum of tea, from history to enjoyment, and from theaflavins to spiritual depth: Loving Tea in all Her glory! In this way, our tradition will be able to have a positive impact on more tea lovers throughout the world. No matter how you brew your tea, or what your approach to tea is, receiving Global Tea Hut will be an enjoyable experience,

and will help demonstrate to all tea lovers the importance of sustainable, environmentally-friendly tea production.

This brings us to the second way in which our growing magazine can have an impact on the tea world: As we gather membership, we will start to have the funds to travel and interview more farmers and artisans, teaware makers and tea friends. In this way, we will begin to connect organic farmers to each other and to the world. Global Tea Hut itself can have an incredibly positive impact on tea production worldwide! And maybe through other tea influence all agriculture, especially in Asia! In other words, this magazine and tea are a way we can all make a difference!

The improvements that will happen as membership increases should be a good incentive for you to help us spread the word. Nevertheless, we feel that we should also show up for you *before* you start sharing Global Tea Hut with everyone! After all, isn't it our responsibility to demonstrate that we can make a better magazine? Shouldn't you get to see what GTH will look like, at least a little? We think so. From now on, each issue of GTH will contain some glimpses of the future and where we envision this magazine in the months to come, as membership increases.

Transparency on all levels is key to us, as a non-profit, and the honest truth is we currently don't have enough funds to make all the improvements we hope to this year as we get closer to our goal of 2,000 members. Still, we can take some baby steps, which you will hopefully see as hints of the wonderful changes to come, and be further inspired to share GTH with your friends and families. Consequently, right now, in this issue, you are going to see a teaware artisan interviewed, more tea articles, and even a few more splashes of color as we gear up for the best tea magazine on earth!

Help us provide the world with the best tea magazine ever made—full of informative tea articles, a balance of Cha Dao and self-cultivation, connection to a community of tea lovers, as well as organic tea to drink as you read. And unbelievably this whole amazing project will help build free tea centers around the world!



# YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, FEBRUARY 2014

2000, Aged Liu Bao, Cangwu, Guangxi

As you travel this tea road, you encounter the tea spirit in so many places. You often meet the most kind and giving friends, tea brothers and sisters, and in places you least expect to. This month we attended a tea expo in Taichung, as you'll read about in a bit, and sat down to try some Black Teas with Mr. Lin Yi San, whose friendly smiles and array of teas seemed inviting. We enjoyed the Liu Bao he served us and told him so. When we mentioned Global Tea Hut, he immediately offered to donate this month's tea. His generous heart and warm smile reminded us why we love tea so much, and why we are all here in this Hut sharing tea with each other, despite the distance that separates us.

Before we start discussing Liu Bao, we must once again drive home the difference between Red Tea and Black Tea. What is called "Black Tea" in the West is actually Red Tea (*hong cha*). Red Tea is oxidized completely during production, whereas Black Tea is characterized by post-production artificial fermentation. Ordinarily, the mistake wouldn't be worth correcting, as it doesn't really matter what we call something. However, in this case calling Red Tea "Black Tea" is confusing because there is another genre of tea called "Black Tea" in Chinese. So if you call Red Tea "Black Tea" then what do you call Black Tea? The mistake began when Europeans first started trading with China and weren't allowed very far beyond the docks, learning most of what they knew about tea in broken Pidgin English from the dockside merchants. In those days, they also called Oolong "Black Tea".

Liu Bao is a real Black Tea produced in Cangwu, Guangxi. The name "Liu Bao" literally translates to "Six Castles", which may refer to forts that existed in the area at some time in the distant past. The local mountains are full of canyons, streams and waterfalls that are misty year-round. The loose, fertile soil, humidity and proper sunshine make it an excellent region for growing tea. The tea trees here are Big Leaf, which we have discussed extensively in past issues. To briefly summarize: the first tea trees are all what has become known as *Camellia sinensis* var. *Assamica*. They can grow bigger leaves, and generally have a single trunk with roots that grow more downward. As tea moved northward, naturally or carried by people, it evolved into a Small Leaf varietal, known as *Camellia sinensis* var. *Sinensis*. These trees can't grow as large of leaves, are more bush-like with many trunks and roots that grow more outwards. Like Puerh, Liu Bao is Big Leaf, and the best quality Liu Baos are made from older tea trees as well.

Liu Bao tea is processed similar to Shou Puerh. In fact, when Puerh manufacturers were developing the process of artificial fermentation used to create Shou Puerh in the 1960's and early 70's (officially licensed production began in 1973) they studied Liu Bao production, amongst other kinds of Black Tea. Ultimately, Shou Puerh production methodology is based on such teas, and owes its existence to them.

There are some variations in Liu Bao production, like all tea, so formulas can be a bit misleading, as they ignore the adaptations farmers make to suit the weather—different amounts of rainfall lead to different schedules and moisture content in the leaves, for example. Also, different factories/farmers have different recipes, even internally at different times or for variety. Liu Bao is traditionally harvested in bud sets of one bud and two leaves, though in modern times more leaves are sometimes picked to increase yield—a problematic trend in many tea-growing areas. The tea is then withered indoors and/or outdoors to oxidize and remove moisture, which is necessary with most teas. The tea is then fired in a wok, called "kill green (*sa qing*)", to arrest oxidation and remove certain green enzymes that make tea bitter. Like Puerh, this is often done at a slightly lower temperature than other teas, to keep some of the enzymes that help in fermentation. The tea is then rolled, oxidized and rolled again. At that point most Liu Bao tea is fermented in moist piles, similar to Shou Puerh. This heaping is called "*wo du*". After fermentation, the leaves are dried, traditionally in the sun.

After fermentation and sorting, the leaves are steamed to re-moisten them and then pressed into large, bamboo baskets. The tea is packed down into these wicker baskets, pressed in tightly around the edges and more loosely in the middle to facilitate the next phase of air-drying. The drying takes a few months, after which the tea is often aged.

In previous times, Liu Bao was only sold in large baskets weighing 40 to 50 Chinese *jin* (1 *jin* = 600 grams). These large bundles were sometimes wrapped in huge bags for transportation, called "gunnies (Bao Lan 宝篮)" by Malaysian Chinese who spoke fluent English. In more recent times, Liu Bao has often been re-packaged after aging into smaller one-kilogram baskets, or into other amounts in boxes, bags, or even compressed into other shapes to hitch a ride on the bandwagon of Puerh, as its neighbor has soared to great popularity and wealth.





Traditionally, Liu Bao tea was exported to Cantonese tea drinkers in Malaysia and Hong Kong. In Malaysia, it was often served to tin/pewter miners during their breaks. In mainstream Chinese culture in Malaysia, senior citizens refer to it simply as “Big Leaf (*Da Ye*)”. It always had a reputation for being cheaper tea, often boiled, dried and re-boiled in restaurants. A lot of famous old Liu Bao teas have survived in Malaysia—mostly left over from the large stocks that the mines had when they closed. Some of the most famous, most coveted vintages of Liu Bao Tea are:

- 1950s *Pu Tian Gong Qing* (普天共庆), which was a higher grade of Liu Bao reserved for the managers and owners of the mines
- 1970s *Shuang Xing Hao Yin* (双星号印/SSHC Penang)
- Liu Bao in gunnies like N152, LLLL367, NL229, etc.
- Some of the best/most famous vintages of Liu Bao teas are those produced by the Guangxi Wuzhou Tea Factory (广西梧州茶厂). They produced the famous “VIVE” in the 1980s (with two grades) and a famous 1990s Liu Bao as well.

It used to be that Liu Bao was a cheap alternative to aged Puerh, often providing the same warming, deep and fragrant brews that settle the soul and aid in digestion. However, nowadays the more famous vintages

of Liu Bao are equally expensive. Aged Liu Bao is said to offer a bright red cup with mellow, thick liquor that tastes of betel nut. It is often regarded as the highest quality when covered with the spores of a certain yellow mold, which you will read about later on in this issue. In traditional Chinese medicine it is cooling, refreshing and good for dispelling dampness as well as detoxification.

Our tea of the month is a 2000 Liu Bao that was also produced by the famous Guangxi Wuzhou Tea Factory. It was aged by Mr. Lin in Tainan. It is deep, dark and mellow and settles the soul. Liu Bao is one of our favorite teas, combining the power of Big Leaf, old-growth trees with the processing of man, the fermentation of Nature and the work of all the microorganisms that change the tea so magically over time. The Qi is deep and Yin, moving towards the center, carrying you inward as you drink. Try brewing this tea gongfu if you can, or at least in a quiet space with some people you love. You'll find this deep, clarifying brew centers everyone and allows for a deeper connection to each other and the moment. We are grateful to Mr. Lin for his generous heart, and so grateful to share this amazing tea with this growing community!

*As we mentioned in previous months, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized.*



# GOLDEN FLOWERS (JIN HUA)

Wu De

Some of the magic of post-production fermentation isn't in the tea leaves. Scientifically, little is known about many of the molds and bacteria that arise naturally in fermented teas like Puerh, Liu Bao and other Black Teas. Most of these teas grow in humid areas, so molds, fungi and unique bacteria are present in and around the trees. As the tea is fermented, each cake, brick or batch of loose tea will be different. Even Sheng Puerh, aged over time naturally, is susceptible to mold and not all of it is bad for us.

When it comes to Black Tea, Chinese people have always determined the quality of many teas by how much “Golden Flowers (*jin hua*)” they have. This is especially true of the brick teas of Hunan, where such mold is most desirable. In fact, Hunanese brick tea is intentionally fermented in conditions favorable to this mold, and any brick without it is considered lower quality. Traditionally, Liu Bao tea was not characterized in this way, though it is sometimes found with this mold on it. For some reason, this particular mold very rarely grows on Puerh (aged Sheng or Shou), though Puerh has many other kinds of molds and fungi.

Also known as *Eurotium Cristatum*, most of the golden bunches are actually spores. In recent times, Black Tea has started to grow in popularity and some Liu Bao and Liu An teas are also fermented under conditions that promote Golden Flowers. However, Mr. Lin says that our 2000 Liu Bao naturally developed these flowers, making the tea more precious.

There have been medical studies in China suggesting that *Eurotium Cristatum* can be effective in treating diabetes, promoting metabolism and as a digestive aid, and even potentially assisting in the treatment of cancer patients. Though Golden Flowers have been used medicinally in China, Mongolia and Tibet—where most brick Black Tea was exported to—for centuries, further research is still needed.

Beyond the more scientific approach to health, we would also like to offer a different approach that focuses on trusting our bodies and Nature, looking to our inner connection to our own bodies and plant medicines instead of waiting for a lab report to tell us what is going on inside of us. Perhaps the combination of these approaches results in a more holistic orientation to health and healing.

There is some debate about the molds that develop in fermented teas like Puerh and Black Tea. There aren't any known cases of mycotoxins in these teas, but

the possibility is there. Some white spores on Puerh tea will give it a musty flavor, which people may or may not appreciate. In the coming issues of this magazine, we can further explore the deep and complicated subject of Puerh storage in terms of so-called “wet” and “dry” storage. Traditionally, most all aged Puerh was musty, having been stored in Southeast Asia. The tea wasn't as valuable as it is today, and was often left to age naturally, with little human intervention. As Puerh has increased in value, however, tea lovers are more concerned about how their tea will age and are putting more effort into controlling the storage environment. In the future, we will be able to share more experiments and results, as tea is aged in new environments around the world, some conducive to better aging and some not so nice.

Although many people think of mold as bad for us, it isn't inherently so. Our bodies are full of microorganisms. We need them to survive. There is bacteria all around and throughout our bodies, and by number they account for the majority of cells in us. While we find that the presence of certain white and yellow molds on aged Sheng and other Black Teas enhances their Qi, and in the case of Golden Flowers makes them sweeter, we aren't doctors and wouldn't recommend using this tea to treat any illness. If you are allergic to molds, you might want to sit this month out. You need to take responsibility for your own health, consulting physicians, Western or Chinese.

Putting aside disclaimers about how we won't be responsible for your health, we drink this tea a lot and it is great. We know you will love it. As we mentioned above, there are no known cases of mycotoxins released from Golden Flowers—to the contrary, there are several studies promoting its medicinal benefits, Western and Chinese. Also, there is research which demonstrates that the molds and bacteria in most teas are mitigated by the temperature of water used in tea preparation.

There is a magic in the relationship between the millions of microorganisms in fermented teas and our bodies. This is a big part of what makes Puerh and aged teas, like this month's Liu Bao, special teas. We have talked here a lot about the scientific aspects of these molds, but we should also recognize that it is hard to say how much of the Qi in any aged tea is from the leaves and how much from the microorganisms. Without humidity, Puerh and Black Teas don't ferment. The changes they go through over time are related to the presence of bacteria, itself the defining characteristic of fermentation—in anything from cheese and yoghurt to kombucha.





The mold adds a deepening to the Qi, making it more Yin, while sweetening the tea, bringing a longer-lasting *huigan*. Microorganisms—molds and bacteria—are part of what makes tea and the world alive. See if you can feel them in your brew, and what differences they bring to this tea experience!

We have other Liu Bao teas from all different ages, some of which are fifty or sixty years old, some from the 1980's, 90's and early 00's. Very few of them have Golden Flowers like this tea, but we compared a 2000 Liu Bao we previously owned with the one donated by

Mr. Lin and the one with the Golden Flowers tasted better, was deeper and resulted in a more rewarding brew. In the end, you will have to be the judge, enjoying this unique chance to have an aged Black Tea with Golden Flowers!





\* This article was generously donated by Wushing Publications.  
It was originally published in *Tea Art Magazine*



Small bamboo rafts carried Liu Bao tea down the winding Liu Bao River from tea growing areas including Buyi, Siliu, Tangping, Lichong, Wutong, and Gaojian. The tea traveled along the Xijiang River system and finally arrived in Guangzhou for collection and distribution. From there it was carried to homes of overseas Chinese throughout the world.

Liu Bao tea is a post-fermentation Black Tea. In Chinese medical terms, it is said to effectively remove heat, dispel dampness, and detoxify the body. These features made it an essential item carried by Chinese emigrants as they left their hometowns. Early overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia drank Liu Bao tea to relieve dysentery and cool the body. It is also said that when their children suffered from diarrhea, they would place Liu Bao tea and spring water in an earthen pot and bring it to a boil over a high flame. Once cooled slightly, they added a moderate amount of winter honey. When consumed, it provided instant benefit.

Aside from the above health factors, Liu Bao tea also greatly benefited from the portside location of its tea production area, which facilitated immediate export. Wuzhou is one of the starting points of China's maritime Silk Road. In the past, it was the great southwest's most convenient export route. In 1897, imperial Japan forced Wuzhou to become a treaty trading port, and tea became a significant resource in their economic plunder. This is another factor that greatly contributed to Liu Bao's status as the tea with the highest volume of exports to overseas Chinese.

Wuzhou Liu Bao tea was primarily shipped along the Xijiang River for sale abroad. Consequently, it is also known as "Oversea Compatriot Tea." As far back as the Qing dynasty Jiaqing period (1796 - 1820), Liu Bao tea farmers shipped their tea out of the mountainous growing areas on bamboo rafts to Guangzhou. There it was put onto boats and shipped throughout the world. Records indicate that Liu Bao tea exports from Wuzhou exceeded 1100 tons in 1935. Consequently, Liu Bao tea has also been called Xijiang River basin "Boat Merchant Tea."

## ***Liu Bao tea fermentation precipitated the development of Ripe Puerh***

The quality and flavor of Liu Bao tea is uniquely characterized as red, rich, mellow, and pure. In addition, it is often sold as "aged Liu Bao" or "disregarding years," which shows the excellent quality of this tea. In terms of quality and trademark, "aged" or "old" are always used to emphasize this characteristic of Liu Bao tea. This factor has also contributed to the emphasis on fermentation in Liu Bao tea production.

The earliest detailed written record of Liu Bao tea production techniques is found in *Tea Collection and Production Methods*, published in June 1957 by the Guangxi province Supply and Marketing Cooperative. It states: "Liu Bao tea originated in Liu Bao township, Cangwu county. Its production craft is relatively unique. Neither Black Tea nor Green Tea, it is unique to this province, and so it is named Liu Bao tea after the production area. Its fermentation process sets it apart. Following heating (*sha qing*) and rolling (*rou nian*), it undergoes post-fermentation in piles for several hours before being dried." This text clearly specifies that the production technique involves post-fermentation in piles.

According to Zou Jiaju's *Yunnan Ripe Tea*, prior to 1948 only pressed Yunnan tea was shipped to Hong Kong. During the early 1950's, most Yunnan tea shipped to Hong Kong changed to loose leaf. That period happens to coincide with the communist revolution, when the popularity of loose leaf Liu Bao tea packed in bamboo baskets peaked in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia. Hong Kong tea sellers were inspired by the mellow fragrance of Liu Bao resulting from pile storage. Based on market demand, they began to experiment with processing methods using humid environments such as cellars and warehouses to accelerate the post-fermentation of Liu Bao and Puerh tea. The market continued to change, and, by the late 1950's, this type of "flood tea" gradually came to dominate Hong Kong tea houses. Consumers widely appreciated the mellow fragrance, red liquor, and brown base of this ripe tea.

Due to the above factors, the Native Produce & Animal Byproducts Import & Export Company (CNNP), Yunnan Branch initiated experimentation into post-fermentation of tea for export. It is said that Wuzhou tea factories still contain staff that were sent from Yunnan to learn post-fermentation techniques for ripe





*1980's VIVE  
Aged Liu Bao Tea*

Puerh production. As the culmination of this study and investigation, CNNP Yunnan successfully produced ripe Puerh tea in 1973.

### ***Traditional Liu Bao tea – red, rich, mellow, and pure***

Liu Bao tea is primarily produced for export to overseas Chinese. It seems likely that its production techniques were gradually perfected over a long time based on the requirements of Cantonese or Hong Kong tea merchants, thus giving rise to its later tea making techniques.

The “corner pile fermentation” performed following heating and rolling is also known as “wet pile fermentation”. This procedure is crucial to the unique quality of Liu Bao tea. Its goal is to hasten the transformation of the tea’s internal substances through the warmth and humidity of the wet pile process, thereby reducing bitterness and causing the flavor to become pure and mild.

The unique character of Liu Bao tea is then catalyzed through the careful “cold fermentation” procedure. The so-called initial production tea material is first dried

over a pine fire. Moisture is then added to the tea until it reaches a suitable level of wetness. It is then pile-fermented for seven to ten days to supplement deficiencies in the initial fermentation. In traditional production techniques, however, steamed tea is stored in piles for 20 to 30 days. The primary function of the wet fermentation is to accelerate changes to internal substances in the tea, thereby causing materials such as theaflavins and thearubigins to increase. The color and fragrance of the tea increases, which gives Liu Bao tea its characteristic style.

The Liu Bao tea produced in Wuzhou is distinguished by another important feature. That is, its aging process is unlike that of other teas. After fermentation, Liu Bao tea is generally stored in air raid shelters to age. The temperature, humidity, and microorganisms are extremely beneficial in aging the tea. The tea is stored in this environment for two to three years before being sold. This relatively long aging process is another characteristic of Liu Bao tea, which distinguishes it from the brief aging process of other types of Black Tea.

Another unique aspect of the aging process contributes to the special mellow purity of Liu Bao tea. This is due to the fact that early Liu Bao tea was transported by water, which further helped to shape the character of

the tea. The tea was shipped along the Liu Bao River on bamboo rafts, which unintentionally helped contribute to its unique quality. The damp environment on the river with water constantly splashing onto the bamboo baskets, combined with the hot sun, caused the tea to continuously ferment and age. This shipping process further contributed to the mellow fragrance of the tea.

### *One hundred years of rise and fall of Liu Bao tea*

Today, it is still not clearly known when Liu Bao began to grow and produce tea. However, historical records indicate that Liu Bao tea was listed among the 24 great teas during the Qing dynasty Jiaqing period (1796 - 1820).

Before World War II, Liu Bao tea was praised by Chinese in Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia and experienced brisk sales. Other factors contributed to the rapid development in Liu Bao tea, including low shipping costs and stable governments in major buying areas including Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Malaysia. In addition to Liu Bao, large growing areas sprang up in neighboring regions and production volumes increased.

At the height of Liu Bao tea, tea farmers brought their initially processed tea to Hekou Street. During the tea harvest, this street was filled with the sound of trading. To this day Liu Bao town still contains a tea collection place, which provides a glimpse at the spectacle of those days. According to local elders, many tea companies were established in those years. Large tea companies from all over set up branches in Liu Bao. These include famous tea companies such as Yingji, Wanshen, Guangyuantai, Xieji, Tianshunxiang and Shenchang.

Major Hong Kong tea companies successively moved into Liu Bao and began buying tea. Of these, Guangyuantai is the most famous. At the time, the same trademarks were printed on the bamboo baskets used to ship the tea and on the pillars outside the buildings of the large tea companies.

Liu Bao tea's long period of prosperity came to an end in 1937 when Japan invaded China, and Guangzhou fell into enemy hands. During the ten years of great decline between 1937 and 1949, many of the tea companies stopped production or went bankrupt. A resurgence in the production of Liu Bao tea occurred after the revolution in 1951. Land reform returned land to farmers, and tea production was greatly expanded. In addition, the highway between Liu Bao and Guangdong opened in 1957, which also helped accelerate growth of Liu Bao tea.

This period of prosperity during the 1950's did not last long. In 1958, communes were formed and the Three Red Banners (General Line for Socialist Construction, Great Leap Forward and People's Communes) were initiated. The Liu Bao tea industry, having just emerged

from the darkness, was once again pushed into a period of uncertainty. The Great Leap Forward was carried out on a grand scale for approximately three years. It gradually came to an end in late-1960, but Liu Bao tea production was greatly reduced.

Another significant factor contributed to the decline of Liu Bao tea. At the time, purchase prices for Liu Bao tea were low—often lower than those of green tea of the same grade. Green tea processing is easier than that of Liu Bao tea, however, causing tea farmers to switch to green tea production. This severely damaged the traditional post-fermentation craft of Liu Bao tea. An even more significant factor, however, came from the communal or collective tea farms and factories. Tea farmers no longer approached their work with the dynamism of the past. Tea plantation management, production, and quality gradually fell. Local elders recount with sadness that the traditional “age” and “red” of Liu Bao tea had changed. Traditional techniques were lost, and Liu Bao tea gradually disappeared from the Hong Kong and Macau markets.





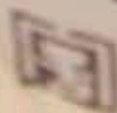
*Our Tea of the Month  
2000 Aged Liu Bao  
Guangxi Wuzhou Tea Factory*

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# GONGFU TEA TIPS

## February 2014

**A**s promised last month, we are going to include a sample of one tea lover's notebook as they do a gongfu experiment.

Twice in this magazine, we prescribed one of the most basic Gongfu tea brewing experiments. It's the most important and one of the easiest experiments to conduct, involving three identical cups and heated water. Let's bear in mind that while I offer you the details of my experience, you will have to do the work yourself if you are to integrate any of what I write here. It's important to remember that to learn and master any Way, we must first learn the basics. Conducting rudimentary experiments is about forming a necessary foundation from which your skill in brewing tea can stem from.

This is an example of how I record the results of my gongfu experiments. I've typed them up for the newsletter, but usually only write them in my notebook.

### *January 9, 2014*

#### *Gongfu tea experiment #1*

##### **Basic Materials**

- 3 identical porcelain cups, cream white in color
- spring water
- 1 clay kettle
- gas burner

##### **Additional Materials for Tea:**

- small Zisha tea pot
- Zisha tray and tea boat
- 1g of Sun Moon Lake Red Tea

*Note that these materials aren't essential, but just what I used. You might not have access to spring water, a clay kettle, or a gas burner. Do your best to use a quality kettle and good water and heat source. All of these factors will have subtle effects on the experiment, but the gross conclusions of this experiment will be noticeable no matter what.*

*Make space and time to perform this experiment. I did it in a clean tea space with a free afternoon. It's a quick experiment, but there's no need to rush.*

##### **Procedure (for water):**

- Prepare teaware and your tea space
- Clean your tea cups with the water from the kettle

- Pour heated water from the kettle into the first cup
- Pour half of the water from the first cup into the second cup. Then pour half of the water from the second cup into the third.
- Drink all three cups quickly, switching back and forth.

*I did the experiment a few times, focusing on certain qualities each time and writing down my notes in between.*

##### **Cup 1**

- preserved temperature
- lots of energy
- movement towards the back of the mouth and down the throat
- smooth and coating

##### **Cup 2**

- lost some temperature
- less energy and movement
- stopped near the middle of the mouth
- smooth, less coating

##### **Cup 3**

- much less temperature
- even less energy and movement
- stopped near the front of the mouth which required effort to swallow
- smooth, less coating

##### **Procedure (for tea):**

*Remember to use a tea that you are familiar with and brew it lightly. I used a particularly small Zisha teapot for this experiment because the cups are so small, but again, manage with what you have. You'll probably need an extra cup or two to decant the excess tea into.*

- Prepare teaware and your tea space
- As with the water, pour tea from the teapot into the first cup

*Note that this is already one extra decant from the water experiment*

- As before, pour half the tea from the first cup into the second, and half from the second cup into the third.
- Drink all three cups quickly, switching back and forth.





*In addition to the qualities observed with only the water, I also considered the way the tea splashed to the upper palate. I still did not consider aroma or flavor and focused on the less subjective sensations in the mouth.*

#### **Cup 1**

- preserved temperature
- lots of energy
- movement towards the back of the mouth and down the throat
- upward splash
- smooth, coating and uniform

#### **Cup 2**

- lost some temperature
- less energy and movement
- stopped near the middle of the mouth
- loss of splash
- smooth, less coating

#### **Cup 3**

- much less temperature
- even less energy and movement
- stopped near the front of the mouth which required effort to swallow
- lack of splash
- smooth, less coating

#### **Summary:**

With each subsequent pour of the water or tea, everything was less. Temperature, energy, movement, smoothness and the general quality of the water in terms of mouthfeel, were all lessened or lost. All of these qualities were reduced after pouring from one vessel into another.

This raises a lot of interesting questions pertaining to the use of gaiwans (lidded cups), pitchers, aroma cups and even pouring from the teapot itself. That's one reason this experiment is so important because it causes us to question a lot of tea brewing practices. We can then proceed to answer those questions for ourselves through further experimentation, ultimately increasing our relationship to tea and our ability to brew with skill, gongfu.





# THE CHAXI CHRONICLES

## *The Chabu*

*Kai Ya*

Two of the greatest joys of being a tea lover are the slow process of “seasoning” one’s teaware through years of use, and creating your own tea utensils, especially out of “non-tea” materials. This month, we are proud to send you a bit of teaware that, for the first time, we didn’t buy from anywhere! We designed them ourselves; they are unique and just for you! These cloths are called *chabu*, and they are almost always an integral part of the tea ceremony when we make tea here.

Practically speaking, *chabu* are important for two basic reasons: The first is that you are protecting your teaware by resting it on something that isn’t hard. In case of a big mistake, if something is dropped or hit, a soft cloth may save your teaware’s life. Secondly, if you spill any tea during preparation, the cloth will absorb it and maintain the cleanliness of the ceremony. If you make tea on a bare tabletop, it looks messy when there are spots and splatters of tea pooling here and there in plain sight. Of course you can wipe them up, and in fact you should wipe them up, but having a cloth minimizes the necessity to do this, and too much wiping up can distract from the gracefulness of the ceremony.

We all spill a bit of tea from time to time, especially when we are getting to know new teaware, or perhaps using a grumpy old pot whose character is drippy, it’s good to have a cloth to catch those mistakes. If we don’t use a cloth, it’s usually because we have a large piece of wood or stone that we are using in that *chaxi* instead, as these can also serve the same function. But be extra careful, because these materials definitely won’t be as forgiving of mistakes.

I have noticed that myself and other tea lovers are inevitably drawn towards very light-colored or bright white cloths. I had to learn early on, though, to be careful when using such colors. It is better if these cloths are the very narrow “runner” style. With a narrow tea cloth, you are only pouring water into your teapot over it, which won’t stain it if you spill some. Then you pour the tea itself into the bowls or cups on a tray that is directly on the table. If the cloth is so wide that your tray is going to be on it, you are bound to end up with tea stains on your light tea cloth in no time, which are often impossible to remove and very messy looking. Such stains can negate the sense of cleanliness a white cloth usually inspires, though sometimes a *Wabi* aesthetic is to be celebrated and the stains take on a charm all their own.

When I do use a wide, light-colored cloth, I make bowl tea. The simplest kind of bowl tea is best, because then I am not pouring tea at all, only water. This is also nice because in a sense this is the “purest” form of tea preparation, so using a white cloth reflects that. Or I will use a side-handle pot, and carefully pick up the pour between each bowl, instead of doing a continuous pour between them all. I can be sure I won’t spill tea this way, and because it is bowl tea, a continuous pour is less important. Personally, I can’t pour gongfu tea skillfully enough yet to be sure I won’t spill a single drop outside my tray, so I only make gongfu tea on a light cloth if it is a narrow one with the tray outside. Even then, I am extra mindful and possibly change the way I normally would pour a bit to be sure I don’t stain my cloth.

Making tea without sloppiness or spilling are ideals we strive for when preparing gongfu tea, and important demonstrations of respect in our tea ceremony, for our guests, the tea and ourselves. In nearly every ancient Eastern kingdom, but particularly in China and Japan, personal hygiene was fundamental to every class of people, as it was considered a basic sign of respect for others. Never forget that the tea is the guest of honor in any tea ceremony. Thus, providing your teaware with something soft and beautiful to sit upon and keep the space clean as you prepare tea is a fundamental demonstration of Respect and Purity, which are two of the four Virtues of Tea.

Whenever we clear away an old *chaxi*, wipe down our tea table and begin again with an empty space, and the *chabu* is often the new beginning for the next tea session. We want to create a space for our tea ceremony that will lead everyone who drinks with us into a space of harmony with the Universe, the Tao, themselves, and each other. A well-chosen *chabu* is often the most fundamental piece in the creation of such a space. A long blue one might be part of a theme with a river or the sky, a scarlet or orange hue might remind us of monk’s robes and renunciation. It is a bit like the canvas upon which the tea session is painted. All the rest of the teaware must be in harmony with the canvas on which they are placed, or the whole session will be disharmonious.

Although a change in such items as the tea scoop or other necessities are important, it is the *chabu* that sets the tone for everything that sits on it, and which can most dramatically change the energy or the theme being presented. For this reason, it is very useful to have a wide variety of *chabu*, and we have sent you a two-sided one that will allow you to experiment. We’ve chosen





similar coloration for each side of the cloths, but one side is patterned and the other is plain. I think you'll find a lot of insight in exploring the differences between the two.

Personally, I have found it to be a great pleasure and an honor to participate in designing and creating teaware to share with you this month. It was a bit overwhelming, going to the big cloth market in Taipei and needing to sift through all the patterns with cartoon frogs, Hello Kitty, half-naked ladies and other just weird or uninspiring nonsense, blasted on all sides with so many different patterns and colors. That market itself was a deep lesson on the importance of harmony. With tens of thousands of completely different pieces of material hoping to appeal to all sensibilities stuffed in every corner, I had to concentrate deeply on my breath and maintain great focus to find the stillness needed to find what I was there seeking. And the same thing happens at the tea table.

If I clutter my tea table with trinkets and decorations, or teaware, or whatever it is, I am forcing my guests to do hard work if they are to find any stillness or connection in that space. By presenting a disharmonious space, I present a barrier to overcome right from the start. I want to make it as easy as possible for my guests. I want to remove as many barriers as I possibly can, not present them with distractions, barriers or conflict. And the same should be true for all the spaces in our lives. It could be your bedroom, your office or your shop. The extent to which you arrange it harmoniously and free of conflicting energies or distracting clutter, the more clear-minded, still and harmonious you or your guests will feel in that space, and the better your work, business and life will be.

In fact, it was awesome that we had to go to a place like that market. We literally traveled to a disharmonious space in our quest to bring a bit of extra harmony into yours! In doing so, we were forced to discover the harmony within the so-called "disharmony", rather than pushing on it or looking for the "perfect" shop where everything was aligned before we were willing to look inside. We'd have been shopping forever. And before we took this cloth out of there, it was just another piece of disharmony as well, so we literally had a chance to transmute it for you. That kind of alchemy is what tea is all about: turning our internal dust into gold. Being there really drove home to me the importance of what we were there to accomplish, and just how vitally important a clean, pure, harmonious space for self-cultivation really is in the world today; how few and far between such spaces are, and how awesome it is to be able to find the stillness in the noise, as it were.

Knowing that there will be hundreds of tea sessions drunk between friends with these cloths sitting on the table takes my breath away, and I've never been so excited about sending out a month's gift as I am about this one! I think I've found a tea lovers' joy that transcends the two more private ones that I began with at the start of this article: Passing on teaware to fellow tea lovers! I am grateful to all of you for the opportunity to give.





# TEAWARE ARTISANS

## *Hometown Stoneware*

*Lindsey Goodwin*

**Y**ou wouldn't expect to see such nice teapots in a small city like Miaoli, Taiwan. But then again, neither would you expect to find an international tea center. Wandering into the shop for the first time generates a sense of surprise and delight in tea lovers, like finding a kindred spirit in the most unexpected of places. But when you see the gentle, knowing smile of Ruo Shi, their maker, surprise shifts into a deeper understanding...

Ruo Shi is a soft-spoken man with an even-keel demeanor. Smile lines have formed around his eyes over the years, demonstrating that he is one of the rare beings who loves what he does and does what he loves. But one look at his teapots would confirm the very same thing. They are forms which express a love of Nature and a love of Tea, forms which speak of the ancient forests, of clay whose clock is on geologic time, of the eons and materials which the Earth gives so freely for human expressions of Her beauty.

These materials (stoneware clay and weathered wood) are fitting for Ruo Shi. Stone is echoed in his name and upbringing, while wood is a part of his creation process from inception to completion.

His family name (Ruo) is common in Taiwan, but Shi (which means "stone") is not. It is a nickname that goes back to his childhood, when he was a sickly boy in a Hakka family of tea farmers. In accordance with Hakka tradition, he took on a local stone as his adoptive parent, an act which is believed to provide a sort of ballast for frail children.

Each year, on his birthday, he honors this tradition by bringing an offering to a large stone near Miaoli. Moreover, he pays homage to his boulder-parent in daily life with his rocky nickname and his even stonier work.

Shi says the clay is a big part of what makes his teapots special. He sources his clay locally, from within Miaoli County. The high mineral content of this local deposit makes it particularly suited for tea. The clay softens and smooths water during brewing, much as a good quality Yixing stoneware pot does, he says. But, he adds, this clay does not get so impacted by seasoning that you must limit your pot to a single tea. He says, "If you have many kinds of tea, you can still use one pot. That's part of why people love it."

Regardless of what people think, Shi's love of his medium is clear. His teapots recall an array of rock surfaces, such as lichen-covered mountain cliffs, geode facades, wet pebbles, shimmering ore and flowing, molten lava. And it appears that his family's love and devotion to the earthen realm will continue; his 23-year-old son is currently working at a clay factory to master the material before learning to craft teapots of his own.

Similarly, the element of wood has played a significant role in Shi's life and craft. He was raised in the mountains of central Taiwan as a child of tea farmers. He grew up drinking deeply of his family's trees and learning the craft of transforming the plants into nourishment for the body and soul. His hometown is known for the ancient camphor trees growing nearby, one of which is said to be the largest in all of Asia. And after 15 years of selling his family's tea in Miaoli, he was inspired to make wood-fired pottery.

To produce this style of pottery, he begins with an inspiration. His inspiration always comes from Nature, and is shaped by what he knows to be best for the mechanics of a good teapot. Sometimes, wood will be central to his inspiration, and the resulting pot will appear as if made of bamboo, or grown from gnarled tree roots, or imprinted with whorled wood grain...

After he has his vision ready to realize, he forms clay into vessels with either a pottery wheel or with a hand-crafting technique known as "coil building". In this process, he uses wooden tools (which he whittled by hand himself) to shape the pots and to attach their spouts, fashion their lids and sculpt other surface details.

Then, in collaboration with three other craftspeople, Shi fires the teapots in a kiln over four days of non-stop work. Each craftsperson mans the kiln for ten hours at a time, feeding charcoal from local wood into the blazing yellow flames. At the fire's peak heat, they add a special type of wood with a name that roughly translates to "lovesick tree". The kiln instantly transforms the wood into a cloud of ash, which snows down over the pottery and melts in the extreme heat. The ashes drift and land unevenly, creating unexpected and extraordinary variations on the surfaces of the pottery. This, says Shi, is what he loves the most about the process—the unpredictability of each firing, the not knowing if the pots will come out ruined or remarkable.

After the firing is completed, Shi adds wooden handles to most of his pots. (A few have clay handles instead.) Usually, the handles are made from dragon cedar or from *qi lin xiang* ("seven miles fragrance" trees, which bear a scent said to be discernible from incredible distances). The materials he selects are not ones hewn by him, but by Nature. He often chooses older pieces of wood with their bark eaten away by worms or weathered away by the elements. The result is a rustic, timeworn feel, which gives a sense of connection to the deep wisdom of Nature.

Over the years, Shi's teapots have evolved into a unique style all his own. Usually a modest man, Shi says with conviction that, "When you see a Ruo Shi teapot, you know it came from him." His early pots were often based on the structure of Zisha teapots, which he also sold in his





tea shop. Over time, he began to experiment with other forms, and today he produces a wide range of styles. Atop his shelves, you'll find so-called "art pots" (large forms which are for decoration rather than for use). Along one wall of the shop, he displays smaller, wheel-turned, side-handle pots. And on another, shelves are filled with larger, coil-built pots featuring intricate hand carvings resembling warped wood, molten rock and other nature motifs.

Across all these styles, a love of Nature and Tea is clear. In form and word alike, Shi emphasizes the roles of Nature and Taiwanese tea culture in his creation process. He says that each of the forms he creates is inspired by Nature and by his own love of drinking tea. But he credits his ability to play with form to Taiwanese tea culture. "Tea is Taiwan's culture," he says. Taiwanese potters can (and often do) make teaware exclusively, giving them the opportunity to deepen their craft. And they are not so bound by convention that their own insights and expressions are lost in the ideas of what teapots "should" look like. This convergence of tradition, support and freedom is unique in the world of teaware, and Shi utilizes this confluence of circumstance to full effect.

In a way, this meeting of Nature and tea culture in Shi's craft explains how we at Tea Sage Hut would be so lucky as to share a town with him and his incredible pots. Like Shi's work, this tea center is rooted in a deep love of Nature and Tea, and we found an ideal space for that love in Miaoli. Smaller cities in Taiwan often offer deeper connections to Nature and to traditional tea culture than do the mega-cities. Certainly, Miaoli offers circumstances which are especially tea-friendly, such as the clay deposits Shi draws upon and the high humidity which keeps our Puerh cakes aging beautifully. Moreover, as Shi says, tea *is* Taiwan's culture... and as you might guess, Taiwan's culture is preserved and cultivated more in the slower pace and more focused living of a small town such as Miaoli—home of the Tea Sage Hut.





*Side-handle pots of Ruo Shi*









# TEA EVENTS

2014 Taichung Tea Expo

Wu De

**T**he commercialism of most tea expos often pollutes any of the chances we could have at having fun, sharing nice tea, meeting new friends and celebrating the old. They often seem more a place for professionals to network connections than for the average tea lover to have a good time. Sure, there are some new teas to buy, and new teaware to check out, but that can get in the way of a pleasant day—too many teas and too many sales pitches. In Chinese, there is an old saying that the merchant with money on the mind makes tea that “tastes of coin.” And when it comes to buying tea at a tea market or a tea expo, only inferior teas need a story—fine tea sells itself.

Still, we always try to find the common ground with everyone we share tea with, at least in our common love of the Leaf and the Nature that made it. In that way, sharing tea with people who approach tea differently is rewarding, even if sometimes challenging. You can question yourself and learn about the limitations in your own approach. Sometimes, this is a real challenge indeed, especially in a temporary environment built out of booths meant to promote the commercial side of tea.

Last year we were invited to serve tea at the first Taichung tea expo and we had an amazing time, contrary to what we expected, meeting many new friends that have lasted the year long. Also, the expo itself was actually kind of fun, and had a variety of booths selling many different kinds of tea things—from Japanese antiques to pottery, and even Buddhist organizations promoting their organic tea. This year we weren't serving tea, but we thought it would be fun to have a look around for an afternoon.

This year's expo was for us about Black Tea. Of course, this doesn't mean “Red Tea”. As we have gone over many times in past issues, what is in the West called “Black Tea” is actually Red Tea, a mistake that wouldn't be important if there weren't another category of tea that actually is Black Tea. Black Tea is characterized by post-production fermentation. Black Tea production has increased in the last few years, and there were a few booths promoting very decent Black Teas. At one booth we tried a 1950's Black Tea from Hunan. It is called “1000 Tael Tea” as it comes in huge cylinders that each weight 1000 tael (a traditional measurement of 37 grams). This large leaf tea is light, but very fragrant and delicious. We also got the chance to taste some modern Hunan Black Tea from a brick with the famous “Golden Flowers” in it. In China, Black Tea that has a certain yellow mold that looks like small chrysanthemums when magnified is worth much more than ordinary

Black Tea. These small bits of mold have a medicinal effect, strengthening the immune system and are also thought to help us live longer. The tea was still strong and astringent. Like Puerh, these brick teas will need to be aged for some time, to mellow out and gather depth.

That booth also had a contest with a new cylinder of Hunan Black Tea, in which you could take home as much tea as you could break off in one minute with a Puerh pick. Most of us tried, averaging around 50 grams. It was a fun game, and we got some free tea as well.

The growing trend of importing Japanese tea antiques to Taiwan has steadily been on the rise, and there were even more such booths this year. It was nice to look through all the coasters, tetsubins, silver kettles and other teaware from Japan. We saw some gorgeous coasters made of lacquered Bodhi leaves, for example. It is nice to see the tea traditions of the world merging and mingling. This is the spirit of tea: wisdom exchange regardless of one's background. The tea space has always been one of humility and equality, and though many tea masters of the past couldn't share tea together due to linguistic and geographical barriers, there is no doubt that they would have welcomed the opportunity. Rikyu would have treasured a tea session with a Daoist tea mystic, and vice versa. Many of the traditions started mingling as soon as they could, and we live in a very special and unique time, where the wisdom of these traditions can grow together towards better and new insights that will change the way Chajin relate to tea from here onward.

There was another beautiful trend to see evidenced in this year's tea expo: more and greater variety of wood-fired, local pottery. It is inspiring to see the inclusion of a more integral, international tea spirit, but also to celebrate a greater depth in Taiwan tea artistry. There were at least a dozen booths selling local pottery, and all of it with spirit and more depth of character. It is in harmony with the spirit of tea to use local, volcanic clay and wood-fire it in the traditional way, often with the incorporation of wood handles, adding *Wabi* (celebrated imperfection) to the pieces—both in function and form. They don't balance perfectly, which means that like people you have to see past their defects and learn to love them and work with them. And the natural elements inspire one to connect to Nature through tea, which is such an important aspect of our approach to tea. What really inspired us, though, was to recognize a deeper love for tea and the way it connects us in such pottery. All too often, tea and teaware are made for profit rather than out of a love for tea, so it is always a good sign to see artists who are inspired by a love for tea.





Through coming into contact with mainstream tea, tea markets, expos, etc., we are forced to question our tradition, learn new things and focus on ways we can share tea with others who don't approach tea the same way as we do. This is an essential aspect of working with tea. There is far too much tea snobbery in the tea world, as there was in ages past. Rikyu spoke at length about this. The tea spirit is one of sharing and humility. While it is important that we take pride in our brewing methods and approach to tea, we don't have to do so because we think we are better than others, but rather because this is *our* way—the one handed down to us. If your father handed you down a hammer from

your grandfather and it worked well, you would be proud of it because it is *your* hammer, not because it is better than your neighbor's hammer. Similarly, at the end of the day, we left in gratitude for our approach to tea, and having learned from others' approaches as well. Our aim wasn't to share, but to explore and learn. Our tradition is committed to serving. We need to find the things we share in common with other traditions, to question ourselves regularly and learn new things, staying open and flexible so that we grow together.

## *Tea Events*

We also need to find ways that our tradition can positively influence tea lovers, whether they use our brewing methods or not, and whether they approach tea the way we do or not. Ours is an attitude of service: we have cooked this meal. It is free. You can have some, whether just a tomato or some of every dish. Take as much as you like. Also, should you wish to cook food like us, and share it with others freely like us, we will also teach you our cooking methods. In other words, we practice certain brewing methods and an approach to tea, but you don't have to share our approach or brew tea like us in order to share tea with us, whether we're serving you or you are serving us.

One trend that we would like to see more in mainstream tea expos is a promotion of more sustainable, organic tea farming. No matter what you love about the Leaf, from the catechins and flavonoids to the flavors and aromas, from the peace and presence to the beautiful teapots—whatever you love in these leaves got into them through the stem, the branch, the trunk and roots, sun and earth. How do you love a leaf without loving Nature?

At least in our love for tea we can sit together and share. We all got to cultivate some of this humility, and not a hypocritical humility where we think we are the best tradition because we are the “humble ones” but a true openness

to connect and learn from Chajin who approach tea differently than we do. Hopefully, we shared some of our spirit with them as well.

While tea expos still aren't our favorite place to be around tea, we still had a great day. We found some novel teas and made some new friends, and laughed together with a few old ones. One of the highlights of the trip was meeting Mr. Lin Yi San, who so generously donated this month's tea to all of us. His kindness and love of sharing shone through right away, and sharing tea with him was worth the trip alone. When we told him about Global Tea Hut, his eyes lit up and he said, “Sharing is what tea is all about. It's why I do this!” Even in an expo, the spirit of tea shines through!









# WHEN SOMETIMES IT SEEMS HOPELESS

Steve Kokker

We can very roughly divide the information which reaches us daily into two gross categories: Those Which Make Me Happy & Excited To Be Alive, and Very Depressing Things. As a result, we tend to feel either optimistic or pessimistic, depending on what kind of info reaches us (or on our interpretation of that info). My real challenge—and I can see that others share this challenge—is how to incorporate such seemingly opposite polarities of ‘factual’ information in a healthy way. Can our brains operate on anything other than a good/bad switch? Is our world, the future and life in general either peachy keen or going to Hell in a handbasket? Should we just shut out all negative info?

After whining and bad-mouthing Facebook for a long time, I am now one of those who checks it five times a day (five however, not fifty—not a typo). I tell myself that I only use it for my business or as an email substitute, but I do scroll down my homepage to see what Facebook thinks I want to hear about and what it has decided to show me. I think I have subscribed to some pretty cool pages, see. They keep me plugged in to the type of news that matters to me. I’m no slave to the big news agencies like CNN and BBC and their filtered versions of this planet’s realities. No way, not me. I choose the news I receive, so there! I just, for example, chose to ignore the link to “Freakishly long eye-lashes in 7 Days!” and watched an inspiring video called *The Nature of The True Self*. See? We really do have control of the info we access on Facebook and Google. What a relief!

Yet links such as these lead me either to life-affirming proof that things are really improving in amazing, exciting ways on the planet or to those which suggest that we are in a devastating free fall and just don’t see it. On a down-to-earth level, most of us shift to some degree from days when all appears sunny and amazing to others when all seems bleak and hopeless. Therefore, such a dichotomy seems familiar, logical. And yet, as with every dichotomy, this one too will be proved false. We humans aren’t great at accommodating seemingly contradictory viewpoints, but we may have to develop this talent pretty quickly. If we don’t, we may find that either living in la-la land or in fatalistic apathy doesn’t necessarily produce the most beneficial results. Can’t both kinds of info spur us to positive action?

## *Sunshine and Angels*

Exposing myself daily to a limited amount of ‘what’s happening out there’ (say, 15 to 30 minutes a day) inspires me with renewed vigor to play a part in this exciting

world we live in. I like being part of a world which encourages Free Hugs, where cute babies smile when hearing beautiful music, where nice people make nice videos about being nice to others and about how positive thinking has a different energetic frequency than negative thinking. I like hearing about Indigo children being born in the last decade or so who seem to be as if from other, wiser dimensions and may not have to sludge through the mud of ego-building in order to understand the fundamentals of life on this planet as humans.

I love reading the stories which seem to point to an awakening of our consciousness as a species, which emphasize a wider acceptance and understanding of the non-duality of Nature. There are now so many great sites (netinetimedia.com is but one) which seem to indicate that an understanding of our connection with a life source greater than ourselves is not the sole domain of scattered philosophers with suspect hairdos, arcane thinkers, hard-to-reach (or expensive to pay for) spiritual gurus or even that freaky acid-head down the street. People seem to be more conscious about what they put into their bodies, and about the consequences their actions have on the environment and others. This is the New Earth in its nascent form, during its beginning, awkward steps, and how exciting to be a tiny part of it!

I am also a believer that technology and science can play a large role in our development as a species, and while I have relatively little enthusiasm about technological advancement in my daily, private life, I do get giddy with excitement that our species has come up with, for example, a machine that paraplegics can control with their mind power alone. I love the fact that ‘our’ Voyager I has just exited our Solar System into interstellar space and has sent images like the famed ‘little blue dot’ which give us much-needed perspective on our existence. The human is a natural explorer, and technology at its best expands our ‘natural’ characteristics; going the opposite way from deep space, James Cameron recently became the first human to plunge to the deepest part of our ocean in a cool-looking machine, and likely saw creatures stranger than any residing in Voyager’s path.

It was a teary moment when I read about some experiments made by Chinese and American scientists which showed how plants like tomatoes and beanstalks ‘speak’ to each other via the fungi in their soil, to alert each other of attack, for example. Science can prove to our minds what our hearts already know about the symbiosis of all things. There’s room for that in our lives, not as a replacement for spiritual matters but as fellow travelers. Do we really need science to ‘prove’ what is deeply ‘obvious’ to sensitive beings





and meditators? Sometimes, yes. And technology can help turn into reality the best aspects of some spiritual realizations—check out the new technologies making it easier to build environmentally-friendly homes, for example. And there's no denying very simplistic 'cool factors' which just make life on the planet a bit neater and friendlier, like the machine in Moscow subways which dispenses free tickets to those who perform 30 squats in front of it!

Although I don't want to eat GMOs, I'm thrilled that some genetically modified silkworms can spin a material stronger than steel and that worm farms may one day replace steel mills. I think it's great that psychedelics are being studied in the treatment of depression and addiction in major universities. I am grateful to the technological media which bring me news of how, say, thousands of meditators created measurable vibrational changes and which give me the freedom to publicly post about our local tea gatherings. And frankly, I do love seeing how the stars look like from the other side of the planet with my iPad Mini's Night Sky app., which I can turn on with its voice recognition program.

Sometimes things can seem so amazing on the burgeoning New Earth that if I listen to *Thinking of You* by Sister Sledge after pondering such things, the unfathomable bliss of being alive, today, on this planet is almost overwhelming and I'm driven to go out into the world and spread all the good news and tickle people! That very human part of me to continue, to go further, to push ahead in a very positive way becomes activated and I am energized. Everything is really and truly fine on Planet Earth.

## ***Demons and Depression***

Yet for every time Eckhart Tolle TV, as well as my teashop clients indicate to me that, wow, we really do seem to be in the midst of a consciousness awakening, all it takes is an open-eyed walk around the block, or a quick check-in to Fox News, or to read a few YouTube user comments to be reminded that, well, not everyone seems to be united in their consciousness with the source of all things and acting for the benefit of humankind. Including myself much of the time.

There are times when the same sources of info which point to our bettering as a species also bring other more 'sobering' news—the kind which makes one feel such a deep sadness for the future. Let's forget about all the Illuminati stuff, the Zeitgeist films, though those are sobering enough and likely truer than we'd prefer to believe. Yet if we focus only on one of the supposedly impending catastrophes on its way, things seem bleak indeed for our future. We can choose between staggering rises in sea levels, over-population (itself perhaps just a ruse used to perpetuate forced sterilization in the near future), and economic or environmental collapse. Take for example the conservative estimates about rising sea levels over the next decades or centuries. This could result in panic and disruption, social unrest and unfathomable expenditure on a scale that might arrest much of our 'advancement' in order to allocate resources to survival. Western humans have for many generations had the luxury of relative wealth, leisure and comfort to devote extra time to 'spiritual' matters. Many

## *When Sometimes it Seems Hopeless*

have wasted this luxury, this bonus time, on more self-serving activities. What if struggle for survival takes up time and effort to such an extent that such luxuries will no longer be an option?

Or we can consider the Fukushima nuclear reactor situation. Just this one factor could instigate massive social changes which will change life on Planet Earth as we know it. As I write, the News (which must be searched for, it is not covered so openly), even if exaggerated, reports that over 300 tons of radioactive water is dumped daily into the ocean. Many reports of heightened radiation levels on the entire west coast of North America have already been noted as well as hundreds of irregularities in the Pacific Ocean. There is very cogent talk of not only the abandonment of Tokyo, but also potentially of much of Japan, even the entire western coastline of North America and the eventual 'death' (for at least centuries or a few millennia) of the entire Pacific Ocean. Couple that with reports of staggering drops of fish stock in that ocean in the last decade alone from reckless and brutal over-fishing and pollution, plus some of the most heart-breaking images we could imagine coming from Midway Island, and we get an impossible-to-comprehend picture of a situation on our planet which might be catastrophic for hundreds of millions of people. That 'Mad Max scenario' of the future does not seem impossible at all, and it might take much less than we think to tip the balance irrevocably.

Even if a clean up of Fukushima will take place (which could take up to four decades to complete successfully and is up against staggering odds—just one more large earthquake and the resulting explosion from the crippled reactor as it implodes could change the way every human on earth lives), the contamination from what has already been released from there might have staggering consequences to our future as a species.

When one contemplates these (and many other very real socio-ecological dangers), it's hard to get excited about improved sales of Hybrids and the heart-chakra-opening seminar at the local Wellness Center. When I read about a future where chips are implanted into humans to inject the Internet into our bodies so we merge with machines in a way that we'll always be wired, it's hard to put a cosmological spin on what Alan Watts said about humans being, deep down, 'the fabric and structure of existence itself.' It's easier to believe what Alan Watt (no 's' this time) speaks about humans as ever-more controlled units of those in real power.

When we look around and see Big Brother coming to life every day a bit more vibrantly, and when we realize the injustice and lack of respect for life which continue on massive scales, it might seem like a denial of reality to hum along to Snam Kaur's lyrics or see the value in making a kind gesture to someone who has insulted you. Sometimes it seems that all those positive developments on Planet Earth might be coming too little too late: that just as humanity appears on some levels to be figuring things out, we might be swept into some kind of Dark Ages.

It might be just as likely, however, were such cataclysms to occur, that humanity would be pushed onto the fast-track towards (sorry to use this much-abused term) enlightenment. If we really had to choose between keeping our species alive or just maintaining personal safety and comfort, I'd like to think we'd do the right thing. We all know how easy it is to just laze around in Comfort Zones until some "crisis" occurs which kicks our butts into motion and gets us to do some pretty cool stuff. Similarly, if we were collectively pushed into a corner, we might be less likely to check our Facebooks, tweet, waste a potentially intimate moment with a friend talking about nonsense or worrying about how we look, or putting off Stepping Up To The Plate and dancing the dance that the Universe would like from us.

## *Plunge or Hide?*

So is 'depressing' news just worth switching off all the time? If you're overly sensitive or prone to apathy, then yes. While I in general agree that one should limit one's exposure to 'news' and depressing doomsday reports, I can't advocate slipping into willful blindness or ignorance and never reading any news source, blocking exposure to what's happening outside of our little bubbles—unless you are unsure how to incorporate that emotionally into your daily reality. I am 100% for surrounding oneself with positivity in the form of persons, music and actions, and think it's beneficial to keep one's spirits oriented positively by exposing oneself to more hopeful or fun stimulation. Yet it's not the news sources themselves which are to blame. As with anything, it is never the thing (in this case technology, or news) but how one uses it.

If one follows Fukushima reports daily to feed a dark, pessimistic or fearful part of one's self, or to look for some conviction that we're all doomed, then that's unlikely to help make you a better listener to your lover when he/she needs it. If you can handle it, though, that same news might make you appreciate the preciousness of our lives and a much deeper listener for your beloved. Moreover, were everyone to live in rose-colored versions of the world, where everything is just peachy, we'd possibly be missing some practical muscle-power and determination to see where there are real issues to improve—face the facts and get to work.

If even some of that "depressing stuff" is true, isn't that better reason to act in a way that really counts? Isn't that the perfect reason to treat your ego like a snotty-nosed, whining little kid and wipe it clean, dress it up and tell it to behave? If we're on the verge of becoming a human-techno species which can effect a right click with a wink of an eye or call our friends by doing an *udiyana banda*, isn't today the perfect day to bring a little gift to a friend or call someone and sing them your rendition of *Thank You For Being A Friend*? If we're all going to be controlled by corporations one day, force-fed GMOs, and dealing with mass extinc-





tions or exterminations, is that any reason for hunching one's shoulders and burying one's head? It's indeed more reason to go out and add value today, right now!

## Happy Chinese New Year

No news is objectively negative, even the really bad stuff. As Joni Mitchell sagely intimated in her brilliant song *Bad Dreams*, we could remind ourselves as we think despondently about the spectacular mess we have made of our home, that “Bad dreams are good in the great plan.” Impossible, even when it seems so blatant, to label something—anything—as “good” or “bad”. Today's nightmares may turn out to be tomorrow's saviors. It may be through the bleakness that we find our salvation.

When I read about the more depressing (many would say realistic) prognoses for our species, far from eliciting hopeless inaction in me it actually spurs me on to more positive action, even limited action on a tiny scale. It has made me, in recent days for example, call someone over to share some tea, send notes and texts of open-hearted love and thanks, to give extra attention to those in need at our teashop, to infuse extra enthusiasm into organizing tea gatherings and meetings, etc. Coming to terms with some at least potential scenarios for our civilization can spur us into action, similar to finding out that we have only a year left to live. Lives and priorities could be reorganized pretty quickly then. Yet the truth is always thus: Do we ever have time to waste?

Sure, no sense in forcing things to happen before their time—all things in their own time and place—but we also know our tendency to delay, put off, be lazy or blind.

Funny how some cold water to the face can instantly wash away complacency or the belief that one must wait for that ever-elusive “right time” to do this or that. Reading about Fukushima might make me not feel like piddling around at home so long today, but instead stop in to see the *babushkas* downstairs and say a friendly, “Hello!”

The truth is none of us have that much time left, no matter how much time we have left—as individuals or as a species. Sobering reminders of this do not have to drag us down into negative apathy; if that happens it's our choice to let it happen, not the fault of the messenger. Instead, we can take a cue from the classic song *Is That All There Is* by Peggy Lee (yes, my last pop cultural reference for this article): “For if that's all there is, then let's keep dancing...” There's sleep enough in the grave, let's use whatever time left to make the best of it, to make a difference, to add value—dance a bit...

So, my ultimately not-so-bleak-after-all Year of the Horse message is to continue doing good in whatever way you do best. For many readers of this newsletter, it will mean not putting off calling people over for a nice tea session, be it a silent one or punctuated by laughs. All of us by now know how to offer the gift of space, time and attention to others through our tea habits. We're tea people (*Chajin*), we spread good via tea. We've all seen the small miracles and know that most of those miracles are not restricted to the tea space but spread out far beyond it. We can keep exposing ourselves to what's going on this planet of ours, the “good” and the “bad”, and let both fuel our desire to help make the situation better!





## BAISAO PART II: THE LATER YEARS

Nick Dilks

A couple of months ago, we left Baisao, our old tea-seller friend, in his 'Snail's Dwelling' shop on Fushimi bridge and wandered, slightly tea-giddy, through the bustling streets of eighteenth century Kyoto. He had entertained us with stories of his early life as we supped, his kind face beaming across the table.

His demeanor had turned earnest and a little pensive as he spoke about his decision to sell Tea whilst still a member of the Buddhist clergy. It was violating an important Buddhist precept that prohibited priests from earning a living. His eyes had moistened a little. He was supposed to live from begging food and donations, but he had found the latter too much of a compromise. He spoke of the priests he had seen "seeking greedily in every way and at every opportunity to obtain donations from lay followers." His head had shaken: "When they are successful they toady to their new benefactors, wagging their tails and showing more respect and devotion than they do their teachers or their parents." Often too, the lay-people's donations came with subtle (or unsubtle!) pressures. It had not been an easy decision to go against his tradition. He had even tried accepting no donations for many years, but had nearly starved to death on several occasions. So, in the end, Baisao had decided that it was more tainted to receive impure donations than to handle the meager money that he earned himself from Tea.

We remembered the conversation vividly. Baisao had turned to us like a child with his toothless grin: "Now, with the money customers leave me, I am able to purchase small amounts of rice that keep me alive and enable me to pursue a way of life that satisfies my deepest longings." He had laughed: "People regard tea selling as one of the meanest occupations on earth. What they despise, I value immensely. It is a life that gives me great joy." Inspired, he had spontaneously burst into a poem as he poured another bowl of Tea for us:

*Set out to transmit  
the teachings of Zen  
revive the spirit  
of the old masters  
settled instead for a tea-selling life.  
Honor, disgrace  
don't concern me  
the coins that gather  
in the bamboo tube  
will stop Poverty  
from finishing me off.*

Baisao had certainly come to the right place to immerse himself in Tea and Nature. The Jesuit priest, João Rodrigues, who had spent nearly four decades in the capital just before Baisao was born, wrote:

*The people of Kyoto take much pleasure in lonely and nostalgic spots, woods and shady groves, cliffs and rocky places, solitary birds, torrents of fresh water flowing down from rocks, and in every kind of solitary thing which is imbued with Nature and freedom from all artificiality . . . On going out of the city one sees everywhere the loveliest and most delightful countryside of all Japan . . . Many people go and recreate in the woods and groves of the outskirts . . . every day crowds of people from the city enjoy themselves there.*

Over the years, Baisao moved his base a lot. Before long, he began setting up shop near temples and scenic spots. He transported his tea gear, including a heavy brazier, in two large bamboo baskets at the end of a balancing pole on his shoulder. Once at his destination, he would spread out a thick paper mat toughened by persimmon juice tanning, and put up a banner adorned with the words "Pure Breeze". He would then make Tea for other Nature-seekers and often compose poems with them to commemorate the occasion. He would continue selling Tea only until the tiny sum of twenty *sen* had accumulated in his offertory tube, then the Tea was free for all. A typical encounter is described in *Opening up Shop in a Grove Before Hoju-ji*:

*In a grove of tall bamboo, by an ancient temple  
steam rolls from the brazier in fragrant white clouds;  
I show you a path that leads you straight to Sagehood  
can any of you understand the lasting taste of spring?*

Often too, Baisao would seek out beautiful spots to be alone, as in *Going to Make Tea at Shin Hasedera*:

*Footing it eastward  
over Duck River  
urged along by  
the autumn wind  
I sit alone with  
my bamboo baskets  
feeding the fire  
with autumn leaves.  
Pines thresh  
up at the summit  
shrilling quietly  
inside the brazier  
gentle voice of*





*the Great Being  
resonating deep  
within my heart.*

Baisao's Tea furnishings must have been viewed with great curiosity by his customers. Among the teapots, cups, braziers and other utensils were articles of great rarity, presumably obtained from Chinese priests and laymen residing in Japan. At the time, the word 'Tea' meant powdered *matcha* for most Japanese. Baisao, however, mainly served a new loose leaf variety that came to be known as *sencha*, a word that translates as "simmered tea" since most teas of this variety were boiled. This kind of tea was introduced by Chinese Buddhist priests in the late seventeenth century. (In more recent times, *sencha* has come to mean Japanese loose-leaf tea.)

We know from his poems that Baisao brewed more than one kind of Tea. His writings include mention of brewing Chinese loose-leaf Tea sent from his home in Hizen. And on many occasions he writes about using a loose-leaf Tea from Shiga. There are even allusions to a superior Chinese brick tea, flower-scented tea as well as Wuyi Cliff Tea. However, though he may have used imported leaves from China on occasion, he probably relied most heavily on the early versions of *sencha* that Japanese farmers were starting to produce at the that time. When this process was perfected later in Baisao's life, the results were a beautiful jade-green colored Tea with a wonderfully sweet flavor that could easily be brewed in a teapot. It is this Japanese Green Tea that Baisao is credited with introducing to the capital.

At sixty-six, Baisao returned to his native province, Hizen, to obtain a special permit for all who roamed outside its borders. Whilst there, he officially resigned his position in the priesthood and returned to lay status. He took on the name, Ko Yugai, a combination of his family name, *Ko* meaning 'high' or 'lofty' in the sense of a person of lofty pursuits, and *Yugai* meaning 'roaming beyond the world'. Around this time, he composed the following verse from *Three Verses on a Tea-Selling Life*:

*I'm not Buddhist or Taoist  
not a Confucianist either  
I'm a brown-faced white-haired old man.  
People think I just prowls  
the streets selling tea,  
I've got the whole universe  
in this tea caddy of mine.*

As Baisao approached the last decade of his life, there is evidence in his poems that his austere Zen practice was beginning to reap rewards. As he comments in *Composed in a Dream*:

*Pain and poverty  
Poverty and pain  
life stripped to the bone  
absolute nothingness  
only one thing left  
a bright cold moon  
in the midnight window  
illuminating a Zen mind  
on its homeward way.*

## Baisao Part II: The Later Years

Such utterances of a Zen nature begin now to appear more frequently in Baisao's poetry. In fact, at some point in his seventies, the man who had said he was not cut out to be a Zen teacher had a change of heart and started taking on a handful of students. His poems now become full of references that the Insights of Zen were becoming his own. In *Admonitions for Myself* he states:

*Your life is a shadow  
lived inside a dream,  
Once realized  
'self' and 'other' vanish.  
Pursue fame, the glory  
of a prince won't suffice;  
Take a step or two back  
a gourd dipper's all you need.  
No matters in the mind  
passions quiet themselves  
Mind freed from matter  
means suchness everywhere.  
The moment these truths  
are grasped as your own  
the mind opens and clears  
like the empty void above.*

And in *Written for the Wall of Master Shinsan's Study* he reminisces:

*There are times sitting  
idly at the open window  
I reach the hidden depths  
of the immortal sages,  
times, rambling free,  
beyond the floating world  
I ascend to the heights  
of the wise men of old.*

At the advanced age of eighty, the combination of declining physical strength and recurring back pain made it impossible for Baisao to continue selling Tea outdoors. Poignantly, he took his favorite carrying basket, *Senka*, ("Lair of Sages"), two of his bamboo offertory tubes, and a small flat piece of bamboo root he had carved into a tray for his teapot, and burnt them in a fire outside his dwelling. The eulogy he composed serves as a great example of how we could value our own precious teaware:

*Senka is the name of the bamboo basket in which I put my tea equipment when I carry it from place to place. I've been solitary and poor ever since I can remember. Never had a place of my own, not even space enough to stick an awl into. Senka, you have been helping me out a long time now. We've been together to the spring hills, beside the autumn streams, selling tea under the pine trees and in the deep shade of the bamboo groves. Thanks to you, I have been able to eke out the few grains of rice to keep me going past the age of eighty. But I've grown so old and feeble I no longer have the strength to make use of you... I shall go off... and wait for the end. After I die, I don't think*

*you'd want the indignation of falling into worldly hands, so I am eulogizing you and then I will commit you to the Fire Samadhi.*

From then on, Baisao could only sell a little Tea in his shop. But, because of his growing fame, his calligraphy became sought after, and he was able to earn a little supplementary money selling inscriptions, some of which still exist today. Having said that, there were periods where he nearly starved, and at times he was only able to survive through the gifts of friends. Indeed, his back incapacitated him for the whole of his eighty-first year. But it wasn't all doom and gloom. Resilient to the end, he still apparently enjoyed excursions with friends viewing maple trees, climbing the small hills behind his dwelling, brewing Tea in distant Arashiyama, and moon-viewing until after midnight with a poet friend. As he says in a poem of the time:

*Trudging eastward long ago  
callow youth of twenty-two  
I see I've come full circle now  
a sheep-ox year once more.  
Eighty-three springs on me  
moving in a timeless realm  
sauntering the Way at leisure  
a goosefoot staff in hand.*

Baisao finally passed away at eighty-eight. In a scene straight out of a movie, apparently his friends were able to hurriedly print a collection of his writings and press the book into his hands as he lay dying. The volume is the now famous *Baisao Gego* (*Verses and Prose by the Old Tea Seller*). Many of the dying man's friends had become leading figures in the cultural flowering of this period in Kyoto.

One of his final calligraphy inscriptions still exists today. On it, Baisao's insight and humor are as clear as ever:

*Going far away to China  
to seek the sacred shoots  
Old Esai brought them back  
sowed them in our land.  
Uji tea has a taste infused  
with Nature's own essence  
a pity folks only prattle  
about its color and scent.*

Next month, in the final of my three pieces on the Tea-sage from Kyoto, I have the good fortune to be interviewing Wu De about Baisao's connection with our own Tea tradition.









# WHAT IS A TEA TRADITION?

## WHAT IS THIS TRADITION ABOUT?

Many people will ask us what a Tea tradition looks like, and what our tradition is about. We should be able to articulate a simple, cogent and powerful answer—one that offers greater depth should we wish to explain more. We realize that ambiguity about our common goals frustrates our ability to achieve them together. As a result, we are able to state clearly what our organization is founded upon as well as our future together. This will also be the legacy we leave behind for future Tea lovers with the same interests.

Before expressing the foundation of our work together, it should be made clear that we are an open tradition. We are non-sectarian, and do not promote any worldview, philosophy or religious views—only our approach to Tea. Our community is global, and includes people from all walks of life, each with different ideas about the world and how to live in it. We have realized that a brighter future for this planet is dependent on more cooperation between all the different peoples, recognizing our common truths and ways we can work towards the mutual happiness of our species: both those who are alive now, as well as the unborn who will inherit the world we leave them. We all love kindness and believe in a healthy, happier earth. We work towards connecting people in heart space rather than dividing them in their minds. Rather than changing minds, we seek to open hearts. We appreciate that our circle is connected to all the other circles, small and large, hoping to have a positive effect on the entire web. Ultimately, our tradition is like a department in one large company called “Earth”, and our goals should not just further the happiness and prosperity of our members, but help promote a brighter world for everyone now and in the future.

Similarly, we do not endorse any particular insights that arise from drinking Tea. We recognize that the alchemy that occurs between Tea and any given individual is unique, and that the lessons and insights that help guide them are their own truths, to be held up as such. You might say that we provide the space to meet the great ambassador from Nature to humans, Tea, and a bit of the etiquette you’ll need to spend time together, but the topics you’ll discuss and what you will learn will be entirely up to you.

We are dedicated to promoting, cultivating and expressing an awakening of harmony through Tea. We believe that Tea wisdom which has no connection to any financial motivation, good or bad, is very necessary in this modern world and therefore strive to build schools, centers and other

Tea spaces in the true, ancient spirit of Tea—leaves, water and wisdom shared out of love and towards connection with Mother Earth, ourselves and each other.

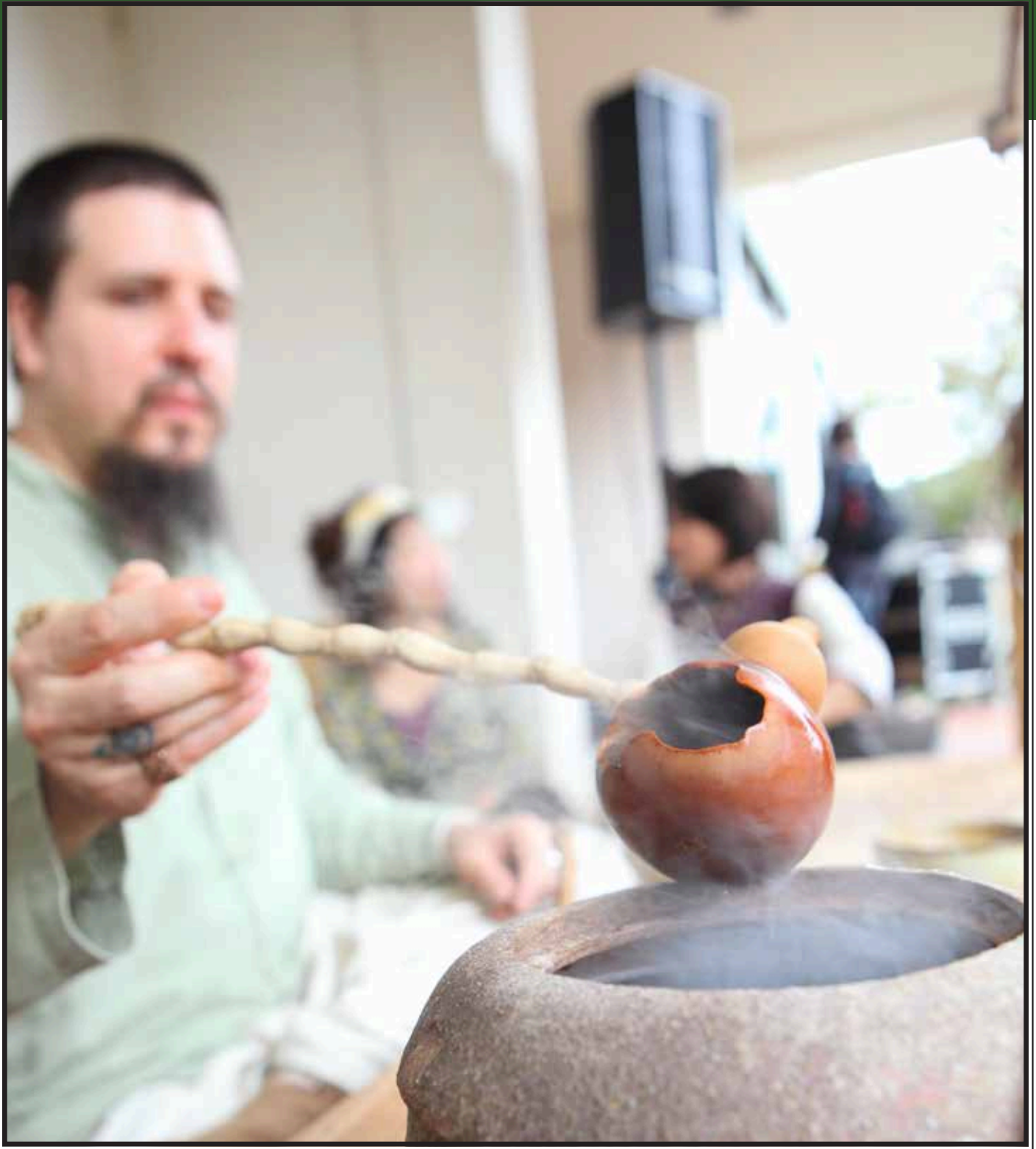
We see this tradition very simply, as three easy to understand principals. Each one can be expressed in a sentence, or expanded upon for hours given the circumstances. Understanding the principles that bind us as a community will make us stronger, and bring form to our current and future goals:

1) ***This tradition is our brewing methods.*** We have these ways of preparing Tea and the reasons that we use them. Our aim is not to compare them to other ways of preparing Tea or to declare them the best. They are ours, and they work. That they work for us is enough. We realize that many people in the world brew Tea in many different ways, and that there is power in them all. We don’t take pride in our brewing methods because they are better than others, but because they are *ours*—the ones handed down to us—and because they work. They are each worth a lifetime of study and practice, and each suits a particular aspect of Tea: gongfu for grace and finer Tea, bowl Tea for meditation, simplicity, in offering friendship, as well as mindfulness.

2) ***This tradition is in our approach to Tea, as Nature, plant medicine and self-cultivation.*** Our approach to Tea is also what binds us together as a community. Realizing that Tea is a leaf grown in the mountains, we see that it is Nature and are full of respect and love. Recognizing that Tea is plant medicine, we see that Tea can heal people, body and soul. And we also approach Tea as an aspect of self-cultivation. Tea can help us to cultivate ourselves, and then amazingly be a means of expressing our insights to others nonverbally. Without words or concepts, there is no agreement or disagreement, only heart space. We do not learn to *make* Tea, but rather to *serve* it. There are many approaches to Tea in the world—some people drink Tea as a beverage, some for pure enjoyment. We acknowledge these aspects of Tea as well, and are happy to just enjoy some tea now and again, though our primary approach is one of Nature, plant medicine, self-cultivation as well as sharing heart space with our fellows.

3) ***This tradition is a community.*** Most importantly, this tradition is a group of people, each with their own lives, their own relationship to Tea, truth and insights, and each one with a unique value. As these methods of brewing and approach to Tea were handed down to us, this tradition connects us to previous Tea lovers, Tea sages and teachers; and as we hand it down, we will travel with it to future





generations as well. We are, therefore, a group of people who practice these brewing methods, along with the approach mentioned above, and do so together. We create Tea family: bonds of support and love to help each other in our Tea journey and in our lives. Our communities should have no “us” and “them”, no “inner” and “outer” as we hope to foster connection amongst all people towards common goals of loving-kindness, and a greener, happier world. We aim

to build Tea communities, centers and schools that train people in our brewing methods, our approach to Tea and to serve Tea in a heart space to their greater, surrounding societies.



# Tea Whyfarer

*Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you 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. This month we would like to introduce the mad man from Down Unda', who brings so much joy to our center, Sam Gibb.*

People look at me funny in Taiwan... Actually, people look at me funny everywhere. I don't know why this is, but I have compiled a list of possible reasons:

- 1) Long hair that only gets washed or brushed three times a year (three is an auspicious number they tell me).
- 2) The scraggly beard with old foodstuffs and Puerh-like micro climates.
- 3) I am barefoot in a number of socially inappropriate situations.
- 4) I grew up upside-down, on the other side of the world from most of you—in New Zealand—causing the blood to rush to my head.

Looking at this list you may think: "Oh, this guy sounds like a hippie." I'm not, though the customs officer in Kuala Lumpur called me that on the way home from Taiwan.

Eight months ago, Taiwan would have been one of the last places on earth I would have pictured myself visiting (America is at the bottom of that list but that is mainly due to legal restrictions—something to do with reason four mentioned above, I believe). And yet, in the last four months I have been to Taiwan twice, with a third trip already planned....

*What changed? What draws me deeper into this tradition? Why is the work of this Global Tea Hut so important?*

The first of these questions is easy to answer: I found Tea. And you know what I am talking about.

Why am I drawn to this tradition is the approach. I'm less interested in the external aspects of Tea—the pots, the types, the growing regions (although if you saw me on a trip to Yingge you might think otherwise)—as I am to the Tao of Tea, the insights, growth and connection it offers. Because I am starting to sound like a "NASG (New Age Sensitive Guy)" as we say Down Unda', I will move on. Suffice it to say, like you all, I think Tea is pretty dang swell.

The second reason I am drawn to this tradition is Wu De and the connection I feel to him and his teachings... Basically he keeps it real. Mad real. I also feel connected to the love and service expressed through the

actions of the Tea Sage Hut community. To me service is the highest spiritual path and the Hut community focuses strongly on this aspect of life.

The final reason bridges to my third question of why the work of this Global Tea Hut is so important. I believe in the vision and path of this tradition and Tea as a whole: No dogma, no sectarian views—just service and love experienced in a bowl. And that's something that can be shared; that's something that can build bridges and heal wounds.

In a world of rapid population growth, decreasing resources, increasing disparity of wealth, religious dogma and materialism, such healing is exactly what we need. Tea offers us common ground to connect beyond the delusions of our minds. It is a place to meet beyond our surface differences. Tea offers the experience of peace beyond words, ideas and concepts. To me, that is why it is so important, and that is why it is so needed in the world.





## *Our goals/plans for the coming year:*

- Increase membership to 2,000 by January 1st, 2015
- Save enough to break ground in 2015, hire an architect, begin building, etc.
- Incorporate Global Tea Hut in Taiwan so that we can offer visas to volunteers

## *Ways in which Global Tea Hut will improve once we get closer to our goal of 2,000 members:*

- At 500 members, we will switch to a full color magazine.
- At 1000 members, we will start traveling more in order to research articles on tea, teaware and also source new and different organic teas. This will also allow us to connect organic farmers to each other.
- At 1500 members, we will start translating modern and ancient Chinese, and to a lesser extent Japanese tea wisdom, to English.

## *Ways in which you can help:*

- Use social media to help promote our videos, links and membership to Global Tea Hut. Help us by making more of an effort to share it online!
- Share each month's tea with friends. Show them the newsletter and tell them that the magazine and the teas are improving as the membership increases. Tell them we need 2000 members this year to begin construction on the world's best free tea center.
- Discuss Global Tea Hut with people you know, and try your best to get one member a month to join. If everyone does that, we can achieve our goals quickly and together!



## *Center News*

- Colin "the Hudonator" Hudon took precepts on 1/9! His tea name is *Qing Yu* (清愚), which means "Clear Fool". On the surface, it means "clearing away foolishness"; deeper still it expresses the essential Daoist ideal of a wise, but simple life; and finally, for those of us who know Qing, he is sometimes "clearly a fool". Still, we can call him "Qing" most days...
- Wu De will be in LA from 3/18 to 4/1 doing workshops, and some larger events. All the proceeds will go to the new tea center that is opening there!
- From now on, we will be posting videos every month with each new magazine! We hope to include some more info about the teas, as well as some brewing tips. Please feel free to contact us at [www.globalteahut.org](http://www.globalteahut.org) with any questions we can answer for you.
- We are offering a free month of GTH to new subscribers. Older members will also get the chance to give away a free month in the coming year in the anniversary month of when you signed up.
- As you can see, GTH is going through lots of changes in an effort to reach a larger audience, and thereby raise the necessary funds to build our new center. We absolutely need and adore your feedback!



## *Our Projects*

### **Tea Sage Hut**

This is our current center, located in Miaoli, Taiwan. Each year, we host over two hundred visitors from all around the world. At the Tea Sage Hut, guests come and drink tea, eat vegetarian food and have a bed should they need it. We have weekly tea classes and daily meditation sessions each morning and evening. We also help coordinate travel around Taiwan and put guests in touch with tea farmers, tea and teaware shops and events. All instruction, room and board, and hugs are free. We operate on a donation basis, and guests are free to leave as much or as little as they like for future guests, knowing that their visit was supported by past guests and hoping to pay the experience forward. For more information visit: [www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)

### **Future Center (Light Meets Life)**

In December of 2012, we were donated three acres of gorgeous land in the mountains of Da Hu, Taiwan. The land has a waterfall, sakura trees, cliffs, views and abundant verdure. Light Meets Life will be the name of our future, expanded center. It will be a great place to learn about and drink tea as well as to meditate. We plan to have an ecological, organic tea garden for educational purposes and a communal farm to grow our own food. Our new center will be run on similar principals to that of the Tea Sage Hut, only on a larger scale.

### **Publications**

- Translations of some Chinese texts for free distribution
- Printing of pamphlets and introductions for free distribution
- Wu De's books: *Faces of the Master*, *Tea Wisdom*, *Way of Tea* and *Zen & Tea One Flavor*