



Global Tea Hunt

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

May 2014



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Tea Wayfarer

Ivan Karushev, Russia

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Letter from the Editor

In May, the last of the world's spring tea is being plucked and processed, finished and brought to market. From the Great Nature beyond and nurtured through tea, each leaf is also brimming full of human energy: sweaty bandanas, dirty knees and deft fingers covered in tea oils. May is a good time for gratitude, recognizing all the hard work that generations of farmers have put into tea, extending back millennia. They have shaped the ancestry of the trees and adapted all the processing methodology that has allowed for the great variety of teas we enjoy today. Countless stems have been squeezed free from a thousand thousand trees, millions of leaves sorted and then shared. At any time, kettles stir to life the world over—each a celebration of all the hard work that has gone into Tea.

We raise our bowls to the blood of all the tea farmers buried in and around the tea gardens. Their bones are the roots of our tea. And to the present farmers, working sustainably to create eco-friendly tea, we also raise a bowl, bowing to their efforts to light the way in the name of a healthier relationship between the bowl and the earth. When we drink our tea with a complete awareness, there is a sense of satisfaction in the farmers' work—our contented smiles mirror theirs, both assured the tea has found the place where it belongs.

The hard work all the tea farmers are doing this month also reminds us that their influence doesn't end with the leaves; it continues on in all that we do. The writing, editing, packing and other work we put into these envelopes is indeed a continuation of the farmers' labors, and also in love. Then each of you fills a pot or a bowl, drinking these amazing teas together. In that way, all that you do is filled with the efforts and inspirations that motivate us at the Hut.

We are inspired by all the feedback we receive from you. We hope that we can continue to find ways to connect with all of you, and help you to help us grow this Hut. This month we started a new blog on our site, which we will update regularly with even more tea wisdom, inspiration, photos of sessions around the world and news of this community as it expands. We also hope to discover new ways to connect all of you to each other. This month some of our members decided to drink Global Tea Hut teas at the same time around the world, coordinating a session between three countries. We hope to see more such sessions and international connections in the future.

This month is our first international tea tour. We're traveling around Yunnan together with Global Tea Hut members from five countries. In the future, we hope to organize such gatherings on a larger scale, inviting all of you to join us. Such trips can be educational tours, combined with a wonderful opportunity to get to know tea



brothers and sisters from around the world. Do you have any other ideas for connecting Global Tea Hut members?

And as our community strengthens, and these magazines/teas improve, we honestly feel like this experience is reaching new heights every month. More and more people are telling us that Global Tea Hut is a very important part of their month, and as such we know that as you help us show it to others, membership will continue to increase and we will begin to build more, bigger and better tea centers and tea spaces, which will result in more tea community and fellowship, increased readership, and so on. But that doesn't mean that we feel like we have reached a plateau. In looking through this month's magazine, you will see that we have continued to work and grow. One of the most important ways that you can contribute to the expansion of our community is to give us feedback about the ways we can improve this experience for you and for future subscribers.

As more of these connections begin to spontaneously manifest, like the international session that happened last month, we have begun to envision a future in which Global Tea Hut inspires more and more community. There are already local groups meeting to share these teas every month in several countries, but we hope to inspire more and further connections between these groups. Then maybe we'll all look back at these bowls we've shared together as the beginning of amazing new travels, adventures and friendships...

AUTUMN 2013 WILD RED TEA FENG QING, YUNNAN, CHINA

As you can see, we've decided to start naming our teas—not to obscure the origin or the linear details about where these teas come from, which we'll still include in each issue, but to celebrate their uniqueness. This month's tea is called "Golden Vajra (*Jing Gang Chu*)". A vajra is an Eastern symbol of spiritual power, which fits this tea well.

We feel that these teas are rare and precious, and deserving of names. All the teas we source for this magazine are either living tea or organic plantation tea. We are committed to the ideal that this magazine support ethically produced, sustainable tea made by people who love tea and Nature. True, living tea is seed-propagated. The trees have room between them and are not pruned, since cutting the crown drastically reduces the roots. Living tea could also be called "garden tea", with less plants and huge biodiversity. Producers of living tea recognize the infinite connections a tree has with its environment, and that removing any cog in the natural ecology disrupts everything, including the tea. This means there are fewer tea trees and that they are indistinguishable from the wildlife around them, interacting with other plants, trees, snakes, insects, etc. Living tea trees are allowed to grow old, and are cared for and approached with respect for whatever amount of tea they offer us.

Many of the teas we offer each month are wild as well, which means they are a powerful representation of the forests they come from. One of the most important aspects of natural seed-propagation is that every tea seed makes a unique tree—and unique teas deserve a better name than just a category like "red tea". This creates diversity and promotes stronger and better trees. In fact, that is precisely why most industrial, plantation tea farmers don't seed-propagate: they use cuttings to clone bushes instead. They do this to achieve uniformity of flavor. Also if a farmer had eight hundred trees they would all have different needs and this would require more work. But in the wild, there is no added work—no fertilization or weeding, only biodiversity and a harvest based on what Nature provides. Sometimes this means that there's only one harvest a year, while other times (like our tea this month) there are autumn buds as well.

As we've discussed in many of these magazines, these mutated varieties coupled with all the different methods of tea processing makes categorization of many teas difficult, like last month's snow buds. Technically, they are processed like white tea (sun-dried), but they are from puerh trees, and very unique ones at that. The snow buds aren't like other white teas, as you surely have tast-

ed by now. This month's tea similarly crosses boundaries, which leaves you wondering whether to classify the tea by its processing methodology or by the trees it came from.

A lot of authors propose an oversimplified classification system based on the idea that all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in tea are all in the processing. There is some truth in that, but it's also misleading. All the processing methods developed over time, slowly, by farmers who lived and worked with local varieties exclusively. They advanced the different processing techniques in part by listening to the tea and in part by trial and error. Over time they worked out which processing techniques brought out the best in the varieties of tea native to their region. Oolong processing—the most complicated and skillful of all tea processing—was developed in Fujian to suit a particular kind of tea. And while it is true that we could process Wuyi Rou Gui leaves like a red or green tea, it would not be nearly as nice as such. So, as you can see, the kinds of tea were traditionally a bit more than just processing methodology, since processing techniques were specific to certain varieties of trees and terroir.

Nowadays, there is a lot of experimentation, resulting in a tremendous variety of teas. Most of the teas processed like other regions don't turn out so well, but sometimes you find a gem (like this month's tea) and have to wonder if that tea "wanted" to be processed that way. Technically, our tea of the month is a red tea from Yunnan, but it comes from wild Puerh trees that are usually processed as Puerh. We've had the Puerh from this region, and it is almost as nice as the red tea, but the red version has just a little more of a magical sparkle—as if something is unlocked in this processing.

With puerh tea, most of the quality is in the trees, not the processing, anyway. With oolong tea, at least half the quality of any given tea is in the craft of the tea maker and roaster (sometimes they are separate individuals). With puerh, however, it's all about the trees. Unlike other kinds of tea, you can't process a Taiwan tea like puerh and call it "puerh"—you can't process anything as puerh because puerh is a region, and to be a purest it is only old-growth trees from Yunnan. And since "puerh" is ninety-percent the trees, you can see why we feel that last month's tea is more puerh than white tea, and why this month's is also more puerh than red tea. Still, to stick to a classification based on processing, let's review a little about Yunnanese red tea, and red tea in general:

Red tea from Yunnan is often called "Dian Hong". "Dian" is an aboriginal word for Yunnan, so this just means, "Yunnan red". As we have often discussed, 'red tea' is what is often mistakenly called 'black tea' in the



A vajra is an ancient symbol for spiritual power

West. Ordinarily, a name doesn't matter so much and we wouldn't even take the time to correct this age-old mistake, and most vendors don't. But in this case there is an important issue that a Chajin (tea person) will face if this mistake isn't corrected: there is another genre of tea in China called "black tea". So if you call red tea "black", then what do you call black tea? The problem began because early trade between Chinese and Europeans was limited to the ports, and most merchants sailors didn't see the tea trees, farms or processing and learned what they knew through broken Pidgin English on the docks, often from Chinese merchants who didn't care to correct them. Actually, Europeans used to call Oolong tea "black tea" as well, probably because it has the word "black" in the name ("Oolong" means "Black Dragon").

Red tea is fully oxidized. It is picked and withered for a long time, sometimes with machines that blow hot air into large piles of tea. Our tea this month isn't withered with such machines, but rather naturally withered spread out on bamboo mats and initially only very briefly. After that, this tea is fried, which is a step that is completely atypical for red tea—closer to puerh tea. The tea is then rolled, further oxidizing it and breaking down the cells to release more fragrance and essence, but not as long or as deep as most red tea, which can be rolled for up to ninety minutes. Most red tea is roasted dry. After the brief withering, frying and rolling, Golden Vajra is withered again

for a long period of twenty-four hours to fully oxidize it. Finally, it is dried in a cool, shady spot indoors.

Making red tea is a simple process, and even though Yunnan is more famous nowadays for Puerh tea, it has been a region of red tea as well, at least for the last sixty years, producing as much or more red tea as other regions. In fact, Puerh's rise to fame is rather recent, and in Yunnan there have been years of more red tea by volume. But our red tea isn't a plantation tea, growing wild in the forest.

*An autumn dawn
dreaming of spring
ripens the sleeping forest
Green crests awaken
on the way to reds and golds*

*A spring dawn
dreaming of autumn
ripens our sleeping minds
Steaming bowls awaken
on the way to green forests*

—Wu De

Tea of the Month

This month's tea comes from the wild forests of Lincang, in Feng Qing County. The trees are between fifty and one hundred years old. They are protected trees sometimes used for puerh production, and are pure Assamica. Many of the red teas from Yunnan are hybrids that were pressured to produce more buds, making them "tippy", which makes the tea sweeter. If you recall, our tea of the month in January of this year was one such tea, from Wu Liang Mountain. This month's tea, however, is not tippy. There aren't as many buds, and together with the frying, this lends the tea a bit of the depth, Qi and astringency of a puerh. It also means that the tea would be an excellent candidate for aging.

It's semi-rare to get an autumn harvest from wild bushes. Autumn teas tend to be lighter, sweeter and lack the power of spring teas. However, as red tea, this makes the tea floral and bright. The aging from autumn till now has deepened the tea and brought out an orchid flavor, as well as a deeper Yang Qi. For that reason, you'll want to drink it in the morning, hopefully with some of the people you love most. At least all of us will be there with you...



Brewing this Month's Tea

Like last month's tea, this one is for us very much a bowl tea. Remember to follow your heart and brew the way you can, depending on your own teaware as well. Bowl tea is the oldest method of tea brewing on earth, dating back before the pyramids. We brew bowl tea for meditative stillness, simplicity and sharing space with people we care about. Bowl tea is also the simplest brewing method. Any small bowl will do, like a rice bowl for example, if you haven't got a tea bowl. Start by rinsing off your bowl with hot water. Then gently scatter a few of this month's leaves into the bottom of the bowl (three to four—or more if you like your tea stronger). Add some boiling water to the side of the bowl, dancing the leaves in a circle and carrying them under the water so they open up uniformly. Use water with small to medium-sized bubbles, rather than a full rolling boil. As you sip, try holding the bowl with two hands, centering yourself over it.

Some days, we also use a side-handle pot to decant this tea into bowls. Though it would be nice to be able to put all our leaves directly into the bowl as the ancients did, the variety of teas nowadays is much greater than ever before. Long ago, there wasn't much processing methodology, so all tea was simple and lent itself to the bowl or to boiling and then ladling into a bowl. Nowadays, there are so many kinds of tea that won't work in a bowl—teas that are compressed or that have small leaves that would be annoying in a bowl. For that reason, we use a side-handle pot to decant the tea into a bowl. The spirit of such sessions, however, is the same as if the leaves were in the bowl: simplicity, connection to Nature, etc. In the case of this month's tea, it can work directly in a bowl, but steeping it creates a different brew—less astringent and more bright. We like them both on different occasions.

Since we drink this month's tea directly from the bowl and poured from a side-handle pot both, this may be a good time to offer you another tip: choose the right tea and the right utensils for the right occasion. This month's tea, for example, would be great in the morning, as it is uplifting. You can choose to make it in a bowl or with a pot depending on what day it is, who your guests are, what the weather is like (directly in a bowl is nicer when it is cold out) and even based on whether you and your guests have eaten breakfast yet (leaves in the bowl are lighter/less intense). Maybe try both?

(There is a video up on our YouTube channel demonstrating side-handle pot tea. You can watch it at: <http://bit.ly/1hQROHp>)



Willi O
Stark

WATER FOR TEA

NICK HUDIS

The day the clocks change to British summer Time dawns foggy and chilly. I'm not up particularly early and it is mid-morning by the time I am at the entrance to Jesmond Dene with Lexi the Collie.

Jesmond Dene is a remarkable place, a deep wooded valley in the heart of the bustling northern city of Newcastle, which was preserved for the community by the 19th century philanthropist Lord Armstrong. Walking into the Dene is like stepping out of the city into the wilds, and also like stepping back in time. It is a magical place.

Today the Dene is mist shrouded—the tops of the tall trees lost in the fog. There is something oriental about the steamy scenery. In the fog, the veil is thinner and trees and rocks seem half nascent, half sinking back into the unknowable, formless realm. The crocuses and snowdrops have come and gone, but a scattering of wood anemones and primroses, the first greening of the trees, the chirping of songbirds and the occasional drilling of a woodpecker reminds that spring is well underway.

We follow zigzag paths to the valley floor where the Ouseburn gushes its way down to the Tyne. The paths are busy with Sunday morning dog walkers and runners. Today I am on a mission and instead of the familiar route along the burn; I seek a path I've not taken before that climbs steeply up the other side of the valley. Lexi is puzzled. She keeps running ahead and then looking back questioningly, unsure which way to go.

I am not sure either. I have found out that somewhere just beyond the west side of the Dene there is an ancient holy well known as St. Mary's Well. I am on a quest for water for tea.

The path leads through a short tunnel under road and emerges in an unkempt grove where stands the ruined chapel of St. Mary. Once long ago this was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Britain and the home of a cherished Christian relic. Now it is all but forgotten—a few ruins amid a tangle of scrub and sycamore. But not entirely forgotten, vases of flowers and crucifixes adorn some of the empty window holes. There is a sense of holiness here and also of sadness and longing for some transcendence and tranquility that is just out of reach.

There is the inevitable tourist information sign, but it makes no mention of the well. However a muddy path between the houses on the other side of the road looks inviting and a short walk leads to the place that I seek.

Through a wooden gate, down a short flight of stone steps into the shade of an ancient yew tree, there is the well, a stone lined basin set into a mossy bank. There are more flowers here, a crucifix and a small statue of the

Virgin Mary. She looks so similar to Kuan Yin. The word "gratias" is engraved on the stone above the basin.

And here, hidden away in suburbia, is water, living water, flowing from the earth, pure and unpolluted as it has flowed for hundreds, maybe thousands of years. "Gratias," indeed.

While Lexi sniffs around, I stand for a while in meditation, feeling the Earth under my feet and the sky above and letting the sense fields open to my surroundings: the vegetal, earthy smell of the place, the shades of green, brown and grey, birdsong, the steady drip of water from nearby trees, the sound of an airplane high above.

Wordlessly, I begin to feel that sense of connection, that oneness which tells me that the spirits of this place welcome my presence. I would like to linger longer, but Lexi is getting impatient. I'm not sure she really approves of Taoist contemplation. I taste the water. It is sweet with a hint of stoniness and surprisingly warm.

I fill the two bottles that I have brought and after a few more minutes of contemplation, toss the traditional offering of a small silver coin into the well, call Lexi to heel and depart...

An hour later I am home. I decant the precious water into a stoneware jar I found yesterday in a charity shop. This is an important moment for me. I have been feeling my way into Cha Dao for some time, but up till now have been content to use bottled or filtered water.

I carry my jar of water to the music room which doubles as a tea space. My *Chaxi* is simple today. A green man printed cloth for the connection with ancient Britain and nature worship that the well represents. A candle floating in a bowl of water. A few shells, a piece of driftwood and a small statue of a turtle, a Taoist symbol for the Water element complete the theme. My teaware is a little rice bowl which serves me as a *chawan*. And the tea? What could be more appropriate than the sheng puerh buds I have received from Global Tea Hut!

After a few minutes of silent sitting I carefully ladle water into the kettle. I've never done this before. It's usually been a matter of glugging some water haphazardly from a bottle. But I really want to be with the water today and the slow mindful ladling seems to honor the water with the respect it deserves. Looking, really looking at the clarity of the water I am pouring reminds me of Laozi's words:

Do you have the patience to wait until your mud settles and the water is clear?



The author's session with last month's Snow Buds

I have got a smart temperature controlled kettle which I couldn't really afford, but a few months ago seemed essential. At the time, the idea of being able to judge water temperature by eye and sound seemed impossibly difficult. But today I leave the lid off the kettle, ignore the temperature dial and watch and listen as first steam begins to rise, then the first tiny bubbles, then strings of bigger bubbles....

Bowl tea is for me perhaps the ultimate expression of Cha Dao. The simplicity and the immediacy of leaves, water and a bowl takes me right into what Taoism calls "*zi ran*", the spontaneity, the naturalness of things as they are. I have no words to describe the rest of this tea session.

Why so much fuss about water? Am I crazy to have spent the best part of three hours collecting enough water for a couple of tea sessions? What is wrong with bottled water or filtered water? For me this is part of a process of growth as a *chajin*. For most of my life I drank tea as a beverage and was content to fill a kettle from the tap. Later, I passed through a short phase of tea connoisseur, or perhaps "tea snob" would have described me better. I filled my supermarket trolley with bottles of Volvic or Highland Spring water because only the best would do.

However, very soon Tea became my teacher, and in silent sessions alone and intimate tea sharing with friends awakened me to her deeper meaning. Cha Dao became "practice" as much as sitting meditation, and it became a

way of being in the spirituality of Nature. Bottled water was perhaps "gong fu" but it was not Cha Dao.

Cha Dao taught me that the essence of tea was not about indulging in elitist or exotic taste experiences. Cha Dao taught me too that the essence of tea was not just about drinking fine tea with meditative awareness. Cha Dao taught me that harmony, reverence, purity and tranquility are not confined within the walls of the tea hut, but like water, need to seep quietly into every part of one's being, purifying, nourishing and flowing gently but inexorably down to the vast ocean of Tao.

I can sit in my tea space and pour Volvic into my kettle. I can have an outer appearance of simplicity and tranquility and ignore the environmental impact of plastic bottles transported by fossil fuels across hundreds of miles, but how deep is such harmony and reverence? Cha Dao was asking me to see clearly and be responsible for my wasteful, consumerist actions and step back to a simpler and more honest connection with Nature. Cha Dao was asking for more effort and mindfulness on my part than casually turning on a tap and filling a filter jug.

In my tea journey, I had already embraced the idea of "living tea." Tea that was organic, grown lovingly by small farmers following ancient tradition and passed to me through bonds of friendship rather than business. My teaware had that living quality too, almost all of it coming to me in chance finds or as unexpected gifts. Now it was time to bring water to life, too.

Water for Tea

There are hundreds, maybe thousands of wells and springs across Britain to be sought out as sources of water for tea. Some are officially sacred, some quietly ignored in the perfection of their ordinariness. Not long since, almost within living memory, they were our only source of water. If the well dried up or became tainted, there would be no water. Water mattered as it does today in so many parts of the developing world. Water, all water, not just water from “holy” wells, is sacred!

This does not mean that I will never again turn on a tap connected to the public mains supply to brew tea, but I hope that when I do there will be a little more awareness that water is just water... and is more than water.

The water I drew from St. Mary’s well had once been ocean, had once been clouds, had once been rain. This water had been all these things since beginningless time and would be all these things again. The water that makes up most of my body has also been all these things and would be again. Through water I am one with Great Nature. Water is the common medium and material of life. As Laozi said, water is truly like the Tao itself:

*The highest good is like water.
Water gives life to the ten thousand
things and does not strive.
It flows in places men reject and so is like the Tao.*

Just as I am finishing this article, I open We De’s book, *Tea Wisdom*, at random and find these words by Buddhist scholar Dennis Hirota:

One does not prepare the water for one’s own use, but rather participates in and enriches the water’s existence as the water participates in and enriches one’s own life. In this relationship, one experiences both a sense of wonder in the existence of the water just as it is, and a profound sadness that reverberates through the shared existence.



The Mother of Tea

Water is the “Mother of Tea”. It supports and nourishes the essence of tea, as it also does so for all life. Nothing improves the quality of tea more than changing where you get water and how you store it. After years of hiking into the mountains to get spring water, we’ve noticed that besides the obvious ways in which the water has transformed our physical lives and spiritual journey through tea, the trips themselves have also had a huge impact our lives.

Try storing your water in an urn, and give it prayers of light and gratitude before drinking. You can experiment with crystals that have been put out in the sun, or full moon and see what effect they have on the water. Alternatively, make your morning Tea and then leave a glass jar of the same water out over night under the full moon. The next day brew the same Tea again. You will be amazed at the difference. And recognizing that the moon gets into our water, into us, is a part of awakening the harmony to Nature that is our healing.

People have always utilized prayer-filled water in healing, at churches or temples, in blessings and other holy rites. Water is the essence of life, even deeper and more elemental than plants. More than 90% of a bowl of Tea is water, so it is a huge force in the healing medicine of Tea and can’t be ignored. As it makes up the vast majority of our bodies, an attention to it is a healing of us individually and globally. The sickness of the fresh water on this planet is testament to our sickness, and an omen from Mother Earth that we are in danger and need medicine.



GAIWAN EXPERIMENT NOTES

SHANE MARRS

Last month, we discussed the topic of gaiwans as they relate to gongfu tea. We offered two different experiments to help us experientially understand the effect of material and shape as they relate to gaiwans. Offered here are the notes and results of two gongfu students comparing the material of a gaiwan to that of an Yixing teapot. These results aren't meant to be the last word on anything. You should all try this experiment yourself, and if you like tea a gaiwan produces, then continue using one with relish and joy!

Materials

- Porcelain gaiwan (lidded cup)
- Traditional gongfu tea pot made of Yixing purple-sand clay
- 2 white porcelain gongfu tea cups per person
- 1 kettle for heating water
- Spring water
- 6 grams of tea that you are familiar with

As mentioned in February's gongfu experiment, just do your best to gather the materials available to you. First and foremost is your participation in these experiments, for without that, you will always be drinking tea through your head. Don't be afraid to make mistakes and grow experientially, and don't make a serious fuss over them either. The impetus to carry out these experiments should come from a desire to enjoy yourself, and then to share that enjoyment with all those whose path you cross.

Introduction

This experiment is more complex than the last as you will be using two brewing vessels at the same time. I would not recommend pouring the gaiwan and the teapot with two hands simultaneously for the safety of the teaware. You should instead pour sequentially, one after the other, taking into account the steeping times and the time it takes to pour each individual brewing vessel. To create equal steeping times, you will need to pour water into the first brewing vessel and then wait approximately the amount of time it would take to decant from that vessel before pouring water into the next one. Then you can simply pour the tea from the first vessel into the cups

followed immediately by the second vessel to approximate equal brewing parameters. It also helps to switch the pouring order each steeping to get a feel for both.

For this experiment, we will be looking for any differences that exist between the tea brewed in the two brewing vessels. That includes aroma and flavor, and all of the usual mouthfeel-suspects: temperature, smoothness, viscosity, movement, splash to the upper palate, ease of swallow, production of saliva and *hui gan* (minty fresh sensation returning on the breath).

Procedure:

- 1) Prepare your teaware and tea space
- 2) Weigh 3 grams of tea for the gaiwan and 3 grams for the teapot
- 3) Clean and preheat all teaware (cups and brewing vessels)
- 4) Add the tea and give it a flash infusion (a very quick infusion to clean off any dust and to help the leaves start opening)
- 5) Pour heated water from the kettle into *one* of the brewing vessels
- 6) Let it steep for roughly the time you think it will take to decant (~ 5 - 10 seconds)
- 7) Pour water into the second brewing vessel
- 8) Use a timer or count in your head the length of the infusion
- 9) Remember you should brew the tea lighter than usual
- 10) Decant from the first vessel into the cups, followed by the second vessel
- 11) Starting with the tea from the gaiwan, drink back and forth between the tea brewed in the gaiwan and the teapot
- 12) Write down your observations and repeat the procedure as many times as necessary

It's usually a good idea to perform these experiments with some degree of quietude, saving your discussion for the end. This calms the mind, increases your awareness and keeps participants from influencing each other's perceptions.

I will share my observations for the experiment. Also, the Tea Wayfarer this month, Ivan, joined me for this experiment. These are his notes as well. Cheers Ivan!

Observations:

It was clear from the beginning that the purple-sand clay from the Yixing teapot outperformed the gaiwan on all accounts. The tea was smoother and silkier, rounded and penetrating; it splashed to the upper palate, coated the mouth uniformly and moved towards the back of the throat with an easy swallow. Temperature was better preserved and the tea had a sense of balance, was grounded and more patient. (When a tea offers more steepings it is said to be “patient”).

The gaiwan, on the other hand, was simply less adequate for brewing this tea. There was an obvious difference in all sensations in the mouth and the tea had a sense of sharpness, airiness and imbalance—all comparatively speaking.

One important thing to note about the gaiwan is its “peak and trough” effect. Where the purple-sand clay brings all elements into harmony and balance, the porcelain (and design) of the gaiwan tends to fracture and pronounce certain qualities of a tea while dampening others. This is important to understand because, otherwise, it can catch the unaware tea-drinker off guard. Often times, a gaiwan may highlight the aroma or flavor of a tea in the first infusion or two, giving you the impression that the tea actually tastes or smells better from the gaiwan. From a merchant’s point of view, that might be just what he or she wants in order to sell a product to a consumer. However, if we are going to turn our quality switch on and consider fine tea in a larger context, even the less experienced tea-drinker can appreciate the balancing, smoothing and grounding effect of Yixing purple-sand clay.

In a crude but simple visual, you can consider the se two figures to the right. Figure 1 suggests the balancing effect of purple-sand clay, while Figure 2 reveals the fracturing “peak and trough” effect of the porcelain gaiwan.

These figures do not account for time. While the highlighted qualities from the gaiwan might be sensually pleasing in the beginning, the differences in quality became more and more pronounced as time went on. The peaks dissipated and the troughs were never really expe-



Figure 1
Yixing Tea pot



Figure 2
Gaiwan

rienced. Meanwhile the tea from the Yixing teapot progressed uniformly, infusion after infusion, slowly and subtly releasing its qualities in a balanced manner. Though an impatient tea is not necessarily a bad thing (some teas simply release their essence faster), the issue here is that a tea which had the potential to be patient was compromised by the brewing vessel.

One mechanical note to mention is that pouring from the gaiwan into small cups is actually quite difficult because of the design of the brewing vessel. It’s very difficult to pour smoothly into each cup and, moreover, to obtain an even infusion as a result. The awkward and ungraceful pour from the gaiwan into the cups could be factored into the peaks and troughs of Figure 2, but the details of that can be saved for another experiment altogether on pouring and shape. Of course, some of that discomfort could also be mitigated with practice.

In summary, it is obvious which brewing vessel is more appropriate for brewing fine tea. Our conclusions were suggested before the experiment even began, not because we made any assumptions, but because historically, gaiwans were intended to be directly drunk from, not as brewing vessels to decant tea into a pitcher or cups, which is a much more recent trend. One point of this experiment was actually to dispel the assumption, no matter how obvious, so that we may instead speak from a place of experience and more fully understand why it is we do what we do. Now, not only can we articulate why a purple-sand clay teapot is more appropriate than a porcelain gaiwan, we can demonstrate it. The proof is in the cup!



TEA WITH ANGELS

WU DE

Through this incredible tea practice, I've traveled round the world a few times. My grandpa's trusty medicine box has opened onto countless tea ceremonies, many of which you've attended. And through all the bowls of tea, light green to dark puerh-black, we've shared silence and laughter, life wisdom learned through tea, and forged the bonds of lasting friendship. Each trip is so full of events, workshops and ceremonies that it seems from the outside a lot to bear. But inside there is only more and more enthusiasm. I am doing what I love, following my bliss. And all too often, it leads me to Los Angeles.

It seems far-fetched from a distance, that such a thriving tea tree ever took root in LA, but once you arrive and meet all the illuminated smiles and get hugged a few hundred times, it starts to make sense. Tea is just another aspect of self-cultivation, awakened mind and conscious living so abundant in LA. And amongst the many uplifting attitudes and spiritual seminars, there is a great need for some earthbound connection: grounding forces so seminally a part of tea practice. I've heard a few people say that they find something more authentic and rooted in tea, which is so important in a town that is, at least to a large degree, devoted to show. In the end, people turn to tea because it helps, because it's wonderful to share and for our own individual truth and insights—the secret conversations between our bowls and hearts. You come to the ceremonies for the same reasons I do, though we might articulate them differently, and I show up as host and you guest—at least this time.

After regarding how wonderful the Los Angeles tea community is, I'm compelled to write about the beautiful gardeners who've watered and fertilized this blooming tree for three years now, for it is they who greet me at the airport when I arrive, smile and hug me through the challenges of so many events, workshops and interviews, and then drop me off with tears when it's time to go. There is a very solid tea community in LA, full of bright souls who selflessly donate their time towards the creation of tea spaces and heartfelt sharing of the Leaf. And, ultimately, they are the real reason why tea blossoms in LA, and why the community is lush every time I return.

I realize that many of you have yet to attend any of the events we hold around the world, and are wondering what it is we do (aside from our center here in Taiwan and these magazines/teas). And I also know that many of you already had a relationship to tea before you found us, and are maybe wondering if we are sectarian in any way. Rest assured, we are promoting no such relationship to tea or each other. This community is founded on a tea tradition,

for sure, but we aren't devoted to any doctrine, nor to improving the quality of life for members and not others. There is no inside or outside in our tradition. Therefore, let us first dive into who we are, before addressing what we do.

This tradition is a group of tea lovers connected in three ways: Firstly, we practice the same brewing methodology. That is to say, we brew tea in five ways. We do this because we find the tea world very confusing, and in these modern times there are hundreds of ways of brewing tea. Many traditions have lost connection with the reasons why they brew in a particular way, just as many religions have lost touch with where their beliefs and/or practices originate from historically. There are what you could call external/practical reasons for choosing different brewing methods, like the loss of temperature in one method versus another, for example. There are also internal/spiritual reasons that may motivate our brewing—bringing the bowls/cups to the center to symbolize our oneness as host and guests, for example. We realize that some people might not be concerned with why they brew tea in a particular way. That is understandable. In response to that, we'd say that we aren't asking any of you, or any one else, to brew tea as we do. Succinctly, these are the brewing methods that were taught to us, and they work. If your grandfather passed on a hammer through your father to you, and that hammer worked perfectly fine, chances are you would be satisfied with it. It doesn't matter what kind of hammer your neighbor uses, and different hammers or hammering techniques shouldn't prevent you from doing some carpentry together. I love my tradition because it is mine and it works, in other words.

The second common thread that binds our organization is that we all approach tea primarily as plant medicine and a vehicle for spiritual cultivation—a Dao. Just as our brewing methods aren't exclusive, in the sense that we hope that everyone follows us or that we don't have anything to share with those who brew tea differently, so too is our approach to tea an open one. You could think of it like this: there are many approaches to tea. Some drink tea as a healthy beverage. Some like the sensual pleasure and exotic flavors/aromas; others drink tea for spiritual cultivation. These different approaches to tea are not mutually exclusive. There is no need to place an ugly "or" between them—as in beverage *or* spiritual vehicle. Instead of "or", why not a much healthier "and": tea is a beverage *and* a spiritual vehicle! We celebrate that tea is a delicious drink *and* a tool for self-cultivation. We also sometimes drink tea as a beverage or a hobby, that just isn't our primary orientation to tea. And we aren't interested in changing

Tien Wu serving boiled tea at our garden event

how you, or anyone, approaches tea. Rather, we share our approach freely, and when we're your guests, we share in yours!

Finally, our organization is about community and service. As I mentioned above, so many wonderful people in LA showed up this trip to make all of our events a huge success. They do so freely, with hearts overflowing. We want to foster tea brotherhood/sisterhood, and not just among the tea lovers who use our brewing methods, or who approach tea the way we do, but for everyone. In this tradition, we always say, "We don't learn how to *make* tea, but how to *serve* it." Our aim is to create present, loving, ceremonial tea space for everyone, fostering deeper friendships and even family through tea.

Now that you understand who we are, I have a great analogy for what we do when we host events: Imagine that we were cooks; cooks that only make the same five dishes over and over again. Now, we bring those five dishes out to the public for free, asking for whatever donation you can afford, but perfectly happy to serve the food to you even if you cannot afford to donate anything. You are also free to take as much or as little as you like. Maybe you want to taste just one tomato from one of the dishes. Maybe you want a plate full of just one of the dishes—that's great too. Or perhaps you want to try all five. And then, there are those amongst you who taste all the dishes and are so happy with the food, the atmosphere and the event that you want to learn how we cook these five dishes and how

we host these events. In that case, we have workshops and are more than happy to put you to work helping us serve. It boils down to this: this tradition has something for everyone, whether it is a single bowl of tea we serve for free in parks, markets, events, etc., or a deeper ceremony of many bowls, or even the desire to learn how we make and serve tea—you are welcome to take as much as you like from us; it's free!

In that way, we host large events/parties where we serve tea and create family/social bonds. We also host workshops to teach people our approach and brewing methodology—how we serve tea, in other words. And we also host silent tea ceremonies, as words fall short of tea when it comes to approaching tea as a means of self-cultivation (Dao).

We did a lot of all three of these this time in LA. We had a great music event, with performances by the amazingly handsome Alec Bridges, Paul Livingstone (who shredded the sitar) and our dear brother MJ, who regaled us with bright chants and world rhythms. It was an amazing night. The following day, we hosted tea in a gorgeous garden in Venice, sharing both quiet, ceremonial space that guests visit for three bowls and a more social space to talk and get to know one another while drinking boiled tea or steeped chrysanthemum tea. We also hosted another private party and several workshops to help teach new and old students about our ways of preparing and approaching tea.

Tea with Angels

The most exciting aspect of this trip, aside from all the hugs, was that none of the donations were to support our center in Taiwan. 100% of all the donations we collected at these events went towards establishing a center in West LA, which we hope to open in the next two or three months. Our center in LA will continue our overall purpose of awakening harmony between people and Nature, as well as fostering community around tea. It, too, will not be run for profit, but rather as a donation-based service to the local community. Unlike the center in Taiwan, however, our center in LA will not be residential. Instead, we will offer daily ceremonies, weekly tea classes and monthly events. And all are welcome to come and be served or learn how to serve!

The glimmering hope of such an amazing tea space in LA, as well as all the warmth lingering from all your hugs (and Chris Sage's beautiful smile)—all of it left me moist-eyed on the plane home. I am inspired to continue sharing tea and this Way of Tea with others, confident that what we do really does make a difference in the world!



Skylar serving Snow Chrysanthemum tea



THE TEAWARE OF PETR NOVAK

LINDSEY GOODWIN

Here at Tea Sage Hut, we host hundreds of visitors a year. We connect with people who are completely new to tea, and welcome back those who have been in this tradition for years. Recently, we hosted famed Czech ceramicist Petr Novak here at the Hut.

After fifteen years of commercially producing ceramics, Petr now regularly sells his wares to tearooms, tea shops and groups of tea lovers in Spain, Germany, the US, Estonia, Russia, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as to collectors in Singapore and Malaysia. And although some of his works have been in the Hut for some time now, it was the first time he has visited personally. After a few tea sessions with some gorgeous bowls and a charcoal brazier he made for the center, Petr and I had the chance to sit down for an interview about his work.

Experimentation

Like Peter Qian, who we featured in the April issue, Petr is continually experimenting with his medium. He stated simply, “Ceramics is fascinating. It makes me happy.” And that fascination and joy is clearly reflected in his work. But so is another sentiment he shared about his craft: “It’s not perfect. It’s never perfect. In another thirty years, maybe, but it’s never ending. It’s always growing. You don’t have time to feel, ‘Now I’m good’ or ‘Now I’ve achieved something.’”

Petr’s love of ceramics and his continual growth in the medium have resulted in a multitude of experiments with different materials and techniques. In each monthly firing, Petr includes a mix of orders he’s filling and pieces or test samples he felt inspired to create. He said his creative process for the second category of work “builds out from the last kiln” and that each batch gives him ideas for what to try next time. He added, “I’m not the kind of designer who works on sketches for hours. Instead, I usually sit behind the wheel and start working.”

This iterative process has been reflected in Petr’s overall body of work across the years. He said, “making teaware was a snowball effect” that began with a few pieces. Once they were incorporated into his portfolio, he started returning to teaware again and again. Initially, his teaware was suitable for Darjeeling, Japanese and Korean teas—what he was drinking at the time. But now, he focuses more on teaware for his current tea preferences—gong fu cha wares and charcoal stoves suitable for the Taiwanese and Chinese oolongs and the puerh he now drinks. He

said, “There’s always something new in my tea, and I try to create something for it.”

But it’s not just the forms that change—it’s also the materials and techniques. From variations in clay (sometimes light, white porcelain stoneware, sometimes dark clay with a lot of iron, sometimes clay from a nearby forest or a friend’s garden) to variations in glazes (shino glazing, celadon glazes, homemade glaze mixes, etc.) and firing techniques, Petr is continually shifting his approach to crafting teaware. He said, “I like to use different materials and glazes, not focus on one style. Mostly, I use different glazes after bisque firing. Very often it’s a surprise that you’re testing or experimenting with when you have some free bowls, but very often you base it on experience. It’s an alchemy, but as everything, in ceramics, it’s experience.” He added, “Always, there can be accidents, good or bad. But that’s one of the things I love about the process. The nature of man is that you want to control everything, but you know you cannot. So you have to let it go, focus on what you can do and learn from what happens.”

Glazing

When Petr began to mix his own glazes, he read a workbook on ash glazes by a famous English potter named Phil Rodgers. Petr said, “It’s why I started learning English.” But learning English and knowing how to make ash glazes aren’t the only good things that arose from Petr’s glaze mixing—he also ended up meeting Miroslava Randova (“Mirka”), who had studied ceramics in the US, and experimenting in glazing along with her. He said, “When I met Mirka, I started keeping meticulous notes. We put it in a book—more like a thick, wild worksheet of notes. She taught me different aspects of glazing. It was wonderful.” And today, they mix the majority of the glazes they utilize, trying out different glaze mixes on “test tiles” (small ceramic tiles with test glaze samples) each time they fire. Still, he’s not averse to using a simple glaze that he didn’t make himself. He said, “I don’t want to be too fancy, like, ‘I only mix my own glazes.’ I like simple white glaze for everyday bowls.”

Petr explained that glazes are made from several chemical components: silica (which gives a glaze its glassiness), an oxide (which determines the color), a flux (which lowers the melting temperature of the glaze) and a stabilizer (which keeps the glaze from running too much). These usually come from a mix of natural sources, and are often obtained from plant ash. His preferred materials



Bisque Firing

Although many potters will tell you that bisque firing is optional, Petr and his girlfriend and collaborator, Mirka, choose to bisque fire all their work. Bisque firing is a sort of preliminary firing that changes soft clay into (still soft, but far more rigid) ceramic material. It reduces the chances of breakage and cracking, and it allows for far greater flexibility in glazing and other decorative techniques.

They bisque fire their ceramics to about 1000 degrees Celsius in an electric kiln. Some pieces already have an underglaze (a base layer glaze that does not appear shiny or crystalline after firing), which allows for layered glazing techniques later.

are locally abundant ones: hay ash and the ash from his wood fireplace. But he can't just pick any old plant ashes. The balance of each glaze's chemical components comes from the different natural materials used to make it. For example, rice husks are 90 percent silica, so firing with rice husks alone is impossible, but mixing them with other materials gives a good sheen to ceramics. On the other end of the spectrum, some pine wood has only about 10 percent silica, so it needs additional silica to work well. Petr said they have to find the right balance over time: "Sometimes, the glaze is running too much or there's some other problem, so you work with it over the years." However, once he has found the right mix, there's no promise he can keep it. "Some glazes are from natural materials, so when you start they are great, but when you run out it's different because the ash is different, even if it's from the same plant. It's not possible to recreate."

Additionally, different glazes work well for different kinds of teaware, and Petr has to be very careful about which glazes he uses for cups and tea bowls in particular. He said that certain glaze patinas can change the aroma of teas, so there are glazes he never uses for drinking vessels, and he's still sorting out which glazes are best for which types of teaware.

Reduction Firing

For some potters, firing is a wild and intense process. But not for Petr. He said, "Firing is not crazy. It's nice. But," he added, "the loading is one of the most important things you can do, because of the temperature variations." The front of the kiln is the hottest, while the back of the kiln and the levels closest to the ground are substantially cooler. This can create enormous variations in glaze coloration, effects of the flames and even breakage. Petr said, "When you close the kiln and start firing, you are focused and relaxed because everything you could do, you've done. It's in the hands of God. There's a release. You just focus and listen to the kiln."

After Petr has loaded the kiln and started firing, he uses tools called "cones" to control his firing process. Cones are small pieces of ceramic material in an elongated, triangular-pyramid shape. They are mixed to melt at certain temperatures (such as 960 degrees Celsius or 1250 degrees Celsius), and they are placed at an angle in various spots in the kiln before firing to indicate to the potter what the temperature is there during firing. When the tip of the cone starts to bend over, the potter knows that area of the kiln has reached the temperature that corresponds with that cone. And when the cone continues to melt downward, the potter knows that the temperature is being maintained in that part of the kiln.

Cones are especially useful for a technique Petr uses in every wood firing: reduction firing. The basic principle of reduction firing is that fire needs oxygen to

The Teaware of Petr Novak

burn, and that if you reduce the oxygen supply for a large fire, then it will seek out oxygen in chemical compounds, such as those in glazes and in clay. When Petr knows that the kiln has reached a certain temperature (usually 960 degrees), and then he will close off some of the air supply for the kiln, causing the fire to get its oxygen from non-air sources. So, for example, a celadon glaze may start as FeO_3 , which is clear, then lose its oxygen to the fire, and become FeO , which is a jadeite color. And copper dioxide glaze will start out green, but can become copper oxide, which is a red color referred to as “ox blood” in the ceramics world. Similarly, red clay can lose oxygen molecules and become dark brown or black.

Unglazed Wares

Petr and Mirka built their kiln themselves. It was adapted from the Phoenix Kiln style, and is the seventh kiln Petr has built. One of the perks of building your own kiln is that you can customize it, and that’s something they did in order to create unglazed wares during wood firings.

As you know, heat rises. For Petr and Mirka, this means that the lower levels of the kiln are much cooler than the upper levels. If they wanted to fire glazed wares there, then they would have to create entirely different glaze formulas, which is difficult and minimally rewarding. So rather than do that, they decided to fire unglazed pieces on these lower shelves. And (here’s the cool part) they decided to build in a little side door so they can use these shelves for a charcoal firing technique based on Bizen ware.

When the kiln reaches its peak temperature, and the coolest part is blazing at an infernal 1250 degrees and

the clay is white-hot, they close the kiln slightly and open up a little side door by the lower shelves. They throw in charcoal, which creates several different, localized effects on the pieces there. One effect is a sort of local reduction firing, in which the oxygen gets used up by the charcoal and gets sucked out of compounds in portions of the clay on the lower shelves. Another is a sort of visible smoke or flame marks on the unglazed surfaces. And a third is the appearance of “shadows” of localized reduction or smoke marks, which occur when one piece is partially blocking another, allowing only part of it to be impacted by the charcoal, smoke and flame.

Once they’ve added in the charcoal, they seal the kiln and allow it to cool. When they open the kiln again, there’s a thick layer of charcoal ash spread over the lower parts of the kiln, and they have to dig smaller pieces out of the ash. The results can be surprising and incredibly varied. Petr said, “We like to use reduction firing on big puerh jars because you cannot cover it all with ash, so you just cover the base. You can get rings of black, dark brown, rust, red, yellow and sandy clay. It can be distinct or a gradation. You cannot predict it so much.”

During our talk, Petr also shared quite a few details about celadon and shino glazing techniques, both of which play major roles in teaware production. We’ll expand upon what he shared by gathering additional information from other sources, and you can expect to see articles on these glazing techniques in the magazine later this year. Until then, we’re wishing you peace and wisdom with every sip!





Some experimental ash for glazing made from all Petr's spent tea leaves



About to share tea with Petr's bowls at the Hut

The Teaware of Petr Novak



A most inviting tea session, mingling Petr & Mirka's work with our own GTH cloth



A beautiful tea caddy with natural slip glaze



A wood-fired side handle with stunning textures



SNOBBERY AND TEA

THOMAS LEONS

Steeped for centuries in a tradition of contemplative Buddhism and seated meditation (*zazen*), the tea ceremony in Japan developed into a deeply spiritual and aesthetic appreciation of one of life's simplest joys. Enjoying tea together with others, the simplicity of the teaware, the garden, unique stones and the grain of the wooden beams in the tearoom, this all leads to a meditative state based on the relationship of self and other. With such creative and spiritual possibility also came danger, though. And over time the tea tradition was justifiably criticized because so many of its adherents refined the practice into the ultimate form of snobbery, focused as they were on the practice of meditating rather than the meditation itself. The very spirituality of tea became a kind of "spiritual materialism" in some, furthering the ego and sense of separation—the absence of which was the very enjoyment the tradition was founded upon. Furthermore, you need not regard this trend as exclusively Japanese, either. Chinese history also brushes its own share of condescension.

The issues at stake are perhaps only relevant to those who utilize the appreciation of tea within a contemplative life, though I would go so far as to say that those who regard tea as a mere hobby would be better served to treat it casually, as obsessive hobbies aren't healthy and quickly lead to addiction. Being a contemplative person by nature—"spiritual", you could say—I've always been attracted to tea for the ability it has to relax the sense of ego, and allow me to find real gratification in the rocks, simple pots and cups, and in letting go of all the worldly divisions between fellows, sharing the realization that our relationship drinking tea defines us as much as any of the abstractions we use to set ourselves apart as individual egos.

I lived in Taiwan for some years, which of course was the perfect place for me to "develop" in tea. The further you go in the tea world, there is a very natural progression of sensitivity, and you begin to explore the roles different teaware, water, temperature, tea processing, etc. play in the quality of the tea. Over time, you become sensitive to more than just the uniqueness of the flavor, grow accustomed to the different sensations in your mouth, throat, chest and stomach; and then, of course, the *Cha Qi*, and the world of variation that such an experience opens. As this sensitivity is natural, the progression is encouraged. In fact, as other authors here have commented, *Cha Dao* is often based more on seeking Nature through the perfect cup; the connection of self and environment coming through a kind of alchemy as one seeks the Morning Dew of perfect water, kettle, pot, cup and environment—a realization of the identification of the self with

every aspect of this process over time. Having the chance to learn from Taiwan's tea masters and collect some great tea, teaware and experiences of drinking great teas was of great significance to my growth.

Coming back to North America was also an important step in my tea journey. I went to local tea shops, to Chinatown, and then made new tea friends here. Through this, I realized that I had become a bit of a snob. I could no longer appreciate the simpler teas offered at these shops, no longer find beauty in the cheap teaware of Chinatown, and I was critical of my new friends' preparation methods, especially since the difference between these teas and the ones I had enjoyed in Taiwan was so great—I was, after all, working on the ever-so-subtle variation between different minute aspects of preparation. I realized I had stumbled into a new obstacle to my advancement.

I had learned to be humble in the presence of great masters, but needed to learn to be humble amongst the experiences that were happening in the Americas. Being a snob effectively cuts off the experience I have always sought through tea: the appreciation of the ordinary and simple, and more importantly, the recognition and experience of a direct relationship to Nature and so-called "other" through a gathering of such open hearts. The distinction between the "higher" tea I had experienced was in my mind, but still real enough to affect the new tea experiences I was having.

I needed to find a way to seek balance, for I couldn't abandon what I had learned any more than I could shut off the senses that were telling me the tea I found locally was inferior. It is after all only inferior when compared to a past experience, but that past was preventing me from enjoying the moment at hand. I had become one of the snobs criticized by ancient masters like Baisao for not understanding tea, and losing the contemplative mind of a real session for the idea and practice of a contemplative life through the refinement of the external rather than internal aspects of tea preparation.

Recording our internal growth in the form of an article like this always makes us seem fractured, confused and crazy. This is perhaps based on the illusory nature of our thoughts as linear abstractions of a real world that is really a tangle of interconnected processes, a weave of endless relationships and patterns rather than the solid objects we perceive ourselves to be. Over time, the solution to what I had mistakenly thought of as mutually exclusive approaches to tea dawned on me. My problem was rooted in the distinction itself between my natural development of sensitivity and the need to always appreciate the sim-



This inexpensive pot is actually quite elegant

ple and connect to the moment at hand, even if it is lower-quality tea, teaware and/or preparation.

I've been fortunate to have been taught from the beginning that my internal growth must keep pace with the external sensitivity and development of technique. Couldn't the same be said of any art, especially if the spiritual and aesthetic are to be in accord? I've learned without a shadow of a doubt that the real masters make better tea from within, not as a result of more knowledge or better technical skill. Cha Dao is cultivated from within, and masters *are* more rather than *know* more. Most all spiritual traditions recognize this fact, especially the Eastern ones. It was many years of Daoist and Buddhist influence that created the whole idea of Cha Dao. In other words, the tea sages of the past were already developed internally before they ever approached tea, and as a result the simple bowl with unprocessed, or simply-processed leaves floating in water was enough of a vehicle for the contemplation and companionship they were seeking. There is no doubt that this mindset could be continued throughout a growing sensitivity to better quality tea and teaware itself; and that the more beautiful teaware could further inspire such sentiments in the participants.

When the internal development keeps pace with the intellectual understanding of tea, as well as the technical skills that accompany learning to prepare tea, then there is no dilemma between the higher and lower quality tea sessions. Whatever is at hand is appreciated fully for

what it is, as it is; rather than compared one against the other. The masters in Japan who really understood tea didn't criticize the beginner or compare his or her method or teaware to the better ceremony they had last week or would have a week from now, but just enjoyed the session as it was: the eternal now, and a connection to the world through simplicity, through drinking it, and through companionship with others who are also relaxing their sense of distinction as egos.

I began to treat the times with better teas and teaware and the greater sensitivity I was enjoying as unique bliss to be enjoyed when it is present, but not compared to other kinds of tea that should be without the judgment of high or low. Within such sessions, I tried letting the variations between teas, cups and methods come naturally and not scale them as better or worse, but rather more suitable to the situation at hand. When I was at the local tea shops, I looked a bit closer and realized again the beauty in a contemporary lotus on a large teapot I may have found beautiful ten years ago, but would most likely have ignored in a more snobbish mindset, having seen other more beautiful examples. However, the important point here, which cannot be over-stressed, is that those more beautiful examples were not here before me then and there. It was this pot here. And I could choose to dismiss it by comparing it to an illusory memory or enjoy it for what it was, in itself. The same for the tea and the different friends in whose company I now

Snobbery and Tea

found myself. I had never doubted they were worth less as people, just that their skills weren't as great as other tea sessions I had enjoyed in Asia. But this comparative thought process and the resulting condemnation of this or that was paradoxically blocking me from experiencing the peace and contemplation that I had had in Asia—the very experience that I was using as a standard to qualify the tea session at hand as inferior!

On a two-week trip back to Taiwan to visit friends I decided to try experimenting with one of my teachers. Happy to see me, the two of us set out for the mountains outside Taipei to enjoy an afternoon of tea. For the first tea, I brought out a simple, low-quality green tea from China that I had bought in Canada and began to brew it in a cheap pot with simple one-dollar cups. My teacher showed me exactly what I had been seeking verification of. He simply enjoyed the tea for what it was. We were there to enjoy tea and each other's company, not to learn about tea. If he wasn't able to shut off the learning, teacher mode, I realized, he wouldn't be the teacher I knew him to be. On the contrary, his only comment was positive, that the weather, tea and mountain were splendid and that he was happy I was back in Taiwan. Later we drank some higher-quality tea, and there was never any mention of a need to compare it to the first tea. We just enjoyed it for what it was.

Recognizing the need for internal growth that parallels an exploration of tea on the intellectual or technical level was instrumental in my own Dao of tea, and I thought that it might be important to others as well. If you only explore the external aspects of tea, it will be very difficult to avoid growing into a snob, and also difficult to prevent losing touch with the simple joys that led you to tea in the first place. There is nothing wrong with developing sensitivity, or in learning how to improve the experience of tea with better tea, teaware or technique. The new sessions that result will be all the more rewarding for your work. However, your experience can do nothing for the tea that is before you in the session you now sit in. If you are having tea now with someone who prepares a different tea in a way that you have learned does not work as well and they are open to your suggestions and want to learn, you might offer them the opportunity to go home later and compare a different technique with the one they are using. But in the moment, the tea is there. It is what it is, and your connection to the relationship you share with the environment and your companions is no less real because your ego has critically deemed the experience inferior to some other that is not here and not now.

As soon as you think you have the answers and know what you are talking about, you stop learning. My meditation teacher always says that the master who desires students is not ready to be a teacher, for his desire to put others beneath him will only result in possessiveness and in the end an unhealthy relationship for both student and teacher alike. The giving must be unconditional. And the taking must be received in an empty cup. If your cup is full, you won't take the time to read, learn, practice, find teachers and all the other movements that make a life of tea worth exploring. Instead, you may find your-

self withdrawing into more and more exclusive circles and speaking more than listening.

There is a modern trend of blogging, writing and discussing one's own perspective grossly more than listening and learning from the perspective of others, especially those worthy to be called teachers. There are some who can't stop listening to their own voice even when they are drinking tea, and unfortunately spend the whole session chatting with their inner self in the form of a journal or "tea review". I would suggest that if you haven't a companion to share your tea, and you can't find a teacher or master locally, in the very least listen to the tea itself rather than your own voice, as it will also have a conversation and relationship with you if you are open to it. Paradoxically, I am also suggesting that if you find yourself having tea with such a person, enjoy the unique experience for all its worth—even if you won't repeat it yourself when you are at home.

In the end, my travels back and forth to Asia have taught me to be open to whatever tea experience I stumble upon. However, this open-mindedness to enjoy the tea, teaware, and company during any tea session can't itself become an ideal or rule, lest it become another standard to compare tea sessions—in that one I was open and in that other one I was acting like a snob. We must relax and find joy in the moment through whatever tea is there. I've learned to find the same sensation in a large pot of red tea in a local café as I enjoyed once amongst silent masters in Taiwan drinking vintage puerh with antique teaware. I can still discriminate the fact that the latter was better tea, and richer experientially. But it is no less real than the red tea in the café, and the fact that I feel less connected in one situation rather than the other is an illusion. If you keep up your internal progress, and learn to shut off the mind and find contemplation in all the simple aspects of tea, it won't matter what kind of tea you're having, what teaware you're using or even where and with whom. You'll just see these sessions as different opportunities, variations in degree not in quality—the red tea offered the same completion, just to a lesser degree, in other words. In that way, you can enjoy great tea and simple tea without the need to compare or condescend. That, to me, is the spirit of tea.



Tea is more than an idealization of the form of drinking, it is a religion of the art of life.

—*Kakuzo Okakura*



THE ELEMENTS OF A CHAXI

KAI YA

We've had a few articles now on the spirit and principles of *chaxi*, so this month I thought it would be nice to write something a little more down to earth and practical. The standard elements of most *chaxi* are the tea cloth (*chabu*), the tea "boat" or "pillow" (where the teapot rests), a scoop or other item for displaying the tea and putting it into the pot, and a stick of some kind to guide the tea out of the scoop (usually thin enough to unclog the teapot's spout if needed). Though these represent the typical elements of a *chaxi*, you can prepare tea on an empty table, or think outside of teaware and gather elements of Nature, discarded things, etc.—fully expressing your own creativity!

Beyond these, there are a few optional items that you can include. Often a lid rest is used while pouring the last water from your kettle with two hands, so you have somewhere to put the lid without staining your cloth. If you have a beautiful stick, you may want something to rest the end of the stick on so it doesn't sit flat on the table, thus making it more prominent. It is also usual to include various decorations in the form of statues, flowers or bonsai. Anything decorative that you want to place on the table is fine. At the tea competition I participated in a few months ago, there was a children's category, and we saw everything from robots to Hello Kitties adorning the tea table!

As we talked about last month, the *chabu* is usually the first thing you will choose, and it generally sets the tone for all the other elements, as a base note or drone beneath the melody. It is possible to use the same small variety of utensils with many different cloths to greater effect than a large variety of utensils can be used with a small choice of cloths. I still have only four scoops in my collection, with a handful of sticks and perhaps eight pillows, but nearly thirty *chabu*. With these, I have been creating completely unique *chaxi* for three years, and rarely do I find myself frustrated because I can't make a *chaxi* I wanted to make for lack of the right scoop.

Make sure to get a broad range of different basic colors, as more complicated patterns tend to go well with only very specific things and are therefore less versatile. From there, you can also expand into different widths and textures and kinds of materials of those same colors as well, or, preferably, different shades of those colors. Two-sided tea cloths are common and quite desirable in a tea cloth, as you can often get a beautiful pattern and a simple one in the same cloth, like the ones we sent you two months ago. A tea cloth can be any material. Try hunting in fabric stores. All the best *chaxi* have elements outside the box

(sometimes simplicity is out of the ordinary). Any cloth you like will do. It isn't necessary that it be stitched for the purpose of tea.

Probably the second most important element is the tea "boat" or "pillow". A boat is used for gongfu tea, and has space to hold water that is showered over the pot. A pillow, on the other hand, is just something to rest a teapot on. Sometimes they are hollow with holes to accept drained water, which can then be discarded out a spout on the side. Generally, you want this especially to stand out in contrast from your cloth, so the teapot also stands out and gets the attention it deserves at center stage. If your cloth is elegant, it probably should be more refined. If your cloth is simple, you can choose something more rustic if you want. This is also a great place to break some of the boundaries of the standard *chaxi* being presented here. If you find a large enough, well-shaped piece of wood, for example, you can use this as both pillow and cloth (the wood will absorb spilled tea and you can place your bowl or pot on it directly instead of using another item), thus eliminating an element and simplifying your *chaxi*.

The material of your pillow is also important. If it is something particularly hard or abrasive, you should consider placing a small piece of cloth, or the round rattan circle we sent you as a gift, or anything else that is softer, between it and your teapot. This usually isn't an aspect of the *chaxi*; it's just a practical necessity to protect your pot. As such, don't put it out until the session begins, and try to find something very nearly the same size as the bottom of your pot so it won't be too distracting. The rattan circle we sent you is a good choice because it doesn't intrude on most any *chaxi* you can create.

Sticks and scoops go hand in hand, so of course it is natural for them to be the same material and design most of the time, though sometimes we contrast materials. For example, we have a copper scoop that looks like a crumpled leaf, which goes well with a particular natural bamboo stick. These two are often the supporting pieces of the theme, instead of the definition. But sometimes in *chaxi* with a simple cloth and pillow, an elegant or large and unique scoop and stick can play a more prominent role.

Lastly, the two more situational elements of a *chaxi* are a stick rest and a lid rest. Very often, these won't be needed and will just clutter up your table. It's important to have a *reason* to include these elements, instead of including them automatically. Actually, the same is true of all the elements: I've seen Wu De make *Chaxi* without *chabu*, without a stick, without a pillow or even without a scoop at particular times. These are a bit more "advanced"



Sometimes a simple season-themed chaxi is best, here for spring.

exceptions though, and it may help to lean a more basic style first.

For a stick rest and lid rest however, the considerations are fairly simple. If my tea pillow is large enough and flat enough to set my lid down next to my teapot, I don't need a lid rest. Sometimes, when making *gongfu* tea, I don't need a lid rest because I know I won't use the very last of the water in my kettle.

As for a stick rest, I first take a look at all the ways I can present the stick without it. Perhaps it can rest on the scoop itself. Or even under the scoop, hidden away, making my *chaxi* that much cleaner and simpler. If I can't tuck it away and my scoop is the wrong shape, I try putting it directly on the table next to the scoop. Some sticks get lost in the pattern or color of the cloth, or they are just too small and delicate to stand out. Sometimes it's a special one that has a rest that complements it and presents it in a special way. But only after first looking at the other options and finding them inadequate, and considering the necessity of these items, do I include either a lid rest or a stick rest.

Your efforts will be well worth it. No other element adds the kind of vibrancy, life and beauty to a *chaxi* the way a good flower arrangement does. And as we discussed last month, *chaxi* is all about honoring the transient unique beauty of this session. Flowers are the perfect representatives of the spirit of *Ichigo Ichie* in Nature.

The last of the basic elements is the wastewater container, or *jin shui*. It is important to note that although this is a necessary element to make tea, it is not necessarily always a part of *chaxi*. The main question when considering *jin shui* is whether you are going to make bowl tea or *gongfu* tea. In bowl tea, we only need a *jin shui* very briefly at the start of the ceremony. In the spirit of a simple and clean *chaxi*, then, it is best to keep the *jin shui* out of site, under the table. If you are making bowl tea on the floor, this won't be possible. If you are making *gongfu* tea, you need the *jin shui* to be on the table because you will be using it very often and you need it to be close at hand. It is common for, *jin shui* to be quite small so they don't impose on the *chaxi*, and can be poured into a larger, hidden *jin shui* that is not on the table. Often this is an element that you want to keep out of sight if possible, or at least unobtrusive. We do have some very beautiful and ornate *jin shui* at the center however, and they can bring a nice balance to the table, especially with a large flower arrangement or statue on the other end of the table.

This is all you really need for a complete *chaxi*, and my advice is to start with these simplest of elements and make as many different *chaxi* as you can, before beginning to incorporate decorations or other optional elements. Don't forget that tea is about healing and connection, and that where the spirit and the heart are in alignment, your *chaxi* will be in alignment too. Don't think too much!



Tea Wayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines. 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 tea-struck **Ivan Karushev**:

I first got into tea through listening to Russian rap. Some rappers in Russia write songs about Chinese tea: puerh, tiguanyin, Da Hong Pao, those kinds of tea.

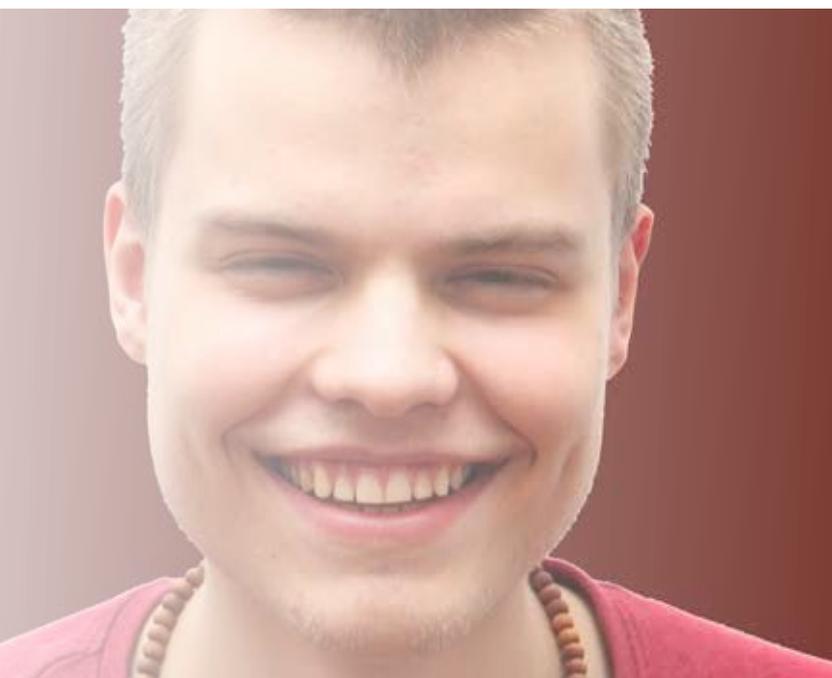
One day, when I was 16, I was walking around and saw a tea shop selling puerh, so I checked it out. The woman there told me about this "20-year-old" shou puerh and I bought some. But I didn't know how to brew it. I made it British-style, adding some sugar and drinking it from a mug. That was exotic for me, but I wanted to learn more and I started from that point.

Later I returned to the shop and bought some other kinds of tea (oolong, white tea) and started to explore those worlds. For me, the real tea journey started one evening, when I sat in my room drinking Dian Hong. I used awful teaware to brew it, but I took a sip and something transcendent happened inside. It took me to the deepest level of tea.

In Russia, we have a lot of information about tea as art, and we have some tea culture too. I learned about tea from Russian books and websites. Then I moved to Moscow to work as a tea server at a tea club. I was trying to learn all I could about tea. So in Moscow, I contacted tea people I knew through the Internet and met many fellow tea lovers that way. One of them was Denis. He invited me to his home to drink tea.

Denis is a student of Wu De. We drank bowl tea in silence, and he showed me Global Tea Hut. We drank a Global Tea Hut oolong gong fu style. He explained equanimity and sensitivity in these brewing styles, and I was really excited about that. One week later, I drank 1980s puerh with Nastya (another Global Tea Hut member), and that session was exactly what Denis had told me about drinking tea with my heart. So, this tradition just found me. I didn't choose it. It just came and I accepted it because it was already a part of me.

I wanted to deepen my knowledge of the brewing methods in this tradition and I was in luck: that summer, Wu De came to Moscow. Wu De helped me go to the deepest level of tea. I went to his workshops and really changed my viewpoint, to see tea not only as a beverage, but as a living plant spirit. We drank Five Elements tea, and it was like when I drank Dian Hong, but more intense. I really felt the leaves fill my body. It completely changed me. It started my way of life, because I started to feel myself more alive. I feel more subtle sensations around, not only in my body, but in other people and in objects, too. I started to feel more compassion for all I see as well.



Since then, I've started to practice all five brewing methods from this tradition step by step, and to do all I can for this tradition. So right now we are working on our tea center in Moscow. We create tea gatherings and so many people come to these gatherings. Every time we have different experiences, like *ichigo ichie*. You always want to make something special for your guests, to help them feel the Leaf, to be of service and to connect. It's not about imposing my vision of tea on them, but rather helping them hear Her voice by themselves. I help them create their own relationships with tea.

Wu De and I met again last autumn, in Estonia, when he came to do other workshops there. Then we had workshops in Kiev. I realized that the next time we would meet, would be in Taiwan, so I started to plan my visit there. It ended up being spontaneous, and now I'm here at the center writing this! Here in Taiwan, I started to realize how fresh my love for tea is and how much I need to do for the future of the center in Moscow, but it's good because I'm not stuck in ideas of how to do things. I can come back to beginner's mind. Being here has completely refreshed me and prepared me to return to Moscow and share what I've learned. Please come help us in Moscow, or if you're visiting, share some tea:

Inside the Hut

Global Tea Hut sessions around the world:

- In Los Angeles, there are Global Tea Hut events every Thursday at 6 PM and Sunday at 9:30 AM. To reserve a spot, email Colin at livingteas@gmail.com.
- In Barcelona, Spain, Global Tea Hut member Antonio holds tea events each month at Caj Chai Teahouse. The next Global Tea Hut event is on May 3rd at 9:45. Contact him at info@cajchai.com for more info.
- In Moscow, Russia, there are frequent tea events. Contact Tea Hut member Ivan at teeabai@gmail.com for details.
- In Nice, France, GTH member Sabine holds regular tea events at the tearoom Les Causeries de Blandine. You can email her at sabine@letempsdunthe.com.
- In Darwin, Australia, Sam holds GTH tea events on Fridays at 6 PM. Email him at sdsgibb@gmail.com.
- In Tallinn, Estonia, Chado tea shop holds events most Friday evenings at 7 PM. Contact events@firstflush.ee for more details. Also, Timo Einpaul and Herkko Labi both hold small weekly tea events in their homes in Tartu, Estonia and Tallinn, Estonia (respectively), on Wednesdays at 6 PM. You can email Timo at timo@sygis.net and Herkko at herkots@gmail.com.

Our goals for the coming year:

- Increase membership to 2,000 by January 1st, 2015
- Hire an architect and begin building in 2015
- Incorporate Global Tea Hut in Taiwan so we can offer Taiwanese visas to foreign volunteers

Ways in which Global Tea Hut will continue to improve as we get near our goals:

- At 1,000 members, we'll start traveling more to research articles on tea and teaware, and to source new and different organic teas. As an awesome side-effect, this will allow us to connect organic farmers to each other and to you!
- At 1,500 members, we'll start translating modern and ancient Chinese and Japanese tea wisdom to English. In many cases, these will be the first translations of major Asian tea texts into English!

How you can help:

- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Use social media and email to share our videos, our links and membership to Global Tea Hut. Post photos of your tea sessions and GTH envelopes. Spread the word to people who may benefit from membership as much as you do!
- Share each month's tea with friends. Show them the newsletter and tell them why you love your subscription. Tell them we need 2,000 members this year to begin construction on the world's best free tea center.

Center News

- Before you visit, check out the center's website (www.teasagehut.org) and read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. Please email us with the details of your stay.
- Lindsey will be serving tea in Germany in June. Also, Nick will start serving tea in Britain this summer as well! Contact us for details.
- As you read this, we will all be in Yunnan finding some old-growth puerh for our annual Light Meets Life puerh drive.
- 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. Feel free to contact us at globalteahut@gmail.com with any questions we can answer for you.



Tea Inspired Poetry

Meanwhile, let us have a sip of tea.
The afternoon glow is brightening
the bamboos,
the fountains are bubbling with
delight, the sighing of the pines
is heard in our kettle.
Let us dream of evanescence, and
linger in the beautiful foolishness
of things.

—*Kakuzo Okakura*