



國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE
June 2015

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"WHITE COCKSCOMB" CLIFF TEA

WUYI MOUNTAIN

RUI QUAN FINE TEAS



WHITE COCKSCOMB

In May, we went to Wuyi Mt. for our second annual Global Tea Hut trip. It was the first time many of Wu De's students got to meet his teacher, Master Lin. In our hearts, we were committed from the start to bring you all there with us: to share in the stunning landscape, the mastery of traditional hand-processing and, of course, the magic Cliff Tea.

*Love is
Changing the world
Bowl by bowl*

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Ashley Smith, USA



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Letter from the Editor

In June we reach the zenith of another year of tea, another year of self-cultivation and community, sharing new teas with new friends and celebrating old friends with old teas! As this global tea family grows larger and larger, there is more that we can do together to influence the way that tea is produced and shared. We can work towards our common goal of sustainable tea farming that is good for us and for the Earth. And we can promote a perspective of tea as plant medicine, healing people by awakening serenity in their lives as well as a feeling of connection to Nature. As we create a lifestyle that moves in harmony with Nature, humanity moves towards greater prosperity and happiness—person by person, bowl by bowl...

The summer is actually a great time for tea, especially outdoors. Alternatively, if it is really hot where you are, you may want to check previous issues of this magazine for some sun tea recipes that make amazing living and/or organic iced teas! From a Traditional Chinese Medicine perspective, it is actually healthy to have some hot liquids in the summer, helping to acclimatize you and induce sweat, which is also purgative. Some nice oolong, green, white, yellow tea or young sheng puerh are all great when the weather warms up. It is nice to try waking up a bit earlier in the summer, before dawn when the weather is cool, and pour your bowls of tea in unison with the life that is pouring into the world. The greenery and wildlife thrive at this time of year, and are at their zenith at this time of day as well.

This is a *very* special issue of Global Tea Hut! This May, we went on our second annual GTH trip to China, this time to Wuyi Mountain in Fujian Province, the birthplace of oolong tea. These annual excursions have so far been small in size, and we've been forced to find ways to limit participation. But as we learn all that goes into managing tour groups in China, we plan to open the trips up each year so that more and more of you can have the opportunity to go along with us and learn about tea and Cha Dao. Sixteen people traveled with us this time, almost double the amount we took to Yunnan last year. We had a spectacular trip, full of tea gatherings, hikes in the park and plenty of tea processing.

Our whole June magazine is devoted to Wuyi Cliff Tea, the oldest and brightest of oolong teas. There is a magic in these ancient cliffs, inviting centuries of spiritual seekers to do their meditations around what the Daoists called, "The Heaven Portal". And there is something magical in the water, earth and air here. It awakens new patterns in you—mind and body both. The tea trees that grow in the park sparkle with the same



vibrancy, singing the minerals and sun into the greenest songs, especially at this time of year. It is such a joy to see all the pickers trodding along the old trails with leaves balanced on either shoulder, to watch the bright green leaves withering on bamboo trays, and to see them processed by hand in the way they have been for hundreds of years... And then to drink such tea with the stream water nearby—breathing and drinking Wuyi's wonder into you is an overwhelming bliss every tea lover should experience.

We hope to take you along with us to Wuyi, through the stunning photography and the articles on Cliff Tea that will educate you on the history and wonder of this most precious of oolongs. And you can also expect some great videos soon. You were there with us in spirit as well; we often spoke of the Global Tea Hut community and our connection to all of you through this amazing place and tea. If all of that wasn't enough, we've also brought back this amazing Cliff Tea to share with you as your Tea of the Month, so that all of us—around the world in more than thirty countries—can have a bit of Wuyi coursing through our bodies, heart and soul.

Wu De

Tea of the Month



SPRING 2014 BAI JI GUAN YANCHA

For hundreds of years, tea lovers have followed a journey leading into the northern wilderness of Fujian province, where cliffs and rivers touch the sky with a dancing grace that is otherworldly. The rocks here are covered in calligraphy, carved to commemorate dignitaries who came to pay respect to this land above the clouds and poems written by famous scholars and unknown travelers—each compelled beyond constraint, overflowing with the emotions such beautiful rivers, cliffs and bends in the sky inspire. And of course, there is the tea, called “Cliff Tea”, for its liquor has within it all these elements.

Undeniably sacred, Wuyi is one of the only mountains in China where Daoist, Buddhist and Confucian temples abound in such close proximity. The powerful connection these mountains have to Nature, the incredibly rich waters and the old tea bushes growing amongst the cliffs have gathered saints, sages and seers since time immemorial. There are Daoist caves that were once essential stops on meditation tours that led to immortality, and some say there are still hermits high

up amongst the peaks of Wuyi even today. For hundreds of years, Buddhist monks and nuns have tended their own tea gardens here, helping to establish the rich tradition that has made this magnificent park an essential stop on any tea journey. On a visit, you can't ignore the influence these old temples have had, bringing a tradition of holiness and the smell of antiquity to the area. And yet, more often than that, you turn a corner and find yourself between two tall cliffs, the sun's rays visible brushstrokes that gently end in highlights upon the greenery and sparkles on the crystal waters—and then you realize that it is not the temples which have made this place sacred, but rather a mystical and mysterious charm which drew the wandering ascetics here in the first place.

Cliff Tea

Wuyi Cliff tea is traditionally only picked in spring. Some of the lower grades, however, are harvested more than once a year and sometimes not by hand. Oolong tea is the

most refined of all tea processing, and quality depends as much on the skill of the craftsman as on the trees themselves.

The tea is withered indoors and outdoors on racks to ensure airflow from underneath. The specialty of oolong is that it is shaken around a bamboo tray to bruise the cells in the leaves. You can tell a masterfully shaken oolong by looking at the edges: the best quality striped oolong will only be slightly red around the edges, meaning that only this part of the leaf was bruised. Then the tea is pan-fried to kill green enzymes and to arrest oxidation. After that it is rolled to break down the cells and to shape the leaves. *Yancha* is rolled across ribbed bamboo trays with great skill. The tea is then roasted over charcoal for flavor. *Yancha* will be roasted more than once since the farmers cannot possibly process all the tea during harvest. They therefore give it a short roast to arrest the processing and store all the tea until the harvest is finished, at which time they can slowly roast each of the teas with the attention they deserve.



"White Cockscomb" (白雞冠)



Wuyi Mt., Fujian, China



Cliff Tea, Oolong



Min Bei, Fukanese Aborigines



~400 Meters





The heavier roasts of *Yancha* mean that the tea is better left for some time so that the roast can cool off. Traditionally, spring *Yancha* wasn't brought to market officially until Chinese New Year the following year (around February).

Cliff Tea changes far more quickly and more dramatically than other aged teas like Puerh. In just five years, a *yancha* reaches a whole other world of flavor, especially the good ones. Most *yancha* is allowed to rest for at least six months, so the roast cools down, and the original flavors of the leaf swell up. (Our tea is from 2014.) Also, unlike Puerh, aging *yancha* requires no special environment, humidity, etc. A good container with a nice seal is all that is needed. Every time we open our *yancha* jars, the tea inside has transformed and opened up new worlds of experience.

Similarly, we have found no tea in the world that changes as much from steeping to steeping as *yancha* does. The flavors, aromas and mouthfeel all transform with each brew, and as you get down into the later steepings, a mineral flavor—called “rock flavor (*yan wei*, 岩味)” in Chinese—continues for many steepings to come.

The world of *yancha* is deep and profound, and you could spend several lifetimes brewing this tea without ever plumbing its depths. Such a time would not be wasted. Wuyi tea has been called the “Tea of Immortals” for centuries. The wizened bushes deep in these scenic crags have ever been brewed into elixirs of meditation and life, sought out by travelers who traversed leagues of mountains, plains and rivers in search of their legendary golden sutras, whispered in quiet cups directly to the soul.

To drink *yancha* in the park on some quiet rock with clear water scooped from one of the ever-present streams is one of the finest joys under Heaven, and brings a lasting peace that you carry in your heart long after leaving. The surrounding hills are covered with meditation caves, temples and monasteries built on the foundation of such calmness. Back across the Taiwan Strait, lifting our cups, we close our eyes and return to those vistas, now forever imprinted on our souls.

Tea of the Month

What an amazing year of Global Tea Hut! Starting with the very first tea donated by Master Lu, our teas have been higher quality than any of the teas we've sent before. Most of this abundance is due to the generosity of donors willing to share



better teas with all the brothers and sisters in this community. Great teas shared in the company of wonderful tea people makes for transformative experiences. And this month sets a new bar, as this is easily the finest and most valuable tea we have ever shared in Global Tea Hut!

We went on our second annual Global Tea Hut trip to Wuyi Mt. this year, where we were hosted by the Huang family. The Huangs are now in their twelfth generation of making master-crafted Cliff Teas. Very soon, you'll be reading about how special their tea and craftsmanship are. Their teas are hand-crafted, which no one else in Wuyi is doing in such full production. It is very rare to find fully hand-processed oolong tea in this day and age, let alone to have so much of it donated to many people around the world. We are so honored to share this

wonderful tea and the spirit of our trip with our dear tea family.

In Wuyi, the Four Famous teas are: Big Red Robe (*Da Hong Pao*), Iron Arahant (*Tie Luo Han*), Golden Water Tortoise (*Shui Jin Gui*) and White Cockscomb (*Bai Ji Guan*). Our tea of the month is the last and most unique of these, White Cockscomb. It is unique because the leaves are a bright yellow mutation that is unlike any other tea on earth.

Bai Ji Guan originates at the Bat Cave (not the secret lair) on Yin Ping Peak, Wuyi. According to legend, it was given its name in the Ming Dynasty. It is perhaps the most unique of all *yancha* varieties. Like the other teas discussed here, Bai Ji Guan is farmed asexually from late-grown seeds. It is mostly found in the inner mountains, and has also been propagated in larger amounts since the 1980's. The bushes are medium-sized and

have very thick, dense branches. The leaves are dull and shallow with average teeth around the edges. The surface also bulges. These leaves appear even more delicate than the other varieties of *yancha*. The buds are all a bright yellow color with minuscule hairs. The older leaves appear white in the sunshine and together with the buds look similar to a cockscomb, which is where the tea gets its name. The diameter of the corolla is 3.5cm with seven petals. They blossom fully at the end of April. The yellow, bright buds and leaves together make a very unique oolong tea that often has a fragrance of lychee fruit. Some masters say Bai Ji Guan also tastes of mushrooms. The sensations should be crisp and slightly dry in the mouth. It tends to be the sweetest of the Four Legendary Cliff Teas, and therefore the most accessible.



Every Cliff Tea has a history, a lineage and myth surrounding its name. They say that a baby was napping while his mother picked tea in the gardens near their home. An eagle saw the baby and thought it easy prey. But as it swooped down to scoop the baby up, the family rooster put himself between the eagle and the babe. It fought bravely, fiercely defending the child with every attack. Eventually, the eagle gave up and flew off in search of other food. But the rooster was gravely wounded. Hearing the commotion, the mother ran over just in time to hold the rooster as it breathed its last. She summoned the whole village and a funeral was held for the rooster, burying it with the highest honor near their sacred tea trees. Shortly thereafter, the rooster was given the highest of all rebirths: *as a tea tree*. The tree grew with yel-


low leaves like the wing feathers of the rooster, and a three-pronged leaf shape that resembled his comb.

This legend, and many others like it, can open our heart to how strongly the aboriginal peoples of China revered the tea tree, holding rebirth in that form as the highest of all honors—one reserved for heroes, saints and immortals. As you read through this magical issue of Global Tea Hut, we hope that you will cultivate a similar regard for this amazing tea. If ever there was an issue of Global Tea Hut to read cover-to-cover, this is it. Never before have the articles been as influential to your experience with the tea, for as you learn about this magical place and the tea there, you can't help but bow with a deep reverence for the gift we've sent you in this tea. First and foremost, we hope to take you on a journey to the fascinating and

glorious Nature of Wuyi. Then, as we learn about all the heritage and skill, effort and sacrifice that goes into fine, hand-processed tea like this we honor this incredibly valuable gift.

A tea like this is priceless, and only comes around every so often in one's life. Take the time to brew it with love and focus, sharing it with people who feel the way you do about tea. During our trip, Master Lin often said that the best company for tea is people who love and know tea the way you do. He said that such friends and family are the ones you want to come over so you can share your best teas with them. And that's exactly how we feel about all of you, which is why we're so happy to share this month's tea with you!





*Your heavy eyes long to close
Perchance another dream of Wuyi
Where part of your soul now roams
Peacefully cliff-hidden
Sipping streams and walking the treetops
With the other Immortals*

*Rest and be reborn
Feel your roots caress the rocks
Drunken rain and sun
Cleansed by the mists
You give your medicine
To the ones who dream*

*But were you a man dreaming you were a tree?
Or now a tree dreaming you are a man?*

—Wu De

Brewing Tips for Bai Ji Guan

Good *yancha* is notoriously difficult to prepare. It was made to be brewed gongfu (if you have such a setup). Learning to brew *yancha* properly is one of the ways we learn how to make tea gongfu. You can brew it in a side-handle pot or bowl if you have to, but it will shine better when prepared gongfu style. When mis-brewed, the tea will become sour. If you get it right, you'll be rewarded with a dark, golden-amber nectar of the gods with a lasting fragrance and Heavenly Qi.

Gongfu and oolong grew up together, shining brightly in one another's company. This is a great opportunity to practice your tea brewing skills, as this tea will respond to the soft and skillful touch of a seasoned brewer. Every little detail matters with a tea as fine as this, from the water to the heat, the teaware to the brewing methodology—how high and gently you pour and in which direction... Such a sensitive tea rewards extra care and attention to detail, blossoming in the mouth in indescribable aroma and flavor when it is prepared well. There-

fore, use this wonderful opportunity to brew this tea with focus, attention to detail and a mind free from distraction. Ultimately, we should prepare all our tea in this way. But this month's tea is especially valuable. You can put these leaves in a bowl if you don't have a gongfu set. If you take this route, you should just put three leaves or so, as the essence of this leaf is stronger than others we've sent.

As you enter the later steepings of this marvelous tea, brew it well beyond what you would an ordinary tea. Notice the "rock flavor" in these watery brews. The tea tastes almost like drinking the mineral-rich waters from the cliff faces of Wuyi. Also, you may want to save these spent leaves. We have kept them going for up to a month after brewing! Try putting them in a glass with hot water and a lid overnight. Then, drink the tea in the morning after it has steeped all night. Put the lid back on and let it rest during the day, repeating the process each night for as long as you like. We think you'll be pleasantly surprised each morning!



Wuyi Cliff Tea

茶的天堂

MT. WUYI HEAVEN FOR TEA

-Wu De

Of all the genres of Tea, oolong is the most refined, requiring the most from the people who make it. Traveling to the birthplace of oolong tea is a pilgrimage for Chajin. There is a natural mystic that moves like the mists through the cliffs of Wuyi. Through these pages, let us travel there in spirit, like the Daoist mendicants and Zen monks that have come here for millennia to practice beneath the paradisaical tea trees.

I have always felt a kinship to Wuyi teas. They were among the very first teas I fell in love with, and each spring I return to these mountains to bask in the Nature that creates my favorite teas, have sessions on the very rocks ancient tea sages sat on, using the bright stream water that the trees themselves drink of. And every year I find myself hushed to a state of deep calm unlike anywhere else. It is difficult for me to choose any one genre of tea as a favorite, but if I had to drink only one kind of tea for the rest of my life it would indeed be Wuyi *yancha*. Wuyi tea is, to me, the richest variety of tea, with so many varietals, and a rich processing heritage, culture and folklore. Not only that, but the way in which flavors, aromas and Qi change from steeping to steeping, session

to session means Wuyi tea is always inviting further exploration. Then, as Cliff Tea ages, it transforms completely so that after five years or so it's no longer recognizable, expanding in breadth and depth, changing flavors and aromas, and growing in energy...

Terroir

The World Cultural and Heritage site of Wuyi Mountain has been regarded as a national treasure since the Han Dynasty. The many gorges, rivers, cliffs and other scenery have inspired countless poets, painters and authors. The park itself is approximately seventy square-kilometers, and most of the famous "36 peaks and 99 crags" are around

400 meters above sea level. There are numerous waterways, the most famous of which is the "Nine Turns River", whose nine bends have been eulogized countless times throughout history. Its source is around two-thousand meters higher and to the east in another park, the Hang Gang Mountain.

The environment here produces tea like no other on Earth. It is called "Cliff Tea (*yancha*, 岩茶)" because the old bushes cling to the rocks in beds and valleys between natural gorges. Many of the beds that host these small gardens are manmade, but a deeper trek into the park will yield plenty of natural settings, with very old bushes, wizened by hundreds of years. These cliffs enhance and become the tea bushes in an amazing variety of ways,



surging all the forces of Nature through this channel towards humans.

The cliffs on both sides protect the trees from wind and other natural dangers, as well as shielding the bushes from too much sunshine. Many of them allow only the morning and evening light to gather on the bushes. Studies have shown that the reddish-orange light of the morning causes the trees to produce more sugars, while the more purplish light of the evening results in more amino acids and various kinds of proteins. The unique environment here at Wuyi has resulted in a tea with a very unique profile of hydroxybenzene, amino acids, catechins, caffeine and other elements which all affect the nature and quality of a tea.

The cliffs here also aid in tea production, as they funnel daily mist into the valleys, assuring that the tea trees are always humid and moist. Locals have for centuries called this the “Breath of Heaven”, claiming that the tea trees breathe in the Qi of the mist and rocks, lending them their “rock flavor”. Water is always such an essential aspect of tea, both as the tree flourishes in Nature and in our preparation of the liquor. And as one strolls through the park, the crystal streams and dripping falls that highlight every turn also emphasize the coursing pulse of the mountains, flowing through the Earth to the trees and on to us. The water that streams down these cliffs is full of rich minerals, not only from the countless rocks within the park, but also from the higher

mountains to the east. This irrigation has also helped to create the rich, gravelly soil that tea sages have said is most suitable for tea since long before Lu Yu made that claim famous.

Besides protection, rich oxygen and minerals, the cliffs also participate in tea production in one other important way: during the day, the rocks and cliffs absorb the sunlight in the form of heat, which they then release throughout the night, comforting the old bushes with a consistent temperature at all times. This is especially important during the harvest season, when slight temperature fluctuations can affect the quality and abundance of the harvest.

While we can explore the different elements of Wuyi tea production, the harmony of sun, rocky soil, water, mist and air is really not something maintained or controlled by the hands of men. The best teas are created by Nature first, and man second. Besides the qualities pointed out here, there are a million subtle ecological relationships between other plants, insects, animals, the mountains and sky, which we'll never fully understand. But is there any need? A nice hike through the park trails to an undisturbed garden, quiet these hundreds of years, leaves you with an impression a thousand, thousand poems could never capture—in awe of Nature and your place in it. Perhaps there is no need to know why Wuyi tea is like none other on Earth, especially when you can drink it. The same sunshine that's in the leaves warms your skin, as you reach down to scoop up some of the smooth, soft water the trees also drink. Eating the amazing local vegetables and walking around a bit more, you realize that like the tea trees here you'd be healthier living here as well.

Wuyi people take great pride in the tea processing skills they've developed over centuries. One of the problems that you can encounter with other popular genres of tea is that the booming tea industry attracts farmers who were previously working with other crops. They then learn the “standard” method of processing for their region and stick to that, day in and day out. Many of the “flaws” in such production come as a result of this formula, which fails to account for all the subtle changes that need to be made for each batch, based on temperature, humidity and many other factors. Watching the ancient wisdom unfold in hand-processed *yancha* is amazing, as slight adjustments are made all day and night to balance factors that are often felt rather than analyzed. It is an art. And if you've ever tried even the simplest aspect of the process, like shaking the leaves



for example, you'll see that it is no wonder why, like any art, it takes decades to master.

But not all Wuyi tea is high quality; not all of it is environmentally protected or processed by hand (or even with any skill). It is therefore important to understand a bit about the four grades of Wuyi *yancha* and have some guidelines for identifying them.

Zhen yan 正岩

The highest grade of *yancha* all comes from within the protected park itself. “Zhen Yan” means “True Cliff Tea”. The trees in the park tend to be older and grown with the proper distance between them,

so their roots have room to breathe, growing deep and wide to absorb all the wonderful nutrients of this amazing place. They aren't tended excessively by people, either. Some of the small, terraced gardens are so surrounded by vegetation that the tea is not easily discernable to the untrained eye. Of course, these trees are often organic and harvested by hand only once a year.

There are, however, several “distinctions” of *Zhen Yan*, starting of course with the trees themselves. It is a big park and different locations are better for tea growth than others; places where the trees are older, the water and minerals better, or perhaps where the mist and sunshine are perfect. As mentioned above, the cliff walls absorb the day's sun-



shine and release it at night, so many locations in the park stay at a constant temperature and humidity during the growing season. This means that the location of the trees in the park has a huge influence on its quality.

Another important factor relates to the fact that the park is such a famous tourist destination. Thousands of people walk through every day, following the clear and defined paths constructed by the government. Consequently, the tea gardens near these paths are all inferior. The noise, cameras and even the breathing of thousands of people all affect the quality of these gardens. The best gardens, on the other hand, are deeper in the park—down dirt paths that take you to silent places well

away from all the crowds. Like all plants, tea also responds to human interaction, emotion and even the human voice itself. Before the strict ban, put into effect around 2002, friends picked some of the famous *Da Hong Pao* from the original bushes, processed it and drank it a few days later. While the tea was amazing, coming from such old and powerful bushes, their guide said that compared to earlier years, the quality had diminished. When I asked him why, he responded that it was definitely because of the thousands of people who come and take photos and make a lot of noise around the trees each day.

Of course, much of the mastery of oolong tea is in the complicated processing, so this is a major

factor in the end product as well. The best *Zhen Yan* is completely hand-processed, though there is also semi-hand-processed and machine-processed tea. It is easy to differentiate the hand-processed from the machine-processed varieties by appearance alone, as the latter produces more uniform leaves, all about the same shape with the same kind of twist, whereas the hand-processed teas display a variety of sizes, shapes and twists unique for each leaf.

Even *Zhen Yan* from a single garden will be sorted several times, and a variety of grades will eventually be packaged. A lot can go into the distinction. The tea processed by the hand of the master, for example, may be the smallest quantity

each year, as his job is mostly to teach and supervise his younger relatives and employees.

A true master never roasts genuine *Zhen Yan* from within the park heavily. A lot of people have only tried heavily-roasted *yancha* and therefore have probably not tasted much *Zhen Yan*, which is produced in smaller quantities and is more expensive as a result. Each of the thousands of varieties of *yancha*, like “Golden Water Tortoise (*Shui Jin Gui*)” or “Old Man’s Eyebrows (*Lao Jing Mei*, 老金眉)”, has very distinct flavors. “Iron Arahant (*Tie Luo Han*)”, for example, is known to taste of burnt bamboo, while “White Cockscomb (*Bai Ji Guan*)” tastes of lychee. If the roast is too

heavy, these flavors are lost. In fact, almost all *Zhen Yan* was traditionally stored for six months to a year before drinking so that whatever roast there was mellows out, leaving behind the flavors of the leaf. Like all oolong, mastery in roasting is when the roast affects the flavor in a positive way without leaving behind any traces of itself. The exception to this rule is the “mistaken” *Zhen Yan* tea, which is heavily roasted. As each variety of tea is hand-processed, some percent of it is sorted down, due to all kinds of mistakes, natural and human. This tea is set aside with all the “down-sorted” tea. At the end of the processing period, there is then a bulk of this tea all mixed up—with “*Shui Jin Gui*”, “*Tie Luo*

Han” and the other varieties processed that year. This pile of mixed tea is then heavily roasted to cover up the differences in the leaves, and sold under the generic, all-encompassing “*Da Hong Pao*” that denominates all low-quality tea from Wuyi. Many of the best heavily-roasted teas are of this variety, as they at least come from *Zhen Yan*. A look at the wet leaves can often show if the tea was blended.

Ban Yan 半岩

This is what you could call “Halfway Cliff Tea”. It grows on the hills and cliff sides of the immediate edges of the park. A lot of these gardens are planted in the traditional way, like *Zhen Yan*: on terraces with a meter or so between each tree, which is left to grow strong and old. Some of these gardens are actually quite old as well and some are even organic, though much less than in the park.

Ban Yan can be a shady division because some of the gardens that are just outside what the government has demarcated as the park produce better tea than some of the worst locations within the park. Also, a lot of *Ban Yan* is right on the border, and there are trees just on the other side of a cliff that could be called *Zhen Yan*. For the most part, these trees lack what the best quality *yancha* has: cliffs on both sides, which not only absorb and release heat, as we discussed earlier, but also drain minerals down from both sides into streams of nutrient-rich waters for the trees. This water also keeps the soil aerated, loose and gravelly.

As with *Zhen Yan*, processing will play a huge part in determining the quality of a *Ban Yan* as well. Much less of this tea is hand-processed, as it does not warrant the attention and cost in energy. Hand-processing oolong tea is very labor intensive and during the harvest season many of the masters get very little sleep.

Halfway Cliff Tea



Zhou Cha 洲茶

Down in the flatlands between the park and the river that separates the new village, several plantations of tea have been created. The soil there is rich and the humidity is adequate. Some of these trees are also old, though less than the previous kinds of tea.

In this category, much of what makes *yancha* special is lost. The distinct flavors of certain varieties of *yancha* have as much to do with their special location in the park as they do with the genetics of the trees themselves, which is why tea masters in Wuyi only really refer to the six original trees as “*Da Hong Pao*”. Even grafting clones and planting them elsewhere will eventually result in a new variety of tea as the trees adapt and interact with their new surroundings—like the first genera-

tion “*Da Hong Pao*” planted in the now-famous Bei Dou area.

Also, farming by the river ceases to be about quality and starts to march to the economic drum. For that reason, very little of it is organic and it is often harvested year round, as in other tea-growing regions around the world. All of this tea is heavily roasted, which, as we discussed, is almost always done to cover up inferior quality leaf, and sold as generic “*Da Hong Pao*”. Most of this tea is sold raw to large factories that machine process it. (In fact, some farmers have even begun to sell their *Zhen Yan* to the factories rather than process it themselves.)

Wai Shan 外山

Literally “Grown Outside”, this tea is propagated in the hills sur-

rounding the park. It shares in none of the richness that makes Wuyi tea special. This tea is all from lower altitude, inorganic, hedged and pruned little trees that are over-harvested into the ground, like in most tea-growing areas in the world. This tea is all about mimicking real Wuyi tea, with heavy roasts to cover up any trace of flavor that could possibly infuse from the tea itself. Basically, these are farms that have, over the years, jumped on the “*Da Hong Pao*” bandwagon and converted their land to tea production to cash-in on the growing interest. I have some of this tea from a trip in 2001 that to this day still has not lost its roast, so that when you open the jar or brew the tea, the roast-flavor and aroma is as strong as it was the day it was roasted. *Zhou Cha* and *Wai Shan* represent around sixty percent of all *Yancha*.

Zhou Cha



Yancha must pass through many stages in its production before it is ready to be brewed and enjoyed, and if any one of them is done improperly the tea's quality will be compromised. There aren't any secret recipes involved; rather, the beauty of the tea depends upon mastery of technique gained only through experience. Tea-producers have been handling this tea for generations, first watching as they were children, then participating more and more as they got older. The masters have lived Wuyi Tea Dao for decades.

The Harvest

One can't underestimate the importance of the picking stage. A "Master Guide" must accompany the pickers to find the right bushes. There are no fences or boundaries in Wuyi, so the Master Guide needs to know the land as if it were his own backyard. Unknowingly harvesting leaves from someone else's bushes is a serious offense. In the olden days, the owner of the bush was permitted to exact any punishment he wished on the culprit. Today, it is an unwritten law that the offender must pay the owner double what was taken, by mistake or intentionally. Consequently, the first job of the Master Guide is to lead the pickers to the bushes that they can pick.

At the start of the season, local monks hold a large ceremony. They make offerings, burn incense and place fruit upon the altar before chanting through the morning. The Master Guide, the tea-pickers and porters are all blessed in turn before they set out. They remain silent as they walk to the tea bushes, which are often high up amongst the cliffs. Before the leaves are ever seen there is a reverence—a sense of the Sacred amongst even the lowest porter.



The Master Guide's second job is to direct the pickers, showing them exactly which leaves to pick. Tea leaves grow alternately on their stems, not opposite from one another. Traditionally, only the first three leaves of each branch were taken. However, the increased demand for Wuyi Cliff Tea has made the Master Guides more lenient. Nowadays, the leaves are picked down to what is called the "fish eye" (*yu yen*, 魚眼), a small curled leaf residing about five leaves down the stem. The leaves below the fish eye are reserved for the next season. Despite the increased yield in recent times, the leaves that are lower down, between the fish eye and the third leaf, are lower quality and later downgraded in the sorting, so that even today the first three leaves are separated and packaged together to create the highest quality Cliff Tea.

The picking process can become extremely complicated. Even the placement of the bush must be taken into account. The side facing east will be blessed with more morning sunshine and therefore grow larger leaves that are opened more. The backside, on the other hand, will have more buds. These teas must be separated. Sometimes blends are made, if the mixture will have a better flavor, but all of this must be conducted by a master with years of experience.

After showing the pickers which leaves to take, the Master Guide can step back and supervise. The best pickers are often elderly ladies, as the picking is a delicate process. If a leaf is dropped to the ground it is considered spoiled and left behind. These older women have the experience and dexterity to pick the tea with the most efficiency. Often, it is only the women who pick the tea, and then male porters carry it back



to the village. The paths are often steep and treacherous and the baskets heavy (100 kg). But I have seen men picking and strong women carrying the baskets on occasion. When the tea is harvested to the fish eye the Master Guide will order the pickers to halt. They return to the village at a quicker pace than they walked on the way there, because the tea must reach the village as soon as possible to start the processing. Almost the entire process occurs on the same day the leaves are picked.

Withering & Reduction

When the leaves arrive at the village they are gently placed on round bamboo trays. Sometimes a tarp is laid on the ground if the leaves are of lower quality or higher yield. The leaves are arranged neatly in a single layer, using as many trays as neces-

sary, then left to wither. The leaves are withered because the moisture in tea leaves makes them too fragile for processing; they would only break. The withering accordingly prevents breakage by making the leaves slightly limp in preparation for the rest of the procedure. There is never a moment in which they aren't monitored. If it is too sunny or too hot, the leaves could be burned, which would ruin them. Also, if they are left to wither for too long, they will become overly-oxidized and must be discarded. The leaves must reach the desired level of flexibility, no more or less.

Periodically, the trays will be brought inside and placed on shelves, where the temperature and light can be controlled more precisely. This stage is sometimes called, "reduction." When the leaves come inside out of the sun, they begin to stiffen slightly. This is called "*huan yuan* (还原)" in Chinese,

which literally means "alive again." A master watches the leaves and moves them in and out of the room as many times as necessary to reach the desired flexibility and degree of oxidation. Much of this depends on the weather for that day, the time of day, the strength of the sun and the nature of the leaves themselves. Like any aspect of life, it's about finding the right degree. Masters know by sight and touch when the leaves are ready for the next stage. The harvest day is usually chosen at a time when there won't be any weather issues that could potentially disrupt production, though contingencies exist. Subtle changes result if the tea is processed on a rainy day, and therefore dried indoors. On such a day, at best, sixty percent of normal quality can be reached.



Shaking & Oxidation

The shaking part of the process is the predominant stage that separates oolong from all other varieties of tea. A round, woven bamboo tray is held firmly in two hands and the leaves are vigorously shaken. Shaking the leaves requires great skill. There is a rhythm to the process. It takes strength and endurance to shake the leaves and wisdom to know when they are finished. The shaking bruises the leaves, which encourages oxidation. The master producers try to bruise only the edges so that they will later develop a reddish hue that makes the leaves beautiful to look at and more delicious to drink. It is quite difficult to achieve this by hand.

After shaking, the bruised leaves are placed on shelves to oxidize. The shaking and oxidation will be continued at regular intervals until the master who oversees the production declares that the tea is sufficiently oxidized to move on to the next stage. It is this keen eye which

distinguishes the masters from the skilled apprentices. Charcoal braziers are often used to masterfully control temperature and humidity, guiding the oxidation to the desired degree.

Frying

When the tea has finished oxidizing it is time to fry it. The frying of tea serves two purposes: First, the frying arrests the oxidation process. If the leaves were allowed to further oxidize, they wouldn't taste and smell the same. Secondly, the frying destroys certain enzymes in the leaves that give them a bitter, grassy taste. For that reason, the frying of the leaves is often called the "kill-green stage" (*sa qing*, 殺青).

When the process is done in the traditional way, by hand in a large wok, the person frying must know when the leaves are finished by touch alone. It takes many years of practice before a student is allowed near the best quality teas. The fin-

gers must remain firmly closed so that no leaves get caught between them. The leaves are pushed to the center and then stirred outwards again. If the leaves are slightly damp the person frying will gently pull them up from the center and drop them to evaporate any excess moisture. The leaves must be pulled because they are too hot to reach under. Besides the heat and moisture, a lot of things are going on during this stage. The person frying must concentrate. A lot depends on this phase of the process.

Shaping & Bruising

The shaping of the leaves must happen immediately after frying. The temperature mustn't decrease at all. This often requires the cooperation of more than one worker. The leaves are quickly carried to bamboo trays that have raised ribs woven into them. The shaping (*rou nien*, 揉捻) is done with rolling, kneading motions and is done



for several reasons: Firstly, it causes the leaves to dry in a curled shape that is both pleasing and saves on packaging space. More importantly, rubbing the leaves across the bamboo ribs bruises the cellular structure of the leaves. The combination of the curled shape and bruised structure will cause the leaves to slowly release their essential oils, flavors and aromas when they are steeped. The bruising also changes the way in which the tea will oxidize during the rest of production as well as the way it will age.

Roasting

When the tea is shaped properly, it is ready to be roasted (*hong bei*, 烘焙). Smaller factories that produce Wuyi tea by hand do not have time to complete the roasting during the harvest season. There isn't enough space or people to complete all the other steps and roasting on the same day. For that reason, only the best teas will be

roasted start to finish on the same day. The greater bulk of the tea will go through a short initial roasting, called “*zou shui bei* (走水焙)”, or “temporary roasting”, which stops the oxidation process and puts the tea “on hold” for a short time. It is then carefully stored until all the tea has been gathered for that season. This could take days or even weeks depending on the factory and farm. When all the tea has been picked and processed, it is roasted. The second roasting, referred to as “*zhu bei* (足焙)” or “completing the roasting” is then conducted under the supervision of the masters. All of the laborers cooperate in this longer roast, which requires constant supervision. Any stage of the process can damage the quality of a tea, but the roasting is perhaps more evident than the other stages. A poor roasting is immediately noticeable in the first sip.

To roast the teas, compact charcoal is placed in wells. Rice ash is used to cover the coals, reducing the temperature to inhibit any flame.

The roasting must be through heat alone, as a flame would cook the tea. The tea is stirred and spread out regularly throughout the roast.

Sorting & Packaging

The teas are sorted on large tables by masters. The first three leaves, which are of higher quality, are separated into piles. The sorting is very time consuming, and done very carefully to maximize the amount of higher-grade leaves for the market. Sometimes a winnower is used to remove dust particles from the lower quality leaves.

Because the process takes a long time, the leaves will again be exposed to moisture in the air. For that reason, when the sorting is finished, the leaves are then roasted again for a very quick spell. This dries them out. The best Wuyi teas are packaged while they are still hot from this final, swift roasting.

There were eight hundred kinds of *yancha* in the Qing Dynasty. Now there are only a few dozens left. Many of the more unique varieties are limited to a few bushes only. They are unique mostly because of the differences in their locations, sunlight, minerals, soil and water. I have one small canister of a *yancha* made from a single bush, called “Old Bright Star (*Lao Shou Shin*, 老壽星)”, that is more than three hundred years old.

The four most famous varieties of *yancha* are “The Emperor’s Crimson Robe (*Da Hong Pao*)”, “Iron Arahant (*Tie Luo Han*)”, “Golden Water Tortoise (*Shui Jin Gui*)”, and our tea of the month, “White Cockscomb (*Bai Ji Guan*)”. “Water Fairy (*Shui Xian*, 水仙)” and “Cinnabar (*Rou Gui*, 肉桂)” are also quite common varieties. Each has a history and legend surrounding its name, a special leaf-shape and even subtle nuances in processing and drinking. Perhaps a brief exploration of the three remaining “Four Legendary kinds of Yancha” will be useful here (we discussed *Bai Ji Guan* in the Tea of the Month article):

Da Hong Pao 大紅袍 (The Emperor’s Crimson Robe)

Da Hong Pao, The “King of Tea” is the best known of all Wuyi *yancha*. It is also the best of the bunch, admired near and far in both the modern and antique age. It was often a favorite tribute of the royal court. The origin of this marvelous tea is the cliff of Tian Xin Yan, Jiu Long Ke of Wuyi. It received its name of “The Emperor’s Crimson Robe” in the Qing Dynasty. Since the 1980’s, *Da Hong Pao* farms have spread down into the inner mountains of Wuyi. *Da Hong Pao* grows from a medium-sized bush with leaves that belong to an asexual reproduction based on late-grown seeds. The plant has a half-open shape with thick branches in close proximity. Its leaves are elliptical,



bright and dark-green in color. There is a slight bulge on the surface and sharp, dense teeth around the edges. They give the impression of being thick and yet fragile at the same time. The buds are tender, showing a carmine color with lots of little hairs, and their fertility is strong and dense. The diameter of the corolla is approximately 3.5cm with six petals. Late in April the blossoms display themselves with great luxuriance. Overall, *Da Hong Pao* is of medium output compared to other *yancha*. The dry tea is tight and solid with mixed greens and browns throughout. The tea is full-bodied and has the fragrance of osmanthus flowers. It is especially famous for the sensations (*cha yun*, 茶韻) it brings, especially to the upper palate, and a rich, long-lasting aftertaste (*hui gan*, 回甘). True *Da Hong Pao* is said to taste and smell of the citrus spray that flies off an orange as it is peeled. I have often

smelled and tasted this when drinking high-quality, first-generation tea from the Bei Dou area. There are several grades of *Da Hong Pao* that are mostly evaluated in terms of their genetic proximity to the six original bushes. Some tea masters suggest that since *Da Hong Pao* has become such a generic term, perhaps it is more akin to a brand name than a variety of tea. Consequently, some masters only use the term “*Da Hong Pao*” to refer to the original six bushes, calling other varieties by the location in which they grow and their genetic approximation to the original bushes, like “Bei Dou First Generation” for example.

Tie Luo Han 鐵羅漢 (Iron Arahant)

Tie Luo Han received its name long before any of the other traditional teas of Wuyi, in the Song



The Mother Trees of Dao Hong Paoi and a single purple bud of Tie Lou Han



Dynasty. It is the earliest of all known Wuyi teas. It originates in the Nei Gui Ken of Hui Yan. The tea trees are planted on a long, narrow belt beside a small ravine with cliffs on both sides. The trees are therefore taller and bigger than the other varieties, with a half-open shape and crowded branches. The leaves are also elliptical, though slightly longer. They are dark green, bright and thick with dull, shallow teeth around the edges. The buds are reddish-purple with a lot of hairs. They are also very fertile, yet tender. The diameter of the corolla is 3.5cm and shines brightest in the middle of April. The buds yield a very high harvest, and are the raw material for this tea. Because *Tie Luo Han* is almost all bud, the tea is sweeter and thicker than the other kinds of Wuyi tea. It has a rich fragrance with a very fresh aftertaste that quenches the thirst and offers a very characteristic sensation of cleanliness

in the mouth. It is known to taste and smell a bit like roasted, or even burnt bamboo.

***Shui Jin Gui* 水金龜 (Golden Water Tortoise)**

This tea originates on the Du Ge Zhai Peak, Niu Lan Keng of Wuyi. It has played an important part in the culture and economy of the region since the 1980's. According to legend, it received its name in the Qing Dynasty, though the plant is much older. Like *Da Hong Pao*, *Shui Jin Gui* is a medium-sized bush and leaf cultivated asexually from late-grown seeds. The main distribution of *Shui Jin Gui* is in the inner mountains of the Wuyi region. The branches are dense and the leaves elliptical. They too are dark green in color. The surface also bulges like *Da Hong Pao*, but the edges display a slight wave with tiny, sharp

teeth. The leaves also fold inwards in a unique way. The buds are tender and a unique purple and green with flowery hairs; their fertility is dense. The diameter of the corolla is 3cm and usually boasts seven or eight petals. In mid-April they shine the brightest. This tea likewise offers a medium output. The color of the dry leaf is bluish. When finished it is smooth, fat, tight and even. When a package is opened, the leaves are all tangled together, which has earned it the nickname "Head of the Dragonfly". The tea is rich and fragrant with hints of plum and osmanthus. The liquor is a clear and deep orange color, and should have a full body, obvious sensation and deep aftertaste.



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SETTLE THE HEART FIRST

-Wu De

Now and then, it is important to return to the basics. We've been covering the Five Basics of Tea Brewing over the course of the last three issues. While these principles also apply to bowl tea, they are primary in gongfu brewing as well.

In the last three issues we've discussed the Five Basics of Tea Brewing. We keep returning to our foundation, no matter how far we have traveled, checking its strength and refining its power and beauty. Remember, *advanced techniques are basic techniques mastered*. The basics are like your shoes: they always travel with you, and no matter how far you hike, you have to keep them in good condition. It doesn't matter if you are a beginner or a seasoned hiker; well-maintained shoes are your best friends, preventing injury and, as any hiker knows, are the difference between a pleasant and unpleasant journey. Just as a wise hiker always takes great care of their shoes, so too a Chajin always hones her basics, knowing that Cha Dao is founded on simplicity. The beginning of the *enso* is also its end...

So far, we've talked about separating the tea table down the middle and doing everything on the right side with the right hand and vice versa. This helps us stay balanced, front and center, which is very important energetically. It is also rude in Asian cultures to turn one's back on guests. The most important

aspect of this principle, though, is that it protects our teaware.

Then we talked about all the circular movements in tea brewing, and there are many, like filling the pot with water or pouring the tea into the cups, etc. All of the circular movements done with the left hand should be clockwise, and with the right hand, counter-clockwise. This is to do with the ergonomics of our body and the natural energy flow from our center to our wrists/hands.

The third Basic of Tea Brewing is to do with the kettle: always put the kettle on the off-hand side and use the off-hand to handle the kettle. There are many reasons why this is an important basic of all tea brewing. The first practical reason why we hold the kettle in our off-hand is that it is important that our tea brewing be balanced. But the most important reason for using the off-hand to hold the kettle, though, has to do with fluency. Smoothness and fluency in brewing are the most relevant factors of gongfu tea, which is why this basic is the one that is most applicable to a gongfu brewing methodology. When you use the off-hand to handle the kettle there is

much greater fluency. You can pick up the kettle with the off-hand and remove the lid from the pot with the strong hand. Then you fill the pot and at the instant the off-hand is returning the kettle, the strong hand has already lifted the pot to start pouring into the cups. This is much smoother and without hesitation. It is all one movement, in other words.

This month we turn to the fourth Basic of Tea Brewing, and in doing so take our list inwards: *Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever pick up the kettle until your heart is still.* (That's right, ten 'evers'!) The time it takes the water to boil has always been a time for meditation. In traditional times, Chajin called the sound boiling water makes "the wind soughing the pines". If you use a metal kettle, you may also share in this sentiment. There are Zen poems that sentimentalize this meditation, saying "the wind in the pines summoned me back from my meditation." Nothing will improve your tea brewing more than a still heart, a heart free from obstructions. The path from the mind to the hand is through the heart. And if you are talking,



out loud or in your mind, nothing with mastery, quietude or grace will follow. Instead, you may leave a trail of broken teaware behind you. In order to achieve mastery of gongfu tea, concentration and focus will be needed.

There is a tradition dating back hundreds of years in China that one shouldn't talk while pouring the tea, lest the words pollute the tea. The pours have always been an opportunity for pauses, even in business meetings or casual conversations over tea. In that way, both the host and the guest gather themselves and reflect on the discussion, weighing their responses properly. Then we speak from the heart, and we learn the art of listening well.

There is no more important advice than to take the time to center yourself before you start each brew. Clear your heart and mind. This could happen through meditation, breathing, a prayer or my favorite, which is to connect the kettle to the pot—with one in each hand—while breathing deeply to calm the mind and center one's energy in the heart. As I do this, I can feel when the connection

between the water and Tea is clear, through my heart. When the line is clear and the connection is strong and without any interference or static—only then do I raise the kettle. This requires some patience. But remember that there is no hurry. Tea is always about slowing down! There is never any reason to rush, and nothing good will come from it (and talking while you pour, whether outside or in the form of internal dialogue, also results in more broken teaware over time). If you are to prepare tea masterfully, it must be from the place in you that meets the Universe.

When you are resting deep and centered, the tea brewing happens all its own—in a *wu wei*, to use a pun... Therefore, the more you cultivate yourself, through meditation and other practices, the better tea you'll make. Tea brewing is not something you do, in other words, but rather something you are.

This month, try to make a greater effort to take a pause before each brew to clear your heart. Live without walls of the mind for a second and put yourself into the tea brewing process, as opposed to

standing outside and “doing” it. Connect the kettle's handle to the button of your pot and see if you can feel the flow of energy and communication between the tea and the water/heat. It will be easier to feel after the first steeping, as they have already met—there is water in the leaves and pot, in other words. See if you can recognize when the connection is not clear—when it is bumpy/static as opposed to a smooth flow. What happens when you brew tea with your mind? If you find clarity within and pour from there, how is the tea different? What is the difference in the preparation itself? Where do the guiding principles come from when you aren't there? When there is no sense of ‘I’ as subject who is ‘preparing tea’ as verb, who/what is preparing the tea? Where do the movements come from? And where do they go when they are done?

As usual, we are excited to hear about your insights: globalteahut@gmail.com

The Legend of Da Hong Pao



The Lord of Heaven and Earth, The Eighth Tang Emperor of the Seven Kingdoms had just been married. In honor of his new bride, he bestowed tributary titles and lands upon all the members of her family. He gave her parents a great and fertile land to the west, and owing to his sharp mind and vast knowledge, he appointed her brother Shen as the official court scholar. He was to research the vast royal library and join in the council that advised the emperor, his voice representing the wisdom of past ages. Shen couldn't have been happier if the gods' nectar had showered him unawares. In those days many court positions were hereditary, so Shen wore the gold seal that signified his position on a cord around his neck, near his heart. He never took it off, even when bathing. He told his sister that the seal was worth more than life itself, as it would also be for his son one day. He spent his days amidst the hoary scrolls of the largest library in the kingdom. He loved the smell of the scrolls, their soft touch as he so-gently unrolled them. He loved the art of the words before he even began to read. But what Shen loved most was to suffuse himself in the legends and times before.

One day, the emperor himself sent for Shen. He asked Shen to leave on an important mission. He was to travel to a distant province and retrieve a very ancient scroll there. It reportedly contained the secrets of life. The emperor stressed the importance of Shen's trip, playing to his pride and helping him to forget how much he would miss the library, his writing, and how poor he was at traveling. Shen had always had a delicate disposition.

After a long and weary journey, Shen reached the distant city in the mountains. The officials there greeted him ceremoniously. He exchanged the chests of treasure the emperor had put in his keeping for the scroll that was needed, and stayed on to study some of the other scrolls in the library there. After some time, Shen decided to make the return journey to the palace. The elders there warned him to wait for spring, but Shen had already stayed longer than he should have, and didn't want to upset the emperor. He trudged on through the mountain passes; his fur coat bundled up to offer shelter from the storm. But Shen fell ill nonetheless. He tried to keep going, growing weaker with every passing mile. Finally, he collapsed.

When Shen awoke he was in a simple room that smelled of incense. Monks were praying over him. He thanked them profusely for bringing him to their monastery. Surely he would have died otherwise. Still, Shen wasn't in the clear yet. He had a deep cough and occasionally turned the rag red when he covered his mouth. The monks' healer had somberly told him that there was little to be done. He should begin to chant and pray. The monk offered to teach Shen how to die. Shen gave the monk his official gold medallion in exchange for their kindness. It was all he had. When the abbot found out, he was touched by Shen's selfless gift and sent for a small canister from his room. The small silver box was covered with sacred runes. The old abbot's wrinkled, golden hands gently twisted the jar open and the room was filled with a blossoming fragrance of grace, deeper than the incense even. Inside there were a handful of elegantly curled leaves resting in a nest of silk.

The abbot ordered hot water and a silver kettle was brought. As the leaves steeped their aroma permeated the room with ribbons of Heavenly steam. Shen was given a cup of the brew to drink. The first sip unraveled in his mouth and filled his body with celestial warmth. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted. It seemed to reach down past the corners of his body and massage his soul.

Over the course of the next week, Shen would be given the magical herbs once a day. He was already beginning to feel better. The taste of the liquor was so delightfully strong that it would last for hours, resurfacing with every breath, even after he had eaten his porridge dinner.

By the time the snows started to melt from the passes, Shen was completely recovered. He promised to return to the monks some day. The abbot showed him the six magic bushes that created the herbs that had saved his life. He said that the bushes had always been there, beyond the history of the monastery even. He gifted Shen with a small silver tin of their leaves. He said that only four such tins were harvested each year.

Shen returned to the palace and gave the emperor the scroll. He was rewarded with gold. He didn't tell anyone of his adventure that winter, or of the treasure in his robe; that he knew was far more valuable than any amount of gold. For what were riches without life? He carried the silver tin with him everywhere, close to his heart. He wore it just as he had once worn his royal seal. It was his most prized possession.



A year or two passed and Shen went about his business writing and studying in the library. Then, one cold winter the emperor suddenly fell ill. Shen's sister came to him crying. She said that the court doctors all said it was hopeless, the emperor's lungs were bloody and he was having difficulty breathing. The end was near. The emperor had been kind to Shen and his sister, and he couldn't bear the thought of his suffering. He ran to the emperor's quarters and asked all the doctors to leave. He held the emperor's hand and brought forth the small, silver tin from his robe. As the monks had done for him, Shen brewed the leaves and helped the emperor to sit up and drink them. It took only one day for their magic to work. The court doctors called it a miracle. By the time spring came the emperor was fully recovered. He summoned Shen to the court and said, "Shen, I asked you to go forth and bring back to me a scroll that contained the secrets of life. In that you failed." Shen's sister, the queen, gasped. The emperor grinned slyly, "For that scroll didn't contain the secrets of life." He paused. "But you Shen, were ultimately successful. You found the secret of life, not in a scroll but in some magic leaves." The emperor told him that he had but to ask and his very wish would be granted. "Anything in my power," offered the emperor. Shen was honest. He replied that the magic had not been his and proceeded to relate the story of his sickness, the hidden monastery up in the beautiful mountains of Wuyi, the monks and their magic bushes. The emperor ordered a caravan to be readied right away.

With Shen's help, the emperor traveled to the monastery himself. To the monks he gifted gold and the best of the religious scrolls and reliquaries from the royal library and treasury. He also gave each of the six tea bushes a long red cape, woven of the best silk in all the kingdoms, and embroidered beyond even what he himself wore. The robes were to be placed on the bushes in the cold of winter to keep them warm. He decreed that the tea trees were to be regarded as beyond the Lord of Heaven and Earth himself. And so each winter the sacred tea bushes were wrapped in the emperor's capes in all their glory, beyond any man or king. And there they sit today, the original "*Da Hong Pao*."

武夷山之旅

A TRIP TO
WUYI MOUNTAIN

-Chen De Hua

The scenic park of Wuyi Mountain has stirred the hearts of a thousand, thousand poets and sages. There is so much more to take in as part of a tea pilgrimage to the birthplace of oolong, with more adventure and Nature than a single trip can hold.

Wuyi has a legacy of Nature and cultural heritage that would make any nation proud. The unique landscape is awe-inspiring, leaving one bewildered even after many years of going there. The water is clear and clean like white jade; the thirty-six emerald peaks all reach towards the sky in askance, and ninety-nine different kinds of rock add color and variance to the scenery. The mystical setting, celebrated culture and exquisite tea all make Mt. Wuyi a necessary stop in China.

There are countless places worth visiting in Wuyi, offering an experience of Nature, culture, art and of course tea. The “Hanging Coffins” and “Hong Qiao Ban” were part of the Min Yue people’s cultural heritage. They were created more than three thousand years ago. The Min Yue also built a castle around two thousand years ago that still stands

to this day. The rock caves of Wuyi were used throughout the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Almost any road in Wuyi will lead to some place where Nature meets the sky in a stunning vista-embrace. And no trip to Wuyi would be complete without a look at the production of its renowned Cliff Tea. Recently, the roads in Wuyi have been upgraded, and travel has become much more convenient. The local government is promoting tourism with the hopes that more people will share in all the wonders Wuyi has to offer. Let us take a tour of just a few of the more magnificent places in Wuyi that are worth visiting:

Jiu Qu River

This murmuring river winds around Wuyi between the peaks on the southwest of Mt. Huang

Gang—the main peak of the Wuyi Mountain range. The source of the river is high up the peak. The Jiu Qu is said to bend nine times, each with its own unique beauty. There is an old folk saying, “Every turn around the mountain, the peak is reflected in the water,” which expresses the elegance of Nature there. By looking upwards one can see the mountains twisting into the blue, and below the same image is delightfully inverted again in the river. The water is clear and clean, and one feels like dipping a hand into the mountains reflected there. Some tourists close their eyes and listen to the riversong, forgetting where they are completely. The first visit to Jiu Qu often leaves one too stunned to even take a photograph.



The West Han Min Yue Wang Castle

This castle has several names. It is also referred to as “Ancient Hang Castle” (Gu Yue Castle) and “Ming Wang Castle”. It’s located just south of the famous Wuyi temple. It is over 48,000 square meters and is the best kept Hang castle in the south of China. The castle was built in 202 BCE when the Duke of Min Yue received his feud from Emperor Han Gao Zu, who was the founder of the Han Dynasty. The railing architecture is very characteristic of the local Min Yue culture. There were also a variety of historical relics discovered in or around the castle. Some were also found in the village next to the castle called “Gu Yue Cheng Village” because of its proximity to the castle. Much of what is known about the Fukien people was augmented by the finds in Wuyi. One feels very special standing on such ancient ground, knowing that a village once flourished beneath the walls of the castle. A trip to the castle will reward one with an understanding of the history and heritage of Wuyi.



Mt. Wuyi Primeval Forest Park

Located on the upper reaches of the Jiu Qu River, this primordial forest offers spectacular views of subtropic vegetation beneath Wuyi peaks, deep and serene gorges and beautiful waters. The ecology there is vibrant and colorful enough to make each and every visit a different experience. The Emerald Valley is made up of eighteen ponds in a palette of colors, and sixty-six gorgeous emerald pools. The most famous of these vibrant waters are the Dreamy Pond and Ox Horn Pool. This park is a kingdom of plants and animals unto itself. It is an ideal place for exploration, repose and adventure.

Natural Reservation Area

The National Reservation in Wuyi is one of the five largest in China, spanning more than twenty-thousand hectares. Natural forest covers more than 95% of the park. It is home to several unique species of plant and animal, like the amphibious creeper. It is a heaven for birds, snakes and insects as well as the scientists that study them. In September of 1999 it was added to the “Record of the World’s Natural and Cultural Legacy”, thereby becoming an internationally protected site. There is so much to see and do in the park that a complete travel book would be needed for it

alone. All of the following sights are found within the region of the park known as the Wuyi Scenic Area:

Lotus Peak & Yu Ting Lin Kiln Site

Besides the beautiful panorama offered by Lotus peak, there is the very interesting Yu Ting Lin Kiln Site. The site was a Song Dynasty pottery village. Hundreds of pieces have been found there dating back roughly a millennium. Most of them are tea sets made with pitch-black glaze. They are bright and clear with a primitive simplicity that is gorgeous nonetheless. The park is



about seventeen square kilometers and there are many sights worth visiting there. The Kou Bing Ancient Buddha and Laying Buddha are both very old Chinese representations. At the kiln site one can visit the museum and view the Song tea sets as well as watch modern potters make recreations of these magnificent pieces. One gets the sense that religion and tea have always played a pivotal role in the life of Wuyi people. The environment inspires spiritual hermitage and the growth of tea both, so it's no wonder that they were attracted here even in ancient times.

Wuyi Great Canyon

On the upper reaches of the mountain range, this scenic park will stun the senses in that characteristic Wuyi way. The Qing Long and Feng Huang waterfalls are both dazzling photo opportunities. Anyone who travels here will leave with a sense of breadth and profundity. The way Nature carved out the Red River Valley is almost alien, seemingly sculpted by titan hands before there were men. One can enjoy white water rafting in the river below if one is inclined more towards the excitement and danger of travel. Otherwise, one can just laze around and take pictures of

the mountains and waterfalls that abound.

Tian You Peak & Dao Yuan Caves

The Dao Yuan caves have always been a solace from the turmoil of the world below. The 10-square-kilometer park offers views of the Tian You, San Ceng and San Yang peaks, the Snow Flower Mountain, Xian Yu and Golden Brick Pools, as well as the Huma Ravine. The caves were once home to Daoist mendicants and still vibrate with the cool tranquility of their meditations.

Shui Lian Cave & Da Hong Pao Area

This area is the largest and longest ravine in the Wuyi scenic area. It gives the impression of an emperor god's great hall, decorated profusely with majestic mountains and water fit for such a king. This part of the park also represents the largest of the scenic spots in Wuyi, covering more than 22 square kilometers. The Shiu Lian cave is cool and beautiful. There are several peaks, ravines and waters in the area worth visiting. And no stop to Wuyi can be complete without a visit to the legendary *Da Hong Pao* tea trees which are held in a Monastery park. *Da Hong Pao* is a cliff tree, fed by the spring water that drips down through cave minerals and nourishes the trees in such a unique way. Looking around in a circle, one will understand quite clearly why *Da Hong Pao* is known as the "King of Tea".

The Linear Sky Hu Xiao Yan Area

This part of the Scenic Area is on the south of the mountain, near the second bend of the Jiu Qu River. It offers deep draughts of mountain air that seem to be drawn from the sky itself, so close. There is a deep gully flanked by a giant stone named "Lin Yan". In the grottoes nearby there are several caves to explore. One must be sure to go into Fu Xi Cave. Inside the cavern, one can look up past the vast walls and see the dark sky in a line shaped like a rainbow. Nature's uncanny workmanship is why the name "Linear Sky" was bestowed upon this area. It is yet another example of how the gods seemed to sculpt portraits of heaven upon the landscape of Wuyi.



Drinking Water Fairy tea grown right here with the water from the curtain itself





Rui Quan

十二代的工夫

AUSPICIOUS SPRINGS

Twelve Generations of Mastery

-Wu De

Rui Quan tea is more than just a transformative brew; it is also a history and heritage. The Huangs are preserving Wuyi tea culture for future generations. Their devotion to tea is unparalleled, and it shows in every cup. We hope that these introductions will give you a greater respect and reverence for the experiences we're sharing this month, and also for Tea Herself.

On the upward of a moist-eyed bow to my host, Huang Sheng Hui, after thanking him once again for all he's done, I glance over his shoulder into the hall of the guesthouse and up at the golden statue of Xuan Zang, who long ago defied royal decree banning international travel and left China to roam around India. After sixteen years, and many adventures, Xuan Zang returned home with thousands of sutras, relics, statues and other Buddhist treasures. As I stand bowing my farewell to Master Huang, I think I understand what it must have been like to leave India for home with so many treasures, feeling as if I too were departing with a few dozen horses worth; and like Xuan Zang, most of my fortune is wisdom as well—*Tea wisdom*. But Master Huang dismisses my thanks with the old Chinese saying: "One house people don't talk like two house people." It's said to impart familiarity when you are being too

formal. It means that 'we are family', 'make yourself at home' or perhaps 'don't be afraid to ask for anything you need'. It also expresses a kind of loving-hospitality, suggesting that you speak as you would to your own people in your own home. Often, such polite sayings deflate over time into superficial manners, but there are those rare people who are living traditions—people whose hospitality is genuine and heartfelt. The fact that it really is their pleasure to have you as a guest beams from their eyes, and you feel honored and loved. You feel the way you do when you go home. I've been fortunate to meet such traditional people now and again in my travels, but none more kind or generous than the Huangs.

Huang Xian Yi and his sons truly see the Buddha in the guest and the guest in the Buddha, inspiring me to be a better host after I return home. Every visit to Wuyi, I have felt a sense of homecoming to distant but loving family. They are gra-

cious with their home, food, tea and their wisdom. And when you ask around, you see that others feel the same way; that they too are leaving fulfilled by a magical trip and in awe of their hosts' selflessness. The many years they lived in a small, remote village still informs their modernized lives. In that way, they are a part of the heritage and wisdom we all need to learn from if we are to create a world truly worth living in. The generosity they have shown me year after year throughout my tea journey makes them one of the greatest mentors for our center, and a powerful influence in its creation. Guiding by example, they've helped us to define the principles that we believe to be at the core of Tea spirit: *sharing leaves as an act of kindness, and asking nothing in return.*

From my viewpoint, the Huangs' tea is at the pinnacle of the most refined tea on Earth. Of all the kinds of tea, oolong is the most complicated to produce,

瑞泉



requiring the most skill and management. As a semi-oxidized tea, it requires many stages to wither, bruise, de-enzyme and roll to get the right level of oxidation. This formula may sound simple, but any skill seems simple when presented to beginners in the most basic list of procedures. To the master, there is infinite variety in every one of these stages, based on the water content in the leaves, the weather, sunshine, temperature, etc. In terms of processing skills (gongfu), oolong is definitely the most refined of all tea genres. And all oolong tea processing, as well as many of the varieties, originate in Wuyi Mountain, making the Cliff Tea produced here the eldest of this princely caste of tea. Amongst such royalty, there is surely a king, just as every mountain has upper reaches, and then finally a peak—*Huang Peak*. If oolong is the most refined of teas, and Wuyi Cliff Tea its brightest example, the teas made by the Huangs at their studio, Rui Quan, are the last vista, from which we can climb no higher.



Rui Quan Tea

Like you, the sixteen people of this year's Global Tea Hut trip listened to my speech about how amazing this tea, and the family that makes it, really are; and like you, they may have thought it to be exaggerated hyperbole. After a trip there, however, everyone's heart had shifted. I hope that in the future all of you will get the chance to come with us on a Global Tea Hut trip and meet the Huangs yourself, but in the meantime let's travel there in our heart-minds, starting with a hint at why their tea is so special and then moving on to a history of their amazing people.

The Trees: First and foremost, Rui Quan tea is special because of the trees. As we discussed in the previous articles, there are four grades of Cliff Tea. The best is called "*Zhen*

Yan" which means "True Cliff Tea". These are the trees in the park. They have the perfect drainage of steady water over loose, fertile soil. The waters run down the cliffs and bring minerals, crystals, and good pure mountain energy to the roots of the trees. The cliffs refract the sun so that the trees get only certain spectrums of light, mostly oranges and violets. They also channel mist through the park almost every day, which creates the humidity Tea adores. The cliffs absorb the sun during the day and release the heat they collected all day during the night. This means that the temperature stays constant, which increases the growing period. Beyond all the scientific/physical reasons why Wuyi is the perfect tea growing area, Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian sages have come here to cultivate themselves for thousands of years,

charging the whole park with spiritual juju that influences the breadth and power of the Qi in all the teas grown there. And one hundred percent of Rui Quan's teas are True Cliff Tea from gardens within the park.

The Heart: You can make tea for a lot of reasons. You can do it to support your family or because it is what you know. One stonemason cuts bricks to certain dimensions all day. When asked what he is doing, his fellow stonemason says that he is here working for money to support his wife and children. The third man, cutting the same stones in the same way as the first two, stops and looks up with a far-away gleam in his eyes: "I am building a glorious cathedral that will house the prayers of people for many generations to



come,” he says. The Huangs are that third builder.

Tea has only been a commodity for maybe a thousand years, and only in earnest for hundreds. Before, and even through that time, there are many thousands of years of tea as sacred plant medicine. The terraces that hold the tea gardens in the park are made from tens of thousands of stones that were quarried thirty kilometers away and carried into the park, and then placed lovingly in ideal spots in a way that has lasted the centuries. You can feel the Human/Nature cooperation in this. Our host, the eldest son Huang Sheng Hui, told me that in his grandfather’s time tea pickers had to remove their shoes before entering the garden and weren’t allowed to talk at all during picking. With a bright smile and a sparkle in his eyes, he told us of a time when some

neighbor came into his grandfather’s tea garden smoking a pipe and his grandfather chased the man out, not letting him live the infraction down for the next three days. In honor of that, the Huangs also start the picking season with prayers and a silent walk to the gardens for the first harvest.

True Cliff Tea (*Zhen Yan*) is only harvested once a year, like all tea was traditionally—before the industrial ‘Nature as resource’ philosophy began to motivate tea and other agriculture. This means that the families in Wuyi must earn their entire income from the output of these few weeks. This ensures focus and heart from them all. But beyond that, the Huangs have a true passion to make better and better tea, and a reverence for Tea. As the old master, Huang Xian Yi told me about the many decades when tea

was sold for almost nothing—not enough to feed a family—I realized that the people who carried those stones thirty kilometers weren’t economically motivated to do so. While they may have made part of their living from tea, it wasn’t the reason why they were willing to go to such great lengths to honor Tea. It was because they revered these trees, and through them found heritage and culture that connected them in a living way to their forebears.

Long before others in the area, the Huangs made a decision very early on to bear the extra costs and produce all their tea organically. Of course, they then had to weed by hand, find ways of managing pests and ways of fertilizing that may not increase production as much as the chemical alternatives. “We decided that if the tea was better for people and the land we love,

then it was worth the extra effort. We knew other people would care the way we do and pay a bit more for finer tea.” That decision came out of a heart devoted to *being* a tea maker, not just making tea for money or because that is what you do—but because that is what you *are*, heart and soul.

From the ages of twenty to twenty-six, Huang Sheng Hui lived in the Tian Shin Monastery, studying Buddhism and volunteering as a lay novice. He had an inclination to leave home and become a monk, but he was the eldest son and his father needed him to help with the work at home. During the latter part of that period, the words that the old father used to convince his

son to come back home, for me, sum up what makes the energy of Rui Quan tea different from other producers in Wuyi and other tea mountains I have been to. The old father said to his son, “Meditation and study of scriptures is good spiritual cultivation, but making tea is also spiritual cultivation.”

Handcrafted: Out of the passion to make finer teas as a Way (Tao) of life, the Huang’s realized early on that it would have to be by hand. No machinery is as sensitive as the hands of a master, shifting and changing the processing methods based on the tea. For example, if the tea leaves have more water, the frying (*sa qing*) should be done with

long, upward pulls that scatter the extra moisture; whereas tea from a dry season should be fried in little inward rotations that hold the leaves in the wok and preserve the water content.

Like the other families in Wuyi, the Huangs bought modern machines to produce more tea, quicker and more efficiently. In most houses, the elder masters then make a small batch of some hand-processed tea to give to important clients, good friends or government officials. Over time, this meant that the traditional processing skills would eventually not be handed down to future generations—yet another aboriginal art leaving this superficial mechanical

Huang Xian Yi

Huang Xian Yi is the eleventh generation in a lineage of tea masters from Wuyi. He was born in 1949, at the birth of his nation. As a boy he hopped from stone to stone to get to school at the Tian Shin Monastery. He went on to boarding school in the local town for five days a week, but later returned home when the school closed for lack of students. He began helping his father farm vegetables and tea. In the early 1990’s, he began to put his heart fully into a life of tea with an earnest desire to master all the skills needed to produce the best teas he could. He sold his teas by the packet to tourists outside his home at the Water Curtain Cave, also serving boiled bowl tea for a few pennies a bowl. After the family was moved out of the park in the late 1990’s, he made a decision to move more and more into hand-processed tea, preserving the traditional tea making skills passed down so many years.

It is amazing to watch Master Huang craft tea. The young men struggle to roll the tea halfway across the mat, for example, flexing all their muscles in doing so. The old man, much smaller than them, pushes the tea across the mat with ease and grace, and without any contraction. You can see the energy moving up from the earth through his entire body. He rolls the tea with every particle of himself. And the tea he makes challenges what you thought possible.



world for some other. This would break the old master's heart, so the Huangs began increasing their production of handmade tea every year. In that way, his sons all continued to practice making tea the way they had first learned back when they still lived in the park, with a chance of one day becoming the master their father was. They eventually started making more than half their tea in this way, becoming the only family in Wuyi producing large quantities of fully hand-processed Cliff Tea.

Producing tea fully by hand in the traditional way is unheard of in the oolong world. You would be hard pressed to count a single hand's worth in the whole world. I know of only one in Taiwan, though

there might be others. And even those who know how to produce tea by hand and do so, very rarely create large enough productions to share with anyone. In this way, the Huangs are doing more than just creating incredibly fine tea, produced by master hands; they are also protecting and preserving important cultural heritage.

Made in the Park: The Huangs own around fifty acres of some of the best gardens in the park, all with heirloom trees, many of which are centuries old. But they aren't the only family to have access to *Zhen Yan* tea. Many aboriginal families are producing True Cliff Tea. But Rui Quan is the *only* fam-

ily producing their tea inside the park itself. In the late 1990's, when Wuyi became a UNESCO protected park, the aboriginals were relocated to a small village on the other side of the river that demarcates the national park. They were given subsidies and low-interest loans to build a small village there. They built simple, modern gray houses with shared walls along several little streets. The families then converted the first floor of their houses into tea processing facilities and they live upstairs. The Huangs also have a house in the village, where they too processed their Cliff Tea for many years.

The old master of the family, Huang Xian Yi, has often told me



that moving out of the park, his home and inheritance, broke his heart in a way that it can never be healed. He said that every time he crosses the river and leaves the park, his body feels different. I asked him if the same could be said for the tea. "Of course," he exclaimed, "the energy in the leaves shifts. Also, the hike to get the leaves is already a long one and when you add the time it takes to then transport the leaves by vehicle over to the village, it can sometimes take too long, affecting the overall withering of the tea. And that is the most important stage in processing fine oolong tea." Furthermore, the small village was designed to be simple and affordable rather than architected to create the

finest tea. Having no outdoor space, the tea produced there is all withered on the road, or in the adjacent parking lot, exposed to car exhaust and the dust of life traffic. Traditionally, fine Cliff Tea went through its outdoor withering on round mats suspended on long bamboo poles that allow airflow from underneath. For these and many reasons, the Huangs knew that to produce the best Cliff Tea it would have to be done in the park, as it always had been. But how? Building in the park was illegal.

With that dream as a guiding star, they never let go of the idea, saving all that they could with the hopes that such an opportunity would come. Because of their ded-

ication to hand-processed tea and protecting cultural heritage, they began to attract true tea lovers over time, including my own master Lin Ping Xiang. People began to recognize how much heart they put into all aspects of their tea production, from caring for the trees organically to producing the tea by hand. Eventually, they achieved some renown. Saving all their money, a lifetime's worth, and working together with local and federal governments, their dreams finally came true: In the mid-2000's the Huangs were given permission to convert the only building in the park, an abandoned, run-down government office, into a tea processing museum that would protect the cultural heritage of Wuyi

Huang Sheng Hui

The eldest son of the Huangs, Sheng Hui was born in 1973. He also grew up in the park, walking to the neighboring elementary school, which only had nine students. When he was young, his grandma would take him to all the many temples around the Wuyi area, and the boy proved to be a devout Buddhist. When he was twenty he moved into the monastery to study Buddhism and volunteer. He lived there for nearly six years before coming back home to help in the family business. He married his wife in 2000. She is related to the abbot of the Tian Shin Monastery, who asked them to take over care of their guesthouse outside the park in 2002. In that year, Sheng Hui moved with his wife and baby into the Buddhist guesthouse where they still reside today. Despite their success, Sheng Hui lives modestly, using the guest house to host friends from all over China (and now the world) every year. He loves kindness and hospitality. He is one of those magical people that make you feel special when you're around him. Like his father, he has placed Tea above all else in his life, with a devotion that is inspiring and infectious to be around. He is amongst the best tea friends I have ever made, inspiring a lot of what we do here at the center and in our travels as well.



traditional tea processing. They spared no expense and left no detail undone, including the walls which they re-built, using the traditional mud bricks that were used to build the tea processing facilities in the old days in the park. This same mud from inside the park has an energy to it, but more importantly it allows the masters to control the humidity and temperature much more skillfully. They also installed the bamboo poles outside to wither the tea in the way it should be.

Apart from the tea processing facilities, the museum has several tea rooms to hold events, like the International Wuyi Tea Gathering we attended on our trip, a library and many local antiques. Aside from the monks of Tian Shin Monastery, Rui Quan is now the only Wuyi Cliff Tea produced inside the park itself. This makes Rui Quan tea the “*Zhen Zhen Yan*.”

History & Heritage

“Rui Quan” teas have been produced for more than three hundred years, though they officially branded the name in 2003. Our host, Huang Sheng Hui is the twelfth generation in a line of master tea producers. For most all of that time, the family lived inside the park in several locations, finally settling in the Water Curtain Cave (*Shui Lian Dong*) area where the past five generations of Huangs lived in the same large house with four wings and a courtyard in the center. When we first arrived at the Water Curtain, the whole Global Tea Hut group was breathless, and only after several full breaths came back did they realize that people once lived here. “This was someone’s back yard”, one guest exclaimed. The stunning escarpment is a giant brushstroke of browns, yellows and oranges that are different from the dark blue/gray of the other cliffs in the park. And from this giant cliff, a

thin waterfall has ever flown, swayed by the wind back and forth like a summer curtain billowing before an open window, and then falling into a pool beneath where the Huangs once bathed in the warm seasons. The green valley and centuries-old Water Fairy (*Shui Shian*) trees all around made it feel as if we’d strayed into a dream.

We sat up on the ledge near the old village temple that used to be devoted to Guanyin, though the government has more recently made it into a Confucian temple. We drank tea from the old bushes growing just a few meters away, with water from the curtain itself.

One can understand the broken-hearted sadness that comes with being moved out, not to mention the end of the villages and traditional culture that surrounded them. But the grief has not overwhelmed the Huangs; they still treat you like you’re a village neighbor, and they still carry their culture and heritage in their hearts, shaking, frying and rolling them into their tea.

Transported and uplifted, everyone felt a deeper reverence for the place that made these people and this magical tea both. The park is in the Huang’s blood, just as it also runs through the roots of the old trees here.

Their tea processing facilities were also located there, along the large cliff, and the ruins of it still stand. Visitors to Wuyi often put sticks between the cliff bottoms, balanced upright as prayers for healing. We all placed prayers by the old tea processing facility, hoping for healing in all our Cliff Tea, for us and those we serve. The bluff and ledge on which the old processing facility rests is called “Rui Quan” which means “Auspicious Springs”, and

is, of course, the inspiration for the family’s brand.

The modern history of tea production in Wuyi is often sad, like much of the world’s. The sons have had easier lives, but the old father has seen his share of hard times. Despite that, he is quick to smile with joy. Fortunately, Wuyi was not directly effected by WWII, as the Japanese never invaded or bombed this rural area. Most of the people I have asked about this attribute it to the protective energy of so many thousands of years of meditators, monks, hermits and other spiritual aspirants that have lived and practiced here.

In the late 1970’s, the families in Wuyi were forced by the government to grow rice, and many tea trees were uprooted by officials. In the Qing Dynasty, there were more than eight hundred varieties of Cliff Tea. Over time, that number has been reduced to around fifty, many of which were lost at this time. In 1982, the government returned the tea trees to the aboriginal people, leasing the land to different families. Great councils were held to divide the old gardens amongst all the people living there based on how many relatives each had.

I asked the old master if there were many arguments over who got which garden at that time. He said, “No, in those days people were used to village life and council. And while some gardens or trees were famous, *all* the tea was good.”

Even though they began farming tea again, the government took the finished tea and paid them very moderate wages. They barely earned enough to buy clothing, tobacco, oil, soap and sundries. All of their food had to be self-cultivated, which meant that when they weren’t caring for the tea gardens or processing tea, they were farming vegetables, raising pigs and doing other chores. “It didn’t feel like work, though” Huang Sheng Hui says. “It felt like life. It wasn’t something you had to do,

but who you were. And the vegetables we grew were amazing... I still remember how delicious they were. You can't find such nutritional food nowadays."

In 1993, the old master began producing tea with real heart, and loving what he did. He began investing all his soul in making better and better tea, which he would sell in small packets to tourists for nine RMB a *jin* (500g in Mainland China) for his highest quality tea. He also would boil stems and some leaves and sell bowl tea to passersby for some pence. The money wasn't enough to have a savings, but they were happy living in the beautiful park, making such fine tea to share.

Three Inspirations

As I talk with the Huangs each year, three recurring themes always inspire me: The first is how deeply their ancestry is rooted in the park, and how little life there was affected by the outside world. The old father laughingly relates how the people had different names for things from the outside world than what they are called by mainstream society. The son tells of how his entire school from first to fifth grades was only nine students, all of which he still knows today. You get the feeling that these are a rooted people—people who grew up with their blood and sweat irrigating the land their ancestors also bled and sweat on, with lives rooted in a rich culture and calendar of holidays, harvests, weddings and funerals that connect them in a tangible way to their lineage. With sparkling eyes, Huang Sheng Hui told me that, "In those days, wedding feasts would go on for seven days, bringing the whole village together. These days, you just eat one meal for a few hours."

The second theme that threads through the fabric of all our conversations, leaving me embroidered with Tea spirit, is the influence of the park itself. I love the stories of

when father or sons were boys, leaping over rocks on the way to school, catching fish with their hands, or occasionally meeting hermits or monks meditating in caves. They told me of a time the whole village saw an immortal walking across the tops of the trees, or the father and his young friends coming upon a cave inhabited by an old hermit that was glowing with an otherworldly light. Life inside the park was even more beautiful than a walk through its glorious paths can now reveal glimpses of. And one can understand the broken-hearted sadness that comes with being moved out, not to mention the end of the villages and traditional culture that surrounded them. But the grief has not overwhelmed the Huangs; they still treat you like you're a village neighbor, and they still carry their culture and heritage in their hearts, shaking, frying and rolling them into their tea.

The last, and most glorious, topic we always discuss is Tea itself. I always leave grateful to tears that I have had the fortune to meet in this life people who revere and honor Tea as more than just a commodity—as a way of life, a sacred plant and a rich and deep spiritual culture. The Huangs truly love Tea. And all the Wuyi stories, from the legends that surround the varietals' names to the more personal stories like the one I just told about the old grandfather scolding his neighbor for three days because he smoked around the trees—all of it leaves you humbled. As I walk through the park, I see and feel the terraces as altars and the trees as worshipped saints. And all that reverence isn't just fancy talk to sell their tea; the Huangs have gone through great hardship and put forth constant, diligent hard work to produce the best tea they can, sparing no expense in time or money to improve what they do for its own sake.

In the late 1990's, the Huangs met Master Lin Ping Xiang, forming a deep and lasting friendship

that has also led us to them. It says a lot when such a great teacher supports everything you do unabashedly, especially someone with as much integrity as Master Lin. Over time, the care and love the Huangs have put into their tea have brought them abundance and success. They have come a long way from selling bowls of boiled tea to passersby for a few cents. When the gardens were divided up in 1982, the Huangs owned around five acres of trees. They have since increased their stewardship to roughly fifty acres, with some of the brightest and best teas in the park amongst them.

When I asked them about their future goals both father and son said that they hope to pass on these traditions to the next generation. Currently, all three of the sons are mastering different aspects of the business. The eldest son, our host Huang Sheng Hui, is in charge of customer service and marketing. His time in the monastery shows in his natural ability to love kindness and deal with others. The second brother is working directly with the old master to inherit the processing skills. The father said his skills are good enough to make excellent tea. He is now teaching him all that is needed to manage the estate and the workers, and about the changes in weather over long periods of time. He said that they employ based on a meritocracy: "When people work hard and get better at tea processing, we reward them accordingly." The third, youngest son is the accountant for the family. And all three have children, so there is hope for traditional, hand-processed Cliff Tea.

Having traveled with us in spirit, we hope that you recognize how precious this month's tea is: crafted from old trees in one of the most idyllic spots for tea in the world and processed by the hands of the eleventh and twelfth generation of master tea producers. And not just great tea makers or even great people, the Huangs are also our great friends.



A large antique pot like the one he used to sell tea by bowl for pence



Tea Wayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. 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 share glimpses of such beautiful people and their Tea. This month we would like to introduce Ashley Smith:

In July 2013, I took a trip to Asia. While traveling and studying abroad, I fell in love with the East. It would be only three short months after my return to the States that I had booked a one-way ticket and was on a flight back to Asia for a more permanent stay. I landed in Taiwan January 1st, 2014. The plan was to save up and pay off student loans, travel Asia, live simply, explore my spirituality without distractions, hopefully meeting some cool people along the way. Coming to Taiwan with these preset ideals of what I wanted my life to look like created dis-ease. I came to a spiritual low-point that manifested itself physiologically, and quick. But it was during the time of my greatest surrender that the Leaf danced her way into my life and into my heart forever.

Before coming to Taiwan I was really into loose-leaf herbal teas and single origin coffee. I was a frequent buyer at a local teashop where I almost started working. Although I loved the teas, I didn't think much about them in a spiritual way. It's no surprise that my journey had finally led me to this moment. It seems like the Leaf was preparing for my arrival for some time.

As I was climbing out of my own self-made muck, I was attracted to a podcast that my cousin, Victor, had been sharing. I had never listened to a podcast in my life. But after the first episode I was hooked. I scrolled through the archive and hit play when I came across Wu De's podcast. I was captivated by way he described this magical plant. My body had chills the entire time I was listening, and it was when Wu De shared the "indigestible version" of what Tea is, *an avatar of Love*, that I found myself crying. Something inside of me felt like it was reawakened. It struck a chord deep within, of an ancient and deeply buried wisdom, recalling a knowing from a previous lifetime.

Every morning I put on music, light my incense, put on the water and sit. I drink three silent and still bowls and then, with Tea, I create, either by writing or drawing, dancing or singing. I am often times brought to tears during my morning ceremonies. The tears I cry are of deep and abundant gratitude. She helps me see and connect to how incredibly blessed I am. I have everything I need. And what a miracle that is! She gently washes away the false beliefs about myself that I cling to. She brings to the surface what the Universe is ready for me to see, so I can make space for more of



Life's blessings. Also, I have never felt more profoundly connected to Nature and Mother Earth in my entire life, and I have never felt so sensitive to the state of our world and the ways in which we are destroying our sweet home.

Any extra moments I have are spent at the center where I have made some of my best friends and most sacred memories. This tradition has changed my life. I am constantly inspired by the Love and Wisdom shared with every bowl.

So now, maybe you can see what I can see: that I didn't come to Taiwan for the reasons I thought. I came to Taiwan to be reunited, in this lifetime, with the Leaf. I have been serving tea to women each New and Full Moon. I will soon be moving back to St. Petersburg, Florida and I cannot wait to share this gift with the ones I love so dearly, as well as with my hometown community that is ever evolving and growing in Love. If you are ever in St. Petersburg, you always have a place to stay and a hot bowl of tea waiting for you.

Infinite Love and Gratitude to you all!

Inside the Hut



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. The community in LA also has a new meet up page: (<http://www.meetup.com/Los-Angeles-Tea-Ceremony-Meetup/>).



In Barcelona, Spain, Global Tea Hut member Antonio holds tea events each month at Caj Chai Teahouse. Contact him at info@cajchai.com for more info. In Madrid, Helena hosts a monthly session. Contact her at: helenaharo@hotmail.com



In Moscow, Russia, there are frequent tea events. Contact Tea Hut member Ivan at teeabai@gmail.com or Denis at chikchik25@gmail.com for details.



In Nice, France, GTH member Sabine holds regular tea events at the Museum of Asiatic Arts. You can email her at sabine@letempsdunthe.com.



In Melbourne, Australia, Lindsey hosts Friday night tea sessions at 7/7:30pm. Contact her at lindseylou31@gmail.com



In Brisbane, Australia, Matty and Lesley host a monthly ceremony on the first Sunday of every month. Contact them at mattychi@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.



In England, Prabhasvara (Nick Dilks) holds regular Tea events For more information, please contact him at livingteauk@gmail.com.



In Almere, The Netherlands, GTH member Jasper holds tea events every 4th Tuesday of the month at 7:45 PM. Email him at hermansjasper@gmail.com.



Center News



Before you visit, check out the center's *new* website (www.teasagehut.org) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. We've had a big increase in our number of guests lately, so if possible please contact us well in advance to arrange a visit.



Our 2015 Light Meets Life cakes are still available, with more news coming soon. We have some amazing teas this year. Check the site regularly for details.



Rumor has it that Wu De is working on another book, which he hopes to publish by the end of this year. Hopefully, he finds the time to work on it over the summer!



Wu De will be in Bali in July and Holland, Belgium and Estonia in August/September. Contact us for details.



Submit your feedback and help spread the word about Global Tea Hut!

June Affirmation

I have endless talents and gifts.

Am I doing what I love? Am I using the gifts that were given to me? Can I start today? Can I have the courage to do what I love?

