



Global Tea Hut

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

July 2016

茶 2016 GLOBAL TEA HUT TRIP
AI LAO & JINGMAI, YUNNAN

茶 DAUGHTER OF THE FOREST
DIAN HONG RED TEA

茶 THE GUARDIAN TREE



DAUGHTER OF THE FOREST

One of the many benefits of being in this global community is the amazing guided trips we take each year to tea-rich lands. We are working on more such trips and scholarships to help many of you come along. We do our best to bring the whole community with us in spirit, both in the crafting of the tea and in this issue's special coverage of the trip.

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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Morten Menge, Germany



森之女兒



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From the Editor

In July, the sun passes its zenith and tea moves towards a warm, relaxed vibe at the Center. We have fewer guests and more afternoon tea, and our teas turn towards young sheng puerh, organic *shincha* from Japan (which provides us the opportunity to delve into rarely-opened boxes and use our Japanese teaware, as well as some rarely-seen brewing methods), and, of course, Liu Bao, which can be very cooling. Amongst the ten greatest tea sessions in the life of a Chajin, one would surely have to be a lazy summer afternoon with no schedule or time to speak of and some lovely green tea or Liu Bao to drink by the bowl.

Sometimes I find it difficult to know how to introduce Global Tea Hut to someone, especially when time is limited. You could start with the magazine, of course. There are other English-language tea magazines, and quite happily so, but none as holistic, covering the entire spectrum of Tea from history and lore to production and processing, and from antique to modern, linear to spiritual. And any discussion of the magazine need mention that it is ad- and skill-free, without any financial agendas. Though many beautiful tea merchants gather here, this isn't the place for their tea business, but rather for their tea hearts. But there is so much more to this experience than the magazine, starting with the all-important fact that it comes with tea—tea we all share together around the world. Some of us retreat and enjoy the tea alone; others use it with the magazine to learn and to educate themselves on tea; and many of us share it with others, using these teas as an opportunity to practice service and grow through the giving.

Why bring this up? Well, the point is that, when introducing Global Tea Hut, there is rarely time for the aspect of this experience to which this month's issue is testament: *community*. Even if you cursorily summarize the magazine and tea it comes with, leaving out the gift, how do you describe the global tea community? This isn't a business for us—it's a *family*. Each year, we have these issues devoted to our now-annual trips to tea-growing regions. Such activities take this project off the page. They connect people in life, as the Center also does. And this is what makes Global Tea Hut truly unique. Without the heart of connection, this is just more wasted paper and ink. (By the way, we are working on a digital version of Global Tea Hut.)

This year's trip was a stunning example of the best Global Tea Hut has to offer—the real perk of membership! Twenty-five of us traveled to the rural jungles of

Yunnan, the birthplace of Tea, to sit beneath old trees and share bowls, to learn how tea is made by making it ourselves and to travel further down the Dao of Cha. As we do on all our trips, we made a sincere effort to bring all of you with us: we spoke of you often, hand to heart, as we made your tea, and sent prayers to you during meals. Travelers on this trip made heartfelt and very real sacrifices to capture the trip through photography and video. Deep bows to Renata and Ilyas for missing many important experiences in order to let you all in. They carried the burden with honor and grace, knowing very well that it meant that many who could not come with us due to financial or geographical obstacles would at least see the journey and connect to us in spirit.

If none of this expresses the intangible and most important aspect of Global Tea Hut, perhaps my greatest highlight from the trip will. As most of you know, Master Tsai went with us this time. (If you haven't met him yet, you can read all about him in the January 2016 issue.) Anyway, a switch flipped on day seven of the trip; the change was natural, effortless and happened so quickly that many probably missed it altogether. But not me. It flattened me. I was in tears, crying privately several times over the course of the rest of the trip. At first, it may seem like nothing special, but it captures the essence of what being in Global Tea Hut does to you: For the first time, Master Tsai started saying “*our* Center.” From day seven on, every single time he spoke of the Center or Global Tea Hut, he used the word “*our*.” If you haven't yet felt the “*our*” in “*our* Center” or “*our* Global Tea Hut,” may you do so soon. And if you already carry that feeling in your heart, may this issue celebrate and deepen the very real and true sentiment that this is indeed *your* Center and *your* Global Tea Hut!



Further Reading

This month, we have two special bonus articles by Taiwanese masters Zhou Yu and Huang Chan Fang, both of whom are mentioned in this issue. These excellent articles will be up on our blog shortly. Enjoy!

TEA OF THE MONTH

The tea we make ourselves is, of course, always the rarest and most treasured tea we send you! Not only does making tea ourselves mean traveling to the source of the tea (and carrying you with us in spirit), it also means putting our hearts in our hands and sharing a direct touch that we hope reaches out to all of you and solidifies this global community. We hope to continue sharing many more teas right from the source, bringing you a rich background to complement the amazing experience that is Global Tea Hut. As membership increases, we plan to devote more funds to continue traveling to tea-growing regions and finding farmers who produce tea organically, and who love the Earth and wish to protect it the way that we do, sharing their tea and their smiles with all of you.

Drinking tea with this community each month is a profound experience, and we are always blown away by how different the tea is once it starts arriving at its destinations and we all start to drink it together. As so many of you have verified, you can really feel the community in the bowl. This month will be extra special because of all the stories echoing through each bowl in spirals from our third annual Global Tea Hut trip.

Sometimes people in the tea world get jaded, hearing so many of the stories vendors use to sell tea. We know. After you go to a tea market in China and hear a few dozen wild claims about how the boss bought more tea than a region actually-factually produces: how they know him so well in such-and-such a village that he's family, or how his close relationship with some high government official allows him access to otherwise inaccessible tea—after all that, you start to tune out stories and rely solely on your own taste. Good teas don't need a story. They speak for themselves. "The truth is in the cup," as Master Lin always says. Relying on your own taste when buying tea is great, but let's face it: *a tea with a story is more enjoyable!* Isn't that true for anything? Isn't your favorite piece of jewelry the one with a story? Isn't your favorite piece of decoration or artwork in your house the one you found on that special trip? Most certainly, your favorite tea also has a story.

We believe that honest, heartfelt stories can enhance a tea and help connect us to the source. It isn't stories themselves that are the problem, but rather stories fabricated to sell tea or enhance its financial value. Stories improve tea, but

not when they are financially motivated. We often speak of how you need to use your tasting skills when purchasing tea and practice common sense when navigating the tea world. There is a lot of misinformation, after all. But don't throw out the good leaves with the misbrewed liquor! There is still good in stories, just as there are tea vendors with spirit.

Since we aren't selling any teas, our trips to tea-growing regions will always be invested with a pure-hearted wish to deepen your relationship to Tea and this community. We have three goals in mind: first, to inform you, so that you can learn about tea, tea regions, processing and history. Second, to make the drinking experience personal. This brings myth and emotion to each bowl, beyond what this beautiful community already brings to the tea table. Finally, we hope to promote organic farmers who grow tea in sustainable ways, connecting them to the world and to each other, so that we can educate tea lovers about the effects their purchasing decisions have on the environment and the farmers' lives, as well as about the effects you each have on the future of tea production.



Daughter of the Forest



Ai Lao, Yunnan



2016 Dian Hong Red Tea



Ku Chuong Aboriginals



~2500m

*Check out the Tea of
the Month video to
learn more!*



www.globalteahut.org/videos





In May, a group of twenty-five Global Tea Hut members traveled to Yunnan in southwest China, which is the birthplace of all tea and Cha Dao. This trip was the third of what we hope will be many gatherings and tours designed to bring this community together in person. We hope to use our tea centers to create movement from this magazine, and the experience that surrounds receiving it, to actual tea spaces and then back home again. Receiving these envelopes always means more after you've visited our Center, met the authors in person, and had a chance to see how your financial support is used. We hope to host a lot more tea trips in the coming years, as well as big gatherings at the new Center, Light Meets Life, after it is built and running free tea courses!

We traveled to two places on this trip, which you'll read all about in the coming pages. The first stop on our trip, and the source of this month's tea, Ai Lao mountain in Puerh Prefecture, has a long story and is very dear to Wu De's heart...

Wu De is always ready to learn anything tea-related from anyone and will humbly receive any teacher, whether in his lineage or not. Amongst many teachers he's studied tea with, he learned a lot from a Taiwanese tea master named Huang Chuan Fang. Some of you may recall that he even discussed Master Huang's calligraphy in his book, *The Way of Tea*. Master Huang is a kind and gentle teacher who has a way of conveying the spirit of Tea simply and unadorned, so that people from all walks of life feel

inspired to let Tea change their lives. He also has a vibrant experimental streak, exploring new tea regions and testing new processing methods. This sometimes creates amazing teas. In the mid-2000s, Master Huang began spending more and more time in Yunnan, eventually settling there and only returning to Taiwan on occasion.

In 2007, Master Huang began exploring more remote areas of Yunnan—literally getting off the beaten path. He began hiking up as-yet-unpaved roads to more remote villages that other tea connoisseurs weren't yet exploring, often uncovering amazingly clean and stunning teas. Around that time, Master Huang started visiting the village of Qian Jia Zhai in the Ai Lao mountain range.



滇紅

Dian Hong

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

茶 Tian Wu sitting by our tea of the month as it finishes drying.

While there, he met the amazing Ai Li Juan, a tea lover and producer with the same verve for bright, clean and old-growth teas. He began producing small batches of tea with her burgeoning company and the two formed a powerful business partnership. Around that time, Wu De met Ms. Ai at a tea expo in Malaysia, where he was visiting his master. Her strong personality, friendliness and love for tea made Master Huang’s flattering introduction unnecessary—the two were fast tea brother and sister. It also helped that her tea had more than an amazing liquor; it had an amazing story as well!

Years later, we left for our second trip to Ai Lao, traveling by bus for more than fifteen hours from the capitol of Yunnan, Kunming.

Some of us were returning from the first Global Tea Hut trip in 2014, but most were new faces. We arrived at the beginning of the Ai Lao range late at night. The Ai Lao mountain range is huge, extending hundreds of square kilometers. (The Nature reserve alone is more than 500 square kilometers).

Our destination was Qian Jia Zhai village, which literally means “Thousands of Families.” It is located in Jiu Jia Township, Zhenyuan County, in the heart of the Ai Lao range. There are around 16,000 people spread out over Jiu Jia Township, most of them rural farmers. Until recently, there were no roads to the village and everything was carried in and out by donkey. The elder generations still tell stories of those days, reminding

their children and grandchildren not to take their modern amenities for granted. There are 4,700 acres of tea forests here at an altitude of 2,000 to 2,500 meters. And these tea forests have a story that left Wu De agape when he first heard about them in 2007.

As Master Huang described the tea-growing situation there, Wu De’s heart leapt, for it sounded like a solution to the environmental degradation happening in Yunnan—much of which had dampened many of Wu De’s two dozen or so trips there. In fact, he has even cried for Tea. Seeing trees that have been part of a people’s cultural heritage for centuries killed by unnecessary chemicals, like fertilizers, felt to him like someone spray-painting a Ming Dynasty painting.

He remembered crying in the embrace of another of his teachers, Zhou Yu. A reporter present asked another member of the group why the two were crying. The answer later overheard in the video was, “They just love tea.” As an optimist, though, Wu De is always on the look out for inspirational stories, stories of hope. And he found one in Master Huang’s description of Qian Jia Zhai.

The tea in Qian Jia Zhai is completely controlled by a co-op. There is little that any one individual can do to spoil the old-growth tea, its protected environment or any aspect of its processing without the other members of the group coming down on them. This means that personal greed cannot destroy what rightly belongs to no single human. Hav-

ing lived for hundreds, if not thousands of years means these trees have a right to see future generations of people who *tend* to them rather than claim “ownership” over them, who pass them on to the next generation as healthy as they found them! From the time Wu De first heard about the Qian Jia Zhai co-op, he developed an interest in visiting, and from then on kept an eye out for any and all tea from Ai Lao, tasting a lot along the way.

To continue our story, in 2010, Mr. Liang, a dear friend of our Center, whom many of you have met, came back from visiting Ms. Ai with a small batch of Ai Lao *bings* (a *bing* is a discus of puerh). This 2010 cake is amongst our all-time favorite teas. Many of you have tried it, or were even lucky enough to purchase a

cake of it when it was still available. And, believe it or not, that very tea was the first-ever Global Tea Hut tea of the month! (Be sure to go back to the first issue and read about it on our website!) Sharing that tea hundreds of times around the world ensured that one day we would take Ms. Ai up on her offer to visit her village and make some similar tea, which we finally did in May of 2014.

On that first trip in 2014, Ai Li Juan made us feel like family, so much so that we came to know her as “Auntie Ai.” She housed and fed us, guided us to the tea trees and showered us with traditional songs and heartfelt smiles. Even though we arrived late at night, she was there in high spirits to greet us again this time, remembering each



and every one of the returning visitors and welcoming the new guests with embraces. When we left three days later, she shed a tear, saying she didn't want us to go. She said she hopes it isn't another two years before she sees us and promised to visit the Center in Taiwan. Auntie Ai is an amazing, strong and modern woman: a single, tribal woman in rural China who controls an international tea production company! She has been a member of the co-op in Qian Jia Zhai since 2005, tending to more than 400 hectares of tea. In 2012, Auntie Ai took all her savings from tea production and began construction on a tea processing and pressing facility that includes guest rooms for friends as well as a museum and theater to preserve traditional Ku Chuong

culture. When we went in 2014, her center was still under construction. She proudly showed us the foundation, smiling and saying that next time, we'd be completely in her care. It was nice to see the final building on this trip and stay with her, surrendering to her very "complete" hospitality.

The Ku Chuong tribe has around 40,000 people with some heritage living throughout China and Laos. Until very recently, the Ku Chuong were still living a simple lifestyle in the mountains of Ai Lao—completely self-sustained. In the last decade, they have moved down from the original village site, which is now part of the protected National Reserve, to settle in a small town below. They have paved roads leading to the capital and some mod-

ern amenities. Evidence of their traditional culture still abounds, however, in the gloriously colorful clothes of Ms. Ai as well as the way she and her family cook and farm.

Auntie Ai told us that in the '90s, some farmers cut down a lot of the old tea trees to grow tobacco. Some of the elders then tore up the tobacco in protest of this. Our faces grew long, and a few of us looked down at the ground. "Cheer up," she said. "Those old tea trees are as strong as the mountain. They have deep and vast root systems. Even though many were cut down, after the land was returned to the National Reserve, many of the trees came back as though they'd never been cut!" And sure enough, she was right! The trees are strong and healthy again.



We rolled this tea less than most red tea in the world, leaving some of the old-growth juju in the leaves. Overall, it took around thirty to forty minutes. Auntie Ai walked around and smelled everyone's tea, letting us know when it was done.

Before we started rolling, Wu De announced that we should all think of you, our Global Tea Hut family as we rolled and try to fill the tea with as much light and love as possible, so you would all feel as if you were there with us in spirit!

Tea of the Month

In Qian Jia Zhai, they call the red tea “Daughter of the Forest.” We didn’t have time to pick the tea ourselves, but we got to see the trees. The tea all came from trees that are two to seven hundred years old. Red tea is fully oxidized. It is picked and withered for a long time, sometimes with machines that blow hot air into large piles of tea. Our tea this month wasn’t withered with such machines, but rather naturally withered, spread out on bamboo mats. Making red tea is a simple process. Even though Yunnan is more famous nowadays for puerh tea, it has always been a region of red tea as well, producing as much or more red tea as other regions for some decades. In fact, puerh’s rise to fame is rather recent; in Yunnan there was more red tea than puerh by volume fifteen years ago. But our red tea isn’t a plantation tea, since it was grown semi-wild in the forest.

“What could be better than a blend of tea made by your tea family and Auntie Ai? Daughter of the Forest is an amazing celebration of all this community stands for!”

Yunnanese red tea, called “Dian Hong,” is processed a bit differently from most red tea in the world. First of all, there is more variation in the technique in rural Yunnan. Other red-tea-producing areas have become more standardized and incorporated more machinery, which is slowly making its way to Yunnan as well, since tea farmers are earning enough to purchase it. Secondly, Dian Hong is mostly sun-dried, whereas most red tea is dried in ovens. Since it comes from large-leaf trees and is often less oxidized, this sun-drying contributes to the “puerhy” flavors of Dian Hong and to its ageability as well.

Daughter of the Forest has its own regional idiosyncrasies. Our tea was picked early in the morn-

ing and withered for a few hours to remove moisture and start the oxidation process. When we arrived, the tea was all ready to be rolled. We divided it into twenty-some trays and began rolling. Many red teas are rolled for a long time—up to ninety minutes, in fact—but we rolled our tea much less. Auntie Ai came around and inspected each person’s tea, smelling it to see if it was done. No one rolled for more than thirty minutes. Two years ago, we withered the tea in traditional cloth bags, twisted up to compress the tea. This year, there were too many of us, and too much tea, so we compressed it into a large tub and covered it with cloth, leaving it to wither overnight. Early the next morning, we spread the tea out on large mats to dry in the sun. Of course, the four kilograms of dried leaf we produced was nowhere near enough for this growing global community,

so we added another batch that Auntie Ai herself made. She said she also wanted her heart in this month’s tea along with everyone else’s on the trip.

As we were processing this month’s tea, we made several announcements asking the participants to think of all our tea brothers and sisters who were not present and put their good wishes and prayers into the tea, as it would eventually be sent to all of you. We hope you can feel all the love and good intentions that were put into this month’s tea, from all of us and from Auntie Ai, who expressed a heartfelt desire to meet you all some day.

You may have noticed some unique, longer, darker leaves in your tin this month. Those are amongst

the ones that we processed by hand ourselves. The reason they are different is twofold: First, our rolling is not as skilled as Auntie Ai. And second, we arrived late in the season (May)—too late, in fact—so the raw material we used was late-season tea with larger, inferior leaves (fewer buds). Ordinarily, such tea wouldn’t be brought to market. Auntie Ai picked it for our education and for the pleasure of sharing tea that was handmade by Global Tea Hut members with you all. Anyway, we have found the blend to be quite lovely! We worried that maybe the two kinds of tea would not fuse or find harmony in the bowl, but they do. The later-season, rougher tea we made brings a bit of briskness and strength to the smooth, sweet and malty tea that Auntie Ai made for us. They are deeper and stronger together than apart, and the Qi longer-lasting and more yang. They lovingly embrace one another and feel very much like one tea.

Daughter of the Forest is one of our all-time favorite red teas. It is strong and juicy, and very patient. The protected ecosystem of Qian Jia Zhai thrums through the leaves, the liquor, the bowl and even your hands before you take the first sip. Try holding the bowl for a second before taking a drink and see if you can feel the forest by touch. Daughter of the Forest has a deep yang Qi that enlivens you and changes the rest of the day. It is, of course, best drunk in the morning or early afternoon. Share it with as many loved ones as possible and watch how it opens hearts and eyes to the moment!

Master Tsai checking the tea after its oxidation period. We had just set it out to sun dry.



Daughter of the Forest

Like so many of you, we also sit down with friends to share the Tea of the Month. And though we drank this Daughter of the Forest at a different time than you, we are reminded once again of the interconnectedness we share within this global tea community. Just as we set out altar cups in acknowledgment of our tea brothers and sisters the world over, we also drank this tea with all of you in mind, knowing that somewhere under this global thatched roof, you'll likely be doing the same! And just as you might discuss your experiences drinking this tea with your friends, we did the same:

☞ This is a tea that summons visions of mountain peaks rising above the clouds, with dark green patches and contours of red soil: a familiar memory I glimpse when drinking fine Yunnanese red tea. The energy in the tea can be felt swelling up my spine, residing betwixt my shoulder blades and occiput as a soothing, tingling sensation. It continues to lift me from my shoulders before gently mellowing in my chest, as if a hearth was lit that warms me from the inside, though I remain externally cooled. As the leaves float listlessly around the bowl, the fragrance of plum blossoms, honey and a mélange of spices ascends to titillate my nostrils and bring me deeper into the moment. The red color reminds me of a sunset diffused through smoke from the cycle of the forests on a warm, summer evening. After the tea, a sweetness lingers. I taste a medley of raspberries, burnt sweet potato, tobacco and raw cacao.

-Liam Samos, USA

☞ As soon as the water touched the leaves, the aroma of tranquility came over me. Upon the first sip, I immediately felt the warmth and energy my tea brothers and sisters had put into it. I felt calm and grounded; mental clarity and consciousness allowed me to think and feel in the present moment. As the tea opened up, the taste of sun-kissed cherries heralded the coming of summer!

-Christophe Kaplinsky, USA

☞ In part, I love Tea for Her ability to bring presence into my life. It's when I'm most present that I feel most alive, and so a lot of my most precious time on this earth unfolds when I'm drinking tea. In part, I love red tea for its versatility to be drunk throughout the year and to energize me. And in part, I love this particular red tea for its ability to connect me to a time and place that I wasn't there for, yet now feel like I am.

-Shen Su, Canada/Taiwan

☞ Usually with red teas, I feel the warming of my heart space, but I also hear my monkey mind quietly running through thoughts. I experienced both when drinking this tea; however, I also felt this comforting feeling of emptiness, almost like I was an empty tea bowl, accepting whatever medicine was placed inside.

-Ingrid Herrera, USA



*Check out the video
on our tea sessions now!*

www.globalteahut.org/videos



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white ceramic tea cup. The person's face is partially visible on the left side of the frame. The background is a blurred wooden lattice structure. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Brewing Tips

People new to brewing tea often ask is what amount of tea at what temperature and steeped for how long. We understand that many Western tea vendors approach brewing instructions this way, and that such directions can indeed help people who are first starting out. However, these three parameters are actually infinitely more complicated than they may seem. After all, if we were to suggest five grams of this month's tea, that may be too much or too little leaf, depending on the size of your brewing vessel. And then there is the question of what material your vessel is made of. Water at 95 degrees, but what kind of water and how was it boiled? For example, wouldn't you rather have under-boiled spring water than tap water at the correct temperature? And what about over-boiled water versus water at the right temperature that was microwaved? Obviously, these parameters are only a very general starting point.

Ultimately, we have to learn to use our senses to judge the appropriate amount based on the pot we're using, gauge the water temperature by sight and sound and know the steeping time by feeling the tea as it releases itself into the water. To get to this point, we will need something else, though. And this tool will be one of the most useful brewing tips that we have ever shared with you: a willingness to make mistakes.

Let go of the idea that there is a perfect bowl or cup. Be willing to practice and make mistakes, and, more importantly, learn from them. If you oversteep, correct yourself next time. Find the perfect point through experience. We could tell you that red tea, especially Dian Hong, responds very well to higher-temperature water or that green tea can be pleasant when brewed at lower temperatures. But those directions will never compare to actually experiencing the difference! And if you only follow the instructions, you will never really find the perfect steeping time, which is a balance that cannot be taught, as it is founded on experience.

Practice letting go of parameters and asking the tea what it wants. Listen to it as the liquor talks to you and tells you if you put too much or too little (it's better to start with too little, as you can always add more). Listen to the liquor and it will tell you if it is over or under-steeped. Learn to love your mistakes, as they are Tea's way of guiding you towards mastery. She will lead the way if you listen and adjust, especially if you are then listening to the way a proper bowl feels in the hands, smells and tastes and circulates in the subtle body. The best brewing advice, in other words, is just that: listen!



Ai Lao Mountain

A RETURN TO QIAN JIA ZHAI

The Ai Lao range is China's most vibrant evergreen forest, with vegetation covering more than eighty percent of the mountains, comprised of hundreds of species of plants and more than seventy kinds of large arboreal trees, including several varieties of *Camellia sinensis*. The highest peak is around 3,000 meters. There are also vibrant ecologies of animals: everything from Bengal tigers and leopards to bears, rare birds, cobras and monkeys. Yunnan is a lush and vibrant province, with fertile soil, mists and fog and crystalline waters that flow down from the Himalayas to the West. Ai Lao is mostly situated between the two most important of these "Nine Dragons," as the major rivers are called: the Lishi/Yuanjiang and the Lincang. There are eight traditional villages in Ai Lao and seven tribes. They have all cooperated for as long as they can remember, most recently working together to build their own roads, electrical grid, water treatment facilities and schools.



*Our first fifteen-hour bus ride, called
“Getting to Know Each Other.”*



*Our Ai Lao cake, available now,
called “Mountain Gate.”*

Auntie Ai and her niece.



公車
駛
源
頭

A BUS TO THE SOURCE

茶人: Steve Kokker

It is best to start with a description of our itinerary, as we often forget this when describing a trip to others. The whole purpose of this issue, after all, is to make you readers feel like you were there with us, since you really were. We spoke of you often. Understanding the itinerary and where we went will help you have a context for all the wonderful accounts of the trip experiences and teachings that will follow in the coming articles.

The antidote to all the internal, mental blah blah blah we are deluged with is to have a teacher, a lineage. Lineage equals accumulated power and forms the basis of how we live, or strive to live. Having a tradition, a teacher, is how it has always been done.

Those lines were written in my well-used notebook early on during this year's Global Tea Hut tea trek to Yunnan. They paraphrased a snippet of one of Wu De's talks. They intimated a truth that was one of the many lessons learned on this trip, and appropriately set the tone for a journey guided by two tea masters who for whatever bizarre twist of their karmas undertook to be absurdly generous in the dispersal of their knowledge to twenty-five or so eager—and oh so lucky!—little sponges like us.

This was a journey in every sense of the word. That we were carried along by a wise lineage was perhaps

more powerful than we realized at the time, so fun, human, and down-to-earth as it also was.

As Wu De added, students *should* advance more quickly than the teacher. We *should* be leapfrogging over knowledge accumulated by others onto our own insights, taking advantage of the toil of others to bring us to realizations, which would otherwise take us ages to attain.

And so it was with this trip in general. We were deliberately brought to very specific people and places that none of us likely would have ever managed to get to, kindly shown so much of such importance to us, offered so much advanced-level wisdom through both words and silence.

While all of our writing here about our reflections on and lessons from the trip will unveil some fraction of the trip's deepest essence, for the sake of context, let's walk through a bit of a timeline/frame-

work of what we actually did and where we went. A linear who-what-where sometimes helps provide a scaffolding upon which to hang our attempts to comprehend other people's experiences. Otherwise, it might seem as if we somehow vaporized at the international arrival gates and through some magic drifted steam-like through cloud-enshrined bliss for days on end...

Day 1:

...and yet we did mundane things like stepping onto a large, air-conditioned bus in busy, hectic central Kunming early on a Thursday morning in May, after half an hour of hugs, hellos, "nice to see you agains" and "my name is'es." Thanks to the forty-three reminders Wu De had sent us (right down to the last hour) to not be late, none of us held the bus up, and off we went...



*Master Tsai drinking tea under the
Da Diao Shui Waterfall in Ai Lao.*



The entire day we drove, getting to know our neighbors over the course of the thirteen-or-so-hour drive, which included pee & stretch stops, and a few extended eating stops. The province of Yunnan is almost 39,500sq km in area (which is slightly smaller than California, more than one and half times the size of the United Kingdom, or nearly double the size of the Australian state of Victoria). It's big. And mountainous. Which makes travel times and distances enormous, as well as breath-takingly beautiful to traverse, being constantly surrounded by towering rocky landscapes and rust-red earth.

We were headed to the village of Qian Jia Zhai ("1000 family village") in the Ai Lao mountain range. Ai Lao, too, is a huge expanse,

stretching over 1,740sq km and sitting at the intersection of the Qinghai/Tibetan plateau, the Hengduan mountain range and the Yunnan high plateau. Its highest peak is 2,811m (which in Yunnanese terms is kinda not-so-impressive; it's only the fifteenth-highest peak in the province!). Our destination was a newly-built guesthouse/tea-processing facility run by our host Auntie Ai and her radiant family.

By the time the bus had rounded its four hundredth twist up bending mountain roads in the encroaching darkness and past the millionth tree-rock ensemble, we were all quite anxious to arrive. As I had been there two years prior, a few people were asking me, "Is this scenery ringing any bells? Are we getting close?"

We arrived, stiff-backed but excited as puppies, to smiles, hosts dressed in colorful costumes, fresh air, a sky full of stars, and many plates of fresh fruit and snacks... and just in time, it turned out, for a tea session. Sleep came fast and deep an hour or so later, each of us paired up and in our own comfy rooms. Queries of "Does your room have a squat toilet too?" could be heard wafting through the halls.

Days 2 & 3: Ai Lao

The morning arrived for all of us with a shockingly stunning sight outside our windows: verdant mountains stretching their sides towards the blazingly sunny sky and clouds above, for as far as the eye



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The Ku Chuong Legend of Tea

One evening, close to sundown, the Ku people chased a fat deer deep into the forest. Eventually, the deer outran them. When they'd caught their breath, they realized they were lost. Worse yet, a dangerous storm was brewing. The eldest had an idea to climb a tree to look around, hoping to get some bearings. He volunteered to climb, but one of the younger hunters insisted. He climbed up an old tree and looked around, but there was only a sea of green in all directions. The dark sky made him anxious, so he nervously plucked one of the leaves from the old tree and started chewing on it. His whole body filled with bitterness and he thought he was poisoned. He spat and choked, and his tribesmen below were worried he was dying. Then, his face changed and he shouted, "I've found it! I've found it!" He fell out of the tree, he was so excited! Now, his mouth was filled with a sweet aftertaste. His energy was full and his eyes bright as the stars. He got up and smiled, again exclaiming, "I've found it!" His tribesmen looked on in amazement. "What did you find?" they asked. "I can see the way home now—see it through the heart!" Everyone started chewing the leaves from the wise old tree, and with renewed energy and clear hearts, they made it home safely before the storm, carrying knowledge of this new powerful medicine with them.

could see, with signs of animal and human life buzzing everywhere.

These first few days, we were all feeling each other out, rekindling paused friendships, tentatively establishing new bonds, and slipping out of the busy-ness and possibly stressful lives from which we had all come, as well as shaking off jet lag.

Our days in and around the village were full, vibrant, punctuated three times a day (at least) with mega-portions of freshly prepared Yunnanese cuisine. While we couldn't get permission this time to trek through ancient forests to visit the 2700-year-old King Tree, we did get a live lesson by Wu De and Master Tsai surrounded by old tea trees of various subspecies and had our first outdoor tea session by a stunning waterfall from which our

drinking water was culled. What a treasure!

It delighted us all to be able to help process some stunning Ai Lao ancient tree *maocha*, after receiving rolling (*ro nien*) lessons from Auntie Ai and our two guides. We were all smelling each other's piles (of leaves, that is) and hands; just as each emptied tea cup smells different from one another, so too did the leaves after we had rolled them. I suppose I should have washed my hands after anointing them with sandalwood essential oil. Live and learn!

On our last night, not only were we treated to a culinary feast, but also to a dance presentation. Some two dozen locals had dressed up in full costume and came over just to help us party. We were all looking at each other, wondering what was

happening and why such a fuss was being made over us. We were coaxed to join them in trying out the choreographed Ku Chuong folk dances. Even the shyest amongst us tried out the fancy (read: awkward) footwork alongside them, arm in arm. As if the show of hospitality from our host's side was not already overflowing, Auntie Ai also made us all traditional tea, and offered us cakes of precious tea to buy. Ah, and there was the local wild honey, too, which got me babbling excitedly.

As a group, by the end of our Ai Lao stay, we had relaxed into a new rhythm, had shaken off whatever tiredness or mind-based tensions had held us tighter than we needed to be and were already connecting with each other on a much more personal, honest level.



Days 4, 5, 6 & 7: Jingmai

The fourth day was another mega bus trip, from morning until late in the evening, punctuated by pee breaks at gas stations boasting awkwardly-translated signs and equally incomprehensibly delicious food. It was an awesome bus ride, too, right through the military-patrolled borders of the southern prefecture of Xishuangbanna (a Holy Grail in and of itself for tea lovers). The relentless twists and turns down sharp, narrow corners atop perilous but stunning cliffs with pedal-to-the-metal speed was enough for some of us to feel our lunchtime bok choy resurface at the back of our throats, but in the end, we all hailed the heroic stature of our driver, who had pulled off what none of us felt we could have ever done. And safely. And without complaint!

Indeed, one of the most touching aspects of the kindness we encountered everywhere was that there was never a sense that we were imposing or that all the time and effort expended on us was anything less than a genuine pleasure.

In total darkness, we reached the village of Jingmai in Lancang County of southern Puerh prefecture. We couldn't see much of it when we first arrived, but even by the smell, the unique look of the neat village itself, and an enveloping feeling in the air, we knew we were in another world. Feeling nestled in the embrace of something mysterious and larger than life, we fell into a deep sleep.

The three days in Jingmai were Heaven in a way many will doubtless describe in these pages. Our days were very, very full, and yet went by with the pace of a cool, confident swagger—the comfortable stride of someone fully in their element. We shared tea as a group in the lobby of our very tasteful guesthouse (some people had squat toilets, others had sit-down ones, I could glean from corridor conversations); we were fed almost con-

stantly; and we received from the indefatigable Master Tsai soulful teachings about gongfu, *chaxi* and of course about the ancient forests. We were allowed to take an active part in the processing of tea, observing as leaves were withered, spread out, put through enzymatic deactivation and were rolled. We were treated to lavish dinners, some served by a bevy of folk-song-singing beauties doubling as waitresses. We visited a tea-processing factory and saw how puerh cakes are pressed (and got to swivel our hips while stone-pressing cakes—here we saw who got the funk and who hadn't,

at least yet!). We learned how to wrap puerh cakes. We watched the sun rise over glorious distant mountains. We danced together; we ate still-warm, wild honey freshly cut from wild hives; and we laughed—a lot. Particularly memorable was the twenty-five-minute spontaneous and very trippy music and toning session we lapsed into, a vortex created by the now well-bonded group during one of our rare free times. Drums and voices, throat singing and toning merged in drone-like but mellifluous overtones and brought everyone into a state hard to achieve even in meditation.



波羅揭諦

Most striking of all, however, in Jingmai were our three outdoor sessions among ancient tea trees: the *raison d'être* of the trip (or so it felt to us). Others will surely describe these as pivotal life-changers. There were profound moments of depth and peace where I felt myself to be *Camelia sinsensis var. homo sapiens*.

Here, the group was at its closest. In this otherworldly place, where we were profoundly moved and shifted on a daily basis, it became easier (natural!) to open ourselves to each other, expose fears and mini-demons, and be there for each other in those times of vulnerability. In

the Global Tea Hut community, everyone is a healer in some sense, and so there were constant offers of oils, drops, ointments, pills, needles (acupuncture, of course), massages, and helpful suggestions all being freely exchanged. There were many instances in which one approached another in an offer of support, or gently encouraged another to sing, to come and dance, to hug, to be real in the witnessing presence of another human.

The accumulated knowledge of all us mini-masters was being offered out in life-affirming dollops. Beautiful! There were also many

tears, truly meaningful hugs and some moments of dark realizations. Yet, all of this was contained and embraced by the spirit of the ancient tea trees, which never felt very far from us, and were powerful enough to absorb anything our troubled souls had to expunge.

One of the more magical sessions of our trip was the tea we shared under a thousand-year-old tea tree full of prayer flags and offerings. Left is the tree from another angle.





Days 8, 9 & 10: Kunming

The distance from Jingmai to Kunming is about 450km—about the same as from Berlin to Frankfurt, a trip which would take five hours in Germany, but takes about twelve in Yunnan (ok, including mega eating bouts). Ours took us more than sixteen hours, including an unexpected four-hour pause on the highway as we very narrowly missed being part of a kilometer-long multiple-car crash. We made the best of it, continued having great talks and were able to pause and process the majesty of what we had just lived through. The girls peed in buckets and the guys exhibited their martial arts prowess; the natural order of things was restored.

The last two days in Kunming provided an appropriate closing overture to our large orchestrated symphony. We were invited by Master Tsai to attend a tea service at the university where he teaches, a deeply touching event where both he and Wu De tearfully expressed some profound wisdom about the disappearance of Nature and the role of the heart in tea.

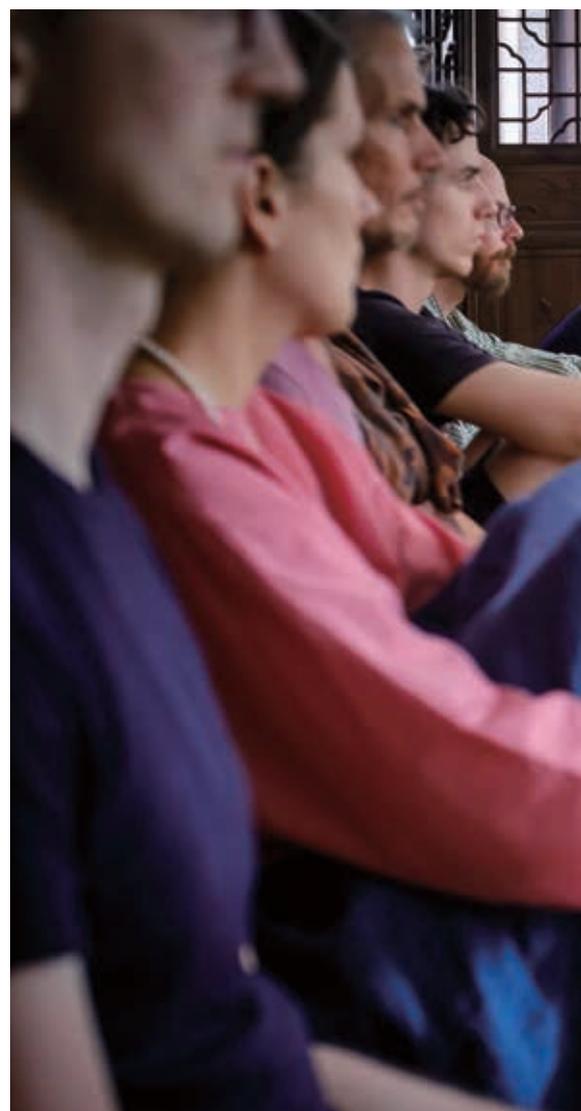
We also visited Wu De's beloved tea sister Shelley in her sumptuous teahouse, where we were served three jaw-dropping teas. It was also Ivan's birthday party celebration there, so we got to spoil him with attention and see him cut a triple-tiered cake.

Our last day was also marked by a long final tea session in a central park, where we all sat in a large circle and, to the astounded, open-mouthed gazes of passing locals, shared at least some of our feelings and reflections on the experiences we had just moved through, trying to do justice to the ineffable by using inadequate words...

It was obvious by this point in Kunming that we had left (what we took to be) Great Nature and were slowly stepping back into our city-life mode. Some of the

micro-tensions in people's shoulders were slowly returning, as was the temptation to place old masks back on. Spontaneous hotel room dance parties helped keep the flow merry, but in the back of everyone's minds was the eventual return to Life As We Know It. A mostly unspoken melancholy was creeping into the hearts of some in the lead-up to an inevitable parting. Many were also craving some time to even begin absorbing what had happened and what significance it had in their lives, yet the pull of Life was already making itself felt. All was perfectly lovely, of course, but a journey of this emotional magnitude certainly carries with it a bittersweet closure.

Likely also, being mere mortals, we were somewhat unable to constantly access the calm, inner stillness and depths unlocked so powerfully by being in the presence of Great Nature. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges/opportunities this trip offered is to find a way to access at any time the lessons learned and the source of stillness revealed during our golden moments surrounded by wisdom in both plant and human forms.



Wu De's sister Shelley played guqin while we drank tea.



We had a wonderful session in the university where Master Tsai teaches.



Afterglow

Sitting among the woody sentinels of ultimate truth, on the land which first begat the tea tree on our planet, drinking of their nectar and being hypnotized by the insect and bird songs which have stimulated their growth for untold millennia, the trees began to feel like conscious beings, aware of our presence. With their eternal patience and compassion for the wandering restlessness of our minds, they gently asked if we were ready to shed some of the gathered dust and debris which stood in the way of our hearing their simple message to remember the essence of who we are as beings. With their myriad outstretched, twisted limbs forever moving

in a slow, yet complex, hypnotic ballet that was frozen to us, they were like a multi-armed Hindu deity caught by a light flash in the middle of an exquisite dance. They gently whispered: "Leave only your conscious awareness. Let the rest fall, as we have done. Do not forget who you are. Dance your human dance and enjoy your senses." Ah, yes, let's, but let us not forget the very essence of our selves.

I wrote that in my notebook as well. Bowing in gratitude, I close my eyes and take a moment to rise to this challenge. As I bring this long article to a close, I dedicate this moment of peace I experience to the deeply stirring souls with whom I had the fortune of sharing this trip. I shall often recall the raw expressions of vulnerability and openness on your faces as you sat, bowls in hands, masks shed, and allowed others to take in the beautiful sight of humans open and present in their frailty, allowing the spark which animates your souls to be seen and held safely in the hands of others. Thank you.



HANI TEA CEREMONY

During our time in Yunnan, we shared tea ceremonies together as a group and amongst ourselves a few times when we had breaks in our full travel schedule. As we've discussed in previous issues, every tea session is a beautiful and unique chance for connection. These sessions were no exception—we shared a deep peace and bond in each one. One of the highlights of our previous trip in 2014 was when Auntie Ai made traditional Ku Chong tea for us, so we were excited to have her prepare it for us again. She agreed, mentioning that back in the day such tea was always served to important guests or guests from far away—a tradition she lamented losing.

Auntie Ai appeared in stunning traditional garments bearing some yellow-hued rice, chunks of jaggery-like sugar, pine resin and a bowl of sheng puerh leaves. The previous night, we had been treated to a beautiful Ku Chong dance, though this night would also prove to be one of the highlights of our stay in Ai Lao.

Auntie Ai is a member of the Ku Chuong ethnic minority. The Ku Chuong have inhabited Ai Lao since around the third century CE, and they are also found in nearby Laos and Vietnam. For about 1700 years, they have been interacting with local tea trees. Today, some still say prayers to the trees, leaving offerings at their roots. And some, like Auntie Ai and her family, still revere the trees and the deep soul nourishment they offer. During our short time in her town, she had already sung us songs about Tea. She had blended tea with adept skill and with more than a touch of artistry. And she had rolled tea with graceful ease and firm strength in perfect balance. Certainly, we were in for a treat.



Charcoal smoldering in the brazier, a slab of stone resting on its wire grill: the setup was simple. Auntie Ai spread the dry yellow rice on the slab. Its color, we learned, was from a local flower (just one of the many wild plants locals gather by hand to make their food powerfully nourishing and downright delicious). She spread the rice over the hot stone with a pair of wooden chopsticks, and then placed the pine resin next to it. She placed a simple clay pitcher over the coals. Into the dry pitcher, she dropped a handful of long, wiry sheng leaves to roast.

An aroma hinting at old trees and far older mountains curled out from the lip of the pitcher. She held the vessel out to each of us so we could savor this ode to nature, writ-

ten in hot air only to disappear no sooner than it was created.

Next, she added another pitcher to the heat. The pitchers were amazing, and we talked of how they looked antique and rustic, streaked with the horizontal ridges of a potter's fingers as they met the gentle, rhythmic spin of a pottery wheel. She scooped up the grains of rice with her fingers and placed them into the small pitcher. Then, she shifted the other pitcher to the space she had made on the slab. With her chopsticks, she patiently stirred the rice as it grew increasingly hot over the coals. After some time, the grains began to puff and pop, like the toasted rice in Japanese *genmaicha* (only yellower, thanks to the flowers).



Being welcomed with a traditional Ku Chuong tea ceremony was a highlight of our trip. The tea is roasted, then boiled with puffed rice, pine resin and jaggery sugar. One cup was enough to leave an aftertaste that lasted the entire evening. It tasted like a sweet, strong and malty cup of warmth and love!

A sudden look of alertness flashed in her eyes—time for the sugar and pine resin! Using chopsticks, Ms. Ai swiftly took the russet-colored lumps of sweetness from a bowl and placed them gingerly on the hot block of stone. She poured the contents of the small pitcher into the large one, mixing together the roasted sheng and the puffed rice. Then, she transferred the hunks of sugar and resin into the small pitcher for more heat. After a few minutes, they began to bubble and sizzle softly, caramelizing in the heat as the rice and tea continued to roast. As she stirred, the dark brown sugar and resin began to melt into an even darker brown syrup.

The rice and tea were ready to brew. Auntie Ai grabbed a kettle of

simmering water and poured it into the pitcher. She gave it a stir and then plopped in the melty nuggets of sugar and resin. She waited and watched closely as it boiled. Then, she arranged an army of white tea cups onto a round bamboo tray used for tea processing. She gave the brew a final stir and poured a small sip into each cup, apologizing for how little everyone would receive. We received the cups with thanks and smiles.

The liquor was rich and roasty, sweet and complex, and just as tasty as you might expect it to be. More importantly, it contained all the care and love that Auntie Ai had put into it, from the trees to processing the leaves, preparing the tea to handing us the bowls. And it contained all

the tea sessions shared by her and her family, stretching back many generations. She wasn't just giving us homemade sweet tea. She was sharing a tradition that has been a part of her culture for hundreds of years, and sharing the love of tea and hospitality that has been a part of her people's tradition for all that time. She was giving a blessing from one tea tradition to another, and we were grateful to receive it. And while we probably won't start sweetening our tea with jaggery any time soon, I can only hope that we learn from and spread the spirit of Tea she shared with us that day. Perhaps the next time we serve you tea, you'll see a glimmer of Auntie Ai in us...





A CUP OF UNFORGETTABLE TEA SHARING A HUG IN THE TEA MOUNTAINS

茶人: Snow Yang

Snow was one of the highlights of this trip for us all. She had already done so much planning and coordinating for the trip long before it started that we all showed up with a deep gratitude and affection for her on day one. Over the course of the trip, she proved an invaluable guide and a wonderful new tea sister. We have also officially hired her as a Global Tea Hut correspondent to Yunnan, so you can expect to see many articles from her in the coming months!

When I first met Master Wu De, he gave me a big, long hug. I was a little nervous, since before our meeting, my teacher, Tsai Yizhe, had told me that we were about to meet the author of *The Way of Tea*. Wu De is a man with a profound understanding of the Way of Tea, a practitioner of Buddhism and a tea master. Although we had never met before, I could already feel my admiration welling up inside me well before we greeted. To a traditional Chinese girl, a hug is something that is reserved for one's lover or a close female friend. We seldom even hug our parents. Though I was shy, Wu De smiled and said: "Snow, you're going to have to get used to hugging. You're going on a Global Tea Hut trip and we're all huggers. You will probably get hugged a lot over the next week or so! And you may even grow to like it." And with that, my journey to the tea mountains began.

All together we were twenty-five people, led by our teachers,

Wu De and Tsai. Master Tsai came from Taiwan. I myself am a Yunnan native. Wu De and the twenty-two other members of our group came from different countries around the world.

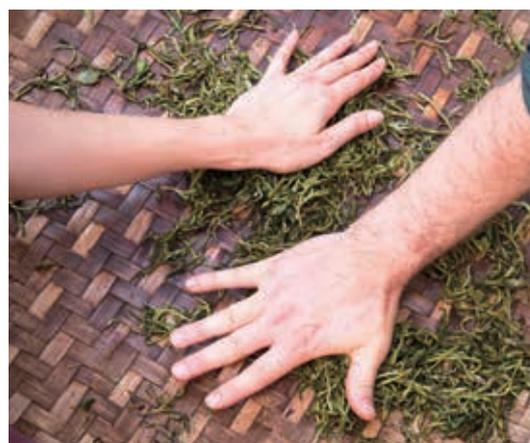
On May 5th, at nine in the morning, we set off from Kunming. By the time we reached Qian Jia Zhai, it was already midnight. After the fifteen-hour trip, we were all exhausted, but the next day we were up bright and early in anticipation of the day's "conversation with Tea." We set off in the direction of the waterfall called "Da Diao Shui." Halfway through the day, I was surprised to see that some of the friends in our group had taken off their shoes and were walking barefoot. The mountain paths were no easy walk, covered in water, large holes, and jagged rocks. I began to wonder if perhaps walking barefoot was their way of getting closer to the land we now traveled through, the land on which grew tea trees up to 2700 years old. Da Diao Shui is

one of Qian Jia Zhai's most beautiful waterfalls. Though the early May temperatures had risen to over 30 °C, the refreshing waters washed away the heat of our long journey.

We drew some water from beneath the falls to brew tea. This was my first time drinking tea with members of Global Tea Hut. Everything was calm. This was a different way of drinking tea. Throughout the time it took for the water to boil, nearly everyone sat silently. Those first few minutes felt completely unusual to me. I almost didn't dare to breathe. I closed my eyes and cleared my mind, and soon I, too, began to calm down. This allowed my mind to organize recent events—things which were confusing became increasingly clear, and any ill feelings I had were met by an internal voice telling me to let go. I was having an internal conversation, which was fascinating.

雪





While in Jingmai, we had the opportunity to make a puerh cake from scratch, following the unique processing method of the locals: withering and shaking, firing (sa qin), rolling, sun-drying, dancing on the compression stones. Wu De hand-calligraphed our wrappers and then we learned how to wrap each cake!

The water finished boiling. Wu De steeped the tea himself, offering us each a bowl of the leaves of ancient tea trees from the area. The flavor was extremely sweet and clear. Wu De's tea steeping technique was very unique. I decided to quietly copy his methods in my mind and practice them once I returned home.

We then took part in the process of traditional red tea production: withering, rolling, oxidizing and sun-drying. Rolling was an interesting process. Despite many hours of work, our leaves were still not ripe enough. Perhaps we needed the farmers' lifetimes of experience to properly roll the tea leaves and bring out their fragrant and pure flavors. Our tea did have joy in it, though!

Our next stop after Ai Lao was the Jingmai Old-Growth Tea Garden. Our lodgings were located among the tea mountains. Stepping out the door, one could see the tea trees and mountain slopes covered in wild flowers.

Master Tsai had asked his local friends to help us prepare some fresh leaves in order to produce puerh tea. From withering, de-enzyming, rolling, sun drying and pressing to the very last step of wrapping the cake in paper, each person participated in every step to personally hand-craft his or her own cake of puerh. Drinking a cup of tea is easy, but producing tea is not so simple. Tea farmers pick leaves in 35°C weather, and oftentimes simply walking to

the tea mountains can take hours. During the de-enzyming, one must use one's bare hands to roast the leaves in a large iron pot over a hot fire (though farmers in Jingmai have started wearing gloves). In less than five minutes one's entire body is drenched in sweat. Yet, when that sweat is put into the leaves, a more beautiful cup of tea is created.

Under the guidance of our local friends, we were lucky enough to see Crab's Claw (a kind of leafless mistletoe) growing on the tea trees. Crab's Claw is a very interesting parasitic plant that can only be found in areas with the proper natural ecology. Some examples can be found growing in the natural forests of Yunnan, while others can appear



on tea trees that are hundreds or even thousands of years old. Because Crab's Claw absorbs the energy and essence of the tea tree it attaches to, it has the ability to reduce blood pressure, fat and blood sugar, soften the arteries, cleanse the gallbladder, induce diuresis, and treat stomach flus, among many other beneficial effects.

The Jingmai tea garden left every one of us stunned! The ancient tea trees, lush vegetation and balanced ecology—all were in perfect harmony. It is difficult to find words to describe how I felt sitting around the thousand-year-old Guardian Tree, drinking bowls of puerh tea steeped in the mountain spring water we had carried into the tea

garden. I can only say that I felt as if I had become one with the ancient forest, where the elements and essence of Nature seemed to come together.

In my ten days with the group, my happiest moments were those in which we drank silent tea together, produced our own tea as a group, and, yes, the hugs we shared. As Wu De had said, I was hugged quite often. He was also right that by the end I began to appreciate hugs a lot more! (I even hugged a few people on my own initiative!)

In seeing each new friend treasure the tea in their bowls, express their love for Yunnan and the local tea they encountered on this journey, and demonstrate their great

respect for Nature, I felt deeply moved. Even now, I am touched to know that there is a group of lovely people willing to come to my native home to help protect the natural environment and support the ecology of Tea and aboriginal culture, and to do so with such reverence. I am extremely grateful for that.

In a bowl of fine tea, there is Nature. There is a Way of life. There is water, mountains, birds, and even the sounds of insects. I hope that through Global Tea Hut, more people get the chance to drink such bowls.

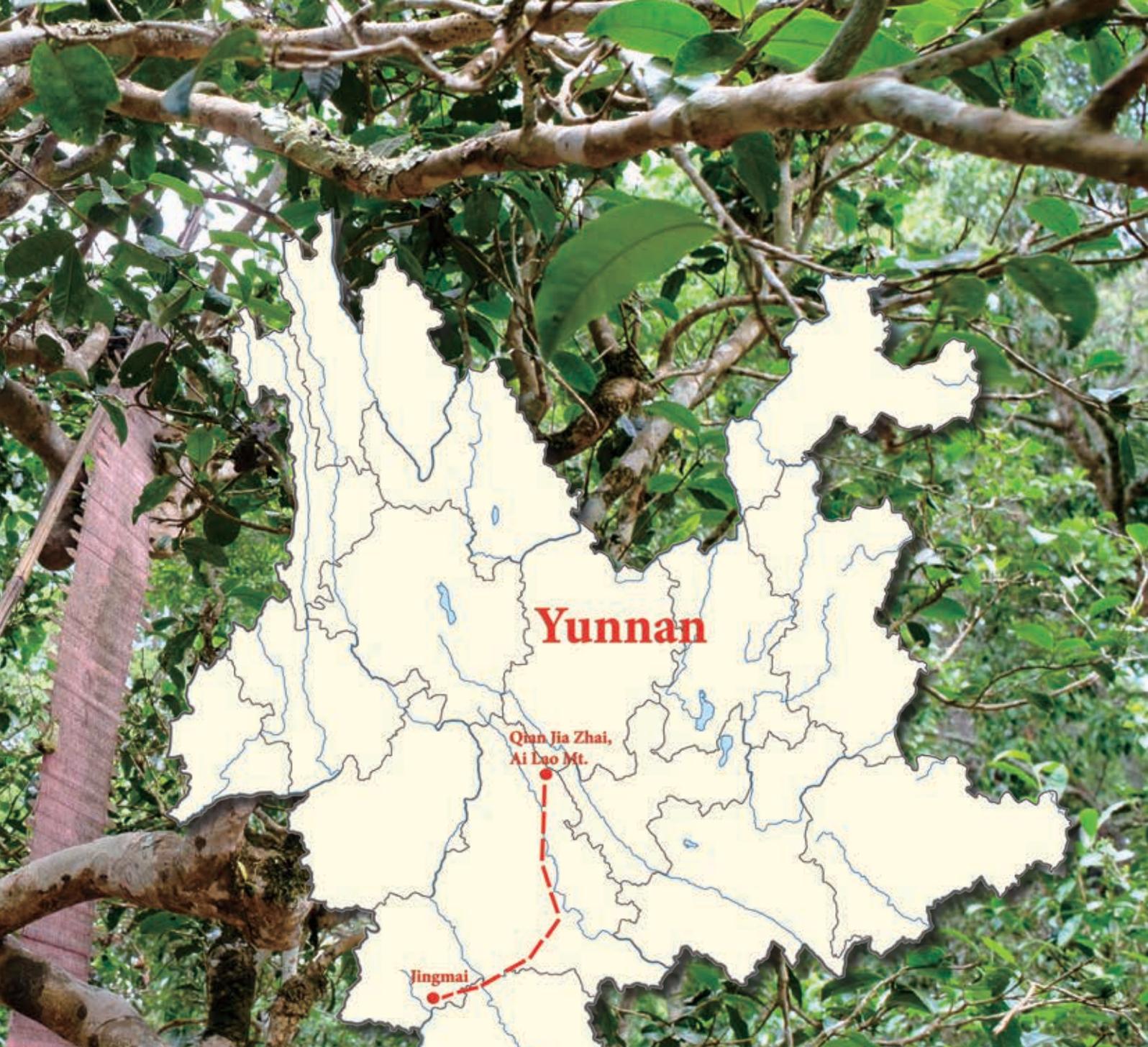




Jingmai Forest

AN ANCIENT GARDEN OF TEA

The Jingmai tea growing area covers the Lancang County villages of Jingmai and Mangjing. This stretch of 10,000mu cultivated ancient tea gardens has upwards of a thousand years of history. Scholars believe the Jingmai teamountain was first cultivated over 1200 years ago in 696 C.E. by the ancestors of the Bulang people. The next several dynasties saw a succession of tea planting, leading to the current scale of cultivation. The Jingmai Old-Growth Tea Garden is one of the largest conservatories for old tea trees in the world. It is, furthermore, completely protected and one-hundred percent organic, living tea. In all of our travels in Yunnan, we have never visited a place with a greater concentration of tea trees. Unlike the tall trees in Ai Lao, which are very unique due to the altitude and deciduous nature of the forest, the trees in Jingmai are the more typical jungle/rainforest kind of tea tree, with twisted fairy-tale trunks and branches covered in mold, fungus, vines and other species like Crab's Claw, which we had the fortune to add to a bowl or two. The forest here sings of tea—a song that we hope you hear through these pages!



*Our second fifteen-hour bus ride, called
“Letting Go of All Our Ego-Baggage.”*

*Our Jingmai cake, available now,
called “Forest Bridge.”*



*The eldest in our host’s family.
He was eighty-eight this year.*





THE GUARDIAN TREE

茶人: Wu De

In Jingmai, we all drank two teas in the old-growth forest. The first was under a laurel that had watched over the forest for thousands of years. The second was under an ancient tea tree. Wu De had the tea session of a lifetime that day. Beneath the Guardian Tree, he learned so much about Tea that he feels he has the material for an entire book to come. We are excited to read the new book when it comes out, which he says will bear the same title as this article and be about the environmental aspects of tea cultivation and preparation. In this article, he offers a rudimentary summary of some of these teachings and describes the experience for us.

In a lifetime there are but a few dozen days that we can say honestly change everything—every particle of every cell. These magnificently destructive days demand that things never be the same again, and we often are forced to re-evaluate all the ways we look at this world. Our habits no longer suit us and many of the stories we've told and retold up until then no longer make sense, lacking the verve they once had. With our connections to the past subdued or severed, we can experience the grief of loss and the confusion of not knowing where to go from here, only that we cannot ever return to the same. But then we remember that this is fertile soil, and new seeds will thrive here. Returning home from this year's Global Tea Hut trip was a returning home to such a slashed-and-burned field, leveled of all previous life. As uncomfortable as seeing my familiar surroundings destroyed has been, there are these hundred baby sprouts—my new children of insight.

I was literally leveled by a tea session more singularly powerful than

any I have ever experienced. And in its glorious gaze, all I thought I knew about Tea was razed. I felt hurt and lost. I dropped my bag of seeds, the contents of which fortuitously spilled all over the ground, no thanks to me. This was a saving grace, for when I returned home, I saw that many new seeds had hatched. The burned field now had the potential for stronger and more powerful trees. With such hope, my vision was restored and I could look out on a future full of new and greater tea trees covering this land. The sprouts still need watering, though.

My experiences on this year's trip were wonderful, with many lifelong memories and smiles that will fill the hallways of my life's celebrations. But the deepest one, the one that forced me to begin this writing in such a strong mythopoetic tone, happened the first day we went into the old-growth forest to drink tea in Jingmai. We had three tea sessions that day, each one so different and amazingly consecutive that they flowed

into and supported each other as a single, life-changing day. In the morning, we woke up and drank tea around an awkwardly shaped table, sharing three bowls in silence. I then gave everyone my annual speech about how meeting the old trees was very much central to our time here and that we should therefore revere these moments and not waste them in idle chit-chat or distraction (as much for my own good as for my companions' state of mind).

True to my word, I entered the forest quiet and balanced—each breath focusing my mind so that I could take more in. And there was way more than all of us combined could take in through our senses, even if we were much more sensitive—even if we came back every day for a month! There was a symphony of sound, and not the second, quiet movement, but the finale of the Ninth. The tea that was coursing through me from earlier that morning was from this forest, and it all started buzzing and chanting, joining in with the surrounding songs whether I willed it to or not.

守護樹



And as every other sense heightened, I slipped past myself, down a golden thread, through the wardrobe and into the otherworldly. The cacophony of the forest retreated from me and I found a peaceful place, where the trees lived—beyond the human understanding from mere decades of life to the experience where centuries mark time.

There are more tea trees in the forest of Jingmai than anywhere I have visited in Yunnan. They account for the great majority of all trees here. And the park is protected, completely chemical-free and thriving and thrumming with Tea juju. The trees here are happy, and so you have to get over the initial feeling that you are disturbing that century-conscious peace. I recognized my intrusion, and also that the communication I was having with the forest meant that the trees had seen us, briefly acknowledged that we were a nuisance (though a harmless one), and gone back to their meditations. We barely register in a conversation that takes from decades to millennia to complete. But, wow! So many tea trees! I can't say that enough. Astoundingly, the whole forest is tea—from ancient thousand-year-old grandfathers down to the little children that still look up to them. Tea beyond imagining, and all of it healthy! Such inspiration is heart-food and hope for environmentally conscious Chajin like us. Their roots were all spread beneath our every step, and I had the feeling that so much more was happening down there than we could ever possibly understand.

After a short, blissful walk, putting our heads on ancient trees in gratitude, we turned off the main road and head down a trail into the forest proper. After some time, we rounded a corner and there was a giant—beyond words huge—laurel tree with offering flags hanging from it. And beneath, in all their color, were some local aboriginals on their knees in prayer. The force of the scene poked me, and I realized that

there was something special here. Master Tsai whispered to me that this tree was the “Guardian Tree,” and that it had watched over this forest for centuries. He also smiled and said that we would drink tea here before this old grandfather.

There wasn't much to say. We'd all found our way into a reverie, and by this time, the group had spent around a week together, day and night, often cramped on a bus or in the one space we all shared, so the circle formed naturally. We'd also just gotten over the ego-baggage of our different trips to get here and finally started feeling like one tribe. Just the previous day, many had said that whatever they had brought with them—the trials and tribulations of their home lives—had finally been set down. Many of our conflicts getting to know each other, bumping and scraping against so many people stuck together—all of that was starting to transmute-transcend, and we were resting in one heart. When so many meditators and sensitive people travel together, we are bound to face challenges beyond the physical discomfort of travel and close proximity to so many people. There is a psychic closeness, too, and discomfort in that if you aren't used to it. But as the days passed and we worked and lived in harmony, our souls started really meaning the hugs and smiles we were sharing each day, and we started to find a place where we all could meet in our hearts that were now the group heart as well. The result of this was that tea, for the first time on that trip, came together effortlessly, arranging itself on its own.

I was so overwhelmed by the great tree and its messages, which started coming from within my core, that I blinked and we were all sitting in a huge circle before this old grandfather tree, who had sat here for millennia, its roots deeper beneath us than the crown so far above. The preparations all happened effortlessly and I looked down from the giant tree to find



myself sitting in a large circle with water on the way.

As the tea streamed into me, I melted and the whisper of the giant tree turned into a loud chanting. Everything changed. It was a moment and also not in time. I can't escape the need to share the details of what was happening on an outer linear level, along with some more poetic words that perhaps point towards much of the nonverbal, right-brain visions I was having inside, despite the fact that I know that this language will turn some people away from this account and perhaps leave some of you who weren't there wondering what I am talking about. The fact is I don't yet know. As I said at the outset, these insight-sprouts still need watering. The good news is that the outline for my next book is slowly forming, as are the teachings that will come



through me over the course of my next teaching tours. But they aren't yet solid—they are runny metaphor-colors all swirled together, like the roots of the tea forest, and like the images I am expressing here in this article. As simply as I can possibly put it, in the hopes of breaking through any confusion I've created with too much feeling in too many words, I could say it like this: *that session under that Guardian Tree changed my life and I honestly feel as if the tree transmitted some wisdom to me, hoping I would one day find the voice to express it.*

The challenge is that I myself haven't yet come to understand all of what was communicated, and so lack the clarity to share it with you. However, over the course of the week that followed, as we traveled on, some of the Guardian Tree's lessons did take shape, and I found

a unique and powerful reflection of them in the eyes of those around me. Even Master Tsai began to express some of the sentiments I was sharing, despite the fact that he didn't know that I had already expressed similar things to the group or felt them inside. Finding that the Guardian Tree had also shared some of its wisdom with others felt like a deep confirmation of my experience, but also made the responsibility of the vision weigh heavier on my heart. Translating the teachings of the Guardian Tree will occupy the next year. But before I unpack the teachings of the Guardian Tree more fully and write my next book, I thought that I could share the beginnings of them with you here—both to help me shape the tale of one of the most profound experiences of my life and also to begin the process of paying what was given

to me forward to my global tea family, for whom I do all my work and devote all my love and life. Anyway, looking back now, there really isn't much else from the trip I want to talk about.

Here are some brief summaries of what I learned that day. Mostly, these were not concepts when they happened, but feelings. There are many more layers unfolding in each tea session I have back at the Center. Voicing these feelings in words is a translation, as it were, and an incomplete one, so forgive the confusion, if there is any.

Tea & Laurel

The first profound experience on that day began the moment I turned the corner and saw the locals praying to the Guardian Tree.

And as I passed out the bowls and looked at the twenty-five others around me, it really set in. I realized that this giant tree both is and is not Tea. He is not Tea; He's a laurel tree. He's Tea's guardian. And yet, his ancient roots share the same soil, drink the same water and, judging by the length and breadth of the huge roots we could see sticking out from the ground, his roots are all tangled up in the roots of the many thousands of tea trees that surround him. They are connected, open and one, and yet also different. The Tea spirit is flowing through the Guardian Tree, as he protects them from above.

This feeling is forming in me into a literal and metaphorical representation of all us Chajin. We are guardian trees as well. We are and are not Tea. I am not a tea tree, nor a tea leaf nor its liquor. And then I drink it and become it, sharing one spirit. It is not as if I am a hollow

tube through which my tea liquor passes—it becomes me, changes me. Tea alters my perception, changes my body, spirit and mind. Tea like this shares the forest with me, bringing the forest into my body, mind and spirit in a way that is unifying.

The Guardian Tree asked me to look at the forest through his “eyes.” I was invited to see things the way he does. I saw the forest in terms of the millennia he has watched over it. I saw the connection, harmony and balance of things. I was asked to be a guardian—to join in the protective spirit of the land, ensuring that this space is forever reserved for this kind of life. These trees need to be. They play an important role in the ecosystem of the forest and the world as a whole. Preserving Tea's purity is paramount, lest all of its energy be washed into the human version of tea, as plantations on deforested, irrigated, chemical-laden lands replace old-growth forests like

this. Using cuttings to clone tea, or other plants, I realized, waters down the natural energy of the plant—distributing one spirit amongst many weaker and less nutrient-dense plants.

The Guardian Tree showed me that I am, indeed, made of Tea. I felt that quite viscerally. Like the giant tree above me, I wasn't honored with the task of protecting the “other,” but really with protecting my self. This forest preservation isn't about the survival of the jungle or Mother Earth, but about our own survival. It is about healing our suicidal tendencies. I was being asked to save myself from myself—to stop the power in us from being too destructive, which will upset the balance in a way that will cause our extinction. But what can I do to protect forests in Yunnan? How can I help? I felt the need to protect, but called out to the Guardian Tree—again from the gut and not in words—



pleading for a way to support the old tree in his duty as sentinel of this huge herd of peaceful, quiet and majestic tea trees. How do I serve?

Being a Guardian

The answer came after I had left, though the seed was planted in the session itself. The session was the answer. As I listened to others share their experiences under the Guardian Tree, drinking ancient-tree tea steeped in local spring water, I realized that the harmony I had experienced was awakening in them as well. The connection to the forest in the tea leaves was waking up their cellular memory in the same way mine had been stirred. They were realizing that they were home here, and that this place was *their* place—this forest belongs to us all because it is now forever a part of us. It is a part of our soul. And it always has

been. It was a remembering more than it was a realization.

The solution was the tea itself. We are never going to change the world with any kind of argument, no matter how convincing. There is no political, economic or philosophical solution to environmental degradation. Just as you can't stop drug use by making it illegal, we won't be able to protect Nature by making laws. Even if we convince some of the people some of the time, we won't be able to stop others from profiting from the destruction of natural spaces and resources. There really is only one solution: *they have to experience it themselves*. People have to know in their bodies that when they say "I love you" to their children, they are also expressing love to the fresh water that makes up more than half of their loved ones' bodies; that they are also loving the forest, which creates the air they breathe. They have to feel that

love. If they love the forest as they love their children—seeing and feeling that they are one—there is no need for philosophies. If the love is real and truly felt, they will naturally see the forest as their own property, and the protection of its integrity as their own health. Just as they naturally care for their own bodies and the bodies of their loved ones, treating them when they are ill, for example, so, too, will they defend the forests. The tea from these forests will awaken the Guardian Tree consciousness in those who drink it. Protecting these leaves and ensuring that they are used in this way is how we can participate. It is how we were meant to fulfill these forests.

I realized that as the Guardian Tree is the protector of this ancient Tea forest, like a fractal, the Tea forest itself is a guardian of all forests everywhere. This forest is so important because it contains the medicine that will awaken-



the protective energy that will defend all of Nature from our madness. And it will do that by helping us to remember that we are the forests and that their destruction is our own demise, as well. Seeing them as parts of our self, loving them as we do our own bodies and families, ensures their protection and vibrancy. It restores harmony through breaking up ignorance and showing us the truth of our makeup. We are plant energy: plants feed us, body, mind and soul. They are our breath, our food, our water—all that we are. We must feel this way again if we are to be healthy, as individuals and as a species. It is what already is. This is not a belief, but a fact. Our ignorance is like the clouds in the sky: the clouds block the sun, and to the ignorant it therefore feels as if the sun comes and goes—darkness and light with the passing of the clouds. But to the sun, it is always the same brightness; to the sun, the presence or absence of clouds doesn't matter. Our ideas of separation are just ideas, and dangerous ones. To the Guardian Tree, there is no separation, and whether we feel that way or not doesn't matter. From its perspective, there is only connection.

To put this more simply: *I realized that my role as a guardian tree is to protect the leaves by encouraging their medicinal use, which includes the way they are harvested, bought and sold, the proceeds of which should be used to protect aboriginal culture and Nature.* I am not talking about plantation tea. As long as we shift that to sustainable, organic agriculture, then let it be a beverage, agribusiness, and means for supporting farmers around the world. But these old-growth leaves need to be used for the good of humanity. They are like rare artworks: a Michelangelo belongs in a museum where everyone can benefit from it. These precious leaves and all the proceeds that they generate should be used to benefit people. To protect them, we must first protect those who tend them. The local aboriginals need

to be respected and cared for if we are to ask them to care for the trees. And these teas should be prepared and shared in a way that awakens the harmony inherent in them, so that they fulfill their role as medicine, designed by Mother Earth as such.

Regulating how often the trees are picked, what happens to the proceeds and how the tea leaves are prepared is a worthwhile mission. As the week passed, I was shocked to hear Master Tsai say the same things. The way we buy and sell these precious leaves will determine our attitude towards them. How and to whom we sell them will determine how they are prepared and whether or not the one consuming them will feel the connection that they should. Taking a powerful medicine that has the potential to awaken such feelings in the drinker and then giving it to someone to enjoy for the sake of some mouth pleasure is a bit like wasting one of a few precious cures for cancer on someone who doesn't have cancer just because they like the flavor of the medicine. And when that medicine can only be made in very, very limited quantities, it will have to be selectively bought and sold. The fact is, there is not currently enough old-growth tea for everyone to own.

You might ask, "Who are you, Wu, to determine who should or shouldn't have this tea?" You may feel it isn't fair that only some people get such rare tea. Of course, I don't want anything to do with determining who gets old-growth tea. That isn't my point. My point is that there is already a system in place for determining who does and does not get some, and it also is not fair. And worse, the system we have for distributing this precious resource is deflating its efficacy and ruining its very reason for existence. *Having the money to buy old-growth tea does not make you worthy of it*, in other words.

On our last day, Master Tsai said to all of us, "We aren't sitting

around drinking this old-growth tea because it is rare or worth a lot of money. We are drinking it to experience what Tea can be and how it can make us feel the love of Mother Earth, which will then change the way we treat Her." I couldn't agree more. Entrepreneurial spirit has helped create a lot of innovation and benefit for humankind, but most rational people in the world agree that there are aspects of life that are, or should be, off-limits to capitalism, like human rights, healthcare, and so on. And I would say that protection of Nature, necessary for our continued existence, ranks high on that list. The distribution of sacred tea from delicate old trees that have been a part of the cultural and religious heritage of aboriginal peoples for thousands of years should not be controlled by a market-based economy, especially one run from distant cities or foreign countries, but rather protected so that these resources benefit first the cultures that have cared for them these thousands of years, and second fulfill themselves as medicine with the potential to awaken love for Mother Earth in each steeping! And this brings us to the last aspect of the teachings of the Guardian Tree that I would like to discuss in this article: *How to be worthy of the precious tea from such forests.*

Worthiness

One of the strongest feelings I had drinking tea under the Guardian Tea was a feeling of unworthiness. This wasn't the kind of unhealthy shame we are used to avoiding in Western culture—the kind we think prevents us from living fully. In Zen, "shamelessness" and "guilt" are both amongst the ten "bondages," which may seem contradictory, but only because of translation issues. The feelings represented are subtler. Initially, we may see shame and guilt as they same, making the two "bondages"



The most important session of my life so far!

mutually exclusive. But here, being shameless is indeed an obstacle. This means we need shame, but a positive shame (not guilt, which is also a bondage). This means we have to take moral inventory of ourselves. And that is a positive activity, because the mind which is shameful is not the same mind that made the mistake for which we feel shame. Furthermore, this mind is now oriented towards a different outlook, one that transcends the mistake and/or habit that caused us to repeat it. This shame is a positive fuel that pushes us to transform ourselves. It is not guilt, which is self-defeating and holds us back.

The “unworthiness” I felt beneath the tree was not a negative emotion. It was, in fact, beyond positive or negative. It was not small and dualistic like that. It inspired me, actually. During the session, as I have said many times here, it

was all nonverbal and visceral, but afterwards, this feeling of being unworthy brought up all kinds of wonderful and self-motivating questions. I asked myself what I have done to deserve such magical tea. I then realized that the Guardian Tree was saying to me, “Now that I have given you the spirit I protect, what will you do with the energy?” He was encouraging me to share what I had learned with the world—to be active in the protection of this forest, which in turn protects all forests by helping wake people up.

The Guardian Tree was asking me to see that the privilege of money is not enough. Having the cash to come there, or even worse to buy these leaves on the Internet, was not enough. He has a mind of thousands of years. Money isn’t real to him. He has seen empires come and go. *He refuses such payment!* What would I do with the Tea once

it was inside of me? Where was that energy headed? How would I pay back the connection I had experienced? What do you give to a tree? What can you give back to the forest? When someone changes your life, how do you ever repay them? I realized that there are many, many answers to these questions which would satisfy the Guardian Tree. There are many ways to show up that will fulfill the contract. I somehow imagine the Guardian Tree’s spirit as a staunch old samurai, and earning his approval only gets you a glance and a slight bow of the head, which ordinarily may seem off-putting, but in this instance is so full of respect that it melts you and makes you feel like you really have earned your place amongst the other protector-samurai warrior-trees!

As I mentioned earlier, the Guardian Tree does not acknowledge our mind-made separation.

He doesn't have a mind like that. He is a tree. Connection is his nature. He is like the sun: the clouds of ignorance do not matter to him. This means that when we drink the tea, he is as much in us as we are in him. Is he ashamed to be us?

Buying and drinking old-growth puerh for flavor or recreation is a bit like meeting the Dalai Llama and talking about the weather. It is a waste. It isn't a sin; it isn't wrong. But it still needs to be protected against. There isn't much I can do to change the whole market surrounding old-growth tea or stop all the fortune-hunters from traveling to Yunnan from all parts of China and beyond looking to get rich from the leaves of trees they claim to love. I don't think this is a case where you need to prove yourself worthy in order to drink such tea. As I said earlier, I wouldn't want to have anything to do with choosing who does and does not get old-growth tea and why. I think that if you have the karma, you will find such tea.

“I realized that my role as a guardian tree is to protect the leaves by encouraging their medicinal use, which includes the way they are harvested, bought and sold, the proceeds of which should be used to protect aboriginal culture and Nature.”

Some people travel to Yunnan often without finding real old-growth tea. I realized that achieving worthiness comes afterwards, as it did for me that day beneath the Guardian Tree. Once I had drunk the tea and awakened, with a tear in my eye I looked up, knowing I had a debt to pay, knowing that I would earn the tea from that moment on. In India, there is an old saying that if you don't pay the teacher, the teaching won't work for you. If you don't pay the forest, the medicine won't work either.

Many of the people who went on this trip expressed the sentiment that we were “meeting” the

trees, and that they knew we were there. A few years earlier, I had the feeling that the old trees would want to help participate in building Light Meets Life, and as a result, we started our annual puerh fundraisers. The money really isn't that significant, but having the old trees' energy involved in building our future Center is very important to us. However, I questioned that after listening to the teachings of the Guardian Tree. So I asked him and the tea trees. I got the feeling that they were happy to be a part of our Center, especially if those who took the cakes home drank the tea with respect and reverence, using it in the way it is intended: *as medicine*. Furthering the serendipity of this whole amazing trip, Master Tsai later turned to me on the bus and said, “I think those trees are very happy that part of them is becoming a part of our Center. I felt their agreement.” Be sure to remember this if you decide to bring one of our 2016 cakes home!

We are all responsible for the environmental degradation of our world. We have all played our part. We are all, therefore, unworthy of such rare tea and the healing that it provides. But this is not a bad kind of shame; it is not guilt. It is positive shame. Having had the fortune to drink such tea, despite our horrendous abuse of Mother Earth, we find an undeserving forgiveness in Her and an awakening in the experience. We now have the very real opportunity to change our ways and become worthy of Her love. Drinking such a tea is a luxury that we'll have to pay for afterwards, at least for now, until different and better protective

measures are in place. And it is, in a sense, donation-based, as we pay whatever we wish for the experience. But if your experience is anything like mine, then you will want to earn the rare old-growth leaves that came to you by way of thousands of years of aboriginal care, by way of millions of years of evolution, and, most importantly, by way of Mother Earth's love for you!

The Last Bowl

Believe it or not, we had two full, long and deep sessions that day in the tea forest. (As I said, it was one of the most powerful days of my whole life.) The second was under a thousand-year-old tea tree and was very feminine, in contrast to the strong masculine power of the Guardian Tree. That session also had its wisdom and teachings, and was, ultimately, the perfect complement to the session that filled me with teachings, since it somehow emptied them. It provided space for a very overwhelming experience to gestate in. It was like a fresh shower after the field had been cleared and was pregnant with seeds. It brought the energy that would be needed to grow the seeds that will one day fill a whole book. In the meantime, I encourage you, my beloved tea family, to start contemplating what it means to be a guardian tree yourself: an ent, a Treebeard, a steward of the forest. Start with this month's bowl...







THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

茶人: Siim Loog & Raneta Coolakova

Everyone who went on this trip expressed that it was life-changing for them, and then got that far-away look in their eyes, sincerely hoping that all of you in this global community have the good fortune to come on one of our trips at least once. We also hope that you have the chance to come with us one year! In the meantime, know that you were in our hearts, and that we made this issue to honor the fact that you traveled with us in spirit, all throughout our journey!

As I am not very much of the traveller-type dude, and as I had never been to Asia before, I really did not know what to expect. But you can be certain that I was excited—so excited! Ask Steve. There was not a day when I did not bring up questions about every aspect of the trip: what to bring, if we would need raincoats, how much money I would need, and so on... Steve was rolling his eyes a lot. But I couldn't really anticipate what was going to happen.

So off we went! Arriving in Kunming, I was super grateful and happy that Steve was with me because instantly I understood that in rural China there is really nothing to do with English. Nobody speaks that language. Suddenly you understand that the world is bigger than the one you could imagine living in the tiny village of Estonia. So I quickly learned “*xièxie*” and kept it with me for the whole journey. Mandarin learned, we went shopping.

There is so much abstraction about how tea arrives to us, and, like many of you probably do, I feel pretty spoiled here, since many of the decisions about which tea to buy

are in large part already made for me. But going out to actually buy puerh, I finally understood what Wu De is always saying about the puerh world being something of a “Wild West.” It's crazy how much crappy tea there is lying around, how much of it you have to drink at teashops, how many puerh cakes are available and again how the so-called “international language,” English, won't help you.

Several days forward, several gems richer and many RMB lighter, we found ourselves at the Crowne Plaza Hotel lobby with many anxious Westerners. Lots of beautiful hugs and smiles later, we all carried our bags to the bus, where the true journey began. We found our seats, trusting our lives to the bus driver's experienced hands. (He was amazing! Many thanks and a thousand prayers to our bus driver!)

Already at the very beginning, it seemed like these two weeks in China would be monumental for me. As my soul is much more the rooted family type, the occasional trips I do take are usually very important for me. I tend to go to learn some important lessons. That was the case this time, too, but what

else would you expect from this kind of atmosphere, where there are twenty-five spiritually-charged people around and you are visiting ancient tea trees glowing with wisdom?

The trip was amazing, starting in Ai Lao at the stunning Auntie Ai's center. What a beautiful being she is, doing great deeds to keep tea production clean and healthy. The over-the-top food she offered nourished our soul and bodies (although those sticky buns were difficult to handle at points). From Ai Lao, the highlights I remember the most are producing red tea, our tea session at the waterfall and, of course, the night with traditional dancing. It felt like the whole village had been brought out to entertain us, and after several pictures with shy local kids, I thought to myself, “Is this how a superstar feels?”

Having been catered to in Ai Lao, we took a long bus ride to Jingmai, where the old village opened up in front of us. The days there were just pure magic! Producing our own sheng cakes, having tea sessions next to ancient tea trees, receiving verbal and non-verbal teachings from humans and



the plant kingdom—transforming! Without exaggerating, and with emotion atypical for an Estonian, it felt like a real fairy-tale in that village! It was in the energy of that area. You could feel it in your core, your *dan tian*, like the Earth was pulling you to the ground; it was felt in the open-hearted talks and hugs. We were all shifted, and our focus was turned to what is most important in life. I can only speak for myself and say that in Jingmai, I felt naked and maskless—without any of my ego stuff. I realized how important it is to take time for myself to reflect and look inwards. My daily life asks a lot from me, and as a family man, there is not any real alone time, so it is essential to make some for myself. I am happy I'm lucky enough to have realized this.

After some beautiful dancing and guitar playing, tea producing and throat singing, we headed back to the city. Getting closer to the city, I felt a gentle hurt inside, since we were leaving the beautiful jungle behind and returning to the World of Dust once again. But the feeling was eased by a stop on the highway due to a huge accident. We had time to stop and play games, share jokes

and laugh. It feels a bit naughty to say, but I feel grateful for the delay on the highway (no one was seriously injured). Those four hours gave us some time to understand that we were leaving Nature behind and returning to business as usual.

We arrived really late in Kunming after some brilliant sixteen-hour driving by our bus driver (a true superstar) and we went directly to our rooms and slept. The next days were filled with tea sessions, visiting teahouses, markets and, of course, the beautiful event at the university where Master Tsai hosted us. Such a lovely place. (There are beautiful dresses in a shop in that university; my wife is very happy!) Overall, the city time served as a transition back to real life. The dust was returning, and busy life was knocking. But the lessons were learned and new views on life were already formed. The dust and business of life does not feel so bad when you have the inner strength to cope with it. To me, it felt like my foundation was solidified and some new, much-needed cornerstones were added to it. I stand now on top of a very strong foundation

filled with life lessons and tea lessons, which I'll carry in my heart and transmit into my actions and words.

I haven't written much about my tea experience in these pages, though I have been a member of Global Tea Hut for a long time. I feel like tea sessions are about life and medicine for life-aches. This trip served as a huge tea session in which there were such beautiful, hidden life lessons. I am grateful to all my Global Tea Hut family for making this trip happen—for me, it was a real life-changer!

Since coming home from this amazing trip, lessons have sunk in, the mind has calmed and I'm steady. Several weeks have passed since the Yunnan trip, and I find myself doing the same old things back home: cleaning the car, putting my baby to bed, plucking my beloved guitar, waking up to go to work, etc. The everyday life of Siim has found its flow again, but the stream of the river is stronger, more unified—and it's flowing in a clearer direction.

-Siim



Friends on the Way, I am sitting on a plane 10,000km high in the sky, taking me away from the tea forests of Yunnan, where we spent the unforgettable days of our tea journey. And while I am high in the sky, my heart and thoughts are still there, below, with the mountains and springs, spiders and crickets.

I knew long before this trip that we were going to make tea with our own hands and would be spending time in the forests of Yunnan, vibrating and pulsating with life, full of exotic bird songs and insects, and that we would also have the opportunity to learn about Cha Dao from Wu De and Master Tsai. However, among the numerous and abundant memories and impressions that I am taking home, there are also unexpected gifts. One of these gifts is the feeling of joy upon meeting my tea brothers and sisters from around the world, and sharing many bowls of hot tea with them. The delight of sharing our experience, hearing their questions and insights and admiring the way their faces were lit by their smiles all helped me to truly realize what the word “*sangha*” means: *friends on the Way*. The first time I saw all of them in the hotel lobby, they were a crowd of interesting strangers, and when we drank tea for the last time together in the park, they’d suddenly become a part of my family and my heart.

Tea is a medicine that puts us in harmony with ourselves, with Nature and other people. And tea friends are people who live on the same wavelength with us. Of course, we meet different people on our way and everyone has their own attitude towards Tea. And it’s not that every time we drink tea with someone we become best friends with him or her. But when we meet a person who shares our relationship with Tea, who has the same amount of reverence and love towards the Leaf, and with whom it is very easy to sit in silence over a bowl of tea, then this kind of person becomes not only our friend, but a family member.

We all came into Tea with our own baggage and suffering. And every one of us has weak and strong sides. Because we drink tea together and serve tea, we can learn from each other how to do everything in the best way. For example, every time my tea brother Ivan comes back from a meditation retreat, he leads tea sessions which turn my world upside-down and fill it with calmness and tranquility. This always reminds me of the importance of meditation and inspires me to sit on the meditation cushion every day in order to become more aware and present and to serve tea to others in the highest possible way. In the same way, when we have tea with our tea *sangha*, we inspire each other and learn from each other, too. We learn how to choose the best teaware, how to boil water and choose music for a tea session;

“*Sangha is about inspiring examples; it is about people with whom our tea sessions become deeper as we enhance each other’s energy.*”

how to prepare the space for tea and how to prepare this particular tea so that it reveals its best quality. *Sangha* is also about inspiring examples; it is about people with whom our tea sessions become deeper as we enhance each other’s energy.

In our Moscow *sangha* we have been holding regular tea sessions for the last two years and we have developed our own language of signs and symbols that we use to communicate with one another in silent tea sessions. This happened in the most natural way, as we love tea and share in the same service together. For example, if you leave the kettle’s lid in a certain way, this is a sign for the *chatong*, or water-bearer responsible for keeping the water flowing, that the tea sessions is coming to an

end and no more water is needed. I noticed during our journey that when Mia and Tian Wu were helping in tea sessions, they too had such a silent communication with each other. Therefore, this silent language of glances and gestures is born naturally, to preserve meditative quietness during tea sessions and prepare tea in the best possible way. Such signals display true intimacy.

To be amongst the ancient and old-growth trees in Yunnan was also a beautiful and powerful experience for me, but to be there with friends who share the same deep love for Tea was even better! To see how your joy is reflected in the eyes of others and is amplified by their joy—what a gift!

We tea people prefer silence and meditative immersions in ourselves. But if you met us during our trip to Yunnan, you would have seen that we were opening towards each other both in our hearts and minds, that joy was circulating powerfully within our circle and our voices could be constantly heard, even when we were silent. Our hearts developed a way of signaling and communicating naturally, like the signals *chatong* use during a silent session.

Sangha is one of the most important components of any spiritual practice—a community of people who share the same values and joys. And if you have found your tea *sangha*, I wish with all my heart that you preserve it and make it deeper and stronger. If you haven’t met your tea family yet, I hope you do meet your tea sisters and brothers soon. You can go to Taiwan and meet amazing magical people there who love tea and serve it with all their hearts, minds and bodies; or perhaps come to Moscow, where we will welcome you as family. What I am saying is that if you haven’t yet found a tea *sangha*, this Global Tea Hut is the best one of all!

-Raneta



The best of the tree huggers!



RYAN RUSSELL'S

15 REASONS YOU WILL HATE GOING ON A GLOBAL TEA HUT TRIP:

1. *If you have a problem with tea that is drunk leaves in a bowl, this journey may be confusing.*
2. *If you have an aversion to eating fresh wild tea-blossom honeycomb whilst wandering through ancient tea forests, please reconsider.*
3. *If you have a personal limit of making no more than fifteen new friends on a long voyage, you will be sorely disappointed.*
4. *If drinking tea near massive magical waterfalls scares you, avoidance may be prudent.*
5. *If you've been to Jingmai and you find the local practice of adding Crab's Claw to your tea reprehensible, stop reading now.*
6. *If you find Wu De's volcanic dharma-flow to be overwhelming, simplify your life through Zen abstinence.*
7. *If you cannot bear the sound of a guqin strummed expertly to the rhythm of a tea tasting, the trip may not be for you.*
8. *If you find two tea sessions in a single afternoon under ancient tea trees excessive, stay in the comfort of your home and have just one.*
9. *If the wildly hospitable nature of the Chinese people makes you uncomfortable, the Earth is home to many cultures.*
10. *If you demand that your vegetarian meal contain fewer than ten different dishes, this lifestyle could spell DANGER.*
11. *If you can't stand a tea sage such as Master Tsai smiling at you every day in a manner that makes you want to serve with a pure heart, by all means, don't read any further.*
12. *If the sunrise through an ancient wooden oculus over a misty Jingmai mountainscape hurts your eyes, you may find things visually challenging. (Back cover.)*
13. *If tea prepared by a beautifully costumed auntie in the old Ku Chuong method offends your purist sensibilities, there are less exotic places where they won't add things like pine resin to your puerh.*
14. *If manual labor is undesirable and you have balance problems, you probably shouldn't be making tea cakes from old-growth trees and gyrating atop a marble cake press. Right?*
15. *And finally, if excessive hugging causes you discomfort, you are, of course, entering a world of hurt joining a Global Tea Hut trip.*



THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME II

茶人: Nuria Garcia, Kristen Fix & Lera Zujeva

Here are the last three accounts of the trip. We hope that you feel as if you were there and also see how transformative Global Tea Hut gatherings are, which will inspire you to join us on future travels (and, of course, to host your own Global Tea Hut gatherings). The connections made on this trip were the real lasting change, and we are all here because we heart Tea, Nature and one another!

I had just found a place to sit down and accommodate myself to the slightly uncomfortable forest ground, and I was starting to settle down in order to wait for the first bowl. Suddenly, all the forest began to breathe rhythmically, and at the same time started singing an ancient song without music. It was so loud and intense that I could not do anything but pay attention to it. I felt the trees' anxiety—their excitation due to our presence there. All the forest was talking about us: "Welcome!" they said. "Meet the Guardian Tree."

By the first bowl, I realized that in that special and unique moment of the trip, Tea was not the protagonist of our journey any more. It was just another simple part of the Universe, a channel that brings us together—tea trees, the rest of the forest, the water, the soil underneath, our past ancestors and all of the Nature. All together, in only one soul.

By the time the second and third bowls were filled, we had already become part of their community and the forest's excitement had died

down, giving rise to individual life and expression. The wind sounded different through each tree, birds started to sing one to each other, the strange noisy insects began to communicate from one side of the forest to the other. Each one of us left behind the rhythmically-induced respiration and began to breathe under their own emotions, body and place in the world. Tea, human and the forest were then different, but forever changed by the unity we'd felt in that moment.

-Nuria

This trip was a dream come true for me. I have wanted to make a pilgrimage to be with old tea trees for some time now. Making the journey with my Global Tea Hut family made the experience much deeper than it would have been otherwise, and much more fun as well!

The main offerings I received during this journey are deeper connections to Tea and to Nature—

two of my greatest passions. I was beyond grateful and infused with joy and peace to be sitting on the Earth drinking tea amongst the wise, ancient tea trees and the younger family of trees as well, each bowl bringing me more into myself, Nature and Tea.

There was such a diversity of plant life where the tea trees grow—so much aliveness. Through being with the old ones and my fellow tea sisters and brothers, I feel tea as medicine in a much stronger way now. I'll carry all of this with me and share it with others.

Another of the many amazing things that happened on this trip was that we all had the opportunity to actually make tea! So awesome! I had never thought I would do this. I hope that you all enjoy the red tea of the month from Auntie Ai's and if we have the opportunity to drink tea together sometime, I would love to share some of the sheng puerh from the cake we had a hand in making from start to finish. Much love to you all!

-Kristen



This was the best trip of my entire life, and I've traveled a lot. I left for what I thought was an educational trip about tea, but what I got was a complete life transformation in just two weeks. The way my mind usually works is that there is always something missing—not enough or lacking from a situation. It goes along these lines: “This is a good party, but... something is not perfect, something is missing. This is a good gathering, but... something is missing.” However, on this two-week journey with the Global Tea Hut community, *nothing was missing*. In fact, it was perfect in all aspects and exceeded my expectations completely. Here are my highlights:

Firstly, Wu De. This was the first time I'd met him in person, and in the videos he usually looks very serious and concentrated. But in reality he is such an open, smiling, shining and fun person to be with! I fell in love instantaneously and tried to be around him whenever he talked so I could absorb as much as possible from his deep wisdom and light-heartedness. Yes, these two qualities reside in him simultaneously, and it feels so refreshing to just stand in his deep and light presence at the same time.

Secondly, people. My tea familia. *Sangha*. Wow! They blew my mind and heart away. I never considered myself as a group person, and belonging to a tribe or a group was never easy. But here, on this journey, I had a very deep feeling all the time that finally I had met my tribe. I am at home. I found my people. And it wasn't always easy: imagine twenty-five introverts on a very intensive journey as a group! But it was beautiful, every single second of it! Each and every person in our group taught me so much about myself and my life, and life in general, too. I had so many insights and transformations from observing my tea sisters and brothers and from interacting with them. Profound healing happened. And the most amazing thing was that it happened

through people just being themselves, not doing anything specific or on purpose. Just by being themselves and by being present, and having tea together, everyone had a such a powerful effect on me. Everyone touched my heart and broke the barriers and shields created over many years of painful experiences not lived through properly. I couldn't believe I was so lucky and privileged to be in Yunnan drinking tea with all these beautiful souls from all over the world connecting to each other on all levels. Thinking about it now still makes my heart expand beyond imagination. I fell in love with everyone on this trip, and this love opened my heart.

Thirdly, of course, was Tea. Drinking tea together several times a day, meeting ancient tea trees, making tea with our own hands and connecting to life in this way as simply amazing. Going to the jungle and meeting ancient tea trees was mind blowing. They were so alive, so wise, so beautiful—living beings that share their love and wisdom with us. And meditating underneath those trees with tea from the same forests had a profound effect on me. What I felt there was almost like an alchemy happening—during our tea session in the jungle, I could feel the spirit of Tea coming into me and connecting me with Nature. Since that session, I can still feel this connection in me all the time, regardless of whether I am in a big, noisy concrete city or the beautiful English countryside. On a physical level, it almost feels like I am a tree or like there is a tree growing inside my heart—like tea is in my blood, running through my veins. And I can feel that this had a strong effect on how I serve tea in London, as well—with more presence, a more open heart, more connectedness with the Leaf and everyone who comes to share bowls of tea with me.

So, in all, this journey was so much more than the educational tea trip I thought it was going to be. It was educational and I learned a

lot, don't get me wrong, but it was also experiential, and I experienced so much more than I thought possible. It was also therapeutic and healing—a returning home and connecting to old/new family. It was so much more than words can describe, and so much of this trip will be forever in my heart.

-Lera



THE GREAT HONEY INCIDENT OF JINGMAI FOREST

蜂蜜事件

One of the most precious experiences on our trip (and we're sure that all the participants would agree) happened unannounced, as all great experiences do. The surprise occurred after a long tea session in the old-growth tea forest of Jingmai, in which Ming Hui had just served a lovely old-growth tea from that very forest and everyone was basking in the open-hearted post-session joy, walking around and hugging one another and the old tea trees. It was, after all, our last visit to the forest before heading back to the city the next morning. Wandering around, we found a beautiful aboriginal woman pruning her tea trees in a distracted way, as though she was waiting for someone or something, which she was. All of a sudden, from up the trail, her husband came bounding into view, wearing a green rain-suit that covered his entire body and carrying a matching green plastic bucket. As he approached, we realized that he was dressed in this way because he had just been harvesting wild honey! He offered us all some, saying that since the entire forest was tea trees, this honey was made almost exclusively from the pollen of tea trees! Tea honey! Really?! The honey was still warm and in the comb. We all chewed it up, licking it off our fingers. It was beyond a doubt the best honey any of us had ever had! Dave put some in his mouth, his eyes lit up and he said, "I think this is going to get me high!" Sure enough, everyone was full of boundless joy and smiles of delight for the rest of the day. Is there anything better than tea honey?



Teawayfarer

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 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 Morten Menge.

Tea came to me in in my late twenties, around seven years ago. As the story goes, my mom and sister decided to go to a tea seminar together and asked me if I would like to join them. At that time, I had no connection to tea whatsoever, but I loved the part in Karate Kid II when Danielsan was having a tea ceremony together with Kumiko.

That tea seminar changed my whole perception of tea, especially when we got to the part when we were drinking Taiwanese oolong brewed gongfu. I found it very charming. (The tea was really nice, too.) That tea experience changed something in me—something was lit on fire. Today, I think it was the peace in the tea and ceremony that really touched me.

Back in those days, peace of mind was really something I needed. I suffered from a deep depression and my whole life seemed gray and without any direction or purpose. I had already tried meditation for some time, and it did help to balance me out more and relieve some of my pain. But Tea came and suddenly, a completely new world opened up to me, calling out to me to explore it. Tea became of more interest to me. I started learning Mandarin, Asian history, pottery, religion and spirituality, flower arrangement and bonsais, biology and plants, etc. The list of tea-related studies is endless, as it seems like Tea is connected to everything.

I needed healing in those days. I needed to slow down and get back in touch with myself, and so I spent many bowls and cups drinking tea by myself. Over time, my relationship to Tea changed into something bigger. I participated in many tranquil tea sessions, reminding me of the clarity I'd sometimes experienced in deep meditation sessions. Then I started drinking tea less judgmentally, more "just drinking" the tea: feeling it, listening to it... Meditation and Tea seemed to merge more and more naturally for me.

With this changed view, which felt more "real" in a way, I discovered more and more truth in life and insights started to slowly unravel for me. It is this kind of learning, which you can only attain by yourself in moments of clarity, that creates the fertile ground in which we can grow roots.

Then, I stumbled upon the words "Cha Dao" on the Internet and subsequently found my way to older publications of Wu De and other writers. As I was read-



ing, I was in awe. For the first time, I was reading something that would put those personal tea experiences and insights into words. I realized that there are more people in search of true tea wisdom, and that Cha Dao is not just a thing of ancient times—it's very much alive!

I really ended up getting in touch with the Hut due to my dear tea sister, Robekkah. I am so grateful that I met her, as she and her boyfriend, Christian, are not only such warm and kindhearted people, but were the last missing, connecting piece for me to lead my way to this wonderful community of tea-loving people like you all!

As I tell many people now, I am not worried about getting lost in life anymore, as I have a compass now, and the needle is a bud with two leaves. May you find your compass too!

Big hugs to all you out there! Come visit Robekkah and me in Berlin and let's share some peaceful tea sometime!

Inside the Hut

Because of the large number of tea sessions happening around the world, we are going to post about them on our website from now on and use this section to discuss news happening around the world. If you have any news, like a wedding, birth or tea happening, let us know and we'll write about it here. Also, our new website coming in the next few months will connect you to tea sessions around the world in a much better way than this page ever could!



There are two amazing cakes from this trip that will be a part of our 2016 Light Meets Life fundraiser, one from each of the places we visited. It is very rare that a tea lover gets a chance to drink real old-growth tea from such old trees in Ai Lao & Jingmai!



Wu De may be headed to Bali in September if everything comes together. Be sure to check our social media for details about that trip. Last time was very rewarding, sharing tea in paradise.



We have started broadcasting live videos at the beginning of every month on our Facebook page. This is a great way to connect with us, learn together and ask any and all questions. Check it out!



The 2016 Photo Contest has officially begun! It will be going until August 5th, with only one entry per person this year. Runners-up will get free months of Global Tea Hut for friends and winners will get cakes, a Petr Novak side-handle teapot & Wu De's artwork!



We are giving away two cakes of Ambrosia each month until the end of the year. All you have to do to be eligible is take a picture of yourself serving Global Tea Hut tea and post it on Instagram with the hashtag #servingglobalteahut. We have already given the first few away! Don't miss the chance!



Wu De will be facilitating a six-day retreat in the Spanish Pyrenees. It will be a Zen & Tea One Flavor retreat focusing on the connection between meditation and tea. Participants will gather fresh spring water, meditate a few hours a day, learn chanting and have tea as well as Zen discourses throughout. It will be a rare chance to deepen your practice and learn tea at the same time. And, if that wasn't enough, it is being held at a gorgeous venue in the mountains of rural Spain. This event will run from October 8th to 14th. If you are interested in attending, please check out the website: www.casacuadrau.org.

Wu De will also be traveling in Germany and the Czech Republic after the retreat, sharing tea and teaching Cha Dao.

Center News



Before you visit, check out the Center's 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.



We are looking for help with farming, photography, video and web design. If any of you have experience in these things and are interested in staying at the Center to learn Cha Dao, with free room and board, contact us!



We have started gathering money towards offering one annual scholarship that will fly someone to the Center each year. Once we have enough, we will let the community nominate who that is. Let us know if you want to contribute!



We just had a one-month break in which everyone had a chance to meditate and rest more. We are enthusiastic for all our new guests!

July Affirmation

I forgive those who have harmed me.

Do I allow resentment to reign over me? If all were understood, all would be forgiven. Others are as frail as we are; they are doing their best. Only when I practice forgiveness am I free, and forgiven.



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