Global Tea Hut

國際茶亭

Tea & Tao Magazine

November 2016

Calm Fragrance

Traditional Mi Xiang Oolong

Aloeswood Incense

Ceremony, History, Poetry & Lore

Contents

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GLOBAL TEA HUT
Tea & Tao Magazine

Calm Fragrance

Many of you know that we love Aloeswood at the Center, and often have incense ceremonies, especially before whisked tea. And we needed an especially fragrant tea for this month, so we worked with Mr. Xie to create something unique. Meditation, fragrant tea and incense make this the aromatic issue!

Love is changing the world bowl by bowl

Features

Traditions

From the Editor

In November, the weather turns perfect in Taiwan. We start drinking aged oolongs, *yan cha* and aged puerh more often. Our sessions grow longer, deeper and more heart-centered as the weather starts to retract towards winter—towards less movement and more meditation. This inward movement in Nature is one of the best times for a tea lover. In Taiwan, this also means more outdoor tea in the mountains, at our favorite tea pagodas, rocks and riversides. We also start having a bigger flow of guests here at the Center, which is the wind in our sails.

We feel very abundant and are so grateful for the Center we have now, Tea Sage Hut, but we are also inspired to move forwards. And we need your help to grow this Global Tea Hut. We want to reach one thousand members, which is halfway to building your new, permanent Center, Light Meets Life. The world needs a free tea school. We want to move to a course-based schedule, with one-week and ten-day courses on the Seven Genres of Tea, Gongfu Tea I, II and III, Tea and Meditation, Bowl Tea, Whisked Tea and more. We want to host organic farming conventions and invite teachers from all over Asia to come and help teach these courses as well. As at our current Center, Tea Sage Hut, all room and board, teachings and tea will be free, served heart to heart on a donation basis. Aside from helping further this project by donating for Light Meets Life fundraiser cakes, we need your help to spread the word about Global Tea Hut, which will most likely fund the development of the new center. When we get to two thousand members, we will be in a position to start acquiring more land and even begin the building process.

So this month we'd like you to invite some friends over, serve a Global Tea Hut tea, talk about this amazing, growing community and then post the gathering on any of your social media. Many of you are doing this anyway, but this month we'd like to reward you for doing so. Just email us the link (teasagehut@gmail.com) and we will put a bonus tea into your December envelope! In this way, this amazing education, tea and community will prosper and spread and we'll meet our goal of one thousand members this year!

Reaching a thousand members won't just get us closer to our goal of building Light Meets Life, it will also allow us to continue improving this experience. We are still working very hard on an app to connect all of you, for example. We would also like to keep increasing the quality and expanding the variety of teas we send, translate more for our *Classics of Tea* series and do more journalism, taking trips to tea-growing regions of the world to cover the rich history, processing and lore of tea mountains throughout Asia. We also hope to start offering two scholarships in the coming year: one for a ten-day visit to the Center and one for a space on our annual Global Tea Hut trip, which we are already busy planning. (It will be epic next year!) We would also love to hear from you about some of the changes you would like to see in the magazine, the Tea of the Month, the gifts or the community.

You have hopefully already started to notice that we are investing more time and energy into making these magazines a better read, including better photography and design. We are all volunteers here, so this has meant many hours of training courses to improve our ability to share tea knowledge, wisdom and spirit with you, our tea family. We have also made a real effort to provide substance to this magazine, both in our own writings and in the articles we choose to have translated. The larger this community is, the more we can continue to strive towards a more professional design and better content and tea, while never losing touch with the community that is the heart and soul of this experience!

This is a very special issue of Global Tea Hut that has been years in the making. We get asked about incense and tea all the time, both via email and also by guests who are visiting and have seen us burning incense or holding formal incense ceremonies. When it comes to incense for tea, the best is really Aloeswood, which is a very interesting and deep topic in its own right. We are happy to translate some articles on Aloeswood for you and learn about it together. We also have a very special gift for you this month: a small stick of some very high quality Aloeswood incense to burn as you drink this month's tea and learn all about incense.

Further Reading

This month, we hope to expand this already in-depth issue to make it an even more comprehensive publication on Aloeswood, incense and tea, as well as incense ceremony. We will therefore be posting some more articles to add to the abundance of information.

Further Readings are all posted on our blog each month.

TEA OF THE MONTH

Since this month is devoted to incense, we needed to find a very fragrant tea. We reached out to Mr. Xie, whom you will definitely get to know around the Hut if you haven't met him yet. This month's tea is one of our favorite teas from Mr. Xie. It is called "*mi xiang* oolong," which literally translates to "honey fragrance," and you'll soon see why. But we asked him to process the tea traditionally, which means more oxidation and roast, pairing the processing with the tea, which is bug-bitten. *Mi xiang* oolong is completely organic, although it's plantation tea and not what we call a "living tea." It is a small-leaf varietal. If all tea in the world were grown as it should be—harvested once a year, allowed to grow up with room between trees, and so on—there wouldn't be nearly enough tea in the world. In this age, we must compromise. Mr. Xie's amazing story and his great teas make that easy to do.

As many of you who have been to our Center know, one of our modes of service is to set up our tea service at parks, trails or gatherings and serve free bowls to passersby. We do so without any agenda or teaching—simple tea in a quiet space of presence and loving-kindness. Tea is the great connector, connecting us to Nature and to each other. We blaze right past each other all the time, with more modes of communication than ever before, and yet less human connection since creation. We offer people a bit of humanity, a smile, a chat or even some silence so they can get in touch with themselves before they move on. We do so at a variety of venues, including our monthly service at Hope Market in Taichung.

Hope Market is a group of organic producers who work together as a model for a sustainable future. It is mostly farmers, though there are producers of recycled clothes, jam, miso, and other handmade goods. They hold activities every week including courses conducted by various farmers in which the public can come and learn to make tofu, honey, organic fertilizer, etc. There is no currency exchange allowed within the Hope organization, but rather trade and barter. If a soy bean farmer wants some honey, he trades tofu for it. There is also a wonderful exchange of work as well, which means that if that same soy bean farmer needs some help harvesting, he asks his brothers and sisters in Hope and they all come to help, knowing that he will also help them if and when they need him to. It goes without saying that they will also help us build our permanent center to replace the temporary space we are in now. Every month, Hope also holds a market in a beautiful garden with rivers, koi fish and lotus ponds. As members, we have been given a permanent booth in the market. We don't use tables like the others, though; instead, we set up on the ground and serve tea to the guests that come to buy vegetables and other organic products. Next to sending out this Global Tea Hut, Hope Market is the highlight of our month here.

It was at Hope that we met the amazing Mr. Xie Yuanzhai, to whom we of course gravitated immediately because of his organic tea. He came to the Center a few times and we started visiting his farm. It was so easy for a friendship to develop (organically, of course). He is kind and joyous, with smiles that fill a room, not to mention incredibly knowledgeable about tea. He's made every kind of tea you could imagine at some point, and has decades of experience.

Aside from providing this month's tea, which you are sure to love, Mr. Xie is a very important part of the scenery at our Center, and will be very important for many of you as well, because so many of our visitors come here with a curiosity about how tea is processed. It is very important to experience with your own hands just how difficult it is to make tea, so that in your own soreness you will develop a tremendous respect for the Leaf and its long and winding journey to you.

Calm Fragrance

Mingjian, Taiwan

2016 Mi Xiang Oolong

Taiwanese

~500 Meters

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

www.globalteahut.org/videos

This respect isn't just for the billions of years of evolution, or for the Nature we always wax poetic about: the wind and rain, sun and moonshine, minerals, mountain and water that flow from roots to crown. Our respect is also for the blood, sweat and tears of generation after generation of farmers. And there is a deep reverence in seeing just how much mastery, skill and, dare we say, art in the crafting of the Leaf. And so, with great joy we take as many of our guests as possible to a few different farms to try their hand at tea processing. It is amazing to make your own tea, and take it home with you. If you didn't have enough reasons to come stay with us, here's another: Mr. Xie has formally invited each and every one of you to come to his farm and make tea, eat a nice lunch and take the tea you picked and crafted home with you!

Mr. Xie is a third-generation farmer in Mingjian, Nantou, Central Taiwan. Mingjian is at a lower altitude in the foothills of the central mountain range. In the last few decades, such lower altitude tea has been eclipsed by the popularity of the teas grown higher up. Though areas like Hsinchu and Miaoli counties, where Eastern Beauty is grown, have struggled since high-mountain oolongs have come to dominate the market, Mingjian has prospered by providing lower priced teas for export, or large-scale production for the bottled tea market (often called "Ready to Drink" or "RTD"). Mr. Xie's family has grown small-scale productions of oolong tea through three lifetimes, since before the higher teas even existed.

When we discuss organic farming and the need to make changes in tea farming—as well as other kinds of agriculture—it's important to remember that the farmers are always the first victims. It is they who handle the agrochemicals in large amounts, and most directly. Furthermore, it is only by humanizing and befriending them that we can bring about change. We must include rather than exclude—educate rather than ostracize.

Like so many other farmers, Mr. Xie started to get the nagging (coughing, wheezing) feeling that these chemicals were harmful to his family, his community and his land. When his wife almost miscarried their second child in 1997, he'd had enough. Despite opposition from friends and family, Mr. Xie made a commitment to become an organic tea farmer, no matter the cost. He first attended some organic farming classes held by the MOA organization.

From 1997 to 2000, Mr. Xie and his family struggled to maintain their principles. His tea was sub-par and he lost most of his customers. His father, who had been worried when Mr. Xie suggested upsetting the status quo in the first place, was very critical of his decisions. Organic farming is difficult, and it requires a radical change in farming and processing methodology—changes that take time to learn. Rather than give up, as many would have, Mr. Xie got a part-time job as a painter and carpenter, working day and night—either painting or farming—to keep his family afloat. Finally, in the early 2000s, his acumen for organic farming improved to the point that he was able to take his teas to market again. Since then, he has gone on to win awards, been featured

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MOA Organic Certification

***MOA** stands for "Mokichi Okada Cultural Services Association International." It was created by Mokichi Okada (1882-1955), who started three great projects in his lifetime: a "Mokichi Style Detoxification Treatment" for land, "Natural Agriculture, Drinks and Food" and "Fine Arts and Culture." These three projects created affiliated groups of people with common goals to help each other. His overall aim was "to allow humanity to expand and flourish, helping create healthier people, families, regions, countries and culture." His Japanese NPO natural agriculture culture movement created the Da Ren farm in 1982, and then in 1991 developed standards for healthy, organic agriculture. They began to set up branches and create a social system for theoretical and practical cooperation amongst farmers in Japan.*

In April of 1990, a group of people who cared about Nature and were concerned about environmental pollution wanted to change the situation in Taiwan. They joined the Japanese MOA International Association and created a sister organization to educate farmers and legally certify organic foods and drinks. This Taiwanese foundation was formed to explore and seek health and happiness for mankind and to guarantee environmentally sustainable and natural agriculture, expecting this ideology and the sustainable agriculture techniques behind it to spread all over the world.

MOA certification is rather rigorous and they do a great job of ensuring sustainable, organic agriculture without much of the bureaucracy or financial interests that trouble a lot of organic certification worldwide. Watching for the MOA seal on teas is a good way to enter the world of organic Taiwanese tea.

on TV and has even heard his father, now a sprightly eighty years old, bragging to others about how his son's tea is organic and good for the environment.

Mr. Xie's work hasn't stopped with his own farm. He knew that he would have to keep improving his skills, creating new and better teas, and help show his neighbors the value of organic farming, especially since their land and his are close enough to influence each other. He formed a co-op with other farmers and began teaching locals to shift to organic methods, offering them equal shares in their combined enterprise. As more people have joined this local group, the incentive for others to join has grown as well. To date, more than thirty farmers in the Mingjian region have gone organic, including Mr. Xie's immediate neighbors.

Mr. Xie's kind heart shows in his teas. He cares deeply about tea and the Earth. He produces green tea, large- and small-leaf red tea, as well as several kinds of oolong, and all with great skill. He's generous with his tea, supporting our efforts selflessly. To us, he is an inspiration and a kind of hero—the kind not talked about enough these days. It's easy to follow the crowd, maintain the status quo, or to say, "I am just one person. What can I do?" It is difficult to face criticism from family and friends and stand up for what you believe is right. The problem is that it is too easy for farmers to make more money with agrochemicals and to do so with less work. And that's also why so many of them are overusing fertilizers and pesticides, reducing the average lifespan of a tea bush to fifteen years, all in the name of personal gain. Many of them get cancer from improper exposure to such chemicals, themselves victims, as we mentioned above. Mr. Xie is a man who has seen a different way, and, even more inspiringly, lived that way and taught others to do so. And that is the spirit of Tea.

Tea of the Month

Calm Fragrance is a very special Tea of the Month. Over the years, Mr. Xie has generously donated many teas to this Hut. However, this is the first time that we have ever worked together to produce a unique Global Tea Hut offering. It was so much fun sending samples back and forth, visiting him and even drinking some cups at Hope Market. (While Shen tended our boiled tea, Wu De chatted with Mr. Xie). The result is a delicious traditionally processed honey fragrance tea unlike any we've ever tried!

This month's tea has a honey fragrance because it is bug-bitten, much like Eastern Beauty. As more tea farmers have gone organic, they have had to come up with ways to cope with the katydids that come and eat their tea, especially when neighbors use pesticides and all the bugs come to their fields. Allowing bugs to bite the tea, and then processing it accordingly, began with Eastern Beauty in Beipu County, but has recently spread to Nantou as well. The resulting hybrid is sometimes called "Concubine Tea." This month's tea is processed more like a traditional oolong, with less oxidation than either Eastern Beauty or Concubine Tea,

but much more oxidation and roast than your typical Taiwanese oolong. In the summer at lower altitudes, like Mingjian where Mr. Xie's farm resides, the population of leaf-hoppers (katydids/ *Jacobiasca formosana*) reaches its peak, and most of the tender tea leaves are eaten by these insects. The saliva of these katydids reacts with the tea, causing the honey fragrance. Other insects will also cause such a honey fragrance, but none as pronouncedly.

As we discussed in September's seminal Extended Edition (the largest English publication on Taiwanese oolong in the world), the greener, lightly-oxidized oolong teas that have become the mainstream in Taiwan are often not conducive to organic tea production. At very high altitudes, where there are fewer insects, such tea can be produced organically, but rarely is (chemical fertilizers and weed-killers are used). However, for most farms organic production is difficult because insect bites create holes in the tea leaves, which are bruised and immediately start oxidizing (that is why there is a reddish hue around the bite-holes). This increased oxidation means that the tea will not taste so green, fragrant and bright.

Oolong is semi-oxidized tea. Processing methods evolved over time to suit the tea that farmers had access to, so oolong is a terroir/varietal as much as it is a processing type. Traditionally, before pesticides were invented, all tea leaves (just about) were bug-bitten, so the degree of semi-oxidation was much higher, as was the roast, to compensate for and complement the nature of the leaves. Making very light oolong really demands pesticide use if it is to be productive on any kind of large scale. Sometimes, there is a need to choose between fragrant, light and green oolong and environmental sustainability. We'll take the latter over flavor any day! But, to be honest, we actually prefer deeper, traditionally processed oolongs more. They may not have the same flowery fragrance, which—don't get us wrong—we also enjoy very much, but they often have a deeper body, more lasting Qi and mouth sensations and are closer to what oolong can achieve. And that is why oolong production was carried out in that way for centuries, until the mainstream got involved, and, as many tea vendors the world over will tell you, the mainstream likes green tea best. It is fragrant and bright, the leaves are beautiful and it is easy to prepare. We love green tea, too. But we are also glad that not all producers are making oolong like green tea, and that we can still call Mr. Xie and order a traditionally processed oolong and he'll not only know what we are talking about and why we want such a tea, but has the ability to produce it for us.

Allowing the bugs to bite the tea means it will be more oxidized right off the bush. It also means that you can process it to have a honey fragrance. The bugs bite the leaves and their saliva reacts with the compounds in the tea to start oxidation before the leaves are even plucked. This happens in the summertime, usually between June and August. When the tea is less oxidized, the end result is a musky, honey fragrance that lingers in the back of the mouth. Our Tea of the Month is from August.

Calm Fragrance started with a Four Seasons Spring varietal (*Si Ji Chun*, 四季春), which is a natural varietal born in Taiwan. We chose this because we knew we were going to increase the oxidation and roast to get a darker, more full-bodied brew—and hopefully also enhance the honey fragrance (*mi xiang*, 蜜香). *Si Ji Chun* is more robust than other varietals, with thick, strong and juicy leaves. It is mostly used to make *Tieguanyin* in the northern tea-growing region of Muzha. We planned to process this tea like a traditional *Tieguanyin*, with high roasting, so it seemed like the perfect choice. This proved correct after we tasted several varietals.

The tea was bug-bitten, plucked, withered outdoors and then indoors, shaken and mixed in piles (*jiao ban*), withered more, fired to arrest oxidation and de-enzyme (*sha qing*), rolled to break down the cells and further oxidation, as well as to shape the tea (*rou nian*), and then roasted twice—once to dry the tea and then for a longer time to add flavor and fragrance. We asked Mr. Xie to increase the withering and rolling and also roast the tea deeper, to give it a stronger body with a more lively honey fragrance that we hope will complement this month's incense—the kind you'll be burning and the kind you'll be reading about!

In the end, we had to adjust the oxidation and roast several times. We ended up choosing a batch that was only oxidized slightly more than usual—typical honey fragrance oolong would be around 30%; we ended up going up to around 35-40%. This was because we preferred a lighter oxidation/heavier roast combination to the opposite (more oxidation, less roast). Often, you can't have both. You could think of this using the metaphor of taking water from a bucket—both the oxidation and roast subtract water, so the more oxidation, which comes first, the less water you have left for roasting. This analogy is oversimplified, but works since the reality of the situation actually does have to do with the moisture content of the leaves. Calm Fragrance was roasted twice, the second deeper than the first. Ideally, we would let it sit for around six months before sharing it, but we only had a month, so you can still taste some of the roast. Still, it is an amazing creation, and we are very proud of it!

The Qi of this tea is uplifting, sweeping upwards. You will feel elated drinking it, perhaps, like us, feeling the joyful toil Mr. Xie has impressed upon it. There is a great fellowship in this tea: between our fortuitous meeting at Hope Market, the many cups we've shared with Mr. Xie and now in the passing on of his kindness to you. Light your Aloeswood incense, fill up a few cups and sit back and relax. This is a lazy-afternoon, watching-the-sunlight-play-with-the-curls-of-steam-and-incense kind of Global Tea Hut month!

茶 ***Si Ji Chun flushes reddish purple when exposed to more sunlight, like in low-elevations (Mingjian), due to anthocyanins in the leaf, which are a response to UV rays.***

Calm Fragrance

Like so many of you, we also sit down with friends to share the Tea of the Month. And though we drank Calm Fragrance 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:

茶 Delicate and subtle with a beautiful golden color. There is slight hint of sweetness and blossom in this light and soothing oolong tea. It is unobtrusive and uplifting, like being hugged on the inside. It's a bring-you-to-your-happy-place kind of tea!
-Debbie Phillips, Canada

茶 The flavor of this tea was like an open door, welcoming me into a clean home. A subtly sweet aroma drew me in further and further and asked of me to be still. The longer I sat with this tea, the more Her fragrance and flavor came back on the breath. There was an enjoyable bitterness near the back of my mouth reminding me that medicine is sometimes bittersweet.
-Shen Su, Taiwan/Canada

茶 This tea came to me with the soothing state of pause. By the lingering, bittersweet feeling and rich aroma, I was invited to a good place of clear thought. It felt comforting to stay with Her friendly company cup after cup, letting Her cool down my mind and make more space for some good old clarity.
-Samu Valleala, Finland

茶 Each cup reveals a fascinating, elegant and flowery aroma. The rich aftertaste of this tea returned on my breath, while the rising steam carried me down memory lane. I could see my uncle in his country household during a very different time in Taiwan, many years ago. He was always the first to rise. He would boil water and drink his favorite tea. After a few cups of presence, he would put away his simple teaware and start the day's work!
-Joyce, Taiwan

茶 Like an old friend, She seems so familiar. At first, She seems bitter, but this gives way to an underlying sweetness. Layer after layer, She unfurls, always offering something new if you join Her: a new flavor, smell, sensation, a new piece of wisdom... On the surface, this tea is simple, but underneath is a deep complexity.
-Sam Gibb, Taiwan/New Zealand

Check out the video on brewing tips now!

www.globalteahut.org/videos

Brewing Tips

While you can watch a few balls of this magical tea unfurl in a bowl, such a majestic oolong should really be steeped gongfu. This means paying attention to all aspects of the brewing: create time and space in your life, use the techniques we've discussed in previous issues to make a nice chaxi, use fresh spring water (or the best bottled water if that is unavailable), charcoal if possible to heat the water, a nice Yixing pot and porcelain cups, and, most importantly, a calm and centered heart. With the right teaware and brewing skills, this tea will unravel far beyond its potential as organic plantation tea, lifting you and your guests skyward.

Oolong is always better in small sips. Oolong enters the subtle body upwards, through the nasal cavity. Puerh, red and black tea and some other teas all enter the subtle body through the stomach and chest, and are therefore better in larger cups and drunk in big gulps. Traditional gongfu cups were therefore very small, since gongfu was born to brew oolong. Try taking as small a sip as you can and notice the difference.

For the first time ever, we are going to make a video with some details on the history, lore and practicalities of gongfu tea brewing. Wu De has agreed to demonstrate and discuss how to brew proper, traditional gongfu tea and why it is important. If you haven't been tuning in, be sure to do so this month as you won't want to miss this rare opportunity to improve your brewing skills.

Incense

焚香設茗

Burning Incense, Brewing Tea

茶人: *Liu Jingmin / 劉靜敏* *(Donated by Wushing)*

We can start our journey through incense and tea with a bit of history, exploring the relationship between incense and tea in general, before we move on to discussions of Aloeswood itself. From Buddhist history to scented teas, Liu Jingmin covers the spectrum of incense and tea, ending with some great advice for how we can all incorporate fine incense into our tea gatherings.

A gathering of good friends with fine art and pleasant conversation, freshly brewed tea and fragrant incense is one of life's greatest pleasures—so said Ming dynasty artist and poet Wen Zhengming (1470–1559 C.E.). Exquisite paintings and scrolls of calligraphy may have played the leading role in literary parties of that time, but tea and incense are the perfect supporting characters, subtly bringing the whole play together and heightening emotional connection to the art.

A little later on in history, Chinese opera composer Gao Lian (1573–1620 C.E.), in his *Eight Notes on an Honorable Life*, expounded the importance of installing a tea room near one's study, especially for a reclusive scholar. This way, as you pass the seasons in the solitude of study—contemplating, meditating, reading, arranging flowers, burning incense, appreciating paintings, and making offerings to the Buddha—you'll always have a fresh cup of tea by your side. Both tea and incense can be found throughout Chinese history; they are a central element in a life of peace, contentment, and self-cultivation of mind and spirit.

We can also see evidence of the use of tea and incense in the Ming Dynasty *Wu Collection,* compiled by Wang Xideng and proofread by Zhang Qi from Wulin, housed in the collection of the Taipei National Library. The book contains a drawing entitled "Maiden Looking at an Exotic Bird Whilst Painting Her Eyebrows," in which the artist depicts a desk set out with a teapot, tea cups and an incense burner.

The Union of Tea and Incense and Their Role in Zen

Incense and tea have a surprising amount in common. They both originated in the south of China and subsequently became a staple of everyday life throughout the nation. Permeating the senses through the eyes, nose and taste buds, they've deeply touched the hearts of people and have eventually become objects of beauty and importance to spiritual practice.

At the heart of the connection between incense and tea lies Buddhist philosophy. At the time of the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties periods, tea had already become widespread due to the expansion of Buddhism. Tea was an essential part of Buddhist practice—it could be used to awaken and refresh oneself for meditation, and was also used in ceremonies as well. Incense's earliest traditional uses were also centered around cleansing and purifying, in both a physical and a spiritual sense: it was used for eliminating bad odors, for perfuming one's person and clothing, during bathing, while dining, for making offerings, for warding off evil and even to treat illnesses.

Thus, tea and incense first met in Buddhist ceremonies. When the well-known Tang Dynasty Zen master Huai Hai (749–814 C.E.) wrote his book of rules for monastic discipline, the *Pure Rules of Baizhang*, both incense and tea were featured in many of the rituals he described, including burning incense while brewing, serving and offering tea.

From the *Pure Rules of Baizhang*, it's clear that both tea and incense were integral to the daily lives of monks, from the simplest act of offering tea and incense to the Buddha to celebrating holy festivals such as *Vesak* (the Buddha's Birthday), the Buddha's Enlightenment and many

others. From greeting guests or saying farewell, requesting or receiving donations to daily prayer, for a Zen monk even the simplest ceremonies were infused with incense and tea. Through the passing down of these rituals, tea and incense have been woven into the complex, rigorous set of customs that structure the life of a Zen monk.

According to the *Pure Rules of Baizhang*, each member of the monastery was responsible for performing a certain role in the diverse rit uals associated with tea and incense, such as heating water (*cha tong*) and brewing the tea, offering tea to visitors or even sweeping the floors and setting out the incense. It may seem as if the higher-status attendants were responsible for burning the incense, preparing books, and administering to guests, but in most Zen monasteries, simpler jobs were often given to the monks with a stronger practice. Whenever the head monk called gatherings to share teachings, conduct a ceremony, or chant *mantras*, there were attendants in charge of lighting the incense, performing incense-burning ceremonies, and transcribing speeches. Jobs that required more work meant that the monk or nun had less time to meditate and needed to be able to utilize the task at hand as an aspect of self-cultivation; this, of course, included tea and incense.

Artifacts discovered in the underground vaults below Tang Dynasty Buddhist temples, including incense burners, incense bags, long-handled incense burners and spoons, as well as all kinds of tea cups, braziers and tea-grinding implements, have also served to underline the significance of both tea and incense in Zen practice.

Burning Incense, Brewing Tea: Two of the "Four Pastimes"

While tea and incense took on a spiritual significance through Buddhist ritual, the wider public was also discovering new uses for them, though the mainstream was introduced to them and therefore influenced by Buddhist practices.

Prior to the Qin Dynasty, the earliest types of incense were simply fragrant herbs and plants. In the Han Dynasty, new types of incense emerged, including exotic fragrances from abroad. During the Wei, Jin and North-South dynasties, Buddhism lent incense a deeper significance. Luxury-loving Tang Dynasty aristocrats built their palaces and gardens with fragrant wood and used various fragrances in their daily lives: alongside the art of appreciating flowers appeared that of "appreciating fragrance." Thanks to these influences, incense gradually became more widespread, and by the Song Dynasty, incense and tea were already a common feature of daily life, as well as symbols of an elegant lifestyle. A collection of writings about the customs of Lin'an city from the Southern Song Dynasty, *Mengliang Records*, refers to the "Four Pastimes (四般閒事)": burning incense, brewing tea, hanging paintings and arranging flowers. The author advises that these should not be entrusted to anyone else—to be truly cultured, one should cultivate these artistic practices in one's own daily life.

These "Four Pastimes," also called the "Four Arts of Life," originated from the need to decorate one's living space, to hold banquets and entertain guests. The Song Dynasty saw the establishment of the "Four Departments and Six Posts (四司六局)," which was a system for assigning

responsibilities to attendants during a banquet. The "Four Departments" were responsible for the four main aspects of the banquet, namely setting up the tables and furnishings, attending to guests, preparing food and drink, and coordinating the table service. Each of the "Six Posts" covered a specific aspect of the banquet: fruit, sweets, vegetable side dishes, candles, fragrance and décor. As you can see, this arrangement accounted for every last detail, from preparing the decorations for the banquet venue—hanging paintings, arranging flowers, preparing tea and arranging seating and screens—to the dishes, fruit, and tableware, as well as the lighting and waitstaff. The attendant(s) responsible for the "Fragrance Post (香藥局)" was in charge of setting out various types of incense, incense holders and censers and always had to be at the ready to take away the burned-out ash and replace it with fresh incense.

The banquets of the Song Dynasty were really no different than the ones we hold in large restaurants nowadays—the banquet halls are dressed up to the nines, showing off paintings and calligraphy by famous masters, just like in the saying: "Arranging flowers from all four seasons, hanging paintings by the masters, dressing up the shop front, selling exotic teas all year round…" We can still see the equivalents of those Song attendants always at the ready to refresh our tea, sing, serve fruit or sometimes even light incense. It's not hard to imagine the deeper layers of cultural inheritance behind this popular modern dining culture. Also, much of this attention to detail is echoed in the way we arrange a *chaxi* for tea today.

Song Dynasty scholars were more inclined toward elegant and refined gatherings, such as the one in Emperor Song Huizong's painting titled *Literary Gathering*. (We have printed this picture twice, first in April of this year. Have a look!) The painting depicts an outdoor tea gathering beneath some majestic trees. In the background behind the trees is a stone table with a three-legged cauldron and a *Qin* (Chinese zither), and in the foreground are four servants

preparing tea. The servant on the left is heating the water in a tea pitcher, while the attendant in the middle scoops the whisked tea. On the banquet table are six vases of flowers, and the surrounding scenery is, well, worthy of a painting—it really gives a rich impression of the refined life that Song aristocrats led; a life of banquets replete with incense, tea, flowers, paintings, and the gentle sounds of *Qin* music. Similar scenes were also depicted in murals discovered inside the Liao tombs in Xuanhua County, Hebei, as well as tea-themed paintings—some of the murals brought together tea, incense and flowers all in one scene.

In the Song era, these "Four Pastimes" reflected a growing appreciation for aesthetically pleasing sights, smells, and environments as a part of everyday life. Burning incense was not only a symbol of the royal court and the aristocracy; it came to be seen as an essential part of dignified and refined conduct for scholarly officials. Brewing a cup of tea with clear, freshly drawn water also represented the height of elegance.

Combining Tea and Incense: Natural and Scented Teas

The tea industry flourished and diversified during the Tang Dynasty. Tea became ubiquitous throughout China, with scholars still setting the standard for proper appreciation of its flavor. For example, in his classic *Tea Sutra,* tea master Lu Yu wrote about the origins of tea and various methods of producing and drinking it, as well as types of tea equipment. Another writer, Pei Wen, sang Tea's praises in his *Writings on Tea*: "Its quality is fine and clear, its flavor grand and pure; its effects are soothing and calming, harmonious and balancing." The emergence of the practice of *Gongcha* (貢茶)—offering tea as an imperial tribute—in the Northern Song Dynasty resulted in the emergence of a different side to Song tea, one of refinement and luxury. This practice of offering tea tributes didn't just result in the royal family having

ample personal supplies; in addition, tea tributes formed an important source of income for the imperial household, and were a major part of national finances. The Song Dynasty's imperial records of "Food and Goods" attest that "yearly tea tributes provide income for the whole country."

One of the unique characteristics of *Beiyuan* tea, a well-known tribute tea from Fujian, is the way the tea is scented. The *Beiyuan Records* contain a description of the process for adding camphor to perfume a certain variety of tea. Note that the "camphor" referred to in Song records is what we now call "Borneol," or "Borneo camphor." It's produced from the resin of the camphor tree and takes the form of snowy white crystals with a sweet, cool fragrance.

What, then, was the aim of adding camphor to the tea? The idea was to add another layer of perfume to the tea's own natural fragrance. Ding Wei, a Song official who oversaw tea production, also recorded a description of perfuming tea with musk in his poem "Brewing Tea." In the poem he describes adding "the faintest hint of musk"—when scenting tea in this way, one must strike just the right balance so as not to detract from the natural fragrance of the tea.

Song official and calligrapher Cai Xiang also makes mention of adding perfume in his *Record of Tea,* where he describes how to make a paste using camphor to enhance the fragrance of the tribute tea. As far as the ratio of camphor to be added, we can look to Zhuang Chuo's *Assorted Essays*: "When scenting tea with camphor, one thread of camphor per *jin* will suffice for the fragrance to last a long time." (One *jin* is 600 grams). In *Chinese Plants,* we find this excerpt: "The delicate scent of camphor is first among all fragrances, and is most suited to tea, though too much will drown out the tea's natural aroma. Among all things upon this Earth its fragrance is without compare."

As the practice of scenting tea became common for royal tributes, the fashion also caught on among ordinary folks. The *Shilin Guang Records,* a Song Dynasty reference book, mentions scenting tea with various combinations of incense, including musk, ambergris and camphor. In the fourth chapter of *Chen's Catalogue of Incense,* titled "Perfumed Tea," we also find mention of Chinese Aloeswood (produced from trees of the genus *Aquilaria)* among the fragrances used.

Scenting tea was one of the defining characteristics of Song Dynasty tea practice. It wasn't regarded with universal enthusiasm, though—for example, Cai Xiang expressed his disapproval with the lines: "When drinking tea, the people of Jian'an never add incense to it, for fear of smothering the tea's true flavor." Ming Dynasty tea connoisseur Xu Cishu also voiced his distaste for the practice: "Tea is first steeped in water, so that it loses its true flavor;

and on top of that, it is blended with perfume, so that its aroma is obscured—I cannot see how this could produce any sort of fine result."

However, scholarly disapproval certainly wasn't enough to quell the widespread craze for perfuming tea and didn't deter people from drinking it. According to records and novels penned in the Song Dynasty, tea infused with incense even had medicinal properties: it was effective at regulating Qi and presented a very practical way of looking after one's health. Among scholars, too, were those who enjoyed perfumed tea. Zhu Quan, another Ming tea expert, wrote about scenting tea using flowers in his *Tea Manual:* "Any fragrant flower can be used; when the flowers are in full bloom, place two layers in a bamboo basket, separated by paper—tea on top, and flowers on the bottom. Seal it well, and open it every night to replace the old flowers with fresh ones. After a few days, the tea will have a lovely fragrance. In place of flowers, one may also use camphor incense."

Whether you prefer to savor the natural flavors of your tea or infuse them subtly with flowers or incense, all of these methods have contributed to the diversity of Chinese tea culture.

Incense at Modern-Day Tea Gatherings

As we've seen, tea and incense are both quintessential aspects of Chinese culture. They are beloved by nobles and scholars, yet embraced by ordinary people; important as part of religious ritual, yet also an everyday staple; a symbol of refined culture, but also at home in households throughout the land.

With the popularity of tea gatherings and incense rituals in modern times, people don't see drinking tea and burning incense simply as a way to delight the physical senses; rather, they hope to use these practices as a way to bond with friends, and to achieve a sense of peace and balance in spirit, mind and body.

There's a certain tranquility to be found in moments of quiet solitude spent slowly sipping tea, burning incense, reading the *Book of Tea* or the *Catalogue of Incense* and absorbing the insightful commentary of ancient scholars. And to me, the true essence of a good life is to gather with a few close friends somewhere between forested mountains and clear water, to set up your *chaxi* and enjoy the fragrance of the incense, passing an afternoon in conversation while watching the changing of the clouds and the swirling of the water. To describe such a day, I can't think of a better word than "Heavenly."

A person savoring tea and incense in solitude will never feel lonely, but even more joy is to be found in gathering a group of good friends to sit quietly or join in conversation while enjoying the slow beauty of sipping tea surrounded by the fragrance of incense. In the words of Qing Dynasty poet Nalan Xingde, "a day spent enjoying tea, incense and idle conversation is a happy day indeed!" Just one or two people is a wonderful number for a *chaxi*, too; you'll find there's a lightness and vividness to your experience which is due not simply to the tea or the incense, but to having time alone, or to the meeting of like minds.

As for how to incorporate incense into a tea gathering, I'll offer three suggestions from my personal experience—but first, let's take a look back into history once more to explore the origins of these three types of incense that you might use at your tea table.

Traditional methods of burning incense varied throughout history. In the Han Dynasty, it was customary to light the incense directly, whereas in the Tang and Song it was usual to separate the incense from the flames by placing it on a thin sheet of metal or some similarly flat material. Two examples of incense burners where the incense was lit directly were unearthed from the tomb of a Han Dynasty noblewoman at the Mawangdui excavations in Changsha. Both burners still contained traces of used incense—one of them held the ashen remnants of vanilla grass and roots; the other was filled with vanilla grass, galangal, magnolia buds and lovage root.

Incense burners that separated the incense from the flames were popular from the Tang and Song onwards, with the incense placed on fine plates of silver or mica. The Tang poet Li Shangyin, in his *A Song of Incense,* wrote of "the reddish beast, on its sheet of mica." The line refers to the way the animal-shaped incense cake sends off reddish flames when placed on the mica flakes. Silver is another very pretty material that can be used, as Yang Tingxiu's "Incense Poem" mentions: "The porcelain censer is green as water; the fragile silver is paper-thin. The fire is steady and holds its flame; no wind can blow beneath its screen."

When it comes to choices of fragrance, there is incense developed from a single material to sophisticated blends of different ingredients. Single-scent incense usually involves shaping the raw ingredient into sheets or lumps—the most commonly used materials are things like Aloeswood and sandalwood. Blended incense is made by combining various different ingredients to make a fine powder; after the correct balance of fragrance is achieved, the incense powder can be used directly or formed into various shapes such as balls or sticks.

So, when adding incense into your tea rituals, the tea is at the forefront, with incense in the background. You can choose whichever incense you like to compliment the theme and ambiance of your *chaxi*; "stamped" or "molded" incense, incense balls and incense sticks are all suitable choices. (A proper incense ceremony, roasting the higher-grade woods over coals in a bed of ash, is not really suitable for tea, as it deserves its own time, space and attention. However, you could perform the two ceremonies consecutively.)

茶 A gorgeous Song Dynasty jar made into a censer by adding a hand-carved wooden lid.

丸香

Incense Balls (丸香)

An alternate method of using loose incense powder is to mix it with a sticky substance such as honey, date paste, or pear juice in a mortar and pestle and then roll the mixture into small balls or cakes.

This method of using honey as a bonding agent in incense balls originated from ancient medicinal practices. Han Dynasty physician Zhang Zhongjing (142–219 C.E.) cites methods of using honey to make pills in two of his books. Blending incense powder with honey transforms the powder into a soft, malleable substance and allows it to hold its shape. The honey also adds its own note to the overall fragrance of the incense. However, be careful not to use too much honey, or the incense will become too sticky and won't hold its shape.

The next step after adding the honey is to pound the incense. Once the powder has been evenly mixed to the appropriate consistency in a porcelain bowl, it needs to be pounded until the powder and honey are completely combined into a gluey paste. Then the incense paste is hand-rolled into glossy balls and dried in the shade.

The third step is to decorate the incense balls (also called "dressing" them) with a fine powder. This part of the process is optional—dressing them can change the color of the incense balls or add another layer to the fragrance. For example, in ancient times, people used to swirl the balls in "Dragon Musk" (a mixture of musk and ambergris) to heighten their fragrance. It can also be purely decorative, like using gold or silver leaf, for example.

The fourth step is storing the incense balls to allow the fragrance to deepen and mature. The storage time depends on the ingredients of the incense; different types can take anywhere between 2-3 days to more than a month to mature. This storage time allows the fragrance to settle and the smells of the various ingredients to mature into a unified and harmonious aroma. To prevent the fragrance from fading, the incense balls are usually sealed inside good-quality porcelain jars.

One of the great things about this type of incense balls is that they are moist and easy to shape, and are a very convenient way to make and use your own incense blends whenever you like. This presents a perfect opportunity to explore and express your own personal relationship with scents. To burn incense balls, you can place the incense on a thin plate over a gentle charcoal flame. Both mica plates and fine silver leaf are suitable for this, and both give a beautiful visual effect. (They can also be lit directly to smoke, but are better when roasted as they burn quickly.)

Stick Incense (線香)

For most people, stick incense is probably the most familiar form of incense, especially in temples, where you can see them burning at every altar, their haze of fragrant smoke inspiring a deep spiritual feeling. In traditional Taiwanese culture, stick incense is used to make offerings to one's ancestors, and is burned as part of religious ceremonies. You often see this type of incense formed by dipping slender bamboo sticks in water, then in a sticky powder containing the fragrant ingredients (often cedar powder, 楠仔粉). The finished incense sticks are then left to dry.

Stick incense comes in many different forms. As early as the Yuan Dynasty, incense sticks had already appeared in the form of fragrant ingredients wrapped with paper to make long thin shapes, while in the Ming Dynasty it was common to bury a string in the incense powder to make a type of string incense. Another method was to suspend the incense using a thread of silver.

When using incense sticks as part of your tea ceremony, it's ideal to use homemade ones if you can. You can blend the incense powder as you would for stamped incense, then add a sticky powder (available from most incense retailers; it is made of an odorless sawdust) instead of honey or date juice, and shape the incense into long batons instead of balls—the thickness is entirely up to you. After drying them in the shade, the incense sticks are ready to use straight away.

Stamped Incense (印篆香)

"Stamped" incense is made by grinding the right combination of fragrances into a loose powder, then using molds or "stamps" to shape the incense powder into beautiful patterns. In ancient times this type of incense was referred to as "*Yin* (印) incense," meaning "printed" or "stamped." The winding patterns imprinted in the incense resembled the shapes of *Zhuan* script, the style of calligraphy used in stamped seals, so it is also referred to as "*Zhuan* (篆) incense," and is sometimes also called "*Qushui* (取水) incense." The Song philosopher Liu Zihui wrote a poem about awakening from a daydream to find that "the incense had burned away, leaving a dish of flowers." This poetic description refers to the beautiful patterns visible in the traces of ash that the incense leaves behind.

Stamped incense can also be used to mark the passing of time—in meditation or prayer for instance—though the types of fragrance that the incense powder is made of, as well as how densely it's packed during molding, will both have an influence on how quickly it burns. Also, the powder itself must be stored in a dry place. If the humidity is too high, it will clump and often not burn all the way. There is great pleasure to be found in measuring the passing of time in cups of tea and stamps of incense.

Zen, Tea & Incense

茶人: *Wu De*

Wu De's reflections on incense while casually sipping tea are insightful, lending depth to our experience of tea and incense. He discusses the Zen approach to both these practices, shining light on how we can use them as aspects of our self-cultivation, both ideologically and in down-to-earth practice. As the incense smoke rises from Earth to Heaven, so do these teachings. Then the smoke goes out and we find ourselves back where we started, in typical Zen-fashion.

It's a bright, sunny morning worth revering with some incense. I use a match, because I'm old-fashioned and it's more tactile—you really feel the friction and heat. And if you're paying attention, the moment slows down as the match strikes; there's a grinding sound and a hint of sulfur before the crackling, smoky flame. Lighting a stick of Aloeswood, I brush out the match and place the incense into the wooden lotus-stand that rests before my pot. I relax into my tea, watching the sunlight slowly fill up the smoke, as it curls and sways from form into emptiness. I take a sip and breathe in the fragrances of tea and Aloeswood both. The tea opens me up (empty) and as I set down the cup the incense takes me over (form). The smoke is chanting sutras. The subtle fragrance is preaching the truth. These teachings are older, deeper and more profound than those of all the patriarchs and the Buddha himself. Like the tea I've drunk, this smoke is the fragrance of the Buddha's body. Like me, it honors its true self.

Such mornings aren't just poetry or wishy-washy spirituality to me. When I say that Tea is my teacher, I mean it. *Really*. The incense truly *is* chanting sutras, just not in English (or Sanskrit). One of the most powerful ways that this tea practice has changed my life is in teaching me to honor the simple, ordinary, unadorned moment. All the ordinary present moments in a day are the true pith of life. No matter how you define yourself, as "Chajin," "plumber" or "photographer," you will still spend much more of your time in this life standing, looking at trees, putting on clothes, walking up stairs, brushing your teeth, and so on… To pass over such ordinary times is to pass over the real substance of life, which is the truth. Understanding that *is* Zen. And I honor Zen with my incense, as the incense honors me with its teachings.

The great Zen master Dogen said that when we understand one teaching, we understand them all. "To really, truly understand a speck of dust is to understand the entire universe." He was speaking of the interbeing of all things. Through finding our path, as small, individual beings navigating our limited time on this Earth (a planet which is also a relatively small thing in the cosmic sense of stars, galaxies and all) we find *the* Great Dao. Our path is *the* Path, in other words.

There is a time-honored Zen tradition of celebrating the limitations of Zen itself, which is sometimes called "a booth selling water next to a river." This isn't just an example of the cheeky irreverence for which Zen has come to be known. There is a great teaching in this self-deprecation. The Zen masters are saying that our words are not as strong as Reality itself. That may sound overly abstract, but it's not. What Zen is teaching us is that Nature can explain the truth better than our words or ideas can. The mountains express reality much more clearly than a person trying to explain truth to another person. The same is true of tea and incense smoke. One could argue that this orientation applies equally to the scientific method, in that true science is an attempt to understand Nature as it is. The principles of science are discovered, not created, so they were there before people articulated them. Nature teaches science to people, in other words. Similarly, the Zen teaching is that Reality existed long before we came along and named it,

and will do so long after we are gone (in fact, long after our sun itself has died). And our concepts, as well as the words we use to convey them, will always be very pale in comparison to the truth, just as a description of a sunset over a mountain range, no matter how poetic, will never compare to actually being a part of that experience; just like incense smoke *is* the moment and no words could ever encapsulate, let alone enhance, its fragrance, or the beauty of the play between the sunlight and the curly puffs of smoke.

Because Zen is saying that Nature is a better teacher than a person doesn't mean, as some misunderstand, that Zen is saying we throw out words, ideas or teachings. We are communicating through words and ideas now—me in the writing and you in the reading. Truth is captured and conveyed in words, ideas and logic as well, but often not as powerfully or directly as a cup of tea, a mountain or a river. And since words and ideas can also block our intuition—our inherent connection to Nature—it is often an illogical, nonverbal communication that wakes us up in the end.

The most famous of all Chinese poets, Su Dongpo (1036–1101 C.E.), was a Zen Buddhist. His master Donglin Changzhong (1025–1091 C.E.) taught Su that the "preaching of the Buddha didn't start with the Buddha and didn't stop with his death." Many years later, as Su sat up meditating through the night, he listened to the river and finally, after years of contemplation, understood what his master meant. He composed this poem, which his master later acknowledged:

The voices of the valley are
the Buddha's words
The mountains naught but
his pure body
Throughout the long night,
A thousand verses are chanted,
What can I say about this
that isn't shoddy?

All throughout the annals of Zen, there are hundreds of enlightenment stories in which a monk or nun, after some time meditating, realizes the truth by seeing a flower, hearing a natural sound, stubbing a toe on a rock or looking out on a mountain vista. Xiangyan Zhixian (d. 898 C.E.), for example, was enlightened by seeing a blossom fall, whereupon he exclaimed in poetry that he had been looking for the right "sword" his whole life, which means intellectual approach (the sword cuts and divides, and so is a symbol for the mind), while blossoms had been falling the whole time and he hadn't really, truly *seen* a single one. He then remembered that he had once asked his teacher to explain the truth and his master had said that he could indeed explain things for hours and hours, but that Xiangyan would later thank him for not doing so, since all those concepts would only get in the way. Remembering this, he bowed in the direction of his teacher, fully grateful just as his master said he would be.

The Japanese Zen master Enni Ben'en expressed this teaching quite aptly, saying, "The knowledge that one attains through learning the sutras and commentaries is called seeing, hearing, perceiving and understanding. This is the knowledge of simple, ignorant people; it is not true understanding. The one who directs the light and allows the light to reflect back, such a one grasps the original Buddha nature. This is what is called the 'Eye of Wisdom.' With this eye

one sees one's nature and becomes Buddha." It is one thing to understand intellectually, but another altogether to *be* this moment. And that is the practice of the Way of Tea, and of incense as well. We are connecting to the teachings of Nature through the tea and the smoke, absorbing those teachings and reflecting them back, so that we are a part of the sermons that the mountains and rivers are chanting through the smoke as it rises, plays with the light and then walks out the door of form—back to the emptiness whence it came.

This orientation/attitude is the Zen mind. The etymology of the Japanese word "Zen" demonstrates this, as it can be traced to a southern pronunciation of the Chinese word "*Chan* (禪)," which is in turn derived from the Sanskrit "*Dhyana*," meaning "the meditative mind." This mind, or attitude, is the essence of Zen. And that orientation is what is being referred to in the age-old expression that "Zen and Tea are one flavor." The heart-mind oriented beyond words to Nature, and a communion with its teachings, is what aligns Zen and Tea, not the Buddhist religious practices that orbit the Zen heart-mind. Dogen-Zenji said that this attitude was Buddhism, and Buddhism nothing more than this attitude. It is an attitude of listening and honoring—of being a student, surrendering to the moment and to what is true and real in this instant of happening. This is the real function of a Zen and Tea practice: to cultivate the "Eye of Wisdom"—to see into one's nature as it is. This is called "*kensho*" in Japanese (literally, "seeing one's true nature), or sometimes "*kenshin*," which means "seeing one's true heart." And this "seeing" into nature isn't with the eyes; it streams in through all our senses. You could say it is *an orientation towards apprehending nature clearly with a human body.* And words can only describe that if the words and impressions themselves are the focus of presence. Otherwise, this is just a philosophy.

These ideas therefore need to be applied as a real attitude, in the practicalities of our daily life. We really have to *see*, in other words, or we're left asking what this attitude has to do with our own lives as they are happening day in and day out. What do these grandiose ideas have to do with a real tea practice? With incense? What does this orientation really have to do with the realities of steeping tea, pouring it and serving it to others? It sounds nice to speak of "Great Nature," but what does that really have to do with me as I stare down at this cup of oolong before me?

The most essential way that our tea practice can embody *kensho* is to *see* Tea as our teacher, which is to say that Nature is our teacher (which it ever and always is). In the same way that we listen to Nature, as its teachings are more concrete and real than anything we come up with to describe them, and then try to *live* those teachings—in the same way, we must listen to the tea and prepare it in the way it "wants" to be prepared. Listening to the tea and adapting one's brewing to suit this very pot is following the Dao because it is following the moment—the nature of the tea itself (and not as a genre, or even tea from such and such a farm, but this very steeping in the concrete)—harmonizing the micro and macro together in fused alchemy. By focusing on and truly understanding the minutiae of tea, we are realizing the universal. The details of this moment are more real than any abstractions, even insightful ones.

In our cup there is water, mountain, wind and fire, and there is also our own mind and Buddha's mind.

This practice of seeing the large in the small has ever and always informed Eastern art, from painting to bonsai. Scholars and artists here have always longed to find a window through their art to Great Nature, "touching" it, as you say in Chinese (聯繫大自然). They sought this communion through the discipline and practice of the art itself, and also hoped to convey that heart/orientation/Nature enough in their work that others (including their own future selves) could also find Great Nature through observing their works. There are several old Chinese stories that exemplify this: a master meditates on a masterpiece of painting long enough—staring into the cliffs and crags of the landscape until he sees Great Nature through the transparency of the artist's heart, which is also Nature—until he eventually disappears. Later, his loved ones then report seeing the sage in various places in the painting: dangling his legs from this cliff one day and drinking tea on that ledge on another day.

This is why we focus on all the myriad details that go into a *chaxi*. When some interviewers for a film asked me why I bothered to hike up into the mountains to collect water every week, I looked around at the distant mountains and realized, right there in that moment on film, that the hike into the mountains every week over the years had changed me as much as it had the tea I prepare. It wasn't just about better water for tea; it was about more of myself in the tea practice, which means more of the tea practice in me. The same is true of all else: using carefully-laid charcoal, learning to select the right teaware, practicing and improving one's ability to pour, arranging decorations and also incense. Like the master who became the painting, it's as if I disappeared after enough cups, and you noticed my rough shape in the steam billowing from a freshly-showered pot or dancing with the leaf bits at the bottom of a cup.

Every aspect of the tea ceremony is this here/now—this moment in space/time—teaching us. It is singing the oldest sutras there are. It *is* life itself. It is the truth of a universe that *does* actually exist and we are it and seeing it at the same time—a moon to the sun of its awakening. Tea is teaching us of the starshine and sunshine photosynthesized in these leaves, the water, which was in a cloud less than two weeks ago, the mountain and minerals the tree drank, the coals which are the heat of our sun, the water we gathered on hikes and the incense smoke gathering light and swaying to and from emptiness. All of this makes the ceremony an expression of Nature. And if we can hear those teachings and live them in the moment, we will be oriented towards truth. As Master Enni said, we will be gathering the light of the world and reflecting it back.

Dogen said that we should be eternally grateful for the conditions that came together which allow us to hear the "mountains and rivers sutra," and there are so many: We have these bodies, gifted to us by our parents and ancestors, who suffered through wars and droughts to give us life. And we have the "Treasury of the True Dharma Eye" which allows us to recognize that Nature is always talking to us. And, of course, we have Tea, who helps us understand what Nature is saying. We even have this Hut to be grateful for, as sharing these understandings with others is a big part of what makes them possible in the first place! I love you. I hope you know that. This incense is to honor you as well.

This month, as you sip fine oolong and watch incense smoke trail into nothingness, gathering the light before it goes, try to listen and honor a bit more. Our ancestors have used incense to honor for millennia. Incense makes a wonderful offering. Try to hear the moment—to gather its light and reflect it back on the world. And then fill your heart with gratitude for Tea and for each other...


般若智慧

Gongfu Tea Tips

A Palette of Cups

茶人: *Sam Gibb*

We have often spoken of using mouthfeel to examine tea-brewing methods, teaware and other aspects of gongfu tea, but there is another tradition for determining how well one brews the tea, which is patience. In this article, Sam discusses the method we use to measure the part of patience that has to do with the brewer and sets up an experiment for you to try.

We are often told that the practice of gongfu tea itself encapsulates everything we need to understand about method in this tradition. This is something we can never understand intellectually, only through experience. Years of practice, patience and guidance are required. And ultimately we must realize this poem applies to much more than just the tea table. Master Lin sums much of this poem up in saying, "if the temperature doesn't change from kettle to cup, and your movements are slow and graceful, you can steal the essence of the tea." This means that the more stable and fluid we are in our brewing, the finer the cup of tea. Beyond individual cups, the more we cultivate these skills over a whole session, the more consistency and longevity there is over the course of a session.

But how do we observe this? How can we test whether we are achieving this over a session? Obviously, month in and month out, we encourage you to practice your ability to detect the Ten Qualities of a Fine Cup of Tea. But there is another quality not listed in these ten, as it is not an aspect of mouthfeel: *patience*.

"Patience (耐泡)" refers to a tea's ability to be brewed for many steepings. Obviously, the number of steepings you get will be determined in part by the kind of tea you're brewing, but brewing skills (gongfu) play much more of a role than you'd think.

I have often heard Wu De say (and many of you have probably heard it, too) that you should be able to put a cup aside from every steeping of a session and then when they are all lined up at the end, it should look like the palette charts on the walls of an art studio: There should be a smoothness from start to finish, with no clear difference from cup to cup. All the colors slowly grade into each other. These changes do not happen suddenly, but slowly and evenly. As we line the cups out, we should see this slow and even evolution in steepings. This means the tea was prepared evenly, by a steady and skilled heart. It also means that, as Wu De always says, our guests will walk away with an impression of the tea itself—overall and complete, as opposed to various steepings that are all drastically different from one another. Having a whole, rounded session like this doesn't just mean your tea will be much more patient, it also means a better memory of the tea—consistent and true. We want our guests to feel as if they understand the tea they just drank.

I have often wanted to do this experiment. However, it seemed to require so much equipment! You would need at least ten identical cups, and twenty might even be better. (You could of course go for much longer!) I am lucky, as I live in a tea center surrounded by an abundance of teaware. However, for this reason, it never seemed useful as a gongfu experiment for the magazine, as most people could not try it at home. After seeing Shen undertake this experiment, I decided to try it and as I was doing it, I came up with a way that you could all join me, which I'll get to in a minute.

Normally this experiment is quite simple to do. You merely have your identical cups to one side and brew gongfu tea as you normally would. After each steeping, you set a new cup aside. As the session progresses, you will have a cup set aside from each steeping in the order in which you poured them.

That way, you will have an amazing visual picture of the session and smoothness of your brewing skills.

But what if you don't have twenty identical cups lying around your house, I realized that you could use your phone and just photograph each cup, looking at the pictures afterwards. This way, you can swipe through the photos of your tea session and get a very clear idea of the colors. You will be amazed at the story these pictures will tell. It helps a lot if you have good lighting—just be sure to place the cup in the same place and hold the phone at the same height. Lighting changes or a different camera angle may affect the picture a lot. It helps to mark out the edges of the frame in the shot so you know where to put the cup and how high to hold the camera. This makes a surprisingly big difference in the pictures, so be sure to do it. I used small bits of tape. You can use anything to mark the spot where you place the cup each time. Of course, taking photographs isn't as nice as using cups, since it is distracting and requires time and can upset the balance of your mind. But it is better than not doing the experiment at all!

In many ways, this month's experiment steps outside the normal criteria, which use mouth sensations to judge effects. Instead, we use a visual method to gauge patience as a part of our gongfu skills. I found this way of assessing my brewing deeply insightful. We would love to hear how this month's experiment went for you, so please let us know by sharing your experiences on our website or social media.

Experimenting with this month's oolong, Calm Fragrance.

Experimenting with last December's Liu Bao, Old Grove.

耐泡功夫

Aloeswood
Friend of Tea

沉香茶之友

Incense is a Way, a Dao, as complex, involving and full of lifelong devotion as the Way of Tea. It is a practice that adheres to all the same principles of tea, which is why we have devoted a whole issue to incense and tea. Both reached the mainstream through Buddhist temples, and therefore began as a way of honoring the Buddha, within and without. Both take us to our heart-center, where the Buddha, the awakened self, resides in glory. Both tea and incense honor the present moment, expressing reverence through mindfulness of one's every action, however minute. Tea and incense are truly rich worlds, and richly intertwined like the mingling smoke from a stick dancing through the steam from an old teapot.

Within the world of incense, no topic is as deep as Aloeswood, the "Friend of Tea." We hope that the following three articles, as well as the further readings we will post on our blog, will help you stand back in awe at how vast the world of Aloeswood and incense ceremony is. We also hope to inspire you to further study, practice and enjoyment.

Aloeswood and tea meet in that place where Nature exalts the senses in a pure and clean way that uplifts consciousness, bringing clarity to the moment. Like tea, Aloeswood takes Nature time to produce, and involves the cooperation of many different species. Like tea, the whole world is in each whiff—the forest, roots and earth, water and wind, sky and even Heavenly bodies. May you smell the glory of fine Aloeswood through these pages, heart full of beauty and happiness.

Since long before people could write, we have burned herbs, oils and resins to purify ourselves before ceremonies and to make offerings in homage to the Divine. Ancient Chinese doctors, and before them shamans, used the smoke from fragrant plants to heal various ailments, physical and spiritual. Indeed, there is a cleansing feeling that comes with the smoke of these rare plants, and, in the least, they help calm and center us, much like a fine tea.

There is also a great beauty in the curling wisps of smoke that incense produces. The smoke is formless; it moves and writhes to an inner melody suggested by the slightest movement of the air. Watching incense smoke shift formlessly suggests many of the same sentiments that the shapeless liquor of tea does—moving into and becoming the vessels it travels through, including us. Both tea and incense move in and out of form in profound ways.

A fine tea, some nice music and a fragrant coil or stick of incense together are a recipe for a wonderful session. Like the ancients, we use incense to purify the space and ourselves, furthering the sentiment in Cha Dao that implies that we are all ordained in the tea space. In tea, there is no caste or class, no gender or ego—we are all hermits who have traveled deep into the inner mountains; lost above the clouds, we wander, whereabouts unknown. We also offer incense to Tea, our goddess *Thea*: for the way She connects us to Nature and for the great joy She brings to our lives. We are saying thanks to the world for all the hard work that went into bringing this tea to us, from Nature to the farmer who worked so hard to process it, and then on to all those who helped carry it to our doors.

But not all kinds of incense are conducive to a tea session, or to being around tea at all. After all, a fine tea has a wonderful fragrance all its own. And tea is a very sensitive plant, especially to aromas. If you put flower blossoms into a jar of tea, the leaves inside would quickly smell and taste like that fragrance. Obviously, we don't want to overpower the fragrance of the tea we're brewing. But we also have to be careful about burning powerful incense around the places where we store our tea leaves, as they could easily be affected by the smell of the incense. A lot of incense, especially those made from essential or perfume oil, create a heavy smoke that lingers and overpowers all fragrance in the room. When you burn such a stick, your clothes will carry the smell, sometimes for hours. As Chajin we know that many people begin their contact with tea through its fragrance. This is truer of certain teas, like greens and oolongs, for example, but is there for any tea. Most beginners are first attracted to a tea by its fragrance. As such, we don't want to affect their process of enjoyment (falling in love with tea), so we try to refrain from wearing perfume, essential oils or cologne to tea sessions. We honor and the respect the space that way. The same applies to most incense. And yet, incense plays a part in tea sessions around the world. There are many kinds of incense that can enhance certain teas, and even blends we can use with all tea, but there is a very special kind of incense that is beyond all others in every way: *Aloeswood.*

Aloeswood is sometimes called "Agarwood," "*Jinko,*" "*Kyara*" or even just "Agar." Aloeswood is a dark, very resinous heartwood, not of species of tree itself. It grows in all the species of the *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* genuses, which are evergreens. *Aquilaria malaccensis* is the most common species to form this kind of heartwood. The wood itself is not fragrant, but when it is infected by mold, subjected to manmade attacks (cutting into the tree) or even a kind of cancer (called a "burl" in trees), the tree builds a layer of protective resin around the infection. This resin-filled wood slowly turns from light pinewood in color to dark and fragrant, and is what is used for making Aloeswood incense.

Lower-grade Aloeswood comes from Indonesia and the best from Vietnam. There was also once a lot of Aloeswood in southern China as well. But location is not the only way to gauge quality; there is also whether or not the resin was produced naturally and then how old it is. The older the heartwood is the better. It gets darker and more resinous over time, due to fermentation.

The finest grades of Aloeswood are amongst the rarest and most expensive natural resources in the world. The best Aloeswood is produced naturally and involves the cooperation of millions of microbes, much like puerh tea. A special mold on the tree causes the tree to protect itself with a barrier resin. When the tree dies, the wood surrounding the resin decays. Meanwhile, the microbes continue to interact with the Aloeswood resin, and that continues even after it is found and harvested. This kind of Aloeswood can even be consumed/drunk, whereas lower grades, produced by cutting the tree or intentionally infesting it with mold, cannot be drunk.

For years now, the *Aquilaria* genus has been endangered and forests are starting to be protected worldwide.

The Aloeswood we sourced for your gift this month came from an aged chunk of heartwood buried for some time, and was therefore sustainably harvested and produced into sticks.

A tiny bit of this amazing heartwood, produced by natural processes working together, is enough to create many sticks of incense. An odorless binding wood is used to keep the precious Aloeswood together.

Aloeswood is amazing for tea because its smoke is light and never clings, always drifting like mist into nothingness. The fragrance is sweet and delicious and awakens the taste buds and olfactory senses, encouraging you to taste and smell more in your tea, while never overpowering the tea's fragrance. Aloeswood centers you and calms you down. In fact, you won't smell higher-grade Aloeswood incense unless your heart is steady and peaceful; it is easily missed if you aren't at ease and paying attention. It has a way of drifting into the background and you can forget it's burning if you aren't fully present to it. This is nice as it means that you can also focus on your tea when you want to.

Place the incense stick, or a piece of it if you want to share it for multiple sessions, into a holder, leaving some distance between the incense and your teaware. Allow it to purify you, perhaps brushing some over your body. If you would like to, put your hands together and allow the incense to represent your gratitude for Tea and all the joy and transformation, new friends and Global Tea Hut family She has brought to your life. Take a very slow and deep inhalation through your nose. Let the fragrance fill you up and center your heart. Then, begin making tea as usual. Notice how you are more meditative and steady-handed. Your brewing comes more fluidly. When it comes time to drink the tea, see how the incense doesn't impinge upon your ability to enjoy the tea and its own fragrance, but rather you seem to smell more, as if smelling the incense deeply before starting tea somehow opened your nose up. The fragrance of the Aloeswood will drift in and out of the session. Don't search for it. Let it come and go as it pleases, noticing how it doesn't disturb your tea. Also, take a moment to savor the smoke itself, celebrating the way it shimmers formlessly in such magnificent curls and bunches of flowers, which cluster, roll and then unfurl into thin air.

沉香名之由來和特徵

The many kinds of Aloeswood Incense

茶人: *Zhao Mingming* / 趙明明 *(Donated by Wushing)*

There are many ways to categorize Aloeswood dating back centuries. Learning the different kinds of Aloeswood is a good way to start one's journey into the world of incense, incense for tea or even into traditional incense ceremony. Learning how and where Aloeswood comes from, as well as the many ways Chinese people have differentiated it in terms of kind and quality creates a context for our education.

China's most important Materia Medica, *Compendium of Medical Herbs*, classifies Aloeswood in the category of "tree" and explains the name as follows: "The placing of this heartwood in water and submerging it gives Aloeswood the name 'Sinking Water (沉水)' or 'Water Submerged (水沉).' Half-submerged incense is called 'Stack Incense (棧香)' and incense that floats is called 'Yellow Ripened Incense (黃熟香).' *The Will of Southern Vietnam* (南越志) indicates that people paid their taxes with 'honeycomb incense,' because Aloeswood has a honeycomb aroma (蜜脾). Aloeswood is also referenced in the *Brahamana*, called by the name '*Aloesu*,' and is thought to be sacred."

Aloeswood is the resin that is emitted by *Aquilaria* trees infected by a specific type of mold, cancer or induced by human intervention. Because the resin has a fine texture and is heavier than water, it sinks when placed in water, which is why it was sometimes called "Water Submerged." The uniqueness of a wood that sinks is why Aloeswood was categorized by its ability to sink over time. However, not all Aloeswood will sink when placed in water. Whether or not it sinks depends on the amount of resin, which is often commensurate with quality. However, there is a kind that floats, though it will be half-submerged. That kind of Aloeswood is called by many names: "Stack Incense (棧香)," "Letter Incense (箋香)," and "Handling Water Incense (弄水香)." Aloeswood that floats on the water's surface is called "Yellow Ripened Incense," though some kinds of Yellow Ripened Incense and Sinking Red Soil (紅土沉) types of Aloeswood also sink in water. Actually, due to the confusion surrounding which types sink or float, there are much better ways to distinguish the many varieties of Aloeswood. It is, for example, much more clearly classified by the distinctive features of its scents, the different parts of the tree the resin is produced on or within, the production method or, as we'll soon see, the shape of the incense wood.

The Chinese name "Sinking Incense (沉香)" first appears in historical records about two thousand years ago. In approximately 110 B.C.E., Aloeswood appeared on a list of tribute gifts given to the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (141–87 B.C.E.). It is recorded to have come from places like Vietnam, and in China, Hainan, Guangdong and Guangxi. At that time, only court nobles used Aloeswood incense. Before entering the palace hall, the court councilor would use a censer to purify his clothing before attending court. For similar reasons, chamberlains who served the emperor at close quarters would also keep something fragrant in their mouths when speaking in order to mask bad breath. This ancient kind of gum (known as "chicken tongue incense, 雞舌香") is generally thought to actually have been made of cloves, but Han Ji of the Western Ji Dynasty (西晉人嵇含) suggested that it was actually a type of Aloeswood.

Han Ji, known for both his literary and military prowess, was the grandnephew of Kang Ji, a member of the legendary "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (竹林七賢)," a very renowned group of scholars, poets,

虎斑

authors and musicians who are still famous today. While enveloped by a nation at war, he traveled the breadth of China, writing poetry and essays that were inspired by the local traditions and customs of every place he went. For instance, after visiting a rarely seen bamboo forest in southern China, he compiled his work, *The State of Vegetation in Southern China.* This botany essay, written in the third century, meticulously describes the "honey fragrance tree (蜜香樹)," named for its sweet fragrance, which came from what is today northern Vietnam.

This "honey fragrance tree" (the *Aquilaria*) produces different kinds of Aloeswood depending on the part of the tree in which the resin is produced. "Sinking Incense (沉香)," is heartwood resin from the tree's dense center—heavier and thicker, it is also more fragrant and rich in oils, which is why it sinks. "Chicken Bone Incense (雞骨香)" is produced in the heartwood of a smaller, less dense tree trunk; "Yellow Ripened Incense (黃熟香)" is produced in the roots; "Stack Incense (棧香)" is produced on the outside of the trunk; "Green Cassia Incense (青桂香)" is produced in the branches; and "Chicken Tongue Incense (雞舌香)" is produced near the top of the tree. Almost all Aloeswood comes from the *Aquilaria* tree, just from different parts.

Aloeswood incense is not only categorized by the part of the tree it comes from, but also from the geographic location in which it originates. Besides Southeast Asia, trees that make Aloeswood resin are also found in Hainan (though very rarely nowadays), where they were referred to as "Fine Jade Resin (瓊脂)." Aloeswood from Guangzhou is referred to as "Smiling Fragrance (莞香)." Tradition has it that the young women responsible for washing and drying Smiling Fragrance hid the best pieces of the Aloeswood in their corsets and secretly mixed it into their cosmetics, leading to its alternate name, "Daughter Fragrance (女兒香)." Aloeswood sometimes takes its name from the region it comes from, but the reverse is also true in that there are places named after the incense they produce. According to modern research, the regions of Dongguan, Liyuan (modern-day Sha Tin, Hong Kong), and Shaluowan (the west side of Lantau Island) all transported their incense to Jianshatou (modern-day Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong). The incense was then transported via sampan boats bound for the port of Shipaiwan and was then distributed to the rest of the island, collected for distribution to the Mainland or exported to other ports abroad. This port city became known as "Hong Kong," which means "Incense Port (香港)" or "Fragrant Harbor" in Chinese. Although Hong Kong's incense market no longer exists, the city has since gone on to world-renowned fame, known also as "The Pearl of the East."

The easiest way to differentiate Aloeswood is on the basis of its shape. "Tooth Incense (牙香)" is said to be about the size of a horse tooth; "Leaf Incense (葉子香)" is shaped like a thin leaf; "Chicken Bone Incense" is full of small gaps, which ancients thought resembled a chicken bone; "Polished Incense (光香)" has the external appearance of lustrous,

colorful rocks; "Water Turban (水盤頭)" is large and has a soft texture; and "Penglai Incense (蓬萊香)," named after the mythical island of immortals, is huge, shaped like a large mushroom with a small bamboo rain hat.

Aloeswood is often also named after its color, such as the "Spotted Partridge (鷓鴣斑)," which has brown, black and white spots like partridge feathers (some people think this is a type of Yellow Ripened Incense); "Striped Tiger (虎斑)," which has alternating black and yellow stripes; and "Yellow Candle (黃蠟)," which produces a dark yellow oil that is soft and waxy.

The Song Dynasty chancellor, Wei Ding, wrote *Commentaries on Heavenly Incense*, which divides Hainan Aloeswood into "Four kinds, twenty shapes." The four kinds are "Sinking (沉)," "Stack (棧)," "Raw (生結)," and "Yellow Ripened (黃熟)." Some of the shapes are "Gentle Black Square (烏文格)," "Beeswax (黃蠟)," "Thigh High (洎髀)," "Bone (若骨)," "Kunlun Plum (崑崙梅格)," "Carved Larvae (蟲鏤)," "Umbrella Bamboo (傘竹格)," "Reed Leaves (茅葉)," and "Spotted Partridge." In the Qing Dynasty *New Dialect of Guangdong* and *Notes from Guangdong*, there are more than a dozen different alternative classifications for Aloeswood, such as: "Iron Bone (鐵骨)," "Black Horn (烏角)," "Rapid Oil (油速)," "Embroidered Hemp Bag (錦包麻)," "General's Pocket (將軍兜)," "Caltrop Shell (菱殼)," and "Carp Flake (鯽魚片)."

As experts began to study Aloeswood incense, its production also became a source through which the different types of incense were separated. Among them there are "Quickly Finished Incense (速暫香)," which does not take long to be produced by the tree; "Rapid Oil," which is also formed quickly, but has a thick and oily texture; "Collapsed Frame (倒架沉)," which falls to the ground after being produced and usually contains wood fibers; "Yellow Ripened Incense)," which is usually fermented, but not entirely; and "Sinking Incense from the Earth (土沉香)," which is dug up from the ground, where it has been fully fermented by microorganisms that have already decomposed its vascular tissues. However, back in the day, all of Hainan's locally-produced Aloeswood incense was called "Sinking Incense from the Earth (土沉香)," whether it was actually dug up or not, in order to distinguish it from other kinds. In Taiwan nowadays, that which is called "Sinking Earth (土沉)" still refers to Aloeswood that was completely mature upon being dug from the ground.

Though all these methods of classifying Aloeswood are still used in incense shops and among connoisseurs today, the primary way to distinguish it is by its fragrance. It is incense, after all. And, though Aloeswood is generally submerged in water and dried, calling for a categorization based on whether it sinks or not, there are some exceptions. For example, there is a special type of Aloeswood called, "Rare Cedar (奇楠)," which cannot be submerged in water due to its congealed, oily composition. But its wonderful fragrance makes it superior among the kinds of Aloeswood one encounters nowadays. Of course, incense that has a wonderful fragrance and can be submerged in water is considered the best of the best.

Features of Aloeswood Incense

Shape

The Song Dynasty poet Fan Chengda (范成大) said of Hainan's Sinking Earth (土沉): "If the chestnut shade is horn-shaped, if it has a monk's hood, is covered in Zoysia mold, and if its bamboo leaves are beautiful and light as paper, then submerge it in water." In *Historical Studies on the Trade of Incense and Medicine in the Sony Dynasty*, overseas Aloeswood incense is described in this way: "Thus, a millennium of dead trees has produced incense like 'Rock Laurel (石桂),' like 'Fist (拳),' 'Elbow (肘),' like 'Phoenix (鳳),' 'Peacock (孔雀) and 'Snapping Turtle (龜蛇),' like 'Mist (雲氣),' and like 'Immortal Deity (神仙)' that, when burned, will fill a house with a fragrance that does not disperse for at least three days." The use of "like" so many times is poetic in Chinese, alluding to the many shapes of Aloeswood. Why are there seemingly limitless metaphors for the shape of Aloeswood? This is because Aloeswood resin can be produced in the tree's roots, trunk, branches, between the bark and heartwood or in cavities made by man, animals or even microorganisms. Each type of resin takes a variety of different shapes as a result. Even when the wood around the resin rots and falls from the tree to the ground, the shape and structure of the resin continue to change as it decays.

When Aloeswood hibernates in the ground for a long time, it produces more resin that flows downward. When it is collected, its backside tends to have wooden particles from the ground. This gave rise to the so-called "Rain Head (雨淋頭)," "Turban (包頭)," "Wrapped Shell (包殼)," and other kinds of circular, shell-shaped Aloeswood. The tree's core often produces a high quantity of course but good quality "Sinking Horn (角沉)." The "Sinking Slice (片沉)" is close to the tree bark's surface. If the resin depends on the tree bark for production, it is named "Green Cassia (青桂)." And untreated thin slices that have been in the ground for a long period of time are called "Dragon Scales (龍鱗)."

When you couple the many shapes and sizes of Aloeswood with the fact that incense is an artistic pursuit (and add a dash of the Chinese fondness for poetry), you get lots of poetic metaphors describing the different shapes of Aloeswood. In truth, every piece of Aloeswood incense is unique and such categories only go so far. And, of course, the exceptionality of each piece of Aloeswood is also poetically known as "Heavenly Engraving."

Color

As for the colors of Aloeswood, its veins are also quite different in each variety. Usually, incense resin wedged into the center of the tree is a rich brown, almost black in color, while the tree's vascular tissues are a light white or yellow color. This gives rise to the yellow and black striped

appearance in some Aloeswood. These yellow and black striped varieties are called "Striped Tiger (虎斑)," "Iron Bone (鐵骨)," and "Crane Bone Dragon Tendon (鶴骨龍筋)." When each vein is clearly distinguishable, this variety is called "Sinking Horizontal Partitions (橫隔沉)." Incense with skewed, interlocking veins that look like bird feathers is called "Mandarin Duck's Back (鴛鴦背)." Varieties with spots are called "Spotted Partridge (鷓鴣斑)," and varieties with oily, glossy insides that look like rotten wood are called "Embroidered Hemp Bag." In *New Dialect of Guangdong*, veined varieties of Aloeswood incense were classified as "Flower Gone (花鏟)," because "the tree and the fragrance are mixed together and cannot be unmixed. Remove the tree and the remainder will be fragrance."

After Aloeswood has been buried in the ground for a long time, its decaying process will hasten the decomposition of the wooden parts, leaving more resin, which makes the incense stronger and far superior to all others. This is called "Sinking the Whole Body (通體作沉)." After scraping back the weathered layer, a glossy black layer of resin will be uncovered. An untold number of Aloeswood pieces have been excavated from the soil, and many take on the color of the soil they were buried in, resulting in such names as "Sinking Red Soil (紅土沉)," "Sinking Yellow Soil (黃土沉)" and "Sinking Black Soil (黑土沉)." *New Dialect of Guangdong* mentions "Red Mist Flower Gone (紅蒙花鏟)," "Yellow Mist Flower Gone (黃蒙花鏟)" and "Muddy Fragrance of the Back of Mists (蒙者背香而腹泥)," expounding on how each kind of Aloeswood decayed and in what kind of soil.

As for the so-called "Rare Cedar" variety of Aloeswood, Chen Rang of the Qing Dynasty wrote in *Explanations from Abroad* (海外逸說), "The first person said 'Yingge green,' a color most difficult to come by, like oriole feathers. The next said it produced orchids and its color was a tender green and black. Yet another said it produced golden silk and its color was slightly black. One said it produced yellow candies and the next said resolutely it was like 'black iron,' but all agreed it was oily and resinous." Green, black and yellow are actually all colors found in pieces of Aloeswood due to the soil in which the weathering/fermentation process occurred. In reality, it would have been difficult to find soil-weathered Aloeswood that was the bright green of oriole feathers or the color of orchids. I believe that the numerous scholars the author consulted about this rare incense once again took poetic license, adding romance to their descriptions. However, the variety of descriptions, and the differences between them, cannot be entirely blamed on the "poetic penchant" of historical scholars. This is mainly because of the differences in how Aloeswood incense is formed in the tree, the geographic location it comes from, whether or not it sinks or floats, its various external appearances, and its fragrance and quality—all create the vast array of colors found in Aloeswood.

Aroma

Traditional Chinese Medicine describes Aloeswood thus: "An incense that smells sweet, is cool, pungent, bitter, hemp-y, and acerbic." Good-quality Rare Cedar can be placed directly on the tongue, and after a while it will produce a tingling or numbing sensation. Japanese incense traditions also describe Aloeswood as "pungent, sweet, salty, sour or bitter." Though Aloeswood can be consumed (eaten or drunk in hot water like tea), the taste is actually a metaphor for the fragrance.

Only when Aloeswood is heated will its aroma truly unfold. The Song Dynasty poet Fan Chengda said of Aloeswood incense: "Its smell is always clear and warm, like the lotus flower, the plum flower, the goose pear and so on. When burned, its richness spreads out, its vapor crosses and fills the room; the fragrance arises from all sides until the ember burns out. Fine Aloeswood incense is glorious and delicate, naturally sweet like a subtle aroma of fruit, melons, flowers or honey. Each fragrance is entirely different. From the first whiff, a gentle aroma fills the nostrils, while the next breath carries a pungent fragrance that will overpower the shallow mind. Pure Aloeswood incense can seep through the lungs, enter the Qi and quite peacefully clear the heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys. With calm, deep serenity, one reaches a peace beyond the tumult of ordinary thoughts. The senses then grow sharp and more conducive to self-cultivation."

Because Aloeswood has such a pure and elegant fragrance, it has been figuratively called "The Incense of the Venerable (香中閣老)." The Ming Dynasty doctor Lian Gao (高濂) once took the time to write down the characteristics of every type of fragrance. He called Aloeswood "the incense of calm and grace." He went on to say, "Under the desolate misery of the waning moon, burning this incense can ease your spirit and relax your mind." Rare Cedar became the incense of the nobility in ancient China and Japan, and was described as a "White moon on a clear night, pointing out the icy chords of the birds, long whistles in an empty home and the northernmost peak of a dark-blue mountain range." Aloeswood produces a fragrance that can be diluted and blended well with other fragrances without conflicting with them, and has also been added to medicine for the same reason. Aloeswood can be harmoniously blended with all kinds of substances, becoming an integral component to the whole of the mixture. In the manufacturing of modern perfumes, Aloeswood has become an essential stabilizer. Compared with perfumes that are loved by the mainstream, the subtle, natural, light and meaningfully lingering aroma of Aloeswood is deeper and more profound than a mere smell. Aromatherapy can dispel disease and awaken the spirit. Due to the rich resin of Aloeswood incense, its fragrance goes deeper and is also lighter, filling the body as well as the room without overwhelming either. Before moving to a new home or driving a new car, Aloeswood incense can purify your space. This sacred treasure is much more than just a fragrance for enjoyment!

Rare Cedar Aloeswood

茶人: *Liang Zun Zhi* / 梁俊智

Of the many types of incense in the world, Aloeswood is the king. And among the many varieties of Aloeswood, Rare Cedar (奇楠) is the highest quality, thought they are all produced in similar ways. There is an ancient saying: "A piece of Rare Cedar incense from Champa (a kingdom in southern Vietnam) is worth more than ten thousand pieces of gold."

After the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 C.E.) practising the Way of Incense decreased precipitously in China. The Japanese, however, discovered a new location for Aloeswood production via trade with Southeast Asia in the 15th century. This Aloeswood was produced in "Six Countries (六國)" and became a reliable source for a quality Aloeswood incense product. From the 17th century on, the reference to the "Six Countries" of Aloeswood was no longer used, but the characteristic "Five Flavors (五味)" of the six places was still used to distinguish Aloeswood.

The *Six Countries and Five Flavors* chart became the standard for evaluating Aloeswood. The incense ceremony and Buddhism spread together, reaching Japan in the 6th century. During the Japanese Muromachi (室町) period (1333–1573 C.E.), the eighth shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimasa (足利義政), with the support of the military, established schools to teach the arts of incense, tea and flower arranging. These three "Ways of Elegance" (雅道), initiated a spectacular culture of incense across in Japan. The Japanese tea ceremony is conducted with rigorously strict procedures and carefully studied etiquette. The purpose of the rigidity is to create ceremonial space, baptizing the conscience and achieving a state of refined spirit. During the Warring States period in Japan (15th–17th centuries), incense studies were supported by the shoguns and samurai, who believed the ritual would bring peace and calm, as well as purification in troubled times.

At first, incense was categorized by where it was produced, but later on a new system of classification was developed at the behest of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, which evaluated the intrinsic qualities, merits and drawbacks of the different incense varieties. Nowadays, Japan has many different schools of thought in regards to the study of incense, and each school's opinions differ. The "Five Flavors" are spicy, sweet, sour, salty and bitter. They were used to metaphorically describe and categorize all the different kinds of incense, including Aloeswood. These "Five Flavors" are also important to Chinese and Japanese cosmology and Traditional Medicine, representing the elements and so on.

Nowadays, the "Five Flavors" are used to describe specific aromas, and do not refer to a specific kind of incense wood. Incense that only possesses one such aroma/flavor is called "One Established Flavor (一味立)." Aloeswood incense has an aroma that is clear, abundant and winds around for a long period of time without dissipating. It combines all five aromas/flavors, so it is called "Five Established Flavors (五味立)." Like tea, Aloeswood is a balance of all the elements. It brings together the best of what incense has to offer.

Six Countries & Five Flavors

香 *Jialuo/ Kyara* (伽羅)

Refers to Aloeswood incense, which is considered the highest grade. Bitter; positive polarity; gentle fragrance; bitter as if a red-crowned crane suddenly appeared. Its elegance emerges naturally, like a person living within the imperial palace.

香 *Luoguo/ Rakoku* (羅國)

Located in Siam (Thailand). Sweet; positive polarity with a hint of white sandalwood; odorless, its aroma relies mostly on a bitter smell; descriptive analogy would be the samurai.

香 *Zhen Nahe/ Manaka* (真那賀)

From Malacca, Malay Peninsula region. Odorless; negative polarity; gentle and gorgeous fragrance that gradually becomes fainter; descriptive analogy would be a woman.

香 *Zhen Nanman/ Manaban* (真南蠻)

One theory says it came from the Malabar coast of India, another theory says it came from Cambodia and Laos long ago, and another says Thailand. Salty; negative polarity; at first smell it seems low and superficial; descriptive analogy would be the common people.

香 *Zuo Cengluo/ Sasora* (佐曾羅)

Found in eastern India. Spicy; negative polarity; the fragrance is cold and leads with sour; at first it resembles Jialuo, though gradually fading; descriptive analogy would be the monk.

香 *Cunmen Duoluo/ Sumotara* (寸門多羅)

From Sumatra, Indonesia. Sour; positive polarity; odorless and acrid; its aroma is weak and lowly; descriptive analogy would be a field worker.

In traditional Japanese incense study, the highest-grade of incense was called "*Jialuo* (伽羅)," but *Jialuo* is not exactly equal to Rare Cedar. One could say that Rare Cedar is a kind of *Jialuo*. The first line of the chart shows that *Jialuo* is high-grade incense not because of its production location, but rather because of quality, which is unique amongst the five. The traditional study of incense pays particular attention to the variation in aroma and gradation the incense releases. The enriched aroma of Rare Cedar is undoubtedly unmatched.

Rare Cedar and ordinary Aloeswood incense are difficult to distinguish by appearance alone. But, when heated, Rare Cedar is comparatively clear with a fragrance that changes over time and lasts much longer. In sum, when evaluating "color" with the naked eye, categories are subjective and not a definite standard. The amount of resin produced and whether or not the Aloeswood sinks in water (because it is heavier and more full of resin) remain the most important standards. A rich resin, like that of a good *Jialuo*, produces a complex, rich fragrance; whether or not it can sink in water is of secondary importance.

Jialuo has a texture that is "hard like jade" and also "soft like clay." In reality, the texture is both soft and hard. It certainly is not soft throughout the production process, and some old Rare Cedar incense resin will crystallize when it has been underground for a very long time. Resin that originally was soft will harden under those conditions, but its aroma can still be coaxed out with a bit of heat. Rare Cedar has resin that is as soft as paste. If a bit is pinched off, it will leave a scar. It rolls up when pared out of the wood with a knife. When kneaded, it will become a pellet, and will leave the tongue tingling when tasted. Gentle heating will coax forth a complex aroma that awakens the spirit upon cooling. As time passes, the fragrance will change, its gradations will release and the twisting, changing, rich aromas will last for a long time. The beautiful fragrance will fill the nasal cavity all day long, changing the way you experience the world.

The Four Features of Rare Cedar

Rare Cedar has a fragrance even before it is heated

Without heat, most Aloeswood incense does not give off an aroma. Rare Cedar, however, offers a cloud of fragrance even when it is cold. Some other kinds of Aloeswood are slightly fragrant when smelling the wood itself, but none as pronouncedly or with as much depth.

Rare Cedar is pliable and delicious to the taste

Aloeswood incense tastes bitter, has a hard texture, and is not suitable for chewing. Rare Cedar is pliable and can be chewed. When first placed in the mouth, it is a bit bitter, turning spicy and finally leaving the tip of your tongue numb and tingling.

Rare Cedar changes as you burn it

When heated, Aloeswood's fragrance is very stable, but Rare Cedar's aroma changes over time. At first Rare Cedar is very clear, then percolates into a honey smell and finishes with a strong fragrance that smells like milk. There is no incense known to man with as much complexity and gradation as Rare Cedar.

Rare Cedar is soft

Though surrounded by wood, Rare Cedar has a soft texture. The resin can easily be pared out with a knife; the shavings will roll up and can be kneaded into a pellet-shape. Aloeswood has a hard texture, and cutting it is similar to cutting bamboo. But Rare Cedar incense is as soft as sand.

傳統香道操作

Incense Ceremony

茶人: *Wu De*

A traditional incense ceremony is calming, centering the one preparing the incense and the guests. It is performed with the same heart-centered mindfulness as a tea ceremony. Like tea, it also utilizes our senses to awaken the spirit and calm the mind; and also like tea, it restores a feeling of connection with Nature. In this article, we'll take a photographic journey through an incense ceremony that will hopefully make you feel like you were there, at least until you can come visit us at the Center!

Far Eastern people have been conducting incense ceremonies since at least the Tang Dynasty (618–907 C.E.). In the courts of China and Japan, nobles would smell various kinds of incense in spiritual, austere settings as well as more jovial gatherings, often incorporating games based on guessing which kind of incense was being burned or composing poems about the various fragrances. These ceremonies were akin to tea ceremonies, in that they demanded presence, attention to detail, focus on the senses and alluded to Daoist and Zen ideals.

In Japan, the incense ceremony is called the Way of Incense (*Kodo*, 香道). The incense ceremony, like other arts including tea ceremony (*chanoyu*), became a way to share the Zen-mind. According to Japanese myths, Aloeswood was first discovered in Japan when a log of it drifted ashore from Vietnam. The sacred log was quickly brought to court and offered to the emperor. Later, the Way of Incense was used by Zen monks, alone and to greet lay guests. It also became popular amongst courtiers and the samurai, who sometimes would have an incense ceremony and/or tea before facing death in battle. In the 16th century, a beautiful poem listing the benefits of the incense ceremony was popularized (Far-Eastern poetry is replete with lists), though the author remains anonymous.

We often incorporate traditional incense ceremony into our weekly whisked tea ceremonies (*chanoyu*) here at the Center. We find that the same focus, mindfulness and sacred energy are present in an incense ceremony as are for tea. The Aloeswood calms the mind and purifies the body and spirit, preparing you for the tea that follows. Also, the incense ceremony becomes an offering to Tea herself, to the occasion and to our higher selves (Buddha). They are both based on a return to our hearts and a mindfulness through discipline.

While the traditional Japanese and Chinese incense ceremonies included many kinds of fragrant woods, like sandalwood and others, we almost always use Aloeswood as it has such a positive relationship to Tea.

We thought it would be worthwhile to introduce the utensils and steps in a traditional incense ceremony, should you like to conduct one before your tea. Of course, there are many different ways to enjoy incense. You can burn a stick or coil (like this month's gift), or lay powdered incense in a trail within a censer. Here, we will demonstrate the more traditional way. Roasting the Aloeswood itself will always produce the best fragrance. Burning destroys the oils too quickly and diminishes many of the more subtle notes in fine Aloeswood. By roasting with charcoal, one slowly evaporates the oils from the wood, releasing the fragrance slowly and with a much more full-bodied aroma. Afterwards, we will also show you how to make a patterned "stamp" of powder.

Like tea, an incense ceremony awakens all the senses, filling us with the world. When our senses meet something beyond just pleasure—something that fulfills and harmonizes them—there is always the potential for transcendence if we let go. If we constrict, on the other hand, we may step back and enjoy the pleasure, creating attachment. We should be as the incense: formless and full. Using photography and some descriptions we hope to not only share how a traditional incense ceremony is performed, but also inspire you to the same transcendence open to the guests at such a ceremony. Maybe these pages will have a fragrance all their own.

Let's start with an exploration of all the utensils used in a traditional incense ceremony, before moving on to the steps themselves.

Sharpens the senses
Purifies you, body and soul
Expels impurities
Awakens the spirit
Eliminates loneliness
Brings peace to unsettled times
Is never unpleasant, even in extravagance
A tiny amount is sufficient
Lasts for a very long time
There is no one it isn't good for

感格鬼神
清浄心身
能払汚穢
能覚睡眠
静中成友
塵裏愉閑
多而不厭
寡而知足
久蔵不朽
常用無障

Ash spatula

Ash fan

Incense chopsticks

Incense spoon

Ash tamper

Feather duster

Silver leaf pincers

Mold or "stamp" for laying incense powder in a pattern across an open censer.

Mica sheet and holder for five "silver leaves." Other kinds of sheets for roasting incense are also used, like ceramic, silver, gold and even jade. In our experience, silver plates are the best for Aloeswood.

Open censer

Pure white rice paper ash is used for the incense ceremony. In the West, we call it "rice paper," though it is not, and never was made of rice; it is called this because of its color. When high-quality calligraphy paper is burned, the ash is clear and clean. It is also ideal for an open brazier used to heat water for tea.

Closed censer

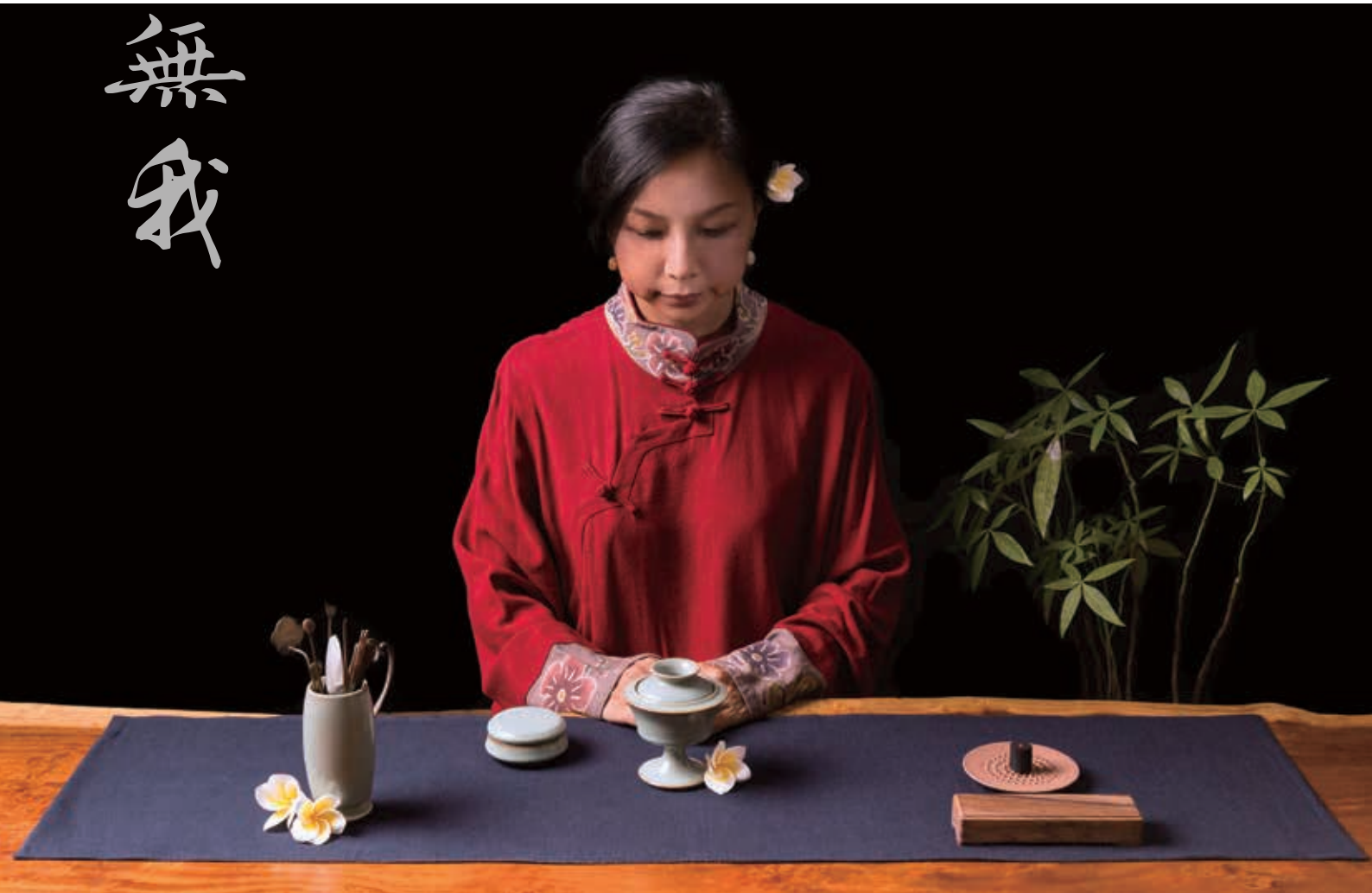
Vietnamese Aloeswood

Indonesian Aloeswood

Special oak charcoal from Japan (sumi). It is self-lighting and burns for quite some time, especially when covered in ash. The plate is for lighting the coal as one prepares the ash bed.

最美境香氣中無我

1) Create a decorative space to enjoy your incense ceremony, honoring your guests and the occasion, much like arranging a chaxi. Start with some deep breaths, calming the mind. Like tea, the heart of the one preparing the incense will matter more than which utensils are used or even the quality of the Aloeswood itself.



2) Light the charcoal on the lighting dish. Most Japanese charcoal for incense ceremony is self-lighting, so you just need to start it and it will get burning on its own in a short time. Antique lighting dishes have criss-crossed metal wires to hold the charcoal above the plate. At the Center, we often use traditional charcoal from the dragon eye tree (龍眼), and use other charcoal (usually left over from tea) to start the piece for incense ceremony. This is, of course, better than using a lighter, but we wanted to show you the most popular and convenient method.

3) Use the chopsticks to fluff the rice-paper ash, which increases oxygen flow. (It also reduced humidity in our case, since Taiwan has a very wet atmosphere.)

4) Make a hole in the center of the ash and grab the lit charcoal with the chopsticks, gently placing it into the hole, covering it over after you place it properly. You have to make sure that the charcoal is thoroughly lit and only then cover it in ash.

5) Round the ash into a rough mound using the chopsticks and ash fan. Then flatten it using the ash flattener and ash fan.

6) Shape the ash. Using the ash fan, ash flattener, spatula and a chopstick, you can decorate the ash, keeping it in a pyramid or cone shape all the while. You can draw any pattern you like, celebrating the occasion (again, like arranging a chaxi for tea).

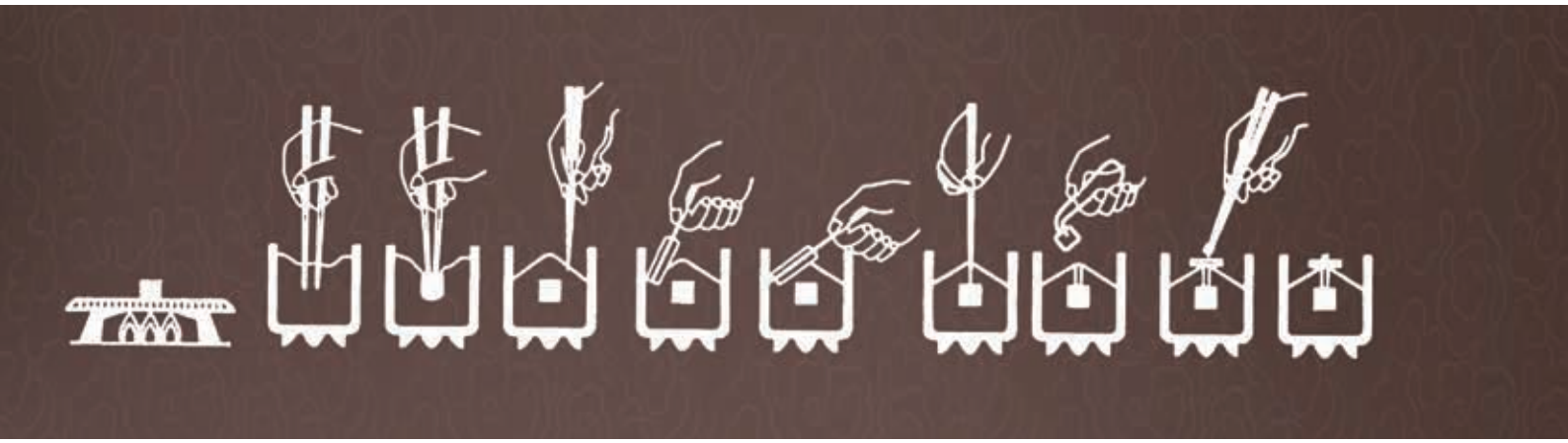
7) Clean off the censer with the feather brush.

8) With a chopstick, twirl a small hole from the top of the cone of ash down to the burning charcoal, so that the heat can rise up through the hole like a small volcano.

9) Use the tweezers to place a mica sheet gently on the hole, careful not to knock ash down into the hole and dampen the heat.

10) Carefully carve a rice-grain-sized sliver of Aloeswood off and use the incense spoon to place it in the center of the mica sheet. (You can also use incense powder here.)

11) Place the lid on the censer, if you have one, and pass it around. Holding the censer with two hands (much like a tea bowl), keep it around 10cm (5 inches) below your nose. Cover the front with your off-hand. Inhale, slow and deep, taking the Aloeswood into your toes, and beyond to the spirit. Lower the whole censer to your mid-chest to exhale so you don't blow the ash or incense around. Pass the incense around several times in silence, letting Nature's glory fill your senses!



1) In a flatter, wider, more open censer; flatten the ash using the ash flattener. Compress it so that it is hard and flat. Clean off the censer with the feather brush.

2) Place the incense mold down onto the hard ash and fill the gaps with powdered incense using the incense spoon. Use the spatula to compact the incense powder.

3) Slowly lift the incense mold up, leaving behind a beautiful pattern of incense powder. Light one end of the powder and very gently blow out the flame so you don't disturb the pattern. Pass the censer around like with the traditional ceremony, but this time you will want to hold the censer a bit lower since there is actual smoke.

茶的音樂

Music for Tea
Concept to Completion

茶人: *MJ Greenmountain*

The album MJ put together with artists around the world is one of our favorite background pieces for gongfu tea. We asked him to write about his experience making the album with so many amazing musicians around the world, figuring that this issue would be complete after steeping some fine Calm Fragrance oolong and lighting a stick of Aloeswood if we all then put on some nice music. Heaven!

Sitting with tea has been a great gift to my life. Since the late 90's, my life as a professional musician has been filled with a constant stream of live performances and copious amounts of touring, both domestically and internationally. Tea has played a major role in this, especially during the busiest of tours, helping to keep me grounded and centered when out on the road.

As the tours would wind down and I was home more often, there were a couple of albums of music I played to accompany my daily tea and meditation practice. One day, after a session with a friend, she asked, "MJ, why don't *you* make an album of tea music?" It hadn't even dawned on me until just then. Here I was, a longtime professional musician, and I had never considered doing such a project, even though Tea is such a crucial element in my life. I thought: "Hmm, is it time for a new music genre called 'Tea Music'?"

Recently, in the summer of 2013, I graduated into fatherhood. I was suddenly faced with the myriad responsibilities that lay before me, and some spiritual housecleaning was automatically underway. Having children certainly creates immediate shifts, like a love tsunami washing away anything that doesn't serve the greater good.

As part of this, I saw the need to have my burgeoning tea life and my decades-long professional music career harmonize, and not compete for my time and focus—a trend that was occurring. Thus, with this confluence of energies all pointing in the same direction, the concept album *Music for Tea* was born, not even one week after our daughter was born.

And it truly is a "concept album." A whole vision emerged, based upon a cohesive through-line and simple, sparse approach of "one master, one instrument," with each weaving a part of a melodic story. Calling upon the talents of an array of master musicians, each playing a traditional stringed instrument in one long, live performance, I encouraged the artists to let the tone of their instrument resonate (quite a bit longer than they normally would) into the silent, open space around it. Drawing out each note, melodies would be played in a deliberately slower, unwinding way, framed by the void of the no-background-music supporting it. As the famous Jazz musician Miles Davis once said, "Music is the silence between the notes." In *Music for Tea*, that silence was meant to be *heard.*

I chose a variety of Pan-Asian stringed instruments that all had a common thread of that traditional sound. Due to decades of working across a wide spectrum of traditional World Music, I had long-established friendships with world-class master musicians from around the planet, a plethora of whom lived locally in Northern California. This was a project long waiting to happen, but somehow hidden from me like the tea bowl staring me right in the face.

Having spent some years working as a film score composer in Los Angeles, I was influenced towards creating a more visual thematic storyline to help guide the recording sessions. This would yield a highly focused end product and help create a common compositional sketch for the musical direction. Just as film score compos-

ers will custom fit music to some kind of visual action, I asked each of the musicians to imagine fitting their performance to a story, appearing below as it does on the CD case, in poetic verse:

Leaving home
The Old Man, withered and weary
Ascends the great mountain
With difficulty, he makes his way

Near the Summit, the ancient hut
Welcomes him again
A garden grown wild
glows in the Sunset
The Sacred Spring splashes out
its 10,000 songs

Preparing tea, he sits resolute
A view of great expanse before him
Eyes wide, piercing cloud and stone
The answer comes without question
Home now, is here.

The recording sessions were done one day at a time, with just one maestro and his or her instrument. Once we had established all the basic criteria for the musical direction, which certainly included serving them tea, I would tell them the story, and then the artist would play as though performing for a live audience, in one take. We typically did no more than three takes, to preserve the immediacy of the live performance energy, choosing the best for the final version. Throughout the sessions, puerh flowed like the river of sound echoing through the recordings. Tea was subtly steering the project, keeping us all on course.

Besides the storyline, there was a very basic sketch of composition to give the music a particular wave. Like brewing really good tea, each piece starts slow, building gradually to an energetic peak, then winds down towards the end.

The appearance on the album of world renowned *sarod* master Alam Khan—son of the late, great pioneering *sarod* master Ali Akbar Khan—was an incredible boon for the production, and the grace-filled finesse of his talent really shines brightly through his instrument; it yielded a stellar recording and became what I consider to be the energetic peak of the album. The piece is based on a traditional North Indian *raga*—a musical performance piece in a particular scale of notes, often assigned to a specific time of day, and with a specific mood. What is unique about this recording, is that although *sarod* is traditionally *always* accompanied by a drone instrument called "*tanpura*," I wanted more focus on the tone of the *sarod*, so I requested that Alam give it a go without the usual *tanpura* in the background. This may perhaps be the first-ever public release of such a high-level master recording of solo *sarod* without *tanpura* behind it.

Gary Haggerty, a multi-instrumentalist also based in the San Francisco Bay Area, is a lead performer in the internationally-known band Stellamara. I wasn't sure Gary was going to be available for the project, but I had him high on the list of probable suspects for the job. Sitting with him in his home studio, with hundreds of stringed instruments of all kinds hanging on his walls, I felt his interest in the project pique.

After recording the *Robab* track, which he nailed in the second take, he grabbed an unusual object. "This is a *tarhu,*" he said, seeing my eyes get big like saucers. As he drew a bow across the strings of an instrument I'd never seen, nor heard (of) before, the deep resonance echoed through his house. "Wow, okay. That's it. Let's get that one too," I said. Its low-end tones provided a nice contrast to the other strings on the album, and helped complete a whole color spectrum of sound. We finished recording both instruments so quickly—due to his immediate grasping of the project and incredible talent—that I almost forgot to drink tea. Almost!

As a surprise element to the album, a Pakistani vocalist named Aliya Rasheed was added near the end of production. Aliya had sung at a house concert in our area, and had completely won every heart in the room. I had no intention of having any voices on the project—until I heard her sing that evening. She was immediately open to the idea, and we arranged to have her record one song in a single-pass session. To have her bless this project was an unexpected treasure that really took the album to a whole other level. What's more, she's a woman singing a classical style of music called "*Drupaad,*" which is a style of music very strictly sung by men for centuries! She is the first woman, and a true pioneer and women's rights leader in Pakistan, to publicly perform in this style and be a fully recognized artist in her own right. And if that wasn't enough, she has triumphed in the face of having no eyesight; she was born blind. I made certain that she was served a nice cup of tea before her recording. It seems to have done its job well.

The other instruments were recorded quite smoothly, thanks to my little portable studio. The only song I did not record originally is a song offered to the project by Wang Fei, a Bay Area *guqin* master. We *had* to have a traditional Chinese instrument on the album, and this piece worked wonderfully. It was used as a kind of introduction, at the front of the album, since tea culture spent much of its (ongoing) journey in ancient China. There were some odd airplane noises in the background of the original version, and the tone needed quite a bit of work, which we were able to solve in the mix sessions.

The mixing was a process of refining the sound quality of each song, smoothing the rough edges, removing any unwanted ambient noises, fixing any mistakes, and bringing out the rich tonality of the instruments. I mixed at a studio that happened to have an old Studer two-inch tape machine, a *major* collector's item in the world of professional recording engineers. This is what all the big record labels used back in the "old days." The analogue "tape sound" is highly coveted now and the magic of having the album run through a tape machine for the mix really added a velvety smooth warmth, expansive sweetness, and clear presence. (Sounds like Tea, doesn't it?)

My travel tea set was getting well used during the production process. Each day of the very fast four-month production journey I used it to drink tea.

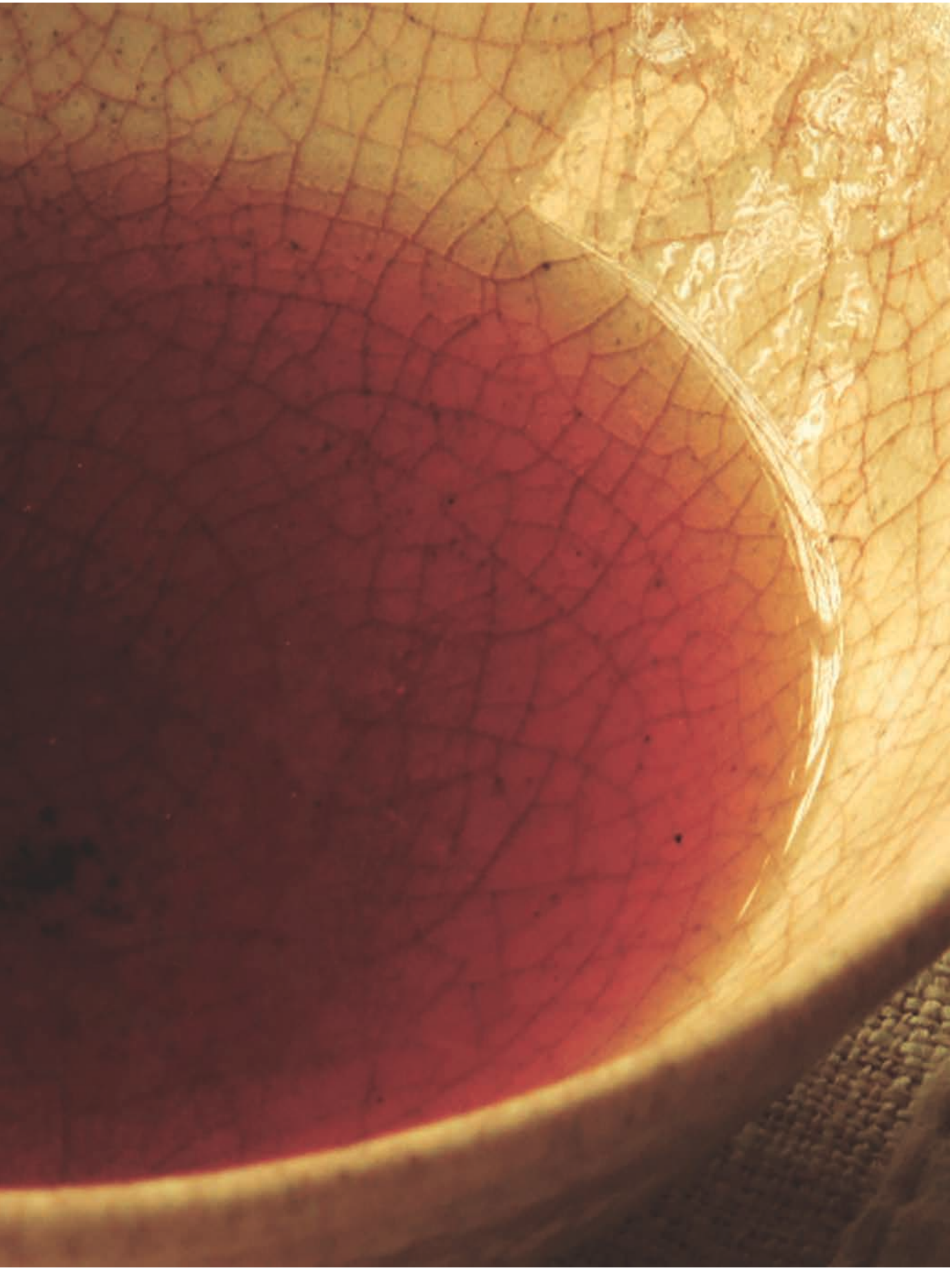
It was also at this studio that I recorded the introduction "Bells" piece, using my entire Tibetan bell collection: a spontaneous recording inspired by thoughts of the so-called "Tea Horse Road," and fueled by some serious late night, dense steepings of aged puerh. My travel tea set was getting well used during the production process. Each day of the very fast four-month production journey, which was kind of a miracle for me (my previous album took nearly five years to complete!), I used it to drink tea.

The mastering of an album is a type of equalizing all the songs so that they sound as if recorded in the same place. This also prepares the recording to be radio-ready. It's an extremely focused process of listening in a hyper-detailed way, literally focusing in on every single note, ensuring a pristine end product without any mistakes or glitches. At one point, I sat alone in the studio control room—a huge board of faders, knobs, and switches flanked by stacks of outboard gear—with the monitors (speakers) turned *way* up, holding my tea bowl gently as I was wrapped in a beautifully rich, warm silken blanket of sound. It was such a profound feeling: a very deep meditation lasting almost four hours. I emerged from that session in quite an altered state, floating out of the studio both tea and music drunk. That's when I realized: this is just the first in a series of *Music for Tea* albums.

The album's stringed instruments (except for the *tarhu*) are all traditional. The *sarod*, is from Northern India. The *oud* is found throughout North Africa, and the Middle East. The *robab* is from Afghanistan (it's the ancestor of the *sarod*, actually). The *kora* is West African, and the *setar* is a Persian traditional lute. To have this collection of sounds on one album is a real treat.

Little did I know that this album would end up being played in a tea center all the way over in Taiwan. I am grateful that this music has already found so many kindred tea spirits. Like birthing a child, *Music for Tea* has taken on a life of its own and is doing whatever it needs to do out in the Tea-niverse. It feels like it's barely started its journey. Who knows just where it will end up or how it will fulfill its greater purpose? Oh, the wondrous mysteries of Tea! Many thanks to the Global Tea Hut family for supporting tea music and musicians!

茶 *The cover shot of Music for Tea. This beautiful bowl inspires the music within.*



Tea Wayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these issues 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 MJ Greenmountain.

On a balmy day in February of 1997, caught between cicadas, crickets and Hawaiian breezes, I found myself awestruck in a friend's lava-rock Zen garden as he quietly poured a dark, loamy shou puerh from a Purple-sand teapot into two tiny cups. I sat upright, mute, motionless and transfixed. He had poured tea for me a couple of times before, yet this time it was *different*. Time stood still, and every cell of my being said: "Take heed, something huge is happening." We raised our cups to the sky, and drank. Then he laughed, delighted by my utterly stunned face. I'd been kidnapped by a leaf. "I need this in my life," I said reflexively. From that moment on, Tea became an essential part of my daily meditation practice.

From early on, I maintained my own "Traveler's Tea-room": fresh spring water, puerh, an Yixing pot and old porcelain cups (packed with tea towels inside a clean camping kettle), a small wooden tray, a thermos, a camp stove, a quartz crystal, and a folding grass mat—all to facilitate tea anywhere, anytime.

In 2001, I met the "Old Man," my first tea-cher. He's well versed in all the traditional tea arts: gongfu, *chanoyu*, ceramics, incense, history, poetry, and so on. He'd whip out little folded pieces of paper with treasure-poems, antique "scholar's pieces" and mesmerizing tea, intermittent with razor-sharp remonstrations and sucker punches right to the old ego. The time we spent left an indelible mark on my life, though I never expected the extent of divine gifts Tea would be bring into my life.

Indeed, many years after that, sitting in my Traveler's Tearoom under a giant tree in the wilds of New Zealand, a Japanese woman and I dropped in deeply over many hours and countless cups of puerh. It was "love at first sip." Tea has since become the hub of our shared daily life; and six years of marriage and two young kids later, it's now a daily family affair.

As destiny would have it, our first time traveling together to Taiwan, my wife and I met Wu De, who had spontaneously offered to fetch us from the airport in Taipei. We were touched by his humble generosity.

After our first tea session together, which also happened to be on my birthday, Wu floated a simple yet piercing question my way: "Why not adopt a vegetarian diet, and seriously upgrade your tea practice?" And *boom*—like a lightning strike, the epiphany came. Instant change occurred. That was the initiation of our yearly visits to the Tea Sage Hut, and the blossoming of a serious love for Taiwanese tea culture.

Just this past summer, my family moved to a new home on a spacious breathtaking property, overtly styled like a Japanese country estate, in a park-like setting, complete with pond and gushing stream. These day, I host people of all kinds—local folks, elders, high-schoolers, gang-bangers, foreign tourists, bikers, hippies, tech geeks, the Republican Hair-do Clan—all somehow showing up with interest in discovering Tea, whether they knew it or not. The depth of gratitude we feel for this mysterious and wise Leaf is just unfathomable. The more one dives into tea, the more profound life becomes. And then this practice starts changing the lives of those around us as well, which is real magic.

A few months back, I routed my music tour to pay a surprise visit to the "Old Man" who introduced me to Tea after not seeing him for five years. I laid out my grass mat beneath a redwood tree just outside his reclusive door. "Oh, you found my tea room. I've been looking for it!" he said. Pushing back tears, I quietly prepared tea for him, as he beamed his sweet, toothless, octogenarian smile, and kept sighing, "perfect, just perfect." This time, no criticisms ensued. The tea was enough.

Email me to share tea: mjgreenmountain@gmail.com

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!

The 2016 Light Meets Life Fundraiser is now in full swing, with more and more cakes showing up all the time. We have two amazing old-growth sheng teas this year, a Five Element shou, an amazing dian hong from Big Snow Mt. and another surprise as well!

We have a new page for Wu De's teaching events around the world. Many of you are always asking for updates, so we thought it was about time to share them: http://www.globalteahut.org/wudeteachings.

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!

We are now offering free Light Meets Life cakes to authors whose submissions are accepted in Global Tea Hut. Let us know if you are interested in future topics or if you have a great idea for a tea-related article and we'd be happy to take a look at your work.

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 in Bali in late January with a stop in New Zealand as well to serve tea at the Wanderlust Festival. Then Wu De and Sam will be traveling in New Zealand and Australia some time in March. Check the website for details.

We have a goal to reach a thousand members by the end of the year. You can help by hosting a bit more, sharing more tea and letting people know about all the wonderful education in these magazines, amazing organic tea and beautiful global tea community. Let us know how we can help you serve more tea! Email teasagehut@gmail.com and we will send you an extra tin of bonus tea in December.

November Affirmation

I am truth.

Look around and this is what your life is; this is your truth. With these lives we experience and express the universe. Am I living in a way that is in harmony with the world? Is there harmony with my surroundings and my work and path?

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 changed the daily schedule at the Tea Sage Hut to include hands-on, practical lessons in the afternoon with guests. This means people staying with us will get a chance to practice brewing and serving tea. We are proud of our ongoing improvements.

We are thinking of hosting some ten-day tea courses at the Center in 2017. Let us know if you are interested in attending.

www.globalteahut.org

The most loving Tea magazine in the world! Sharing rare organic teas, a magazine full of tea history, lore, translations, processing techniques and heritage, as well as the spiritual aspects of Cha Dao. And through it all we make friends with fellow tea lovers from around the world.

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