

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

November 2017

SHOU PUERH

HISTORY, PROCESSING & LORE





SPIRIT

This year, some fortuitous blessings allowed us to make one of the best shou teas we've ever had, so we saved some extra tea loose-leaf to send as a Tea of the Month. Of course, this is also the perfect opportunity to dive deeper into the history, production and lore of the genre of shou puerh!

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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From the Editor

In November, the weather is perfect in Taiwan. This is one of our favorite months, as it means more outdoor tea, a return to roasted and aged oolong, Wuyi Cliff Tea, Liu Bao as well as shou and aged sheng puerh—all our favorite teas. We have three or four usual spots for drinking outdoor tea. The Taiwanese often build small gazebos around the mountains for tea drinkers, which we feel very much capture the spirit and essence of Cha Dao: sharing space with strangers you will never meet, without thanks or a desire for anything in return other than the opportunity to give. That is a love for tea! We hope each and every one of you will have the opportunity to visit us and drink tea in the mountains, enjoying the natural beauty of Taiwan together.

This month we will finish up this year's course schedule, marking our first year of ten-day courses. It feels like this has been a huge step towards Light Meets Life. Having two ten-day courses each month has left more time for us to focus on the magazine, clean and maintain the Center and rest our weary souls. Rested, we serve better and provide more care for the attendees of the courses. The course schedule was designed with a lot of forethought, all of which was oriented towards providing a space in which tea lovers from around the world can steep in an immersive environment and leave with a confident liquor—ready to start a tea practice when they get back home. The courses cover water (gathering, evaluation, storage and drawing), fire (heat sources and temperature for brewing), tea production (visiting a farm to make your own tea) and exposure to three or four of the brewing methods of our tradition with practical exploration of two that you can take home. Participants in the dozen courses we have done so far this year have all expressed a deep appreciation and positive reaction to this shift. The courses have all been successful, and attendees really feel like they have learned a lot during their stay.

Soon, we will be posting the 2018 course schedule. We want to include two or three special courses for the next year as we move closer to Light Meets Life, our permanent Center, which will have a huge array of topical courses. So far, a few of the candidates for 2018 are: a twenty-day deeper course for older students to deepen their practice, including more meditation and intermediate to advanced brewing lessons; a ten-day tour of Taiwan, like our annual trip, only in our home field; and, finally, we have discussed another Tea & Qigong retreat, like the beautiful one we did in the mountains of Miaoli this past September. If you are interested in these courses, or have any suggestions for improving them or creating other special, topical courses, please let us know. We would love to have your participation in this next chapter of the Tradition of the Hut!

This month marks the end of this year's travel for me as well. I have been on the road more than six months altogether this year. I have been moving at this pace for going on six years now. I plan to spend much more time in Asia throughout 2018. This year has been a tremendous opportunity to share so

much tea, hugs and love around the world, and I am extremely grateful to have the honor of exploring tea with so many of you, growing our appreciation for tea and each other. Those of you who know me will know that I won't be idle in 2018. I plan to focus more on this magazine, taking more journalistic trips throughout Asia to gather new and exciting information for articles, nurture some new relationships with organic farmers who may provide amazing teas for us all to share and continue to promote the translation of other authors to provide scope to these pages. And I will do a couple of teaching tours as well...

This issue is wonderful. We have always wanted to dive deeper into shou puerh, which is a favorite tea in the West especially. For some reason, Western people love puerh tea. We do as well. Shou has an interesting history and production methods—there is tons to learn about together! Shou puerh is a really good topic for a tea lover to take the plunge, steeping a darker liquor, so to speak, because it contains a huge spectrum of all that tea is in the world: it has an interesting history and lore; there is a lot of science involved in the artificial fermentation due to the microbial activity; you can brew shou in many ways, like boiling or steeping; and it often has a deep and resonant energy, making it ideal for self-cultivation and more meditative tea.

We have translated some amazing and informative articles to explore shou together. We also have one of the best Global Tea Hut teas ever, "Spirit (神)," which is also one of our Light Meets Life fundraiser teas this year (in cake form). It is one of the best shou puerh teas we have ever tried—delicious and full of vibrant Qi. Boil the water hot and let the tea steam while we explore the dark and creamy depths of shou puerh together!



茶道 FURTHER READINGS

This month, we recommend taking the time to read through the January 2017 issue, especially the Tea of the Month article. Some of the information in this issue is a bit of a review of that one, but the focus is different so they compliment each other, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of shou puerh.

TEA OF THE MONTH

Over the course of this month we will be steeped more thoroughly in a rich, creamy and dark brew of shou—darker than we have ever brewed it, in fact! To celebrate one of the best shou teas we have ever had, “Spirit (神),” which is our Tea of the Month and one of our Light Meets Life fundraiser cakes, we are going to explore this exciting genre of tea more deeply than ever before, exploring shou puerh history, production and preparation in even greater detail. We have gathered a huge collection of shou information, once again offering one of the most comprehensive guides to the topic ever published in the English language! For this Tea of the Month introduction, we plan to review the basics of shou processing, with a focus on the skills needed to make fine shou tea, introduce the history of shou, and finally, discuss aged and aging shou puerh.

Let’s start with the basics of puerh. To begin with, we have to start by dividing puerh into “sheng (生)” and “shou (熟).” “Sheng” means “raw” puerh; it’s the greener, more astringent kind of puerh, which can be enjoyed when it is young and fresh or aged to ferment naturally over time. On the other hand, “shou,” which means “ripe,” is artificially fermented by humans, so it is darker to begin with. The words “sheng” and “shou” are used in Chinese to discuss food as well, referring to “raw/uncooked” versus “cooked” meals. The terms also

describe the ripening of fruit. Understanding this distinction is important for exploring puerh, and specifically shou puerh, more deeply.

In order to better understand tea processing, we also have to return to a review of oxidation and fermentation. Oxidation is an enzymatic process: basically, cellular breakdown due, of course, to the exposure to oxygen, like when a banana or apple turns brown on the counter. Fermentation is similar, but it is metabolic and involves the presence of bacteria and other microorganisms, like the changes in yogurt, cheese or alcohol. Sugar is converted into acids, gases and alcohol. This distinction is important in understanding tea, and especially shou puerh, because many kinds of tea are withered (oxidized) to change the chemistry of the tea and remove moisture from the brittle leaves before processing. But puerh is also fermented post-production, which means it has a strong relationship to microorganisms—whether it is naturally fermented (aging) or artificially fermented in the factory, as with shou. Over time, puerh both oxidizes and ferments. These natural changes are more pronounced in sheng than shou. But we’ll get to the aging of shou in a bit.

Like many genres of tea, puerh starts with “*maocha* (毛茶),” which means “rough” or “unfinished” tea. You’ll hear this term discussed most often with regards to the genres of oolong and puerh, as they traditionally

have “finishing” steps that occur later and sometimes at a different location from where the tea is initially processed. In puerh, the tea is processed fully (dried) and then sent to a factory to be blended, compressed or made into shou. And even back in the day when the final steps were done at the farm, they were still done at a later date (sometimes months later), so the term “*maocha*” was still relevant. In oolong, it is the roasting, which is done later, or traditionally, at the shop rather than the farm. The reason the finishing steps in these teas are completed later is because the farmers have to focus on finishing the harvested tea on the day it is plucked or the quality will suffer. And since there is freshly picked tea coming in every morning during the harvest season, they have little time to sleep, let alone finish the tea, which can be done later. These days, with regards to puerh, almost all *maocha* is sent to be finished at factories that want control over the finishing steps like blending, choosing sheng or shou and also deciding what size or shape to compress the tea into. But before we get to the factory, let’s understand what *maocha* is.

Puerh *maocha* is harvested, withered out- and indoors depending on the place/tradition and the weather, fired (*sha qing*, 殺青) to arrest the oxidation of the withering and de-enzyme the tea, rolled (*rou nian*, 揉捻) to shape the tea and further break down the cells. Puerh tea is then sun-dried, which is unique in tea.



Spirit (*Shen*, 神)



Mengku, Yunnan, China



2017 Old-Growth Shou Puerh



Lahu Aboriginals



~1,500 Meters





The two defining steps that make puerh unique are the firing and drying. The de-enzyming of tea is done to stop the withering and also to remove green enzymes that make the tea bitter and astringent. Like most teas, puerh is fired in a wok (often wood-fired), but it is done at a lower temperature and for a shorter duration than most kinds of tea. This, along with the varietal of puerh, is why young sheng is so bitter and astringent. Puerh is fired in this way to allow the heat-resistant spores to survive the processing, since they will be paramount in the post-production fermentation process. The sun-drying is what also separates puerh from most kinds of tea, and it is done for the same reason, since sunlight and heat are just what the spores need to start colonizing the tea again.

After the *maocha* is dried, it leaves the farm for the factory. However, it is ideal to finish the tea at the source, since the water and micro-ecology will be unique for each place, but that rare-

ly happens nowadays. The tea is then blended or left single-region and compressed into various shapes of cakes as sheng puerh, which can then be enjoyed young or aged for later. The tea is steamed, compressed and dried on racks (often with fans, but traditionally in the sun), before being wrapped individually in natural paper and then often wrapped in stacks made of bamboo skin called a “*tong* (筒).” But if the tea is to be shou, it has a whole other journey to travel.

Shou puerh is artificially fermented by piling in a process called “*wo dui* (渥堆),” which is essentially composting: the tea is piled to about a meter, sprayed with water and usually covered with a thermal blanket. The heat inside is why shou is sometimes called “cooked” puerh. The pile is then stirred regularly until the desired degree of artificial fermentation is reached. To fully ferment the tea takes between forty-five and sixty days. With compression and drying, it’s three months.

Shou piling actually happens in two phases, wet and dry. The first, wet-piling, is more a fermentation of bacteria breaking down the cells of the puerh. This piling is much deeper, usually a meter. During the second, drier piling, the thermal blanket is removed (if one was used) and the piles are thinned out (usually to around 20 cm). This is where the yeasts and molds become more active in the tea. If the tea is destined to be loose-leaf shou, then the tea will be stirred and dried like this thoroughly. If the shou is to be compressed, the second stage of piling will be cut short while the tea is still slightly damp.

Shou tea has to be compressed before it dries—right after the piling. Some factories do compress aged loose-leaf shou later, but doing so always damages the quality of the tea. Once shou tea dries, the leaves are tight and twisted from the heavy fermentation, so getting them to stick in a cake at a later date requires a much heavier, hot-

THE PROCESSING OF MAOCHA

採摘
Plucking

萎凋
Withering

殺青
De-enzyming

揉捻
Rolling

晒干
Sun-drying



THE PROCESSING OF SHOU

分級
Sorting

堆積
Artificial Fermentation
Piling

干燥
Drying

蒸氣
Steaming

壓制成磚
Compression

裝箱包裝
Packaging

ter and deeper steaming than with other puerh, which affects the quality of the tea, lending it boiled-tea flavors. It is, therefore, always better to compress shou right after piling. If one wanted to use aged tea, it would be better to age the *maocha* as sheng and then pile/compress it later, when it has matured to the desired age.

A Brief History of Shou

Deciding when to begin the history of shou puerh depends on how we define shou. If shou is any artificially fermented puerh, then it is actually quite old, since aboriginals have been artificially fermenting puerh tea in many different ways for centuries: roasting it, burying it, stuffing it in bamboo, etc. Different tribes had different ways of consuming puerh, but it was rare to drink it young and green, as young sheng puerh is astringent and considered “cold” in Traditional

Chinese Medicine, and therefore, not so healthy for most Chinese people who have “cold” constitutions. Consequently, most tribes developed their own ways of artificially fermenting, roasting or boiling puerh to make it more palatable. For the sake of this discussion, however, we are going to restrict the term “shou” to its modern sense of piled puerh that has gone through *wo dui*.

Piled shou puerh is a modern sub-genre, beginning in the 1960s. In most books and articles you will find either the dates 1972, 1973 or 1974 listed as the beginning of shou puerh. There was some confusion, but recent research into historical records has verified that 1973 is the correct date. 1973 is the date the government licensed the first commercial production of shou puerh tea for sale, starting with the Kunming Factory. However, research and under-the-table batches were being produced as early as 1965 (perhaps even earlier). It took the factories

a number of years to demonstrate a consistency, safety and quality that the government would license (all factories were state-run during the Communist Era, of course). We actually have a ‘60s shou brick here at the Center. Most of the batches from that time were done for research, though it is likely that the factories tried to mitigate costs by selling some of this tea illegally as well.

Sheng puerh takes seventy years to reach full maturity. That number is not arbitrary. As sheng puerh ages further and further, the aging process itself begins to slow down. The cells crumble onto one another and the fermentation therefore relaxes. Even a beginner can tell the difference between a one- and three-year-old puerh, just as the difference between five and ten years is obvious. But the differences between ten, fifteen and twenty years become harder to distinguish, requiring more experience with aged and aging puerh. After that, even the experts have to start gauging the tea in terms of decades.

At seventy years, the physical appearance of the liquor will not change anymore: black in the center, moving out into browns, then auburn and maroon, with a golden ring at the edge. The tea will change beyond that, gaining depth in Qi and flavor, but those changes will be for the next generation. Of course, puerh can be enjoyed long before full maturity—even thirty-year-old puerh is marvelous. Nonetheless, it is easy to understand why producers, distributors and consumers would look for ways to speed up a process that is measured in decades or even generations.

The process of speeding up fermentation began long ago with wet storage. Puerh lovers, especially in Hong Kong, would carefully store their tea for a few years in warehouses near the sea or in basements with very high humidity, rotating it to higher, drier warehouses occasionally. This “traditional storage” would greatly speed up the fermentation process, decreasing the quality of the tea but allowing people to enjoy it much sooner. In those days, the raw material used to make puerh was very inexpensive (especially compared to these days), so they didn’t mind such compromises. Factories wanted to speed this up even more, inspired

by the artificial fermentation that was already very established in the black tea industry of next-door Guangxi, which produces Liu Bao. Guangxi and Yunnan had already been exchanging raw material and ideas for decades, so it came as no surprise that researchers from factories in Yunnan would one day show up in Liu Bao to study the artificial fermentation there. Of course, they had to adapt the process, because the varieties, trees and leaves of Yunnan are different from Liu Bao and other black teas, and also, perhaps more importantly, the microbial ecology is very different. The “microbial terroir” is why various kinds of beer in Germany, wines in France or even Mao Tai alcohol in China are not reproducible elsewhere, despite many attempts to forge famous examples. The same is true of cheeses, which will be very different when fermented in different places, even if the milk and cultures are the same.

The main difference between the piling of shou and other black teas is that the piles are deeper, wetter and hotter. The thicker, larger leaves of large-leaf Yunnanese puerh require a deeper pile, and the wetness perhaps was inspired by the “traditional” wet

storage—shou puerh is, in fact, the wettest of wet storage. Wetter piles also work faster. Finally, the factories in Yunnan added the thermal blanket to increase the speed and degree of fermentation.

It may go without saying that the puerh factories were not successful in reproducing in a month what Nature makes in seventy years. Like “traditional” wet storage, the shou process of artificially fermenting (piling/composting) the tea reduces its quality in terms of flavor, and even more so in Qi, sacrificing much of the energy of the mountain and tree. What they were successful in achieving was adding complexity to puerh by creating a sub-genre that needs to be understood and evaluated on its own terms. You really cannot compare shou to sheng in any meaningful way, whether the sheng is young or aged.

A Dying Art

In recent years, much of the skill and craft that goes into making fine shou puerh has been lost. Overall, the puerh market has gone through many changes over the last fifteen years.

Genres & Puerh

Over the years, we have talked extensively about our unique categorization of tea, which is important because it helps you explore and understand tea better. Traditionally, there were six genres of tea: white, yellow, green, black, red and oolong. Categories are always arbitrary, ultimately, and only useful in communication and education. And when our understanding of the world changes, the world itself changes, or perhaps both, then our categories also need to shift. And that is what has happened in the tea world: change. Puerh used to reside comfortably in the black tea category (not red, which is often called “black” in the West), but that was back when all the puerh consumed was either naturally fermented (aged) sheng or artificial-

ly fermented shou tea. All the tea was dark, in other words. Nowadays, however, millions of tea lovers are drinking younger sheng, which doesn’t really fit in any category: it’s a bit like a green tea, but it is more withered/oxidized than most green tea. Due to the unique terroir of Yunnan; the very special trees used to produce puerh; and its unique history, processing, aging and appreciation, we have found that students of tea understand the genres of tea much more quickly and clearly when we separate puerh as a seventh genre. And the fact that students of tea understand tea better and more expediently is all the argument we need for presenting the genres in this way! (This is an important review for tea lovers who wish to explore tea more deeply!)

七種類的茶

尊重最古老的茶



Sheng puerh has also changed a lot, which has affected shou puerh as well. As more and more tea lovers have started consuming young, green sheng puerh, the criteria for evaluating sheng puerh has changed: Back in the day, all sheng puerh was evaluated based on its candidacy for aging; its “age-ability,” in other words. But nowadays, more sheng is consumed young, which means tea lovers now evaluate it on its “drink-ability,” which, for us, is to say the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea. And the two sets of criteria don’t always line up, meaning that a tea that is great for long-term aging is not necessarily great for drinking young, and vice versa. Many famous vintages of puerh, like Red Mark (紅印), were notoriously bitter when young. Usually, if a tea is to be aged long-term, it must be bitter and astringent, strong and vibrant. If a runner is already weakening five kilometers into a forty-two kilometer marathon, he probably won’t go the distance. This has all resulted in great changes to puerh production, as pro-

ducers move towards meeting a demand for drinkable young sheng tea. They have begun to process their puerh more like green tea (or sometimes even oolong, which we call “poolong”). Such tea may taste nice now, as it is fresh, but isn’t worth taking up valuable storage space.

The second influencing factor that has had a tremendous impact on sheng and shou production over the last decade is that the cost of quality *maocha* from nice trees has skyrocketed. Old-growth raw material is extremely rare and expensive, so the overall cost of cakes has gone through the roof, making it hard for tea lovers to age their own sheng. This change has also indirectly affected the production of shou, which is the main topic of our discussion.

As we discussed earlier, shou puerh is never as good as sheng. All things equal (the same raw material) the piling of the tea leaves takes away some of the essence. Sheng will always be stronger, cleaner and more vibrant—

filled with the energy of the mountain and forest the tea came from. Also, natural fermentation and oxidation that happens slowly over time breaks the cells down in a much more gentle, smooth and clean way, as opposed to piling and covering with a wet blanket, which creates heat and moisture, forcefully composting the tea in a short period of time. Shou and sheng are apples and oranges: you cannot use the same criteria to evaluate them, as they are very distinct categories of puerh tea. But, once again, all things equal, sheng is better, which is why it is much more expensive than shou. The difference in quality is reflected in the market price, in other words. And that is as it should be. Sheng cakes are much more expensive than shou, especially if the tea is from good trees.

The quality of puerh tea is measured differently from other genres of tea. Most tea is qualified by some ratio between the terroir/garden/trees and the processing skills of the producer: leaves and processing, in other words.



Puerh, on the other hand, is evaluated by the mountain and its reputation (sometimes warranted; other times, partly hype), the kind of garden and the age of the trees. Since the cost of good *maocha* from nice mountains, gardens and older trees is so high, if a producer tried to create a shou tea from this material, she would have to sell it for the same price as the sheng cake, which very few customers would pay. In fact, she may have to sell it for more, since, as we discussed with regards to shou processing, shou has an extra piling step in post-production and can, therefore, be even more expensive, as a result of the extra labor costs. Also, there is a genuine loss of quality that happens through the piling, which is hard to justify when the raw material is so rare and expensive.

The end result of all these changes is that there is very little shou puerh intentionally produced these days. Most shou is just a blend of plantation tea grown and produced cheaply. Even if it does come from slightly better gardens, it is still often just the leftovers of whatever sheng puerh didn't sell that

year or from the previous year. These trends have further widened the gap between the quality of sheng and shou. Very few producers start out with a desire to create a shou cake, let alone the skills to execute—though there are exceptions, like our Tea of the Month.

The Gongfu of Shou

There are three main skills that go into the production of a fine shou puerh, which are unfortunately becoming rarer, as they aren't passed down within factories anymore, as lower costs and increased productivity have become the aims of the larger factories, while smaller boutiques have focused their energies more and more on sheng puerh production. To make a nice shou puerh, the producer has to start with that aim: evaluating shou based on its own terms, with heart and soul bent on creating the best possible tea within those parameters. This means that rather than seeing shou puerh as a second-class citizen, one needs to stop comparing it to sheng puerh al-

together. We know that we said over and over that, all things equal, sheng is better tea, but in terms of trying to create a beautiful shou, a comparison to sheng has no bearing. The producer should instead be focused on what makes a great shou tea, and on honing the skills needed to create one, which we will explore in this section.

The first and most important skill needed to make any fine puerh tea is selecting the leaves, which means sourcing good quality, clean, chemical-free tea from a nice mountain, a good garden and the oldest trees possible. Finding organic shou puerh has also become more difficult, as factories resort to using more plantation tea and/or blending lots of tea together in the piling. Back in the day, *maocha* was very cheap, so the factories could really focus on creating fine shou tea as a separate endeavor from sheng, following its own criteria. They knew a lot more about which kinds of leaves, blended or not, result in nice, creamy, rich and delicious shou puerh. Sourcing good raw material forms the basis of all fine tea.



The second skill needed to create fine shou puerh is to add starters from previous batches to the piling. This creates long-term bacteria strains, much like sourdough cultures, which can potentially be passed down for centuries. In the '70s and '80s, factories had strains for certain blends/kinds of raw material, which were passed from batch to batch, creating the ideal fermentation for each kind of tea. The microbes can be added as a starter in three ways: Firstly, the producers can add “slur,” which is the dark water that runs off the piles after they are sprayed, covered and fermented. This thick liquid is full of microbes. Secondly, they can also add the microbe-dense balls, called “*cha tou* (茶頭)” that form at the bottom of piles due to the heat and pressure. Traditionally, there were fewer *cha tou* due to more skillful stirring of the piles, but it is impossible to prevent them from forming at all, and they make a great starter for future batches. Finally, microbes can be added as a starter by simply saving some of the wet leaves from one batch and adding them to

the next. The preservation of certain colonies of microbes for certain types/blends of raw material (*maocha*), improving over time, creates the best fermentation. After all, it is the microbes that are doing all the work in making shou tea, and so a healthy colony will, of course, result in a better tea. If the microbial colonies are off in any way, the tea will also have off flavors, as with any fermented product in the world.

The third skill needed to create fine shou is the skillful management of the piling process itself. This starts with knowing how much water to add, when to stir the leaves and how often, as well as when to add or remove the thermal blanket, depending on the ambient temperature. More importantly, skillful piling is about understanding the desired degree of fermentation relative to the leaves being piled. Different blends/types of leaves need to be piled to a different degree. Nowadays, as fewer producers focus on shou puerh, these skills are being lost (except the skill of recognizing when shou is completely fermented, though some factories have lost even that, going be-

yond the time the tea is as fermented as it can be). It is much easier to fully ferment the tea for forty-five to sixty days, no matter what kind of leaves are used. However, this is not ideal for fine shou. The best shou teas are fermented more lightly than this, and are stopped intentionally at a precise degree of fermentation that is ideal for the type of tea being piled. As we discussed earlier (more than once), shou is lower quality than sheng (again, all things equal), because the piling process alters the tea, and some of the natural purity of the old trees and the mountain forest where the tea grew is lost as a result of this processing. Obviously, if the fermentation is done to a lesser degree, these changes are also less aggressive, preserving more of the natural essence of the tea. Knowing when and how to stop the piling is a skill that requires a deep understanding of different types of leaves, as well as knowledge and experience with fermentation. As with all stages in tea production, piling should enhance the tea and leave no trace, so the best piling should not result in a piling flavor.





Appreciating Shou Puerh

珍賞熟茶

Flavor (wei dao, 味道/xiang qi, 香氣): Shou puerh should be earthy, loamy and yet clean. If it is aged, it often tastes of mushrooms, wild forests, leather or tobacco, Chinese herbs or sandalwood. The liquor should be clean, without any murkiness. The flavors should be pleasantly complex, full-bodied and long-lasting. Shou should be dark and rich, and remind you of long hikes through an autumn forest, the leaves fermenting along the paths you tread. This is the most subjective of the criteria we use to evaluate shou, as flavor is often based on our memories and personal preferences.

Thickness (hou du, 厚度): Fine shou is thick. The best shou teas are creamy, milky and oily, coating the mouth and throat. In the first few steepings, you should be able to see the thickness just by appearance alone. If you pass the liquor between two porcelain cups, you can see the thickness, as the tea clings to the sides of the cup and spreads like milk. “Viscosity” is another way of saying this.

Smoothness (hua du, 滑度): Smoothness is the most important characteristic for evaluating any tea. Fine tea should be smooth in your mouth, comfortable and clean. It should roll back smoothly and go down smoothly, without any pinch in the throat. The tea shouldn’t bite anywhere or leave an impression of roughness on the palate, tongue or throat. Try rolling the tea around your mouth to see if it stays together or comes apart in your mouth.

Mellowness (chun du, 醇度): This criteria has everything to do with “piling flavor (dui wei, 堆味),” caused by fully-fermenting the tea. “Mellowness” is the opposite of this pindy, ammonia kind of flavor. Mellowness also means the shou is free of any off-putting flavors or sensations due to improper piling—musty, funky or fermentation flavors. A mellow shou is clean and billowy, like clouds in the mouth. It should be soft and subtle without any unnecessary or outlying flavors.

Hui Gan (回甘): This tea term is often misunderstood—even by Chinese people. It is a very specific kind of jargon, so it should come as no surprise that people without experience in tea are often confused about it, the way a layman may use scientific jargon inappropriately. Some people think this has to do with sweetness, but that is actually another term (*hui tian*, 回甜). “*Gan*” refers to a minty, cool sensation in the mouth, like after sucking a peppermint, brushing your teeth or breathing outdoors on a cold winter day. Chinese people traditionally found this sensation quite pleasant. “*Hui*” literally means “to remember.” It refers to when the sensation of *gan* lingers on the breath after swallowing the tea. If you haven’t yet sensitized yourself to *gan*, try blowing out of an O-shaped mouth after swallowing the tea to see if a nice wintry mintiness is lingering on your breath, and then ask yourself if you find this sensation to be pleasant.

Qi (氣): Qi can also be tricky, as talking about the Qi of a tea gives you the impression that you are in some kind of solid state and the tea is traveling through you. Actually, once you swallow the tea, it is you that moves—your body is moving. Also, some people mistake gross sensations like heat or a caffeine rush to be Qi. When we speak about Qi, we are talking about where and how the tea enters the subtle body—the movement of that energy. In general, a shou tea should enter the subtle body through the chest and cause gross sensations like warmth and an overall sense of ease, relaxation and comfort, like slipping into a nice bath.

AGED & AGING SHOU PUERH

Many shou puerh teas from the '70s and '80s would taste like an aged sheng to the inexperienced puerh drinker, because tea sellers knew that many of their customers would age the shou tea. Since the blends were intentionally produced using fine-quality raw material, and then artificially fermented to a much lesser degree, the newly produced shou tea was still “green,” especially compared to all the fully-fermented shou puerh teas sold these days. This meant that the tea still had room to naturally ferment. It was worth storing these teas long-term, in other words, as they would grow and change over time—fermenting and oxidizing like a sheng, only to a lesser degree. And this is the main factor in storing shou puerh even today.

To properly store shou puerh, a tea lover should learn to recognize the degree of fermentation used. Ideally, one would have access to fine shou puerh, produced using the three skills we discussed earlier (like our Tea of the Month, for example), but that may not always be possible. Fully-fermented puerh is often “pondy,” tasting of ammonia or pond water, due to the long, aggressive piling process, which results in the production of many gases as the tea is forcefully composted over forty-five to sixty days. Such tea is not suitable for long-term storage. Since it was already artificially fermented to a high degree, there isn't much room for it to change over the long haul. There is little left in the leaves for natural fermentation and oxidation slowly over time, in other words. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't age fully-fermented shou.

The best option for most of the fully-fermented shou teas is to mellow them out. “Mellowing” is so relevant in today's puerh world, full of such shou, that it is even a criteria of all the shou tea reviews we conduct for various tea magazines. Of course, one should start with organic, clean shou, even if it is piled unskillfully. Then, you age it for around ten to fifteen years. There is no point in going beyond this. Ten or fifteen years is enough to mellow out the tea, which means that it loses the

pondy, “piling flavor (*dui wei*, 堆味)” it had when it was young. It will become smoother, thicker, creamier and gentler as well. The aggressive piling of most shou puerh teas makes them rough, so mellowing them out will result in a much more enjoyable tea liquor.

If you find intentionally-produced shou puerh that is artificially fermented to a proper degree, then you will have found a candidate for long-term storage. Such tea will grow finer and finer over time—the older, the better, in fact. Our Tea of the Month fits into this category, and so does Inner Path, which some of you will remember. (It would be great if everyone shared some more examples on the Global Tea Hut app this month!)

Whichever kind of shou you are storing, it should be stored like all other teas: in a cool, dark place that is clean and free of aromas. For that reason, the kitchen is always the worst place to store any tea, as the air is full of oils, spices and other smells. Find a nice, quiet place that is consistent in temperature and is dark. Puerh needs some humidity and airflow, which most other teas do not. A fluctuating humidity that rises and drops seasonally is ideal, with a minimum of 60% humidity, which is the low end for puerh (this means indoor humidity, not based on an outdoor hygrometer).

It is important to keep shou puerh away from all other kinds of tea. The strong piling/artificial fermentation aromas of shou puerh are notoriously detrimental to all other kinds of tea, especially delicate teas like green, white, yellow or young sheng puerh. Shou should have a cabinet all to itself, kept clean and apart from all other teas, though you can store both kinds of shou together—those you are storing long-term and those you are mellowing out.

The more puerh stored together, the better—a warehouse will produce way better tea than a few cakes in a cabinet. Traditionally, we store all puerh as at least a “*tong* (筒),” which is seven cakes wrapped in bamboo skin and an extra cake left loose (eight cakes

in total). The bamboo skin protects the seven cakes in the *tong*. The extra cake is for tasting over time. Tea aged in a whole, unbroken cake is way better for the long run, and when it is time to drink a tea, breaking the cake up completely and storing the pieces in a jar for at least a month will result in a much better liquor. After a long period of storage, this is important, since the center of the cake has not been exposed to any oxygen throughout that time. Breaking a cake up makes for more even, smoother tea. This is why we need the “tester” cake: to determine when it is time to dig into a tea (when it has aged enough). Then we can break a whole cake up and store it in a jar for consumption, carefully closing up the *tong* to protect the six remaining cakes, and so on, until the tea is gone...

茶 This is a 1965 shou brick produced by the Kunming Tea Factory. It is evidence that they were experimenting with piling and other techniques of artificial fermentation long before they were licensed to sell the tea in 1973. The brick came from a retired, old puerhian, who got it from an employee in the late 1970s and kept it ever since.

老和熟成熟茶



茶 Spirit 神

Our Tea of the Month is part of our Holistic Healing Cakes series for this year's Light Meets Life fundraiser, which are each created for the three energies that make up the human being, according to Traditional Chinese Medicine: Jing (精), Qi (氣) and Shen (神). This is the Shen cake, representing the spirit. It is the most cosmic of the three, connecting you to the Celestial energy that brings perspective and balance to a healthy life.

Spirit is one of the best shou teas we have ever had. It comes from an organic garden in Mengku (勐庫). That tea was sheng *maocha*, whereas this tea has been piled. It is a good garden, with some old-growth trees. It is an eco-arboreal garden, which we define as the gardens nearer to the village, which aren't as good as forest gardens, but are still certified organic, bio-diverse, often have old trees and are an example of village farmers and Nature working together cooperatively.

This tea is also a great example of all the principles we have been discussing for how to create a great shou tea. It was intentionally produced—we chose this tea specifically, as it is an affordable *maocha* from a nice garden. This already makes it extremely rare in the world of shou tea. It was then piled with the introduction of microbes from previous pilings, and done so to a very specific degree: We wanted to maintain as much of the essence of these beautiful trees, leaves and environment in the finished tea as possible, so we requested that the piling be light. Overall, this tea was piled for around twenty-five days, which is much less than the fully-fermented cycles of forty-five to sixty days that most tea producers are following. This means that the tea is still slightly green, especially around the edges. The skillful piling means that there is no “piling flavor (*dui wei*, 堆味),” even though it is a new shou puerh.

This also means that Spirit is a great candidate for long-term storage. It won't just mellow out like fully-fermented shou, losing the piony piling flavors, but it will actually age and change like a sheng puerh, only to a lesser extent. It will grow deeper and develop all the wonderful flavors and aromas of aged puerh that we know and love, like Chinese herbs, plums, ginseng and that “ancient places” aroma. We are excited to store this tea as a community and taste it throughout its journey.

Spirit is a deep and powerful shou. It draws you inward and connects you to the natural wisdom in your heart. We have found it to be calming, with both earthy flavors and energy. It is dark and rich, with a lessened, though still very present, vibrancy, like you get from a young sheng. We love the flavor, smoothness and Qi of this tea, along with its future potential to become something absolutely extraordinary. As you drink this tea, bowl by bowl or cup by cup, you will find a deep warmth radiating from within. The Chinese say that when the Shen, the Spirit, descends to the heart, the eyes light up, which is why tea is said to “brighten the eyes (明目).” And this tea does brighten the eyes in a very powerful way, changing the world, or at least the way you see it!



Sidehandle

Gongfu

Water: spring water or best bottled
Fire: coals, infrared or gas
Heat: as hot as possible, fish-eye, 95° C
Brewing Methods: sidehandle or gongfu (they make different brews)
Steeping: longer, flash, flash, then growing (you can get three flashes as well)
Patience: thirty steepings

茶 Heat is going to be the most essential aspect of brewing this tea well. Crinkled up, fermented leaves need strong fire to penetrate the leaves' cells and elicit the essence.

Brewing Tips

熟茶最佳讚賞是深黑和濃郁

Shou tea is much better appreciated dark and strong. This means you should use slightly more leaves than you are used to, and/or steep the tea for longer. Shou puerh is nice when it is thick, dark and creamy. It should have the consistency of milk. Since this tea wasn't fermented as long as most shou teas, however, you may want to use fewer leaves than you normally do when brewing shou puerh—more leaves than other teas and fewer than most shou puerh, in other words.

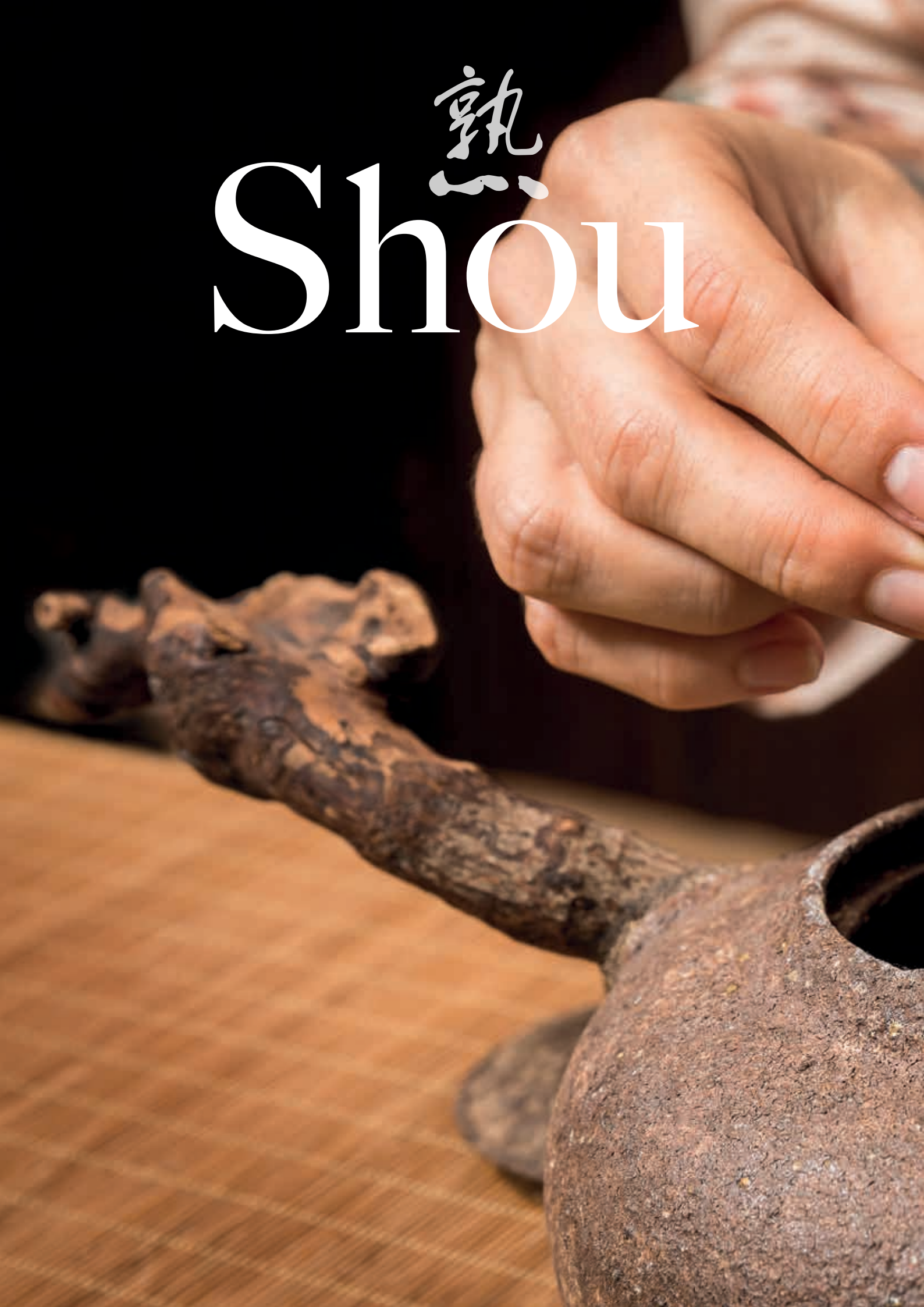
Ideally, this tea should be brewed gongfu or as sidehandle bowl tea. (You can use the Sidehandle Ceremony Guide from last month's issue.) Temperature will play a very important role in preparing this month's tea well. Shou tea, black tea and aged sheng puerh are the kinds of tea that require the most heat, in fact. The leaves are crumpled from the aging and/or artificial fermentation and the cells have all collapsed on themselves. We need a deep, penetrating heat to draw the essence from such leaves. Also, the liquor of such teas is complex and rich, and we therefore want the tea to be as full-bodied and deep as possible. The liquor should be black in the very center, moving into brown, then maroon, and finally, have a golden ring around the edge of the cup or bowl. You should taste many flavors in these teas, from earthiness to Chinese herbs, sweetness to mustiness.

The ideal would be to use charcoal for this tea. Now is a great time to start your journey with charcoal, which means true fire, as opposed to just heat, if you have been thinking of lighting that fire. If not charcoal, we find that gas or infrared are best when heat is paramount, as it is with this month's tea. Charcoal fire also includes a lot of infrared, and we have found that infrared stoves are the best option amongst the electrical choices. But nothing will ever substitute for real fire!

Since puerh like this enters the subtle body through the stomach and chest, shou puerh like this month's tea is best enjoyed in larger cups or bowls. It is better to take big drinks. Oolong, on the other hand, is delicate and enters the subtle body upwards through the nasal cavity, so it is better to drink from small cups and take the smallest sips possible. This month's tea, however, is for gulping. It is nice to have a big, full cup of piping, steaming hot shou puerh, especially if the weather is starting to get colder where you live.

熟茶在大杯子或碗裡更好品

熟
Shou



Puerh

普洱



A SHOU PUERH JOURNAL



熟茶記事

The perspectives of those who have been drinking and working with puerh tea for many decades are invaluable. They may not be celebrated authors, but tea merchants like Mr. Ho have been on the ground through all the drastic changes that puerh has gone through since the early 1980s. His “journal” of shou puerh is an eyewitness account, not based on historical scholarship, but rather, on personal experience.



茶人: Ho King Shing (何景成)

The Basics of Shou

Historically, Yunnan large-leaf tea would firstly be sun-dried to make *maocha*. After processing, the *maocha* would become what we call Yunnan puerh tea. If those puerh teas were not being consumed immediately but were being stored for years, we would then call them aged teas. Nowadays, tea producers often further process *maocha* by the procedure of *wo dui* (渥堆), and we would also classify those teas as puerh. If the tea leaves were sold as they were after being processed, they would be called loose-leaf puerh. If the tea leaves were further processed and compressed into the form of a cake, a bowl or a brick, we would call them compressed puerh tea. Different kinds of Yunnan compressed teas have different names in different places. However, I believe what really matters is that you understand the classification of those teas.

Yunnan puerh tea is commonly classified into sheng tea—sub-categorized as “dry-stored” and “wet/traditionally-stored” sheng puerh—and the second main category, shou tea. Some people nowadays prefer to classify puerh tea by the location in which the teas were stored: Yunnan, Malaysia, Guangzhou, Hong Kong or Taiwan, for example.

Before 1985, the production and supply of all tea leaves in the Mainland was organized by the Tea Corporation of China. There were production schedules or sales targets for every tea planter, tea producer and tea

seller. Each and every process you can imagine about tea (including planting, processing, producing and selling) in Mainland China was implemented based on the annual production schedule set by the Tea Corporation of China.

During this period, Yunnan compressed puerh tea was commonly classified into three categories: border-sale tea, domestic market tea and export tea. Border-sale teas were sold to the western border areas of China, including Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, Xinjiang, etc.; domestic market teas were sold to Sichuan, Hunan, Guangdong, etc.; while export teas were mainly exported to Europe. Most of the border-sale teas and domestic market teas were sheng puerh, while most of the teas exported to Europe were shou puerh.

Tea retailers in Guangdong Province found that sheng puerh must be aged for a long period of time before they could be sold in the market. In response to this problem, the Yunnan Province Import and Export Corporation arranged for the staff members of the three state-owned tea producers in Yunnan, namely the Kunming Tea Factory, the Xiaguan Tea Factory and the Menghai Tea Factory, to learn the production method of shou tea in Guangdong.

It was hoped that by learning the *wo dui* technique from Guangdong tea producers, the time required to age sheng puerh could be shortened. However, all three of the tea produc-

ers failed in their first attempt, which brought them back to Guangdong again in 1971. This time, the Xiaguan Tea Factory succeeded in producing shou puerh tea. However, as this factory was focusing on producing border-sale, large-leaf sheng teas, it decided not to start the production of shou puerh immediately. The Kunming Tea Factory was the first runner-up to succeed in the production of shou teas, and it became the first Yunnan tea factory to produce and export shou tea bricks. That’s the reason why the public wrongly assumed the Kunming Tea Factory was the first tea factory to learn the craft of shou tea production.

We all know that the Menghai Tea Factory, the loser in the above race, produces the largest variety of shou puerh teas with the best quality. If I were to guess the reasons behind this, I would say that the advantage of the Menghai Tea Factory lies in its geographic location. Xishuangbanna, where the Menghai Tea Factory is located, has a sub-tropical climate, and both the temperature and moisture level in the region are suitable for the *wo dui* process to take place. It is agreed that the shou puerh teas produced by the Menghai Tea Factory are the best, and both the flavor and after-taste of these shou puerh are beloved by tea lovers, so much so that it has come to be known as the “classic” shou flavor that tea lovers seek out in the shou puerh they purchase.

Even after the tea industry in Mainland China had undergone reformation and was opened up in 1985, shou puerh tea was still being tightly controlled by the government. Without the permission of the Yunnan government, tea producers (including stated-owned producers) were not allowed to process and sell shou puerh teas. This was done to ensure that the shou puerh teas exported to Europe were stable in quality.

In the late 1980s, the government started to loosen its grip on the shou tea industry in Yunnan. Nowadays, most tea factories in Yunnan are producing shou puerh teas. However, due to the lack of techniques in the *wo dui* process, combined with lack of proper control in the quality of raw materials, temperature level and moisture level, most of those factories are unable

to produce shou teas that are stable in quality. The shou puerh teas produced by those tea factories are often under-fermented, over-fermented or unevenly-fermented.

I have often heard our fellow tea lovers say that some puerh teas were “mixed.” For example, they would say a puerh was 30% sheng mixed with 70% shou, while the other one was 20% sheng mixed with 80% shou. This was not the case, at least not for the teas produced in Yunnan before 2000. The truth is that the technicians responsible for the fermentation process of shou teas would sometimes decide to dry the teas earlier, stopping the fermentation sooner, based on the types of leaves they were using and what their goals were in creating a shou puerh. Some small tea factories in Yunnan unwisely believed there was some

truth in the myth, and they started producing compressed mixed teas in the early 2000s. In fact, the production method of shou puerh was a secret between the tea producers in Yunnan, and only a handful of technicians who were responsible for the fermentation process would know the tricks of the trade. In recent years, the representatives of tea companies from other areas have often requested to visit the tea producers in Yunnan, and some of them naïvely thought that they could master the craft in one visit. I believe we should all be concerned about the consequences of letting such tea producers make shou puerh themselves. The piling process involve the fermentation of bacteria and other microbes, so there are obviously health factors to consider when producing shou puerh tea, especially on a large scale.

MODERN SHOU PRODUCTION IN A LARGE FACTORY

I am really grateful that the Changtai Tea Factory in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, agreed to let me take photos to record the production process of shou puerh teas so that our fellow readers can learn more about Yunnan shou puerh tea. The Changtai Tea Factory was established in 1999. In the beginning, the business focused on producing wild arbor puerh. As per the request of customers, the factory started producing shou teas, and shou puerh has become one of the hot-selling products for the factory. In the past, the fermentation plant of the Changtai Tea Factory was located in Jinggu County, Simao Prefecture. Owing to the constantly increasing demand for their products, the business has built a larger fermentation plant near the Dadu River. It is estimated that the annual production capacity of the company is 1,000 tons of loose-leaf shou puerh.

Before fermenting the puerh teas, the factory needs to prepare the *maocha*. The *maocha* can be wild arbor puerh, planted puerh or a mix of the two, depending on the requirements of customers. The tea leaves used are generally thick and old, unless otherwise requested by the customer. The

shou puerh produced can be classified as spring harvest, summer harvest and autumn harvest (also commonly called “*gu hua cha*, 穀花茶”), according to the season in which the tea leaves are collected. For each harvest, six to fourteen tons of tea leaves are fermented. Before fermenting the *maocha*, the fermentation plant must be cleaned thoroughly. The size of the fermentation area depends on the amount of *maocha* being processed, while the thickness of the *maocha* should not exceed two feet, regardless of the amount of tea being fermented.

Before the fermentation process begins, the water content of the *maocha* is generally less than 10%. During the process, water is added constantly to the tea, until the water content level reaches 25%. Throughout this time, the technicians keep turning the tea until its condition meets the requirement of the customers. After that, the tea is flattened and dried. Generally speaking, it takes three months to complete the fermentation, drying and compression process.



發
酵
的
神
奇

一個看不見世界在我們下面

茶道

Well-Fermented Shou Puerh

So, how can you determine how well a shou puerh is fermented?

茶 A shou puerh tea should have dark amber, maroon and golden colors in its liquor. The liquor should be clear, and the tea very patient (you can steep it many times). The brewed leaves should be soft and deep red in color.

茶 An under-fermented shou puerh tea gives a lighter amber color in its liquor. Like a perfectly-fermented shou puerh, the liquor is clear, but it is not as patient. The brewed leaves are soft and somewhere between rusty red and dark green. Such tea can be great if the tea is intended to be aged or comes from old-growth raw material.

茶 If a shou puerh is over-fermented to a stage where it is almost carbonized, the liquor will then yields a dark black/brown color even with only a few leaves in the pot. The liquor is also clear, and the brewed leaves are soft and black. You should note that this tea does not respond well to being steeped for too long.

茶 If a shou puerh is so over-fermented that it is carbonized, the liquor is clear and chestnut-red in color. The brewed leaves are hard and black. This tea, like the one we discussed above, cannot be steeped for too long or it will be very tannic and bitter.

茶 Shou puerh fermentation must be done with skill. The piling should be adapted to suit the raw material used, and done with a specific goal in mind that corresponds to the material. The fermentation is controlled by the size and depth of the piles, how often they are stirred, the starter batch of bacteria from previous ferments, and the humidity/temperature of the piling room.



THE ART OF FERMENTATION



發酵的藝術

Here we continue with our exploration of the history of shou puerh, seen through the eyes of those on the ground, working and living with this tea. Understanding shou puerh starts with understanding what shou puerh really is. If you define it as any puerh that is artificially fermented, then such tea dates back centuries; the modern method of piling, on the other hand, was researched in the 1960s and brought to market in the '70s.



茶人: Chen Jr-Tung (陳智同)

The Beginnings of Shou

The shou puerh that we can see in the market nowadays are all produced by using a process called “wet-pile fermentation (*wo dui*, 渥堆).” The state-owned tea producers in Yunnan have been producing shou puerh by this method since 1973, after they learned this craft from the Guangdong Tea Import and Export Co., Ltd.

Even though they were able to learn the techniques in Guangdong, the journey of Yunnan tea producers to perfect the craft of artificial fermentation can largely be described as a trial-and-error process, due to the unique temperature and moisture levels in Yunnan. Through numerous experiments, tea producers finally made the necessary adjustments and were able to produce artificially fermented puerh of a high quality. Nowadays, shou puerh is widely considered a more affordable version of puerh tea, and it plays an important role in supplying enough puerh teas to satisfy the market.

You would probably like to know whether the “wet-pile fermentation” that we discussed earlier was the first artificial fermentation process to be tested in Yunnan. While I don’t have a definite answer, my guess is that it was not. I believe that the tea producers in Yunnan had done a lot of unsuccessful experiments on producing shou teas, before they went to Guangdong to learn the craft in 1973. Maybe the other methods that the tea producers tested were less cost-effective, or those methods would make it difficult to maintain product quality and stability.

What we can be sure of is that the tea producers in Yunnan failed to find a way of mass-producing shou teas, and that’s why they went to Guangdong in search of a new path. Thus, even though the wet-pile fermentation method may not be the best fermentation method in terms of quality or mouthfeel, it is naturally the best way for tea producers to mass-produce shou teas with low cost, high quality and stability.

There were articles written to record the fermentation process of puerh that had taken place in Yunnan prior to the 1970s. The following paragraph about the history of the fermentation process in the 1930s is excerpted from the article “A brief summary of the tea industry in Menghai,” written by tea expert Li Fuyi in 1939:

“(The tea leaves) would be piled, in order to make wet-pile tea. After one day’s time, the wet-piled tea would then be fermented for a second time. As the moisture level of the leaves was still quite high, the tea would be fermented for a third time. Some yellow mold would then begin to grow on the tea leaves. Some tea lovers would then describe the teas to be in perfect condition.”

According to *A Book of Puerh Tea*, the Menghai Tea Factory used a fermentation process called “steaming fermentation” to produce shou teas. Also, according to Cao Zhenxing, who was a plant manager of the Menghai Tea Factory, they had been experi-

menting with the post-fermentation of puerh teas since 1969. They originally planned to mass-produce those teas for Tibetan consumption, but abandoned that idea due to the lack of success with the fermentation techniques at that time. On the other hand, the steaming fermentation method was also adopted in producing a tea called “Yunnan Qing,” which was sold to Hong Kong. It proved that the state-owned tea producers in Yunnan had been producing shou teas before learning the wet-pile fermentation process in Guangdong.

In a memo from the Xiaguan Tea Factory, it was written that Yunnan ceased the production of round-shaped tea cakes during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), to concentrate on the production of Seven Sons Cakes (*Yunnan Chi Tse Beeng Cha*, 雲南七子餅茶). These tea cakes were classified into sheng and shou cakes. In making these cakes, the *maocha* was first mixed before going through a series of processes, including sorting, selecting, steaming and shaping.

After studying these historical records, we know that the artificial fermentation process of shou puerh teas has a long history. The quality and mouthfeel of a shou puerh largely depends on controlling the temperature and moisture levels, as well as the environment of the fermentation plant. Thus, how the tea producers ferment shou puerh is, ultimately, decided by the market, as the taste of end consumers changes throughout time, and an experienced market means better tea.

Wet-pile fermentation has been adopted by Yunnan tea producers since 1973, after a long period of learning, experimenting and adjusting. This fermentation process is not an innovation of Yunnan. Instead, it is a reliable process for artificial fermentation of puerh teas, and it was, indeed, a breakthrough for the tea production industry in Yunnan.

To know more about Yunnan puerh tea, we should learn more about the years 1973 to 1975, as the standard recipes were developed in this period. 1975 was an especially important year for puerh tea, as it marked the beginning of standardized production of puerh tea. As of that year, methods of mixing tea leaves were standardized, and the names that we all know today (such as 7542, 7532, 7452 and 7572) were brought into the world.

We can easily see that the standardized production process created a path for mass production of standardized puerh teas, especially shou puerh, by adopting the wet-pile fermentation process. This was how the shou puerh that we see today were initially invented.

Actually, some of the earliest products produced by the Menghai Tea Factory had a different style from those wet-pile fermented teas. For example, this year, I tried two cakes produced by them. Both of the cakes have traditional Chinese characters on them. One of the tea cakes is an “iron discuss (*tie bing*, 鐵餅),” while the other one is a Yellow Mark (黃印) cake.

Both of the teas that I mentioned above are shou puerh teas. Li Yisheng, who was the vice general plant manager of the factory, told me both of the products were produced during the 1960s, even though there was no wrapping paper to indicate this fact. In my book, *Profound World of Chi Tse*, the original packaging of the two cakes was presented. Both of the cakes are shou teas, instead of sheng teas, and they have a significantly different style from the wet-pile fermentation teas produced after 1975.

I believe that those tea cakes had a style similar to the “Yunnan Qing” mentioned by Cao Zhenxing, and their unique taste is different from 7572 tea cakes, 7452 tea cakes and Jinggu bricks. In the following section,

we are going to discuss the characteristics of the two cakes that I mentioned earlier.

Firstly, the name of the company, as printed on the packaging, is “Yunnan Branch China Tea Import and Export Co., Ltd.” instead of “China National Native Produce & Animal By-Products Import & Export Corp.,” which proves that the tea cakes were produced before 1971. Thus, we can see that tea companies in Yunnan had already been producing artificially-fermented puerh teas before adopting the method they use today. Secondly, the brewed leaves are not so dark and carbonized, which is very different from the tea leaves processed by the *wo dui* process.

The fermentation style of these products is vastly different from those standardized products produced since 1975. If you’ve seen these cakes, you may have already noted that the name “China National Native Produce & Animal By-Products Import & Export Corp.” was printed on the packaging of the teas, but not on the inner trademark ticket (*nei fei*, 內飛). This is because the name of the seller was printed on the packaging, while the name of the producer was printed on the *nei fei*. Thus, changes in packaging solely reflected changes in the structure of the state-owned company, which has nothing to do with the tea producers, as long as the state-owned company still used their existing products. (Note that the wrapping papers were designed and produced by the state-owned company.)

Amongst these teas, “Yellow Mark” with traditional characters, “Big Yellow Mark (大黃印)” and “Big Blue Mark (大藍印)” all have a similar style, and the diameter of those tea cakes is wider than a common Seven Sons Cake. Thus, we can see that these tea cakes were produced roughly around the same period. You can also verify this fact by seeing the packaging yourself.

As the production facilities and techniques kept improving, the tea producers could control the wet-pile fermentation process pretty well. However, the problems of under-fermentation or over-fermentation still existed. In addition, the temperature in the center part of the tea during the *wo dui* process would often be quite high, which would sometimes make the tea partially carbonized.

However, even though these factors would make the taste and mouthfeel of each tea cake unique, so this fermentation process is still considered the most stable for mass production.

As I mentioned earlier, the craft of artificial fermentation is built upon experiments and experience instead of imagination, and there is no shortcut to success. Despite the fact that the Yunnan tea producers learned a lot from the Guangdong tea producers, they still needed to make the necessary adjustments using their own experience.

As we would all agree, the shou teas produced by the Menghai Tea Factory have a different style and taste from those produced by the state-owned company in Guangdong. This is because the Menghai Tea Factory was actually improving its existing fermentation process for mass production after learning in Guangdong, instead of copying the whole process from other tea producers.

After 1975, artificially fermented teas were produced on a large scale. Compared to the teas produced during the experimental period, the teas produced after 1975 were more cost-effective and more stable in quality. Even though these teas do not taste significantly better than the teas produced before 1975, the tea producers could make more profit by producing teas on a larger scale. Thus, the development of shou tea production that we have witnessed is reasonable and logical.

As the tea leaves are often damaged or carbonized during a heavy artificial fermentation, the mouthfeel of such shou tea is not as strong as sheng tea, and that is why many tea drinkers belittle shou tea. However, I still believe that shou tea plays an important role in the puerh world, as it can be produced on a large scale and be consumed right after it leaves the factory. Also, many aged shou teas are much cheaper than the sheng teas of the same age! After all, aged tea being sold at a discount is irresistible, wouldn’t you agree?



茶 This is one of the earliest shou cakes, the “Big Yellow Mark” from the 1970s.



黄印



Gongfu Teapot

功夫茶壺

One of the great treasures passed down in this tradition is the abundance of gongfu tea experiments. At our Center, we conduct them weekly. We approach them both seriously and jovially, with an open mind, knowing how important they are to better understand what we are doing at the tea table and beyond. Honestly, I approach them joyfully also because it's amazing how revealing even the simplest experiment can be, especially for those who have never done them before. When you see for yourself how one tiny detail can change everything, and then you consider all the details that go into brewing gongfu tea, it becomes very exciting to know just how much you can improve your tea through self-discipline, practice and experimentation.

As your sensitivity increases and you go back and repeat one of the basic experiments with an open mind, there is always another layer to unfold, another infusion to be had! Gongfu tea experimentation can certainly be as fun as it is educational, and I feel this is an important balance to achieve when developing your tea practice.

There is room for the scientific method, but our primary approach to tea will always be ceremonial, and so naturally, we conduct our experiments in a way that facilitates our tea ceremonies and our love for tea. Experiments can be fun and playful and shouldn't be overly serious. Learn through playful experimentation like a child. In no way should the experiments we explore in our magazine feel like work, or worse yet, like a test, which would

be snobbish and exclusive. Conduct experiments to improve your brewing skills and your understanding of tea in general, and gongfu tea specifically. Enjoy making better tea, which you can then share with others! In this article, I would like to go into more depth on the importance of experimentation in a gongfu practice, and also include what I consider to be ten fundamental gongfu experiments for all tea lovers.

Why We Experiment

Gongfu tea is, in part, about brewing the finest cup of tea possible. It requires a lot of skill and practice to consistently brew a really fine cup of tea, and what a joy it is to drink one with friends or loved ones! We, therefore, do



THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIMENTATION

茶人: Shen Su

Developing one's skill in gongfu tea requires a strong experiential foundation. You have to learn to feel the differences in tea, teaware and brewing methods. It is not your mastery if it is only the experience of others, even your teachers! Once you begin to discriminate yourself, you can then explore why the ancestors chose the criteria that they did.

experiments to help us understand all the details that go into brewing gongfu tea. When each aspect is more fully understood, we can begin to make progress and enjoy finer and finer tea. But what defines a fine cup of tea?

Be sure to study up on the Ten Qualities of a Fine Cup of Tea (they are listed on the following pages, but also search the “Past Issues” section of the website or watch our video on this topic, which is on our YouTube channel, for more information), as you will need them as a standard throughout all your experimentation. Though all criteria are partially subjective, we still need them to learn from a teacher and to measure our own progress, so that we have a standard to see that our brewing is improving over time. Without such a standard to strive for,

we just brew tea however we like it. Enjoying tea how you like it is fine as a pastime or hobby, but not for “mastery through self-discipline,” which is what “gongfu” is. With a properly defined set of qualities to aim for and to gauge our progress, let's take a look at what else comes as a result of doing experiments and why they're important.

First and foremost, when I do experiments, I can then speak from a place of experience. What I have to share about tea isn't just coming from something I read in a book, watched on a video or heard from my teacher, but something I can experience within the framework of my own body, and that's empowering! The more experiments I do, the stronger the foundation upon which I can stand with confidence and talk about tea. I start to

understand tea and brewing methods in more and more detail—and details matter for the person of tea. In order to communicate and educate about tea, it is important to fully understand why we are doing what we're doing at the tea table. If nothing is done arbitrarily in gongfu tea, then everything is done with purpose, and the experiments help to reveal that purpose.

We are very fortunate in this tradition, because the traditional gongfu tea brewing method, as developed in southern China, has been preserved by teachers before us and then passed down to our generation. Part of that preservation was a result of doing and teaching many experiments. Having a tradition, a lineage, handed down to us, is important, because we have the criteria we need to experiment.

In our tradition, these are the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea, without which there would be no way to reference “better” or “worse” and all experimentation would, ultimately, be lost in subjectivity. Our tradition also helps contextualize and inform our gongfu experiments in at least three ways:

History of the method/teaware

Traditional gongfu tea has been refined and preserved over hundreds of years—and a tradition has a better memory than any one person. If any changes or modern adaptations are made, I want to know the history behind the decision to make such a change. That’s very relevant information, especially when it comes to some of the more prevalent changes in gongfu tea we see nowadays, because it helps us understand why that change was made in the first place, and whether it was a well-thought-out decision. Doing the pitcher experiment listed below is an excellent example of this, if you consider what the pitcher is used for outside of tea, and when and why it was introduced into the modern tea ceremony. I’ll leave that up to you to find out.

The practical lesson

We also learn about the surface-level, practical reasons behind each aspect of the gongfu brewing method. If you ask someone brewing tea why they’re doing what they’re doing, they’re likely to be able to give a practical reason for it, which is good. But even that ability is being lost today. Without a tradition to provide even a simple, practical understanding of the different aspects of this brewing method, we are left brewing tea however we like it, and there is no room for progress with that approach.

The deeper, spiritual lesson

Finally, every aspect of tea preparation has a deeper meaning to it. We are very fortunate in that the experiments taught and handed down to us have maintained their spiritual lessons. They are often good life lessons, too.

As you do some of the experiments below, always ask yourself what’s being lost or gained and consider what that means with regards to the most important parts of tea service. Sometimes, an experiment will demonstrate a practical benefit to using a certain piece of teaware, while at the same time, sacrificing something very deep and important to your tea ceremony. Is it worth it? Sometimes it is and other times it isn’t. The only way to really know is to do the experiments, consider all the pros and cons, and on what occasion certain sacrifices might be acceptable.

As you start to understand the historical, practical and deeper lessons of an experiment, together with the gains and losses, you can really start to make educated decisions on how best to serve tea!

The Experiments

When we finally sit down to complete a few experiments and consider the history of them, along with the practical and deeper lessons, we can quickly narrow down the reasons for making changes and adaptations to a three-hundred-year-old tea brewing tradition. Some adaptations are great and improve our tea, others are market-driven. Knowing which is which is important, so that we don’t buy things we don’t need or use teaware and/or brewing methods that do not bring out the best in a tea.

Of course, you don’t need these three contexts to inform your experimentation. With the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea, or another standard that you observe systematically throughout your experimentation, you can still learn and grow through conducting our tradition’s experiments and, perhaps more importantly, develop the ability and verve to create your own experiments!

Ten Important Experiments

For each experiment below, it is important to use a tea that is very familiar to you. I often use a lightly oxidized tea and brew it in smaller amounts, about 1–2 grams, depending upon the size of the brewing vessel. If you use too much

of a dark, aged or complex tea, it will be distracting and difficult to notice the subtle differences when comparing teaware and brewing methods.

You’ll want to have a notebook to record your findings. Write as many details as you can, including date, materials used, procedure, observations and other remarks. This will be very useful in the future when you come back to do the same experiment again. It will also help you gauge your progress.

As you record your observations, remember, it’s not about what you think is better or worse, but any differences you notice. Being able to notice that there is a difference based on the teaware or method used is good enough. Focus on the ten qualities listed above, and set flavor and aroma aside as much as possible for the time being (this is also why using a lighter brewed tea is helpful). How does the tea feel in your mouth and in your body? Maintain a quiet ambiance throughout each experiment so everyone can focus on the tea. Feel free to discuss the outcomes once everyone is finished.

Note that we won’t reveal the conclusions of any of these experiments. That is completely left up to you! It’s more fun learning through your own experience anyways, and there’s no pressure to find a right or wrong outcome. Always stick to your experience, and be open to the fact that next time a new subtlety may reveal itself to you that you weren’t sensitive to the first time. We’re not here to convert anyone to our brewing method, but to give you a platform upon which to have fun and learn to make better tea through your own experience.

This practice of gongfu tea must be a labor of love and passion. Wu De always tells us that the best tea is tea made with love, referring to the way the tea is grown, processed and prepared. If the tea follows the heart in these three ways, then it is made in alignment with Nature, Heaven and Human, and we have found the Dao through our tea practice. But we must become these teachings; we must live the Way, rather than just contemplating it or philosophizing about its subtleties in this magazine. This is why we have included so many of our experiments in these pages over the years.

Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea

Remember, gongfu means mastery through self-discipline, and in order to master gongfu tea, we need to first define what a fine cup of tea is. If you don't, then there is nothing to aim for and no way to make progress. If it's just defined as however you like it, there's no way to get better at it—you cannot improve “however you like it.” A properly defined set of qualities allows us to evaluate our tea, discuss it with others and learn through experimentation, in order to make progress with the guidance of a teacher.

Of course, let us also remember that quality is arbitrary. Tea is an art, not a science, and there is no such thing as complete objectivity. Our observations will always be subjective to some degree. With the list of qualities below, we will attempt to bring in as much objectivity as possible, with the understanding that it is, however, ultimately arbitrary. With that being said, and for the sake of experimentation and progress, we use this standard set of qualities, by which we measure our gongfu tea. Because opinion-based qualities like flavor and aroma are so subjective, we have instead gone down to mouthfeel. Sensations and texture in the mouth offer much more room for agreement.

好茶的十種品質

通往精通的路

- 茶 Splashes to the upper palate
- 茶 Coats the mouth
- 茶 Is smooth, round, thick and structured
- 茶 Travels back on its own
- 茶 Swallows easily (goes down on its own)
- 茶 Soothes and coats the throat
- 茶 Causes salivation
- 茶 Has a fragrance rising up the nasal cavity
- 茶 Has huigan (minty coolness on the breath on a winter's day)
- 茶 Has deep and relaxing cha Qi (a general sense of ease)



THE EXPERIMENTS

I) Choosing Water

The best and easiest way to improve your tea is to improve your water. Tea is 98% water, so obviously, better water will go a long way towards helping you make better tea.

What you'll need:

- 茶 3 or more kinds of bottled waters
- 茶 2 identical white porcelain gongfu cups per person

Procedure:

For this experiment, buy at least three different kinds of bottled water. Randomly choose two, pour equal amounts into two cups, and drink them side by side, back and forth. Make notes of any differences you notice. Based on the ten qualities listed above, choose one of the two bottles which you feel is more suitable to make tea, and then compare it against the third bottle of water. Remember, water should have no aroma or flavor; it should quench your thirst, and like any good tea, it should be round, smooth, soft and easy to swallow.

Continue with this process of elimination until you've decided which water you feel is most suitable for tea. If you have a good source of spring water, perhaps compare your top bottled water to the spring water, and again, see if you can notice any differences.

實驗真相

II) Three Cup Experiment

This is one of the most important and simplest experiments to do. It's the one I do most often with guests at the Center. It's also an excellent example of why the first line in the gongfu poem is so important...

What you'll need:

- 茶 3 identical, white porcelain gongfu cups per person
- 茶 Kettle for boiling water

Procedure:

Heat your water. Before it's fully boiled, pour it into one of the three cups. There is no need to pre-warm your cups. Pour half the water from the first cup into the second cup. Then pour half the water from the second cup into the third cup. The first cup should contain half the water, whereas the last two cups should contain one quarter each. Starting with the last cup, quickly drink back and forth between all three cups, recording your observations as you go. Repeat at least three times, making sure to pour accurately from each cup to the next. You could easily do this experiment with more than three cups.

功夫茶實驗

III) Zisha Teapot versus Gaiwan

This is one of my favorite experiments to do. It demonstrates the importance of shape, material and design in your teaware. This is one not to miss, especially in modern times when the use of *gaiwans* is so prevalent. Why are they so widely used, and when did they become fashionable as brewing vessels in tea shops? What was the motivation here? How were they used long ago?

What you'll need:

- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot (It is particularly important that your gongfu pot is the real deal. This experiment is misleading and useless if it is not authentic Yixing clay—done with a teapot made from some other type of clay, in other words.)
- 茶 1 porcelain *gaiwan* (lidded cup)
- 茶 2 identical white porcelain gongfu cups per person

Procedure:

Weigh about two grams of tea for your *gaiwan* and for your Purple-Sand teapot. Brew them side by side. If you're confident with both hands, you could steep them at the same time and pour with one vessel in each hand at the same time (I prefer the gongfu pot in my dominant hand and the *gaiwan* in my off-hand). Otherwise, you can steep one vessel at a time, drink the tea and record your notes. Then, steep in the other vessel. Repeat this at least three times. If you pour into the teapot first and the *gaiwan* second, switch the order each round.



IV) Cold Water in Hot Water

I notice a tendency in people to top up their kettles once they are low by adding cold water to it and reheating. (I've always wondered what is happening when that cold water hits the remaining hot water.)

What you'll need:

- 茶 Kettle of choice
- 茶 Heat source of choice
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot (optional, can just drink the water)
- 茶 1 white porcelain gongfu cup per person

Procedure:

For this experiment, I like to heat my water and drink a few cups just to familiarize myself with it. You could also drink a few cups of tea as well. Then, add a cup or so of cold water to your kettle and bring it back to a boil. Even the sounds can be revealing at this point. Once the water has returned to a boil, drink the water again or steep some tea and record your observations.

V) To Pitcher or Not to Pitcher

To really understand when and when not to use a pitcher, this experiment is essential. What are the pros and cons of using a pitcher, and do the sacrifices outweigh the gains? Where and when did the pitcher even come from? What's the most appropriate situation in which to use a pitcher?

What you'll need:

- 茶 1 pitcher (glass or porcelain)
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot
- 茶 2 identical white, porcelain gongfu cups per person

Procedure:

Use about two grams of tea in your gongfu teapot. Line up your cups and the pitcher. It's often difficult to preheat all the cups and the pitcher, unless there's only one person, so don't worry. Just steep the tea and pour back and forth into your pitcher and *half* the cups. Immediately pour the tea from the pitcher into the other empty cups. Take both cups, one with tea from the pot and the other with tea from the pitcher, and drink them back and forth, recording your observations. Repeat at least three times.

VI) Preheating Your Cups

This is another eye-opener. Many people think we are cleaning our cups between each steeping, but actually we are preheating them. What for, and does it really make a difference?

What you'll need:

- 茶 2 identical white porcelain gongfu cups per person
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot
- 茶 1 waste-water basin (or medium-sized bowl)

Procedure:

As usual, steep a lighter tea that you are familiar with in a smaller amount, about two grams. Preheat half of the cups with boiled water and don't preheat the other half. Pour off the water from the preheated cups into your waste-water basin, and soon afterwards, pour the tea into your cups. Drink both cups back and forth, recording your observations as you go. Repeat two or three times. Move back and forth between the cup that is preheated and the one that isn't, holding both in your hands as you do.



VII) Heavy Showers Predicted

You'll notice we shower our gongfu tea with heated water both before and after steeping the tea inside. The results of this experiment always surprise me.

What you'll need:

- 茶 1 white porcelain gongfu cup per person
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot
- 茶 1 ceramic tea boat (could also use a shallow dish or bowl)

Procedure:

For this experiment, you prepare three consecutive steepings. For the first round, shower the outside of your pot with hot water, lift the lid and steep the tea. This is called “showers before.” Pour the tea into your cup. Drink quietly and record your observations, focusing on the sensations in the mouth. For the second round, only shower the pot after you fill it. This is called “showers after.” Again, pour the tea into your cup, drink and record. For the final steeping, shower before and after steeping: “showers before and after.” Drink that cup and record. It's difficult to repeat this experiment once the leaves have been steeped a few times and the pot thoroughly showered. You could simply repeat the experiment later with fresh leaves, or if you're lucky and have three of everything, you could do all the “showers” at the same time.

VIII) The Vast World of Cups

This one is excellent because it's simple, and most people have different types of cups and rarely consider how big an impact those small cups can have on the quality of the tea. Which ones are actually suitable to make better tea?

What you'll need:

- 茶 3 or more different gongfu-style cups (different shape, size, material, age, etc.)
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot

Procedure:

Weigh about two grams of tea and brew as you normally would, showering your teapot before and after steeping. If you're doing this experiment with a lot of people or a lot of cups, you can skip pre-warming them. Pour the tea into all your cups and drink back and forth between all of them. Repeat at least a few times, noticing how the shape, size, material or age affects the tea liquor in your mouth.



IX) Heat Sources

Our experiments wouldn't be complete without testing the different heat sources out there. There is so much to learn in this fun experiment!

What you'll need:

- 茶 Gas stove
- 茶 Electric burner (infrared or a hot-plate)
- 茶 Charcoal and brazier
- 茶 1 or 3 kettles
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot (optional, can just drink the water)
- 茶 1 white porcelain gongfu cup per person

Procedure:

You can do this one with tea or just with hot water. Some people find only water a little difficult to discern the differences, whereas other people find the tea and the time between each steeping too confusing. It's up to you and it's a good idea to try both eventually.

If you have three of the same kettle, then you can fill them with the same volume of water and heat them at the same time. Note that each heat source will heat your kettle at different rates, so you may need to time how long it takes on each heat source, in order to bring them to a boil at the same time.

If you only have one kettle, which is more likely, then you just have to test each heat source one at a time, recording your observations as you go and being patient to heat up the fresh water for each heat source. You only need a little water in your kettle. If you have access to charcoal and a brazier, you will want to drink the water or tea from this heat source first, then move on to the other heat sources. As always, focus on the sensations in the mouth. Think about the quality of the heat as a texture in your mouth. Is it penetrating and structured, or spiky and uncomfortable?

X) Types of Kettles

With so many kettles out there, made with different shapes and materials, which one is most suitable to boil water for tea?

What you'll need:

- 茶 As many different kettles as you have (glass, ceramic, iron, silver, new, antique, etc.)
- 茶 1 Yixing Purple-Sand teapot (optional, can just drink the water)
- 茶 1 white porcelain gongfu cup per person

Procedure:

Again, this one can be carried out with just water or tea. I prefer to do them with just water in the beginning. This time, you'll want to use one heat source for all the different kettles, drinking the water from each one, recording your observations and moving on to the next kettle. Use a heat source that is easy to control for this experiment, like electric or gas. Each type of kettle has an energy and imparts qualities to the water. Try to not only evaluate the kettles' performance, but see if one is more suitable for certain kinds of teas.



Conclusions

I hope you find these experiments as fun, educational and revealing as I have! No matter your approach to tea, I really believe the experiential understanding gained from conducting these experiments will help you brew finer tea in a way that is suitable to you.

It is also my great hope that these experiments will stimulate some deeper discussions and that some of you will get creative and design your own experiments. If you do, we would love to hear from you through our app, email and social media outlets. We also have many other experiments to

share with you as well, should you like to steep a little more mastery through self-discipline. I also hope that these experiments will inspire you to create your own, and to learn to love the process as much as I do.

Remember, this isn't about putting on a white lab coat and sterilizing your teaware, but rather, it's about keeping an open mind and recognizing the differences that result from using different teaware and brewing methods, so that you can make educated decisions in your tea preparation. As always, the most important element in any tea ses-

sion is you! The heart with which you brew and serve tea trumps all experiments and their conclusions. The best cup of tea is always the one brewed, given and received from the heart. In that way, may your love for tea grow through a combination of mastery through self-discipline, brewing from the heart and joyful experimentation! Happy brewing, everyone!



Global Tea Hut Expansion Packs

EXPANSION V: SHOU PUERH TEA

We've developed a new and exciting way to expand your tea education. If this trial run works and you find these expansions fulfilling, we plan to offer three or four of them a year. Each will come with two or more teas that expand upon the topics we are covering in that issue, allowing you to taste more, rarer and sometimes higher quality examples, in order to learn more about various genres of tea.

This month, we are offering a very special Expansion Pack. Puerh is abundant in Taiwan, as so much of it was shipped here from Hong Kong in the 1980s and '90s. We are spoiled with options. We wanted to share some of our all-time favorite shou puerh teas with you, so you can learn more about the genre and the ways that shou puerh production has shifted, then till now.

Most loose-leaf shou puerh teas are blended. In fact, almost all loose puerh is blended, full stop. And we don't mean blended during production to create a more balanced brew, though most puerh since 1972 is created in that way as well—we mean added to over time to increase weight, change the flavor (often to make the tea seem older than it is) or to create a unique tea that separates the shop selling the tea from the source.

It is consequently impossible to date loose-leaf puerh tea. You should never, ever use the date of a loose-leaf puerh given by a vendor as the measure of whether to purchase the tea or not!

There may be some basis in truth in the date, but usually the date increases as the tea is sold from person to person. Most old loose-leaf sheng puerh is a blend of some older tea, younger wet-stored tea and a little shou. Overall, these teas taste fine. They should be evaluated based on their own merits and bought accordingly. In other words, a tea lover must compare loose-leaf puerh to other loose-leaf puerh and develop a sense of quality and price. This is why we encourage friends with tea shops to create a nomenclature for aged, loose-leaf puerh based on terms that they can use consistently, like “aged,” “well-aged,” “vintage,” etc., and each term then corresponds to a certain flavor profile and quality/price. This is a much better approach to the world of loose-leaf aged puerh.

Storage also plays a huge role in aged loose-leaf puerh. One of the reasons cakes age so much better than loose-leaf puerh is that there is too much oxygen in and around loose-leaf tea, which means it oxidizes/ferments too fast. There is nothing wrong with

some wetter storage, within reason, so long as the price reflects the condition of the tea. This is as it should be with any antique—the price is determined, in large measure, by the condition of the object.

One of the main reasons that the two loose-leaf puerh teas we are offering in this expansion pack are among our all-time favorite shou teas is that they are unblended, original tea stored by a Hong Kong merchant and a Taiwanese collector. Nothing was added to them over time. They are the same tea that was packaged by the factory, so they provide a standard for all loose-leaf shou puerh that can help you navigate the world of loose-leaf puerh. Also, the storage was immaculate, as they were in sealed bags on the third floor of a building. Wu De named Bindbole, after the oldest forest in the Shire, since he grew up with *Lord of the Rings*. It is an early-1980s shou made of second-grade leaves (mostly buds) from large-leaf trees. “Shaman's Drum” is a similar tea, only younger and less deep (we suspect it's from the late '80s).



茶 1990s Cake (*The Cake with No Name*)



茶 Spirit (2017 Old-Growth Shou Puerh Cake)



茶 7572 Cake (mid '80s)



茶 Bindbole (early '80s loose-leaf)



茶 Shaman's Drum (late '80s loose-leaf)

We have also gotten a few cakes of one of the best shou cakes of all time, a mid-1980s 7572 from Menghai Tea Factory. Though you only get a single steeping of this treasured tea due to the high prices, it is worth having a reference session, since this is one of the greatest shou teas ever produced.

Then there is a mid-1990s cake for comparison. We cannot be sure of the recipe for this one, as the papers have been lost. This is common for that era, since Taiwan could not import directly from China. Since the wrappers said "China" on them, they were removed after the tea passed through Hong Kong or Vietnam. This is also a spectacular aged shou.

Finally, we have included the cake version of the Tea of the Month, "Spirit," which is one of our Light Meets Life fundraiser cakes this year. This will allow you to experiment with the differences between loose-leaf and compressed tea.

These five teas will leave you with a very comprehensive grasp of the world of shou puerh through time.

Here's what comes in this month's expansion pack:

50 grams of Bindbole (early '80s loose-leaf shou)

50 grams of Shaman's Drum (late '80s loose-leaf shou)

15 grams of mid '80s 7572 shou puerh cake

25 grams of a mid '90s shou puerh cake

25 grams of the cake version of our very own "Spirit"

This expansion is a bit more than previous ones, as it includes so much aged tea, but, as usual, this is not a fundraiser, but rather an educational opportunity, so we have not marked up the teas: \$65 + shipping

***Get yours and find more information at:
www.globalteahut.org/expansions***

THE WAYS OF RIPENING PUERH

成熟的
方法



This article was written by an old puerhian in the early 2000s. It is very important, and timeless really, as it captures the shifts in the puerh world, as people started to consume more young sheng and production began to create greener puerh for immediate consumption. Shou puerh also changed at the time—even the terminology changed, since “shou” originally was also used to refer to fully-aged sheng puerh, which is also “ripe.”



茶人: **Liao Yirong (廖義榮)**

The Beginnings of Shou

If we want to really deepen our understanding of puerh tea, we must be clear on one point—in fact, there are two different fermentation methods used for puerh: the older, traditional method of ripening puerh, which can be rightly called the *true* “shou (熟)” method, or “ripening,” which is really just the natural aging of sheng tea (which is a ripening, after all), and the more modern method called “*wo dui* (渥堆),” or “heaping/piling,” which is artificial fermentation. Most people tend to lump these two techniques together when discussing finished puerh tea, but we must separate them if we hope to understand puerh, and particularly, the differences in flavor and mouthfeel that these methods produce. There is a time when most beginners cannot taste the difference between naturally and artificially aged puerh, but with some practice, one can learn to tell them apart.

The real method of ripening puerh is to age sheng tea over time, and the original characteristics of the tea are influenced by the temperature and humidity of the storage environment; this may be caused by carelessness during the manufacturing process or the influence of storage conditions (caused either accidentally or deliberately in “traditional” or “wet” storage (濕倉)—mostly in Hong Kong). In the olden days, a newly-made tea cake was not actually made from freshly produced leaves the way they are to-

day, but rather from tea leaves that are two to three years old, or even older. This is because none of these teas were for immediate consumption. Loose tea leaves degenerate and oxidize faster than compressed tea cakes, as they have a greater amount of surface area exposed to the air. (By comparison, two- to three-year-old tea cakes would take twice or three times as long as loose leaves of the same age to naturally mature and oxidize until the liquor achieves the desired bright, clear red.) This means that the teas that went into cakes were often already well on their way before they were even compressed.

One interesting experiment involved storing loose-leaf tea and compressed tea in the same place for three, six and nine years to compare the changes. The results are shown in the accompanying table. From these results, we can see that for those tea lovers who wish to drink their puerh quickly and aren't keen on the character of piled, or *wo dui* tea, a good alternative is to buy some loose-leaf sheng puerh and store it yourself. This way, you can drink it whenever you please, and over time you will get to experience the joy of “raising” puerh yourself. In compressed tea, on the other hand, the oxidation and post-production fermentation is slower, and puerh tea cakes enjoy a certain reputation in the market.

Because of this, many tea merchants seek to speed up the oxidation

and breakdown of the tea, so they buy newly-made sheng or “raw” puerh and purposely store it in an environment that will speed up the aging process and allow it to oxidize/ferment more quickly. Tea stored under these circumstances confuses things, since it is technically “artificially fermented,” just not in piles (*wo dui*). Such tea ages two to three times faster than quality tea that has been stored in a normal, “clean” environment, so in a sense this is “fake aging,” though it is really more of a technique and shouldn't be regarded as a scam. When done well, such tea can be great, and should be evaluated by its own set of criteria. After being stored like this for one or two years, the tea is taken out of wet storage and returned to dry storage to “recover” and oxidize normally. The overall aim of this process is to shorten the aging time by stimulating chemical changes, using the dampness in the environment, transforming the pectic substances in the tea into theaflavins after the process of oxidation, polymerization and fermentation.

With the added influence of microorganisms, the theaflavins are soon transformed into thearubigins. At this point, the color of the tea will become darker, but the mouthfeel and Qi of the tea can't keep up, so it still won't have enough of an “aged” feel—and in comparison to slow-aged tea, will produce a potentially uncomfortable roughness in the mouth and throat.



Tea stored in normal conditions would take four to six times longer to reach the same depth of color in the liquor (but one thing that cannot be changed is the original quality of the tea—aged tea will lack liveliness and freshness if the *maocha* used was not from a good source). The flavor of tea that has been stored in “wet” conditions for too long can be compared to that of fruit that has been soaked by rainwater—it lacks its original freshness and sweetness. If compressed tea is aged using this artificially sped-up method, it loses some of its original flavor, fragrance and quality and takes on a sort of “semi-ripe” quality. So, knowing a bit about this comparison can help us become more familiar with the world of fine puerh. Making nice “traditionally-stored” puerh is a skill that requires understanding when to move the tea from the wetter to drier environments.

Thus, we are left with three ways of ripening puerh tea: natural, slow aging; intentional aging; traditional/wet storage and piling (*wo dui*). Many people feel that tea will naturally become well-aged, vintage sheng tea if it is left for long enough, and that keeping sheng tea in hot, humid conditions will cause it to develop a more ripe flavor, which means that the latter two categories may be closer to each other than the first. In other words, wet-stored sheng may have more in common with piled shou tea than it does with slow-aged sheng.

The “heaping/piling” or *wo dui* process has been used since the early 1970s as a scientific method of controlling heat and humidity to speed up the transformation of puerh tea and reduce its bitterness and astringency. In the current sheng puerh craze, one might be tempted to think that *wo dui* tea is inferior, which isn’t always the case. The heaping technique was considered a national treasure in 1973; it wasn’t until the modern puerh craze took off in 1997 that some factories began piling without following the proper technique, which gave rise to the impression that some people have today, which is that shou puerh is inferior and tastes “pondy.” There were a lot of well-known *wo dui* teas in the early days, including 7572 cakes, 7562 tea bricks, Xiaguan 7663 bowl-shaped *tuocha*, Jinggu bricks (often called “73 thick bricks”), Cultural Revolution bricks and 7582 bricks from the Kunming Tea Factory. These are all classic examples of the heaping technique done properly, and confirm that there are many good-quality *wo dui* teas, so long as the piling is done with skill and intention, which it rarely is these days.

When tasting *wo dui* tea, we could just as easily go from older to newer teas, or newer to older; but how does one tell whether a tea was made using the *wo dui* technique from before 1997 or the later techniques of fully fermenting the tea in deeper piles that sit for longer? It’s quite simple: First,

take a sniff. Early teas have a steady, aged fragrance, and the liquor is bright and clear in both color and flavor. Teas from after 1997 that have undergone full fermentation in large, deep piles leave you with an overall feeling of discomfort. They are rough and smell “pondy.” You may smell some ammonia. After time, you will also learn to taste the piling, which isn’t hard when it is done to such a heavy degree.

There’s a saying that offers some good advice about appreciating puerh: “Smell a lot, ask a lot, drink a lot, look a lot, learn a lot and buy only a little!” Don’t let yourself pre-judge the tea based on what you’ve heard, either; you must first relax and empty your mind before approaching the tea. After all, it’s the person who appraises the tea, not the other way around! It’s with this type of approach that we can bring meaning and culture to our tea drinking practice.



Loose-leaf vs Compressed Puerh Over Time

	Three Years		Six Years		Nine Years	
	Loose-leaf	Compressed	Loose-leaf	Compressed	Loose-leaf	Compressed
Proportion of gold in tea liquor	70%	95%	55%	85%	45%	75%
Proportion of red in tea liquor	30%	5%	45%	15%	55%	25%
Mouthfeel	Smoothness: 30%	Slight bitterness & astringency: 90%	Smoothness: 40%	Slight bitterness & astringency: 80%	Smoothness: 50%	Slight bitterness & astringency: 70%
Aroma	Aged aroma: 20%	Fresh & cool: 90%	Aged aroma: 30%	Fresh & cool: 80%	Aged aroma: 40%	Fresh & cool: 70%
Appearance of the brewed leaves	Dark green	Emerald green: 95%	Black-green	Emerald green: 85%	Slightly rosy	Emerald green: 75%

茶 The loose-leaf and compressed teas charted here were all stored in more dry conditions, with seasonal humidity fluctuations between 60-70%, which is considered natural storage. "Wet" or "traditional" storage exposes the tea to periods of higher humidity, resulting in faster and more pronounced fermentation. All things equal, natural, slow storage is ideal.



Grade: 8
Age: 1yr
dry-stored



Grade: 7
Age: 1yr
dry-stored



Grade: 5
Age: 1yr
dry-stored



Grade: 7
Age: 2yrs
dry-stored



Grade: 7
Age: 2yrs
wet-stored



Grade: 7
Age: 2yrs
wet-stored



Grade: 5
Age: 5yrs
wet-stored



Grade: 4
Age: 3yrs
2 wet-stored shou cakes

茶 These samples show some of the early changes in sheng puerh, as well as two shou cakes blended together for comparison. Storing loose-leaf sheng is another way to "ripen" puerh tea, especially if we use the more traditional definition which is "to ferment," whether naturally or artificially. The increased surface area and oxygen ferments/oxidizes the tea faster.

Our Third Annual

Every year, more than a hundred members and non-members submit photography to express their Tea spirit. We so enjoy watching how people creatively show the ways Tea is manifesting in their lives. It is always so hard to choose our winners each year. We discuss our favorites, ask guests what they think and are often awestruck by so many of the entries that it is hard to choose a winner. Alas, it is a contest! We would like to commend the bravery of all the photographers and to say that we love them all. They will stay up on our website as beacons of Tea spirit to the world! Check them out:

www.globalteahut.org/photocontest

Our winner for this year is:

Alexandra Smirnova

She's from Ukraine. What a stunning photograph! She will receive an Yixing teapot and some tea!



Photography Contest

年度攝影比賽



There were so many amazing photographs this year that we chose three runners-up to receive some wonderful tea:



Simon M. Osten from Germany



Triin Labi from Estonia

Morten Menge from Germany



We also let Petr Novak and our own Raneta choose some winners to receive teaware they have made:

茶精的攝影

眼睛充滿了茶



Petr chose this beautiful photograph from Carolina Mobarac of Finland to receive some of his teaware! This photograph was made at Jesse & Nelly Öro's wedding, discussed on page 59.

Raneta choose this photograph by Andrus Kiisküla of Estonia to receive her teaware:



SHOU PUERH CULTURE IN HONG KONG



香港熟茶文化

Hong Kong has always been one of the capitals of puerh tea, with as rich and important a history as Yunnan itself. For more than a century, Hong Kong people have consumed puerh as part of their daily meals. They have stored and sold the tea for just as long, understanding the changes in the tea and the puerh world throughout the modern era. To explore the history of puerh, one must therefore make a stop in Hong Kong.



茶人: **Chen Ganbang (陳淦邦)**

Shou Puerh Is Dark and Rich

Puerh tea is a part of everyday life in the Cantonese regions of southern China, so it has its own corner in the tea market. However, with today's puerh craze, there's a tendency to blindly chase after traditional sheng or "raw" puerh products, such as "un-aged" tea or "Pure Green" puerh cakes—everyone seems to have forgotten that the vast majority of puerh in the market is actually "ripened" shou puerh. In Hong Kong's puerh tea culture, shou puerh is the most widely known, and is the commonly accepted definition of puerh tea. Because of this, whenever someone lauds puerh as a rare, valuable tea, people tend to be mystified, even more so by the high prices it can fetch. This is because when most Hong Kongers think of puerh, they think of the cheap, low-grade drinking tea that is served to accompany ordinary meals in Hong Kong's restaurants. Nonetheless, shou puerh is still generally considered a good choice of drink, as long as it's not too rough in quality. In this article, I shall present an exploration of shou puerh tea culture in Hong Kong, with the hope of offering fellow tea lovers a glimpse into this unique side of shou puerh.

Discovering Hong Kong Shou

Forty years ago, Hong Kong was very different from the large international metropolis that it is today, founded on its financial and service industries—back then, it was still an

industrial city. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Hong Kong was just developing as an industrial city, and the living conditions were poor. Many households were composed of blue-collar workers who didn't have the financial means to taste expensive teas, so the practice of drinking tea for tea's sake alone was not very common. Tea leaves were considered an everyday part of life, something that you offered your guests to show courtesy. A household would usually have a pot of tea at the ready, not only for the convenience of the family members if they were thirsty, but also so they could greet guests with a hot cup of tea, as a sign of the family's good manners and hospitality.

In the early 1950s, the Chinese government implemented land reforms, with specific policies affecting landowners and wealthier peasants. Ownership of all land, livestock, farming equipment, surplus grain supplies and buildings was transferred to the state. Land formerly rented out by the wealthier farmers was taxed and distributed among the less well-off farmers and sharecroppers. The result was that land-owning classes were basically eradicated. Because of this, many former landowners and their descendants from Chaozhou in Guangdong left their homeland, due to a dearth of work in the countryside, and migrated to Hong Kong, which, at the time, was still a British colony. They brought an aspect of their tea culture with them to Hong Kong, namely Chaozhou-style gongfu tea (潮式功夫茶).

Chaozhou people were accustomed to drinking gongfu tea after eating to "dissolve the grease" of a meal. So, Hong Kong tea merchants catered to the tastes of their customers and mainly sold teas typically used for this purpose, such as tieguanyin and Cliff Tea. Many immigrants from Chaozhou also opened tea shops of their own. So, although drinking puerh was not yet very popular in Hong Kong at the time, there was already a strong underlying foundation of tea culture.

Tea Houses & Restaurants

In this new millennium, we carry around devices that allow us to make a phone call or connect to the Internet in an instant, so interpersonal communication is very convenient—all we need to do is tap out a message or press "call." But we ought to recall that in Hong Kong several decades ago, only commercial enterprises had the financial resources to install a telephone. And from the 1950s to the 1970s, telephones were the only type of communications technology available. So, if you wanted to meet with your friends for a chat, tea houses were an important part of the equation. Discussing business and socializing with friends all took place in traditional Hong Kong tea houses, which served tea and dim sum. Thanks to the importance of tea houses in the social lives of Hong Kongers at that time, the consumption of tea began to rise.

Up until the 1970s, the most common teas served in Hong Kong's tea houses were Shui Xian (水仙), a Wuyi oolong whose name translates to "Narcissus" or "Water Fairy," Tieguanyin (鐵觀音) and a white tea called "Shou Mei (壽眉)." These types of tea were brewed in a *gaiwan* (lidded teacup), which meant that each guest had their own personal vessel to brew and drink their tea. This way, you could brew your tea to your own liking—as soon as it had reached the desired strength, you could pour it out or drink it, with no need to over-brew. During that era, many traditional tea houses still used *gaiwan*; even today, some restaurants, such as the Lin Heung Tea House (蓮香茶樓) still use *gaiwan*. At that time, people didn't go to restaurants in a family group, as prior to the 1970s, it was still fairly uncommon for women to work outside the home or have much of a public social life. This meant that the patrons were generally men out to discuss business deals and socialize—so *gaiwan* were perfect for this type of scenario. In the '70s, however, the situation began to change.

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Hong Kong's economy was booming, and there were plenty of jobs to go around. There's a saying from the time that describes this state of economic prosperity: "Even grannies are out cutting threads." (In other words, even such small jobs as trimming threads were picked up by grandmothers who didn't even know anything about dressmaking!) So, as the saying illustrates, it was very easy to find a job and earn money.

As a result, many women went to work in Hong Kong's factories, which supplemented the family income (in those days, it was common for families to have six to eight children). Because of this, many families found themselves a lot more well-off than before, so they now had the spending power to go out to restaurants for dim sum. After a week of hard work, many families chose not to make breakfast on Saturdays and Sundays, instead, heading straight out to a restaurant for a dim sum "brunch" to save themselves the trouble of cooking. As a result of these societal changes, from the mid-1970s, restaurants or *jiulou* (酒樓) serving food and alcohol became much more common in Hong Kong, outnumber-

ing the more traditional tea houses or *chalou* (茶樓).

Thus, social occasions where each person had their own *gaiwan* slowly transformed into large family gatherings to celebrate free time together. Many tea houses gave up on using *gaiwan* to brew tea, as they took up a lot more table space with the three pieces required to make up one *gaiwan*; on top of that, children didn't know how to use them and risked breaking them. So in the end, these restaurants changed their brewing methods to better suit large family groups. They started using big teapots, which could easily brew several cups of tea and didn't need topping up with hot water as frequently as *gaiwan*. So large teapots inevitably became the vessel of choice in these new restaurants. As we discussed earlier, the most common teas in Hong Kong's tea houses were Shui Xian, Tieguanyin and Shou Mei—in the days when they were still being brewed in *gaiwan*, this was just fine; however, this new era of large pots presented a new problem. With large teapots, it wasn't convenient to pour out all the tea straight away, and people dining out in Hong Kong were accustomed to letting their tea steep, rather than separating the liquor from the leaves. The problem, then, was that teas like Shui Xian, Tieguanyin and Shou Mei become stronger the longer you brew them, so the first two brews of a pot would be very bitter and astringent, while the next few brews would be weak and insipid. So, the restaurant owners began to purchase large quantities of Yunnan puerh, recommended by the tea merchants who had shipped it over. Puerh tea offered the following advantages:

1. *It was well priced, and therefore budget-friendly*
2. *It's a patient tea that lasts through many brews*
3. *It is sufficiently rich in color*
4. *It is gentle on the stomach*

Thanks to these benefits, once puerh appeared in tea houses, it quickly spread across Hong Kong and became well-known among ordinary people. Of course, this isn't to say that

puerh was completely out of favor with tea connoisseurs, but simply that it entered the collective consciousness via Hong Kong's tea houses, and more and more Hong Kong people came to learn of its existence.

Puerh Culture in Hong Kong

Hong Kongers have a special word for going out to have tea; as well as using the ordinary verb "drinking tea," there's also a phrase that means "enjoying tea": *tancha* (嘆茶). The word *tan* literally means "to sigh" or "to exclaim." Throughout the history of Hong Kong's dining and drinking culture, there have been various, different types of establishments, all with separate functions: "tea house" style restaurants; restaurants serving food and alcohol, literally "liquor houses," shops serving cold drinks and other restaurants. But as the lives of Hong Kong people grew busier, it became more convenient if one establishment could offer multiple types of food and drink, so traditional tea houses that served tea on its own gradually began to decline, due to all the competition and were replaced by restaurants and taverns. Many of the old-style tea houses were no longer able to stay in business, and one by one they closed their doors. But, as they say, every cloud has a silver lining: The closure of these old tea houses meant that as their storehouses were cleared out, a number of rare and precious antique puerh tea cakes once again saw the light of day. This resurgence led to the flourishing market for old puerh that we see today. So, the development of puerh is inextricably linked to these changing historical circumstances.

These traditional old tea houses placed a great importance on the quality of the leaf, as several decades ago in Hong Kong, there wasn't a great variety of drinks available to choose from: mainly just tea, alcohol and coffee. There weren't any of the soft drinks and other flavored beverages that are common today. To ensure the quality of their tea, these old-style tea houses would employ a "tea supervisor" who was responsible for overseeing the tea buyers. For a tea house, supervising the purchasing of tea leaves was extremely important, since different grades



茶 Puerh served with dim sum is a mainstay in Hong Kong (often shou nowadays).

of tea leaves had different flavors, and the price of tea varied a lot. To be successful at blending the different teas, one had to understand how to use the right proportion of sheng and shou leaves, as well as how to find a balance between price and quality. To do this well required depth and breadth of knowledge. As a result of this process, tea blends from the different tea houses all tasted slightly different.

Perhaps this explains why many of Hong Kong's older tea drinkers would faithfully show up at their favorite tea house every morning for their first cup of the day! It's a pity that today's tea houses mostly forego this carefully thought-out process in favor of using leaves that are all the same grade. Traditional tea houses also had a position called the "Tea Doctor" or *cha boshi* (茶博士), whose job was to carry a large copper pot to refill everyone's hot water—since the tea was mostly brewed using individual *gaiwans*, it needed refilling often. This takes a special skill that is recognizable to those in the know. They can spot the time for refilling even from afar.

Originally, the puerh served in Hong Kong's tea houses was made from high-quality loose-leaf tea from storehouses with good conditions. In the 1980s, however, the tea houses didn't have enough puerh to keep up with demand, so lesser quality puerh that has been stored in underground warehouses started to hit the market. This led to the widespread impression that puerh tea has a moldy flavor to it. As a result, someone had the idea of adding chrysanthemum flowers to the tea to mask this moldy taste, which started a trend for drinking chrysanthemum-flavored puerh, or *jupu* (菊普). Later on, however, there was a rumor that drinking chrysanthemum-flavored puerh over long periods was bad for the health, so the number of people who chose to drink this *jupu* tea decreased dramatically.

Aged Sheng Puerh

It's said that many of the early stamped tea cakes were made to order for the tea house owners. This is a rea-

sonable theory, since according to the recollections of tea professionals from the older generation, a few decades ago, there wasn't much retail demand for tea cakes, and you wouldn't normally see them sold individually. They were usually bought wholesale in large batches by the tea houses that used them to blend tea. So at the time, people wouldn't usually use puerh cakes at home.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, since these disc-shaped tea cakes, or *cha bing* (茶餅), were mostly bought by the tea houses and didn't fetch a high price, in the eyes of retailers, they were all but worthless. They were variously described as "round tea," "troublesome tea that you have to break up before drinking," "tea that consumers don't really want to buy" and "a product that won't sell." So, before Taiwanese Cha-jin began arriving in Hong Kong in search of puerh, most of the tea shop owners were in the habit of breaking up the low-value sheng tea cakes and blending them with shou tea. This was quite understandable, as this extended the patience of the sheng tea.

It also enhanced its sweetness, as well as reducing the odor of the shou tea, so the two complemented each other well. In fact, Hong Kong people in general have never warmed to very young sheng puerh, as it's too hard on the digestive system.

So, for the above reasons, sheng puerh cakes have never been too popular in Hong Kong. In the '80s, many Yellow Mark cakes that had been aging in storage were broken apart and blended with other teas, before being sold off cheaply for drinking. Twenty or so years ago, tea shop owners did their best to avoid sheng puerh cakes, so no one ever imagined that twenty years later they would see such a resurgence in popularity, where supply could no longer meet demand and prices practically rose by the day. The reason that so many puerh cakes were preserved in Hong Kong was due to their low price and suitability for blending to stabilize the flavor and quality of the puerh. This was why Hong Kong's tea merchants were willing to invest money and warehouse space on these unglamorous tea cakes. So those puerh cakes that were originally intended for brewing up in large pots were slowly refined by the passing years, until they rose like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes to become a precious tea that people were falling over each other to buy. This all came as a great surprise to the owners of the tea houses and shops!

Because very young sheng puerh was never widely accepted in Hong Kong, in the 1970s, when tea merchants were ordering their tea, they always specified that they wanted shou puerh. Sheng puerh cakes were so unpopular that they were almost regarded as a kind of parasite. In order to get rid of the sheng puerh cakes as quickly as possible, wholesalers would feign ignorance and surreptitiously stick a couple of tubes of sheng puerh cakes into each shipment of shou puerh (the tea cakes were usually packed in bamboo tubes, or *tong*, 筒). Although, at that time, the retail tea merchants' concept of sheng and shou puerh was still somewhat murky, each time they unpacked a shipment to sell the individual cakes, they would notice that some of the cakes were hard as stone and unpleasant to drink. They didn't really know what to do with these hard cakes, so they would either return them to the

wholesaler or ask them not to send any of these hard cakes in the future! As a result, 1970s wholesalers still didn't have a good way of dealing with their sheng puerh cakes.

But tea merchants need to make a living, too—who on earth would be willing to store tea for more than a decade before they were able to recoup their costs? What's more, no one could guarantee that the tea would actually sell in more than a decade's time! Some tea merchants at the time knew that some of the early loose-leaf puerh sold to restaurants and tea houses had been "soaked" in Changzhou, that is to say, that some sort of fermentation technique had been used to "ripen" sheng puerh into shou puerh—this seems to refer to the process of piling, or *wo dui* (渥堆), to oxidize the tea. But of course, the technique for this "soaking" process was a trade secret, so the merchants, not understanding tea production methods, could only think of recklessly exposing the tea cakes to humid storage conditions, without properly considering the degree of humidity, in the hopes of maturing the tea more quickly. The merchants referred to this process as "underground storage," since these humid warehouses were often underground.

Hence, a great volume of unsaleable sheng puerh cakes were taken to these underground storehouses, in the hopes of finally being rid of them and making a quick profit. However, it's some of these stamped puerh cakes that were stored by tea houses that have been preserved the best, since the tea was only being kept for the tea house's own use, and there was no pressing need to sell it. This also explains why many of the surviving tea cakes, such as Zhongcha Jianti (中茶簡體), "China Tea" cakes with simplified characters, or Xiao Huang Yin (小黃印), "Small Yellow Mark" Seven Sons cakes, have suffered some serious damage due to humid storage conditions. Although compressed tea cakes were not generally well known in the '70s, there were a few high-level tea connoisseurs who sought them out expressly. Since selling tea cakes made a healthy profit—higher than for loose-leaf tea—and since the merchants knew that they could increase the price with the right fermentation techniques, they began to import tea cakes in large quantities.

Since their aim was to make a profit, they also chose relatively cheap sheng puerh cakes to put in storage, because the cost of shou tea cakes was usually around 20% higher. To their surprise, after a few years of storage, the tea still had the same young, green flavor—it didn't seem to have changed at all. On top of that, it wasn't popular to drink puerh from compressed tea cakes in the '70s—there was almost no market for it. So these sheng tea cakes just kept on piling up in the storehouses of small tea merchants.

Although tea dealers at the time didn't have a clear concept of sheng and shou puerh, they did understand that storing those round tea cakes in underground warehouses would make them marketable, so this kind of storage became more and more popular. This led to the development of so-called "Hong Kong-stored" puerh, with its distinct flavor. In the early days, the merchants importing the tea were really going through a process of experimentation. Some smaller-scale merchants took



the hard, sturdy sheng puerh cakes that were threatening to swamp their warehouses and, as a last resort, tried using high humidity to oxidize the cakes, in the hope of selling them more quickly (these were most likely China Tea and Yellow Mark cakes). So, as time went on, Hong Kong's tea merchants developed a more defined concept of puerh tea: Namely, that it needed to be aged in storage to achieve a sufficiently smooth, rich flavor and mouthfeel. And of course, the most important factor was that only with this kind of aging could puerh tea fetch a good price.

Hong Kong Loose-Leaf Shou

Now, don't be fooled into thinking that there are many ordinary households in Hong Kong that mainly drink their puerh in the form of tea cakes. I myself, as a puerh lover from Hong Kong, can tell you that most families still mainly consume inexpensive loose-leaf puerh. I would even say

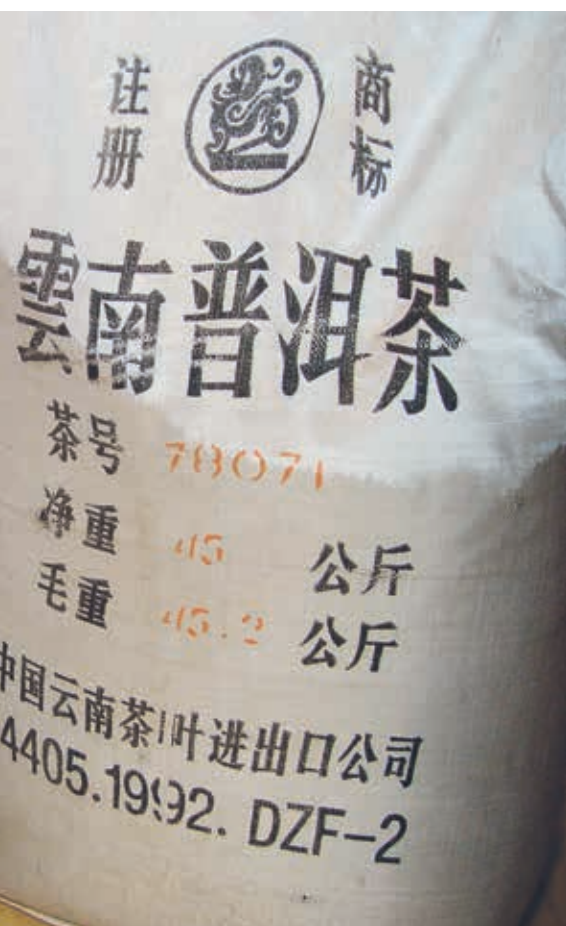
that, aside from those well-versed in the art of tea who have a special interest in puerh, most puerh drinkers in Hong Kong don't even really know about puerh cakes in any of their various shapes, be they disc-shaped *bing* (餅), bowl-shaped *tuó* (沱) or brick-shaped *zhuān* (磚). Most people only know of loose-leaf puerh and don't buy cakes for everyday drinking, as they're inconvenient to break up, and people don't know how to do it. Cakes also tend to be more expensive than loose-leaf puerh.

The loose-leaf shou puerh found in Hong Kong has two different origins: There is puerh made from genuine Yunnan leaf, and another type made from Vietnamese tea leaves. Vietnamese leaf is generally cheaper, and the tea that results from it is not very patient, and has a very subtle sour taste to it; who knows, perhaps this is a distinguishing characteristic of tea from across the border!

In the '70s, some merchants were already wise to the fact that aged puerh

could appreciate, because during the buying process, they noticed that when they bought tea from the same batch two years apart, the price had gone up the second time—even though it was from exactly the same batch of tea! So, they started to look ahead and view the tea like money in a savings account—if it stayed in the wholesaler's warehouse, it would sell for more in a couple of years' time anyway; from the merchants' point of view, it made more sense to buy it now and store it themselves, so they could be the ones to collect the "interest" after the tea was sold. So, some of the smaller merchants started aging the tea in their own storehouses. Tea sellers of that era were very pragmatic; they had long been in competition with each other to do business in their local neighborhoods. Now, they needed to be able to sell puerh for an extended period of time. Although in the '70s the retail market for puerh tea wasn't exactly red-hot, a part of the population still drank it, so every two years,

茶 Today, puerh is exported in nylon bags; each bag weighs 45 kilograms. 78081 is grade 8 shou tea; 78071 is grade 7 shou tea.



a merchant would need to buy around ten large sacks of loose-leaf puerh. In the first year, they would sell the first five sacks, keeping the other five until the following year so they could collect the extra profit from the rising prices. At the end of the two years, they would buy another batch of young, low-priced tea to replenish their stocks for another two years, and so on. Over time, a tea-storage cycle was formed.

Another reason why the tea merchants needed to store the tea themselves was that this loose-leaf tea had all been stored in damp, “underground warehouse” conditions. Buying it in large quantities meant that the merchants could then store it in their own clean and less humid warehouses to “recover.” As time passed, they realized that this tea that had been taken out of “wet” storage in this way would become richer and more mature over time. Eventually, it became clear that the longer puerh was aged, the higher a price it would fetch. The loose-leaf puerh sold in Hong Kong is also known for its naming conventions: The merchants in Hong Kong would sell the tea under product names that they created themselves, rather than using the original factory numbers from Yunnan. Although each tea merchant had a different method for choosing the names, certain names would only show up among very high-grade aged puerh. For example, more valuable puerh would be called things like *Zhen Cang* (珍藏), “Collector’s Treasure,” or *Bu Zhi Nian* (不知年), “Year Unknown,” to indicate that they had been aged for a very long time, improving with the years.

I have personally compared several loose-leaf shou puerh teas, which you can find in the accompanying table. Throughout this process, I noticed that those teas which have undergone “underground storage” are more pleasant to drink, and more closely resemble the aged Yunnan puerh that most people are familiar with from Hong Kong’s tea houses. Although the left-over leaves from brewing teas number five through eight contain some dark chestnut, almost black tea leaves, in my opinion, the teas that have been through underground storage have more of an aged flavor to them and are nicer to drink. Shou tea needs to have a long enough “recovery” time after be-

ing taken out of wet storage, in order to achieve a rich, harmonious flavor.

7432 Shou Puerh Cakes

Although most Hong Kong households mainly consume loose-leaf tea over the years, there has also been a small group of tea enthusiasts who seek out puerh tea cakes. So Hong Kong’s tea sellers still needed to have some shou puerh *bing* on hand to keep their customers happy. One excellent example of a classic Hong Kong puerh cake is the 1988 vintage 7432 tea, which comes wrapped in thick brown paper. This tea’s full code number is 7432–804. The first four digits denote the year the recipe was first invented, followed by the leaf grade and factory code. The second set represents the production year and batch number—804 means that this was the fourth batch produced in 1988. It’s an excellent tea that exhibits all the characteristics that a good shou puerh should: It’s pure, aged, sweet, smooth and rich. It also displays a hint of sheng puerh character, namely a subtle sweet aftertaste.

According to the tea shop owner, this is because it contains a relatively high proportion of sheng tea and was not made entirely from shou tea, so when it was first produced, it wasn’t overly pleasant to drink. So the original tea merchant had to put it into underground storage, in order to sell it more quickly. But because it was left to age for an unexpectedly long time, the sheng component in the tea was influenced by the storage conditions, and ended up producing a flavor close to that of shou puerh. This was how the tea shop owner put it, at least. In any case, whether it is completely shou tea or half sheng and half shou, this batch of 7432–804 tea is very worth drinking by today’s tasting standards.

Shou Puerh Cakes From 1992

Whether because of the weather or some other factor, 1992 was an excellent year for shou puerh. Whether it be ’92 vintage 7542 tea, ’92 small tea bricks or ’92 Xiaguan First Grade *tuocha*, all display a great flavor. Any shou puerh from 1992 that has come out of underground storage produces

a ginseng fragrance when brewed, and an astonishing flavor that encompasses the five classic characteristics: pure, aged, sweet, smooth and rich. The only thing it lacks is the bright liveliness of sheng tea, but as a shou tea, it exceeds expectations. For someone who mostly drinks aged sheng puerh cakes, this tea was a pleasant surprise; it’s easy to drink and is an excellent tea for those who are starting out in their puerh tasting journey. These cakes are hand-wrapped in tissue paper, and the whole batch is notable for the absence of large *nei piao* (內票) or identifying tickets, usually included inside the packaging.

Zi Tian (紫天) “Purple Sky”

Another quite well-known variety of shou puerh cakes are Purple Sky cakes. Apparently, there are quite a lot of imitations of this tea on the market. I acquired this tea quite by chance, and I haven’t been able to uncover any definite information about its background. However, judging by the original paper wrapping and *nei fei* (內飛), the small identifying ticket embedded in the cake, I believe it probably dates to the early 1990s.

Conclusion

Puerh tea has developed to such heights today, not just due to its memorable taste, but also thanks to the gentle and patient nature of shou puerh; it acted as the perfect teacher to guide early puerh students in their journey of discovery. If it weren’t for shou puerh, sheng puerh cakes may have never become what they are today. So, while we go on tasting fine aged sheng puerh cakes, there’s no reason not to include some shou tea, too. What’s more, a good shou puerh has its own lovable qualities, and will certainly be more affordable than a sheng puerh cake of the same vintage. Shou puerh is a type of tea that is well worth appreciating and exploring.





茶 This is the famous “Purple Sky” cake of the 1990s, with a “sky (天)” stamped on the wrapper in purple. It has become a famous shou cake, with deep, dark liquor and a very nice blend of large-grade leaves, some buds and some mid-grade leaves. Since the artificial fermentation/piling of this tea was light, the tea has aged over time and developed many of the flavors that aged sheng has, with hints of Chinese herbs, plum and ginseng. It is a wonderful shou.



經典 Classic Shou Tea 熟茶



茶 This is a 1980s 7432, which is another in the shou Hall of Fame. These old teas were made right—back in the day when piling was an art form and the masters knew how to introduce bacteria from previous batches and stop the fermentation according to the blend. This blend had a smaller grade of leaves than Purple Sky.

Voices from the Hut

Tea Weddings

Love is in the air! Our community celebrated three beautiful tea weddings this year. Erika Houle and Gordon Arkenberg were married by Wu De in Connecticut this June, and Ilyas Jetybayev and Nadya Vorobyeva were married with Tea in Siberia this August. Also, in Finland Jesse and Nelly Öro were married through Tea (Petr's photography contest winner is a picture from this wedding). Congratulations to each couple. Love is truly changing the world bowl by romantic bowl!



☪ *Over the past year, we worked to craft our own special wedding ceremony, which we called with some amusement an “Al-chemical Union.” We structured it using Western occult traditions, but the heart of the ritual came from the tea ceremony. By centering our union on the ceremonial act of serving each other tea, we experienced an intimate stillness, as if we sat upon the hub of a great wheel. At the circumference, our friends and family stood witness, each one a tangent in the arc of our life. After serving each other, we prepared and offered a bowl of tea to each loved one in turn. We carried them one by one from the center to the edge, as if along the spokes of the wheel, with each journey inward and outward joining everyone in one breath.*

This day marked the beginning of a lifelong ceremony. The guests got to keep the bowls and were given a tin of the same special tea to take home. Thus, they were equipped to extend the ceremony by preparing and sharing the tea with others. Additionally, Wu De gifted us a stunning large celadon jar to store our ceremonial tea to drink each anniversary. In remembering our connection to all of nature through tea, we feed the harmony in our relationship and to the greater cosmos. These photographs were taken by our dear friend Felix Candelaria.

Erika & Gordon





茶 On the 19th of August, I married the woman I've shared countless bowls of tea with, Nelly Öro. In our wedding ceremony, we wanted to share bowl tea together with all our guests. Thanks to our good friends near and far, we were able to do so! We had bowls from Petr Novak, tea from our favorite local teashop, water from a great spring and many hands ready to serve tea. All of us crammed into a small and intimate space, and shared bowls of fresh, green leaves. I have no words for the atmosphere then and there. We also wanted to personally offer tea to our guests, so after dinner, we visited each table and prepared gongfu tea for them. It gave us a chance to connect with everyone, and offer them a very different kind of tea experience. There was no meditative silence, but there was still all our effort and strong, aged tea! In the evening, as our guests departed, we gave them each a bowl used in the ceremony and a small package of the tea, with a wish that the bowl tea wouldn't become just a memory for them. Photography by Carolina Mobarac.





茶 For both of us, Tea happened to be not only a medicine, but also the perfect match-maker. We first met at a tea ceremony five years ago, and since then, we've been building our relationship as students of the Leaf, so there was no doubt that our wedding would be Tea-infused. And it was! We gathered our friends and, with their support, hosted a tea party with a somewhat Japanese accent: paper cranes were swaying in the air while we shared a bowl of matcha, sealing our connection. We had casual tea sessions afterwards, with some jazz and classical music played on traditional Japanese instruments in the background. There was a lot of delicious food, Japanese okashi and matcha desserts, a joint painting and even a hokku competition. All that bliss ended with a loving-kindness meditation, after which we and our friends dripped wax on a special jar full of puerh and a paper crane with a promise inside to seal the lid tight for storage. A couple of days later, we had a more traditional wedding for relatives. There, we served bowls of tea to our parents as a symbol of acceptance.



TeaWayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you, 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 Tatyana Leonova.

In preparation for this honor, I read almost all the TeaWayfarers in Global Tea Hut and I cried several times, so touching were the words of people—straight to the heart, as Tea always is, in any form: liquid, silence, words or the warm care of a grandmother. Here are some details of my Tea journey.

It all started in 2008 in Novosibirsk. A good friend of mine, Ivan, was sitting in my kitchen. We were drinking strawberry *sencha*. It was midnight, and we were chatting. After a few sips, he told me that there is another way of drinking tea—the “Chinese tea ceremony”—and he invited me to one he was hosting at his home. From the first cup, I fell in love. It was so mysterious, so touching, so deep, so silent! I got into it very quickly and became a part of the local tea community, who often gathered for silent tea sessions through our long and cold Siberian winters.

Some time later, I started a meditation practice, which also influenced my tea. I also moved from Siberia to the Netherlands to study, where people drink tea in bags. I was surprised that it was so hard to find any loose-leaf tea. I felt a bit sad and lonely without tea friends. But I had brought my teaware from Russia, and I brought some tea from Russia every time I went back.

Each summer, when I went home for the holidays, the first thing I did was drink tea with my friends there. One summer, three years ago, I found myself on a tea retreat in the Altay Mountains with Ilyas Jetbayev (also a past TeaWayfarer). It was a one-week tea retreat called “Tea Diving,” in a very beautiful and wild place. I got to know Wu De’s teachings there, learned of this tea tradition and of the existence of Global Tea Hut. I felt very much connected to this approach of drinking tea in a silent and meditative way—to focus on connection to yourself, others and Nature.

I came back to the Netherlands and subscribed to Global Tea Hut right away. I thought it was amazing that you could get such great tea every month delivered to your door! A few months later, I opened my envelope and saw on the last page that “Jasper Hermans is serving Tea in the Netherlands”! I was very pleasantly shocked and happy that there was somebody else here who practices tea the way I do. A few months later, I met Jasper at a public ceremony held at the Amsterdam Zen Center. A bit later, our Dutch Global Tea Hut community started to grow. Since then, we have organized many tea events together with our tea friends in the Netherlands, and I feel very grateful to be part of such a wonderful local tea community.

It was very special for me to meet Wu De in person and to listen to his teachings. They resonate very deeply with me, and some of them have become the principles I follow in my life,



茶人: Tatyana Leonova

helping me to live more peacefully, harmoniously and, ultimately, to be a better person.

I feel grateful to the Global Tea Hut community, mostly because I have met so many great people in this hut. The Global Tea Hut Netherlands and Belgium communities have grown a lot during the last two or three years. Now, we often gather for tea together, fetch water at a spring in Belgium and regularly organize weekend Tea retreats. Last May, nine Dutch Chajin served tea at the Dutch Tea Festival, spreading the word about Global Tea Hut. We even served tea to 250 people in one day.

Tea helps me to calm down, and it works for me as an easy entrance to meditation. A good tea session has a healing effect on me. Among other things, Tea has helped me to finish my PhD thesis. Tea is definitely something that gives me energy and makes me happy, and even though it is often like a hobby for me, there are times when Tea plays a major part in my life, and I feel it is my Dao.

If any of you happen to be in the Netherlands, please stop by Eindhoven to share some tea. We hold weekly tea gatherings and are always happy to host any tea lover.

Inside the Hut

COMING SOON TO GLOBAL TEA HUT MAGAZINE

茶主题: Tea & Zen Retreats

茶道

茶主题: Recipes & Tea

茶主题: Chajin Stories/Biographies

茶主题: Liu Bao Tea



If you serve tea regularly and would like some extra magazines or tea tins to give out to help spread the word about Global Tea Hut, please let us know. We are also looking to donate magazines to public places.



We are considering hosting two Annual Global Tea Hut Trips in 2018: our usual spring trip to a tea-growing region of Asia and a second trip within Taiwan itself. Would this second trip interest you?



Please continue to use the app. Don't feel intimidated to post about your daily tea, any questions you have about tea or teaware, or your reflections on the magazine or the Tea of the Month!



We have been looking at land for Light Meets Life. Help us make our new Center a reality by reading the "10kx2020" pamphlet and contacting us if you feel there is any way you can help!



The live broadcasts are so much fun! We are doing two every month: one in the beginning, which is a great Q & A, and another broadcast at the end of the month, where we discuss the Tea of the Month.



We have begun a recipe contest, running until early December. Winners will have their recipe published in Global Tea Hut and will receive some tea and teaware. (All submissions must be vegetarian.)



Our Light Meets Life fundraiser teas and teaware have arrived. We have some of the best cakes we have ever produced and some glorious gongfu teaware. All the proceeds will help build our future Center, called "Light Meets Life."

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. Make sure you apply early for courses as they fill up fast (this is why we need a bigger, more awesome Center).



We are hiring! We have three jobs to fill: a PR position, a web designer and we are offering a one-year internship for a photographer/vid-eographer. All three positions are paid. Check out the "10kx2020" pamphlet for details.



We are considering offering one longer, more meditative course for older/experienced students in 2018. This course would be twenty days, cover each brewing method more in-depth and also include more meditation each day. Would you be interested? If so, what time of year would be best for you?



The Center will be closed throughout December for holidays, rest and a thorough cleaning for the new year of courses.

November Affirmation

I am body and spirit in harmony

Am I too grounded? Am I too much in the physical realm? Or am I too lost in the clouds, struggling to navigate the mundane world? I balance the spirit and body. I harmonize the Earth and Heaven, integrating both in my life.



www.globalteahut.org

The ripest of ripe Tea magazines 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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