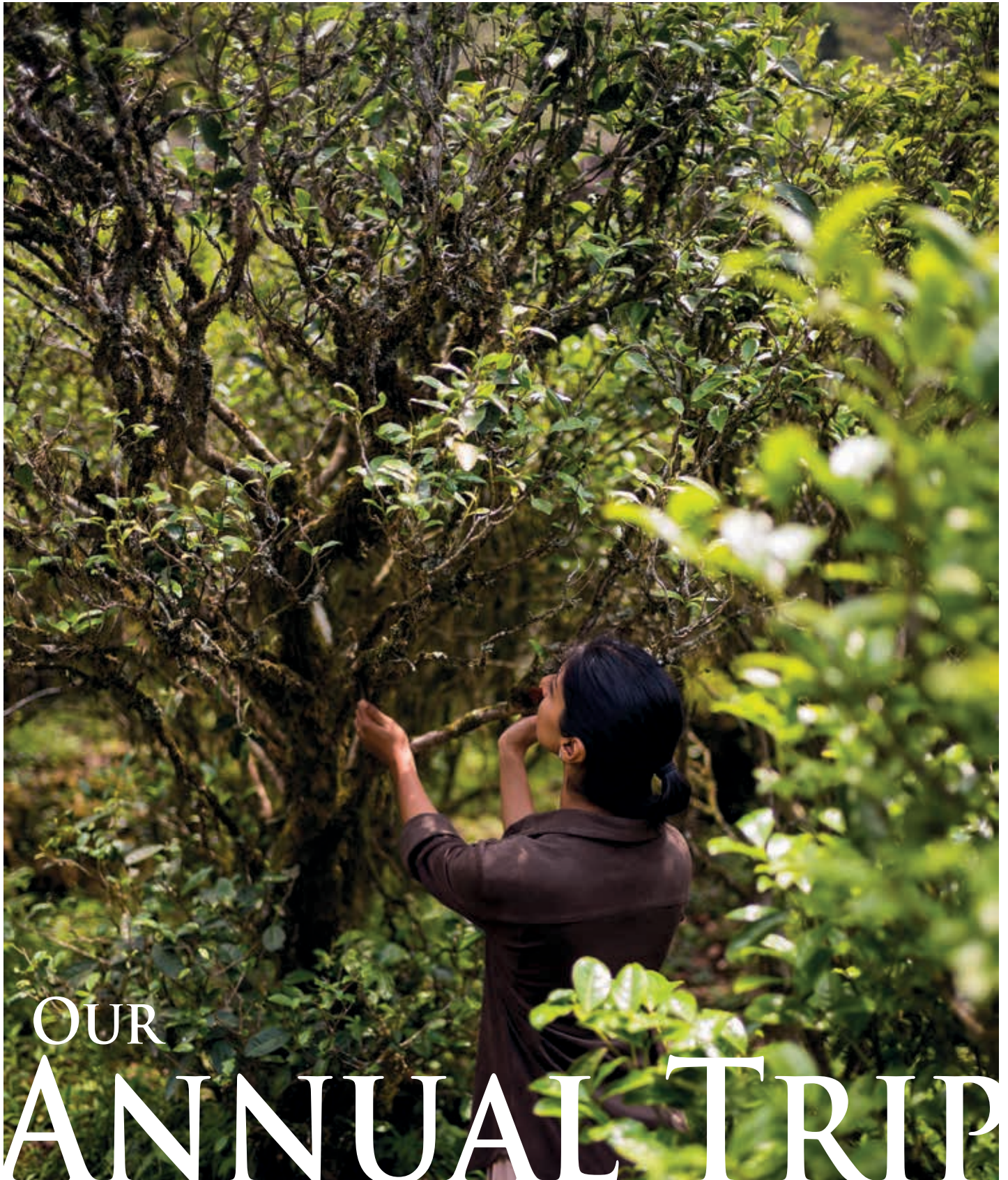


GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

July 2018



OUR
ANNUAL TRIP



DUCK SHIT

These annual trips somehow manage to grow more epic each and every year. This was the most tea-filled of our five trips so far. Follow us on our journey, traveling through the oolong lands, and join us in drinking a rare and precious Dancong tea with a very unique story and name!

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

FEATURES

17 INTRODUCTION TO OUR ANNUAL TRIP

21 ANXI (安溪)

Antonio Moreno, Måns Kämpe,
Yuliya Maslyn & Kristina Clark

31 PHOENIX MT. (鳳凰山)

Mascha Coetzee, Kent Steedman,
Admar de Bruin, Connor Goss
& Eli Buren

41 CHAOZHOU (潮州)

Steve Kokker (Ci Ting, 慈聽)
& Jing Ren (淨仁)

51 HONG KONG (香港)

Emily Morrison, Shen Su (聖素),
Morten Menge, Rivo Sarapik,
Jaanus Leplaan & Signe Sillasoo

41



21



17



TRADITIONS

03 TEA OF THE MONTH

"Duck Shit," Dancong Oolong Tea
Phoenix Mt., Chaozhou, China

61 TEA WAYFARER

Rivo Sarapik, Estonia



鴨屎

03



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From the editor

In July, the weather in Taiwan is very hot and we are often indoors with the air-conditioner on, drinking fresh Japanese green tea (*shincha*), this year's new sheng puerh *maocha*, other green teas like Cloud Temple and lightly-oxidized oolongs like our Tea of the Month this month. Of course, Liu Bao is also famed for its cooling properties, so a late-afternoon session of some 1990s Liu Bao (like the Ma Bao we are selling for Light Meets Life) is also very welcome amidst all the astringent, greener teas we are drinking. Like last month, we continue to enjoy reviewing this year's sheng puerh, dian hong and even some white teas as they roll in fresh from the farm. We have already chosen this year's Light Meets Life teas, but we are still choosing tea for the Center and have lots of samples to drink our way through, which is one of the highlights of the year.

This issue is one of our favorites each and every year: the issue covering our Annual Global Tea Hut Trip! This was our fifth year taking a group of Global Tea Hut members to tea-growing regions around China to explore, learn about tea production, connect with the Nature that makes our beloved Leaf and also, of course, foster community and fellowship through tea. This year was by far the most tea-filled trip ever—jam-packed with tea trees of various kinds, tea production, teaware making and much more. Each day was so full of tea experiences and new information that I am still unpacking all that I learned more than a month later! It has also been amazing to see these trips grow from ten people to forty-three, and yet the organization has gotten better and smoother, though inevitably China always offers some bumps along the way.

Of course, we always make a strong effort to take the entire community along with us on these trips. Throughout the trip, we stopped to pray for all of you and invite you to join us in spirit. We realize that many of you would love to be with us but couldn't due to the logistics of travel. We hope that you felt our small circle within the larger circle of this Hut, as we called you in. We also knew that we would be bringing you with us in the form of this issue and the videos we will be publishing this month as well. We went to great lengths to record our experiences, writing about what happened, making lots of photographs and videos and even processing some glorious tea to share for you.

If you are fishing around for the gift, shaking the envelope up and down, you can stop now. This month's tea is among the best, and the most expensive we have ever sent out. For that reason, we had to use the gift money along with our tea budget to purchase this wild, old-growth Dancong oolong. We hope you support this decision. We did this last December and most of you were happy with the upgrade in tea, so we think you will be okay with it now as well. We had the opportunity to get some more affordable, organic plantation Dancong, but wanted to offer you the chance to drink some tea from the older trees we sat and meditated with. It is nice to raise the bar and share tea that is higher quality with all of you, whom we love so much. It makes this all worthwhile.

We have a tremendous amount of tea and teaware in our fundraiser this year, to help build our future Center, Light Meets Life, and also to support your practice. We have bowl sets, three different types of sidehandle pots, amazing kettle and brazier sets, Yixing teapots for gongfu tea and more. We also have some glorious teas this year, including one of the best shou puerh teas we have ever tried from old-growth trees in Jingmai (the same grove as Forest Bridge). Your support in choosing this tea and teaware means that we can move closer to our goal of building your Center in the mountains. This is much-needed, as our courses are always over-full with long waiting lists (we had thirty-two people on one waiting list early this year).

Before we move on to our exciting adventure through oolong tea, carried by a black dragon through the southern mountains of China, there are two more announcements we have to make. First, we have changed the Tea of the Month article around. From now on, the information about the tea itself (that which used to be next to the "Brewing Tips") will be on p. 3, and the article on the Tea of the Month, which will now be called a "A Deeper Session" exploring the topics surrounding the Tea of the Month in greater detail, will begin on p. 5 after the spread with the tea's information.

Second, we have converted all past issues to .html. This means that every past issue is now searchable by article, topic, author, etc. There are tags you can use, or you can conduct your own search with any keyword you want. This is a huge step, as it opens Global Tea Hut, the greatest resource on tea in the English language, to the entire world. We hope that beyond this community, tea lovers around the world will make use of this free resource to learn about tea and grow a greater love for Nature through tea, which may lead to a more harmonious relationship with our Mother Earth. We are extremely grateful for your support, which makes this project possible, and for your inspiration, which fuels all the hard work that goes into its continuation.



—Further Reading—

This month, we recommend rereading the previous annual trip editions, which will provide context for the types of trips we take and what it is like to travel with us on one. Hopefully, this will inspire you to sign up for a future trip and everyone in the community will join us at least one year!

TEA OF THE MONTH



Our beautiful Duck Shit (*Ya Shi*, 鴨屎) tea was made by our host on this year's annual trip, Mr. Zeng Shun Tao (曾舜濤).

We had a lot of choices for our tea to go with this year's trip issue, but we wanted something special, as this is the first-ever Dancong we have shared with the community. We decided to spend the tea budget and our gift budget, explaining to Mr. Zeng how much we had. He offered to match us, dollar for dollar, and through his generosity, we were able to purchase this stunning tea, which comes from a wild garden of old trees on Wudong Mountain (烏洞山) that average fifty years old.

Like most other famous varieties of Dancong, Duck Shit Fragrance comes from a single Mother tree that is around one hundred years old. The name is amongst the most curious in the tea world, and the Chinese is the most vulgar character (*shi*, 屎), so there is no point in translating it euphemistically as "poop" or "feces," when only "shit" will do. There are many versions of the story of how this tea got its unique name. In most versions, the soil in the area where the original tea grows is yellowish-white and thought to be inferior to other areas of the mountain. When a farmer found this unique tree and tasted the glorious tea it yielded, he named it after the soil that produced it. Other locals refer to this farmer as "Wei," adding that the tree was wild and didn't belong to anyone. They say that Wei was worried that once people realized how wonderful the fragrance of this tea was, they would

steal the tree or take graftings, so he gave it an unattractive name to scare people off. Other less frequently heard stories involve duck shit as fertilizer or even the fragrance of the tea leaves when they are withering overnight, which, they say, smell faintly of duck shit.

Our Duck Shit Dancong is incredibly fragrant, with a rising glory of floral, fruity notes that come in waves. The thick, sweet liquor coats the mouth and throat and lasts for a long time. The energy is incredibly uplifting. These wild trees are full of the movements of the sky, as the area on Wudong Mountain where this garden resides is around 1,200 meters above sea level and is rocky and open to the air. Mist and fog roll through each morning, and the old garden is full of plants and insects. The trees are covered in seeds, showing their wild vibrancy. This is one of the most powerful gardens we have ever visited, and the tea thrums with that energy.

We suggest taking an entire afternoon to enjoy dozens of steepings of this amazing tea. Be sure to smell each and every cup, as much of the energy (*Qi*, 氣) of this tea is in the fragrance. If you are brewing this leaves in a bowl, just two or three leaves will do, and you may want to have it in the morning instead. The leaves open up gorgeously in a bowl, but the fragrance really shines when prepared gongfu. (There is enough tea for you to try both if you wish to.) Take the time to soar on the dragon's back, through the clouds and up into the full and open sky...



Duck Shit (鴨屎)



Phoenix Mountain, China



Dancong Oolong Tea



Han Chinese




~1,200 Meters



A DEEPER SESSION

Further Exploration into Our Tea of the Month

 ver the course of this month, we will be joining this year's intrepid Global Tea Hut travelers through Anxi, Phoenix Mountain, Chaozhou and Hong Kong. As usual, we selected a tea from our journey and the hosts we were visiting, adding some depth to the experience of reading about our trip with us. We were offered three grades of tea this year by our host in Phoenix Mountain and decided, like last December, to forgo a gift this month and use the extra funds to choose the highest grade of tea we could get, sharing an extra special tea this month as we celebrate our fifth such tea trip gathering, hoping to take you all with us on this epic journey. As usual, let's move from the general to the specific, starting with a review of some important lessons about tea genres to the category of oolong and then on to talk about Dancong oolong and our Tea of the Month.

Oolong tea production developed in Wuyi, in the north of Fujian in the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and then spread southwards as it was the most suitable production method for the varieties in this area. Throughout these issues, we always try to correct the mistaken understanding that the seven genres of tea are just a result of processing methods. In the West, it is often assumed that the types of tea are defined exclusively by processing. This mistake is, in part, due to the fact that early European traders were not allowed beyond the docks, never saw tea trees or

processing and learned everything in broken languages from the hearsay of merchants who were instructed not to tell the foreigners much. In the early days, the European traders, merchants and eventually consumers whom they informed only divided tea into “black” and “green,” and it was assumed that these two types of tea came from different plants altogether. Once it was discovered that both types of tea came from varieties of the same *Camellia* tree, tea vendors combated the misinformation about tea coming from different plants with the simplification that the differences in type were “all in the processing.” While the strategy worked and merchants, vendors and consumers all came to realize that all tea came from *Camellia sinensis*, the oversimplification misled in another direction.

In books and on the Internet, it is common to find authors stating that “all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the difference is in the processing,” further promoting this age-old misinformation. The first part of this statement is wrong, as tea is actually made from many species of *Camellia*, with dozens of species in Yunnan and others in Taiwan and elsewhere. Furthermore, the processing of tea developed over time to suit a local variety or varieties. The processing of tea evolved the way all human skills do, which is in three ways: insight, innovation and trial and error. *Insight* refers to a deep, or one could say “spiritual,” connection to the medium and process of an art. This kind

of adaptation comes from beyond the artist and flows through her. Second are *innovations*, which are the bright ideas—the light bulbs that go off when brilliant men come up with new ideas. Finally, what usually follows the first two methods of development is a period of *trial and error*. Within this type of progress, one might also include the times when we accidentally stumble upon something that turns out to be genius. Tea processing evolved over centuries in all three of these ways.

Some of the characteristics we find in different genres of tea are potentially contained within any variety of tea, while others are only specific to the variety(ies) of a region. This means that some of the techniques used to process tea of a specific genre could be applied to other tea trees in a very different place and create similar results, but certain qualities would be missing. This unique specificity also goes beyond the varieties. Even when a variety is transplanted to another region, the environment shapes a very different leaf. As Wu De always says, “A leaf is the tree's expression of its relationship to its environment.” All the nutrients used to grow that leaf came from the soil, the mountain and the weather of that place. And if a farmer is sensitive, which is a requirement for mastery of tea production, he will adapt his processing to suit the leaf. In other words, great farmers adapt their processing every year depending on the weather, rainfall, humidity, mist and other natural influences.



The conclusion is that oolong is not just a processing method. It is a cluster of processing methods and a cluster of trees/terroirs extending from Fujian down to Guangdong and over to Taiwan. As the processing methods invented in Wuyi spread south, they were adapted to suit the varieties already in Anxi, Taiwan and Phoenix Mountain. Anxi oolong is rolled in cloth bags ball-style because the varieties there are tough, and a more vigorous roll is needed to break down the cells and shape the tea. If Wuyi Cliff Tea was rolled in that way, it would be destroyed. Phoenix Mountain tea is also more delicate, and so it is rolled across bamboo trays when it is hand-processed. All of these and many more subtle differences from region to region, tea to tea, are the result of processing skills that are responding to certain varieties and the unique characteristics found in those trees along with the unique environments those trees grow in and the changes in weather each year or season to season.

Oolong is made from larger leaves with more open bud sets than green, white or yellow tea. These more mature leaves are bolder and stronger, with more potential for bright, deep fragrance. Traditionally, before the invention of agro-chemicals, these tea leaves were covered with bug bites as well, since they had been on the tree longer. Farmers who still work with clean tea welcome this, as it is first of all a sign of a healthy, vibrant ecology, which means the tea will be rich that

year; and, second of all, around each bug bite is a red ring that shows that the leaf has already started oxidizing before it was even picked. Oolong tea is withered and shaken to semi-oxidize the tea, traditionally to a range of 40% to 70%. This allows the fragrance of the tea to develop more profoundly and with a greater character, especially since the trees in Fujian, Taiwan and Guangdong are rich, semi-tropical or tropical, with full-bodied flavors. They are juicy and vibrant, strong and bright, and this type of processing brings out the richness within. This is also why the buds of oolong tea are left to open further than with white, green or yellow tea varieties.

Oolong tea all goes through indoor and outdoor withering, shaking, firing, rolling and then usually roasting if it is traditionally processed, though there are great variations from region to region and varietal to varietal. (We will discuss the processing of Dancong and our Tea of the Month later.) The withering oxidizes the tea, and the shaking, which is perhaps the most defining feature of oolong production, bruises the edges of the leaf, further enriching the oxidation. The firing slows the oxidation down to a trickle (enough that we can say it has been arrested), and the rolling breaks the cells down, bringing the inner juices of the tea to the surface. The roasting matures and develops the flavors, hopefully enhancing and encouraging them to fix in the drying. But knowing this basic formula is just a very rough sketch of

what oolong is. The details all need to be filled in with other, sharper pencils, brushes and ink.

In order to really understand oolong tea, we must first recognize that this procedure was developed to bring out the best of certain varieties of trees, growing in a certain type of environment within a certain climate. Each kind of Dancong or Cliff Tea is processed slightly differently based on its characteristics. *Shuixian* (水仙), for example, is delicate and usually oxidized more lightly. The above formula is always adjusted based on the varietal, the garden and the weather that year, and while the variations may seem subtle from a distance, they are strong and extremely influential to the sensitive hands of the farmer working with the tea and the palates of a tea connoisseur drinking the finished tea. The best teas require the right environment, varieties suited to that place, perfect spring weather (traditionally tea is made only in spring and the best teas are still thus) and subtle, sensitive and skillful hands to process the leaves, coaxing their inner spirit out (and this includes skillful brewing as much as it does processing). As any tea farmer will tell you, fine tea is a cooperation of Heaven, Earth and Human.

Tea is a dance: one partner is Nature and the other human, and in this dance Nature leads. We follow Her steps, and only find grace when in harmony with the music, which is the Great Dao that we both follow around the stage.

PHOENIX MOUNTAIN

鳳凰山

Phoenix Mountain (鳳凰山) is to the north of Chaozhou in Guangdong Province. This small tea-growing region has peaks that reach up to 1,500 meters above sea level in a very temperate and tropical region with average temperatures of between 18-22 degrees Celsius. The mountains here are dense and rocky, and the even temperatures during the day and night during the spring and loose gravelly soil are perfect for tea growing. Tea loves loose, rocky, mineral-rich soil with constant water flow. It also likes humid, consistent temperatures with fog and mist rolling in each morning, all of which are present in abundance throughout the Phoenix Mountain area. All of this contributes to the rich and healthy trees of the area, with thick, juicy and dense, extremely fragrant and slightly larger leaves that are perfect for oolong production.

The history of tea production in this area is ancient and rich, straying off the pages of record into legends and lore passed on down generations of

farmers, merchants and tea lovers. Tea cultivation began here in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) when the area was called “Chao Shan (潮山).” Some historians say the first trees were brought down from Wuyi, while others argue that wild trees were discovered here, native to the region. In the middle of the Song Dynasty, the court was forced to flee south due to another invasion from the northern tribes, beginning the Southern Song (1127–1279). They say that during that time the august emperor himself visited Phoenix Mountain and was so impressed with the green tea there he wrote a poem about it, comparing the small buds to a bird’s beak. Shortly thereafter the tea was called “Beak Tea (*Niao Zui Cha*, 鳥嘴茶)” throughout the realm.

The oldest and most famous varietal of tea in Phoenix Mountain is referred to as “Song Tea (宋茶),” or “Song Varietal (宋種),” as it was brought here in the Song Dynasty. These trees are actually a kind of *Shuixian*, and most certainly originated in Wuyi.

Shuixian trees can be found all throughout Fujian, in Anxi and other parts of Quanzhou as well as Guangdong. The best and oldest gardens in the Phoenix area are found on Wudong Mountain (烏東山), which is the origin point for tea production in the area.

Whether the emperor really visited the area or not, he and his descendants certainly drank Beak Tea, and later oolong, as it was a tribute tea from the Song era on. But it was in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) that the tea from Phoenix Mountain started to become famous throughout China and eventually beyond. When oolong production traveled southwards and influenced all of Fujian and Guangdong, the tea from this region reached its true potential as one of the brightest and best of the dragons to fly. Of course, the processing from tree to leaf grew along its own roads in Phoenix Mountain, becoming a very unique tea over the centuries, produced like no other. From tree to leaf, processing to liquor, Dancong is a very unique tea.



DANCONG

單 叢

Oolong tea from Phoenix Mountain is called “Dancong tea (單叢茶),” which literally translates to “Single Bush tea.” The name of this tea actually celebrates the most unique aspect of the tradition of oolong production that grew up here: the trees. The processing of Dancong is unique amongst oolongs, which we will discuss in a bit, but the rarest jewel of tea culture that evolved in Phoenix Mountain is the “Single Bush” ideal, because Dancong tea was traditionally processed one tree at a time. (Because these are small-leaf or medium-leaf teas, they are referred to as a “bush,” as they have several trunks and roots that grow outward, but we will also refer to them as “trees” in this article.)

There is no historical record of when the process of creating single-tree tea began in Phoenix Mountain, but it predates the evolution into oolong processing, back when tea from this region was still made into green tea. Since seed-propagated trees can live hundreds of years and the tea only gets

better, it is actually amazing that this culture of preserving the trees didn’t spread to other regions as well. It is easy to imagine the why of how this trend started, even if we can’t be sure of the who, when or how, as any tea lover is thrilled to have tea from a single-tree. At some point, a farmer decided to harvest and process a single old tree’s leaves separately and his success meant he repeated this, perhaps with other trees as well, and eventually the practice spread to other households as well, until everyone was doing it.

There is a magic in drinking tea from a single-tree. Every tea we have ever had that was made from one old tree, whether from Yunnan, Wuyi or Phoenix Mountain, we were always impressed by the breadth and depth of such teas. There is little doubt that the practice of harvesting and processing single-tree tea created something special, which motivated farmers to continue the practice. There can also be no doubt that such tea was valuable to tea lovers—as valuable in antiqui-

ty as it is now, which means that the producers in Phoenix Mountain had financial motivation to continue such hard work, then to now. If the tea had not sold well, the process of making single-tree tea may have only continued for very special trees, on special occasions or by certain houses, as is the case in Wuyi. But the practice caught on and Dancong tea was born.

The special qualities of a single-tree tea and the market behind it had another very positive effect on the landscape of Phoenix Mountain. As certain single trees became famous for their unique tea, farmers took extra care to preserve and protect them, allowing them to grow old. In other tea growing regions, bushes are often replaced when they get older and their production decreases—long before they reach centuries old, let alone allowing them to die naturally at the age of eight or nine hundred years. But in Phoenix Mountain, the fact that the tea was being sold tree by tree meant that quantity wasn’t ever an issue.

Pronunciation of Dancong

The term “Dancong” is just one of those Chinese words that all non-Chinese speakers mispronounce. We always hear people saying this like “Dansong,” with an “s” sound for the second character, which is a mistake. (Other big ones include pronouncing “puerh” as “poo-air” and calling the Buddha, “Booo-da.”) It is important that as tea lovers learning from another culture, we respectfully learn the proper pronunciation of terms, which also helps us when traveling to tea regions, of course. Along with this small sidebar to help you, we would recommend going online and finding a site where you can listen to the pronunciation of Chinese tea terms. In the future, we also plan to make a video about tea terms in Chinese for our “Brewing Tea” video series.

“Dancong (單叢)” is two characters, obviously. The first character, “dan (單),” is pronounced a little like the “don” in “Don Corleone” of the Godfather movies. Usually, non-Chinese speakers get that part right. However, the second character, “cong (叢),” is a bit more difficult. A “c” in the Romanized pinyin of Chinese is a “ts” sound. It’s like the “ts” you hear in the English words “bats,” “Watson” and “carrots.” The main challenge with this sound for English speakers is that in English the “ts” usually appears at the end of words, or more rarely in the middle, whereas in Chinese it is an initial sound. This can be hard to retrain for an English speaker. The “cong” in Dancong is pronounced like “Dan-tsong” not “Dan-song,” or you could think of both characters as “Don-tsong.”

Hopefully this helps you to pronounce this tea properly, respecting the language and culture it comes from. (You can also work on “puerh” and “Buddha” if you are mispronouncing those, as well.) We hope to include more Chinese lessons in future issues as well!





香是品種

In fact, when an old tree started to produce less, the value might go up as the already rare tea, harvested only once a year, would then be even rarer. This also meant that people in Phoenix Mountain discovered that the older the tree grew, the better and more fragrant the tea.

Older trees produce better tea for physical and spiritual reasons. Physically, the tree gets stronger, the roots deeper and its ability to take in more nutrients from the ground and sun from the sky increases; spiritually, the tea improves in energy because the tree is getting older and wiser, conveying more years of experience and Nature energy to the drinker.

Another very unique aspect of Dancong tea is that the varieties here are almost all literally called “fragrance (香),” named after the aroma they elicit. Though some teas are named after legends, place of origin, etc., most are delineated by their scent. Currently, there are around one hundred different “fragrances,” with more being invented as seed-propagated trees mutate, get older and/or get famous, literally making a name for themselves. Aside from the Song Varietal, some famous fragrances are Honey Orchid Fragrance (*Milan Xiang*, 蜜蘭香), Almond Fragrance (*Tao Ren Xiang*, 桃仁香), Eight Immortals (*Ba Xian*, 八仙), the amazing and very subtle Ginger Fragrance (*Jiang Hua Xiang*,

薑花香) and many more fragrances. Indeed, Dancong oolong teas are among the most fragrant of all teas, with subtle aromas and shades of blossom, fruit, musk and many other perfumes not found in any other kind of tea. And appreciating the fragrance of the tea is a must when drinking Dancong!

Ultimately, Dancong tea is only “single bush” in name. As certain old trees became famous, they were grafted elsewhere, creating new trees with the same “fragrances.” Some of these second-, third- and even fourth-generation trees are now also very old in their own rights. As a result, gardens were built over the centuries and Dancong tea was slowly divided into three main types: original single-tree Dancong, in which one tree is still harvested separately and processed individually in a traditional way; old, natural gardens that may be graftings of special single trees or even wild areas where trees have propagated themselves (like our Tea of the Month), creating many varieties and even sometimes new ones; and, finally, plantation tea, which extends even into the lowlands surrounding Wudong Mountain in neat rows of bushes. There are way too many fake “single-tree” teas on the market, and the real ones are astronomically priced, which is a sad trend that many other types of tea are facing, including puerh and Wuyi Cliff Tea.





THE PROCESSING OF DANCONG FROM TREE TO CUP

單欖茶製作工序從樹到杯子

Plucking

Withering

(indoors and outdoors)

Shaking

(lang qing, 浪青)

Withering/Shaking

in 90-minute cycles

Firing

(Chao qing, 炒青)

Rolling/Shaping

(rou nian, 揉捻)

Roasting Dry

(zou shui bei, 走水焙)

Roasting

(hong pei, 烘培)

Sorting

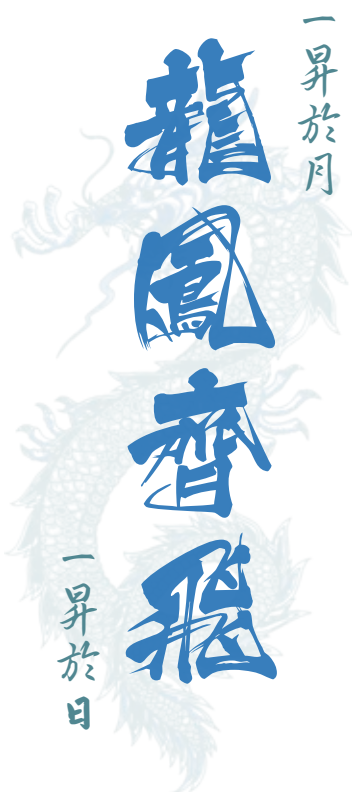
(fen ji, 分級)

Packaging

Preparation

Cloud-Soaring

(yun teng, 雲騰)



Dancong oolong is made in a very unique way that is as rare as the environment and trees it comes from. There is no other oolong made in this way. Most teas are plucked in the early morning and completely processed in the same day. Dancong, however, is plucked in the early afternoon and usually not finished until the following morning. As we mentioned above, subtle variations in processing will be exercised for different varietals, different types of weather patterns and, of course, some variations from house to house.

Traditional tea production is only and ever in spring. In certain very temperate areas, like Yunnan, there would be autumn flushes as well. But most tea only naturally flushes in spring and then very rarely has a small autumn harvest. (In twenty years of visiting Wuyi we have seen two small autumn harvests.) In such cases where there is a small autumn harvest (or a larger one

in Yunnan), the spring tea will still be much better in quality, as the weather is ideal for tea. In order to have multiple harvests in a year, the farmer must fertilize the tea. This can be done with natural fertilizers, creating organic plantation tea, but this will shorten the life-cycle of the trees and the vibrancy of the tea and land. While it is necessary for us to encourage organic plantation tea, which is healthy and sustainable, the best teas will always be produced naturally, which means once a year.

The harvest of Dancong begins in March. Because it is further south than other oolong tea mountains, and within the tropical zone, Dancong is picked earlier than other types of oolong, which begin in April or even May. Traditionally, like most tea, it was plucked in sets of one bud and two-to-three leaves, though on some farms these sets are augmented with more leaves to increase yield. The bud is fully

opened in oolong tea, as we discussed earlier. The fact that Dancong is picked in the early afternoon makes for a very different chemistry. And in tea production, the previous step always informs the following ones, and is always more important—meaning that the environment determines the varietal, the weather the harvest, the harvest the processing and so on.

Ideally, the tea can then have an outdoor withering (*shai qing*, 曬青), though modern demand coupled with climate change has meant that farmers cannot always wait for the right day, and this step must be skipped if the sun is too strong. The ideal is for the tea to be withered on round bamboo trays so that there is airflow from underneath, but most farmers put their tea out on the ground spread out on tarps. This process will greatly depend on the humidity and weather. It may last around thirty minutes or even up to two hours.



Dancong tea has a unique and much longer indoor withering than other kinds of oolong tea. In most houses, the tea goes through five 180-minute cycles of shaking and withering. These days, everyone is using machines to toss the tea (*lang qing*, 浪青). They are large bamboo drums that spin in a circle, shaking and bruising the tea. Dancong has ninety minutes of withering (*wei diao*, 萎凋) and then ninety minutes of shaking. The first cycle is shaken and piled more lightly, the second and third grow harder and more vigorous, and the fourth and fifth then taper off to a lighter shaking and withering. Though we say ninety minutes of shaking and ninety minutes of rest, it is important to remember that there is no precise recipe—great chefs only follow recipes loosely. The farmers are constantly checking the tea throughout this process, smelling its fragrance and adapting the process based on the varietal

being processed, the desired fragrance and even the moisture content of the leaves (the weather). This process typically goes on until around midnight, at which point the tea is covered and rests until very early in the morning (around 4 or 5 am) when it is checked by the master processor to determine if it is ready to go on to the next phase.

Early in the morning, the tea is de-enzymed, which the locals call “stir-frying (*chao qing*, 炒青),” as opposed to the more usual term “kill green (*sha qing*, 殺青).” The typical machine used in Phoenix Mountain is a combination of old and new world technology. They use a wood fire to heat a wok that has electric-powered iron blades that spiral around it, stirring the tea as it is fired. When the temperature of the wood fire is correct and the wok is around 200 degrees Celsius, they insert the moist, limp tea leaves to be fired and then click on the blades that circulate the tea, lifting it off the wok

as they spin. The hole is covered with a flap of cloth or cardboard to hold the heat in, though the farmer occasionally lifts the flap and smells the tea or even stops the blades very briefly to grab some leaves and check on them. When the firing is finished, the farmer then reverses the blades, causing all the tea to be pulled out by the blades. The tea falls out onto a round bamboo tray.

At this point, the tea is rolled (*rou nian*, 揉捻). Rolling breaks down the cells and brings the inner juices to the surface of the leaves. Dancong is a striped oolong, with long, twisted and delicate stripes. It was traditionally rolled by hand across bamboo trays, which we all tried when we were there. Nowadays, this is more often done with a rolling machine that presses the leaves down and pushes them over metal ridges. Because these machines can roll more vigorously, the rolling time has been decreased drastically from the hand-rolling days.

However, the character of the farmer's hands and the energy of their skill is also lost in such mechanized innovation.

After rolling, the tea is spread out thinly on metal screens that are held taut by round bamboo hoops. These large trays are then placed on metal racks within a large, wood-fired oven that is kept at a low temperature of around seventy degrees Celsius for drying. The trays are rotated and even taken out once to cool down. If they were dried all at once, they would toast and have burnt flavors or even be scorched. Therefore, the tea is dried in two periods with a cool down between. The duration is highly variable, so the tea must be watched carefully, moving the trays around the oven and out and in. Different varieties and leaves with more or less moisture due to rainfall will require different types of drying.

After the tea is dried and left to rest for some hours, it is usually packed away until the end of the season. Some houses finish tea as they go if they have the manpower, but most people will not be sleeping during harvest time in the spring, as their entire annual income will be derived from these two weeks. As one tea is being finished, another is coming in, which means that there is only time for catnaps here and there. When the season is over and the tea has all been processed and dried, the final stages of production can then ensue—with everyone rested up and ready to continue.

Then the tea is roasted in wood-fire ovens to mature the fragrance and finish the tea. The degree and method of roasting is different for each house, and unique for each varietal as well. Some teas aren't roasted at all, while others are roasted more deeply. This also will depend on the requests of the customers. Roasting finishes the tea, bringing the fragrances into harmony. It should enhance the tea without leaving too strong of a cooked fragrance—bringing out the tea's natural fragrance, in other words, without leaving a trace of the roast itself (roasty flavors or aromas). Oolong tea traditionally sat for a period of at least a few months after the roast to allow these flavors to settle, mellow out and balance. This rarely happens nowadays, though. After the roast, the tea is sorted, with yellow leaves (*huang pian*,

黄片) and broken bits taken out. (Some houses do this before the roast, and, traditionally, some farmers sorted twice, both before and after the roast.) Finally, the tea is weighed and packaged for market.

While it is great to understand this process, and we love the details as much as you do, it is worth repeating that great tea producers do not follow a formula, general or specific. They are smelling, touching and even tasting the tea through all the stages and adapting their processing to suit the leaves they are working with. While the variations may seem subtle to us looking in from the outside, they are very pronounced to those with experience and skill. Different gardens, varieties and weather (mostly rain) require completely different production skills to compensate. And all farmers know that it is only when the environment (Earth), the weather (Heaven) and the human work together that a fine tea is produced.

*The Phoenix rose from fire
Near the water's edge
Up to the glorious sunset
Shining in orange and red
That silhouetted her wings
And shimmered on the sparks
That trailed behind her.
An ethereal beauty
To take the breath away,
Which is a good thing,
Since it all happened
Right above the place
Where an old duck shat!*

—Wu De

剪影的翅膀和火花隨之她身後
鳳凰火裡升起至夕陽



Brewing Tips 茶

冲泡技巧完成好茶

Dancong tea is a quintessential oolong, which means that if we want to get the best out of this month's precious tea, we should brew it gongfu. If you don't have gongfu teaware or haven't learned that brewing style yet, don't feel ashamed. You can also brew this tea *leaves in a bowl*, relaxing into a meditative session and focusing more on the energy and Nature flowing through these leaves than on their physical qualities. The ideal, however, would be to have both shining and bright together.

In order to brew gongfu tea, we need four pieces of teaware: an Yixing pot, a nice kettle, porcelain cups and a tea boat (*cha chuan*, 茶船). Some other useful tools would be a small tray so that you can pour into the cups with greater fluency and not worry about spilling, as well as some coasters for the cups, but these are not essential. Always keep things simple. A lot of other tools have been invented in recent times, complicating a process that should be simple and fundamental.

Fine oolongs like our Tea of the Month are fickle and can be challenging to brew. When you put too little tea leaves, the liquor will be too light and the ethereal fragrances of honey and orchids, grass and sweet forest won't shine as bright as they can. And if you put too much, the tea will be astringent and overly sour. Of course, water and fire will also play a role in making a fine cup, so we should use the best water prepared ideally on charcoal to bring out the best in this amazing tea.

In gongfu brewing, temperature is the key to success. Maintaining heat throughout the session will make the tea more fragrant, uplifting and patient, which means you will get more steepings. Gongfu tea is about larger quantities of tea in small pots with consistent temperatures that do not fluctuate so that the tea leaves open slowly, evenly and release their essence in full blossom. For this reason, we shower the pot both before and after each steeping, helping to maintain temperature and create a hot, even environment (similar to the ideal growing conditions for a tea tree). We also pre-warm the cups every steeping for the same reason, so there is no temperature shock when we decant the tea into the cups.

This is not a great tea to experiment with, as it is a fine, high-quality tea and should, therefore, be enjoyed fully and completely. But we do recommend experimenting with these principles and with temperature in general. Maybe you can do the experiments with a familiar tea before brewing this amazing oolong. That way, you will understand experientially why temperature is so important, and why preserving it makes a better tea. This will enhance your experience drinking our Tea of the Month quite a bit.

As we will introduce when we discuss the Chaozhou portion of our annual trip, this simple technique is traditional gongfu tea, which does not include teaware like tea sinks or pitchers (*cha hai*, 茶海), which were invented much later. We hope to devote whole issues to this brewing method in the future, going into much greater detail into all the history, philosophy and practicalities of gongfu tea in general and Chaozhou gongfu tea in particular.



Gongfu

Leaves in a Bowl

Water: spring water or high-quality bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: crab-eye; 90–95°C

Brewing Methods: gongfu or leaves in a bowl (gongfu is much better)

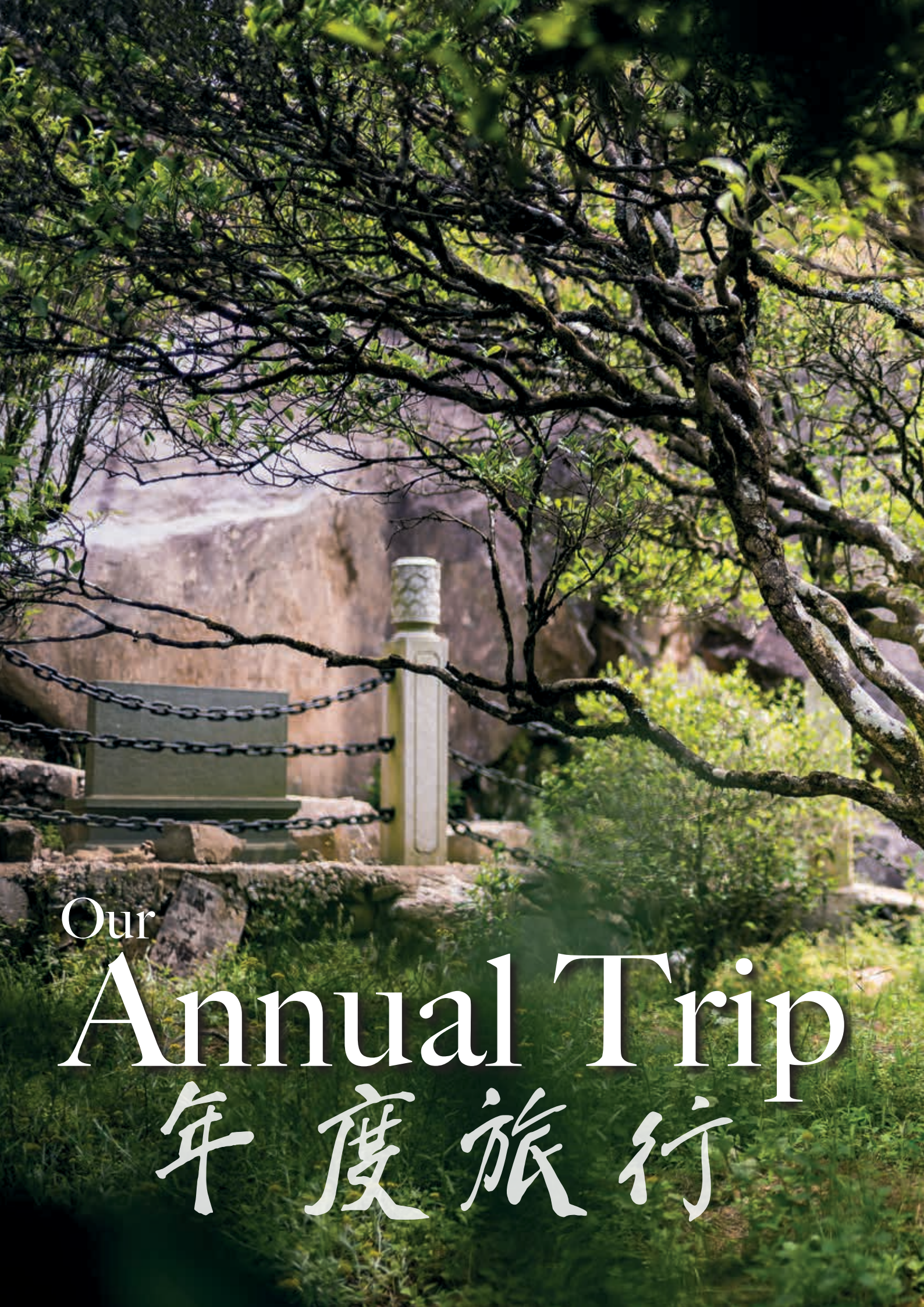
Steeping: flash, flash, flash and longer

A few leaves in a bowl if brewed that way

Patience: ten to fifteen steepings/ five pours

茶 Maintain heat throughout the session by showering the pot both before and after steeping the tea. Try not to take too long drinking as well, which increases the overall patience of the tea for more brews.





Our

Annual Trip

年度旅行





On April 14th, around forty of us set out to explore the oolong region of southern China. We represented nineteen countries, including five or six Taiwanese who came along with us. The Taiwanese often cannot communicate with our travelers, and neither can our hosts, but connection still happens. In fact, one of the highlights on this year's trip was when Lou Yingyin, an important tea scholar who has contributed articles to this magazine several times over the years, mentioned that she was "beginning to understand us." She meditated with us and even asked if we wouldn't mind hugging her the way we all hugged each other. This was a sweet reminder that tea connects us to each other, even when language cannot. Community is what it's all about!

We met in bustling Xiamen and were soon off to Anxi where we spent three days learning about Tieguanyin. Then, we headed off to Phoenix Mountain, allowing us to see ball-shaped and stripe-shaped oolong teas. We also spent time in nearby Chaozhou, learning about gongfu tea and sharing an aged puerh in an old tea house. Finally, we crossed the crazy border to Hong Kong to share two fun-filled days there, visiting temples, meditating, drinking tea and having a wonderful feast. It was a stellar, fast-paced trip filled with tons of tea: tea trees (old and new), tea production, tea drinking, teaware making and tea brewing lessons.

Along the way, we got to meet so many masters, it made some of us dizzy: from tea producers like Master

Chen to teapot makers like Master Zhou, calligraphers to potters working on wheels, we saw it all. Much of the mastery inspired us all to work harder and cultivate our brewing skills to bring even a semblance of the skill tea farmers bring to the Leaf, and masters like Zhou Qi Kun bring to the teapots we use to prepare our tea.

One of the main goals of any Global Tea Hut trip is to demonstrate experientially just how much work goes into the production and craft of fine tea. We want travelers to return home with a newfound respect for every leaf that they put in the pot. If we all honor our tea, we use it less and cultivate the skills needed to extract every last drop, saving the Earth by using fewer resources and making tea in a way that is more patient and satisfying. We re-



member farmers who work so hard by raising a cup to the artistry they offer us. If there are to be “tea masters” in this world, then they are the farmers who craft the Leaf, not those of us who enjoy brewing it!

We make every effort we can to bring you all with us on these glorious trips. This year, many volunteers stepped forward to record video and make photographs along the way, often sacrificing experience for the chance to make something that you could all use as a window to join us. We stopped on some occasions and said prayers, inviting you all with us in spirit. Finally, many of this year’s participants volunteered to write an account of their trip, including feelings and highlights, so that you can all read about what it was like to be there. So put a kettle on and

join us. Travel along with us and imagine all the beautiful spots we visited, as you were certainly there in our hearts. Travel through this issue not with jealousy or a feeling of having missed out, but with true joy for all that we learned, which we now share with you in these pages.

Imagine you landed after a long flight to Xiamen. You purposely set aside a day to get over jet lag and explore that beautiful city on your own. It is full of temples, parks and a lovely bay. You take it easy and get a good night’s rest. The following morning you meet everyone in one of the most hectic parts of the city (by the university). Fortunately, you find them due to the help of signs, while some others are late in the confusion. (You find out that the travel agent chose

this crowded meeting place. Welcome to China!) After lots of hugs with old friends and some brief introductions to the people you haven’t yet met, you already feel a warmth and friendship. Smiles abound. Once everyone arrives, you head off into the crowd, down one street and up another to the bus. You put your luggage on and help your new friends do the same. Then, everyone walks to a restaurant a block away, where a huge vegetarian feast awaits you. You listen to the catch-up of old friends and smile. Wu De gives a small orientation speech and hands everyone a bowl and a cup. Afterwards, you head back to the bus and drive off to Anxi, the first stop on the trip...





安溪 野茶天堂

Anxi

We started our glorious adventure in Xiamen, with a hectic meet-up in a tourist area and a guide who led us through the extremely crowded area to put our luggage onto the bus before heading off to what would be the first of many vegetarian banquets and an orientation. After our bellies were full and we had all our teaware, we loaded onto the bus after only two hours in Xiamen and headed through the hills and into the mountains of Anxi, our first stop.

Anxi is a tea-growing mecca in Quanzhou, Fujian Province—home to Iron Goddess tea (Tieguanyin, 鐵觀音). Anxi is roughly 3,000 square kilometers with tea growing all throughout. The best teas are grown between 1,200 and 1,600 meters, with lowland tea plantations as well. As you drive into Anxi, you are immediately struck by the amount of deforestation in the name of tea production. This always saddens the true tea lover. Though Anxi is one of the largest tea-producing regions in China, and it's even called the "Chinese Tea Capital (*Zhongguo Chadu*, 中国茶都)," almost all this tea is for domestic consumption and is therefore produced on a large, industrial scale with terraced hills and mountains to maximize production and heavy agro-chemical use. In fact, on our scouting trip to the region looking for stops and activities as we planned this year's trip, our intention was to spend only a day in Anxi, mostly visiting plantations and discussing the negative consequences of large-scale, industrial monoculture and how we as tea lovers impact the environment. While it is important to explore the problems we face as tea lovers and humans on this planet, we prefer to focus more of our energy on solutions. We stayed in Anxi for three days instead of one, because a bright and shining solution presented itself to us—our tea karmas had ripened into juicy fruit!

Master Chen Liang Gu (陳兩固) was for most of us a stellar highlight of this year's trip. He has purchased three mountains with wild trees and set out to preserve Nature in Anxi, creating the world's only wild Tieguanyin tea. We visited his forests, with trees ranging from dozens to two hundred years old. These are amongst the largest small-leaf tea trees on Earth. The forest was powerful. He has also preserved traditional hand-processing techniques, mostly lost to the machinery of modern times. Not all of his teas are completely hand-processed, but they are all hand-picked, and many of the wild ones are hand-processed, including some single-tree teas. At some point while walking around the streets of his village, we happened to bump into the mayor of Anxi and several other high government officials. They commended Master Chen, saying that they wanted to help him acquire another mountain or two to return to natural, protected tea reserves and hopefully encourage more and more farmers to turn to these growing methods, preserving and beautifying Anxi. His work is changing things, in other words.

The good news is that our entire issue next month will be all about Master Chen and Anxi Tieguanyin, so more to come. For now, let's recap our amazing stay in Anxi... As soon as the bus arrived from Xiamen, we wasted no time and hiked up a cool mountain through the mist to see some old tea trees, including *Shuixian* varietal (水仙) and wild Tieguanyin. We meditated in a circle at the top for a while and headed down for some tea and dinner. The next morning, we were up early and up another mountain to Master Chen's oldest forest. Everyone was blown away by the tea forest. We sat among the ancient trees, filled by the spirit of this magical place. It was electrifying and amongst the most powerful tea places we have ever visited.

The next day we went to Master Chen's small home village, where we visited the temple to the "King of Tea (茶王仙)," a god worshipped by tea growers throughout Fujian. We then watched him hand-process some Tieguanyin, and many volunteers in the group got to try their hand at firing (*sha qing*, 殺青) and rolling (*rou nian*, 揉捻). Master Chen's village has one of the highest concentrations of very old people in China, and has even been the subject of a CCTV documentary as a result. He says that it is, in part, due to a very rare tea they produce here, which is made of wild Tieguanyin, roasted with wild honey and wild buddha's hand fruit skin (*Fructus Citri Sarcodactylis*, 佛手). The session we had with this tea after watching them produce it was among the most powerful sessions of the whole trip.

Our last day in Anxi, we went to two old temples, one of which had a park where the original Tieguanyin trees are supposed to reside. We also drank some twenty-year-old Tieguanyin provided by a friend of our guide, Mr. Liang (he also gave everyone a few small packets as a souvenir).

Some bonuses of our time in Anxi were a sharing session in which Master Chen cried, as he was so impressed by our love for tea and great sensitivity to Nature and Tea's spirit and once again watching Master Zhou make an Yixing pot for us one evening, having traveled all the way to Anxi to meet up with us. We also drank too many amazing cups of Master Chen's wild tea to count, losing our heads in the clouds.

It was hard to leave Anxi. We had made some beautiful friendships to last a lifetime and had seen some of the most stunning tea forests we have ever been to, many of us for the first time. But don't worry, next month's entire issue will be devoted to Anxi Tieguanyin, so we'll be back very soon!

ANTONIO MORENO, SPAIN

Such a wild tea trip!!! This year's Global Tea Hut trip was so amazing that it's impossible to choose a single focus to write about; everything is intertwined in experience, and I have so much to share with you! But, I'm comforted by the fact that this whole issue is dedicated to the trip, and many friendly voices will be covering different angles and perspectives. So I will just concentrate most of my efforts on talking about the very special wild tea trees we visited.

As you probably know, this trip was bound by a distinct oolong motif as we visited Anxi, home of the famous Tieguanyin; Phoenix Mountain, home of the Dancong sub-genre of oolong; and Chaozhou, home of the gongfu brewing method that we all treasure (and, don't forget, gongfu tea was created with oolong in mind).

I was excited when we arrived in Anxi, but I had no idea why we had come! After all, anyone who has been in this Hut long enough knows that

Anxi's story is a heartbreaker... A crucial chapter in tea history and oolong processing that has been dying from success. After all, Anxi Tieguanyin's popularity converted it into a cash crop resulting in the subsequent agro-chemical abuse. So why were we there? To pay our respects to its glorious past? To shake our heads and leave heartfelt prayers for some distant tomorrow? Perhaps to deepen our awareness detecting agro-chemicals in a meditative state? Or further understand the impact of human abuse on the environment? Could Wu De possibly be taking us to some kind of exception? Would we be happy to drink Tieguanyin again? It was all very wait-and-see. No problem really... We know Wu De well enough to trust whatever we did or saw would be well worth the experience.

So when we were told that the first place our host, Mr. Chen, wanted to take us was to see some wild tea, I was really surprised. I realized then that,

in the best case, I had been imagining perhaps some organic garden with old cuttings. I had never heard of wild tea in Anxi! And would it also be contaminated somehow by chemical run-off from nearby plantations? *Wait and see.*

Our bus drove past many terraced tea plantations—entire mountains barren but for neat little rows of waist-high tea bushes. One mountain after another on both sides of the highway. Wild tea, here we come!

Eventually, we stopped by a temple and all got out of the bus and suddenly were ushered into a bunch of SUVs and little buses. Soon, we were bouncing our way up windy dirt paths, upper and yonder, gaining elevation amidst a thickening mist. It was in this marveled state that our small groups of five first began making our timid acquaintance with each other. And then, our vehicles stopped, we got out and followed our host into the old tea forest. This was a profound moment in all our lives and in our tea journey as well.

茶 Master Chen Liang Gu (陳兩固) was a highlight of everyone's trip. He really lives a life of tea. The good news is that there was so much to learn in Anxi, and his presence was so influential, that we have decided to devote the whole of August's issue to Tieguanyin and Master Chen. The wild forest he protects is a powerful and fey place that changes your breathing, slows time down and makes you feel peaceful almost immediately. As we arrived, all chatter slowly died. The mist that was rolling through that day helped filling everything with a mysterious vibe. The small trails that lead through the forest are amazing, as the trees have grown over them through the years, lending them a tunnel-like quality. We wandered through the forest, tasting leaves and hugging trees like good, heart-filled Chajin. Master Chen showed us the oldest trees, which are between two and three hundred years old. These trees are a Shuixian varietal from the north of Fujian Province. Though their ancestors may have been planted here by people, these descendants are self- and seed-propagated, wild tea trees.



I've seen wild tea trees before, in Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan, and in Jingmai, Yunnan. Right away, I was surprised how these were so different from both those places. A big part of that would be that the trees I was now visiting weren't large-leaf Assamica. But the real beauty of wild tea is that every tree is different, and of course, every varietal is different. Here we were looking at *Shuixian* and Tieguan Yin varietals, but I only found out later that they were mostly *Shuixian*. I wasn't able to appreciate the distinctiveness of each varietal because, in fact, every tree looked different from each other.

The common thread was that these wild trees grew as clusters of slender trunks that seemed to dance upwards. Sometimes the trunks were visibly connected and sometimes they weren't, and looked like many seedlings had sprouted and were each growing close but separate to one another. The effect was a mesmerizing forest of trunks everywhere you could reach.

When I think of the special terroir of those wild trees, the memory comes with a special bird song that was ever-present. The trees grew on steep slopes, the earth was moist and reddish, and the trees grew between other larger trees of different species. The area itself was far removed from tea plantations or civilization in any shape or form. We were all alone with the living mountain and each other.

The next day, we visited a different mountain and saw more trees. There, the land was similar in color and moisture but the slope wasn't as steep. The trees themselves tended to come out of the ground as one trunk but then branched out right about ground level into multiple trunks, each of them curving over heavily. There were large stretches where we were crouched walking beneath a canopy of tea trees that bent on either side of our path, their branches hugging above us. Were the trees romantically inclined? Was it phototropism? I don't care—it was

magical! You come out into a small clearing and take in a particularly majestic specimen, covered in a lichen and hairy green ecosystem of moss.

Thus, our gang of forty made our way through this old tea forest until we arrived at the mother of them all, the eldest of the mountain. Mr. Chen nimbly climbed this elder and quickly picked a large handful of leaves so we could each eat one. Then we silently gathered around and meditated a while. I wish we could have stayed longer but the mist was growing denser and our host feared it would soon start raining and that would spell trouble for us getting down from this remote mountain. As we were leaving, we saw an old kettle on the side of the path and imagined what it would be like to sit there drinking tea, but "Quick! Move it! Hurry down! The rain is a-coming!"

A couple of days later, we found ourselves further south in Guangdong province, led by the leading expert on Dancong varietals and history.



Our bus made its way through Wudong Mountain and stopped at a large open area. Then, we got out and began walking up a path with Dancong trees growing alongside it. Apparently, these Dancong trees grow thicker trunks than most of the ones we saw in Anxi. They can be technically regarded as “medium-leaf.” For the most part, they grew out of the earth as a single trunk and then branched out into multiple shoots with each growing in a different direction, but there were plenty of exceptions, such as the very first ancient tea tree our eighty-year-old host specifically led us to: a 500-year-old Song Zhong Dancong, which was composed of a healthy cluster of six to eight limbs that branched out marvelously. We all admired its beauty and then gathered around it and had a wonderful meditation!

Our guide was excited to show us as much as possible, and would go on to take us to a 700-year-old Mi Lan Dancong tree. This one was just as magnificent, and we were all eager to get close and touch it. Our guide wasn't so sure about our idea, but ultimately he acquiesced. I believe his eagerness to move on was a combination of being excited to show us as much as possible and his own preoccupation with the welfare of the trees and what it meant to have such a large group touching the tree and stepping on its soil. We all gathered around the tree and now that we were up-close we were all taken back by a heavy waft of septic sewerage. This precious tree was very close to the town—it was literally brushing up against a brick house that I'd estimate was probably built in the last fifteen years. We were sitting beside the tree, many of us touching it and sending our prayers. Two of its limbs were severed with open wounds. It was very sad to see such a special tree in such a state. I closed my eyes and respectfully grabbed separate limbs with my arms, making sure to not touch any of the lichen and moss growing on its bark, trying to connect to the ancient tea tree spirit.

And then it happened... I began to feel a very clear pulsing sensation on my hands, as if a potent life fluid were coursing through its limbs. It was saying, “Here I am.” Yes. Wow. And then suddenly I doubted... I turned around to see if someone else was leaning on

either of the limbs and perhaps I had been feeling their vibrations or something, but no, it was the tree! So I just stayed there feeling this intense pulsing communication between us, showering this tree with gratitude. I praised Her on behalf of all the tea trees that ever were, all the tea trees that ever would be, the entire plant kingdom and how indebted to Her I have become as She's become so essential to my life.

I have hugged trees before but I had never felt a tree breathe like this. It had always been some kind of vague vibration that I was never sure if I was imagining. After this experience, I was wondering if this was commonplace. Was it just me who had never felt this, never silenced myself enough or never listened so deeply?

At dinner that evening, I shared my experience with a dear sister who happens to live very connected to the plant kingdom and she encouraged me to ask at the table. Had anybody felt anything touching that tree? Any physical sensation? After a little bit of joking, not one, not two, but three others went on to describe similar sensations!!! And then I shared mine. This was definitely one of the more impactful moments of the trip: the connection itself, sharing that feeling with the group, admiring the ancient trees and being so grateful to have even gotten this chance to visit them!

The wild Tieguanyin and ancient Dancong trees are protected, and we were so fortunate to be led to these places, only because this Hut's love for tea is so pure! Can I say that again? I feel like it's been understated! For ultimately, there is no other reason, no other motive! I am forever grateful to the Hut for the many personal lessons I've learned and can only hope this gratitude spills over, onto, into, through every other aspect of my life, as often as possible, and as thoroughly as the love coursing through my veins. My heart stretches when I reflect on this tea community and I wish to expand this gratitude in every direction throughout my life.



茶 An hour-long honey tea session that grounded us all and created harmony in the group. This amazing tea is made of wild Tieguanyin tea, wild honey and sun-dried Buddha's hand fruit (fo shou, 佛手). It felt like drinking all of Nature in every bowl, filling us with our surroundings in a very powerful way. Many people afterwards said that this session was the first time they felt a love for the group traveling together. We were also joined by our host's ninety-one-year-old mother, who is bright and healthy. She still gardens, cooks her own food and cares for the house shown above. She drinks this tea every day and attributes her long life and health to its medicinal qualities. She cannot speak Mandarin, so we communicated mostly through smiles, hugs and laughs!



MÅNS KÄMPE, SWEDEN

This trip offered so many different impressions and resonated with me in so many ways that it's difficult to put into words what actually happened. Right from the Saturday morning when we met up in Xiamen, the group were my new friends. We immediately set off to explore and learn together, spending time with some of the most fascinating masters, with the opportunity to learn from their thoughts and ideas, work and dedication, their vast

knowledge and love for tea. We observed, reflected and discussed, and the wide diversity of personalities within the group offered more perspective and insight than any of us could ever have gathered on our own. The whole trip was so much about tea, from being around the old trees to understanding the hand-picking and the different steps of processing, to serving, tasting and feeling. Somewhere along the way, I realized that as much as it was about

tea, it was also about people, focus, wisdom, society, stillness, friendship, Nature, complexity and simplicity—and just about everything in between.



茶林鬱鬱



我們早已誤入夢境



遂迷其中



🍵 Like last year, we were once again treated to a demonstration of how an Yixing pot is crafted from start to finish in a rough way (the actual process takes more than a week). Master Zhou Qi Kun (周其坤) made a unique shape this year, and even included some duanni flecks like our Starry Sky teapots. The whole process took around two hours to complete, but no one was bored. Everyone watched transfixed by the process and Master Zhou's ability to create in a flow, with absolute concentration, presence and heart.

YULIYA MASLYN, UKRAINE/SWEDEN

From day one, I loved everything about Global Tea Hut. It conveys profound messages in such an effortless way that it was hard to resist; it invites you to lean in and listen attentively, so I opened my heart for the teachings of Cha Dao.

It usually doesn't take much to convince me to travel, especially if this travel involves Tea. Last year, I went to the Tea & Zen retreat in Spain, the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan and the annual trip to China. All of these were about Tea, but in very different ways. Only when completing the full circle, did I realize that it corresponds to the message of connection through the Leaf to self, community and Nature. There was a lot of Nature on this trip: several wonderful days among tea bushes old and young, wild and cultivated by farmers. This trip was an educational, inspirational and emotional journey intertwined with passion, mastery, joy and love.

The Global Tea Hut community is a tribe of truly remarkable people! Every

time I get to know someone personally and share a few bowls of tea together, I am amazed at how diverse and yet similar we are. But when you find yourself surrounded by forty Chajin from all over the world on a bus for ten days and let go of all expectations, you are setting yourself up for the journey of a lifetime. And it is not only a geographical journey through remote places, but a pilgrimage of the soul returning home. I had a very strong sensation of being part of something bigger and at the same time deepening my connection with the Leaf. Belonging to the tribe gives so much primitive joy, to sit around the fire and drink leaves steeped in water like thousands of sages have done through the centuries before us, and will continue to after we are all long gone.

After hugging wild trees that are hundreds of years old, drinking tea will never be the same. For me, each tea leaf is like a person with a story, and when I brew tea, I engage in the internal storytelling, listening to the

quiet whisper from a distant past. It encourages me to redefine my life, create space to cultivate the mastery and dedication we witnessed from the masters we met—holding withered leaves in my hands and inhaling with every cell of my body the aroma of Chinese villages during tea-picking season, and storing that memory so I can search for the same scent when I hold a bowl of tea back home. I take the serving of tea as a huge responsibility. It is an honor to pass a bowl of tea to a guest and carry on the tradition of the Hut, and this trip was instrumental in getting closer to that—to learn more by listening to the discourses and learning from other students of the Leaf. This responsibility is a driving force for me to become a better version of myself.



KRISTINA CLARK, USA

This trip was life-changing for me. I had a wonderful time. Here are some daily reflections from our journey steeped in tea, learning and friendship. A collection of moments that impressed themselves upon my heart and memory:

Day 1

We meet, and we are a very big group. I could slip into feeling overwhelmed, but I trust Wu De and his gift for gathering lovely people around him, and I trust tea. It is fun to meet other Chajin in person that I only know from the app. Tian Wu keeps us all on track and accounted for, especially with our very busy schedule of “Get on the bus!” “Get off the bus!” “We’re hiking up a mountain!” “We have to leave now before it rains!” “Come on guys! Get on the bus!”

Right away, I come to learn that picturesque rows and terraces of tea plantations laced with chemical pesticides and fertilizers are not so attractive after all. Nature wants to be natural, and it is important when a human can recognize and restore that.

Our host Master Chen is such a human. As he guides us up a red dirt trail, the mountain speaks to me, beckoning me, calling me home. It is not a slight thing, to have a mountain speak to you.

Day 2

The mountain mist kisses our faces as it kisses the tea leaves. The branches of the wild tea trees stretch and grow where they like, mosses and spiders making homes in their crooks, on their skin. I speak to a tree, and she speaks to me. Do I recognize that we are not different?

Later, sharing this intimate conversation leads to a deeply emotional moment between Master Chen and myself. I am grateful that all of Wu De’s work has brought us to this place.

At the temple of the Tea King God, our thirst is quenched with sweet water ladled from a stone cistern, and I light strawberry-scented incense for the blackened patron of tea production.

We drink wild grown Tieguanyin that we can’t afford to buy out of handled mugs with lids.

Master Zhou arrives to give us a teapot-making demonstration. His hands carry skill and knowledge, his eyes discernment.

Day 3

By now I have learned the names of all of my travel companions. At the village home of Master Chen’s mother, we circle up, sipping special honey tea from our white bowls in silence, giving the Tea space to ride our spirits, and giving the nearby birdsong space to reach our ears.

Hotel room tea ceremonies at night, Morten serves the circle I attend and I am grateful to share with my brothers and get to know them better.

Day 4

I am finding that it is rather a big deal that we have all traveled from so far because we want to learn more about tea. We are experiencing enormous hospitality and generosity.

We are affecting our hosts as much as they are affecting us. This is worthwhile indeed.

One of our number injured her foot the day before. Although Jess’s fall is painful and unfortunate, it brings us a moment of heartfelt connection beside the temple where the first Tieguanyin bush grew. I am humbled to carry her prayers and incense to the altar for her.

We are served a special aged Tieguanyin, and I discover that sometimes transcendence can be served in a plastic cup.

Day 5

Morning tea in the company of women, sunlight enters through the window, while the tea called “Grace” (a sheng puerh) is served by Mia’s capable, elegant hands.

On the bus, Simon and Emily give me a little introduction to Dancong tea. I didn’t know anything about it previously, as I’ve just begun my tea journey. I appreciate their kindness, knowledge and sharing.

We enter a village on Phoenix Mountain by foot, the fragrance of sun-withering tea filling the air with song. I want to never forget this scent. I am struck that the entire village processes tea at once—carpets of tarps strewn with fresh picked leaves line the roads, and every home has an oven and racks of



一生的朋友

bamboo trays. Lou Yin (one of our Taiwanese companions and a contributing author to this magazine) expresses to me she is happy that the trees here are happy.

At night, a much-needed quiet tea session with May brings us both serenity and healing.

Day 6

A gentleman tea scholar proudly recites the many names the 700-year-old tea tree has been given throughout the years. The farmers here know each tree individually. Do I know the trees around me that well? Do you? His granddaughter serves us tea she picked and processed herself.

Mr. Liang (another of our Taiwanese companions) and I are now great pals, even though there is very little we can say to each other. “OK? Hao!”

Our bus driver stops to buy us a great bunch of *pipa* (枇杷, loquats), so we can have a true taste of the region.

Evening hotel room tea again. Marina has climbed a tree on the street to pick a flower for her *chaxi*. I am learning from my fellow Chajin to always be prepared to serve or sit for tea, and how to transform your hotel room for a ceremony. These are skills I will take home with me and use in my practice, as I serve tea.



Day 7

Quiet time in a very old temple. A little cat befriends me. I feel Guanyin near.

Later, in a timeworn tea house, we share aged *Da Ye Qing Bing*, served in proper gongfu style. This special old tea that has been sitting still for decades is yearning to feel the breeze again, and it wants to move, and it wants to be human. I am grateful to our brothers and sisters who are serving as brewers and *chaitong*. Their service affords the rest of us the space to drop in. We thank you.

Our teacher's teacher's teacher is present, in his red jacket and charming manner. He makes a point to connect with each of us (and he kisses my hand). I find myself at the center of a hug sandwich, which grows into a group hug mob, vibrating with love and resonating “OMs.”

Day 8

I love all of my travel companions, and I love drinking tea with them, in little circles, this time on a hill in a park with charcoal, tin kettles, and boiling revived *Da Ye Qing Bing*.

Day 9

As we wind through the immigration lines between Mainland China and Hong Kong, I smile at every chance I get to see the faces of my dear friends, knowing we will part all too soon.

Resham's diligent planning brings us to the feet of our dear Guanyin, who in this case is seventy-six meters tall! I see that humanity is capable of beautiful elevated architecture that praises the sacred. In different smaller circles—circles always changing each sit, we laugh with the joy of drinking Blue Mark together in a traditional teahouse.

Day 10

We meet the Big Buddha, and for both the first and last time, we sit all together in one circle for tea ceremony. I put words to what has been rolling in my mind and heart the past few days, like the ball of tea leaves we rolled on Phoenix Mountain. Knowing the hard work and dedication, the effort and sacrifice that go into producing our tea, not to mention the magic that the universe conspires to bestow upon the trees in the form of sunlight and mist, and spider embraces and soft moss, and also realizing that the tea I've had the privilege of drinking is now a part of me, I feel the enormous responsibility of being human. Tea, may I do you the honor of being human.

It is the last night and I serve hotel room tea with all my heart to those I have come to love dearly in this short time.

The Final Morning

We share a last round of hugs before we part ways, spreading out again across the globe, like sunrays—hearts full of love, tea and gratitude.







Phoenix Mountain

Phoenix Mountain (*Feng Huang Shan*, 鳳凰山) has been a mecca since the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), though tea first came here as early as the Song Dynasty (960–1279). The oldest small-leaf tea trees in the world are here (though some would call them medium-leaf). We arrived in the heart of tea production, and the smell of withering tea wafted out of every door, with tarps of tea outside of every home, as farmers walked to and fro spreading leaves out upon the ground. As we strayed near gardens, others were picking the flushes of green buds that abound all around. There is nothing like the energy of a village in a tea-growing region during spring, as all human energy cooperates with Nature in devotion to the Leaf. It is always awe-inspiring to see how much work goes into the production of our beloved tea.

“Dancong tea (單叢茶)” literally means “single bush.” (Sometimes we hear Westerners pronounce the “c” in Dancong like an “s,” but it is more of a “ts” or slight “ch” sound). A very unique tea culture developed in Phoenix Mountain long ago, which is a reverence for individual trees. As farmers began plucking and processing individual trees on their own and this proved to be commercially viable, as it was no doubt as desirable to tea lovers of the past as it is to us today, the locals developed a respect for individual trees, especially ones that produced delicious teas that exist nowhere else in China. There are old, revered tea trees in Yunnan, and throughout history these teas were sometimes processed individually,

but nowhere else has this become such a widespread and celebrated aspect of tea production as Phoenix Mountain, where the tea is literally named after the fact that it is produced a single tree at a time. The respect that locals had for individual trees meant that tea trees were also allowed to grow old, living out their natural term of up to nine hundred years. This, also, is incredibly rare for small- to medium-leaf tea trees.

One of the main goals we have for each and every Global Tea Hut trip is to instill in our fellow tea travelers a deep respect for how much work goes into making the tea we drink at home. It is easy to sit in a cozy tea space on the other side of the world and lose touch with the fact that people living much simpler lives worked round the clock to make our tea. This respect can help us to treasure our tea, always brewing it to the very last drop. By honoring our tea and maybe drinking less each day, we respect the environment and all the hard work that brought it to us. Wu De always says that the only masters are those who have passed on, and the rest of us are students, learning until we die. But then he often adds to that statement, “But if there are to be any tea masters in the world, surely it is the farmers who craft these leaves.”

We all had the opportunity to witness and participate in tea production in Phoenix Mountain. The tea processing room was small at our host’s home, so we went in to watch and roll tea in three shifts of around twelve people. Everyone got to try hand-rolling oolong tea, breaking into a sweat in the process. The others sat outside and

drank Dancong tea *leaves in a bowl* as they waited.

We spent two glorious days on Phoenix Mountain. Both days, we visited different old gardens, guided by the beautiful old tea lover and master, Huang Bai Zi (黃柏梓), who is an encyclopedia of information on Dancong, which he shares freely and happily. He has written two books on the subject, in fact. We had the great chance to meditate in two old gardens. The first day we sat for a long time in the garden where our Tea of the Month comes from, and the second day we sat longer in one of the most ancient clusters of trees on Wudong Mountain.

The oldest tree on Phoenix Mountain just died last year. The locals say it died of old age, but we do not think it was a coincidence that it left the Earth at this time. We visited another 800-year-old tree and all sat and held Her, praying for medicine and healing for this place. She had a brand new five-story building looming over Her, with air-conditioners humming up all the floors, sewage smells and power lines passing within meters of Her majestic branches. Modern development and farming practices are indeed threatening the Earth, our survival on this planet, and with us, Tea Herself. We all felt that our presence, our prayers and our inspiration made a difference to the lives of the farmers and other craftsmen we met, all of whom were committed to the preservation and protection of these ancient trees and the human heritage that surrounds them. We all need prayers these days, even the trees!

MASCHA COETZEE, RUSSIA/AUSTRALIA

This year's Global Tea Hut Trip to China and Hong Kong has been a profound experience, having brought with it many, many highlights that are rather hard to narrow down, and having revealed valuable lessons in patience and humility, love and reverence for the Leaf, as well as deep interconnect-edness and generosity, equanimity and belonging among many.

The first three days were spent in Anxi, hosted by Mr. Chen and his daughter, whose humility and generos-ity deeply touched and taught me. And while being a gentle and humble man, Mr. Chen is amongst the highest tea craft masters in China. During our time in Anxi, wild Tieguanyin oolong was enjoyed among us, while we were

taken through the steps of tea process-ing: shaking of the leaves, for instance, seemed easy when done by the master, but, in reality, was more challenging. This brought a multitude of smiles, as we did our best trying!

A very special treat was the quiet time at Master Chen's house, where another wonderful tea was generously shared with us: a honey-roasted Tieguanyin with sun-dried buddha's hand (*fó shou*, 佛手) fruit, the secret of longevity in that village.

In Anxi, we had a very rare oppor-tunity to connect with and meditate among forest tea trees, many of which are over 100 to 150 years old, grow-ing in the wild and protected by Mas-ter Chen, who considers himself the

protector of those magnificent magic forests filled with spirit. Immersed in the energy of the forest felt ethere-al! Being surrounded by the coolness of the forest, morning fog, the most beautiful moss and the craftiest spider webs, while observing and connecting with the wild leaf, has been one of the deepest experiences of my life! "A tea leaf is a tree's expression of its relation-ship to its environment," repeated Wu De, and this phrase rang so very true in the areas where we were privileged to spend time in.

After that we visited Chaozhou, the capital of gongfu tea, where peo-ple drink gongfu tea everywhere in the city: in the parks and shops, streets and homes.



茶 We were guided by the vast knowledge and expertise of Mr. Huang Bai Zi (黄柏梓), the author of several books on Dancong tea, through the old-growth gardens at the height of the tea season. We got to see troops of giggling tea pickers carrying their ladders through the fields as they marveled at the huge gathering of foreigners walking around. The forests were still and ancient. For most of us, though, the two days in the tea forests of Phoenix Mountain were both joyous and painful: there was so much beauty and also the signs of human destruction of that beauty, including a nine-hundred-year-old tree that had just died last year. We saw a ton of new construction, including power lines over the old trees and a huge five-story building jutting right up against the gardens. We found a very ancient old tree that was adumbrated by one such building. We all gathered around her to pray, hoping that her leaves would help heal the locals of this modern sickness.



Next followed two days on Phoenix Mountain, where, in between a sampling of Dancong tea, we participated in its processing, and got to take some home with us! Dancong tea gardens are spectacular and filled with high vibration trees, some of which are 400 to 800 years old. We meditated in the tea gardens, too. Those moments of stillness, quietude and connection to the living tea trees will always be among my most precious memories.

Meeting the masters of tea crafts throughout the trip was amazing: watching Master Zhou create an Yixing tea pot in front of our eyes, listening to scholarly Master Huang passionately teaching about Dancong tea on Phoenix Mountain, seeing Peter

Kuo's teacher's teacher form a whole tea pot within seconds and watching a master calligrapher was all a huge privilege and honor to behold!

The pinnacle of the trip for me was a very special tea ceremony, held in a Shanghai-style tea house in Chaozhou, where Wu De introduced us to one of his favorite teas: 1979 *Da Ye Qing Bing* (大葉青餅) puerh, which left the most profound impression on me. Drinking this tea has been the deepest whole body, mind, heart and soul experience of my life, as it flowed through my whole body effortlessly, bringing with it the feeling of physical purification and clarity of mind. It energetically moved through the whole of my spine, leaving me vibrating and

feeling the Leaf radiating through my fingertips! In yoga we say the hands are the extension of the heart (as we hug, give, express love with our hands), and I realize it may sound woo-woo to some (or "foo-foo" in the language Wu uses), but that tea allowed me to be a witness to that, opening my heart and all my senses!

To say I am grateful for being a part of this Global Tea Hut trip would be an understatement, as words cannot describe the depth of the lessons revealed and memories created during the trip.



KENT STEEDMAN, AUSTRALIA

China is a fascinating country and it presents many spectrum of life all at once, as do tea and Global Tea Hut trips. The observer is never bored, whether it's the witnessing of the self or the surrounds. From the guys on boards with burns and no arms, to the guys with armaments; from the wallets full of cash to the unconscious consumption and natural devastation, from the power and beauty of Nature to the madness of social conditioning, control and queuing—it's wild, confronting, intense and mostly fun.

It was a nutty start with the convergence of the group at a gate that was crowded, where some of us were missing/lost, followed by food with a settling in, but by late afternoon we were sitting round some old tea trees high up a mount. I remember a deep meditation up there.

Iron Goddess territory, wacky hotel with a great breakfast. Our assorted hosts were always ready to laugh it seemed, at or with us. Family, kindness, generosity and skill are what remain as memories. Traditional Tieguanyin, as I like it at least. Hard working people.

One of the clear memories of the journey for me was giving a little energy work to Mr. Chen, the Dude from Anxi. Feeling his Qi, his strength, innocence and how hard his life was—all in three minutes.

The trip had many meetings, many moments to witness people at one with their journey, from tea production skills to pottery. By our presence, help stimulate the promise from the local officials of more land for Mr. Chen and his family to create more seed-propagated, clean and eventually wild tea. Worth the trip if only for that outcome.

The group harmonized pretty quickly, a few ego wobbles early on but all then mostly settled down with a genuine enthusiasm. Some serene tree interaction on Phoenix Mountain, mixed with a barbarian exclusion zone to stop us staying up there. This meant no tea drinking amongst the trees. An unusual trip in that regard, not a lot of group tea sessions, but the ones we shared were special. The wild honey oolong session sent the "*ida pingala*" energy system into quite the color

scheme, and the aged puerh explained why the gods created mouths among other profound sensations.

It's pretty funny and ironic on these Global Tea Hut trips, for we are, in essence, tea nerd central: we study the importance of great water, fine teaware, kettles and focus, and yet we are forced to drink tea using water boiled to excess in electric kettles in average teaware. It's part of the surrender to tea and self these trips become, allowing and enjoying whatever it is for why-ever it is and learning to be with the ups and downs of travel in China.

I always leave China with more hope than despair, for the great land itself—for the future of living tea and for those that caretake those teas. However, the balance is delicate, while most who live in China don't seem to have the awareness of how delicate, or their own survival, dictates their inability to see it.





茶 One of our days in Phoenix Mountain was spent in the old garden where our Tea of the Month comes from. We meditated for around half an hour in this abundant garden, where we found a huge, rainbow-colored bug that the locals assured us was a “tea bug.” We then returned to the factory and tried our hand at processing tea. After the tea was withered and separated, we watched Mr. Zeng Shun Tao (曾舜濤) fire the tea. Then, everyone got to try rolling the tea (rou nian, 揉捻). One of the goals of every annual trip is to allow participants the opportunity to understand experientially just how hard tea production is, hopefully finding a new-found respect for all the tea we drink at home. This was that day, and everyone fully got the message!

ADMAR DE BRUIN, THE NETHERLANDS

I feel under-qualified to describe what it was like to experience all the trees, the people and the places on this year's Global Tea Hut trip. I am still processing what happened. I can however describe the two things that stood out most for me.

The first was the 1979 puerh tea we drank in Chaozhou, called “*Da Ye Qing Bing* (大葉青餅).” After drinking that tea, I noticed a warm ball of energy in my stomach. It was bubbling happily even after the session ended and the group was sharing their experiences. Suddenly and without warning, the energy ball shot up to my heart and exploded. My heart was almost burning with love, and was opened like never before. I got up and shared this with the group and lots of happy hugs followed over the next couple of hours.

The second thing that stands out to me, I did not notice until after the trip.

And even now, I really only notice the effect it has on me. During my weekly tea ceremonies prior to the trip, in the later steepings, I would sometimes grow restless and a bit discontented. Since the trip, this hasn't been a problem. I can enjoy the later steepings as much as the first. I cannot tell exactly when and how this came to be—only that it probably happened on Phoenix Mountain, walking through the old gardens, hugging some of the trees and seeing the spectacular views. Call it too spiritual or too flowery, but I believe that somewhere on that mountain I received a gift. I do not know what the gift contains, but I know that it shines. And as I am writing this now, I realize this gift is not for me alone. It is for all of you.



景德鎮
瓷器資本

CONNOR GOSS, AUSTRALIA

The threads of thought and questions that arose during our annual Global Tea Hut trip in China, especially when pondering what I would write about here (which thread to gently grasp and follow), were numerous. I knew already what awaited me. As some of you may know, I am one for journeying the thresholds; the shadows in all of their beauty and mystery enthrall me endlessly. Throughout our journey in China, visiting many soul-stirring places steeped in Tea, the threads of grief arose in unspoken and unseen ways, until emerging with a thunderous presence during our first tea gathering in Chaoshou, where we opened our hearts and entire beings to a profoundly wise tea, *Da Ye Qing Bing* (大葉青餅). The experience of sitting with this tea changed many people's lives on that beautiful evening. A shared experience could be felt throughout the entire room, with each person who verbally shared their experience mirroring those before and after. Upon that evening, those previously unseen threads emerged, crystallizing and taking form within. I knew what had to be expressed, even if the words I carried were inadequate and empty. Now I wonder where to begin? Have we come back around to the beginning again, or the ending?

I was mourning not the loss of any particular thing, rather mourning human misconduct and its great blindness/ignorance. I am part of that blindness too, and no words or actions can separate myself from that. It was our inability to see clearly that struck me painfully deeply during our meeting of the old tea tree who was sick, perhaps even dying. While humans may be the cause of its death, the tree ultimately does not care about its death, and will go willingly into whatever comes next, giving life for the continual cycle of birth and death—its body decaying back into the Earth to nourish new life, new tea trees who will in turn give their lives one day. However, the manner of its death is a part of its life, and that was the aspect of the tree that made me sad. No matter where in the world you live, from what place or culture you were birthed, there is no escaping the fact that we are

part of the problem. I am here writing on a laptop that undoubtedly caused far greater suffering than can be fathomed. There exists no high ground to take, no words or actions that can separate myself from the world. We must acknowledge truth and integrate it.

Observing the experience with the sick tea tree was a catalyst for me. Simply put, the environmental destruction we witnessed in China opened me up and became what William Blake calls “a golden thread.” I followed its path. An immense ocean of anger surged and thrashed as I stood before this elder, a tea tree who held such vast wisdom, alongside thirty brothers and sisters whom I shared the journey with, each experiencing something different, each experiencing their own perception on a pilgrimage to tea mountains. It was an anger that I mistakenly thought came from seeing the tea tree, in a state of sickness, and the potential loss of another elder in the world. It was not until after returning home and listening to Wu De talk about humans and our misunderstanding of life and death that I realized the anger I felt was undigested grief I had carried for many years: an anger that dwelt quietly beneath the surface, repressed and mostly unknown, seeping into my mind, into my thoughts and perception of the world.

Where does the root of such anger lead? I do not know whether it really serves any purpose to find its root, but rather the importance lies in what I do with the knowledge of its existence. It is all too easy for one to become lost in the ocean of inner dialogue and exploration of past experiences. There does exist benefit in acknowledging the unconscious and its motivating forces, as there is a benefit in recognizing that we are all part of the problem this world faces. But we can easily become too enthralled with the experience, identifying with it. Instead of choosing to grow from the suffering, we choose avoidance of suffering, of pain and difficulty, escaping in varying degrees, finding ways of disengaging with reality. It is all a matter of orientation. We can choose to exclaim with lofty ideals, “We have sinned! We, humans, do not deserve this. Now we must atone for

what has been done,” failing to see that life *is* suffering, it is death, and through the right orientation we can use it as fuel for our growth and cultivation.

In finding Tea, I have discovered a Way in this life. I have been gifted a method of ceremony that creates the space for me to remember and actualize a way of digesting what I carry with me. Consuming the grief within that creates a misaligned perception of the world, I digest it, metabolize it and grow from it. Tea has shown me the grief and She has shown me how to consume it for my own benefit, and more importantly for the benefit of all beings. Discovering the undigested grief and anger within has offered me another opportunity to orient myself skillfully, orienting myself to growth and honoring my responsibilities in this world. While every fiber of my body and soul would delight in disappearing away from the world, into the forest and mountains, into solitude, that would not offer the possibilities of growth that the world offers me in each moment. Instead, give me the conditions to see my own inherent blindness, orienting to consuming and becoming each lesson experienced on the path.

We mourn to celebrate life. It is just as necessary and as vital as breathing, food or sleep. It nourishes our bodies and souls. It allows us to deeply sit with that which we are mourning, honor its existence, honoring what was shared in the oceans of impermanence. When we mourn, truly mourn, in the bones and depths of our beings, we digest the experience, becoming more than we were in the moments before mourning. It can take days, weeks, months or even years to mourn properly. Do we have the time and space in our lives to mourn properly, or do we treat it simply as another task to be done between here and there? Have we lost connection to the intimacy of life? Or do we honor its beauty with each thread and breath of our body?







ELI BUREN, USA

I had an amazing time on this trip. Here are some of the visions from this year's Global Tea Hut trip that continue to inspire me:

Sitting with the ancient wild Tieguanyin tea trees in their environment on top of a misty mountain in time and space. Roots to tender bright leaves, humming with life force, vines, insects, moss, bird song and awareness. A deep communication that was felt, breathed and received in reverence.

Walking through a small Phoenix Mountain village at the height of Dancong spring processing, tea leaves permeating and present in all forms. From the living taste of a fresh leaf I just picked off a tree, to baskets and tarps covered with leaves in driveways, roads and any open space. Lovely leaves journeying through the process of picking, firing, rolling, drying—literally everywhere! The most memorable thing of all, though, was the sublime and all-pervading scent and spirit of tea in the air.

Thank you tea family for these moments, adventures and real conversation shared throughout the trip. These imprints, and so much more, live with me and are recalled and resourced as I lift a cup to my lips: the scent of a whole culture and history, while tasting a wave of bird song in the wild Tieguanyin brought back from Anxi. Thank you Global Tea Hut for making this exceptional immersion into the Leaf possible!



潮州功夫首都

Chaozhou

Chaozhou is a city in the east of Guangdong province with a deep and rich heritage and culture. When you enter the area, you can feel the old and new world surrounding you. A deep past haunts this small city. There are still the remains of a Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) wall surrounding a large part of the old town and many other old temples, bridges and buildings. But for us, there is another history and heritage here that was far more relevant, and the reason we came: gongfu tea.

Chaozhou is the home of gongfu tea brewing. “Gongfu” means skill achieved through self-discipline, mastery. Though “gongfu tea” has become a generic term for any type of tea brewing in China, with any kind of teaware, it really refers to a specific cluster of lineages that all originate in Chaozhou (ours included). We came to learn about the heritage and history of a brewing method that means so much to us.

Gongfu tea began in the south for three main reasons. First, gongfu tea was established by martial artists. They lived their lives according to the principles of martial arts, based on a Chinese cosmology of Yin and Yang, the Five Elements and a preservation of energy in motion. Movement based on fluency and essence is key to this understanding of the world and how to live a healthy life in it. This tea brewing is therefore based on harmonizing the elements involved in tea brewing (fire, water, earth/teaware, wood/tea, metal/kettle and spirit) with the human at the center of the process, so the person and Nature work together in a melody or “rhyme (韻),” which is the word used to describe the best cups of tea.

Secondly, gongfu tea began for a more practical, economic reason. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), most people in China brewed tea in large pots with large cups, using long steeping times. As this was the era when the Euro-

pean tea trade began to rise, this brewing method influenced traders and spread to Europe and eventually the Americas later on, which is why Western people tend to brew tea this way even today. But people in the south were poor and were looking for a brewing method that required fewer tea leaves at a time, with smaller pots and cups.

Third and finally, gongfu tea evolved at the same time oolong processing did. Of course, we can brew most any tea gongfu style, but no tea is more suitable to gongfu brewing than oolong. They grew up together, fated for one another. Oolong production is the most complicated and requires the most skill of any tea production method, so it is no wonder that the brewing of this tea would follow suit. Though gongfu brewing began in Chaozhou, it quickly spread to Fujian, the birthplace of oolong tea, and then to Taiwan itself. Since it was created to make oolong tea, bringing the best out of traditional oolong tea, it is no wonder that it quickly became the predominant method of brewing in these three regions, where oolong tea is grown. In fact, it is primarily from Taiwan that tea brewing teachings and techniques spread back to the Mainland over the last couple of decades, resulting in the generic, widespread use of the term “gongfu tea” to apply to many types of tea brewing.

In Chaozhou, we met with one of Wu De’s teacher’s teachers, Chen Xiang Bai (陳香白), which was a great honor for all of us. He is a legendary Chajin, author and teacher of gongfu tea and has been for several decades now. Wu De says that his book is amongst the most influential tea books in his life and he is happy to announce that Master Chen gave us permission to translate some of it for this magazine in the future! We met Master Chen in a traditional Shanghai-style tea house off the back of one of the alleys in the old street, complete with antique furniture and all. They offered us char-

coal stoves, small old-school stainless steel gongfu kettles that aren’t produced anymore (gongfu tea is best when each steeping of water is prepared separately) and lovely tables that could seat eight of us. We brought our own spring water, as we were drinking our best tea here: the 1979 *Da Ye Qing Bing* (大葉青餅).

The *Da Ye Qing Bing*, or “Big Leaf Green Cake,” is one of Wu De’s all-time favorite teas, and one the Center has more of than any other aged tea. It is considered the precursor for the now-famous 8582 recipe that began in 1985. Noticing the changing trends in puerh production in the Masterpiece (1949–1972) and Chi Tze (1972–1998) eras, puerh lovers in Hong Kong commissioned this tea to be more like the Antique Era (pre-1949) teas. This meant blends of bigger leaves (called “higher grade”) from older Yiwu trees. The Menghai Factory agreed to make this *Da Ye Qing Bing*, which is essentially a special version of 7582. Later, in the mid-1980s, other tea vendors requested a tea “like that 7582,” and the famed 8582 cakes were born, which also used bolder, larger-leaf blends made from old trees (though not always from Yiwu).

The tea was spectacular and took us all to the stars and beyond. We could hardly talk afterwards. Other highlights of Chaozhou were the old Buddhist monastery with its gorgeous calm gardens, strolling around the old street finding snacks, watching potters make Chaozhou teapots, drinking tea in the park where old people gather every day to serve gongfu tea and, of course, three feasts at the same vegetarian restaurant that we returned to because it was that good (and they offered to cook us different dishes each time, though we had these mushroom-looking steamed buns every time because everyone loved them so much). This was a festive part of the trip, with camaraderie shining through abundant compliments, kind words, pats on the shoulder and hugs.

STEVE KOKKER (CI TING, 慈聽), CANADA/ESTONIA

We often hear in our community, “Tea spoke to me.” While we all instinctively have some sense of resonating with this statement, based of course on our own previous similar experiences, it’s sometimes hard not to sound a bit fey and insubstantial if we try to describe it further. Sounding like something that might be overheard at a New Age conference after a long hug and sigh, it also reflects a great truth. One that is very difficult to explain linearly. Tea speaks to us... when we listen.

Our recent group tea trek across a swath of southern China gave us all numerous opportunities to slow down, tune in and listen—as well as observe the effects of listening to spirit speaking over many years through the master craftsmen and women we continually met.

I myself was unprepared for the tenacity and directness with which “Tea” (feel free to here substitute with Nature, Spirit, Inspiration, the Universe, etc.) spoke to me on this trip. And while describing the *what* (She said) will undoubtedly result in sounding rather silly or awkward at best, just the *that* (She said) is stunning enough on its own! When one’s mental noise is reduced sufficiently, when the radar is as unobstructed as it can be, the messages slip through the cracks of usually-muddled consciousness loudly, sharply and in ultra-fast, rich downloads in the form of images, associations and a sense of knowledge and understanding.

I am forever grateful for such moments, which have sprung up in numerous instances during various Global Tea Hut road trips over the years. As socially endless and voluminous as they are, they also contain space for reverent silence directed towards Tea. For example, in sitting among tea trees hundreds of years old, or making our way through luxuriously thick growths of multi-layered groves where entire mature ecosystems play out their existence in a slow-motion dance of fog, rain, spiders, frogs, molds and leaf-covered fertile topsoil—all on a pillowy carpet of velvet moss. Brushing ourselves past these sentient beings, for brief moments breathing in the same

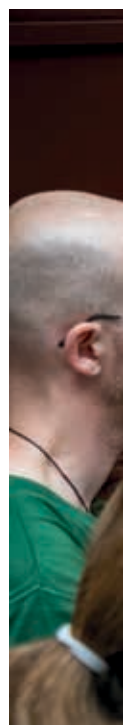
air they do, we do our frail human best to feel as rooted and harmoniously part of their environment as they appear to us.

Ah, conscious moments like that! For these we live, although we seem to spend much of our lives running from them. The sharpest moments of the trip were when I received at times almost overwhelming (here is where words feel inadequate) impulses/downloads/images, and these are likely the same that others will also choose as their highlights: generously amassed to imbibe a witchy and rare brew of wild honey-cooked Tieguanyin on a veranda perched above a picture-perfect old-fashioned village (the kind which we all know doesn’t exist anymore); meditating among old, wild-growth trees destined to become Tieguanyin, the likes of which most of us will never experience; sitting among the world’s wildest trees that offer us Phoenix Mountain Dancong and touching a being that has been offering Her wisdom for about nine centuries, yet now bows wearily but gracefully to the inevitable creeping onslaught of human “civilization”; drinking several straight-to-cosmos precious teas; and much more...

Mastery Master Class

Yet other transcendent moments were related to dedication and mastery. At one point it was overwhelming to a group of decent folks like us, who often feel like we are truly doing our maximum to be our very best, to find ourselves in the presence of individuals who were true masters in their respective crafts. Some days, it felt like a “Masters Road Show,” with world-class masters suddenly appearing out of nowhere unexpectedly to demonstrate their essences to us: be it tea processing, tea brewing, teapot crafting, calligraphy, farming, hosting, public speaking and more. Not only was there a feeling of a continual mini-Olympics being performed in front of our eyes, but even more impressive were the personality characteristics that this level of craftsmanship implied.

To me this implied primarily an open channel of communication: be it to Tea and to what She leads, far beyond the roots and leaves, or via another medium, but nonetheless leading to Source-inspiration. For, aside from the 10,000 hours or 40 years of dedicated practice necessary for mastery, the aspect of deep listening—of being open enough to listen—is an essential component of any aspect of perfecting one’s craft. To be in the presence of such listening skills and witness their physical consequences was strikingly inspirational. Mastery also is a form of communication, or at least implies it, with the concomitant ability to push aside distractions, to be committed to doing something well for its own sake.



It seems to me that this has been a constant message from the beyond to us, since time immemorial. It is synonymous with advancement, antonymic to stagnation.

For 0.01% of Life, We Make a Lot of Noise

One common theme of communication for me during this trip was how resonant were its non-verbal aspects. In weight, volume and time, verbal communication dominated ceaselessly, but in depth and resonance, the non-verbal kind was king. Master Chen, for example, patiently picking up the fresh

tea leaves over and over again that we spilled onto the floor trying to bruise them in the hanging baskets—this spoke volumes. As did when Master Chen, wife of Yixing potter Master Zhou, for what must have been the 600th time, sat quietly, engaged totally, transfixed and in deeply supportive presence while her husband generously took three hours to make a pot for us all (once again) to see some of what is involved in this process. It was a double act of generosity and selfless desire on their part to transmit some of the secrets that are shown to those who are dedicated and concentrated on their craft.

A huge part of the overall communication we were afforded with Great

Nature via the medium of tea came from the relatively little but powerful time we spent in meditative silence, among the trees themselves and while partaking in their steeping and serving.

Moments of silence will remain among the most memorable of the trip for our lucky selves for a long time to come. For example, right at the beginning of the trip, the brain-expanding trek through ancient, thick forest in which trees that yield the name “Wild-grown Tieguanyin” grow offered such moments: ducking under canopies of thick lichen-embraced branches while trepidatiously edging down moss and steep undergrowth, single file, a unit of forty individual consciousnesses doing their best to stay present.



茶 By far the most epic tea session of the whole trip was when we got to drink 1979 Da Ye Qing Bing (大葉青餅). This aged puerh sent us all to the moon. Unbelievably, we got to drink it in a very old Shanghai-style tea house in the old streets of Chaozhou. The owners loved us, providing charcoal. Our hosts went out to get good spring water and we had the whole tea house to ourselves for around an hour and a half. After this magnificent tea, we took turns sharing our experiences.

We tried our best to resonate with the enormity of what surrounded us. We tasted freshly-plucked buds, watched Master Chen sprint up an ancient tree like a gazelle, filmed, photographed and selfied before deliciously settling into a few minutes of humble crouching down close to the Earth and listening as closely as we could to the whispers all around.

Experiencing the group communication with the ancient tree in the Phoenix Mountain, Guangdong province was without question a supreme highlight. We had been told that the oldest tree in this extended hillside garden was about 800 years old, but not doing so well. A few pointed words from Wu De focused on why: a newly constructed concrete building was now standing but a few meters away from its extended branches, and it seemed to shrink from the stench of sewage that floated to us from nearby. Whatever poisons from sewage or construction materials reached her roots we cannot imagine. As a large group of us crowded around and held some part of the tree in silence, eyes closed, the aggressive noises of perpetual traffic pierced the air. This little town was something of a boom town, thanks to tea, and was obviously in the middle of unattractive growing pains. In the outlying valleys, we could see swaths of land that had once been thick forests now displayed like neatly arranged patches of quilt. She had been nourished by silence for centuries, and was now treated to this daily onslaught. That the tree appeared to be “giving away” after so many centuries was touching—a horrifying symbol and yet a noble gesture of retreat from inevitability.

When She Speaks by Not Speaking

Most of the time we need to quiet our own mental noise inside sufficiently to let either our intuition be heard or to hear the subtle vibrations of life buzzing around us, but other times, depending on the medicine, the messages come as subtly as a hammer to the head. Such was the case with the 1979 *Da Ye Qing Bing*. Most people at that session reported very stark, sharply felt experiences drinking that

tea, from the first sip, which left them speechless, aghast—gobsmacked. For me, however, the message of that session was different, and wonderfully unexpected.

We had all heard about this upcoming tea session from the first day, each day, and we were all psyched for it. I had been kindly asked to brew, and secretly, I was deeply, deeply pleased by that—not only for the chance to serve, but particularly *this* tea. See, 1979 has always been that mystical/mythical year for me. If there is any calendar year with the most/major significance for me, it is 1979! To some degree, I can’t properly explain why. There are many linear reasons (I was thirteen then, had a lightly traumatic change of schools, the music I was into then had an immense effect on the person I was turning out to be, and many other reasons), but they cannot explain the almost obsessive nature of my connection with that year. For years already, I have watched documentaries about that year, have collected something like 100 albums and 300 songs released in that year which I liked, read historical articles about that period, and so on. I have sometimes even dreamed of television shows I watched then, waking up humming the theme songs. This has especially happened during periods of deepest reflection and silent meditation retreats.

I have always felt as if there are some clues held in this period of time, which I might only partially have access to, to unlock some remaining mysteries of the Self. When I heard I would have a chance to brew this rare tea from exactly that year, I thought, “Wow, perhaps the Tea will speak to me’ and unveil some clues.” For days, I prepared myself mentally for the honor. In the end, it did unveil some clues, only using a different grammar than I expected.

At the very last minute, it turned out that I was not to brew after all, but to *cha tong* (茶童, be water bearer for a brewer). A brewer is usually the most concentrated, focused, aligned, open, channeled element in connection with the tea at the table and the *cha tong* the least. All the elements one needs to keep a watch over sometimes detract from experiencing the tea in as focused a way. This time, it turned out that with charcoal to attend to, a time limit for the session and a huge,

even irritating hold-up accessing hot water in time at the place we were, a place not used to the classic Global Tea Hut rock and roll pace, resulted in my having the chance for only about three fully present, concentrated sips.

While the tea was of course ultra-powerful and its energetic effects were felt instantly as buzzing in the head (even despite water fetching), there was no real communication for me, or special shared moment for me with this tea. My focus was entirely diverted elsewhere—which is fine. I’ve had more than my fair share of opportunities to be utterly receptive to Tea’s messages from beyond. It just felt particularly ironic that this happened with this particular tea just then. And yet, what I took from the experience was that this *was* likely the communication in this case: there is no particular hidden message in 1979 for me, and that I might as well stop searching for clues there, and instead focus my energies in more productive ways—that some elusive answer to some personal mysteries indeed may not have their origins from that year of my life. Maybe it was just a damn incredible year for music, if a rather drab and destitute ending to a wild and fascinating decade and transition into a very embarrassing and ego-driven one to come.

I was not ultimately disappointed to not serve the tea. That night, I bowed my head to the experience and to the communication that had been delivered. And, yeah, maybe in honor I played a Donna Summers track, likely *Lucky*, from 1979’s *Bad Girls*.



茶 After our epic tea session, one of Wu De’s teacher’s teachers, Chen Xiang Bai (陳香白), spoke to us about Chaoshou gongfu tea, including its history and philosophy. One of his students then demonstrated the steps in this old style of tea brewing with grace.



JING REN (淨仁), THE NETHERLANDS

Our company sits scattered around five tables in a magnificent Chaozhou tea house. We're having one of the more casual tea moments of this trip, sipping some Nostalgia while we munch on some peanuts and listen to singing from the Chinese opera. We are waiting for the moment to start drinking the spectacular *Da Ye Qing Bing* (大葉青餅), a 1979 Sheng Puerh.

I sit at Wu De's table together with a couple of brothers. Wu De serves tea equally casually, munching on some peanuts in between steepings as well. A few steepings in, Wu De is called away, most probably to discuss some of the many organizational issues that come up during such a trip with such an abundant gathering. The five of us are sitting around the table while the next pot is steeping and the brewer's seat is empty. After a while, I start to realize that Wu De probably won't be back anytime soon, and that someone else should probably pour out the next steeping. Feeling responsible, and slightly nervous, I decide to hop over and pour the tea into our cups. We sip the tea, I fill the pot and I pour out the tea again. After everyone has finished sipping from their next cup, I can't help but ask the question: "And... do you notice any difference?" After all the answers come in, and paired with my own experience of the difference between the cups, I start to feel satisfied. Not because I brew better tea than my teacher, but because I get yet another confirmation that I'm not a fool for being his student: Wu De's cups were obviously better, we all agreed.

This was just one of the many experiences I had during this trip that humbled me as a student, refreshed my beginner's mind and strengthened my respect for all teachers, human, tea and most of all Nature. I would like to invite you to have a look together at what we can do in order to be better students and learn to brew better cups of tea. At the same time, I will use this opportunity to share about how my experiences on this trip relate to these aspects. Let us return to the proverbial classroom, sit in the students' seats and ask ourselves: What can I learn from this? What else lies hidden in these cups? There is a doorway through each

cup that leads to a whole lifetime of insights and joy. And that is what makes this path powerful!

Gongfu: the Technique

Next to all of the deep, bonding and enlightening experiences during our trip, there was lots of time to geek out on the more technical aspects of gongfu tea brewing as well. After all, we did visit the birthplace of gongfu tea: Chaozhou. We had lots of time to discuss among ourselves and ask all sorts of questions about clay, temperature, pour, cups, kettles, teapot shapes and anything else we wished to engage ourselves in. We saw Master Zhou making an Yixing teapot from Zisha ore. We also drank two spectacular teas during this trip, one of which was the aforementioned *Da Ye Qing Bing* (one of the best teas I've ever drunk in my life). Like Wu De's teacher, Master Lin, says: "If and until you have experienced a fine cup of tea, it is too hard to tell." After these cups of tea, we all had experienced what it is like to drink a fine cup of tea!

After all these opportunities to learn more about all the technical aspects of gongfu brewing and to drink some spectacular teas, you would expect that I would be able to pinpoint exactly what I need to improve on in order to brew a cup as good as Wu De brews it, right? But wait, this session goes much deeper...

Gongfu: the Approach

During one of the regular evening discourses, Wu De told us that he once was too focused on technique in order to improve his brewing—until one day, his teacher and he were brewing tea side by side. Wu De was using all the teaware he could dream of, and his teacher just had two mason jars. "His tea was still better!" Wu De said with a big smile. When Wu De asked him: "Why is your tea so good?" he replied: "I just love tea." Wu De often tells this story, and it is poignant every time, no matter how often we hear it.

Could gongfu tea be more than a technique? Could it be that there is more between Heaven and Earth that influences our experience of the cup than merely brewing parameters? In this tradition, we approach tea not just as a beverage, or as a hobby, but as a Dao, a path. Tea can be a way of life, meaning that we are fully dedicated to the pursuit of this path, and that the path itself is fulfilling and fuels us in our attempt to live life skillfully. Perhaps we should have a look outside of our teapots, or even the tea space, as well...

Master Chen & the Tea Forests

With a convoy of cars we drive up a bumpy, narrow dirt road in the middle of Anxi, the land of Tieguanyin. We pass by tea field after tea field. Most of what we see is the light brown, almost orange-colored dry soil. In the soil are planted rows of thin, fragile-looking tea trees. It almost looks like I could uproot them easily with my bare hands. I start to wonder what was here before humans carved out the mountain like this—how many different species of plants and animals shared these very plots of land that we're passing?

It grows mistier as we continue up the winding road, but suddenly we come to a halt and the driver signals us to get out. Fresh air, dewdrops moistening my skin, a moment of silence as we wait for everyone to arrive. I almost start to forget the sadness I feel. Standing out in one of the bare fields, I hear Wu De calling us together. It's time to go somewhere. But first Wu De reminds us to keep quiet and soak in the rare moments we have amongst the tea trees and gives us some hints about what we're about to experience. Master Chen leads us into the forest at the edge of one of the bare tea fields. The forest is lush, and at first there are many different kinds of trees. The mist seems to get thicker and thicker with every step we take. And out of the thick fog, a very special sight begins to reveal itself, unlike anything most of us have ever seen...

Quite suddenly, all that we see around us is tea. Not the big single-trunk tea trees of Yunnan, but full-grown bushes with many branches reaching outwards as high as actual trees. We are walking downwards through a tunnel made up of the jungle of branches. These bushes seem to have been here way longer than any of our company has walked the Earth. This is no dry and orange dirt; this is loamy soil, moist and mossy. The branches surrounding us are covered in uncountable different varieties of moss, ranging from the tiniest little spots to long hairy strands like those of the beard of an old man. It is like the whole atmosphere underneath this canopy is putting a spell on us. There is

a noticeable strength to this land, and yet it feels like we're walking above the clouds.

Meanwhile, Master Chen is walking around the forest with verve and enthusiasm, calling Wu De every so often to show us yet an even older tree. A few moments later, we're all gathered around one of the oldest bushes of the forest. Master Chen tells us something in Chinese, and Wu De translates. And before Wu De is done translating, it seems that Master Chen can't wait to share with us the next thing about this tree, all the while having one hand resting on his dear old friend, the big tea bush. Before we know it, he starts climbing up the tree like he has been doing it every day of his life. He moves

quickly, but with certainty and care. Standing on top of the tree, he looks like he is part of the tree and its whole ecology.

Reciprocity & Symbiosis

Symbiosis has never expressed itself so fully and visually to me before. Human teachers of self-cultivation in any form, often talk about “inter-being” or “inter-dependence,” but these tea trees, that whole forest, gave us not only an intellectual experience of this truth, but also a very visual, experiential and physical one that we all felt from our hairs to our bones.



🍵 We had another epic session in the park on our last morning in Chaozhou. We hiked up to the peak and sat in quiet around some tables drinking Dancong in bowls. Then we broke out the spent leaves from the previous night's Da Ye Qing Bing session and boiled them for another hour, drinking ourselves into peaceful bliss as Wu De offered a loose Q & A discourse that helped provide context for a lot of what we had experienced up until this point. It was a wonderful morning!



茶 One of the most magical experiences of the whole trip was arriving at a huge studio for the production of Chaozhou “san tou (汕頭)” teapots for an afternoon/evening. We started out with a small tea session, and one of the brewers recited some of her tea poetry for us. She wasn’t aware at the time, but this poetry was like a chain reaction of artistic mastery that exploded over the next two hours, leaving us all agape. After her poem, and a few more cups of tea, we took a tour of the factory and watched the apprentices working on teapots in various stages of completion. At that point, the owners brought out a pottery wheel and demonstrated the production of a teapot body. They asked if anyone wanted to try, not knowing that we had masters amongst us. First, Peter Kuo made a pot and then his teacher’s teacher sat down and demonstrated great mastery of the wheel. After that, one of our Taiwanese companions walked over to one of the tables and created some of the most beautiful calligraphy we have ever seen. It was a glory to behold so much creativity.



As an insect in that forest, we couldn't do something independently from it, for all that we would do would be part of the whole, affecting all life in the forest. And as humans in this world we cannot do something independent from this world either. The realization of this truth reminds me of what a gift it is to be alive, and to be given all that we need in order to be here. It makes me feel grateful towards my surroundings and the world. And it makes me want to be more than just a consumer of these gifts, but to be able to give as well.

Master Chen is a living example of someone who is able to turn his yearning for harmony and balance into action in a way that gives back. He has at least three such living gardens where trees, moss, insects, soil, microorganisms and humans live together in a balanced way. And with skill and care, he takes the leaves from those gardens and turns them into something extraordinary, which in turn has the power to remind people of the preciousness of it all. The voice of his tea is being heard by people from many different walks of life, ranging from this unusual bunch of foreigners to the mayor of Anxi, whom we met by chance on the road and who told us how inspired by Master Chen he is.

After the Ecstasy, the Laundry

When all of us shared our admiration for Master Chen's efforts, Wu De reminded us that it is not the specifics of his efforts we were most inspired by, but that we are most inspired by the qualities of respect, dedication and commitment that he so clearly demonstrated, and that we are perhaps searching and longing for such a path of mastery through respectful dedication ourselves. Like they say in Zen: "After the ecstasy, the laundry."

What do I do with this inspiration coming from the wild tea forest, and Master Chen's efforts? I would like to make a vow to focus my attention and efforts on learning and mastering something by which I too can place something precious upon the altar of this all-encompassing existence. I vow to be diligent and persistent in my

efforts, and to not let my efforts be diffused and weakened by the countless potential distractions that we're faced with today. One day, I hope to be able to serve and share tea with as much verve, enthusiasm and commitment as my teachers, brothers and sisters who inspire me.

Gongfu: A Better Cup of Tea

Now let's go back to our question of how to brew a better cup of tea. I hope that you can understand that with the right intention, focus and efforts, the right attitude and ethics, we learn to master a skill more fully. And perhaps you can imagine how liberating it can be to fully engage ourselves in something that we love to do. Through this love, we learn to get to know everything about this thing, this person we call "I," this craft or practice. We brew tea and listen, and She tells us of her subtleties in response, and we adjust accordingly. In this way, we learn to "brew the tea the way She wants to be brewed." We love, and we are loved back by the very same thing we love, and in turn we start to love it even more! Wu De often says: "We don't have mindfulness problems; we have respect problems." Once we are respecting the situation, that thing, that person or being, we are present onto it and mindful as well. For a Cha-jin, tea ceremony is an extremely powerful tool to practice this respect and to experience what we receive when we come to Her with this approach.

As a meditator, I have come to realize that together with the practice of mindfulness, the practice of respect can help us to strengthen our efforts to be present onto the moment. Our respect grows because we are mindful of the present moment, and through this, realize its preciousness. Our mindfulness grows because we respect the moment, and feel a natural desire to be present. This forms a never-ending road towards better cups of tea, and, ultimately, a better version of us!





神的香氣
香港

Hong Kong

After eight days of flying at a breakneck pace, Hong Kong opened welcoming arms to us, thanks to our local tea sister Resham, who had spent so much time planning this leg of the trip in such a beautiful way. We slept in Shenzhen so we would be close to the border in the morning. Since we needed our tour bus to pick us up on the other side, we had to use the old border, rather than the convenient one that has both sides in one building. This meant getting everyone, and all our luggage, through the China border, onto a shuttle to the Hong Kong border, through the Hong Kong border and then onto another shuttle to take us to our bus. All of that with forty people passing through immense crowds and long lines! Amazingly, it was a highlight of the trip for many of us, as all the love, calmness and tea spirit served us well. It was beautiful to move back and forth through the lines and see the calm, smiling faces of tea brothers and sisters before and after you, reminding you to breathe, stay present and in the heart. What would have been an extremely stressful morning became, instead, a wonderful exercise in patience and peace of mind.

In an extraordinary juxtaposition that was so jarring it was difficult to describe, we went directly from the cacophony of the border to a glorious giant Guanyin temple. We all practiced noble silence for around ninety minutes: circumambulating the glorious statue, meditating and contemplating our experience in quiet. At the end we said a prayer, in which we included all of you and went to a beautiful Zen garden in town for a nice vegetarian meal.

That evening, we went for tea and dinner to the Lock Cha teahouse in the park. Before we went in, we visited the Flagstaff museum, which has a wonderful collection of Yixing teapots, including many antiques. Someone found one of Wu De's books on display there, which was a good sign for us all. We learned a lot, but more was in store. The Lock Cha teahouse in the park was built in 1991 by Mr. Wing-Chi Ip (葉榮枝), a renowned tea expert who has founded many tea education programs and has taught tea classes for decades. He is a great master, but humble as all Chajin should be. The teahouse offers vegetarian meals and some great teas to people looking for a rest in the park, including some great puerh teas. We were fortunate to have Mr. Ip teach us for a half an hour. He spoke about the history of the teahouse and puerh tea in Hong Kong. He said: "The meaning of 'Lock (樂)' is happiness, enjoyment or fortune. Simply speaking, Lock Cha wants our customers to enjoy a good tea happily and easily. Our concept of good tea is one that is delicious, healthy, a good value and offered with kindness and a pure heart." We couldn't agree more! After that, we drank a 1960s Blue Mark puerh, which was stellar, and then were served a lovely vegetarian meal by the teahouse staff.

The following day, we took the cable car to Lan Tao Island to see the largest metal Buddha in the world. We hiked up and wandered around, meditating and saying some prayers. We then found a small pagoda in a quiet back corner of the park where we could sit in a circle and share the

final tea session of the trip. Just prior to the trip, one of our Taiwanese tea sisters had just come from Yunnan. She gifted us a small can of sheng puerh from a single, ancient tree. We put a few leaves of this in each bowl and drank three in silence, blown away by the deep and powerful energy. We then went around the whole circle sharing our experience. There were a lot tears and heartfelt love for the group. We had come so far and learned so much together. It really felt like a family or a traveling tribe of tea people. The energy of our circle was so strong that it attracted some sensitive people who came and sat meditatively nearby. Everyone spoke eloquently about the trip and the harmony of the group, which had really and truly come to feel like a family, as if this were a family vacation through China. We all sat in that circle overwhelmed by the love that we had shared over the course of ten very, very full days.

That evening we had the final, goodbye feast at a vegetarian hotpot place. It was so much fun to cook our own veggies and enjoy the end of our fellowship. This was one of many, many stunning meals throughout the trip. The food was overall incredible this year, and so many of us felt so.

There was a toast for Global Tea Hut, toasting us for successfully traveling through so many vistas, within and without, and one for the community that made it all possible—your spirits and blessings traveling with us and carrying us all back home safely. We hope this virtual journey has been as fun as ours was and that you, too, feel ready to lift a cup for Global Tea Hut!

EMILY MORRISON, USA

I've been home now about a couple of weeks, so the trip has had some time to wash over me. While I was on the trip it really was go, go, go from day one. Nearly every day was packed, from 8 am to 9 pm, 10 pm or even 11 pm. I think what really served me well on the trip (and I'm feeling the effects of this even still) is that in order to go on the trip one has to commit to following the guidelines of the Tea Sage Hut (they're on the Tea Sage Hut website, FYI) while traveling with Global Tea Hut: to hug everyone on the trip every day (note: I'm not a hugger, ask anyone who knows me), and to change up whom you sit with and room with at every opportunity. I didn't really know before I went on the trip if following the guidelines would also mean waking up at 4 am to meditate (it didn't!) or having silent meal periods (nope!), but I decided to be game for whatever came my way, and I'm so glad I did, because I would have completely chickened out on a few things and missed some opportunities to hike even further, connect even more, and learn more deeply.

I learned a lot about myself from meeting the places where my mind said any number of things to me that

would have had me take back my promise to follow the guidelines:

"You're too old for this. This hike *will* kill you."

"Clearly I need more alone time than anyone else here."

"Discourse? At 10 pm? Are you kidding me? You can't tell me what to do."

"It's true... no one likes me. I knew it all along. I'm sitting alone on the bus and that obviously proves it."

"OMG! I just can't have this deep of a connection with someone today. Please don't sit next to me."

"Tea at 10 pm? Seriously?"

"Street food? I hate street food."

You get the picture...

So, while hanging out with some very old trees in China (Wow!!!), learning deep lessons on generosity and hard work from our hosts and from the folks who live at the Tea Sage Hut who came on the trip, getting to learn tea and pottery from some straight up master-level folks (not like how some regular Joe or Jane might call themselves a "tea master," but an honest-to-God federally-recognized master of the craft), having tea sessions with some seriously old tea, having tea sessions

with some seriously amazing traveling companions, listening to Wu De talk about tea every day and getting the opportunity to ask whatever questions I wanted, being fed a veritable bonanza of delicious vegetarian food three times a day, getting gifted *so much amazing tea* along the way—even with all these once-in-a-lifetime events happening and available to me, I think it was the promises that were asked of me that set me up for a much richer experience. I got to have all of those events... (the trees, the tea, the demonstrations, the talks) AND I got to see where I had up until that point set seemingly reasonable limits and boundaries for myself that were actually bringing me down and keeping me away from people, from Tea, and from a self that I might like a little more than the old one.

So yeah, the trip was amazing—once-in-a-lifetime stuff, with the added bonus of my heart being re-opened in places where I had convinced myself it was a good idea to close it down.





來自世界各地的聚集透過茶我們成朋友

友誼和回憶終生難忘成朋友

SHEN SU (聖素), CANADA/TAIWAN

Global Tea Hut annual trips are one of the pinnacle benefits of serving and participating in the Global Tea Hut community. Having tea brothers and sisters from around the world gather and travel together to distant tea locales is perhaps my favorite experience of the year, not to mention one of the most educational experiences as well. It's excellent to read about and drink tea and to practice a daily life of tea, but to go to the source of different teas, brewing methods and traditions is a rare opportunity and one not to be missed in the lifetime of a Chajin.

As a student and servant of this tradition of Cha Dao, these trips are an important reminder of why we work, serve and participate. Knowing *why* you do something gives you the motivation to persevere through the challenging times. It takes hundreds of hours of preparation for the trip (many months in advance), not to mention the endless hours of service within the trip itself. As well, it has taken years of effort on the part of hundreds of volunteers to make Global Tea Hut possible, which in turn made this trip possible! But the important lesson here is to remember that we are not actually *working* (in the sense of going to and from our daily jobs), but *serving*. Serving something greater than ourselves, like this trip for example, is an honor.

Externally, what we do in preparation for the trip might appear like everyday work, but when paired with the attitude of service, everything changes. When I remember to orient towards my work as service, and fully understand why I am serving, I find an increased capacity to do more and with higher quality energy because it is purposeful. With this attitude, our work shifts from a means to an end to a meaningful, present activity that can even be utilized as a form of self-cultivation: "My work is my practice," as the affirmation goes. More importantly, it is service towards something that will outlast us and hopefully improve and inspire the lives of future generations of tea lovers. That's a major part of what Global Tea Hut is really about, and this is what I was reminded of on this year's trip. This was very inspiring for me.

There was one moment in particular during this trip that captured this insight perfectly. It was simple and fast, but effective. We were visiting some tea gardens on Wudong Mountain. Many of the trees were aged and weathered, with outreaching limbs covered in moss and lichens. They reached for the light in gnarled movements so that their newly sprouted leaves might capture enough sun to flush another harvest. At a glance, there was one wild garden in particular that stole my attention. This was the first time I had a real visual understanding of what the tea gardens at Light Meets Life might look like. We often talk about growing tea at Light Meets Life and imaginary landscapes naturally unfold, filled with all the varieties of tea we can get our hands on, like a museum of tea trees. But here was a real example of what it could really be like. In that moment, I knew very well what future generations of tea lovers might be looking upon and caring for at the world's best school of tea! That vision alone makes so much of this service worth the effort, let alone all the other beautiful and inspiring reasons to serve in this tradition. For anyone reading this in the future, enjoying some of the classics of Global Tea Hut magazine, perhaps while sitting among the now-developed tea gardens at Light Meets Life, know that it was our honor to lay the foundation upon which you stand, so stand proud!



MORTEN MENGE, GERMANY

Now when it comes to the annual Global Tea Hut trip there is one thing in particular I am looking forward to the most. And that is the tea ceremonies. Tea ceremonies happen throughout the whole course of a Global Tea Hut trip. For me, they make up the heart of the whole experience. This is because in a way they indicate where the trip is at, where it's going and also in some way how it's going to end. Tea ceremonies also come in different shapes. Let me tell you a bit about the different kinds of ceremonies on a Global Tea Hut trip.

Arguably the first tea ceremony on a trip is also the most important one. As on most trips, the schedule is pretty tight. The people who organize these trips each year put a lot of effort into creating an unforgettable experience for each and every participant. This is important because many of us have to overcome substantial financial and/or geographical obstacles in order to come. The organization crew therefore wants to load the trip with highlights as densely as possible, and that makes for a tight schedule. Also on this year's trip we jumped right into the game.

We all met in busy Xiamen, and it felt like we all just briefly closed our eyes and then instantly found ourselves sitting in between ancient tea trees in Anxi. And after a short night, this experience continued right into the next day with visiting even older trees on magical-misty mountain tops. We were seeing ancient temples, a master potter in action and tried to get to know the people on the trip a little in between our excursions. The first days you kinda feel like inhaling experience after experience, by which your head gets pumped up bigger and bigger.

The first communal tea session is the moment when for the very first time you have a chance to release some pressure from your balloon-head and make some space. The session on this year's trip that served that purpose was the honey tea session at Master Chen's mother's house. We sat outside at round tables of 8-10 people and were served one bowl after another of vibrant wildtree Tieguanyin tea seasoned with goeey, thick, wild honey and sun-

dried buddha's hand (*fo shou*, 佛手) fruit. What a rare delicacy it was! And what intense effect it had on all of us! We drank the tea in silence at our tables, our hosts constantly making sure our bowls were never empty.

When the session ended and when I looked to the left and right of me, for the first time on this trip, I really saw the person sitting next to me. I felt connected to Jing on my left and Marcel on my right. And when I looked further around me, I felt connected to the whole group. I felt eternally grateful for being able to share this moment with all my tea friends. And that's what happens to many in the first tea ceremony of a trip—you start to bond with the whole group. The "Global Tea Hut Trip Tribe" was born at that moment! From then until the end of the trip, we were all moving on together as one.

The next days are just as busy, but the pace is easier to hold now as you are synced with the people around you. Now it's time for different kinds of tea ceremonies to happen: the intimate type, the ones when you start making even deeper connections with people on the trip. These sessions can be so deep and insightful, you might never forget them again in your whole life. The funny thing is, there is actually no time available for such intimate ceremonies to happen. But nevertheless they still *do* happen!

Nearly every day, you get up at around seven in the morning and then have a tea-packed day that usually doesn't end until 9:30 at night. After such a long day, you are exhausted and ready to hit the pillow, when something happens. The "unofficial" parts of the trip start. Even though you know you should crash, the temptation to hold out is stronger: roommates want to get to know each other better by sharing some tea; old tea friends have not seen each other in years and want to celebrate that with a little tea gathering; or some other tea friend you just met simply brought a beautiful tea along she wants to share with others in the group. So instead of getting some much-needed rest, you find yourself wandering down hotel corridors at ten at night with a bottle of spring water

under your arm, hoping you remembered correctly the room number you were told earlier.

The sessions that happen then are lovely, because they are just so wonderfully imperfect. The host just has to work with what is given in the hotel room and adds those things to the ceremony he or she brought along. As a guest, you then sit down on the floor in a comfortably dimmed room, close your eyes, let go of the day, immerse yourself in the company of your dear tea friends, while at the same time trying hard to not fall asleep!

After three bowls of tea in silence, your head is lighter again and very often the end of such a tea session ends with exorbitant, never-ending laughter—a laughter full of joy and love. Now at one in the morning, short sleep ahead—but man, how I love those sessions!

And then there are the epic kind of tea ceremonies that define the character and make up the spirit of the trip. They come to your mind first when you tell your friends about the trip and elicit a magical glow in your eyes. For me that session was in Chaozhou, where we drank a very old, very special, very expensive tea, a 1979 *Da Ye Qing Bing* (大葉青餅) puerh.

For that session, we had a whole tea house almost completely to ourselves. Just thinking back on the preparations for the session makes me smile. Our whole group spread out to sit at five tables with the tradition's most experienced brewers heading them to serve tea. Everybody tried to help getting all the necessary tea tools to the tables, including such things as pots, runners, kettles, etc. The concentration level was already high paired with the excitement about the tea we were about to be served.

Then, suddenly, out of the corner of your eye, you could see that small bags of paper were being passed to the brewers. Those bags were holding fifteen grams of tea worth a small fortune.

I was sitting at Shen Su's table and could sense how nervous even he, that old tea dog, was when it came to brewing such a special tea. Of course, in the

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end, he ended up serving the tea just perfectly. Jing Ren was assisting him with the water.

I won't ever forget that tea! Just thinking back on the texture and flavor of the tea makes my mouth water. It was such a pleasure to just feel the tea take a walk on my tongue to then spread wings and fly to each and every corner of my mouth. All I had to do was to close my eyes, observe the tea and enjoy. Right after I finished my first cup, my body started to relax and my mind cleared up. The tea affected me instantly! The more cups I drank, the deeper I calmed down and became aware of how the tea slowly got some things rolling in my unconsciousness. I managed to not get involved, to stay with the tea and let things unfold one after another in my head.

The setting for our tea was great too. We all were drinking in silence, for what seemed hours, but maybe

actually just was an hour to an hour and a half. The background music in the old teahouse was easy, quiet *guzhen* music. The staff of the tea house just let us do our things and observed us with interest. When the session was over, it seemed everybody was moved deeply. Wu De could hardly speak, and the same with Tian Wu and many others who shared some words about their experiences with the tea in front of our group.

We drank a thirty-nine-year-old tea—just two years older than me. Of course during the session, I shortly reflected on that matter: how much that tea had to tell and teach. I took it as a lesson and reminder to put effort into living a meaningful life for the good of myself and all others. The older I grow, the more I want to be able to tell such stories as the Tea did and not waste my time with unimportant things. We both may then speak our truths.

This tea session had it all: (Tea) lessons were taught, gongfu mastery was demonstrated and I connected through Tea to my higher self. To me, these three things also made up the essence of this year's trip. They go in line with the people we met, the places we visited and the experiences we were exposed to.

With much love and reverence, I reflect back on those moments with tea, shared with my tea brothers and sisters on this trip. I bow to you and can't wait to reunite (hopefully next year)!



RIVO SARAPIK, ESTONIA

After our last tea session in Hong Kong, in front of the giant Buddha, everyone shared what had been the highlight of the trip for him or her. After giving it a thought, I realized that border crossing from China to Hong Kong a day earlier must have been it for me. What sounds like a simple act (crossing a border) meant thousands of people pressed together in a small room to get over to another country, and everyone fighting for their spot anywhere—in the queue, the transfer bus you need to take, etc. The huge crowd was rumbling and we were sucked into the complete chaos of endless queuing, shuttle buses, more queuing, paperwork, etc. It took a small fight (for our bags, no one was hurt) to get on the transfer bus. Totally different energy from what we had seen previous days of the until-then pleasant trip: aggressive, careless and only thinking of oneself. However, those couple of hours we spent there turned out to be powerful. After traveling for almost ten days with mindful people, taking care of each other and being extra cautious of everything, the border situation was a reminder that our moving retreat would end and we would head back into the so-called “real world,” where things are messy. To stay mindful, caring and centered through the world is something to work on.

Despite the adventures at the border and a few nervous hours, I reached Hong Kong with a calm state of mind. As Tian Wu advised us beforehand, this situation can be turned into a meditation practice. And I did just that: breathe in, breathe out, observing myself and just surrendering to the situation. Something that could have been a messy and annoying commotion turned out to be the brightest moment of the trip for me. It's not just logistics that get better with the meditative mind. It's everything!

Having access to a meditative mind (and practice) can make every experience more powerful, deeper and stronger, whether it be resting, reading a book, a conversation or enjoying fruit. Without Zen, even the power and depth of a tea from the 1960s might be lost in words or descriptions of flavor.

It wouldn't be a tea ceremony without a calm and awakened mind. Presence and mindfulness also emphasized a few other things we had a chance to encounter on the trip.

As with all things Tea, these encounters had a lot to do with connection; without it, people act like they did when trying to cross the border, rushing in, mindless, fighting for a place in line or trying to get on a bus sooner than others, and trashing others' luggage as they do so. This rush is something I do from time to time as well, and it always leads where I don't want to go: mindless consumption, overworked exhaustion, dissatisfaction, regret and health issues.

Second, there is also the connection between me as a tea drinker/server and the plant to the roots. Even though I'd heard numerous stories and watched videos about how much effort goes into the processing of tea, I didn't really had any idea. When we walked through the small village on Phoenix Mountain with the scent of freshly-picked tea leaves floating in the air, or hiked up the mountains in Anxi to see wild tea trees, I started to realize the challenges that go into getting these leaves to me. My gratefulness and respect grew. Somebody needs to pick the leaves, carry and process them. Slopes on tea mountains are often steep, and the sun is burning, the baskets get heavy—it takes ages to create a pot of tea! There is also the influence of the tea farmer (hopefully mindful and caring) to consider. They require great skill, adapting to changes in the weather, for instance. Miss one step and there's no tea.

Connection in Tea also has a wider meaning. Whatever the service, in the form of a good or an offered experience, somebody has given their life energy to provide me with something. It is another reason to value whatever I have and notice that sometimes I already have more than enough. Sometimes a lack of a meditative mind prohibits gratitude for our abundance, and helps to create ridiculous first world problems.

These contemplations might sound like they don't have anything to do with the annual trip, but they actually

do. As Wu De always says, “How I do anything is how I do everything,” from washing dishes, training, working or serving tea. The presence of a meditative mind (calm and awake) helps us to experience the maximum out of the moment and becomes the Way of Tea.

Finally, there was a lot of gratitude on this trip, which was a highlight in and of itself. Besides being deeply grateful for Global Tea Hut, the trip, my expanding consciousness, my fellow Chajin and all our experiences, there is also a timeless gratitude: for life, for roots (my home, Estonia, with its wild Nature and long summer days, friends and clean springs in the forest), for now (serving the tea community at the Tea Sage Hut), for the past (even the things that look like mistakes or hard times but were necessary in order to get where I am) and the bright visions I have for the future. These are valuables that I sometimes forget when I seek the proverbial greener grass on the other side, even though I know it's not greener. Never. This Way of Tea is a great Way, and the annual trip deepened that understanding and my appreciation for it.





JAANUS LEPLAAN, ESTONIA

The morning feels crisp and a thick curtain of mist envelopes the tea trees growing on the mountain slopes as if hugging them gently. I follow the winding chain of people into a milky cloud of dew, and a few minutes later find myself in front of a portal made of branches. “Could entering a tea forest be more befitting and magical?” I think to myself as I bend and crouch down to enter the rabbit-hole-like tunnel taking us into the heart of the oldest grove.

This striking scene in that amazing forest on top of a mountain in Anxi on the second morning of the trip marks, to me, the beginning of an unforgettable journey. What can be said in summary of such an adventure? Which parts of this highlight of my year could be highlighted? How does one express something so meaningful?

Each day brought with it a staggering amount of memorable experiences. Meeting the old tea trees and spending time in the tea gardens watching the local ladies pick the leaves with beaming smiles on their faces (and occasionally stopping to chat to each other and giggle at the curious foreigners) were amongst my favorite memories.

Perhaps the most meaningful memory I brought home with me was meeting our host in Anxi, Master Chen. He is someone who has a way of life and truly embodies the Tea spirit. His attitude towards life, as well as his kindness and hospitality, were inspiring and deep life lessons were learned in his presence. There were also many beautiful small moments shared on the road: the conversations on the bus, the smiles and hugs after tea sessions, spontaneous group singing and, of

course, no Global Tea Hut trip would be complete without at least one dance party.

I am also proud of the way we traveled—not as a tour group, but as a tribe. Yes, jet fuel was still burned and carbon dioxide released to get us there and around, but seeing the sincere joy and enthusiasm our hosts expressed for meeting a group of people so deeply connected to the spirit of Tea, I realized that one of the ways we gave back was inspiration. Our visit changed not only our little Tea tribe but also the people we met along the way. The wheels of change have already been set to motion, and in the long run the positive consequences far outweigh any environmental impact we had.



SIGNE SILLASOO, ESTONIA

How would these tea trees describe the forest? Or the people who are walking around here? One small and young tree on the edge of the forest might say that people are very tiny creatures, like ants because the path where they walk is far away from her and she has never really seen a person very close. And the forest... “Well, this is a nice, quiet and colorful, but shady, place.” The branches and leaves of bigger and older trees are creating an airy roof over her. Another tree next to a narrow path might think that people are big creatures who sometimes make cacophonous sounds, while at other times they are mellow and create wonderful sounds, similar to birdsong. “Oh, wow, one of these big creatures is hugging my trunk right now,” might be her thought.

This trail of thoughts came into my mind as I was hiking together with forty other people down a narrow and hilly road in a tea forest on the second day of our annual Global Tea Hut trip. It was a foggy morning near Anxi. The forest was magical in the fog-light:

spiderwebs, red blossoms, birdsong, moist air, moss on the tea trees, one abandoned kettle in the middle of the forest, which has probably been at the heart of numerous great tea sessions, and lovely people all around me... The truth is I had no idea what these trees might be thinking or how they might experience our presence there. They are connected, but at the same time very different from us, having their own roots, trunks, experiences and their own truths—or so it seemed...

A Path to Truth

In Sanskrit, the word “*satya*” means truth. It is also referring to being truthful in one’s thoughts, speech and actions. There have been times in my life when I was an eager student, and other times when I didn’t want to learn at all, but life forced me to. I learned/memorized lots of things as a child, teenager and young adult: facts, poems,

formulas, hand-crafted skills, stories as well as behavior, reactions, responses, what to say, what not to say or when and how to show or hide your emotions and express your thoughts—but I wouldn’t call any of that “*satya*,” or “truthful living.”

Some years ago, after almost three decades of living such programs, I got to the point where cleanup was necessary. By sorting out all these emotions, stories, facts, beliefs and behavior, I found that many of these lifeways actually didn’t resonate with me at all. These things weren’t supporting me, though I carried them with me for years. I felt like my life had been a big sale and I had bought too many meaningless things without really thinking about it, just because they were cheap. I had followed my desires and old thought patterns. I had wasted my time, energy, money and space. But I did my best at that time because I didn’t know a better way to live. The ways I followed were educated and socialized into me, after all.



Being Fully & Completely Alive

Being in different tea forests, tea factories and the homes of people who have fully dedicated their lives to tea growing and processing during our ten-day trip, and hearing talks about the characteristics of living and healthy tea, I started to think about the characteristics of a truly living and healthy person, the one who really 100% lives his or her life. Aren't the characteristics that make a living tea the same for a person? Don't we need room to grow, letting our own branches grow? Allowing room to develop strong and deep roots? We also need full biodiversity and natural ecology that supports our growth. We need a clean environment (mentally, emotionally and physically), and food and water to be in our best shape. (Agrochemicals aren't good for us either.) We need to exercise our bodies, rest, find peace and quietness inside. The relationship between us

and others, but more importantly our own relationship with ourselves, must be one of respect and reverence. And perhaps most importantly, we need to be ourselves, stick to our truth and path.

Being Your Own Hero

Such simple, yet not easy to achieve, insights were in my mind, wishes and even prayers as I sat for tea in many sessions during the trip, or stood in front of the statue of Guanyin in Hong Kong, praying for fulfillment in this way. Simply being quiet, feeling humbled, helped facilitate magical moments that touched and changed things inside me. And when I say that, I don't mean big fireworks or emotional roller coasters; I mean whispers inside me that I finally paid attention to. Whispers that brought me closer to myself, to my *satya*, and to the things that really mean a lot to me: being honest and truthful with myself; being

kind to myself; being kind to people, animals, Nature and all things around me; being there for the ones I love; replacing some old stories, behavior and reactions with new healthy ones; practicing self-love; and stopping my quest for excuses about why I can't do the things I dream of doing.

Sometimes, being your own hero means noticing and acknowledging the victories no one else sees—the victories that are not recognized by others. There are no trophies, there's not any encouraging pats on the shoulder. There's just you left to congratulate yourself. But you can tell that you have changed, because you think, react, feel and behave differently. You live your truth. I thank Tea and all the warm, sincere, and good-hearted people from all over the world who came on this trip and helped me create the space for such insight to blossom.



🍵 On our last night, we drank 1960s Blue Mark puerh from broken cakes (making it more affordable) at the Lok teahouse in the park after spending an hour or so at the Flagstaff museum looking at all the antique Yixing pots on display. (Someone found copies of Wu De's books in the museum library!) Master Wing-Chi Ip (葉榮枝) lectured us on the history of tea in Hong Kong, his teahouse and traditional storage of puerh tea. He spoke eloquent English, telling us that tea connects us to Nature and must make us happy, bringing joy to our lives. This tea session wasn't as deep as the one in Chaozhou, as we had a time limit, but we did get to laugh and connect with each other. Afterwards, they served us a glorious vegetarian meal at the teahouse and we made it back to our hotel, full of tea and tea wisdom and exhausted from ten days of a whirlwind pace through tea mountains, factories, teahouses, tea sessions in hotel rooms until late at night, countless hugs and jokes, laughs and some cries for the environment as well. We had a lot to digest on the way home!

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 Rivo Sarapik.

I had to go to a dark place to hear Tea talking to me. Two events especially were guiding me down to the right spot. First, I had to break my back in a silly but shocking cycling accident. To recover from the injury, one of the things I needed to change was my diet—give up on animal products and bring more plants into my life to nourish the body and provide all the nutrients I needed for healing. This also meant giving up on coffee, which I gulped 5-10 mugs of a day. Secondly, I needed to lose my brother to suicide. Without having the skills or experience to deal with this kind of tragedy, I did what I could: I took a dive into work and just didn't deal with it. Fast forward a few years, and this destructive way of handling trauma burnt me out, with daily anxiety and a lack of skills to manage daily stress.

It used to be ultra-endurance sports (like running, cycling, cross country skiing for days or even weeks in a row) that would help. Just head out to the woods for some activity and soon it was just me and my body. Mood followed action. Only later would I learn that this solution wasn't really a solution. Instead, I would add another stress factor, duplicating it. Sports had also been my Zen. It had taught me so many things about myself and humans in general—the truths of life, if you will, and without any words. But it stopped working. At one point, the anxiety just wouldn't leave anymore. I would wake up in the morning and my heart would be beating. I was panicked and unable to function properly—at work, home or during a training session. The most frightening aspect of it all was that I was only in my early 30s and had already used lots of my inner resources to make it thus far.

I used to label these previous things “shocking,” “frightening” or “something I would rather avoid.” Today, I see that labels are useless. These events needed to happen. Only broken was I ready to listen to Tea. The invitation was handed to me during one of the tea ceremonies Wu De was offering in Estonia during his visit to Tallinn a few years ago. I arrived to the event anxious and a little bit angry because of work issues. I had been drinking tea casually for some time, but the idea of a ceremony made me nervous. “What should I wear?” (Anything comfortable) “Are we going to pray?” (No). These were just few questions running through my head. Wu De said a couple of sentences by way of introduction and then started to brew tea, in silence... Even his calmness annoyed me in the beginning. “Faster, please. I would like some tea,” I was saying in my head. Then the first bowl arrived... and another one... and another one... Everything that had annoyed me started to dissolve into silence. An hour passed and suddenly I felt very light; like stepping out of a dark room into the sunlight, all the weight dropped from the shoulders. Tea entered me and lifted up my spirit.



🍵👤: Rivo Sarapik

I hadn't felt like that for ages. Every worry, work, everyday problems, etc., seemed distant and trivial. It also had been a long time since silence—both inner and outer. I hadn't had a proper pause between events for years. Every chance and need for it was filled with a training session, chat, music, film, the Internet or more work. This meant living without noticing, only rushing.

A few years have passed since that ceremony, years spent meditating, drinking tea, serving and learning about Tea, all of which has changed everything. Besides learning the importance of service, community and ceremony, I've also learned a lot about myself and service of myself. This is not blind egoism, but understanding that I can't offer anything I don't have myself. Just like they advise on the airplane: put your own oxygen mask on before helping others. This principle goes out of the window when times get busy or there is a lack of skills to handle different situations—from joy to stress, pain and grief, etc., but things that need attention don't just go away if we ignore them. They come back more powerful.

Now I'm on the path of Tea accompanied by humility, beginner's mind, respect, self-cultivation, joy, a community of wonderful Chajin from all over the world, gratitude and purpose. The healing has begun.

Inside the Hut

COMING SOON TO GLOBAL TEA HUT MAGAZINE

茶主题: Organics & Tea

茶道

茶主题: Classics of Tea

茶主题: Chajin Stories/Biographies

茶主题: Anxi Tieguanyin



Global Tea Hut is looking for an SEM and Facebook ad professional to help us set up and optimize evergreen SEM and Facebook campaigns, to reach people we might not otherwise reach. We want to work with someone who is deeply experienced in this field, and who will be thoughtful and loving. Volunteers have done a great deal of the groundwork already. We need the right person to take their efforts the last mile. For compensation we can offer tea and a small monetary consideration. Let us know if you can help!



Check out our new "Brewing Tea" video series on our YouTube channel, where we explore the philosophy, history, practicalities and experiments involved in improving your tea practice.



The 2018 Annual Photography Contest is underway. Submissions are not limited to Global Tea Hut members, so tell your friends. The winners will be published and receive gifts of tea and teaware.



We have created a vast array of teaware for this community, both for bowl tea and gongfu tea. There are gorgeous kettle and brazier sets, sidehandle pots and sets of beautiful bowls. We also have starry-sky Yixing pots in stock again!



Our third annual Zen & Tea Retreat in Spain is coming up from October 1st through the 9th. For those of you who have never attended, this is a superb chance to cultivate yourself, deepen your meditation, grow your tea practice, all in the gorgeous Pyrenees Mountains. We practice silent walking meditation down the silent trails every day and do a day-long hike in silence in the middle of the retreat. You can read about previous retreats in the Feb. 2018 and Feb. 2017 issues or learn more at: www.casacuadrau.org

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 have opened all the ten-day courses to service! This is exciting for those of you who have already taken a ten-day course and want to come serve one. You can apply on the website. This is also another way to visit if a course is full!



Our longer course for older students will be over the course of two weeks in late August. This course is for those who have been initiated into our lineage. Contact us if you are interested in attending. It will be from the 15th to the 25th. There will also be a five-day trip to Sun Moon Lake beforehand, from the 9th to the 14th!



After a year and a half of heartfelt service, our dear brother Connor is heading back to Australia to spread the tea love there. He will be missed!

July Affirmation

I am also my community

Do I allow too much of a sense of separation from the world? Can I hold responsibility? I see that I am a part of the whole. I see that I am the people around me, and that we stand or fall together as a whole. I am in that love of kindness.



www.globalteahut.org

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

GLOBAL TEA HUT

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

