Global Tea Hut

國際茶亭

Tea & Tao Magazine

September 2019

武夷山 神仙之地 岩茶

Wuyi Mt. Cliff Tea

Extended Edition

Contents

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GLOBAL TEA HUT
TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

ROU GUI

Wuyi Mountain is a must-see pilgrimage for all tea lovers. It is one of the most ideal places on Earth to grow tea. It is also one of the most gorgeous places on Earth. Travel there with us, as we explore the geography, history, folklore and tea processing of this powerful place together in greater depth than before, drinking a great Cliff Tea along the way.

Love is changing the world bowl by bowl

FEATURES

肉桂 武夷巖岩

TRADITIONS

特別加長版

recycled & recyclable

Soy ink

From the editor

In September, the weather begins to cool down and we can sometimes drink tea outdoors. Most of our 2019 fundraiser teas have arrived, and we can start digging into this year's amazing offerings. We have some incredible tea this year, including one of the best teas we have ever offered in any Light Meets Life fundraiser. We also start drinking more traditionally processed oolongs, aged oolongs and Cliff Tea around this time, which is perfect for this month's Extended Edition. It is, of course, way better when we all drink tea together.

There are a tremendous number of stunning teas on our site for the fundraiser this year! Also, as many of you no doubt know, I have recently published a book called *Fallen Leaves*. A signed hardbound version can be purchased on the "teaware" section of our website and a paperback from Amazon. All proceeds will help us build *your* Center, Light Meets Life.

As we continue to move forward towards a new Center for all of you, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank all of you for so much love, tolerance and support all these years. You who have come to the events we have hosted around the world, I bow to you. Thank you so much for all the kindness, support, smiles and love. It has touched me so deeply how far some of you traveled to come have tea with me when I was abroad. And those of you who have sacrificed to come here to Taiwan and take ten-day courses, filling this Center, Tea Sage Hut, with purpose and inspiration, reason and life. I also would like to honor all of you who have subscribed to this magazine and contributed your resources to continue this project. I also know there are all kinds of unseen help and support, like spreading the word about Global Tea Hut or Light Meets Life, as well as those who have carried teaware about town, offered space for ceremonies or done any number of other awesome good deeds to help keep the tea flowing. Finally, I would like to own any and all mistakes made in these magazines, at our events or at our Center and bow deeply once more for your tolerance and patience throughout this tea life we have shared together.

I love you all more than words can tell. And no matter what, even if I end up back in a small hut with only a single cracked bowl and some rice, I would share it with you. I pray we have the chance to share many more bowls of tea. And if we don't, I wish you a thousand, thousand bowls, each one the Morning Dew!

These Extended Editions are the highlight of my year as an author and editor, as they offer a chance to break our backs in service of greater depth. It is always a deep and lasting source of joy, pride and inspiration to explore the topics we all know and love in a much more thorough way. And there is no topic that I am as inspired by as Wuyi Cliff Tea. For me, Cliff Tea was my first passion. In college, I took the train quite some distance to get tins of Wuyi Cliff Tea. Back in the day, it was my first tea love: the tea that inspired me to forget whatever busywork I was up to and sit down for another kettle. It called me to explore and learn more, to research, read and travel. The first time I went to Wuyi, I was blown away…

There are no words in all the tongues of men or gods to describe the glory of Wuyi Mountain. It is more than just a beauty of the eyes; it touches the heart. Entering the park changes the way you breathe, walk and feel. It is a pilgrimage for tea lovers, and for more than twenty years I have made it a priority to travel there at least once a year (I have only missed one year, as I was busy serving tea to you). I have long hoped that we could collect all our writings on Wuyi, translate some parts of amazing books and invite some authors who also love Wuyi, like Master Tsai Yizhe (蔡奕哲), and gather it all in an Extended Edition. This is one of the most comprehensive publications on Wuyi Mountain and Cliff Tea in the English language. It is also one of the issues of Global Tea Hut that I am the proudest of in all the many issues we have made so far. I hope the reading of it inspires you as much as the creation of it did for us. Aside from a trip to Wuyi, this issue will be the next best thing to help you cultivate a real understanding of this magnificent place and tea. But I do hope that you all get the chance to visit one day. It is a must-see for a tea lover. (Maybe a Global Tea Hut Annual Trip?) May you all stand beneath these magnificent cliffs, cup of amazing Cliff Tea in one hand, the other on your heart, transcended and uplifted, inspired to walk further down this Dao of Cha…

–Further Reading–

This month, we recommend re-reading the June 2015 issue, which was all about one of our Annual Global Tea Hut trips, which we took to Wuyi. All of our past issues are on our website for free. Share them with your friends as well when they come over for tea!

Tea of the Month

Over the course of this month, we have the great pleasure to drink one of the most valuable and high-quality teas we have ever shared in this magazine. Wuyi tea has recently grown in fame, resulting in very exorbitant prices. Fine Cliff Tea is amongst the best, most subtle and purest teas on Earth. And as the demand for fine tea has grown exponentially, so has the renown of Wuyi, and fine, well-made teas like our Tea of the Month. It is therefore only through the generosity of our dear friends, the Huangs, whom we will discuss in more detail in the Deeper Session article coming up, that we could share this tea with all of you. Through a love of tea and a spirit of sharing, they have generously donated this month's tea in its entirety to all of you. Raise a bowl to their kindness!

Rou Gui (肉桂) is one of the most famous varietals of Wuyi Cliff Tea. Our Rou Gui comes from old trees in Hui Yuan Grotto (慧苑坑) in the park. Like most varietals of Cliff Tea, Rou Gui began in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). The name literally means "cassia," which is an evergreen tree common to Taiwan and China, the bark of which is used to make the spice cinnamon. We will discuss all the ways that Cliff Teas are named later in this issue, but one of the more common types of name is based on the fragrance of the tea. Rou Gui is one such tea, named after its flavor/aroma, which is said to resemble the cassia plant by some and cinnamon bark by others. Some say its leaves also resemble its namesake.

The Huangs produce half-handmade teas and fully handmade teas. The fully handmade production is too expensive to donate in these quantities, so our Tea of the Month is half-handmade. This means that the harvest and withering were done by hand, but the shaking, firing and rolling were done with machines. They did a charcoal roast for us, which was a very kind gesture and an added bonus to the quality of this amazing tea. Crafting any oolong tea with skill is very difficult, and maintaining a high level of quality with machines is very challenging.

Fine oolong tea starts with a healthy environment. As the leaves come into the factory and we watch them spread around the courtyard for their outdoor withering, we see bug bites all through many of the leaves. The old Master, Huang Xian Yi (黃賢義), says that "this is a good year, you see." The bites ensure that the ecology was healthy, full and rich, which means the tea will be great. Master Huang knows that Nature makes fine tea, and before humans get involved and start using skill to dry the leaf, one needs high-quality raw material. This is why master chefs do their own shopping. They know that high-quality ingredients are half the dish. Having a healthy, balanced ecology is just the start of fine tea. It also takes the perfect weather. Heaven and Earth must therefore come together to make fine tea.

The bug bites also mean oxidation. When a bug bites a leaf, the rim around the hole turns red, as the leaf has started to oxidize in that location. This added oxidation is good for traditional processing, in which the oxidation of oolong tea is heavier (usually between 40 and 70 percent). Traditional processing also means a heavier roast, but one of the problems we often encounter with Cliff Tea is that the roast is too heavy. People often report that they bought various varietals like Rou Gui, Bai Ji Guan (白雞冠) and Shui Xian (水仙) and then brewed them at home, only to find that they all taste the same—like heavy roast. When we asked Master Huang about this, he said that any step in tea production should enhance the tea without leaving a trace of itself, roast included. He said that most Cliff Teas were traditionally allowed to sit until Chinese New Year of the following year to let the roast mellow, but nowadays it is often sold in the autumn (like our Tea of the Month).

Brewing this tea to bring out its finest qualities will be a bit of a challenge for some of us, but if you do hit the sweet spot, this tea is full-bodied, fragrant and powerfully rich and smooth with a long-lasting aftertaste. If you brew it lighter, you will definitely be able to taste the cinnamon/cassia notes of the varietal. Spend a proper amount of time with this tea, would you please, as it was a very generous gift. It deserves some appreciation and care. It will reward you for the time and devotion with a precious session that will be a tea highlight of your year!

Rou Gui (肉桂)

Wuyi Mt., China

Traditional Cliff Tea

Han Chinese

~300-500 Meters

烏龍茶
武夷正岩茶

A Deeper Session

Further Exploration into Our Tea of the Month

Over the course of this month, we will be drinking an amazing Wuyi Cliff Tea named after the cassia trees that flourish throughout southern China, "Rou Gui (肉桂)." It is amongst the best teas we have ever sent and will be an amazing tea to sip with our tea family around the world while we once again dive deeper into a topic, doubling our magazine towards greater, vaster and more open vistas of tea wisdom. Throughout this issue, we are going to cover Wuyi and the Cliff Tea that grows there in greater detail than ever before, taking a long trek through the park with plenty of tea stops. Here, let's brew up a deeper session of this Rou Gui and talk about an aspect of this tea we don't always cover…

As we so often discuss in these issues, tea is its location. Place is tea and tea is place. This is often referred to as "terroir." As we will discuss in much more detail later on in this issue, Wuyi is a very unique place with a very special geography, flora and fauna unlike anywhere on Earth. This means that tea is "immovable," as it was often called in ancient times. In part, this means that moving tea to another area creates a completely different tea. This is something tea lovers before us understood very well.

In modern times, we have come to view agriculture in terms of industrial production. We see plants as a "product" and the place where they are grown as a medium or factory, and think that by controlling certain factors, we can reproduce the same plants in larger, identical quantities in different places around the world. But this factory philosophy to farming eliminates the local ecology and its role in production, treating all soil as the same conglomerate of chemicals that we control by adding this or that, and views plant species as products that can be blueprinted and then produced on a large scale.

No matter what environment we grow plants in, the environment plays a role, as does the human relationship to that environment. A philosophy that treats a mountain as a blank canvas, and ignores the flora and fauna that are growing and thriving in balance there is akin to an oppressive society colonizing a foreign place for its

resources and ignoring the rights of the local natives (which human history is also fond of doing). This is also like building architecture that stands out and apart from Nature. But there is a more cooperative philosophy based on designing buildings that harmonize with Nature and feel like they have always been there.

Growing sterile, reproducible tea that can be blueprinted anywhere in the world via cloned cuttings of trees and agrochemicals, in the end, produces just what it sets out to: a cloned, sterile, lifeless "product" that lacks the unique characteristics that made that varietal famous in the first place. Factors that are undoubtedly related to the unique environment it comes from and the culture, history, processing methods and craftsmanship of the locals who developed ways of processing that tea over many, many generations. And those generations have not only evolved and refined those methods, but honed them through decades of practice passed down to children who will practice for decades before handing them down again, and so on.

When you remove a tea from its environment and from the cultural legacy that crafts it, it becomes lifeless, like a cheap touristy copy of the original. Cliff Tea must be grown between the cliffs of Wuyi, in other words, and processed by the people who have been doing so for centuries.

The centuries of prayer, devotion and lifelong commitment to refining and improving Wuyi Cliff Tea are a huge aspect of what makes Cliff Tea become Cliff Tea. In these articles, we often discuss the natural part of tea, perhaps leaning too far into the need for healthy, natural and biodiverse ecologies to grow fine tea, and sometimes neglecting the importance of the Human element in tea. Fine tea is always the work of a good ecology and healthy trees (土, Earth), the right weather and timing (天, Heaven) and the skills, craftsmanship, devotion and work of people (人, Human). The human element is as critical as the natural factors.

There are three aspects to what humans bring to the equation of fine tea: first is the heritage and history running through their blood. If you travel to India and take a cooking class,

you will be awestruck by the locals' ability to make great curries without recipes and their innate spiritual connection to the spices they use. How many times have you been in a city and chosen a restaurant because it was "authentic," which means the cooks were of that nationality? And wasn't it better? There really is something to this. There is a generational and spiritual bond that is handed down. It is hard to put into words, but hand-processed tea possesses something that machines cannot reproduce, and when it's done by genetic ambassadors whose ancestors have been working with these very leaves for centuries, there is a magic that cannot be reproduced. There is a magic oil in the hands of locals that is permeated with tea spirit.

Aside from the more spiritual side of affinity, called "*yuan fen* (緣分)" in Chinese, there is the more concrete refinement of skills that are handed down generationally in tea families. Like recipes, these are often guarded secrets—methods of processing the tea. For example, the Huangs, who we will discuss shortly, often say that when oolong tea is made properly, the liquor should be golden, not reddish as most Cliff Tea is. And their Cliff Teas are certainly golden, as you will see when you brew our Tea of the Month. The methods for making a golden tea, as opposed to a red one, are very detailed, refined and take a lifelong commitment to achieve. Even if you had the recipe, in other words, you would need to have started practicing in childhood and dedicated your entire life to the honing of these skills to reach the level of mastery of the Huangs. And they represent more than ten generations of such devotion and skill.

These, then, are the human factors that go into the production of fine tea:

1) An unsaid spiritual connection to the environment where the people live, to the trees and the processing of the leaves. Remember, terroir includes culture and the human being as a natural part of the environment. This spiritual affinity to the tea includes prayers and rituals (common to all tea-growing regions), devotion to the trees and spirits of the land, soil and water, as well as prayers and devotion to their own ancestry. The care for the land and resources handed down to them includes spiritual maintenance—something all our ancestors understood.

2) The methods of production handed down in families, often secretly. These "recipes" are then refined each generation, so that what is being handed down is improved upon, like any local art or craft.

3) The skills that can only be honed to this degree by a lifelong commitment to this craft. One must be born into it, so that one can start practicing at a very early age, and therefore have many more years of practice than an outsider possibly could. This is where the methods in #2 find their outlet, their application. It is one thing to have theory, which could be shared with you if you gained the family's confidence, but it is a whole other thing to actually be able to apply that theory with your own hands. In tea production, these skills include knowing the environment and trees to a very subtle degree, understanding the climate spiritually, astrologically and scientifically to know when to harvest, and then, of course, all the amazingly refined skills needed to dry the tea, from withering to shaking, firing to rolling, and roasting to sorting.

In a world where the human influence all too often harms or outright destroys Nature, upsetting the balance of local ecologies and extincting species that play a decisive role in the overall health of their environments, it is easy to emphasize, or even exaggerate, the wild, natural influences. But in focusing just on natural environments, we forget that it is human philosophy, mindset, heart and devotion that protects these environments in the first place. In order to grow living tea, in other words, we need humans to protect natural tea gardens. The human also is central to fine tea in so many ways. And that brings us to some of the finest tea farmers we have ever met in decades of tea travel, the Huangs (黃) of Rui Quan (瑞泉).

Rui Quan

On the upward of a moist-eyed bow to my host, Huang Sheng Hui (黃聖輝), after thanking him once again for all he's done, we glance over his shoulder into the hall of the guesthouse and up at the golden statue of Xuan Zang (玄奘), who long ago defied royal decree banning international travel and left China to roam around India. After sixteen years and many adventures, Xuan Zang returned home with thousands of sutras, relics, statues and other Buddhist treasures. As we stand bowing our farewells to Master Huang, we think we understand what it must have been like to leave India for home with so many treasures, feeling as if we too were departing with a few dozen horses' worth; and like Xuan Zang, most of our fortune is wisdom as well—*Tea wisdom*. But Master Huang dismisses our thanks with the old Chinese saying: "The people of one house don't talk like two house people (一家人不說兩家事)." It's said to impart familiarity when you are being too formal. It means that "we are family," "make yourself at home" or perhaps "don't be afraid to ask for anything you need." It also expresses a kind of loving-hospitality, suggesting that you speak as you would to your own people in your own home. Oftentimes such polite sayings deflate over time into superficial manners, but there are those rare people who are living traditions—people whose hospitality is genuine and heartfelt. The fact that it really is their pleasure to have you as a guest beams from their eyes, and you feel honored and loved. You feel the way you do when you go home. We've been fortunate to meet such traditional people now and again in our travels, but none more kind or generous than the Huangs.

Huang Xian Yi (黃賢義) and his sons truly see the Buddha in the guest and the guest in the Buddha, inspiring us to be better hosts after we return home. Every visit to Wuyi, we have felt a sense of homecoming to a distant but loving family. They are gracious with their home, food, tea and their wisdom. And when you ask around, you see that others feel the same way—that they too are leaving fulfilled by a magical trip and in awe of their hosts' selflessness. The many years they lived in a small, remote village still inform their modernized lives. In that way, they are a part of the heritage and wisdom we all need to learn from if we are to create a world truly worth living in. The generosity they have shown us year after year throughout our tea journey makes them some of the greatest mentors for our Center, and a powerful influence in its creation. Guiding by example, they've helped us to define the principles that we believe to be at the core of Tea spirit: *sharing leaves as an act of kindness and asking nothing in return.*

From our viewpoint, the Huangs' tea is at the pinnacle of the most refined tea being produced today. Of all the kinds of tea, oolong is the most complicated to produce, requiring the most skill and management. As a semi-oxidized tea, it requires many stages to wither, bruise, de-enzyme and roll to get the right level of oxidation. This formula may sound simple, but any skill seems simple when presented to beginners in the most basic list of procedures. To the master, there is infinite variety in every one of these stages, based on the water content in the leaves, the weather, sunshine, temperature, etc. In terms of processing skills (gongfu), oolong is definitely the most refined of all tea genres. And all oolong tea processing, as well as many of the varietals, originate in Wuyi Mountain, making the Cliff Tea produced here the eldest of this princely caste of tea. Amongst such royalty, there is surely a king, just as every mountain has upper reaches, and then finally a peak—*Huang Peak*.

瑞泉茶

If oolong is the most refined of teas, and Wuyi Cliff Tea its brightest example, the teas made by the Huangs at their studio, Rui Quan, are the last vista, from which we can climb no higher. Let's explore some of the reasons why…

The Heart 用心做

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

Tea has only been a commodity for maybe a thousand years, and only in earnest for hundreds. Before, and even through that time, there have been many thousands of years of tea as sacred plant medicine. The terraces that hold the tea gardens in the park are made from tens of thousands of stones that were quarried thirty kilometers away and carried into the park, and then placed lovingly in ideal spots in a way that has lasted the centuries. You can feel the Human/Nature cooperation in this. Our host, the eldest son Huang Sheng Hui, told us that in his grandfather's time, tea pickers had to remove their shoes before entering the garden and weren't allowed to talk at all during picking. With a bright smile and a sparkle in his eyes, he told us of a time when an elder uncle came into his grandfather's tea garden smoking a pipe and his grandfather chased him out, not letting him live the infraction down for the next three days. In honor of that, the Huangs also start the picking season with prayers and a silent walk to the gardens for the first harvest.

True Cliff Tea (正岩, *zheng yan*) is only harvested once a year, like all tea was traditionally—before the industrial "Nature as resource" philosophy began to motivate tea and other agriculture. This means that the families in Wuyi must earn their entire income from the output of these few very intense and stressful weeks.

茶 *To the far left, we see the grandmaster at work. Huang Xian Yi (黃賢義) is one of the most sensitive tea producers we have ever met, and a deep smell is often enough to know exactly where a tea is in its journey. To the left, Sheng Hui makes incredibly convincing and loud animal calls with bamboo, which is how the farmers used to communicate over distances when they lived in the park. Below, Sheng Hui smells some of their old trees and his father shows us our magazine, which he carried in his back pocket for months, as he was so proud to be featured in such a way by "true Chajin."*

This ensures focus and heart from them all. But beyond that, the Huangs have a true passion to make better and better tea, and a reverence for Tea. As the old master Huang Xian Yi told us about the many decades when tea was sold for almost nothing—not enough to feed a family—we realized that the people who carried those stones thirty kilometers weren't economically motivated to do so. While they may have made part of their living from tea, it wasn't the reason why they were willing to go to such great lengths to honor Tea. It was because they revered these trees, and through them found heritage and culture that connected them in a living way to their forebears.

Long before others in the area, the Huangs made a decision very early on to bear the extra costs and produce all their tea organically. Of course, they then had to weed by hand, find ways of managing pests and ways of fertilizing that may not increase production as much as the chemical alternatives. "We decided that if the tea was better for people and the land we love, then it was worth the extra effort. We knew other people would care the way we do and pay a bit more for finer tea." That decision came out of a heart devoted to *being* a tea maker, not just making tea for money or because that is what you do—but because that is what you *are*, heart and soul.

From the ages of twenty to twenty-six, Huang Sheng Hui lived in the Tian Xin Monastery, studying Buddhism and volunteering as a lay novice. He had an inclination to leave home and become a monk, but he was the eldest son and his father needed him to help with the work at home. During the latter part of that period, the words that the old father used to convince his son to come back home, for us, sum up what makes the energy of Rui Quan tea different from other producers in Wuyi and other tea mountains we have been to. The old father said to his son, "Meditation and study of scriptures is good spiritual cultivation, but making tea is also spiritual cultivation."

Handcrafted 手工製作

Out of the passion to make finer teas as a Way (道, Dao) of life, the Huangs realized early on that it would have to be done by hand. No machinery is as sensitive as the hands of a master, shifting and changing the processing methods based on the tea. For example, if the tea leaves have

To the far left is the very spot just under Shui Lian Dong (水簾洞), up the stairs and under the overhang, where the Huangs once had a booth selling their tea for around a dollar a jin (500 g). They also served roadside boiled tea by the bowl for passersby for some pence (like all good tea sages). Sheng Hui still remembers sitting in the hot sun all day and how very few people bought their tea, even at that amazingly cheap price. To the left, Sheng Hui straps on a basket. He has not forgotten how to climb the mountains, striding away from us like a mountain goat, even though the incline was very steep and we were struggling to keep up at all. The garden around Shui Lian Dong is all very, very old Shui Xian (Water Fairy, 水仙) trees owned mostly by the Huangs. The trees are tall and gorgeous. Above, Sheng Hui looks out at the Water Curtain from underneath the beginning of Rui Quan rock, "肉桂," one of the "ninety-nine rocks" of Wuyi with striations and beautiful patterns flowing down to the old tea processing facility shown on p. 15. Traveling through this nostalgic memory with Sheng Hui is one of our favorite pastimes, as the stories about the "good ol' days" always make us smile. Life was truly idyllic for the farmers who once lived in this park, surrounded by its glory and all its Tea!

more water, the firing (殺青, *sha qing*) should be done with long, upward pulls that scatter the extra moisture, whereas tea from a dry season should be fried in little inward rotations that hold the leaves in the wok and preserve the water content.

Like the other families in Wuyi, the Huangs bought modern machines to produce more tea, more quickly and efficiently. In most houses, the elder masters then make a small batch of some hand-processed tea to give to important clients, good friends or government officials. Over time, this meant that the traditional processing skills would eventually not be handed down to future generations—yet another aboriginal art leaving this superficial mechanical world for some other. This would break the old master's heart, so the Huangs began increasing their production of handmade tea every year. In that way, his sons all continued to practice making tea the way they had first learned back when they still lived in the park, with a chance of one day becoming the master their father is. They eventually started making more than half their tea in this way, becoming the only family in Wuyi producing large quantities of fully hand-processed Cliff Tea.

Producing tea fully by hand in the traditional way is unheard of in the oolong world. You would be hard pressed to count a single hand's worth in the whole world. We know of only two in Taiwan, though there might be others. And even those who know how to produce tea by hand and do so very rarely create large enough productions to share with anyone. In this way, the Huangs are doing more than just creating incredibly fine tea, produced by master hands; they are also protecting and preserving important cultural heritage. In the last ten years, as a direct result of the influence of the Huangs, more and more producers in Wuyi are making larger quantities of hand-processed tea. It still does not represent any amount in comparison to industrial tea production, but change is possible.

國家公園裡 *Inside the Park*

The Huangs own around fifty acres of some of the best gardens in the park, all with heirloom trees, many of which are centuries old. But they aren't the only family to have access to *zheng yan* tea ("true Cliff Tea").

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

The old master of the family, Huang Xian Yi, has often told us that moving out of the park, his home and inheritance, broke his heart in a way that can never be healed. He said that every time he crosses the river and leaves the park, his body feels different. We asked him if the same could be said for the tea. "Of course," he exclaimed, "the energy in the leaves shifts. Also, the hike to get the leaves is already a long one, and when you add the time it takes to then transport the leaves by vehicle over to the village, it can sometimes take too long, affecting the overall withering of the tea. And that is the most important stage in processing fine oolong tea." Furthermore, the small village was designed to be simple and affordable rather than architected to create the finest tea. Having no outdoor space, the tea produced there is all withered on the road, or in the adjacent parking lot, exposed to car exhaust and the dust of traffic. Traditionally, fine Cliff Tea went through its outdoor withering on round mats suspended on long bamboo poles that allow airflow from underneath. For these and many reasons, the Huangs knew that to produce the best Cliff Tea, it would have to be done in the park, as it always had been. But how? Building in the park was illegal.

With that dream as a guiding star, they never let go of the idea, saving all that they could with the hopes that such an opportunity would come. Because of their dedication to hand-processed tea and protecting cultural heritage, they began to attract true tea lovers over time, including our own master, Lin Ping Xiang (林平祥). People began to recognize how much heart they put into all aspects of their tea production, from caring for the trees organically to producing the tea by hand. Eventually, they achieved some renown. Saving all their money, a lifetime's worth, and working together with local and federal governments, their dreams finally came true: In the mid-2000s, the Huangs were given permission to convert the only building in the park, an abandoned, run-down government office, into a tea-processing museum that would protect the cultural heritage of Wuyi traditional tea processing. They spared no expense and left no detail undone, including the walls, which they re-built using the traditional mud bricks that were used to build the tea-processing facilities in the old days in the park. This same mud from inside the park has an energy to it, but more importantly, it allows the masters to control the humidity and temperature much more skillfully. They also installed the bamboo poles to wither the tea in the way it should be.

Apart from the tea-processing facilities, the museum has several tea rooms to hold events, a library and many tea antiques. Aside from the monks of Tian Xin Monastery, Rui Quan is now the only Wuyi Cliff Tea produced inside the park itself. This makes Rui Quan tea the "*zheng zheng yan*."

Heritage 遺產

"Rui Quan" teas have been produced for more than three hundred years, though they officially branded the name in 2003. Huang Sheng Hui is the twelfth generation in a line of master tea producers. For almost all of that time, the family lived inside the park in several locations, finally settling in the Water Curtain Cave (水簾洞, *Shui Lian Dong*) area where the past five generations of Huangs lived in the same large house with four wings and a courtyard in the center. Sheng Hui took us to the location of his old house and showed us a giant tree planted by his grandmother. All that remained of the old house were tiles scattered around the forest floor, like the generations of memories left behind.

The stunning escarpment is a giant brushstroke of browns, yellows and oranges that are different from the dark blue-gray or red of the other cliffs in the park. And from this giant cliff, a thin waterfall has ever flowed, swayed by the wind back and forth like a summer curtain billowing before an open window, and then falling into a pool beneath where the Huangs once bathed in the warm seasons. The green valley and centuries-old Water Fairy (水仙, Shui Xian) trees all around made it feel as if we'd strayed into a dream.

Their tea-processing facilities were also located there, along the large cliff, and the ruins of it still stand. The bluff and ledge on which the old processing facility rests is called "Rui Quan," which means "Auspicious Springs," and is, of course, the inspiration for the family's brand.

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

In the late 1970s, the families in Wuyi were forced by the government to grow rice, and many tea trees were uprooted by officials. In the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), there were more than eight hundred varietals of Cliff Tea. Over time, that number has been reduced to around fifty, many of which were lost at this time. In 1982, the government returned the tea trees to the aboriginal people, leasing the land to different families. Great councils were held to divide the old gardens amongst all the people living there based on how many relatives each had. We asked the old master if there were many arguments over who got which garden at that time. He said, "No, in those days people were used to village life and council. And while some gardens or trees were famous, *all* the tea was good. There wasn't any low quality tea in those days."

Even though they began farming tea again, the government took the finished tea and paid them very moderate wages. They barely earned enough to buy clothing, tobacco, oil, soap and sundries. All of their food had to be self-cultivated, which meant that when they weren't caring for the tea gardens or processing tea, they were farming vegetables, raising pigs and doing other chores. "It didn't feel like work, though," Huang Sheng Hui says. "It felt like life. It wasn't something you had to do, but who you were. And the vegetables we grew were amazing… We still remember how delicious they were. You can't find such nutritional food nowadays."

In 1993, the old master began producing tea with real heart, and loving what he did. He began investing all his soul in making better and better tea, which he would sell in small packets to tourists for nine RMB a *jin* (斤, just over one USD for 500 g) for his highest quality tea. He also would boil stems and some leaves and sell bowl tea to passersby for some pence. The money wasn't enough to have a savings, but they were happy living in the beautiful park, making such fine tea to share. This demonstrates the old master's commitment to tea, that he continued producing it despite the fact that it didn't even provide enough for his family to live. He truly does love Tea with all his heart and that is an important aspect of living tea!

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

The second theme that threads through the fabric of all our conversations, leaving us embroidered with Tea spirit, is the influence of the park itself. We love the stories of when fathers or sons were boys, leaping over rocks on the way to school, catching fish with their hands, or occasionally meeting hermits or monks meditating in caves. Sheng Hui often grabs leaves or bamboo and makes incredibly vivid and convincing bird and animal calls with different leaves in his mouth, telling us with a big smile that this was how people communicated across mountains back in the day. They told us of a time the whole village saw an immortal walking across the tops of the trees, or the father and his young friends coming upon a cave inhabited by an old hermit that was glowing with an otherworldly light. Life inside the park was even more beautiful than a walk through its glorious paths can now reveal glimpses of. And one can understand the broken-hearted sadness that comes with being moved out, not to mention the end of the villages and traditional culture that surrounded them. But the grief has not overwhelmed the Huangs; they still treat you like you're a village neighbor,

and they still carry their culture and heritage in their hearts, shaking, frying and rolling them into their tea.

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

In the late 1990s, the Huangs met Master Lin Ping Xiang, forming a deep and lasting friendship that has also led us to them. It says a lot when such a great teacher supports everything you do unabashedly, especially someone with as much integrity as Master Lin. Over time, the care and love the Huangs have put into their tea have brought them abundance and success. They have come a long way from selling bowls of boiled tea to passers-by for a few cents. When the gardens were divided up in 1982, the Huangs owned around five acres of trees. They have since increased their stewardship to roughly fifty acres, with some of the brightest and best teas in the park.

When we asked them about their future goals, both father and son said that they hope to pass on these traditions to the next generation. Currently, all three of the sons are mastering different aspects of the business. The eldest son, our host Huang Sheng Hui, is in charge of customer service and marketing. His time in the monastery shows in his natural ability to love kindness and treat others. The second brother, Huang Sheng Liang (黄聖亮), works directly with the old master to inherit the processing skills. He has, in fact, just taken over supervision of production in the last couple of years, while his father looks on quietly, helping here and there.

The third, youngest son, Huang Sheng Qiang (黄聖强), is the accountant for the family. And all three have children, so there is hope for traditional, hand-processed Cliff Tea.

In 2006, the Chinese government afforded the Huangs with a precious and rare honor, recognizing Huang Xian Yi as a "Grandmaster of National Heritage Skills (國家非物質遗產製做技藝傳承人)." This title is only given to national treasures who preserve culture, and very few tea producers have been given it. Master Huang refused the title and had the government bestow it on his son, Sheng Liang, instead, feeling that the tradition and heritage of Wuyi was important, not he himself. This sentiment also gives us hope that these traditions truly can be handed down and survive into the future.

We hope that you recognize how precious this month's tea is, and what a tremendous gift as well. It was crafted from old trees in one of the most idyllic spots for tea in the world and processed by the eleventh and twelfth generations of master tea producers. And not just great tea makers or even great people—the Huangs are also our great friends.

茶 *To the far left, Sheng Hui bows in welcome at the location of the traditional Rui Quan tea-processing facility in the park, near Shui Lian Dong (水簾洞). The same mud bricks were used to create their current facility as well. Immediately to the left is the tree Sheng Hui's grandma planted right outside the original location of their house, which is now a forest. The only remnants were tiles poking through the forest floor here and there. It was hard for these people to leave their home, but Sheng Hui is happy it is protected and shared. Above, Sheng Hui perched on a rock, and we drank last year's version of the very old Shui Xian (水仙, "Water Fairy") tea growing across the way; using spring water from a nearby spring and surrounded by the beauty of the Water Curtain, the tea tasted oh so sweet. It was the treasure memory of the day!*

Brewing Tips 沖泡技巧完成好茶

This month's precious Rou Gui Cliff Tea really is the quintessence of gongfu tea. As we have discussed in previous issues, "gongfu tea" originally referred to Wuyi Cliff Tea, not a brewing method. Remember, "gongfu" means "mastery through self-discipline." Oolong tea requires more talent, skill and know-how than any other tea. Not only is it more complicated, with more steps in the processing, but the skill of the one conducting the processing will make or break a great oolong. It requires a deep affinity with oneself and tea to know when to stop withering, for example, and great skill and a centered heart to fire or roll properly. Of course, when one receives such a finely crafted tea, one would want to brew it in a way that honored all the hard work, skill, craftsmanship and tradition that went into it by brewing it properly. And that is a big part of how "gongfu tea" as a brewing method evolved.

Gongfu tea, both as brewing and as Cliff Tea, is analogous to owning one's first handmade, well-crafted purple-sand teapot from Yixing. Hundreds of years of tradition taught and informed the hand of the potter who made it, but they also devoted a lifetime to the craft, honing their own mind, life and hands. Combined with all the hard work of miners, clay makers and others, the final result actually took five hundred years to complete. And when it reaches us, we hope to honor all that effort by using it well and properly—by also caring for it and handing it down to future generations of tea lovers.

There is no tea more worthy of starting a gongfu practice than this month's tea. In order to bring out the best in this month's Rou Gui, you will have to brew it gongfu. If you absolutely cannot brew this Rou Gui gongfu because you do not know how or lack the tools, then you can put a few (just two to three) striped leaves in a bowl and have a wonderful ceremony. But this tea will not shine the way it was intended to without preparing it using the brewing methods that grew up with such tea.

In brewing this month's tea gongfu, the amount of leaves will be absolutely paramount. There really is no tea more finicky than Cliff Tea. It is either extremely superb and marvelous or it can go sour, taste off or even tart. Of course, that could be due to the quality of the tea as well—both in terms of the garden the leaves came from and the processing skills of the makers. In our case, we are sitting here this month with an incredible sample of beautiful tea. It will require our skill, our gongfu, to prepare it to its highest potential. Always start with fewer leaves. It is easy to add more mid-session (though not ideal), while it is always a waste to pull out leaves. Start by covering the bottom of your pot while still being able to see the bottom, like the first falling of autumn leaves.

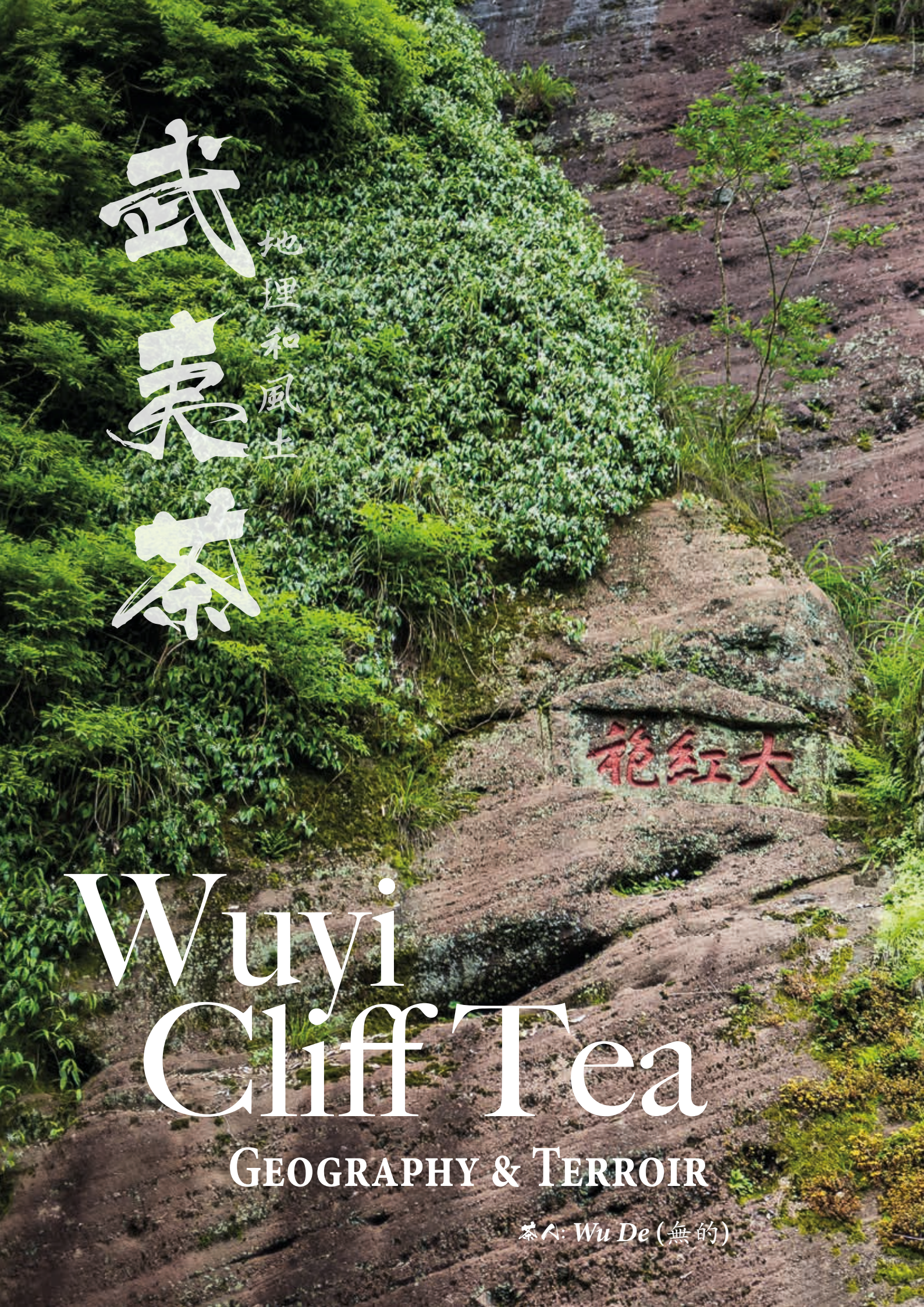
Aside from using the right materials—a good kettle and stove, nice porcelain cups, a good Yixing pot and a nice teaboat, as well as good water and tea, of course—preserving the heat will be the most important practical detail in finely brewing this month's tea. This means showering your pot both before and after steeping, as well as pre-warming the cups. The more consistent the temperature is, the better the tea will be. The next step after that is where self-discipline comes in. After consistent temperature, we must work to make our movements as slow, gentle and graceful as possible, so as to disturb the tea as little as possible, letting the brewing happen effortlessly…

Leaves in a bowl *Gongfu*

Water: *spring water or best bottled*
Fire: *coals, infrared or gas*
Heat: *hot, fish-eye, roughly 90–95 °C*
Brewing Methods: *leaves in a bowl or gongfu (gongfu is better)*
Steeping: *longer, flash, flash, flash, then growing (2-3 stripes is better in a bowl)*
Patience: *twenty to thirty (gongfu)*

茶 ***The amount of tea will be paramount for this month. Try covering the bottom of the pot, but you can still see the bottom. Always start lighter and add more. It is a waste to take tea out.***


工夫茶



Wuyi Cliff Tea

Geography & Terroir

茶人: *Wu De* (無的)

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

Undeniably sacred, Wuyi is one of the only mountains in China where Daoist, Buddhist, Confucian and Neo-Confucian temples abound in such close proximity. The powerful connection these mountains have to Nature, the incredibly rich mountain waters and the old tea bushes growing amongst these cliffs have gathered saints, sages and seers since time immemorial. Though it was the power of Nature that attracted them here, their spiritual cultivation over thousands of years also lends to the power and magnificence of this place.

Some of the oldest evidence of humans in Wuyi are sky tombs up in the cliffs that were used in ancient times for burial. Walking through the park, one still finds evidence of the scaffolding used to reach high-up natural caves in the cliff faces where bodies were once laid to commune with Heaven and Earth. It was no doubt the beauty, spirit and power of this place that attracted these early humans to make this a sacred burial ground. The same energy would attract spiritual seekers for millennia. These graves also highlight an important point, which is that aside from the three major religions of China, there is a fourth, often neglected heritage: the aboriginal people and their wisdom.

There are Daoist caves that were once essential stops on meditation tours that led to immortality, and some say there are still hermits high up amongst the peaks of Wuyi even today. The Daoists believed that if one meditated through all seasons in each of eleven sacred mountains, immortality was assured. This was one of many methods for achieving transcendence. And in that method, Wuyi Mountains was the final stop—the gateway to Heaven. There are Daoist shrines throughout the park even today. Maybe a session there is what's left?

Terroir

"Terroir" is a French word that is generally used in discussions of wine, but it is so applicable to tea as well that most tea lovers have adopted it into their discussions of the Leaf. Terroir denotes the special characteristics of a place, found in its geology, geography, climate and even cultural heritage, which interact with a cultivated plant species to create unique expressions. Terroir is the soil and weather of a particular region; the geography and culture of the people and their relationship to the plant, and even the microorganisms and their interaction with the plants. Every place has a unique soil composition, pH, minerals and climate—all of which create a distinctive tea. When we talk about a tea's terroir, we are speaking to the unique environment that created it, one which couldn't be reproduced. Even if you took a grafting of a tree and cloned it elsewhere, it wouldn't be the same, since the sun would be weaker or stronger, the soil composition different, etc., etc. We are also talking about the cultural heritage of the place, which also makes its natural products unique—from the prayers and beliefs, history and lore to the processing techniques for drying the tea.

In tea, terroir means that a tea is the place where it is grown. You cannot take cuttings from one place and plant them somewhere else and expect them to be the same tea when literally everything will be different, from the climate to the soil and from the micro-ecology to the people and methods used to process the tea. Cuttings taken from Wuyi to Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), for example, became something uniquely Taiwanese and modern efforts to re-create one region's tea elsewhere never fool the connoisseur. This is perhaps most true of real Cliff Tea, as one seeks to drink the incredibly rich, lush and unique terroir that makes Wuyi such a magical place, and that makes the tea there so different from other teas.

For hundreds of years, Buddhist monks and nuns have tended their own tea gardens here, helping to establish the rich tradition that has made this magnificent park an essential stop on any tea journey. The Heavenly Heart Monastery (天心永樂禪寺) and its adjunct Hui Yan Temple (慧苑寺) in the center of the park have been there for centuries. They are full of old shrines and a peaceful energy. Heavenly Heart is also magnificent as it is situated atop a bluff and surrounded by seven large cliffs that all look exactly like elephants (it is really stunning how much the cliffs do resemble these majestic creatures, which are, of course, also important in Buddhist iconography).

On a visit, you can't ignore the influence these old temples have had, bringing a tradition of holiness and the smell of antiquity to the area. And yet, more often than that, you turn a corner and find yourself between two tall cliffs, the sun's rays visible brushstrokes that gently end in highlights upon the greenery and sparkle on the crystal waters—and then you realize that it is not the temples that have made this place sacred, but rather a mystical and mysterious charm that drew the wandering ascetics here in the first place.

Wuyi is a vortex. It is more than just gorgeous. The beauty here affects the system in a visceral way, changing the way you feel and breathe. It is a beauty beyond just pretty scenery. Traveling through the park, one understands why most indigenous cultures spoke of healing sites in Nature that were pilgrimage spots. All of the spirit and power that drew spiritual seekers and masters from all traditions to this place, along with all the accumulated power of the millennia of their practice, has a subtle influence on the tea produced here, one that cannot be put into words.

Wuyi is amongst the most magical places on earth. Painters, poets and spiritual aspirants have all sought and failed to capture the feeling of this place. The beauty is transcendent. It is more than gorgeous vistas or even the poetic flourishes of a brush trying to capture what it feels like to be there. We all try our best, but those who have been there know what we mean when we say that we also fail in all but invitation alone: visit Wuyi, for the love of Tea!

And all of this spiritual power, gorgeous Nature and unsaid power are in the tea we call Cliff Tea, so you can also visit from the cup!

The World Cultural and Heritage site of Wuyi Mountain has been regarded as a national treasure since the Han Dynasty. The many gorges, rivers, cliffs and other scenery have inspired countless poets, painters and authors. The park itself is approximately seventy square kilometers, and most of the famous "36 peaks and 99 crags" are around 400 meters above sea level. There are numerous waterways, the most famous of which is the "Nine Twist River," whose nine bends have been eulogized countless times throughout history. Its source is around two thousand meters higher and to the east in another park, the Hang Gang Mountain.

The tea is all produced in a small area of only 7.6 kilometers, commonly known as the "San Keng Liang Jian" (三坑兩澗, Three Grottoes and Two Mountain Streams), which are comprised of the Hui Yan Grotto (慧苑坑, Garden of Wisdom), Niu Lan Grotto (牛欄坑, Cattle Pen), Daoshui Grotto (倒水坑, Pouring Water); the two mountain streams, the Liu Xiang Jian (流香澗, Flowing Fragrance), and the Wu Yuan Jian (悟源澗, Original Enlightenment). There are also two "nests" where tea is produced: the Zhu Cao (竹窠, Bamboo Nest) and the Jiu Long Cao (九龍窠, Nine Dragon Nest). Each of these seven locations is unique in terroir and in history, and certain varietals of Cliff Tea thrive in different areas, often because that is where they come from. Learning the subtle difference between teas produced in these seven areas is akin to learning the differences between mountains in Yunnan in terms of puerh types. There is a whole world of Cliff Tea that awaits exploration!

Traditionally, all tea production was in these areas, and the further you go back in time, the narrower the area. In recent years, however, tea has been planted all throughout the Wuyi area, including outside the park. We will talk more about the "grades" of Wuyi tea in terms of where it is grown later on, but for now you should remember that as we discuss all the things that make Wuyi tea unique, we are talking about "*zheng yan* (正岩, real/true Cliff Tea)" produced in these seven areas.

The environment here produces tea like no other on Earth. It is called "Cliff Tea (岩茶, *Yancha*)" because the old bushes lie between natural gorges. Many of the beds that host these small gardens are manmade, but a deeper trek into the park will yield plenty of natural settings, with very old bushes, wizened by hundreds of years. These cliffs enhance and become the tea bushes in an amazing variety of ways, surging all the forces of Nature through this channel towards humans. Cliff Tea is the cliffs, in other words.

Wuyi Mountain

There are many amazing and powerful ways that the Nature here in Wuyi makes it one of the most ideal places to grow tea on earth. Though we can discuss a few of the features that make the tea here special, there are many more that defy description. Even the poetry carved so beautifully into some of the cliffs by great men and women who visited here long ago cannot capture those unspoken powers. But let's discuss what we do know.

Biodiversity & the Soil

All fine tea starts and ends with soil, as does all plant life. Soil is not a static medium things grow through; but a living being with spirit life and movement, energy and flow. It is also a great ecology, teeming with trillions of organisms, visible and microscopic, all of which play a role in soil health. This is why it is essential that tea, and other well-made agricultural products, be produced in rich biodiversity. The biodiversity above the ground certainly influences the life and vibrancy of the ecology beneath the surface as well.

There is no way to underestimate the influence of various organisms on each other. What relationship snakes have to tea trees is hard to say. The connection may be four or even seven links away, as the snakes influence an organism that influences an organism and so on until we get to the tea tree. The greater the diversity and balance in a natural ecology, the healthier every species in that environment will be. And the healthier the tea trees are, the better the tea will be. We can express this clearly as:

A tea leaf is the tree's expression of its relationship to its environment.

That is one of the most important lessons a Chajin can learn. Tea leaves do not arise out of an extra-dimensional portal; they grow out of the tree. And where does the tree get the energy to produce leaves? From its environment. This is another way of saying that *tea is its environment.*

The park area of Wuyi Mountain is filled with rich biodiversity, teeming with millions of species of flora and fauna. This rich biodiversity makes it a great place to grow tea. Though tended tea gardens may appear beautiful to the human eye, they are often deforested ecosystems, and as we kill and/or drive away all the living beings from an area so that we can produce monoculture, we also decrease the vibrancy of the remaining species and the soil.

As the great tea saint Lu Yu (陸羽) said in the *Tea Sutra* (茶經), "tea prefers rocky soil." Tea drinks some of its moisture from the air and likes to grow deep roots through loose soil where the moisture does not pool. Wuyi Mountain is a rich, volcanic area (the west of the park is volcanic and the east is sandstone), full of minerals. The soil is so loose and gravelly here that rock terraces had to be built in order to create tea gardens—otherwise the tea trees would be eroded away.

The flow of water over the roots of the trees and the mineral-rich, biodiverse soil means that the tea trees here thrive. The loose soil also means that the trees can extend their roots deeper into the earth. Since there is volcanic activity underneath, this means that they can also absorb the geothermal energy of the earth, including warmth. This also plays a subtle role in the quality, vibrancy and energy of the tea grown here.

Water

Water is always such an essential aspect of tea, both as it flourishes in Nature and in preparation. And as one strolls through the park, the crystal streams and dripping falls that highlight every turn also emphasize the coursing pulse of the mountains, flowing through the Earth to the trees and on to us. The water that streams down these cliffs is full of rich minerals, not only from the countless rocks within the park, but also from the higher mountains to the east. This irrigation has also helped to create the rich, rocky soil that tea sages have said is most suitable for tea since long before Lu Yu made that claim famous.

After the rains, a stroll through Wuyi Mountain will offer views of a greater variety of waterfalls than you have ever seen. There are long curtains that billow in the wind, gushing torrents that dance over rock-faces; there are small, tinkling fairy falls that you can stand under and watch the sunlight play rainbow through the falling drops; and so many more beyond count. The crystal-clear streams that flow through the park are all clear enough to see the bottom, and often hold the sunlight in gentle ways that touch the soul.

All of the power of this water creates the life of tea and other flora and fauna here. The biodiversity and health of this place begins with this water and all the incredible, multi-faceted ways it flows to and through the tea trees.

Living Tea

Living tea is an especially important concept when it comes to Wuyi Cliff tea, as the real tea, grown in the park, is so special due to the fact that it meets these criteria, at least for those growing it properly. (We will talk about the "grades" of Wuyi Cliff Tea in another article later on.) Living tea is:

1. Seed-propagated, as opposed to cuttings.

2. The tea trees have room to grow—upwards to produce large crowns, and between trees, allowing the plants to organize themselves.

3. Living tea is grown in full biodiversity, surrounded by natural ecology.

4. Living tea is, of course, grown without the use of any agrochemicals (the Terrible Trio: pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilizers).

5. The relationship between the farmer and trees is one of respect and reverence. Within the character for tea is the radical "Human," as Tea is a relationship between Nature and Human.

6. No irrigation or fertilizer of any kind (even organic fertilizer). This allows the trees to be independent, developing strong and deep roots and connecting to the energy of the mountain.

葉子是樹與環境關係的表現

真正生態茶

The Cliffs

The Cliffs of Wuyi are where it gets its name from. They alter the tea in a variety of ways. They are mostly blue-black volcanic cliffs filled with an incredible variety of minerals, which of course erode into the water and soil. If you are interested in the energetics of minerals, Wuyi cliffs are also covered in crystals as well.

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

The cliffs here also aid in tea production, as they funnel daily mist into the valleys, assuring that the tea trees are always humid and moist. Locals have for centuries called this the "Breath of Heaven," claiming that the tea trees breathe in the Qi of the mist and rocks, lending them their "rock flavor." There is truth in this, as tea trees do "drink" moisture from the air, which is in part why they prefer that water flow over their roots rather than stagnating in the soil around them.

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

岩岩有茶引

Harmony & Balance

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

But not all Wuyi tea is high quality; not all of it is environmentally protected or processed by hand (or even with any skill). It is therefore important to understand a bit about the four grades of Wuyi *Yancha* and have some guidelines for identifying them, which we will do in the next article of this issue…

The Majesty of Wuyi Tea

武夷山的壯麗

茶人: *Huang Xian Geng* (黃賢庚)

Throughout this issue, we will offer some translations from Huang Xian Geng's seminal Wuyi book "On Wuyi Tea (武夷茶說)," which is among the most important Chinese books on Wuyi tea. Huang Xian Geng is the author of several books on Wuyi tea and tea culture and a bit of a local treasure to Wuyi people. He has been researching the topic for decades, and it is an incredible honor to offer his insights for the first time ever in English. In this article, he shares his insights into the special geography of Wuyi and then discusses the local tea god of Wuyi.

The superior natural environment that nurtures Wuyi Cliff Tea is key to its outstanding quality. The first factor in its uniqueness is the position of the Wuyi mountain range: the main peak, Mount Huanggang, nicknamed "the roof beam of China," and several dozen surrounding peaks of more than 1,000 meters in altitude, are all in an area exposed to a cold wind from the north and a warm coastal wind from the south, creating a unique microclimate. In addition, Mount Wuyi features unique landforms, with towering peaks and steep gorges, chains of peaks and hills interlaced with mountain streams, giving rise to the poetic description: "the mountains wind and curve, each peak embraced by flowing water." This forms a landscape with "the shade of tall mountains and the light of the morning sun," making it ideally suited to tea. The second factor is the climate: the average temperature in this region is around 18°C, with around 2,000 millimeters of yearly rainfall. The ratio of yearly precipitation to evaporation is 63:37, which equals a relative humidity of around 80%. There are about 1,350 sunlight hours per year, and the average wind speed is 10 meters/second. The average air pressure is 744 mm. Each year sees around 200 frost-free days and 100 days of fog. The average amount of cloud cover is 7.6 units. Altogether, this makes an excellent climate for tea. The third factor is that the soil at Mount Wuyi is composed of volcanic conglomerate, gravelly sandstone, sandstone, sandy shale and shale. This soil type is ideal for tea, as tea sage Lu Yu writes in the *Tea Sutra*: "Tea grows best in eroded, rocky soil." The fourth factor is that the region has a 77.9% forest cover rate, which is 4.2 times China's national average, providing a thriving ecosystem for Wuyi tea.

"Jade-green streams and cinnabar-red mountains," sheer peaks and deep gorges, lofty mountains and secluded springs, gravelly soil with eroded rock, dense fog and abundant rain, plentiful shade and morning sun… It seems Wuyi Cliff Tea enjoys the special favor of Mother Nature, a place that "distills the essential grace of mountains and rivers."

Wuyi tea offers the drinker its distinctive "rocky charm," a unique flavor known as *"yan yun* (岩韵)." It is often described as having "bones of rock and a floral fragrance," or "*yangu huaxiang* (岩骨花香)." It is a tea of excellent quality; "it is mild and not cooling in Nature and can be stored for a long time without spoiling. The fragrance grows purer with time, and the flavor richer. It has a sweet taste and a full fragrance."

Ancient authors have sung the praises of Mount Wuyi's wonderful natural environment in many a poem and essay. One example is a poem by Shen Han (沈涵), who once served as a royal tutor at the Qing court. It was written during a visit to Mount Wuyi at the invitation of Wang Zi (王梓), the Chong'an country magistrate, while Shen was in Fujian on an educational inspection trip. The poem goes, "The fragrant peaks raise their heads like fairy maidens; on their dewy

slopes, cave mouths are veiled with pearly clouds." This paints a picture of the unique environment in which Cliff Tea grows.

During the Republic of China era in the early to mid-1900s, Wang Zenong (王澤農), a researcher and testing group leader at the Central Ministry of Finance Trade Committee's Tea Research Institute, emerged as a dedicated advocate for the importance of Wuyi Cliff Tea to China's tea industry. With tireless dedication, he surveyed, tested and analyzed the soil of the Mount Wuyi tea region, producing a paper of nearly 60,000 words entitled *The Rocky Soil of Wuyi Tea*. This invaluable work provided scientific evidence in support of the opinion that "the mountain's soil is well-suited to tea," as stated by Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) scholar Xu Huobo (徐火勃) in his *Research on Tea*.

Thus Wuyi Cliff Tea's outstanding quality is born of its unique natural environment, a heaven-sent paradise for tea. There's a saying in Chinese that "people are shaped by the land around them"; by the same token, the land of Mount Wuyi plays its part in shaping this wonderful tea. A place ***is*** the tea, and there is no place on Earth like Wuyi Mountain.

Enjoying Tea Among Nature's Landscapes

The tea grows on the cliffs, and the cliffs support the tea. Such a perfectly harmonious and intimate connection between tea and landscape is rarely seen, even among China's many majestic mountains and picturesque landscapes. This is why the tea from Wuyi is called "*Yancha* (岩茶)," or "Cliff Tea."

Picture the Da Hong Pao (大紅袍, Big Red Robe) tea plants clinging tightly to Longfeng Cliff; Bu Jian Tian (不見天, Lost the Sky) making its home in Jiu Long Creek; Ban Tian Yao (半天腰, Belt of Heaven) perched halfway up Matou Cliff's Sanhua Peak; or Shui Jin Gui (水金龜, Golden Water Tortoise) quietly nestling at the bottom of Niu Lan Hollow… Seen from afar, the tea gardens resemble miniature potted gardens, with the tea plants echoing the tiny plants and flowers, each treetop forming a different shape, each with its own distinct leaves. From ancient times, the tea plants and the mountain landscapes have reflected each other's radiance, becoming the defining scenery of Mount Wuyi. Visitors from past to present have enjoyed the pleasures of tea and scenery at Mount Wuyi with great delight.

A U-shaped route winds around the mountain for several kilometers, taking travelers on a journey through Wuyi tea culture. It passes through Da Keng Kou, Jiu Long Ke, Zouma Gang, Daoshui Hollow, Liuxiang Stream, Qingliang Gorge and Zhangtang Stream—a landscape of towering peaks and steep ravines, with streams crisscrossing the land. Here, the rocks and cliffs form weird and wonderful shapes, transporting you into a world of myth and magic where your spirit roams free and unhindered by the dust of the world.

Here, the arresting landforms make you picture the heaving and rending of the earth's crust over the millennia. Here, the ancient cave dwellings in the cliffsides naturally make you imagine the lives of the ancient Chinese people who lived there. And scattered among it all stand the elegant tea plants, appearing like bashful young ladies. Strolling through these secluded mountains, you may meet any number of wonderful tea characters… Zui Xishi (醉西施, Drunken Xishi) will rumple your clothes, Yu Lian Huan (玉蓮環, Jade Lotus Ring) will engage you in an intimate tête-à-tête, Sai Wendan (賽文旦, Supreme Pomelo) will grace you with its subtle fragrance, Shui Hong Mei (水紅梅, Red Water Plum) will delight your heart and gaze, and Lao Lai Hong (老來紅, Old Red) will make you blush with its flattery… Where did Wuyi Cliff Tea get such an array of evocative names? They originated in the late Qing (1644–1911) and early Republic of China (1911–1949) eras, when Wuyi Cliff tea was at its zenith. At that time, tea makers selected distinctive Huaming and Dancong variants from within the original Wuyi Caicha (菜茶, "Vegetable Tea") tea plant population and gave these special teas eye-catching names. Of course, part of this was simply tea merchants creating an aura of mystery for marketing purposes. Who could have known that this would end up forming a unique part of Wuyi tea culture, inspiring the imaginations of generations of tea drinkers?

The close of spring and the eve of summer is the best season for flights of fancy. Where better to sip tea and listen to stories than in the Da Hong Pao Tea Hut, surrounded by its nine peaks, or to drink tea and enjoy the scenery than at the Hui Yuan Buddhist Temple, where "guests will gladly drink tea instead of wine, and dwell in mountain huts with bamboo groves for neighbors"? This is a land of towering cliffs, of elegant pine and shady bamboo, of birdsong and chirping cicadas, of flowing streams and bubbling springs, of the pure, serene fragrance of tea and the sweet, rich Wuyi "rock taste." Here, people drink tea with gusto; tea plants take deep breaths of negative oxygen ions; painters quickly dash out inspired compositions; writers instantly outline fluid essays in their minds; and poets need only open their mouths for the verses to come flowing forth. Countless poets and scholars have sipped tea and gazed at the landscapes of Mount Wuyi over the centuries, leaving as their legacy a vast ocean of poems and essays. These have filled a book, *Mount Wuyi Records*, overflowing with literary grace and containing many poems and essays about tea.

In the book, Tang Dynasty (618–907) scholar Xu Yin (徐夤) witnesses a poignant scene: "In Wuyi's tea gardens in the warmth of early spring, the new buds are plucked as an offering to the spirits of the earth." Song Dynasty writer Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹) portrays the rousing spectacle of a Wuyi tea competition: "The winner rises to the status of an immortal; the loser feels the boundless shame of a surrendering general." Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) writer Zhao Meng Zong (趙孟𫖯) contributes a detailed account of the Wuyi Imperial Tea Garden, while Ming Dynasty composer Chen Duo (陳鐸) sings a lively ode: "In Wuyi they harvest the spring tea under a gentle rain; the new leaves sprout profusely,

Every season, before the first picking, the Huangs pray to the tea god, Yang Taibo (楊太伯), for a successful year. Throughout the year, they also pray for protection of their trees. Sheng Hui told us he also prays that more locals in the Wuyi area will wake up to the importance of using natural farming methods to protect the natural environment in the park. All the pickers get a bonus on the first day. This encourages them to start the season off right. The statue at the Huangs' processing facility and museum is a genuine Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) statue, which has had many prayers laid before it. It is likely that Yang Taibo was, in fact, a real person who lived during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). It is very common for sages, saints and seers to slowly become gods in China, growing with their legends. In fact, most tea regions worship Lu Yu (陸羽) in the same way as Wuyi locals worship Yang Taibo. In fact, most of Fujian has a different tea god, as you may recall from our August 2018 issue, in which we explored the region of Anxi and discussed their "tea god."

a fine tea to be cherished again and again!" Even the Qianlong Emperor, he who could "not spend a day without tea," penned the exclamation: "Wuyi tea is the finest in all of China; with such pure and harmonious flavor, how can one praise it just once?" The great contemporary master Zhao Puchu (趙朴初) also once enjoyed a moment of repose at Mount Wuyi, inspiring the line: "May I grow old drinking tea."

Nowadays, Cliff Tea is an inseparable part of any trip to Mount Wuyi: admiring the tea gardens, sipping a wonderful brew, appreciating the art of tea. Hundreds of the houses and tea shops await you, each offering a place to while away the hours sipping tea. If you happen to buy some along the way, the shop owners will naturally be pleased, yet they extend the same warm welcome to those who aren't looking to buy anything.

An astute person once said, "The mountains and rivers of Wuyi are one big teapot," and you can certainly see the truth in this. The true charm of Wuyi lies in its wonderful Cliff Tea. Roaming the mountains admiring the tea, sipping tea and admiring the scenery, filling your time with hillside rambles, taking the time for a leisurely brew—these are the deepest delights of Mount Wuyi.

Yang Taibo, The Wuyi Tea God

In times gone by, all the tea factories at Mount Wuyi had a particular feature in common: in the seat of honor in the main hall or dining room sat a spirit tablet dedicated to Yang Taibo (楊太伯). Some had the god's name written on red paper; some had it carved on hardwood. On normal days, there would be a stick of incense and a candle lit in front of the tablet; to mark the beginning and end of tea season and days when fairs were held, before enjoying their celebratory meal, the tea workers would first place a portion of the delicacies there as an offering to the god. This was done with great reverence.

Legend has it that Yang Taibo was a real person who lived during the Tang Dynasty; his actual name has been lost in the mists of time. He was born in the city of Fuzhou in Jiangxi Province, and was the first person to plant tea on Mount Wuyi. He tended his tea plants diligently and was a skilled tea maker; his destiny was intimately intertwined with tea. He also had an honest and warmhearted spirit, and got along well with the other people in the village. The mountain people took to calling him "Taibo (太伯)" as a sign of their esteem, a term of respect whose meaning is along the lines of "Great Uncle" or "Honored Gentleman." As time went by, people forgot his real name. He saw out his final days in Mount Wuyi, and after his death the tea growers began to revere him as a deity. They gave his spirit tablet pride of place in their main halls and bestowed him with the honorific title "Gong (公)" after his name. Thus he became "Yang Taibo Gong." The village people also showed their respect to his wife; her surname was Li, and during her life they called her "Li Taipo (李太婆)," "Great-Grandmother Li." After she passed away, she was honored along with her husband; people made offerings of incense to her as well.

They gave her the title of "Li Taifuren (李太夫人)," or "Madame Li." Tea-growing households have worshiped them devoutly since antiquity, and the *baotou* (包頭, foremen) of the tea factories honored them as deities. Hence, the popular legends surrounding these tea gods became widely known among the local people.

It's said that Yang Taibo Gong not only protects the tea factories and presides over all tea-related activities, but can also bestow the blessing of a bountiful harvest—the dearest wish of any tea factory *baotou*. A bountiful harvest of tea leaf meant the *baotou* stood to make more profit, as those who were savvy with their calculations quoted the tea bosses a price based on the quantity of tea that the factory produced. So, the *baotou* were particularly devout in their offerings to Yang Taibo Gong, never forgetting to light their customary stick of incense in his honor. If he accepted their offerings, he would not only bless the tea factory with peace and smooth operations, but would also lend a surreptitious hand to the factory workers—when the processed leaf was being weighed for inventory, Yang Taibo Gong would sit in the bamboo weighing basket along with the tea, and Madame Li would lift the counterweight slightly, to increase the final weight of the tea. Because the tea shops sent their own representative who measured and recorded the weight of the tea on-site before sealing it up and taking it away from the factory, if the weight came up a bit short when the tea leaf was weighed again at the tea shop, well, naturally that had nothing to do with the *baotou*. There's an old folksong that people used to sing in the Wuyi Cliff Tea factories that goes: "Yang Taigong and Li Taipo; one sits in the basket and the other tips the scales." (The lines rhyme in the original Hokkien.) This cheerful ditty inadvertently exposes the ruses the factory *baotou* used to short-change the bosses and absolve themselves of all responsibility.

Another reason that the *baotou* were so devout in their worship of Yang Taibo was to reassure the local tea workers. The Cliff Tea factories of the past were scattered between craggy peaks and across steep mountainsides—remote, isolated places. Outside of the tea-processing and planting season, only a solitary person was left to mind each factory, with no family in tow. According to ninety-year-old Zhou Zhongxiang (周鐘祥), who was once a *baotou*, in his youth there were only two women living on the whole of Mount Wuyi; in later years the *baotou* slowly began bringing their wives and families to settle at the tea factories. In such a desolate and lonely place, it's no wonder that there were many reports of "ghosts" on the mountain, and the *baotou* made sure to pray to the gods for their blessing and protection.

In the years preceding the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), a particular kind of "ghost" made itself known—one that would lead a person into a gully and stuff their ears, nose and mouth full of silt. At that time, there was a person at the Qingyun Tea Factory nicknamed "Shui Mao (水毛)" who once went to visit the latrine in the middle of the night and was led off by this kind of ghost. When the others at the factory noticed that he had been gone an awfully long time, they lit torches and began searching all over for him. Eventually they found him sitting in a gully not far from the factory with silt all over his face, his eyes staring blankly ahead. When they tried talking to him, he remained in this stupefied state and didn't respond. It took two slaps across the face from the *baotou*, Zhou Jieliang (周接亮), to bring him to, and even then they couldn't get a clear word out of him. Researchers in later generations studied these accounts and attributed it to the mischief of a crafty monkey called a mandrill. Interestingly enough, its Chinese name, "*shanxiao* (山魈)," literally means "mountain demon," as it's named after a type of mythical goblin by the same name. This same type of incident reportedly also happened at the Leishi, Baiyun and Taohua tea factories.

Another venerable tea master, eighty-one-year-old Guo Shi (國師), also has an interesting story to tell. As an aside, his real name is Chen Jinzao (陳謹造), but he earned the nickname "Guo Shi," an old term meaning "State Teacher," thanks to his extensive knowledge of tea and frequently dispensed opinions. As the story goes, one year on Chinese New Year's Eve, a man unexpectedly arrived at the Hui Yuan Tea Factory. It was the caretaker of the Luxiu Tea Factory, which was up on the northwestern mountaintop of Hui Yuan Cliff. He had run all the way over and was gasping for breath, his face pale as a ghost. After gulping down some hot tea and catching his breath, he started to speak. "This afternoon I cooked a few dishes," he related, "and I was planning to make an offering to the tea god and the other local gods, then get straight into the New Year's celebrations and have a drink or two. But I was just cooking the pork when, what do you know, a hand reaches up from beside the stove to beg for some food. 'Wait a minute,' I said, 'it's not done yet!' Then I quietly scooped a bit of the scalding pork fat and poured it onto the hand. Well, I tell you, that 'ghost' shrieked its way across a good few mountaintops, and I took off and ran all the way down the mountain as if I were a ghost myself…" Could the "ghost" from the caretaker's story also have been a mandrill or another kind of wild monkey? Nobody really knows. Afterwards, the tale circulated around the region for quite a few years, and the factory later closed down.

All these strange happenings, and many more, instilled a deep fear in the caretakers and tea workers. So, this is why the *baotou* at the mountain tea factories were especially pious in their offerings to Yang Taibo Gong, praying that he drive away any ghosts or evil spirits and ensure the peace and security of the tea factories. In the tea-growing communities of Mount Wuyi, Yang Taibo Gong really is God!

The old tea god is a part of the land and make-up of Wuyi Mountain. Remember, terroir includes culture, which means the spiritual heritage of the people also creates the tea, as it flows through the leaves.

The Emperor's Crimson Robe

大紅袍

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

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

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

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

The abbot ordered hot water and a silver kettle was brought. As the leaves steeped, their aroma permeated the room with ribbons of Heavenly steam. Shen was given a cup of the brew to drink. The first sip unraveled in his mouth and filled his body with celes-

tial warmth. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted. It seemed to reach down past the corners of his body and massage his soul.

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

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

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

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

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

The Garden Grades of Cliff Tea

園區種類的岩茶

茶人: *Wu De* (無的)

A lot goes into the quality of a fine tea, from the weather down to the micro-details of the master who watched the tea and knows when to stop the withering or rolling, not to mention the skills needed to roll, shake or fire properly. However, long before the master has plucked the leaf, there is quality in the garden, in the natural world that creates the leaf. Not all gardens are created equal. In this next section of the magazine, we will explore the four types of gardens traditionally used in Wuyi to produce tea, as they are still important to quality.

This is a discussion of garden types in terms of the grade of Cliff Tea. It does not take into account several other factors that also determine the quality of the raw material (leaf). For example, which garden in the park the tea comes from will also influence the quality. Also, is the varietal suited to that location or was it planted there because the farmers don't have gardens elsewhere? The age and health of the trees will also influence quality, of course. And finally, the agricultural principles of the farmers who tend the tea will be paramount, including whether or not they do what they do only for money and do not care much about quality, love what they do or give their heart and soul to growing fine tea. Of course, this also includes the use of agrochemicals (or not, ideally).

It should also be noted that quality and price are not always commensurate. As certain gardens have developed a reputation, especially for the varietals that originate in that location, prices have grown, and the reputation of a place is not always equal to its quality. Though it gained a reputation for producing fine tea, the reputation can outpace the quality, in other words. This happens with all tea, and the best example other than Cliff Tea is puerh, where hype surrounding certain mountains that genuinely produce fine tea can grow to such an exaggeration that the tea from those places becomes unaffordable.

Before we talk about the four types of gardens, it is also important to point out that only half the quality of any oolong tea is in the garden/trees (here we are just talking about the garden). The other half is in the processing skills of those who craft the tea into its final product. Consequently, raw material from an inferior tree or garden will still be a way better tea when dried by a master, as opposed to mis-processed tea from the best tree or garden.

Zheng Yan (正岩)

The highest grade of *Yancha* all comes from within the protected park itself. "*zheng yan*" means "true Cliff Tea." The trees in the park tend to be older and grown with the proper distance between them, so their roots have room to breathe, growing deep and wide to absorb all the wonderful nutrients of this amazing place. They aren't tended excessively by people, either. Some of the small, terraced gardens are so surrounded by vegetation that the tea is not easily discernible to the untrained eye. Of course, these trees are often organic and harvested by hand only once a year.

There are, however, several "distinctions" of *zheng yan*, starting of course with the trees themselves. It is a big park, and different locations are better for tea growth than others—places where the trees are older, the water and minerals better, or perhaps the mist and sunshine is perfect. As mentioned above, the cliff walls absorb the day's sunshine and release it at night, so many locations in the park stay at a constant temperature and humidity during the growing season. This means that the location of the trees in the park has a huge influence on its quality, and also the price.

Another important factor relates to the fact that the park is such a famous tourist destination. Thousands of people walk through every day, following the clear and defined paths constructed by the government. Consequently, the tea gardens near these paths are all inferior. The noise, cameras and even the breathing of thousands of people all affect the quality of these gardens. The best gardens, on the other hand, are deeper into the park—down dirt paths that take you to silent places well away from all the crowds. Like all plants, tea also responds to human interaction, emotion and even the human voice itself. Before the strict ban put into effect around 2002, friends picked some of the famous Da Hong Pao from the original bushes, processed it and drank it a few days later. While the tea was amazing, coming from such old and powerful bushes, their guide said that compared to earlier years, the quality had diminished. When we asked him why, he responded that it was definitely because of the thousands of people who come and take photos and make a lot of noise around the trees each day.

Of course, much of the mastery of oolong tea is in the complicated processing, so this is a major factor in the end product as well. The best *zheng yan* is completely hand-processed, though there is also semi-hand-processed and machine-processed tea. It is easy to differentiate the hand-processed or semi-hand-processed from the machine-processed varieties by appearance alone, as the latter produces more uniform leaves, all about the same shape with the same kind of twist, whereas the hand-processed teas display a variety of sizes, shapes and twists unique to each leaf.

Even *zheng yan* from a single garden will be sorted several times and a variety of grades will eventually be packaged. A lot can go into the distinction. The tea processed by the hand of the master, for example, may be the smallest quantity each year, as his job is mostly to teach and supervise his younger relatives and employees.

A true master never roasts genuine *zheng yan* from within the park heavily. A lot of people have only tried heavily-roasted *Yancha* and therefore have probably not tasted much *zheng yan*, which is produced in smaller quantities and is more expensive as a result. Each of the thousands of varieties of *Yancha*, like "Golden Water Tortoise (水金龜, Shui Jin Gui)" or "Old Man's Eyebrows (老君眉, Lao Jing Mei)," has very distinct flavors and aromas. "Iron Arhat (鐵羅漢, Tie Lou Han)," for example, is known to taste of burnt bamboo, while "White Cockscomb (白雞冠, Bai Ji Guan)" tastes of lychee. If the roast is too heavy, these flavors are lost. In fact, almost all *zheng yan* was traditionally stored for six months to a year before drinking, so that whatever roast there was mellows out, leaving behind the flavors of the leaf. Like all oolong, mastery in roasting is when the roast affects the flavor in a positive way without leaving behind any traces of itself. The exception to this rule is the "mistaken" *zheng yan* tea, which is heavily roasted. Some percentage of tea is sorted down, due to all kinds of mistakes, natural and human. This tea is set aside with all the "down-sorted" tea. At the end of the processing period, there is then a bulk of this tea all mixed up. This pile of mixed tea is then heavily roasted to cover up the differences in the leaves and sold under the generic, all-encompassing "Da Hong Pao (大紅袍, *see the aside on the opposite page*)" that denominates all low-quality tea from Wuyi. Many of the best heavily-roasted teas are of this variety, as they at least come from *zheng yan*. A look at the wet leaves can often show if the tea was blended, as they will be different shapes/sizes.

"大紅袍 Da Hong Pao"

Da Hong Pao (大紅袍, The Emperor's Crimson Robe) is the "King of Cliff Tea." In fact, most people in China refer to all Wuyi tea as "Da Hong Pao" (much more often than they call it "Yancha"). The problem is that "Da Hong Pao" has become a very generic term. Originally, Da Hong Pao referred to the six old mother trees located in the Jiu Long Keng (pp. 19-20). Since then, it has been used to discuss a whole lot of different teas.

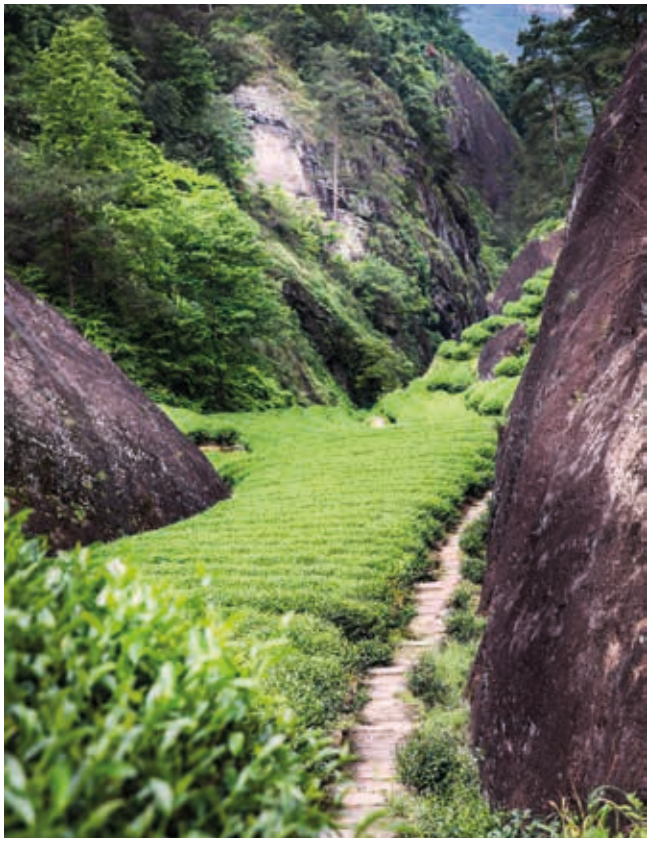
Various houses make blends of their tea, which they call "Da Hong Pao," for example. They may take all their mis-processed tea of various varietals and roast it all heavily to cover the differences and call that "Da Hong Pao." Many shops, teahouses and other brands also will call whatever is the best tea of each year "Da Hong Pao." In such cases, the term simply means "Grade A" for that particular brand or shop.

All of the zhou cha and wei shan tea are supposedly cloned versions of the original mother trees, and so almost all of that tea is also sold as "Da Hong Pao." And since that tea represents the vast majority of all Cliff Tea, almost all Cliff Tea in the world is called "Da Hong Pao," which is, of course, why people all over China know Cliff Tea by that name.

There are many other ways that the term is generalized, making it ambiguous at best. A deep exploration of Wuyi Cliff Tea should include this caveat. There is no need to make this a polemic, but as you dive deeper into Cliff Tea, you should keep in mind that real "Da Hong Pao" should just refer to the six mother trees. Since those trees are hardly ever harvested, and whenever they are sold publicly it is for astronomical sums, the closest ordinary mortals like us can get to real Da Hong Pao is what we call "Bei Dou Yi Hao (北斗一號)" or "First Generation Bei Dou." Bei Dou is a place in the park. In the 1970s, a farmer took cuttings from the mother trees there, which is much more documented than the supposed "first generation" trees down by the river and outside the park. The trees there are direct descendants of the six mother trees, and the place was chosen due to a similarity in its terroir to Jiu Long Keng, where the mother trees are.

Other than the six mother trees, the term "Da Hong Pao" is really just too generic and ambiguous to be of much use in a serious exploration of Cliff Tea. It misleads more often than it brings clarity, in other words.

We really have no problem with calling tea "Da Hong Pao." It just is too general a term, and there are way too many claims about "direct descendants" of the mother trees for this name to be useful.



茶 *Zheng yan, or "true Cliff Tea," grows in the park between cliffs with all of the qualities that make Cliff Tea special. But different gardens are better or worse depending on water flow, the minerals in the soil, biodiversity and whether the humans protect the garden properly. All zheng yan is better than the other grades of Cliff Tea, discussed on the next page, but the garden on the far left is obviously better than the two on this page in terms of biodiversity and natural power. Unfortunately, agrochemicals are used in the park.*

Ban Yan (半岩)

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

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

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

Unfortunately, three years ago the local government of Wuyi initiated a change in the determination of gardens in Wuyi, so that now all the *ban yan* can be called "*zheng yan*." Essentially anything within the road that demarcates the border of the park is now "*zheng yan,*" even though nothing has changed in terms of the tea's terroir, and therefore quality. It is still *ban yan*, even though it is no longer called by that name.

Zhou Cha (洲茶)

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

To the far left is a garden of zheng yan for comparison, as it is helpful to see and feel the differences. The two pictures to the direct left are zhou cha, grown down by the river. This tea is often picked with machines that shred the top of the tea tree and fill large white sacks with shredded tea leaves. Above is ban yan, which is sold as "zheng yan" nowadays, even though it is obviously nothing like the tea on the opposite page. Below is tea grown in the hills outside the Wuyi park area, which is called "wei shan" tea. Here the agrochemicals have made the fields dusty, and the soil lacks any power. There is also no biodiversity here, just dust and tea.

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

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

Wei Shan (外山)

Literally "Grown Outside," this tea is propagated in the hills surrounding the park. It shares in none of the richness that makes Wuyi tea special. This tea is all from lower altitude, inorganic, hedged and pruned little trees that are over-harvested into the ground, like in most tea-growing areas in the world. This tea is all about mimicking Wuyi tea, with heavy roasts to cover up any trace of flavor that could possibly infuse from the tea itself. Basically, these are farms that have, over the years, jumped on the "Da Hong Pao" bandwagon and converted their land to tea production to cash in on the growing interest. We have some of this tea from a trip in 2001 that to this day still has not lost its roast, so that when you open the jar or brew the tea, the roast-flavor and aroma is as strong as it was the day it was roasted. *Zhou cha* and *wei shan* represent around 60 percent of all *Yancha*. This accounts for somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of all Wuyi "Cliff Tea" produced.

傳說 Legends of Cliff Tea

The Iron Arhat 鐵羅漢

They say that the tea from Nei Gui Cave (內鬼洞) is called "Iron Arhat" because of the lineage of masters who lived at its feet. When you look at a teacher who has a teacher, it is hard to know where to start, so you just pick a point in the chain and see if the story of one link can somehow speak for the whole chain…

Shao An left home at an early age. He was too anxious for farm life, always stopping mid-work to wonder at the horizon. And he was the fifth son, so renouncing the world to be a monk would bring honor and merit to his family. His father sure didn't need another mouth to feed, especially one who daydreamed more and harder than he worked. And so, at the age of fourteen, the local priest shaved his head, and Shao An left on a pilgrimage to find a teacher.

His mother wept. She insisted that Shao An take the little cast iron Arhat from the family altar, knowing he would need a small icon to do his prayers until he found a home in some temple. She wrapped it in brocade. Along with the fresh gray robes, the first new clothes Shao An had ever owned, this was all the family had to give him. He was renouncing wealth, after all. Saying goodbye was bittersweet for Shao An. He knew he'd never see his family again, but he also longed to see what was beyond the small hills around the village he had spent his entire life living and working within, always staring out at the horizon.

Full of a spirit of adventure, Shao An first traveled south to the Shaolin monastery, where he lived for more than ten years, studying Buddhism and martial arts. He learned to read and write, studied sutras and also learned to raise his leg straight up and hold it there for hours at a time. The old master who taught them kungfu emphasized that they were spirit warriors, only fighting for light. He wasn't bad at his studies, but Shao An excelled at martial arts, soon rising to the top of the novice monks in training.

When he was around twenty-five winters, Shao An was in the fittest condition of his life. The master decided that the monks would defend a nearby farming village that was being looted by bandits regularly, and many of the defenseless villagers had been hurt or killed. In the battle, Shao An wounded his arm. His two best friends were killed, as well. The monks did drive the bandits off, in search of a less-protected village to loot or cause other trouble. Shao An said prayers for the bandits to his small iron Arhat when he prayed for his friends to be reborn in the pure land.

The battle shook Shao An deeply. He felt that the violence brought dishonor to his ancestors who had given up this body and its work to a temple for good merits. Here he was embroiled in violence, and the bad karmas of injury and harm. He asked and was granted permission to leave Shaolin in search of a hermitage to cultivate himself spiritually.

After traveling for years, and spending time with many renowned Buddhist teachers, Shao An heard of a great master with a story much like his own. He had once been a Shaolin monk and warrior who traveled the land protecting the defenseless. Until, after so many battles, his reputation began to get the best of him. All kinds of martial artists, bandits and ruffians began seeking him out just to test their mettles against him, and he wound up defending himself just for the sake of martial arts. The rumor was that the old man had decided to forsake his quest and retreat to a cave, never to have been heard from again. The young monk who told Shao An this story said the old man was last seen in northern Fujian. Immediately upon hearing the old master's story, Shao An knew they would meet, and that this was the teacher he needed to show him how to subdue the dragons in his mind. He prayed to his little statue and set out on the road.

After many adventures, Shao An wound up in Mt. Wuyi in northern Fujian. He met many great masters there, but none that fit the description of the old master from Shaolin. There were too many hermits to count, but for some reason, his ears perked up when a villager mentioned an old hermit living in the Nei Gui cave. Shao An decided he would try his luck, but the cave was hard to find. On the path, he came across an old woodsman, chopping up a dead tree for firewood. He asked him if he had heard of Nei Gui cave or the old master. The woodcutter said that the cave was up and over the nearby cliff, that it took some climbing to get to, but that there was no master there; the cave was abandoned. Determined to find out for himself, Shao An climbed the cliff, shuffled around a boulder and nimbly descended down into one of the most beautiful valleys he'd ever seen. There was a stream so pure it sparkled, three old tea trees, a pleasant, shaded grove and a nice cave big enough for a hermit's home. It was the kind of place that would never get too hot or too cool, full of sun, great water, tea and shelter—the perfect place to practice.

Shao An searched the cave. Inside, there was a woven grass mat, which was well cared for, an old stove and kettle for boiling tea, three cracked and cleft tea bowls, some small sundries, herbs and that was it. The cave was neat and tidy. Shao An decided to wait for the hermit who lived here, and if there was none, this would be the perfect place to spend a year or two meditating.

One of the most pleasant weeks of Shao An's life passed by in ease. He meditated as his teachers had taught, practiced Qigong at dawn and dusk in the small grove and sun-dried tea leaves from the three old trees for boiling. One late night session with leaves from the oldest tree instigated one of the most powerful meditation sessions of his life. He felt at one with this place, and realized that he was not a Shao An experiencing oneness with the mountains, but rather the mountains experiencing Shao An.

At the end of the week, as he sat out in the meadow one morning meditating, he was startled by a bucketful of icy water from the stream splashed right into his face. Wiping the water from his brow, he saw the old woodcutter standing over him glowering. "Get out of here!" the old man shouted. "I have been waiting a week for you to leave! Now you have overstayed your welcome!" At once, Shao An realized how foolish he had been. The old woodcutter was the hermit master he sought. Now that he knew what to look for, he saw the spirit and wisdom in the old man's eyes, though his simple, dirty clothes and hat had thrown him off when last they met.

"I have traveled thousands of kilometers, passing through untold dangers, including risk to my person and soul, from Shaolin to here. If you think some icy water will drive me off, my master, you are sorely mistaken," Shao An said, obsequiously kowtowing to the old monk.

The old man left Shao An in the meadow for three whole days, going to and from the cave collecting food and water, drinking tea and doing his own exercises as though Shao An wasn't there. Finally, on the third morning, as Shao An went through his morning Qigong routine, the old master *tsked* him and came over, correcting the placement of his foot with a shuffle. He lightly pushed Shao An near his armpits and he was lifted clean off his feet and thrown several feet back. Before he could fall, though, the old man caught his arm and steadied him. The bond had been made, as it had over and over again since before time.

For many years, master and student practiced together. The old man was happy to have some help with the chores, so long as Shao An didn't talk much, and Shao An was learning deeper aspects of martial form, Qigong and meditation than ever before. He also never knew how much power, insight and cultivation there was in tea. He had previously thought of tea as a friendly beverage shared between villagers when they chatted, or at inns along the road. But the old master taught him how and when to properly harvest and process the precious leaves from the three old trees, all of which he had named. He taught Shao An the proper spells for harvest, and for infusing the drying leaves with sun, moon and starlight, being sure to ask permission from the old trees themselves for the medicine. And beyond just the proper water, drawn from the right spring and boiled perfectly on charcoal, the old master taught him a ceremony for setting the bowls up, turning them, pouring and even how to hold them when you drink. The whole thing took so much devotion, practical skill and concentration that by the end of it, Shao An found that it cultivated his mind as much as his meditation or martial arts practice.

One day, after a particularly fine tea that had been transcendent beyond words, the old master leaned in close to Shao An and asked him how he felt. "I cannot even move," Shao An replied. "I feel as though my limbs are rivers that have flowed away. My body is completely pacified, and my mind is still and empty, deeply and vastly open so that even talking is hard, let alone moving. I feel like I could sit here all day and not move a muscle!"

The old master laughed: "You see, my boy, my kungfu is better than yours!"

Many years later, when the old master was long gone, and Shao An was all alone, he quietly awoke one day and said his prayers to the old iron Arhat in its little altar embedded in the back wall of the cave, praying that all his merits be given to his parents and ancestors. He went out to gather vegetables and firewood. Life was good. Though his body creaked and cracked more than it had when he was young, he was still alive and Nature was still free to experience Shao An. "And who could be unhappy with friends and teachers like you!" he said out loud, patting one of the old tea trees on his way out of the meadow. As he worked, he smiled occasionally, thinking of the meal and tea he would enjoy when he got back home.

On returning, to Shao An's great surprise, there was a young monk meditating in the meadow. He was a sprig of a man, so young he looked out of place in the old grotto. But he was meditating… Shao An knew just what to do, and went straight for the old bucket…

The Poetic Names of Cliff Tea

詩意名稱岩茶

茶人: *Wu De* (無的)

There are many, many ways of naming Cliff Tea. There were once many more varietals than there are today. All the varietals of Cliff Tea are types of Camellia sinensis var. sinensis, also known as "small-leaf" tea trees. And some date all the way back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Learning the ways in which Cliff Tea is named can help the Chajin interested in exploring these cliffs to get some bearings and also to discover some lesser-known types of Cliff Tea, of which there are indeed many. While our kettles boil, let's recite the names of Cliff Tea...

Ever since the Song Dynasty (960–1279), Cliff Tea producers and connoisseurs have been naming teas made from single trees. Every varietal must, by definition, have been a single tree at some point. Because tea is a sexual plant, it mutates when it is seed-propagated, which means that every tree will be unique. When trees were appreciated, then, cuttings were taken to reproduce them elsewhere.

Before we turn to the names of Cliff Tea, we thought we would discuss the life cycle of a tea tree, especially *Camellia sinensis var. sinensis* (small-leaf tea trees). Most plant books use a lot of botany jargon, which we will try our best to unpack using layman's terms so we can understand the life cycle of our beloved "*Thea*" a bit more, as well as her rare flowers, which some of you may have never seen.

As we mentioned, Tea is a sexual plant, which means that it is cross-pollinated. A tremendous amount of natural energy goes into the creation of a tea seed, including bugs and forest, sun and sky. Each one carries great energy within it. And no two tea seeds are alike. They will each produce a completely unique tea tree, which is why tea has done so well traveling to different climates. If you plant a thousand seeds, the chances that one of them will survive are high. Unfortunately, very little tea in the world is seed-propagated. The reason, of course, is industry and the commodification of tea. Sadly, tea faces many of the problems that haunt all agricultural products. Most tea plantations use cuttings from a tree, planted to produce another. These are, in essence, clones. Farmers do this to achieve uniformity of flavor. Also, with a few hundred or even thousands of different trees, all with different needs, the farmer would potentially have a lot more work to do. Clones are easier.

Like all sexual plants, *Camellia sinensis* undergoes an alternation of generations. In tea trees, the production of what botanists call "sporophytes," which are the spore-producing generation of a plant, having two matching chromosome sets, represents the dominant stage in the life cycle of a tea tree, while the production of what are called "gametophytes," which are the male and female cells, is the minor stage. Through cell division (called "meiosis"), the sporophyte creates a gametophyte, which is then fused through cross-pollination with that of another plant, with the help of either insects (like bees) or pollen spread by the wind. After the gametophytes are fused, a zygote is formed with chromosomes from both the male and female plants. Then, through "mitosis," which is also a kind of cell division, this new plant will grow to maturity. This is how tea is naturally propagated, in scientific terms.

It took millennia for trees like tea to develop sexual cross-fertilization. It is also tremendously difficult for such trees to fertilize one another, since the mates cannot move towards embrace in the way that animals and people can. As a result, plants have developed magnificent ways of fertilizing each other, enticing insects to pollinate them, using the wind, etc. There is a reason for all this, and it is powerful to think about, since it is connected to the proliferation of life on Earth.

Carl Sagan said that the evolution from asexual to sexual reproduction on this planet was as significant as the beginning of life itself, as it allowed for all the creative power in Nature to assert itself in such myriad forms of trunk, branch and leaf. There is something deep and powerful missing when a plant cannot cross-fertilize according to its nature.

The variety in Nature is magic, just as in humans. Every tree is different. Sure, they share some similarities due to common genetic heritage and similar *terroir* (climate, soil, etc.), but like people, they each have their own medicine, their own perspective, experience and wisdom.

The difference in power and healing between seed-propagated and cloned tea is obvious. As we discussed earlier, there are essentially two main varieties of tea trees: large- and small-leaf. Large-leaf tea trees can live thousands of years. The oldest one we've dated is 3,500 years old! (The trunk is about seven people around.) There are probably older ones out there, or at least there were in the past. Small-leaf tea trees can live hundreds of years, and some are many centuries old. But here's the punch line: the clones on plantations typically live only thirty to fifty years. And more than a few farmers have told me that they aren't living as long anymore, sometimes as few as fifteen to twenty years.

Our attempts to interfere with Nature rarely take into account all the biodiversity and infinite, immeasurable connections between species. We take control of an environment and monocrop it, controlling a few factors in a huge web of symbiosis. As we've done this to larger and more diverse areas, our meddling has begun to have a global impact, changing the Environment (with a capital "E") rather than just the places where we farm.

Nowadays, most tea is made from cuttings, and because it is so heavily pruned, it will never pass through its natural cycle and flower, which is why many tea lovers have visited tea farms in the past without ever seeing any tea flowers there—many plantations don't blossom, in other words. The "natural" growth of new leaf shoots occurs in successions, called "flushes," that are almost always altered by the harvesting and pruning of humans. However, the relationship between tea and human beings (as a natural animal species) is ancient, and need not be seen as "unnatural," especially when the trees are honored as living beings, rather than

as commodified "property," and grown sustainably with the health, happiness and quality of the tree as viable concerns. Human beings need to learn that the quality of life of our food, plant or animal very much ***is*** the essence of its nutritional quality for us!

No matter the varietal/cultivar, all healthy shoots on a tea tree will form leafy growth in spring. Terminal buds then become dormant as the season progresses. Dormant terminal buds will shed bud scales in some varietals, leaving scars on the stems that may represent leafless flushes, which often occur at the same time as the flush of new buds. The flowers are formed in the autumn, usually from October to November. Flowers appear in the space between the leaf and stem where the terminal bud starts growth for the next highest flush. The gorgeous flowers of a tea tree form with a large mass of yellow stamens, often blossoming two or three together on short branchlets. The white or pale pink blossoms of Camellia tea trees appear on drooping stalks, usually between two and four centimeters in diameter. They form from five to nine petals, which are round, concave and often fall off quickly. The petals are surrounded by five sepals arranged in a tile-like pattern described by botanists as "imbricate." These casings are smooth and round. It then takes from a few months to a year for the tree to be cross-pollinated and bear fruit. The fruits (seeds) of the tea tree are smooth with flattened, round capsules that are usually split into five chambers, each with one solitary seed. It is not uncommon for two seeds to form fused together. Do the fused seeds sprout more or less?

Before the two-legged animal came to share in the protection and propagation of the genetic heritage of tea, ensuring that Her genes would spread all across this great Earth, She required the help of mice and owls to propagate Herself, as have many trees before Her. Mice gather the protein-rich tea seeds into caches, sometimes far away from the mother tree, and then owls eat some of the mice, who never return to their cache that is then free to sprout. And it is a good thing there are many seeds in the cache, because tea seeds don't sprout with much consistency. In this way, the tea trees can actually migrate hundreds of kilometers over long periods of time, though much further carried by humanity's love for the Leaf. Like many other plants, Tea has traveled the length and breadth of the globe due to our love.

Names of Cliff Tea

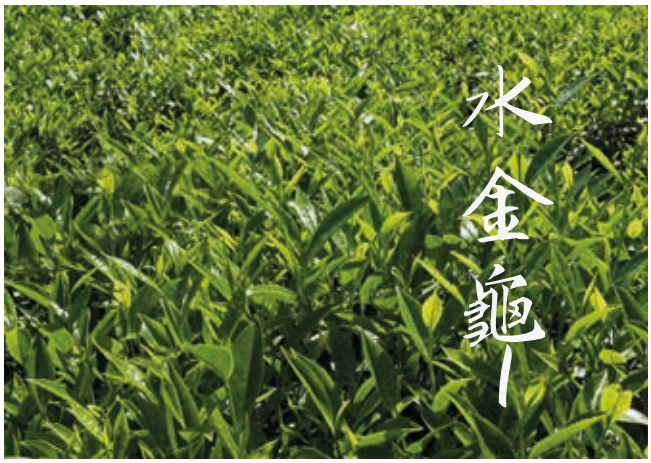
There once were more than 830 types of Cliff Tea based on the names in books left from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). It is hard to say how many are left, but at least a couple hundred survive. When you ask different farmers, you get different numbers. Also, seed-propagation continues, and there are sometimes new varietals named when new trees are discovered to have unique characteristics, or sometimes also for branding to distinguish producers from their competitors.

Sadly, the twentieth century was challenging for China, and the world. During that time, many farmers gave up on tea or were forced to by the government. Many were made to grow rice instead. This meant that a lot of varietals were lost, ripped out and replaced by rice paddies, other vegetables or cash crops. Some varietals also homogenized into more common trees through breeding. Finally, with discontinued production, some subtle differences between certain similar varietals were also lost, and when production resumed in the '80s and '90s, people just came back and assumed that what may have been multiple varietals were only one, collapsing them in name.

Before we get to many of the lesser-known varietals, we must discuss what are called the "Four Big Names (四大名岩茶)," which are considered to be the best, and therefore highest-quality Cliff Teas. The four most famous varieties of *Yancha* are "The Emperor's Crimson Robe (大紅袍, Da Hong Pao)," "Iron Arhat (鐵羅漢, Tie Luo Han)," "Golden Water Tortoise (水金龜, Shui Jin Gui)," and "White Cockscomb (白雞冠, Bai Ji Guan)." Each has a history and legend surrounding its name, a special leaf-shape and even subtle nuances in processing and drinking. We will share our versions of the legends these teas are named after in this issue. A brief exploration of the "Four Legendary" kinds of *Yancha*, as you could also translate these, will be useful here:

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

Da Hong Pao, the "King of Tea," is the best known of all Wuyi *Yancha*. It is also the best of the bunch, admired near and far in both the modern and antique age. It was often a favorite tribute of the royal court. The origin of this marvelous tea is the cliff of Tian Xin Yan (天心岩), Jiu Long Keng of Wuyi. It received its name of "The Emperor's Crimson Robe" in the Qing Dy-



Here are the "Four Legendary" or "Four Big" names of Cliff Tea. Clockwise from above, we have the incredibly unique Bai Ji Guan, with leaves like no other tea tree on Earth; Shui Jin Gui top right; Iron Arhat (Tie Luo Han) beneath that, with its typical purplish buds, which is a common mutation in tea trees caused by anthocyanin pigments that protect the tree from UV rays; and then finally "Bei Dou Yi Hao" or "First Generation trees from Bei Dou," which are direct cuttings of the six mother trees shown on pp. 19-20, which are the real "Da Hong Pao."

nasty. Since the 1980s, Da Hong Pao farms have spread down into the inner mountains of Wuyi. Da Hong Pao grows from a medium-sized bush with leaves that belong to an asexual reproduction based on late-grown seeds. The plant has a half-open shape with thick branches that grow in close proximity. Its leaves are elliptical, bright and dark-green in color. There is a slight bulge on the surface and sharp, dense teeth around the edges. They give the impression of being thick and yet fragile at the same time. The buds are tender, showing a carmine color with lots of little hairs, and their fertility is strong and dense. The diameter of the corolla is approximately 3.5 cm with six petals. Late in April, the blossoms display themselves with great luxuriance. Overall, Da Hong Pao is of medium output compared to other oolongs. The dry tea is tight and solid with mixed greens and browns throughout. The tea is full-bodied and has the fragrance of osmanthus flowers. It is especially famous for the sensations (茶韻, *cha yun*) it brings, especially to the upper palate, and a rich, long-lasting aftertaste (回甘, *hui gan*). True Da Hong Pao is said to taste and smell of the citrus spray that flies off an orange as it is peeled. There are several grades of Da Hong Pao that are mostly evaluated in terms of their genetic proximity to the six original bushes. Some tea masters suggest that since Da Hong Pao has become such a generic term, perhaps it is more akin to a brand name than a variety of tea. Consequently, some masters only use the term "Da Hong Pao" to refer to the original six bushes, calling other varietals by the location in which they grow and their genetic approximation to the original bushes, like "Bei Dou First Generation(北斗一號)," for example.

Tie Luo Han 鐵羅漢 *(Iron Arhat)*

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

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

This tea originates on the She Ge Zhai Peak (社葛寨峰), Niu Lan Keng of Wuyi. It has played an important part in the culture and economy of the region since the 1980s. According to legend, it received its name in the Qing Dynasty, though the plant is much older. Like Da Hong Pao, Shui Jin Gui is a medium-sized bush and leaf cultivated asexually from late-grown seeds. The main distribution of Shui Jin Gui is in the inner mountains of the Wuyi region. The branches are dense and the leaves elliptical. They too are dark green in color. The surface also bulges like Da Hong Pao, but the edges display a slight wave with tiny, sharp teeth. The leaves also fold inwards in a unique way. The buds are tender and a unique purple and green with flowery hairs; their fertility is dense. The diameter of the corolla is 3 cm and usually boasts seven or eight petals. In mid-April they shine the brightest. This tea likewise offers a medium output. The color of the dry leaf is bluish. When finished, it is smooth, fat, tight and even. When a package is opened, the leaves are all tangled together, which has earned it the nickname "Head of the Dragonfly." The tea is rich and fragrant with hints of plum and osmanthus. The liquor is a clear and a deep orange color, and should have a full body, obvious sensation and deep aftertaste.

Bai Ji Guan 白雞冠 *(White Cockscomb)*

Bai Ji Guan originates at the Bat Cave (蝙蝠洞, *not* the secret lair) on Yin Ping Peak, Wuyi. According to legend, it was given its name in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). It is perhaps the most unique of all *Yancha* varieties. Like the other teas discussed here, Bai Ji Guan is farmed asexually from late-grown seeds. It is mostly found in the inner mountains, and has also been propagated in larger amounts since the 1980s. The bushes are medium-sized and have very thick, dense branches. The leaves are dull and shallow with average teeth around the edges. The surface also bulges. These leaves appear even more delicate than the other varieties. The buds are all a bright yellow color with minuscule hairs. The older leaves appear white in the sunshine, and together with the buds look similar to a cockscomb, which is where the tea gets its name. These are among the most unique tea trees in the world. Sometimes leaves mutate to a yellowish-white color, but it is rare to find whole trees covered in these colors. The uniqueness also translates to the flavor, aroma and Qi of this magical tea as well. The diameter of the corolla is 3.5 cm with seven petals. They also blossom fully at the end of April. The yellow, bright buds and leaves together make a very unique oolong tea that often has a fragrance of lychee fruit. Some masters say Bai Ji Guan also tastes of mushrooms. The sensations should be crisp and slightly dry in the mouth. Bai Ji Guan is very unique amongst all Cliff Tea, and even within all of oolong.

Other Cliff Teas
其他岩茶

The naming of Wuyi Tea follows certain categories, which we will now discuss, giving some examples of each. This map will help you in the exploration of Cliff Tea as you try to sip your way through the many, many varietals. This list is in no way exhaustive, but it does represent a nice slice of Yancha. As you will see, many varietals can easily be put into multiple categories.

By the Environment

Some trees are named by the environment in which they grow. Good examples of this are: Bu Jian Tian (不見天, Lost the Sky), which is named this because these nine trees grow directly under an overhanging cliff that covers them from the sky; Shi Jiao (石角, Stone Horn) is another example, growing on the edge of a cliff.

By the Shape of the Tree

Some trees have unique shapes that make them stand out. Zui Hai Tang (醉海棠, Drunken Crab Apple) is one such tree that resembles a twisted, falling-over version of its namesake. Yi Zhi Xiang (一支香, Stick of Incense) is another tree, unique for its thick and very straight trunks, like incense in a censure. There are many other varietals of this type.

By the Shape of the Leaves

Many Cliff Teas are named after the shape of their leaves as well. Gua Zi Jin (瓜子金, Golden Melon Seed) and Zhu Si (竹絲, Bamboo Slivers) both are obvious examples of this. Another, and one of our all-time favorite Cliff Teas (because of its flavor, not because of its name) is called Zui Gui Fei (醉貴妃, Drunken Concubine) because its leaves have a curve on one side that resembles the lipstick of a dynastic concubine. It is a squatter leaf, with a strange curl on one side that makes it very unique amongst tea leaves in the world. Nature is magical in all the variety She makes in tea and in all things.

By the Leaf Color

Many Cliff Teas are named after the unique color of the leaves. Bai Qi Lan (白奇蘭, White Orchid) and Bai Ji Guan (白雞冠, White Cockscomb) are examples of this, although the latter tea fits into other categories, like the shape of the leaf, which resembles a cockscomb, and also legend. Hong Hai Tang (紅海棠, Red Crab Apple) and Da Hong Mei (大紅梅, Big Red Plum) are also examples of this, having anthocyanins, which are pigments that protect the leaves from UV rays and make them reddish.

By When the Buds Flush

Many varietals are named by the time of year they flush. Ying Chun Liu (迎春柳, Willow Tree That Beckons Spring) is one of the first trees to flush in Wuyi. The last, and one of our favorite varietals at the Center, is called "Bu Zhi Chun (不知春, Forgot the Spring)" because it buds in late May, way after all the other tea in the park has been picked and processed.

By the Era or Age of the Tree

Some varietals are named after when the tree is dated to in folklore or in fact, or the age of individual trees. Zhen Tang Shu (正唐樹, Proper Tang Tree) is a varietal said to date back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and Song Yu Shu (宋玉樹, Song Jade Tree) to the Song Dynasty (960–1279). These are amongst the oldest varietals in the park. Song Yu Shu in particular is an exceptional varietal, and trees are often old. Some old trees are picked and processed individually. One such tree is called "Lao Shou Xing (老壽星, Lucky Star)," which is something Chinese people say to very old people on their birthday. Many of these old varietals date back to a time long before there was such a thing as oolong tea. In those times, these teas would have been processed as green tea or made into cakes to be boiled or whisked depending upon who was drinking them.

By Flowers

Two hundred and eighty-six of the varietals in the old books were named after flowers. There are many orchids, like Yan Zhong Lan (岩中蘭, Rock Orchid) or Qi Lan (奇蘭, Rare Orchid). Hei Mu Dan (黑牡丹, Black Peony) is a famous varietal, and there are other peony varietals as well, including a white one as well. Almost every local flower had a representative.

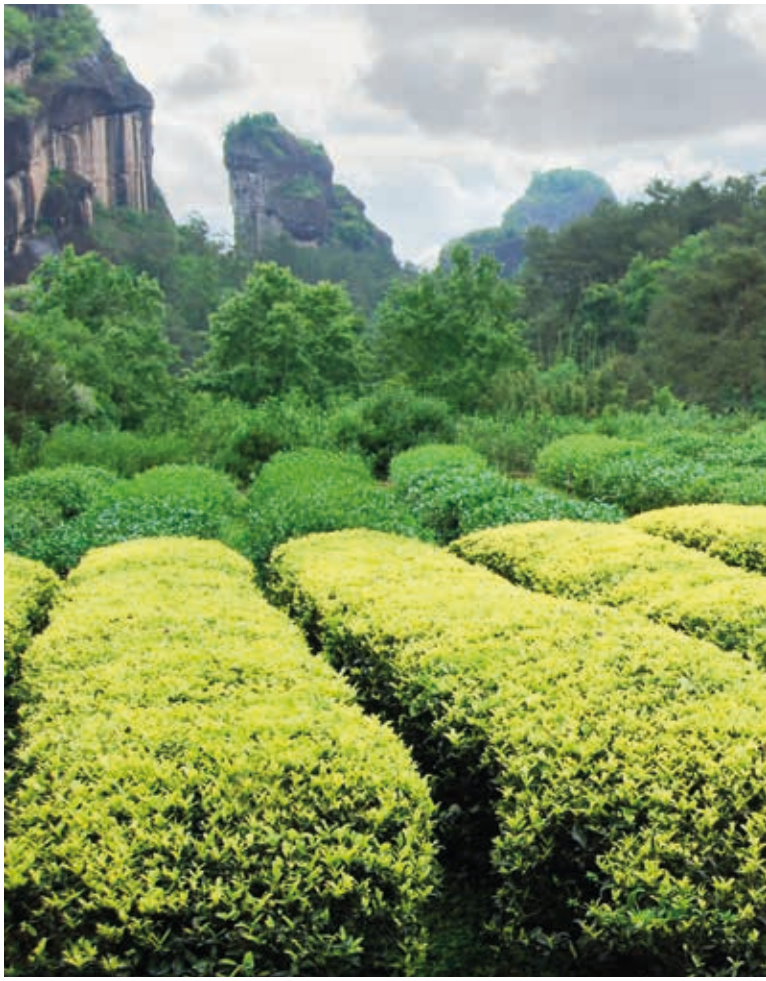
By Fragrance

Like many other regions, many varietals are named after the aroma of the leaf, liquor or both. Our Tea of the Month, Rou Gui (肉桂, Cassia), is one such tea. Bai She Xiang (白麝香, White Musk) is another one that actually is musky. Ye Lai Xiang (夜來香, Tonkin Jasmin) could fit in the flower or fragrance categories. A more poetic tea named after its fragrance, and one of our favorites, is Bai Rui Xiang (白瑞香, Hundred Harmonious Fragrances).

By Legend

Many teas are named after a legend or story in Wuyi, and, indeed, all throughout China. The stories always celebrate the reverence and respect that Chinese people have for Tea. Throughout this issue, we will be telling the stories of the Four Big Names, Dao Hong Pao, Tie Luo Han, Shui Jin Gui and Bai Ji Guan. Other examples of this are Ban Tian Yao (*bottom right,* 半天腰, Belt of Heaven) and Bai Mu Dan (白牡丹, White Peony), which we also mentioned in the flower category.

茶 Clockwise: the shape of the leaves, the age of the tree, the color of the leaves, legends and the shapes of trees all have lent poetry to the many, many names tea lovers have used for the varietals of Cliff Tea.




天下第一关

傳說 Legends of Cliff Tea

The Golden Water Tortoise

水金龜

From the plains below the silvery peaks were lost, wandering above the clouds. Far above, past where even the most adventurous dragons soared, the gardens of Mount Peng Lai glistened in the morning sun. And wallowing in a remote pond of blue lilies, the great, golden water tortoise Jing sat in the mud, gloomy and forlorn, his once radiant form a dulled bronze. Occasionally, the mists below would part, and for the briefest moment, he would look down to the earthly realms below and shine golden rays of joy on the pond, illuminating all the waters around him and cascading dapples of gloss on the blue lilies that surrounded him. The old tortoise was nostalgic, watching the humans far below Heaven. He remembered the times when the children of Heaven visited him and rode on his back, and he would have long chats with the Jade Emperor himself, his oldest and dearest friend. But no one had visited him in the last aeon, presumably busy with more important matters of court.

On one such dreary day, the old turtle finally made up his mind that he would pay a visit to court, in hopes that the august Emperor would remember their friendship. He took a long time walking ever so slowly to the palace, feeling uplifted by his quest. After a short wait, he was admitted to the court.

"My dear friend, Jing!" the Jade Emperor exclaimed, extending his hands in an offering of welcome.

"Your Highness," he replied, bowing low.

"What has brought my old friend from his lily pond to court on this fine day?"

"Your Holiness, in honor of my long service to Your Majesty and all the joys we shared together in the gardens, I have a small request to ask of you." The old turtle spoke slowly and eloquently, impressing the court with his manners.

"Why anything, my friend. Ask what you will and it shall be granted," the Emperor said.

Shining more brightly, the old turtle asked, "I wish to be reborn on Earth as a tea tree, Your Majesty."

Extremely surprised, the Jade Emperor stroked his long beard. No one had ever requested permission to leave Mount Peng Lai.

"Why in all the Heavens would you wish to be incarnated as a tree?" he asked.

"For a long time now, I have watched the lands below. I have seen the great reverence the people show to tea trees, and I long to be loved and relished as they are. In that way, my spirit will be amongst the people and in their lives. For all the ages, my children will also be worshiped and cared for. I will become a legend and shine golden once more."

Impressed with the old turtle's sentiments, the Jade Emperor granted his wish. And soon thereafter a beautiful tea bush was discovered on Mount Wuyi, with the brightest crown the people had ever seen. They say that each morning, its leaves would glow with an otherworldly halo, and that those who drank its Empyrean nectar would be transported to the gardens of Heaven on the back of a black dragon…

All of the stories and artwork in these legends were written and painted by Wu De. We will have an auction of the pieces and put the money towards Light Meets Life. Stay tuned via social media to find out more.


武夷岩茶
手工製作
Wuyi
Cliff Tea
Traditional Hand-Processing
茶人: Huang Xian Geng (黃賢庚)

Harvest 收成

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

At the start of the season, local monks hold a large ceremony. They make offerings, burn incense and place fruit upon the altar before chanting through the morning. The master guide, the tea-pickers and porters are all blessed in turn before they set out. They remain silent as they walk to the tea bushes for the first time. This comes from a tradition of respect for the spirits of Nature. They sometimes hike for miles in order to reach the tea bushes, which are often high up amongst the cliffs. Before the leaves are even seen there is a reverence—a sense of the Sacred among even the lowest porter.

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

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

After showing the pickers which leaves to take, the master guide can step back and supervise. The best pickers are often elderly ladies, as the picking is a delicate process. If a leaf is dropped to the ground, it is considered spoiled and left behind. These older women have the experience and dexterity to pick the tea with the most efficiency. Often, it is only women who pick the tea, and then male porters carry it back to the village. The paths are often steep and treacherous and the baskets heavy (80-100 kg). But we have seen men picking and strong women carrying the baskets on occasion. When the tea is harvested to the fish eye, the master guide will order the pickers to halt. They return to the village at a quicker pace than they walked on the way there, because the tea must reach the village as soon as possible to start the processing. Almost the entire process occurs on the same day the leaves are picked.

Harvesting

Whether or not the harvesting is done carefully, the methods used are suitable, the tips and leaves are picked according to the correct standard; all of these factors not only influence the quality of the fresh-picked leaf and the ease of carrying out the *zuo qing* process (做青, "making the leaf"), but also the quality of the final product.

In the twentieth century, there were not many varieties of Wuyi Cliff Tea (*wuyi Yancha*, 武夷岩茶). In the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), however, there were many. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the main ones were "Caicha (菜茶, Vegetable Tea)" and "Shui Xian (水仙, Water Fairy)." These are late-budding varieties, and the start of the harvest season usually fell at the beginning of the middle third of the fourth lunar month. There's an old saying that goes: "If you haven't started harvesting three days before Lixia, you won't be finished three days after Lixia." (立夏, Lixia, or "Start of Summer," is the seventh solar term in the traditional lunar calendar). In those days, harvesting was all done by hand, so the harvesting period usually lasted around fifteen days. The harvesting work was all done by men, as it involved intense physical labor that was difficult for women to withstand: it involved not only picking the leaf during the day, but also firing and rolling it at night. The beginning of the harvesting and processing season is commonly referred to as "*kai shan* (開山)"—"opening the mountain."

Judging Leaf Growth

The degree to which the tea leaves have opened has always been an important factor in harvesting Wuyi Cliff Tea. The main reason for this is to allow the nutrients in the leaf to fully develop; it also makes processing easier.

There is a special method for judging whether the leaves have opened sufficiently. During the spring tea harvesting season, the tea tips undergo four stages: "not yet opened (*wei kai mian*, 未開面)," "small open surface (*xiao kai mian*, 小開面)," "medium open surface (*zhong kai mian*, 中開面)" and "large open surface (*da kai mian*, 大開面)." "Not yet opened" means that the bud at the end of each tea tip is yet to unfurl at all; "small surface" means that the main bud has begun to take shape and the first leaf has unfurled; "medium surface" means that the first (outermost) leaf has reached half the size of the second leaf; "large surface" means that the first leaf has reached two-thirds of the size of the second leaf or is nearly the same size.

Not yet opened
(*wei kai mian,* 未開面)

Small open surface
(*xiao kai mian,* 小開面)

Medium open surface
(*zhong kai mian,* 中開面)

判斷葉子生長

Judging Leaf Growth

Large open surface
(*da kai mian,* 大開面)

To judge the leaf growth stage of a whole area of tea plants, it's important to judge by a significant majority of the tea tips, and not just look at one individual tip or a small number of branches. It is of particular importance to take into account the leaf growth stage of the middle and lower branches of the tea trees (or the peripheral side branches), and not to simply judge the whole area by the growth stage at the crown of the trees. This is because the leaves at the top of each plant have a distinct advantage in accessing sunlight, rain, dew and nutrients, so it takes longer for the leaves to "open their surfaces." If you blindly waited until all the leaves at the crown of the tea plants reached the "large surface" stage, the rest of the tea garden would probably already be old and withered.

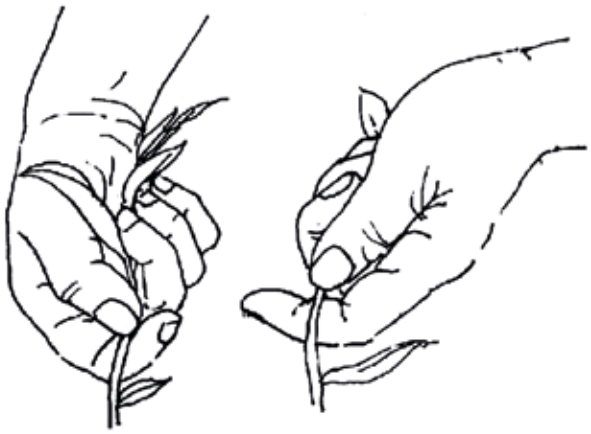
Generally speaking, older leaves make the *zuo qing* process easier and result in a richer flavor in the finished tea, but a lower yield. Younger leaves make the *zuo qing* process more difficult, and the finished tea tends to have a bitter aftertaste, but the yield is higher. With traditional Cliff Tea, great importance was placed on the flavor and texture of the tea liquor, so the leaf was most often harvested at the "large surface" stage.

Due to various constraints—such as the seasons, weather, and available labor and equipment—the factory owners and master guides had to make careful calculations to prepare for the harvesting period. When some of the tea leaves were reaching the "small surface" or "medium surface" stages, they had to begin picking in a planned manner to make sure they didn't miss the time for late-stage harvesting.

Harvesting Method

Wuyi Cliff Tea tips are most often picked with one bud and three leaves, which requires a different picking method than green tea (where the buds are picked alone or with only one leaf) or today's Jin Jun Mei (金駿眉, Golden Eyebrow) red tea (also from the Wuyi region). The method usually involves gently gripping the tea tip in the hand, palm facing up, then using the thumbnail to pinch the stem off between the index and middle finger. Sometimes, if the thumbnail is too short, the stem is instead grasped and broken off using the thumb and index finger. During picking, it's important to avoid pulling roughly on the shoots to make sure no leaves are pulled off, and also to avoid grabbing the leaves too hard so that they don't get damaged. This looks easy when you watch the pickers, but it actually takes great skill and years of practice. The deft and nimble hands of the pickers who work all day, rain or shine, are a part of all fine tea. Raise a cup to them!

Generally speaking, picking is done from the inside to the outside of the tea plant, and from bottom to top, picking each branch clean one by one. This method makes sure no new leaves are missed and avoids leaving any "overflowing bushes"—tea plants that haven't been thoroughly harvested.



Short Bushes: Two-Handed Picking

In the past, most of the tea plants were of the "Caicha (Vegetable Tea)" variety. These tea plants were bush-shaped and were grown without fertilizer, so they tended to be quite short, and the shoots could be easily harvested with both hands, gradually picking each branch and plant clean. The standard for a thoroughly-harvested tea plant was that you should be able to "see black"—in other words, the new tea leaves and shoots should be harvested so thoroughly that only the old leaves are left, making the tea plants appear darker in color.

Tall Bushes/Branches: One-Handed Picking

The "Shui Xian (Water Spirit)" variety of Wuyi Cliff Tea has semi-tree-shaped plants which are never pruned, so they tend to be relatively tall, often reaching five to six feet (roughly two meters). So to reach all the shoots, the harvesters have to bend a branch down with one hand and pick with the other. Sometimes a stool or ladder is even needed to reach the highest shoots. Many old trees are like this these days, as more trees are left to grow up. This is great for the health of tea trees, and ultimately results in better quality tea, even if picking is slower.

Weighing the Leaf

Weighing the leaf is how the harvesters' wages are calculated. Traditionally, weighing occurred four times throughout one spring harvest, but nowadays it is done every day. In olden times, two of the four were "daylight weigh-ins," which were announced in advance, and two of them were surprise "undercover weigh-ins," otherwise known as "caught-in-the-act weigh-ins," because they would catch any harvesters who had been slacking off. When a weigh-in was announced, everyone had to stop picking at the same time, and the foremen, called "*baotou* (包頭)," and the *daishan* would weigh each harvester's yield one by one and record the results. At the end of the spring harvest the results would be added up and used to calculate each harvester's wage bracket. Nowadays, everything is exact, weighed each day and calculated weekly for salary, including bonuses for good work. This is, in part, due to the fact that workers are not consistent.

Gathering the Leaf

After a certain quantity of leaves has been picked, they needed to be gathered up and taken away, otherwise the tea basket would overflow. Sometimes, when one area of a tea mountain has been harvested completely, the leaf is taken away even if there isn't a large amount. There are two reasons for this: one is to facilitate the rotation of the harvesters to a different picking area, and the other is to make sure the leaves from different tea varietals don't get mixed together.

Carrying the Leaf to the Factory

The workers whose job it is to transport the freshly picked tea leaf carry it using a pole across their shoulders. They have to get the leaf to the processing facility very quickly to make sure it doesn't overheat from being packed together for too long, or else get scorched by the sun. It is also oxidizing in the baskets, and too much of that can change the flavor of the tea. For this reason, the coolies who carry the tea are offered a bonus to get the tea to the trucks waiting at the edge of the park to carry the leaf over the bridge by a certain time. These days, this is all much easier to monitor with cell phones and other technology. In sunny weather, they use broken-off tree branches to cover the tea leaf and protect it from the sun. When they stop for a rest, they do their best to choose a shady spot beneath a tree or cliff face to keep the tea leaf out of the sunlight.

Each of the baskets slung from the poles the coolies carry on their shoulders averages around forty kilograms (sometimes more), which means they carry on average around eighty kilograms down winding trails, over stone steps that span streams, around the many tourists these days and up and down valleys and hills at a breakneck pace to get a bonus, only stopping for short rests to catch their breath. Many of them do this several times a day. Obviously the way back is much easier, as their load is empty, but it is still grueling work. Every time we drink a fine Cliff Tea, we can remember these men who carried our tea so far through all types of weather so that it could be processed well. There truly is a tremendous amount of work, effort, skill, sweat and toil in every leaf!

茶 ***The work of tea begins long before it reaches the hands of the masters in the factory, who usually get all the accolades and rewards for the fine tea produced. Before their craft and skill even comes into play, the mountain guides lead an entire team deep into the mountains, up steep inclines, over thin bamboo poles that span streams to precarious places to pick tea, rain or shine. Then, the coolies carry the filled baskets back, often weighing eighty to one hundred kilograms all together. All of this work also comes with its own skill, heritage and hard work. Crafting tea is one of the most labor-intensive agricultural processes on Earth, which is something we should all keep in mind with every single handful we drop into our teapots!***

Withering & Shaking 萎凋和摇青

When the leaves arrive at the village, they are gently placed on round bamboo trays. Sometimes a tarp is laid on the ground if the leaves are of lower quality or higher yield. The leaves are arranged neatly in a single layer, using as many trays as necessary, then left to wither. The leaves are withered because the moisture in tea leaves makes them too fragile for processing; they would only break. The withering accordingly prevents breakage by making the leaves slightly limp in preparation for the rest of the procedure. There is never a moment in which they aren't monitored. If it is too sunny or too hot, the leaves could be burned, which would ruin them. Also, if they are left to wither for too long, they will become overly-oxidized and must be discarded. The leaves must reach the desired level of flexibility, no more or less.

Periodically, the trays will be brought inside and placed on shelves, where the temperature and light can be controlled more precisely. This stage is sometimes called "reduction." When the leaves come inside out of the sun, they begin to stiffen slightly. This is called "*huan yuan* (還原)" in Chinese, which literally means "alive again." A master watches the leaves and moves them in and out of the room as many times as necessary to reach the desired flexibility and degree of oxidation. Much of this depends on the weather for that day, the time of day, the strength of the sun and the nature of the leaves themselves. Like any aspect of life, it's about finding the right degree. Masters know by sight and touch when the leaves are ready for the next stage. The harvest day is usually chosen at a time when there won't be any weather issues that could potentially disrupt production, though contingencies exist. Subtle changes result if the tea is processed on a rainy day, and therefore dried indoors. On such a day, at best, 60 percent of normal quality can be reached.

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

After shaking, the bruised leaves are placed on shelves to oxidize. The shaking and oxidation will be continued at regular intervals until the master who oversees the production declares that the tea is sufficiently oxidized to move on to the next stage. It is this keen eye that distinguishes the masters from the skilled apprentices. Charcoal braziers are often used to masterfully control temperature and humidity, guiding the oxidation to the desired degree.

Throughout this magazine, we will continue to focus on traditional, hand-processing techniques and methodology, in an effort to preserve the centuries of tea-making skill and culture in Wuyi. It should be noted, however, that most Cliff Tea nowadays is produced using machinery—withered on the road and shaken in large drums for example. The differences in the techniques used when hand-processing versus using modern machinery are vast, indeed. The machines function very differently and require a very different skill set. Traditional bruising of tea leaves during the shaking phase, for example, ideally creates a red ring around the edges of the tea leaves. That is not possible in a mechanized drum that rattles the tea around, bruising randomly.

The withering step is called "*dao qing* (倒青)." The literal meaning of the term is along the lines of "collapsing the leaf" or "making the leaf lie down"—a description of the leaf lying in its withered state after being sun-dried. Whether or not this step is carried out properly has a major influence on the later processing stages.

Pouring the Leaves into the Qing Hu

The leaf is poured into a large basket called a "tea-leaf lake (*qing hu*, 青湖)." When tipping out the tea leaf, the ropes on the tea baskets must be untied and removed to make sure they don't get mixed in among the leaf. The workers must use gentle movements to avoid damaging the buds and leaves. Extra special care must be taken with leaves that are wet from rain or dew, and very young, tender leaves and buds.

Some of the tea leaves will have rolled up, either from being grasped by the pickers or from settling while being moved, which will be a problem for the next step in processing. So, they need to be gently shaken out using both hands to open them up again.

The Bamboo Trays

The bamboo trays must be placed behind and to the right of the *kai qing* master, so that he can easily pick them up to use them. The *kai qing* master (開青, usually the second-in-command) and the person who scoops the tea leaves up (usually the chief worker or head tea master) stand facing each other across the *qing hu*. The *kai qing* master holds up the bamboo tray, and the other person quickly scoops a handful of tea leaf into the bamboo tray using both hands. The *kai qing* master turns the bamboo tray with both hands to evenly distribute the leaf within it. Occasionally, if there's a patch with not enough leaves, the tea scooper will quickly sprinkle on a few more to fill in the gap. The scooper must move quickly, scooping a roughly even amount of tea leaf each time—if the amount is too small or too large, it will affect the quality of the end result. During this process, the tea workers must consider factors such as the weather and the state of the leaf when deciding how thickly to spread the leaf in each bamboo tray. This in turn decides the volume of leaf that they will scoop up in each handful. Everything is done by feel, and yet should be precise.

Separating the Leaf

Throughout the processing of fine Cliff Tea, the previous step defines the next. In other words, the garden/varietal determine the harvest and even the picking method, which then defines the withering, etc. The withering is, therefore, a very key step, and separating the leaves is an essential factor.

"Separating the leaf" or "*kai qing* (開青)" involves rapidly turning the tea leaf to spread it out evenly in the bamboo tray. This is an extremely specialized skill. The technique involves shaking the leaf together slightly, then in the instant that the tea leaf leaves the surface of the bamboo tray, rotating the bamboo tray so that the leaf spreads evenly when it falls back down onto the bamboo tray. There are two different methods: the "rocking method (*yao kai*, 搖開)" and the "shaking method (*dou kai*, 抖開)." The "rocking" method is superior.

The rocking method is gentle and involves grabbing the tray and slowly moving it around in circles or back and forth to allow the leaves to separate, influencing the manner and degree to which they oxidize. In the "shaking" *kai qing* method, as the tea leaf is scooped into the bamboo tray, the *kai qing* master tilts the bamboo tray and shakes it back and forth with both hands, thus spreading out the leaf. This takes great skill and many decades to truly master. The skill in tea-making is a marvel to behold!

Withering Racks

Once the leaf has been spread out, it is handed off to the "tea helpers" who carry the bamboo trays to the sun-drying racks. The number of workers needed for this task is decided based on the length of the drying racks and the number of bamboo trays. After the bamboo trays are brought over to the edge of the drying racks, the last person in the process places them on the racks.

The bamboo trays are lined up neatly for sun-drying, with four bamboo trays per row. The later bamboo trays push the first ones into place. If any of the bamboo trays get out of place, they are pushed back in using a "tea hook (青鈎, *qing gou*)."

To judge whether the whole "tipping out the leaf" or "*dao qing*" phase has been carried out for long enough, it's common to observe whether the pointed tips of the tea shoots and the first leaf have begun to droop, as well as whether the surfaces of the leaves have lost their luster. It can also be judged by feeling the leaf with one's hands.

The bamboo trays are gathered up using the tea hook and stacked together in piles of four. Then they are put in pairs and the contents of the two bamboo trays are combined into one before being placed back on the drying rack and sun-dried for a while longer. The reason for mixing the leaves like this is to make sure they are not spread too thinly.

If the piles are too thin, the leaves could get scorched. It also helps expose any leaves that haven't yet had direct sunlight, to ensure that the leaf is sun-dried evenly. This technique of combining the leaves from two bamboo trays appears later during the *zuo qing* phase as well as during this *dao qing* phase; however, the goal is different each time.

After sun-drying for a while longer, the tea leaf must be gathered up and will then be transferred to airing racks in a corridor, where it will be spread out to air. The purpose of this is to allow the heat from the sun to dissipate.

To save time while transporting the leaf into the corridor, the bamboo trays are carried in stacks of two or three, separating each bamboo tray with the fingers to avoid squashing the tea leaves.

The Zuo Qing Room

The tea leaf is left to dry for a while in the airing corridor. Once the heat has dissipated, the leaf is transferred to racks in the *zuo qing* (做青) room. The "*zuo qing*" or "making the leaf" phase is a key element in bringing out the outstanding qualities of Cliff Tea, developing its wonderful color, flavor and fragrance and its famed "green leaves with red edges." The *zuo qing* room is essentially the place where indoor withering occurs. The principles of the *zuo qing* process are as follows: the number of times that the leaf is shaken should be low at first and high towards the end; the force used on the leaf should be light at first and stronger towards the end; and the time between repetitions should be short at first and longer towards the end. It's also very important to adapt the process based on factors such as the tea varietal, weather and observable state of changes in the leaf. There's a saying for this that goes: "Watch the weather while 'making' the leaf; watch the leaf while 'making' the leaf (看天做青, 看青做青)."

For this first step, the leaves only need to be lightly shaken a few times; they can be shaken more later according to the circumstances. During this shaking process, known as "*yao qing* (摇青)," the tea worker takes hold of the bamboo tray with both hands and rocks it, alternating which side goes up and down. This process causes the leaves to curl into spiral shapes, bumping the tea leaves into each other to promote water loss. This effect is even stronger with the later repetitions of this shaking technique. Sometimes the leaves from two trays are then combined into one.

Once the leaves from two bamboo trays have been combined into one, they are shaken slightly longer and more vigorously before being placed on the airing rack. The purpose of this is to regulate the speed of water loss.

Using the Hands

"Using the hands," or "*zuo shou* (做手)," is a technique only employed if the changes and water loss in the tea leaf are progressing relatively slowly. This technique involves placing one side of the bamboo tray against the airing rack and holding it in place with one's stomach, then gently taking a handful of leaves in each hand and lightly bumping the handfuls into each other before gathering the leaves together. This helps promote water loss.

About two to four hours after combining "two into one," the contents of the bamboo trays are combined again. This time, the leaf may be combined from three bamboo trays into two, or from four into three. It is then shaken once more before being placed back on the airing racks.

Surrounding the Water

This technique is sometimes employed if the tea leaf is losing moisture too quickly or has already lost too much. After shaking the leaves slightly, they are gathered into a pile with a concave indentation, which controls the speed of water loss.

Driving Out the Water

This technique may be employed if the water loss is insufficient or too slow. The tea leaf is spread out evenly on the bamboo tray to promote water loss.

Repeat the Shaking

The tea leaf has now reached the later stages of processing. Before progressing to firing and rolling, the leaf undergoes one more shaking phase, adapted to the current state of the leaf.

Before firing, the tea leaf must be tipped back into a large basket, the "tea lake" or "*cha hu* (茶湖)," and tossed to mix it. It is then heaped and left to sit for a while—the time varies depending on the current progress of the leaf. The goal of this step is to further encourage the leaf to oxidize evenly.

The leaf piled in the *cha hu* is then packed into soft baskets. Sometimes it is pressed down to pack it more tightly. It generally takes about four to six baskets to pack one batch of tea, and the process takes eight to twelve hours. This varies depending on the current progress of the leaf. Once the leaf is packed into baskets, the *daishan* carries it on his shoulders to the firing and rolling room.

茶 ***Shaking the tea is one of many, many tea skills that looks so easy when a master does it, but it is actually very hard. When you try it, you find it is hard to keep the leaves on the tray, let alone dance them as gracefully as the masters do so effortlessly. Proper shaking bruises the leaves only on the edges, which creates a red ring around the leaf. This is only possible, however, with traditional hand-processing, as the machines tumble the leaves and bruise them randomly.***

茶 *The withering and shaking is really the step that defines oolong production. The story goes that a man named "Black Dragon (Oolong, 烏龍)" was lazy and slept all day, but he was a good hunter. He was called "Oolong" because his skin was dark from sleeping in the sun while others picked tea. After some time, his father finally had enough of his laziness and told Oolong to fill his basket that day or not to come home at all. Oolong was clever, and filled his basket very fast, so that he would have time for a nap. He sat down, but then noticed a rabbit and got up to give chase, forgetting to unstrap his tea basket. As he ran, the tea bounced all around and flew out of his basket. When he got home, his father didn't want to hear his excuses and sent him to the hills. Later, the village elders came to Oolong's house to ask his father about that day's "magic tea," which was the best they had ever had. They went to find Oolong to ask him where he picked the tea, but the garden was one they always picked from. After asking him to recount what happened, the old masters soon figured out that it was the shaking that had changed the tea. They successfully implemented this new method and created a much better, new type of tea that they named "Oolong" after the one who had discovered it. Black Dragon was allowed to come home and probably be as lazy as he wanted, or maybe he changed his ways? Since then, the elders in Black Dragon's village have spent centuries perfecting this method. Master Huang licks his finger and knows that the humidity in one part of the room is too high, bringing in a charcoal brazier to correct it. He smells the tea and knows whether to change the shape of the pile to increase or reduce oxidation and, of course, to read when the leaves are ready for firing. He brings not just sensitivity but joy to the process.*

手工製作

Firing & Rolling 殺青和揉捻

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

When the process is done in the traditional way—by hand in a large wok—the person frying must know when the leaves are finished by touch alone. It takes many years of practice before a student is allowed near the best quality teas. The fingers must remain firmly closed so that no leaves get caught between them. The leaves are pushed to the center and then stirred outwards again. If the leaves are slightly damp, the person frying will gently pull them up from the center and drop them to evaporate any excess moisture. The leaves must be pulled because they are too hot to reach under. Besides the heat and moisture, a lot of things are going on during this stage. The person frying must concentrate. A lot depends on this phase of the process.

The shaping of the leaves must happen immediately after frying. The temperature mustn't decrease at all. This often requires the cooperation of more than one worker. The leaves are quickly carried to bamboo trays that have raised ribs woven into them. The shaping (*rou nian,* 揉捻) is done with rolling, kneading motions and is done for several reasons. Firstly, it causes the leaves to dry in a curled shape that is both pleasing and saves on packaging space. More importantly, rubbing the leaves across the bamboo ribs bruises the cellular structure of the leaves. The combination of the curled shape and bruised structure will cause the leaves to slowly release their essential oils, flavors and aromas when they are steeped. The bruising also changes the way in which the tea will oxidize during the rest of production as well as the way it will age.

Firing

The purpose of firing the tea leaf is for the high temperature to deactivate the enzymes in the tea, to finish the process of moisture evaporation and "fix" the quality of the leaf produced by the *zuo qing* process. The goal of rolling is to bring the leaf juices, which contain active elements, to the surface of the leaf, and to roll each leaf into a twisted strip. The firing and rolling phases employ a line production method, with many quick, continuously repeated movements. Both phases involve strenuous physical labor—the tea leaf must be fired by hand over a very hot wok and then rolled using a lot of physical strength. Again, as we repeated often in this section because it is so important, the following description is only with regards to traditional hand-processing. Nowadays, most of this is done with machines, requiring different skills and producing a vastly inferior leaf. There is skill and tradition in the hand.

First, the kindling is fed into the stove with a pitchfork. The plant used for kindling is the *Dicranopteris dichotoma* fern, known as "*guimeng* (規蒙)" and also called "wolf's clothing (*langyi*, 狼衣)" by locals. Its formal name in Chinese is "*mang qi gu* (芒萁骨)." Next, "firewood" is added—in other words, branches from trees or bushes. The wok must be heated until it turns red and then blue.

The wok must be scrubbed to remove any rust and tea stains, to prevent the tea leaf from burning. It also helps raise the temperature of the wok. The leaf is put into the wok in small batches of between half a kilogram and one kilogram. The tea worker presses the tea leaves down by hand, moves them toward himself, then flips them over. This movement is repeated continuously. The firing time is decided based on how young the leaf is, the tea varietal and the water content.

During wok-firing, the hands must be pressed together side by side to avoid dropping any leaves, so that the leaf is fired evenly. The *daishan* often calls out "clench your buttocks!" to the tea-firing workers—a phrase that is a humorous take on this action of pressing the hands together. The workers must also be very careful not to burn their hands on the hot iron wok. There are two firing methods:

The Suspended-Hand Firing Method (吊手炒法)

In this method, one hand grasps some of the tea leaf and then drops it from a height of around one foot. The goal is to allow moisture from the leaf to evaporate. This method is used for leaf that has not yet lost enough of its moisture content.

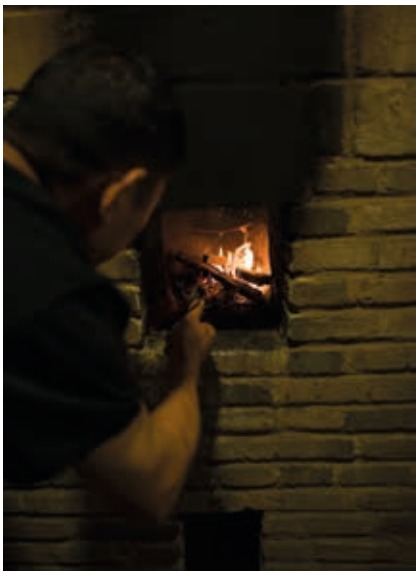
The Closed-Hand Firing Method (閉手炒法)

This method involves pressing quite firmly down on the pile of leaves with both hands, dragging it back and then turning it over. This prevents excessive moisture loss, and is usually used for leaf that has already lost too much moisture content.

Rolling

The usual signs that the leaf is ready to be removed from the wok are that it feels soft and slightly sticky to the touch, and it gives off white steam. A tea-rolling worker holds the tea-rolling tray up to the stovetop, and the firing master quickly pushes the leaf into the rolling tray, sweeping it with a small brush in his right hand and holding the leaf in place with his left. Sometimes he will move the leaf with both hands instead, then use the small brush to sweep any remaining leaves out of the wok.

After collecting the leaf from the wok, the tea-roller puts the bamboo tray full of tea leaf on the rolling table, then quickly divides half the leaf into another bamboo tray for another tea-roller. So it takes two workers to roll one



The Suspended-Hand Firing Method

The Closed-Hand Firing Method

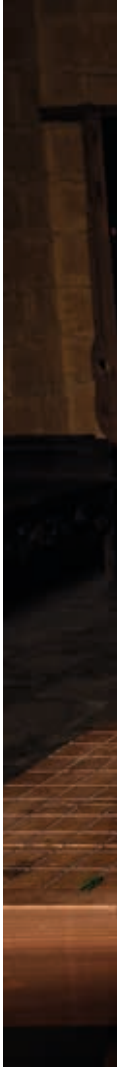
wokful of tea leaf. The workers must pay careful attention to the placement of the bamboo tray—they must rotate it so that the lines of the weave run diagonal to them, rather than horizontal-vertical. This is what gives the rolled leaves their signature appearance, with their proverbial "dragonfly heads, snail tails and frog-skin backs (蜻蜓頭, 田螺尾, 蛙皮背)." Keeping the bamboo tray in the correct position requires quick and frequent adjustments.

The tea-rollers stand with their legs apart and knees bent, leaning forward. They press down on the leaf with the left hand, then use the right palm to roll the leaf forward and toward the left. When the leaf reaches the far edge of the rolling tray, the right hand is placed in front of the left and then the leaf is gently pulled back again. Then the left palm presses down and rolls the tea forward and toward the right. The process continues like this, with the kneading motion repeatedly alternating from left to right until the tea leaves have rolled into twisted strips. The timing must be coordinated with the firing time to maintain a steady production flow.

The leaf has now rolled up into a ball and needs to be shaken apart. The rolling tray is also picked up and thwacked forcefully on the rolling table to free any leaves that have become stuck on the rolling tray. This is an exciting part of the process!

After the leaf is shaken apart, the contents of two trays are combined back into one before being roasted or carried back for re-firing. Sometimes, the leaf needs a re-firing. This is commonly known as "passing through the red wok." The firing master scatters the leaves in the wok, presses them down flat with both hands, pulls them towards him, then tosses them away from him to flip them, much like frying a pancake. This is repeated several times. The main goal of this is to further heat the leaves in preparation for re-rolling. After re-firing, the curled-up tea leaves—often referred to as *"cha suo* (茶索)" or "tea strings"—are swept back into the rolling tray with a small brush. After being removed from the wok, the curled-up leaves are once more divided into two bamboo trays, and the rolling phase is repeated. This completes the "double-firing, double-rolling" technique that is unique to Cliff Tea processing. This is only done for certain leaves, though.

After re-rolling, loosening the leaf, tapping the rolling tray and combining the contents of two trays, the trays full of rolled leaf are passed into the roasting room through the "*mamen* (馬門)," or "horse gate." This is a type of long, narrow horizontal window. It's designed to save time by passing the rolled tea directly to the workers inside the roasting room, where it will be roasted to continue evaporating the moisture.



茶 Watching two generations of masters work together, the extra decades of mastery and skill are obvious. Lao Die moves differently. His two sons flex their muscles and move the tea across the bamboo tray with force, whereas the great master is soft and gentle. You can see the Qi flow up into his body from the ground, like tai chi. His movements are effortless, as if the tea is processing itself. Watching him feel the wok to know when the temperature is right, at peace with his eyes closed, the graceful dance of the leaves firing at such intense heat and then the movement to the table and the thwack when they smack the trays down (shown above) to shake the leaves up is like a gorgeous ballet and fills your heart with gratitude for the centuries of heritage and skill handed down to us Chajin. There is a great force of culture, time and devotion in every pot of tea that brings a tear to the eye.

Roasting & Sorting 烘焙和分級

When the tea is shaped properly, it is ready to be roasted (*hong bei,* 烘焙). Smaller factories that produce Wuyi tea by hand do not have time to complete the roasting during the harvest season. There isn't enough time to complete all the other steps and roasting on the same day. For that reason, only the best teas will be roasted start to finish on the same day. The greater bulk of the tea will go through a short initial roasting, called "*zou shui bei* (走水焙)," or "temporary roasting," which stops the oxidation process and puts the tea "on hold" for a short time. It is then carefully stored until all the tea has been gathered for that season. This could take days, or even weeks, depending on the factory and farm. When all the tea has been picked and processed, it is roasted. The second roasting, referred to as "*zhu bei* (足焙)" or "completing the roasting," is then conducted under the supervision of the masters. All of the laborers cooperate in this longer roast, which requires constant supervision. Any stage of the process can damage the quality of a tea, but the roasting is perhaps more evident than the other stages. A poor roasting is immediately noticeable in the first sip.

To roast the teas, compact charcoal is placed in wells. Rice ash is used to cover the coals, reducing the temperature to inhibit any flame. The roasting must be through heat alone, as a flame would cook the tea. The tea is stirred and spread out regularly throughout the roast.

The teas are sorted on large tables by masters. The first three leaves, which are of higher quality, are separated into piles. The sorting is very time consuming and done very carefully to maximize the amount of higher-grade leaves for the market. Sometimes a winnower is used to remove dust particles from the lower quality leaves. Because the process takes a long time, the leaves will again be exposed to moisture in the air. For that reason, when the sorting is finished, the leaves are then roasted again for a very quick spell. This dries them out. The best Wuyi teas are packaged while they are still hot from this final, swift roasting.

Preparing for the Roast

Preparing the charcoal pits for the first drying roast (*zou shui bei*) must be completed before the rolling phase begins, and involves exposure to a lot of heat, dust and ash. Roasting the tea over a wood charcoal fire is what produces its distinctive flavor. The first roast involves the most work. First, the wood charcoal is brought to the roasting room. Then, any charcoal "stubs" (pieces of firewood that have not completely burned through) are picked out, to prevent their smoke from contaminating the tea leaves.

At this point, the fire pits will still contain ash and leftover charcoal fragments from the previous use. Before the next roast begins, they must be scraped clean.

When starting afresh for the first roast, kindling is needed to help the charcoal catch alight more quickly. To this end, some small pieces of bamboo are placed into the fire pit first and set alight. In the following days, there's no need to use kindling when setting up for the first roast of the day. It is sufficient to simply scrape off the top layer of ash from the day before and place the charcoal directly on the embers, where it will ignite. Once the kindling has been lit, the charcoal is piled on top and ignites quickly.

When all the charcoal has fully ignited and begun glowing red, the roasting can begin. Sometimes, the charcoal is added in two batches—once the first batch is burning it is broken into pieces; then the second batch is added and the process is repeated. A tea worker is present at all times to watch the fire, raking the coals from time to time and making sure it doesn't burn out of control.

Once the charcoal is all burning, it is broken into small pieces with a shovel. The tea worker first uses the shovel to cut the charcoal into short sections, then hits it with the flat part of the shovel to smash it into fragments. The charcoal fragments are then gathered up from the edges of the fire pit with a scraper. They are piled into a tower shape and packed solid.

After the charcoal is smashed and piled up, there are still small gaps left between the charcoal fragments. To remedy this, crushed charcoal is added to smooth out the surface and ensure the fire burns evenly. This type of fire is used especially for the tea-roasting process.

Zou Shui Bei

The purpose of roasting the tea leaf post-rolling is to further reduce the moisture content, so that the leaf ends up half dry. During this process, the roasting frames must be constantly moved along, which involves a lot of walking around on the part of the tea roasters. Because of this, the process is also known as "*zou shui bei* (走水焙)," literally "roasting to walk out the water."

The tea roasters take the trays of tea leaf when they are passed in through the *mamen* (馬門, the window between tea rooms for passing bamboo trays). Because the roasting process requires a lot of stooping down and running around, it was traditionally done by child workers. After bringing in the rolled leaf, the tea workers immediately tip it onto the roasting bamboo trays which are installed in the roasting frame. As the open fires are very hot, the frames of the roasting bamboo trays are first soaked in water for a while to make sure the bamboo trays don't come apart from their frames. The rolled leaf is quickly spread out flat by hand on the roasting bamboo tray.

After spreading out the leaf, the tea roasters must quickly transfer the roasting frames to the fire pits. It's very important that the frame does not come into contact with the fire, to avoid burning the frame and affecting the temperature of the fire. During this step, the tea worker also places an empty roasting frame to one side, ready for the next round of roasting. Everything happens in a coordinated way.

This step is carried out while waiting for the next batch of tea leaf to arrive. It involves removing the frame with the roasting tea and putting it down on a tray. The leaf is then tossed and spread out again before being roasted some more. This is done to make sure the leaf is roasted evenly.

After tossing the leaf, the tea worker moves the roasting frame along one place, leaving the fire pit empty for the next frame of tea that will soon arrive. After each frame full of tea leaf has been moved all the way to the end, it is removed and the leaf is tipped into a *cha hu* (茶湖, large basket, literally, "tea lake," *shown above*).

Once a certain amount of tea leaf has collected in the *cha hu*, the tea roasting master winnows the semi-dried tea to remove broken leaf fragments, old leaves and so on. This also separates the leaves, making them easier to spread out for air-drying.

After winnowing, the leaf is spread out on bamboo trays and placed on airing racks. These are located outside the roasting room so the tea doesn't overheat. Each bamboo tray must contain about the same amount of leaf, spread to the same depth. The next day, female tea workers will hand-sort the leaf.

Sorting

The sorting process involves picking out the stems from the tea leaf so that they don't absorb any of the beneficial substances from the leaf. During the later processing stages, other debris such as coarse leaves, smaller stems and broken leaves will be removed too. This initial rough sort involves picking out the tea stems, old leaves (黃片, *huang pian*) and any other debris from the tea. This dust is often kept by the farmer to drink at home and share with neighbors.

After being sorted by the female tea workers, the leaf is gathered according to varietal and transferred to the roasting frames for roasting. Every evening, the roasted tea leaf is collected and stored. The tea production boss sends a representative, known as the tea collector (*qi cha xiansheng*, 起茶先生), to inspect the tea and make a record of it, then seal it up and transfer it to the warehouse. At the end of the spring harvest season, he will also transport it to the tea houses for further processing.

The large scale that is used to weigh the tea is suspended from the rafters. The tail end of the scale is supported with a rope to ensure that the counterweights don't slide off while weighing the tea and injure anyone's feet. Usually the leaf is weighed in soft baskets, but sometimes it is packed into crates first and then weighed.

After being weighed, the tea is packed into tinfoil-lined crates according to varietal. The crates are then closed and sealed up before being placed into the warehouse. This secondary processing phase is what is referred to today as "refining" (*jing zhi*, 精製). In the past, this was usually carried out at the "tea houses"—the tea shops that would eventually sell the tea. In those days, this secondary or refined processing stage was also called "roasting," and the workers who carried it out were referred to as "tea-roasting masters" or "tea-sifting masters." This process of sifting, winnowing and re-roasting the tea was very complex, requiring great technical skill. The goal of secondary processing is to refine the tea and bring out its unique qualities to best effect—a golden liquor and fine aroma, with a full body and long-lasting aftertaste.

Before secondary processing, the semi-processed tea leaf is sorted into piles. This process is known as "*gui dui* (歸堆)" or "*jian dui* (揀堆)." This generally means gathering the tea into piles or grades of similar varietal and quality to create larger batches for processing and sale. The quality of the leaf is judged by brewing some of it and evaluating the resulting tea liquor.

The next step involves stacking crates of each type of tea together, followed by winnowing, then pouring the leaf all together and tossing to mix it. Sometimes the tea leaf that was to be combined is first spread out layer by layer in a large *cha hu* and tossed to mix it evenly, and the sifting, winnowing, picking out debris and roasting is carried out afterwards. This process is different from the modern method of sorting the tea into piles.

The semi-processed tea is sifted into grades based on leaf size. There are two sifting steps: flat sifting and shaken sifting. There are ten different grades of sieves, with the holes in the weave graduating in size from large to small. The flat sifting step involves holding the bamboo tray level with both hands and rotating it, using each bamboo tray in turn to separate out the successively smaller and finer leaves. Thus the tea is sifted into ten different grades ready for winnowing and picking out any remaining debris. Then, the leaf is combined back together in equal proportions.

The shaken sifting method involves grasping the bottom edges of the bamboo tray with the fingers and gently rotating and shaking the bamboo tray. This allows the fine tea leaves to be sifted out and brings the small, light-colored tea stems to the surface. If simply using the flat sifting method, the stems would fall through the holes in the sieves. Only this combination of gentle turning and shaking allows them to surface and be picked out. Some teas use this shaken sifting method starting from the fourth grade of bamboo tray.

After sifting, the longest and thickest leaves are grasped with both hands and rubbed in a circular motion between the palms to break them into smaller pieces. The pressure must be just right; too much will crush the leaves, yet too little will not be enough to break them. The correct pressure is described as using "living hands," and not crushing the leaves to death. This step is called "*dou shai* (抖篩)" or "*da shai* (搭篩)," and is also referred to in the vernacular as "cutting" the leaf (*qie*, 切).

Next, the tea is winnowed to remove tea dust and broken leaves. This is a different goal than that of the earlier step of winnowing the leaves to distribute the moisture. The winnowing pans used for this step are slightly flexible, so the wrists and belly must work in tandem, constantly adjusting the amount of force used to successfully winnow out all the unwanted material. Winnowing is an alternative to sifting; which method is used depends on the needs of the individual tea.

After sifting and/or winnowing, the leaves are once more hand-sorted by leaf grade to pick out any remaining debris such as small tea stems and yellowed leaves (*huang pian*). This is very meticulous and time-consuming work. Next, the leaf is combined back into larger batches ready for the second roast, also known as "*dun huo* (燉火)" or "stewing over the fire."

It is amazing to wander the streets of Wuyi during production time, as every house you peek into is full of people sorting tea leaves on big tables by hand. They often chat and catch up on village gossip as they sort the tea that we will enjoy this year.

Final Roasting 最終烘焙

A charcoal fire must be specially prepared for this step in the refining process. Similar to the earlier fire-building process, once the wood charcoal has burned through and is smashed into smaller pieces, the small gaps are filled in with crushed charcoal to even out the surface. Then a layer of fine, dry ash is added on top, about one centimeter thick. This regulates the temperature of the fire, producing the desired low-heat slow-roast effect.

The temperature of the fire is tested by touching the back of the hand to the lower part of the roasting frame. Broadly speaking, the temperature is judged to be high if the frame feels very hot and the tea worker has to immediately remove his hand, medium if the frame feels hot but bearable to the touch, and low if the frame doesn't feel hot. But this judgment also depends on each individual person's experience and sensitivity. The temperature must be tested frequently.

If the temperature is too low, some of the ash layer is scraped away with a wooden ash scraper to make it thinner. If the temperature is too hot, an extra layer of ash is added with a special spoon; then the scraper is used to level off the surface and compact the ash.

The goal of the second roast, or "stewing over the fire," is to bring out the best in the tea, so the roasting must be done slowly over a low heat. In the later stages of roasting, a woven lid is sometimes placed on top of the roasting frame to ensure the heat fully penetrates the tea leaves. This prevents the tea from "becoming green again" (developing a grassy or vegetal aroma) once stored, and also makes for a richer-flavored and more patient tea. A tremendous amount of labor, skill and tradition goes into Cliff Tea. This golden-liquored treasure is what all the effort is for!

Tossing the leaf around occasionally in the roasting basket is an important step in the roasting process, as it ensures that the tea is roasted evenly. In the past, there were three methods of doing this. One was to lift the roasting frame down onto a tray, then toss the leaf by hand and spread it out evenly before continuing to roast it. Another method was to pour the tea leaf into a spare roasting frame, then spread it out by hand and continue to roast it. The third method was to pour the leaf into a soft basket, toss the leaf by lifting alternate sides of the basket, then pour it back into the roasting frame, spread it out and continue roasting it. This third method was the most commonly used; each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

During roasting, the top layer of crushed charcoal that covers the fire pit slowly burns away into ash, gradually reducing the height of the coals and the heat of the fire. So, the roasting master must scrape the ash and charcoal away from the edges of the fire pit with a scraper, compacting them in the middle to form a taller pile. He then uses the wooden ash scraper to flatten the surface of the pile before covering it with a fine layer of ash to raise the temperature. In the past, one round of roasting could take four or five days from start to finish, since the fire pits of the time were very small.

The finished tea is packed into rectangular crates lined with aluminum foil or tin. Fine bamboo paper printed with the factory number and the name of the tea is stuck onto the outside of the boxes. Then, the boxes are covered with a thick layer of tung oil and bound up with bamboo strips before being shipped out. The crates were traditionally transported using wooden boats or bamboo rafts.

傳說 Legends of Cliff Tea

The White Cockscomb

白雞冠

Long ago, in the small village near Wu Yuan Jian, there was a small family of tea farmers named Huang. They lived simple lives, like all the others in the village, rising with the sun to walk up and down the twisted, scraggly trails to pick tea, then carry it back to the processing center the village shared—heavy baskets wearing at their shoulders as they trekked through the late morning sun. But there was no rest when they got home. The tea had to be withered all day, then shaken, fired, rolled and roasted lightly before they could catch a small nap and start again. Even the children helped, carrying baskets, withering tea and learning how to pick, fire, roll and other skills necessary to craft a fine tea.

All the tea would be made in a two-week period, where the days were very long and no one in the village slept a wink. Once the tea was all dried, there would be festivities, prayers and rituals almost as large as the first day of picking, followed by a couple of weeks of rest. Then, the tea would have to be sorted, roasted for days over carefully-controlled charcoal, sorted again and then carried to market to be sold. Throughout the rest of the year, the family would farm vegetables and rice, working as hard as other farmers and only pausing to pray to the gods of the soil, the land, the sky, their ancestors and, of course, to pray to the god of tea.

One year, the Huang family was blessed: One of their hens hatched the most beautiful rooster the village had ever seen. His bright white plumage was gorgeous, and he strutted with confidence from a very early age. Many of the other villages said it was a powerful omen for the family and would lead to good fortune. They began planning for the rooster to breed throughout the village. They named him Kai Ji.

Over the years, no rooster would be as handsome, not even Kai Ji's own offspring. He soon became an emblem of the Huangs' household, and even the village itself. As he grew, he only became more and more handsome. It was strange to marvel over something so simple as a rooster in a farm village that had always been home to chickens, but Kai Ji was special. His bright white and yellow plumes, with hints of blue, made him stand out even from a great distance. And he crowed at dawn loud enough to be heard from neighboring villages, which is, in part, why he became the mascot for Wu Yuan Jian. Everyone for miles and miles knew of the great rooster!

The Huangs grew to love Kai Ji. Their children adored him, proud of the status he brought the family. In poor villages, a little bit goes a long way… Kai Ji roamed freely, mating not only with the Huangs' hens, but also others. Even the neighbors' roosters somehow knew he was the alpha. And, of course, his hens were very well-behaved, producing more eggs than the other houses in Wu Yuan Jia. He could come and go into the house freely as well and would often come inside for breakfast and dinner to be rewarded with table scraps, which helped him grow in strength and size. Kai Ji particularly adored the children and would follow them everywhere. Sometimes, he would even come with them to the tea fields to pick, walking all the way over the hill and around the trail to the nearest wild garden.

One morning, in the Year of the Rooster, of course, and at the height of the tea season, Kai Ji followed the Huangs to the nearby tea garden to pick at dawn. The whole family was going since it was the only the second day of harvest. Prayers had just been said the day before—a whole day's worth including the monks from the nearby temple and everyone in the village. For the first week, every man,

woman and child in the village would reverently and silently march to the tea fields to do their part, even second uncle's wife who had just given birth to a healthy, strapping baby boy the week previous—the first baby of the generation, and therefore extra precious to the whole family.

Second uncle's wife unstrapped the young baby Huang from her back and laid him on the grass near the other children so she could help the others pick some tea, though it was necessary for her to go at a slower pace. She enjoyed the mist and the quiet of the tea fields, being around her family in silence. It was a peaceful juxtaposition to the bustle of the large family house, and she breathed deeply, feeling a part of Nature and her people.

High above a mother eagle was looking down from a different struggle. She was starving, and so were her precious babies, perched high above in the cleft of a rocky peak. If she didn't find food soon, they would all perish… With her incredible eyes, she saw the children run off to play in the stream, leaving the defenseless baby alone. She was determined to eat or be killed for her children, even though a part of her knew that humans were dangerous. She swooped nonetheless…

As the eagle came down, the only one left nearby stood over the baby like a proud knight errant. Kai Ji puffed his chest and fearlessly tumbled right into large eagle. The two birds rolled and squawked—claws and feathers flying in a whirlwind of dust and rage. By the time all the villagers stopped and came to see what was happening, the fight was over. The eagle wanted no more of this fight. She was wounded badly, and would have to find some other food. Kai Ji lay on his side, bravely dying without a cry or moan.

The mother had seen what had happened and knew of Kai Ji's bravery. The old rooster had saved her baby selflessly. She held him and cried as he breathed his last in her arms…

The Huangs spent a large portion of their tea proceeds that year to buy the supplies needed for a human funeral. They wore black, tore their hair, mourned and grieved. And when the monks heard the story of the "bodhisattva chicken," they agreed to chant and pray over the old rooster for forty-nine days. He was buried in a special grave near the tea garden where he had performed his final and most spectacular deed: defeating an eagle and defending his home and people. What a rooster!

The next year, when the Huangs had said the year's harvest prayers and came back to the garden to pick tea, two new babies in tow, along with young Rong Ji, which means "Glorious Rooster," who all the monks and villagers had marveled over since he had been born in the year of the rooster and was then saved by the most famous rooster the world had ever known. He had a bright future. When they arrived at the tea garden, they were shocked to see the sprout of a healthy tea tree coming out from the exact spot where Kai Ji's grave stood, dozens of meters from the nearest tea trees.

As the tree grew, as strong and powerful as the spirit it was born from, Bai Ji Guan opened in plumage as glorious as Kai Ji's, with bright white buds that shone from a distance, as his crow had once been heard into the neighboring valleys. The highest honor, the most beloved of rebirths, had been decreed by Heaven, and the spirit of Kai Ji and his heroic sacrifice would live on in the spirit and prayers of the people of Wuyi evermore…

Rock Bones & Floral Fragrance

岩骨花香

茶人: *Tsai Yizhe* (蔡奕哲)

Master Tsai Yizhe is so important to our Center and all we do. Not only is he a great tea teacher and brother, but he helps this project in countless ways: guiding our annual trips, helping us find ecologically sound tea, and helping to make the world a better place through tea. He is also a great lover of Wuyi Cliff Tea, and himself protects several gardens in the area through his Tea Mountain Preservation Society (茶山保育協會). We couldn't publish an Extended Edition on Wuyi Cliff Tea without a contribution from his brush!

Every year when the spring tea harvest season arrives, I pay a visit to the original Mount Wuyi tea mountain. I work alongside the tea farmers, and together we witness the birth of the new tea. Every time I'm on the road to Wuyi, my heart begins to pound with excitement. There are a few reasons why I look forward to this journey so much. One big one is the unique landscapes of Mount Wuyi: mountain chains and steep ravines crisscross the landscape, the Jiuqu stream swirling and gushing between them, tall mountain ranges raising a natural barrier on all sides. Then there's the weather: a gentle climate with mild winters and pleasantly fresh summers, abundant rainfall, comparatively little sun and no harsh winds; a place that "distills the essential grace of mountains and rivers" and enjoys a reputation as "the finest beauty in the southeast." This is a brief picture of Mount Wuyi. Yet, this Heaven-sent natural environment is only one part of the region's visual appeal. There's another, very important one: tea. This wonderful tea, with its "rock bone and floral fragrance," makes any trip to Mount Wuyi a journey of boundless joy.

In *Writings from the Elegant Hall*: Thoughts on Tea, Mr. Lian Heng (連橫) writes that "the pot must be Meng Chen; the cups must be Ruo Shen; the tea must be Wuyi." Between the rocky valleys and secluded mountain streams, the tea farmers make good use of cracks and crevices in the rock, using the craggy boulders on the riverbanks to build "bonsai-style" tea gardens, creating rocky "pots" for their tea plants. This creates a unique landscape, where "tea grows on every cliff; not a single cliff is without its tea." This special knack for growing on craggy cliffs gives Wuyi tea its name: "Cliff Tea," or "*Yancha* (岩茶)." The Tang Dynasty (618–907) tea saint Lu Yu writes in the *Tea Sutra* (茶經, Cha Jing) that "tea grows best in eroded, rocky ground, while loose and gravelly soil is the second best, and yellow earth is the least ideal, bearing little yield." The first part of this description could have been written specifically about Mount Wuyi, with its cinnabar-red cliffs and jade-green water, and its rocky, gravelly soil. These natural conditions imbue Wuyi Cliff Tea with its distinctive style. The features of the natural environment—its dense fog and abundant rain, its peaceful streams and flowing springs, its towering peaks and deep ravines, its sheer cliffs and craggy precipices—all contribute to the great variety of different Wuyi Cliff Tea plants, each with their distinct quality, unique appearance and individual flavor.

A good-quality Wuyi Cliff Tea from the original mountain is described as having "rock bone and floral fragrance (*yan gu hua xiang,* 岩骨花香)." This reputation isn't fabricated; this "rock bone" or "*yan gu*" is an important aspect of Cliff Tea. It is also commonly described using the epithet *yan yun* (岩韻), literally "rock rhyme" or "rock charm." This "rock charm" is a sort of very rich, mellow taste sensation, with a flavor that stays in the mouth and at the back of the tongue, leaving a pleasant lingering aftertaste.

Every year, right after tasting the delightful freshness of Mingqian (明前, pre-rains) green tea, I immediately start looking forward to the exquisite charm of Wuyi Cliff Tea. Every visit to Wuyi is brimming with pleasant surprises. At one point in the past, my daily tea-drinking left me feeling unwell, with a dry mouth and tongue, and even stomach pain; it wasn't until I came into contact with naturally grown tea that I experienced the flavor of a truly clean, pure tea. The mountains and landscapes of the Mount Wuyi Nature Reserve have nurtured the natural spirit of Cliff Tea; this, along with the fact that we Taiwanese people largely inherited our tea-drinking habits and tastes from Fujian, was enough to make me jump at the chance to help protect Wuyi tea's special "rock charm" using natural farming methods.

In my search for an ecologically grown, traditionally processed tea with no harmful health effects, I traveled far and wide, wearily climbing many a remote tea mountain. Along the way, I collected many tales to tell; the wonderful memories of the journey will forever linger in my mind, just as the taste of a good Wuyi Cliff Tea lingers on the tongue. I still remember the year when I first visited Mount Wuyi, during the spring harvest, following the tea farmers up the mountain. I remember climbing up with my whole body balanced on a small ledge only big enough to plant my toes, while up ahead the nimble tea farmers casually climbed up in two or three strides as if it were nothing at all. Meanwhile, I was cowering in a crevice, breaking out in a cold sweat. Seeing me, they teasingly called out, "Be careful! Lots of people have fallen off the mountain carrying tea up here!" I didn't know whether to laugh or cry! The fact that they were willing to bring someone they'd only just met along on this arduous journey, to trace the origins of oolong and learn from the tea together, really brought me to a realization: loving tea is not just about the sedate tranquility of tea sessions; and learning about tea is not just about hanging around at pretentious cultural gatherings!

Along the way, I tried asking some of the tea farmers from the original Mount Wuyi tea region: "Do you have such-and-such tea varietal here?" At this, they simply scratched their heads and smiled bashfully, asking "What kind of tea is that?" They didn't simply grab the nearest tea and try to pass it off as whatever I'd asked about; to an outsider like myself, coming from a commercial urban environment, it was particularly endearing. After spending more time with them, I came to know how kindhearted, sincere and warm they really were. Little by little I developed a deep affection for this place, and its honest and unassuming people would later become the best work partners I could ask for. Even when I asked them to adopt labor-intensive traditional tea-processing methods, like the *zuo qing* (做青) process that requires each bamboo tray full of tea to be shaken by hand for quite some time, they gladly went along with it.

As time passed and I accompanied the tea growers I was cooperating with on several in-depth visits to the original Mount Wuyi tea mountain, I slowly gained a profound understanding of Cliff Tea. After tasting the wonderful product of all our efforts, with its deeply moving flavor, my heart began to harbor a silent wish for the future. I absolutely had to make sure we protected the tea of Mount Wuyi; that we didn't repeat the same disastrous mistake of over-exploitation that was committed in Taiwan; that natural farming had the chance to take root deep within the mountains of Wuyi. We mustn't let ourselves be bewitched by the lure of economic gain and end up losing everything, as happened in Taiwan; we absolutely must preserve the natural environment of Mount Wuyi, as yet uncontaminated by artificial farming practices, so that it may last for all time.

The opening of the "Song of Paddling Down the Jiuqu" by Zhu Xi (朱熹) has a line that goes, "On the top of Mount Wuyi there dwell immortal spirits; at the foot of the mountain, every bend of the stream is crystal clear." A tea friend of mine once found this passage while reading another poem from somewhere or other: "The waters of Mount Wuyi are the finest under the Heavens, with thirty-six peaks meandering all around. Nine-Bend Stream flows with cloud-water; the mountain light steeps gently into the clear ripples." When regaled by my stories of Mount Wuyi and its boundless beauty, this friend started clamoring to come along on my tea journey too. However, this route wasn't exactly tourist-friendly; not the sort of place suited to gentle exploring, not to mention the fact that the mountain paths are very hard going. Indeed, a one-way trip up the tea mountain proper takes the better part of a day. Three hours into the trek, my friend was ashen-faced and couldn't walk another step, so we had to turn around and go back. The next day, I accompanied the tea farmers up the mountain by myself to check on the tea. After that, I resolved not to rashly give in to people's requests to bring them up the mountain.

Even without situations like my friend's, I can't say my own mountain ascents have all been as smooth as I would like. I remember a certain time three years ago when I was heading up the Wuyi Cliff Tea mountain as usual to supervise the tea processing. While attempting to harvest some hard-to-reach leaves off a Mingcong tea (名叢) parent plant, I made a sadly erroneous assessment of my own age and physical prowess, fancying myself as

some kind of strapping young hero. Imitating the young tea farmers, I dismounted from a cliff in a single flying leap… and ended up dislocating my left knee. It took nearly a year and a half of constant treatment and rehabilitation, and even now I've only partly recuperated. And as for that wonderful tea that I'd planned to store away, my students have honored it with the dubious title of "broken leg tea." There's something about the flavor of this hard earned Wuyi tea, though; perhaps it is somehow imbued with my own struggle and toil, or the care that the tea growers showed in carrying it down from the mountain, or perhaps it is the steep and wondrous environment in which it grows. Whatever the cause, when I sat down to a silent tea session, between my carefully regulated movements and the strict standards and expectations I place on myself, the memories of Wuyi came flooding freely out along with the tea steam, and I felt how deeply deserving Nature is of our reverence. In that moment of self-discipline, I understood my own insignificance; I understood that a good cup of tea is created with the aid of a good heart. When we are serving tea or going about our tea practice, we must learn to treat others with generosity of spirit, to know how to act.

As well as rushing about the mountains making sure the Wuyi tea plants are growing healthy and strong, and marveling at the wonderful flavor that Nature has produced, we would do well to regard all living things with a humble spirit, to be sincere in the care we show to every tea leaf. The tea trees are silent, and nor can the tea liquor speak; yet the essence of Cliff Tea, with its true flavor emerging amid the quiet, is silently speaking volumes from within our cups. Passing on this message of beauty is the responsibility of all of us as Chajin. This responsibility is what urges me to truly serve tea and treat others with a sincere heart, to avoid missteps that might ruin the good intentions of the Tea, might ruin Her teachings—the sutras of Great Nature and Heaven, beyond ourselves—so needed in our modern world.

Sitting alone in my Long Cui Fang (㯳翠坊) tea space on a quiet afternoon, I gaze at the garden out the window; it seems to be offering me a reminder of the beauty of Wuyi Cliff Tea. I unconsciously find myself reciting one of Mr. Lian Heng's tea poems in response: "Green tea is fresh in flavor, red tea is strong; new tea is pale in color, old tea is deep. Wuyi tea plants grow curiously well; be it spring or autumn, they veil every peak."

Having reached this point, all these feelings and memories of Mount Wuyi are flooding back, and I feel as if I could go on writing about them forever. However, perhaps it is better to take out some of last year's wonderful Wuyi Cliff Tea instead, heat some water and slowly sip the brew, savoring the lingering flavor and dreaming of the wonderful surprises that next spring has in store!

Special Offer

Treasure

Four Legendary Cliff Teas

四大名岩茶

This a very special opportunity to get some of the rarest tea on Earth. This is a very special treasure box indeed, and one of the highest quality teas we have ever offered in our fundraisers.

Throughout this issue we have talked a lot about the things that make Wuyi Cliff Tea special. These four teas tick all the boxes and are a splendid chance to learn a lot about fine Cliff Tea and fine tea in general.

First and foremost, these four teas are all *zheng yan*, or "true Cliff Tea." This means they were grown between cliffs in the park, with all the benefits and unique characteristics we discussed, including the mineral rich soil and water, the heat of the cliffs, the mists and much more. You should be able to taste the terroir of these teas when you drink them, especially in later brews, where they manifest the characteristic "rock flavor (*yan wei*, 岩味)." As you steep the tea more, each later steeping will manifest more of the minerals of this special place.

These four teas all come from old trees as well, bringing the heritage of Wuyi Mountain into the tea, as well as the wisdom and power of older trees grown in biodiverse, rich and powerful gardens.

These teas are all completely handmade in the most traditional way. From harvest through withering, from firing to rolling and roasting to sorting and packaging, these teas were all fully hand-processed. The tea itself was selected from authentic old-growth trees inside the park.

These are the "Four Great Names" of Wuyi Cliff Tea: The Emperor's Crimson Robe, Iron Arhat, Golden Water Tortoise and White Cockscomb that we have discussed so often throughout this issue, including the legends that named them. There is no better place to start your journey into Cliff Tea than the most famous of all teas from Wuyi.

Bei Dou Yi Hao is first generation Da Hong Pao, which means direct cuttings from the six ancient trees (perhaps the most famous tea trees on Earth) and transplanted in Bei Dou. This tea tastes like the spritz from an orange. It is the best of all Cliff Tea, and the closest ordinary mortals can come to the original six trees.

Tie Luo Han means "Iron Arhat." An arhat is a Buddhist saint. This tea is strong and bright with translucent Qi. It is said to taste of toasted bamboo. The buds are often purplish and the tea bold and strong.

Shui Jing Gui, or Golden Water Tortoise, is said to taste of osmanthus. It is bright, clear and precious. The Qi is incredibly uplifting—one of the most transcendent of all oolong teas we have tried.

Bai Ji Guan, or White Cockscomb, is one of the most unique tea trees on earth, as the leaves are very yellowish-white until they are fully mature. This tea is one of the most delicious of all types of Cliff Tea, tasting of lychee.

These teas are incredibly delicious with a bright and uplifting Qi. They are wonderful to drink or age, as they will become amazing teas later on and are not so region-sensitive in terms of aging, like puerh or black teas. Aged Cliff Tea is amongst the best tea we have ever tried.

These teas were partially donated through the generosity of our tea brother, Huang Sheng Hui (黄聖輝), whom we have written about in this issue. The cost here is actually incredibly affordable, all things considered. Of course, all the proceeds from this beautiful box of Cliff Tea will go to support our new Tea Center, Light Meets Life. Each box of tea contains 25 grams.

$120 USD + shipping per box


Light Meets Life
光善無量


Light Meets Life
光善無量

The Inscriptions of Wuyi Mt.

武夷山摩崖石刻

茶人: *Huang Xian Geng* (黃賢庚)

For thousands of years, Chinese people have inscribed the rocks, cliffs and mountains with inscriptions that might be considered graffiti if it weren't for the fact that the calligraphy is gorgeous, the words often poetic and mysterious, and that these inscriptions often feel harmonious with the natural environment, as if they had always been there. Translated once more from his incredible book "On Wuyi Tea (武夷茶說)," Master Huang leads us on a tour of some of Wuyi Mountain's most famous inscriptions.

Wuyi's much-admired tea has been immortalized not only in history books, but also in inscriptions carved into the mountain's red and blue-black cliffs. These tea-related inscriptions are rich in significance and profound in meaning, earning them their well-deserved status as cultural treasures. Altogether there are about twenty inscriptions. Most of them are records of events, while five of them are decrees announcing the protection of local tea growers and monks, or prohibiting forced labor, extortion and the forced sale of tea at low prices. In the following pages, we will further explore a few interesting examples of these inscriptions.

First, the "Cha Dong (Tea Cave, 茶洞)." This inscription marks the place where Wuyi tea was first discovered. Legend has it that a long time ago on the mountain, there lived a kind, generous-spirited old man by the name of Ban Xian (半仙), "Half Immortal." One day he was climbing up a cliff to harvest some medicinal plants when he unfortunately slipped and fell from the cliff. While unconscious, he was visited by a celestial being, who fed him some tea leaves and bestowed him with a gift of several tea plants. When he awoke, Ban Xian was clear-headed and his pain had completely disappeared. He looked up and noticed several tall peaks towering above him: Tianyou, Xianyou, Yinping and Jiesun. Together they surrounded this lovely place, with little sun and plenty of shade, gurgling springs and moist soil. So, he planted the tea plants there. They flourished into lush trees that produced very fine tea. Some thoughtful person carved the words "Tea Cave" there; the two characters together are one square meter in area. The name of the engraver and the age of the inscription are unknown, lost in the mists of time.

Second, "Wan Gan Hou (The Marquis of Mature Sweetness, 晚甘侯)." This is the earliest of the elegant names that Wuyi tea is known for. Wuyi tea is believed to date back to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).

Third, Da Hong Pao (大紅袍), which is the king of Wuyi teas. Records indicate that it first appeared during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). It grows on Yun Cliff in Jiu Long Keng, watered year-round by a trickling spring and steadily nourished by the organic matter on the cliff face… Blessed by this Heaven-sent growing environment, it displays a very fine example of the Wuyi *Yancha* "rock taste" or "*yanyun* (岩韵)," and is a true treasure of a tea. In ancient times it was presented as a tribute tea for the emperor's enjoyment. In 1943, the name of the tea was inscribed in a nearby cliff at the behest of the county's head commissioner, Wu Shixian (吳石仙), immortalizing this beloved tea in stone. The myth surrounding this tea was very popular and surrounded it with a fantastical aura, making it seem even more mouth-watering. It was not uncommon for people to try to steal the leaves right off the tea plant. So, to combat this, the authorities had the name of the tea chiseled into the cliff

and stationed a guard there. In the late 20th century, the tea plant varietal was successfully propagated asexually by taking cuttings, thus preserving the unique characteristics of the parent tree. After twenty years of expanding the population, it is now produced in large quantities and enjoys great popularity with consumers.

Fourth, we may look at the carving "Bu Ke Si Yi (Unfathomable, 不可思議)." This engraving is a testament to a long, drawn-out legal dispute regarding Wuyi tea. A long time ago, there was a cluster of tea plants growing at the Tian Xin Temple, on the cliff above Niu Lan Hollow. These plants were short and small, with dark gray trunks and dark green leaves. One day there was a heavy downpour, and the land the tea was growing on crumbled and slid off the cliff down to the hollow below. The tea plants lay at the bottom much like crawling turtles, which is one version of how the tea got its name—Shui Jin Gui, or "Golden Water Tortoise." The Langu Cliff Tea Factory, which owned the land at the bottom, built a protective stone barrier around the tea plants, calling to mind a bonsai landscape in a pot, and tended them carefully. Subsequently, the two parties went to court, at great expense to both, to dispute the rightful ownership of the tea. All of this catapulted Shui Jin Gui tea to sudden fame. At some point a Mr. Shi Teng (施棱) carved the phrase "*bu ke si yi* (不可思議)," meaning "unfathomable" or "unbelievable," into the cliffside to express his bewilderment over this lamentable situation.

Fifth is the inscription "Bu Jian Tian (Lost the Sky, 不見天)." This is the name of a Wuyi tea that is something of a wonder. Next to a small path by the Jiu Long Stream, there is an unusual section of slanted cliff that overhangs at the top, facing east with its back to the west. A mountain spring forms a waterfall here, flowing down the cliff and pooling at the bottom. In ancient times, the mountain people planted some tea plants here. This spot gets very little sun, making it damp, cool and shady, so the tea that grows there is of outstanding quality. Scholars named this tea Bu Jian Tian (不見天), "never sees the sky." Unfortunately the carver of this engraving got carried away and added an extra character component on the left of the *jian* (見), turning it into a different character, *ming* (覭), which means "unclear" or "not clearly visible." The intended meaning of this altered phrase is not well understood.

Sixth is the inscription "Pang Gong Chi Cha Chu (Duke Pang's Tea-Drinking Spot, 龐公吃茶處)." This inscription is a relic of the golden age of Wuyi tea. In 1691, during the 30th reign year of the Qing Emperor Kangxi, the Jianning prefectural magistrate, Pang Kai (龐塏), came to Wuyi on an incognito visit to mingle with the locals. While there, he stopped for a rest at a tea house at the docks on the north bank of the Siqu Stream. Seeing the crowds of travelers arriving at the busy, thriving tea house,

The words "Tea Cave, (far upper right: Cha Dong, 茶洞)" carved on the Yanwo cliff face; the earliest written records of it appeared in the Tang Dynasty. Sun Qiao (孫樵), who passed the highest imperial examination in 855 during the reign of Tang Emperor Xuanzong and held several official positions, once penned a letter accompanying a gift of tea to a Minister Jiao at the Ministry of Justice. In the letter he personifies Wuyi Tea, "from the homeland of cinnabar-red mountains and jade-green waters," with the name "Wan Gan Hou (left, 晚甘侯)," literally "Marquis of Mature Sweetness," likening the tea to a noble and sincere old gentleman. Later, someone carved these three characters into the cliff face at Jiu Long Ke on Mount Wuyi. Since the inscription uses flowing cursive in the style of calligrapher Mi Fu, it is unfortunately sometimes misread as "Wan Gan Ju (晚甘居)," "House of Mature Sweetness." Nonetheless, this does make for an interesting little side story to the inscription. To the right, going clockwise starting with the upper left, we see one of the announcements that were carved in rock, with regulations and taxes, etc., concerning tea picking and production, as discussed in the article. Next is "Cha Dong," as we discussed; beneath that are various poems and names for beautiful places in the park. To the left of that is "Bu Ke Si Yi (不可思議)," meaning "unfathomable" or "unbelievable," which expresses the now slightly-humorous situation described in this article. These pictures are film photographs from Master Huang's book.

he was very pleased, and spontaneously carved an inscription with the words "*Ying Jie Bu Fu* (應接不暇)," "overwhelmed with customers" to mark the occasion. His aide, Lin Han (林翰), and one of the local monks added the phrase "*Le Taishou Zhi Le* (樂太守之樂)," or "joy at the governor's joy," and made another flattering inscription on the red cliffside: "*Pang Gong Chi Cha Chu* (龐公吃茶處)," or "Duke Pang's Tea-Drinking Spot." However, some people have a different explanation for this inscription. In this version, when Duke Pang entered the tea house, it was so busy that the owner had to serve the tea in the order people had arrived, which was of course seen as a slight to the prefectural magistrate. Being a fairly magnanimous man, Duke Pang chose not to make a fuss, but his aide was quite unhappy about it and pointedly wrote the inscription "Pang Gong Chi Cha Chu," "Duke Pang's Tea-Drinking Spot," on the cliffside. When the tea house owner learned that the prefectural magistrate had been at his tea house, he was overcome with regret, and in his panic wrote the other inscription, "*Ying Jie Bu Fu*," "overwhelmed with customers," to express his apologies. Word of this got back to the prefectural magistrate himself, who praised the man's quick-witted response. This anecdote was circulated with gusto among the local people. However, it seems to be a made-up story, as it is inconsistent with historical evidence surrounding the carvings.

The seventh important inscription we will explore in this article is "*Cha Zao* (Tea Stove, 茶灶)." The "Tea Stove" rock stands alone in the middle of Wuqu Stream. It's three meters tall and big enough for several people to sit on top. During the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), Mount Wuyi writer and lecturer Zhu Xi (朱熹) carved a stove into the stone atop the rock, and would often invite his friends to take a boat over to the rock and climb to the top to brew some fine Wuyi tea. Surrounded by the babbling stream and sheltered all around by tall peaks, they would draw the spring water and brew the wonderful leaf that grew from the red cliffs. The little group of scholars sat sipping tea and drinking in the scenery, reciting poems and discussing the Dao; what greater joy could there be than this? Master Zhu wrote a poem commemorating these tea sessions: "The Heavens bequeathed us our stove, surrounded by winding waters. We finish sipping and push off in our boat, the delicate fragrance of tea still drifting in the air." Doesn't it convey a wonderful sense of leisure and tranquility? The two large characters "*Cha Zao* (茶灶)," "Tea Stove" carved in Master Zhu's hand are still clearly visible today.

Eighth is the Zhan Wende (詹文德) inscription: This inscription records the establishment of an imperial tea garden. The Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) imperial court proclaimed Wuyi tea a tribute tea and gave orders for the construction of an imperial tribute tea garden on the south bank of the Siqu. Work commenced in 1302, the 6th year of the Dade period, and the Chong'an country magistrate was put in charge of this large-scale project. In 1306, Tang Dewen (唐德文) carved a record of this enterprise into the cliff face: "County magistrate Sun Yu (孫瑀) offers this tea garden and its tea as a tribute to the palace and every level of the imperial government.

In this, the 10th year of the Dade period, he supervised the production of tea alongside military instructor Zhan Congxiang (詹从祥). Also involved were military instructor Liu Tang (刘棠), Daoist priest Yu Shouzhen (徐守真), and Heng Jiangwen (亨江文) from the palace temple." This inscription provides a historical record of the imperial tea garden's construction.

Ninth are the inscriptions by Wan Yanrui (完颜鋭) et al.: These inscriptions are personal accounts of the production of Wuyi tribute tea by three different people. The first is by Wan Yanrui, a Jurchen who was the Chong'an county magistrate at the time, and reads: "In the spring of the second and third years of the Dade period, I twice oversaw the production of tribute tea upon official orders." The second inscription is by a minor Chong'an official named Lin Xiweng (林錫翁), who wrote: "In the 5th year of the sixty-year cycle during the Yuan Dynasty, the Pucheng County *Daluhuachi* (達魯花赤, local Mongolian commander) named Bei Luo (孛羅, a Chinese transliteration of the Mongolian name "Bolod"), together with local Chong'an official Lin Xiweng, oversaw the production of tea on official orders." The third inscription is by Lin Junjin (林君晉), an official aide to the Chong'an county magistrate. It reads: "In the second month of spring in the 6th year of the Dade period, the harvesting of tribute tea was overseen by official Zhu Anmin (朱安民) and the county *Daluhuachi* Tulugh Buqa (Tu Lu Bu Hua, 禿魯不花)." These three carvings are all records by officials who visited Wuyi to supervise the production of tribute tea. They also give an insight into the importance that the imperial household of the Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty placed on tribute tea, as Mongolian officials were sent in person to oversee its production.

The tenth important inscription I would like to mention is "Ban Tian Yao (Belt of Heaven, 半天腰)." This was an erroneous tea name that eventually became accepted as the norm. Ban Tian Yao tea originally grew on the third peak of the Sanhua ("Three Flower") Peaks, on the south side of Jiu Long Ke. The terrain here is steep and very difficult to climb. Legend has it that this tea owes its existence to the high-flying sparrow hawk, or *yaozi* (鷂子); it's said that these birds dropped the tea seeds here, and they grew into plants that produced excellent tea. So, the tea's original name was "Ban Tian Yao (半天鷂)," or "Sparrow Hawk Halfway to the Sky." In ancient times, two tea factories entered a legal dispute over the ownership of this tea, squandering a lot of resources on the case. Later, someone changed the third character in the name of the tea to a different one with the same basic pronunciation, *"yao* (妖)," transforming the name to "Demon Halfway to the Sky," perhaps in allusion to these unhappy goings-on. Later, someone changed it again to yet another "*yao* (夭)," which can mean "tender" or "to die prematurely." It seems that this person was somewhat lacking in culture—either because they simply confused the two characters 夭 and 妖, or because they were intentionally wishing an early demise on any attempts to make a successful business of the tea. Another version, "半天摇," changed the meaning to "Shaking Halfway to the Sky" in an apparent description of the tea's precariously high position.

At some point this was changed again to "半天腰," making it "Waist Halfway to the Sky" (aka "Belt of Heaven," *shown on p. 52)*. This was a common local expression that meant "in mid-air." Although this version is perhaps a bit mundane, it also proved quite palatable, and it is this version that became widespread and is now considered standard.

Finally, I would like to discuss the inscriptions that are announcements prohibiting the forced sale of tea leaf at substandard prices: These were official orders dispatched to protect the interests of the tea producers. Wuyi tea had been growing in popularity all through the Tang (618–907), Song (960–1279), Yuan and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, and by the late Ming and early Qing, it was already famed throughout the world. Because of this, corrupt local government officials and other malevolent parties often enacted forced labor practices, forcing the tea producers to sell their leaf at unfair prices or seizing it with no payment at all. The local monks and tea farmers suffered so many of these grievances that they appealed to the higher authorities. Subsequently, the Fujian Province, Jianning Prefecture and Chong'an County authorities issued five separate warnings announcing that corrupt officials and felons would be punished for these behaviors, to protect the interests of the tea growers.

The county office, in partnership with the monks and tea households, carved these notices on the cliffside at Mount Wuyi in a high-traffic spot where passersby were bound to see it, to warn against these kinds of crimes.

The first inscription is an announcement from the Jianning prefectural office, carved into the cliff at the Jinji settlement in Qiqu. It dates to 1615. The whole inscription measures 2 meters by 5.7 meters, with a height of 4.3 meters. Containing nearly a thousand Chinese characters, it is the longest of the five announcements. It proclaims a joint lawsuit by the monks of Wuyi against the local tyrants for their extortion and forced cut-price tea sales, and announces regulations prohibiting tea levies. This is the earliest known official announcement related to the protection of Mount Wuyi's tea farmers and monks.

The second announcement of this type is located on the "poetry-inscription cliff" at Siqu. An inspector in charge of several districts of Fujian Province by the name of Bai □ Mou (白□某—second character unknown) went to Chong'an County to investigate several occurrences of "corrupt officials and local tyrants colluding in schemes against the locals… These have to do with the purchasing of tea; they are accused of all sorts of wicked ploys, causing harm to the local monks." Subsequently, in 1696, the 35th reign year of Qing Emperor Kangxi, a special notice was issued proclaiming that anyone committing extortion by forcing the sale of tea for less than the commonly accepted price would be "arrested and investigated" and "not treated leniently." It seems clear that this was intended to protect the livelihood of the monks and tea farmers.

Upon seeing this notice from their superiors, the Chong'an County office also issued their own announcement, apparently to confirm that they would be enforcing the new directive. This is the third inscription in the set and is also carved on the poetry cliff at Siqu.

The fourth inscription is carved on Jingu Cliff at the Pinglin Crossing in Siqu. It's another notice protecting the interests of tea growers and monks, this time dating to 1714 (the 53rd reign year of Qing Emperor Kangxi), engraved eighteen years after the previous notice from 1696. The person responsible for this notice was Yang Lin (楊琳), a Fujian Province commander-in-chief and military governor. He announced that all government offices and officials "must be fair and aboveboard when purchasing tea, paying the tea sellers' current price," and that "all who dare to disobey will be found out, arrested and investigated." It's a succinct and effective message.

The fifth of these inscriptions is a stone tablet. It's located in front of the Qinglian Pavilion at Yunwoshi Pond, a place that all visitors must pass by. The tablet is 1.8 meters tall by 0.8 meters wide, and contains a notice from the Jianning government. It dates to 1763, the 28th reign year of the Qing Emperor Qianlong. The contents are a notice reporting the result of a legal dispute brought against a former Chong'an county magistrate by the surname Chai (柴), and various other people, by a group including a monk named Yi Yin (一音) and a Taoist devotee named Zheng Shangtu (鄧上土), regarding a case where the former party had underpaid for some tea. It also includes a decree to local officials stating that "the private purchase of tea at below-market prices is henceforth forbidden" and other such warnings. The tablet also contains two references to Songzhi (松制) tea from Xingcun. One of these states that "it is forbidden for people such as bailiffs and petty officials to force the sale of two teas produced by the Xingcun Tea Factory, Songzhi and Xiaozhong." Songzhi literally means "made with pine," and denoted both a type of tea from Tongmu and the distinctive method used to make it—the tea was roasted over a pinewood fire. This is the earliest known record of a Tongmu tea and its processing method, and has been very helpful to researchers studying the history of Zhengshan Xiaozhong (正山小種, Lapsang Souchong) red tea.

The traces of Wuyi tea culture that can be found in Mount Wuyi's cliffside inscriptions are not only an important feature of the Mount Wuyi UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site, but are also of great significance to the study of Chinese tea. They are worthy of dedicated study and preservation.

茶 *On the Tian You Peak* (天游峰) *of Wuyi Mountain, there is a striking "First Mountain* (第一山)*" inscription, which dates to the Qing Dynasty Daoguang Era (1782-1850). Most authors suggest that it refers to the famous Ming Dynasty traveler Xu Xiake* (徐霞客)*, who praised Tian You Peak in his work "Wuyishan Travel Notes." He said: "It is not by the famed river, but all of Wuyi's beauty is here. This peak should be the first* (其不臨溪而盡武夷之勝,此峰故應第一也)*."*

Voices from the Hut

*In the past, we have opened up to the community a section of the magazine, "Voices from the Hut," allowing all of you some pages to write about your experiences in Tea. Over the years, we have found that these are some of the best and most interesting articles we have ever published. We have therefore decided to include a "Voices from the Hut" section in every issue from now on! Our dear tea brother, Matthew Grohne, has volunteered to edit this section of the magazine. He has a lot of great topics, themes and ideas for future issues and is in need of contributions from the community. (He may have already contacted you about contributing!). So, if you would like to contribute some writing to Global Tea Hut magazine or have an idea for an interesting topic, you can reach Matthew on the Global Tea Hut app (in the "Voices from the Hut" section), on Instagram (**IG: foldedleaves**), or at the email: **voicesfromthehut@gmail.com** We cannot wait to read all the exciting articles to come!*

Life-Changing in Wuyi

茶人: ***Kristina Clark***

It is evening when Wu De, Jaanus and I arrive in Wuyi. We are welcomed at the Huangs' place, called Rui Quan (瑞泉), by Lao Die (老爹) himself, who comes out to greet us happily. He is small, his eyes are bright; it immediately feels right to call him "Grandpa." It is prime picking season, and the evening's rolling session has started. The fragrance of the day's freshly picked tea meeting the heat of the wok fills the night, as does the sound of the nearby bullfrogs. Huang Sheng Hui (黄聖輝) ushers us upstairs, and I am delighted to see the friendship he and Wu De share.

When day breaks, I am stunned to find a view of a flowing stream, local farming beds, fields and mountains right outside my hotel window: Wuyi Mountain! We have woken up very early to attend the "Blessing of the Tea God" ceremony. Sheng Hui is in full command, directing the placement of the altar and the baskets of fruit and candy. Lao Die carefully carries the Tea God statue. I am impressed by the ritual of even this preparation, and that it happens this way year after year. Sheng Hui turns his attention to ordering the tea pickers' baskets to be placed in straight rows; the pickers come and stand beside them. The carriers line up in the back with their bamboo poles and bigger baskets. Sheng Hui is commanding, and not without care. Lao Die begins the ceremony by offering long sticks of incense at the altar, and Sheng Hui leads the prayer and call-and-response of the pickers, praying to the earth and the rains. A long line of firecrackers is set off, and the tea pickers and carriers proceed through the gate, along the road, and into the tea gardens, with us following along.

I am struck by the verdant beauty of this landscape. There are streams and lush green everywhere—mountains and bridges, boulders and tiny flowers. In a quick moment photographing this splendor, we have lost the entire group of tea pickers to a maze of narrow trails. It starts to rain softly, and we decide to head back.

In a tea room with a glass ceiling and walls, nestled in a bamboo grove, I am quite spectacularly introduced to Cliff Tea. Wu De brews steeping after steeping of this elixir. I feel my heart become golden. If there is such a thing as a mind-body connection, the connection has become superfluous. There is no need for this bridge, this conduit. There is only heart-mind-body.

At night the rolling process begins again, and this time the Huangs are permitting Wu De to use some flash equipment for the first time. Sheng Hui charms the camera, firing the leaves in a burst of steam from his wok with a smile on his face. Also a treat for us, three of the Huangs will roll the tea together: Lao Die, Sheng Hui and the second son Huang Sheng Liang (黄聖亮). In perfect unison they roll the steaming balls of tea leaves on bamboo trays, to the left, to the right, in a constant "U" shape. "*Yi, er, san*," *thwak!!!!* They strike their trays to the table, sending the sticky rolled tea jumping into the air to land back in the tray, loosened and ready to be roasted dry over charcoal in the next room. Watching this process has taught me tons about how much skill, craftsmanship and tradition go into making tea—these are twelve generations of tea makers! Watching this has given me a sense of respect for all the tea I drink, and the hard work that goes into it.

The next morning Sheng Hui guides us on a bit of a tour of the park. We visit the pomelo tree that his grandmother planted at the site of their old house which is all but gone, only a few tiles hidden in the foliage remain. He fashions a whistle from a new bamboo shoot, showing us how he and his friends used to communicate in this extensive landscape. A birdsong trills forth, echoing off the cliffs. How clever! He takes us to the "Water Curtain Cave (水簾洞)," where he used to bathe as a child in a pool below the waterfall, before this land was a protected park. We also visit some of the Huangs' tea trees, climbing incredibly steep terraces cut into the rising hills like mountain goats—mountain goats with camera gear. I experience firsthand exactly why this is called "Cliff Tea."

This day we are excited to go on Wu De's favorite hike through the park, along with some of our companions from the recent Global Tea Hut trip. I am at a loss to explain with words the beauty of this magical place to you. I sincerely hope you can begin to get the barest idea from our photos. The land is a play on scale. The cliffs tower so high, sometimes black, sometimes sand-colored, often quite vertical. Step closer and you see tiny little plants and flowers growing on the surfaces, and a spray of sparkling droplets falling from the "fairy waterfalls," as Wu De calls the tinkling kind that only appear after it rains. Nestled in the earth between the mountains are the tea trees. Paths have been made through the stone, or with stones, in a way that completely compliments Nature.

"I am at a loss to explain with words the beauty of this magical place to you. I sincerely hope you can begin to get the barest idea from our photos. The land is a play on scale. The cliffs tower so high, sometimes black, sometimes sand-colored, often quite vertical. Step closer and you see tiny little plants and flowers growing on the surfaces, and a spray of sparkling droplets falling from the 'fairy waterfalls,' as Wu De calls the tinkling kind that only appear after it rains. Nestled in the earth between the mountains are the tea trees..."

In the afternoon, the Bai Ji Guan (白雞冠) has come in from the fields. The leaves are distinctly a fresh, light and yellowish-white. Lao Die helps to weigh the baskets and pour the leaves into trays to dry in the sun.

Firing and rolling again at night, I notice the men are all barefoot inside. It is explained that this is for cleanliness. Although the floor is earthen and dusty, the outside world is not brought in on their shoes. I am given a chance to try rolling myself, and like any skill performed by a master, the ease of it is a deception. The ball of leaves is hot. Strength is required to press downward and roll forward over the ridges of the bamboo tray. Just the right grasp is needed to let the mass ball up and roll, and not get squished down flat. And don't forget the rhythm of the U-shaped path—so difficult! My hands are sticky with the oils and scent of the leaves, which is wonderful for a tea lover.

Streams of clear water trace through the land, sometimes pooling, sometimes rushing through waterfalls big and small. I feel in absolute awe of Nature, and that this land is very old, much older than my mind can grasp. Of course, *Yancha* is what it is, born of this land.

I hope this little story inspires you to realize how special this tea and this land are. I hope to keep the messages of the leaves alive in my heart-mind-body. And I hope someday to drink some Cliff Tea with you!

A Call to Action

As the leaves of this vibrant green tea slowly unfurl in my bowl, I reflect on the history of Global Tea Hut. From a humble black and white "monthly newsletter" to a beautiful full-color magazine and an active worldwide community with members in more than sixty countries—what a journey it has been! As with anything meaningful and worthwhile, the road hasn't always been straight and easy. There have been peaks and valleys, twists and turns, parts uncharted and captivating vistas along the way. But with skillful orientation, challenges can always be turned into growth.

As a reader of Global Tea Hut, you already know that this is much more than just a tea magazine. This project exists to help steward and protect clean, sustainable tea; provide information and inspiration on tea and ceremony; and above all, to support the best free Tea Center in the world, which is open to all. This is a Tea Center you can visit anytime for a day, or to take a course to learn what it means to live a life of Tea, to grow and transform through service.

This year, we have arrived at our biggest challenge yet: Our little Tea Sage Hut in Miaoli, Taiwan, that serves as both the office for this magazine and the Center that houses a living Tea tradition and the brewing methods handed down to us by previous generations, has become too little for us. For the past few years we have operated at, and occasionally beyond, the capacity of our beloved Center, while the number of visitors has steadily increased. The applications for the ten-day courses that we offer have exceeded the spaces available many times over, and it breaks our hearts to not be able to accept even half of the applicants. There are often waiting lists of up to thirty Chajin! Continuing to improve the magazine as we move forward also inevitably requires more physical space. The need for a bigger, more permanent free Tea and retreat Center is obvious, and the time to do it is now. We have received a gentle push out the door of our current home, so there is also no going back. The only way is forward. All of the courses and future plans have been put on hold until we have moved into the new center, Light Meets Life.

Despite the uncertainty, there is also hope and excitement in our hearts for what lies ahead. Your continued support and contributions have filled everyone at the Tea Sage Hut with inspiration and optimism towards the future of this tradition. Yet much remains to be done. Bringing to life our shared vision of a Tea Center for the ages requires us to come together as a community. And we hope that you feel, as we do, that we are creating a center for *all of us*. Every donation, no matter the amount, moves us a little closer to our goal and motivates us to keep going.

We have made a good start, collectively raising more than a hundred thousand dollars in just about a month's time. That is incredible! Though it is important to celebrate little milestones, we mustn't lose sight of our goal. Let us use this momentum to move forward, donating what each of us can and also reaching out to others in our families and social circles who may be inspired to help. Communicating our message to people outside of the immediate Global Tea Hut community is actually a key part of this puzzle, and one that you can help with. If we are to create permanent and lasting change, we have to do it together.

In my relatively short time (eighteen months) of being a volunteer here at the Tea Sage Hut, I have witnessed transformative change in others and in myself. Indeed, this is the main reason why I have decided to commit to serving here long-term. The transformative healing that a meditative tea ceremony offers is very much needed in these busy, chaotic and stressful times we live in. Finding a place that offers respite from this is not easy, and finding one that can offer authentic teachings and wisdom about how to live a healthy human life, and not just temporary solace, is even rarer. Right now, this place is without a home, but together we have an opportunity to create the home we choose. The most worthwhile thing each of us as humans can do in our short time on this Earth is to leave a meaningful legacy. As far as good causes go, helping to create a space that facilitates transformative healing for the good of all beings is, to me, as meaningful as it gets! I sincerely hope that you feel the same.

If Tea has ever touched your heart, if tea ceremony has benefited you in any way, then please help us in our efforts to pay it forward by creating Light Meets Life together for this generation of Chajin and many to follow! This is our chance to make a lasting change in the world and to be part of something greater than ourselves. Now is our time! I'm excited to share a bowl with you at Light Meets Life.

Joanna Lopham

www.lightmeetslife.org

呼喚改變世界的行動

愛正在改變世界一碗接一碗

茶道

Testimony of Donors:

茶人: ***Laura Main***

Global Tea Hut guided me to a simple way to honor the moment. I am at my happiest when I feel connected, aware of spirit and present in my body. Before I was un-grounded, seeking a practice that would stick with me and become a daily ritual. When I found Tea, it changed my life. I feel so much more aware, calmer and connected. I am grateful for finding such a beautiful way to commune with the Sacred. I am also blessed now to have a wonderful Tea community all over the globe, most I have never met, but I know we share similar values and visions for the world. I will donate more next month. This month is tricky for me, but I wish to give to you all so much and am excited about the future for us all. Blessings to you!

茶人: ***Marcin Kaleta***

Global Tea Hut is for me not only the best source of information about tea and inspiration to improve my life, but also a great community of fantastic people.

茶人: ***Breanna Duffy***

Global Tea Hut has helped me find my path with Tea, and for that no amount of money can compare to the journey that has begun. I hope to visit soon and learn in person. Thank you for it all.

茶人: ***Mascha C.***

I love my Global Tea Hut family and am very grateful to how signing up to Global Tea Hut magazine, visiting the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan and later on joining two Global Tea Hut Annual Trips have enriched my life in so many ways! Teacher Wu De and Global Tea Hut introduced me to tea ceremony, and with that brought so much healing and richness into my life, practices and my relationships! I truly believe with the support of the Global Tea Hut community, the new Tea Center will become a reality, and many of us can meet and share tea there soon!

茶人: ***Deborah Accuardi***

I donated because I truly believe in what you're doing. The magazine has deepened my own tea practice, as has the connection to the leaf through your offerings. I have been dreaming of coming to the Tea Hut in the next couple of years. I am sorry to have missed the opportunity, but my heart fills with the idea of Light Meets Life becoming a reality.

茶人: ***Antonio Egea***

I live in Taiwan, and even though I've never been to the Hut (yet), it has been always in my mind and also somehow in my practice. Their spirit and teachings are present with me each time I prepare tea. It is something special that has to be preserved and taken care of.

茶人: ***Selwyn Redivo***

I donated because I believe this cause is contributing to the healing so badly needed in our society today. Please keep up the good work!

www.gofundme.com/globalteahut

Tea Wayfarer

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 Liva Olina.

In Latvian, we have a saying that "three times are good times, but the fourth one comes with all your heart." That's my story of meeting Tea. I believe that my love for "tea" started during childhood when I spent summers with my mom picking herbal teas in wild meadows. She would teach me how to recognize each plant, tell me about their medicinal value and then take an afternoon nap with me right in the middle of flowers and bees buzzing. I still don't know what I enjoyed more, the actual herb-picking or the adventurous spirit of going and finding them; but later, during the cold and dark northern winter, it felt very heart-warming to drink those herbal brews with vivid summer memories steaming in my cup.

My second, and real, meeting with Tea was some twenty years later in Joshua Tree, where I joined two hundred women from all around the world for the Spirit Weavers gathering. As it was my first time in the desert, I woke up right with the sunrise to explore Nature before forty degrees kicked in. I felt like I was walking on the moon, passing by these big, old grandfather rocks and watching trees stretching up into the starry sky and greeting the sun and the new day. Right amidst all this beauty, I saw girls gathering in a big lotus tent. It was one of these moments when "what you seek is seeking you," because the calling to join them was much stronger than my shyness or absence of any idea of what exactly they were doing. I went to the tent, accepted the invitation to join and after few moments of meditation found myself holding that life-changing bowl of tea in my hands. Every sip I took was guiding me deeper and deeper and closer to remembering myself and us all together. It was like receiving a big, loving hug that has been always waiting for me. It was like coming home.

Even though the tea ceremony touched my deepest layers where no other practice has so far guided me, I took a long journey to my third meeting with Tea. I felt not experienced enough to prepare Tea on my own. I would travel the world to meet my dear tea sisters just to sit with Tea, but would find it disrespectful in front of the tradition to start brewing without deeper knowledge and understanding. Then, one night my dear tea sister hit her palm while we were enjoying a full moon sail in the lagoons of Mexico. The morning came with the realization that she couldn't lift the teapot or the kettle, so my time to serve tea had come. I sat down, bowed to the Tea and asked Her to guide my heart, mind and hands. And I met Tea for the third time. Finally, through my own hands.

Growing up in the countryside, I was always connected with Nature, but also felt that there is something much more than school teaches us or that society talks about. That led me to start my inner search quite young, learning different meditation practices, visiting therapists, studying reiki and living

茶人: ***Liva Olina, Latvia***

in the Mexican jungle. But nothing seemed to stay with me. I would pick up something very optimistically, but find myself busy with no time for my practice just a few weeks later. Tea was different. Tea stayed with me. It took my time but also gave me time. I found myself reserving more and more time and space for Tea in my daily life.

Moments with Tea made me want to explore more and dive deeper into the tea world. My prayers were heard and I was blessed to experience a ten-day course at the Tea Sage Hut where I met Tea for the fourth time and with all my heart…

Now, being back home I see and talk about my life before tea school and after it. My fourth meeting with Tea turned out to be my first step into a life of Tea. Ten days at the Tea Sage Hut gave me the answers I have been looking for over the last ten years. It changed my relationships with my beloved ones, strangers and myself. I would never be who I am today without Tea and my Tea family all around the world. If your journey guides you to Paris or Riga, please let me serve you tea full of gratitude.

Inside the Hut

Coming Soon to Global Tea Hut Magazine

茶主題: *Tetsubins*

茶主題: *Chajin & Teahouses*

茶道

茶主題: *Classics of Tea*

茶主題: *Chaxi*

We need your help to get to a place where we can build your permanent Center, Light Meets Life. (And we do hope that you feel that our Center is yours, not ours.) If everyone in this community donates, we can together create the most gorgeous Tea Center ever. Obviously, not all of us have a lot of money to give, but we can all do our part. Each of us is also connected to a larger community of people who can share in the building of this project. As a global community, we can do this for us and for future tea lovers!

Please spread the word about the fundraiser. We will be giving away lots of amazing tea and teaware to Global Tea Hut members who are most active in helping us build Light Meets Life.

We have some of the best teas we have ever had for a Light Meets Life fundraiser this year. We figured we had to get some excellent teas, since this year we are trying to build a new Center. Don't miss out!

We have a new "community" page on our Light Meets Life website (www.lightmeetslife.org). Visit and see all the ways that community members are sharing their work with the new Center. And if you want to contribute some of your work, let us know.

Wu De has published a new book called "Fallen Leaves." We are super excited. We think you are all going to love reading it, especially while you drink tea alone or share tea with friends. Right now you can purchase a limited-edition, hardcover, full-color and signed edition from our website, on the "teaware" page. Otherwise, you can get your paperback copy at Amazon or other online retailers. All the proceeds from this new book will help us build our Center, Light Meets Life. This is another great way to help!

September Affirmation

I stop

Is my whole day a movement from busy to busy? Do I rush to and fro? I walk meditatively. I feel each step. I can remember to breathe. I also remember to stop what I am doing and remember to remember, at least once a day.

Center News

It is Light Meets Life time!!! We have launched a giant, worldwide fundraiser to make the move this very year. This will be our permanent Center, offering tea courses for the rest of our lives and beyond, serving future generations of tea lovers. Visit **www.lightmeetslife.org** now!

It may seem daunting, but together we can raise the funds we need to move into a new Center—*your* new Center. If you have any experience dealing with fundraisers of this nature and want to get involved, please email us and let us know your ideas.

The Center will be closed indefinitely after June for obvious reasons. There will be no courses for the second half of 2019, though if all goes according to plan, we hope to restart in 2020 with an even better and more varied schedule than ever before.

We really hope to restart courses in 2020. It will take a miracle or two, along with lots of help from you, our beloved community, but together we can do it.

www.globalteahut.org

The most cliffed-out 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