

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

March 2020

TEA UTENSILS

PART I: SCOOPS & STICKS



HARMONY

This month we are beginning a new periodic topic: tea utensils, highlighting the peripheral tea friends that are often unacknowledged. As with all things Tea, even the smallest things open doors to deep and vast worlds. Drinking one of the best teas we have ever shared, let's raise a cup to scoops and sticks, and to the start of yet another tea passion!

Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl

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傳統工序
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recycled & recyclable



Soy ink

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From the editor

In March, the weather warms up in Taiwan. The winter starts to fade, and everything is beautiful. All the green of spring flushes and the sakura bloom. It rains a lot, but the temperature is perfect before getting hot in April/May. This month is special for a tea drinker. As the weather warms up, we want lighter teas, like green, white or sheng puerh, but the new teas of the year haven't yet arrived. That happens from April to June. Consequently, we always take this time of year to drink through our library of recent sheng teas. This allows us to check in on their storage, which should be done once a year, and correct any of them that need it. For example, we may move them to a higher or lower shelf, depending on how wet or dry they are, or take them out of their box to get more airflow. This is the perfect time of year to do such tests.

So far this year of rest and relaxation is going great, and we feel like it was the perfect blessing to allow us to catch our breath as we begin to move towards a bigger, better Center, the construction and opening of which will be a giant endeavor. As most of you know, we have conclusively decided to cancel the annual trip to China this year. It is sad to not go on this journey but this decision was much needed. Actually, I personally will be spending that time in retreat. I will take a thirty-day meditation course, most likely in Thailand. Your loving-kindness and support mean the world to me, both in allowing me this space, and also, if you could, raise a bowl for me!

As we work towards your new Center, Light Meets Life, we are busy trying to increase the amount of tea and teaware we offer. The sales of tea and teaware can very much help in building our Center. In fact, this is probably the easiest way for most of you to help. Of course, you need tea and teaware, and we have an amazing selection. You can pay the base price or donate more for your purchases, but either way, rest assured that the proceeds will go towards building your Center. As you are purchasing tea and teaware anyway, this is an easy way to help—you get great, clean teas, and we raise funds for Light Meets Life. Check in regularly, as we will be adding some great teas this year—including this month's very special tea.

Please know that we are working very hard to make Light Meets Life a reality. We envision a cornucopia of tea courses throughout each calendar year, and in much greater variety than Tea Sage Hut ever had. You often ask where you can learn how to brew gongfu tea or how to learn more about the Seven Genres of Tea? When Light Meets Life opens, we hope to host many themed courses, including these topics. For example, we imagine several levels of gongfu courses, so we can deepen our practice together. Help us make this tea paradise a reality!

This movement into the commercial side of tea is a challenge, as we would rather focus on the education of Chajin, building community and hosting courses. However, while we fundraise in the form of donations, it is important for us to not just sit around waiting for help. We should also work towards this goal. Also, many of our friends who have tea farms or tea shops have contacted us recently with a desire to help. They want to partially or completely donate tea or teaware, as that is what they have to contribute to our project. This means a lot to us, as does your decision to contribute by purchasing tea from our site. Of course, all the tea and teaware we offer will be sustainably produced and of a quality that we ourselves enjoy. The desire to raise money for Light Meets Life will not compromise our values.

We are also in the process of updating our website to increase traffic and streamline the experience of visiting. We hope all this gives us a big push towards our common goal of opening a new Center and starting courses again as soon as possible. Let us know if you have any suggestions.

This is one of my favorite issues ever! We all have a love for tea scoops and sticks. Tea utensils are a wonderful way to improve the aesthetic of your chaxi and tea ceremony. We have some amazing artists in this community, as well. Supporting the artists in this community is a highlight not just of this month, but of the entirety of this project. A lot more goes into tea utensils than you think, and the creation is fascinating. They are a pleasure to use and admire. We hope you enjoy this month's issue as much as we do! And, of course, we have an amazing tea to put in our scoops this month. Harmony is amongst the best teas we have ever shared with a magazine—and that is saying a lot, since we have together drunk some outstanding teas!



—Further Reading—

This month, we recommend reading through the September 2016 special Extended Edition which is all about Taiwanese oolong. The Tea of the Month article therein may be of particular interest, as it will provide context for the magic of this month's glorious tea.

TEA OF THE MONTH



Over the course of this month, we are going to be drinking one of the best teas we have ever shared: Harmony. This magical oolong tea is powerful. We have named it “Harmony” because it is an amazing harmony of beautiful raw material and processing skill. It is also harmonious in flavor and aroma, combining a complex array of fragrances and subtle flavors into an overall bouquet that leaves you very satisfied. Though this perhaps sounds too poetic, tasting is believing!

Harmony is a 2017 traditionally-processed oolong from Li Shan (梨山), “Pear Mountain,” in Taiwan. All tea is its environment. As Wu De often says, “The leaf is the tree’s expression of its relationship to its environment.” A healthy environment is a requirement of fine tea, in other words. Grown at almost 2,000 meters above sea level, this beautiful garden is a great place for tea. Full of rich minerals, daily mists and plenty of rain, our Tea of the Month comes from a small, artisanal and organic farm. There is a nice biodiversity there with plenty of undergrowth, flowers, insects and wildlife. The altitude also affects the tea, creating a strong uplifting energy and beautiful aroma. This tea is made from Qing Shin (青心), or “Gentle Heart,” varietal trees, which thrive at this altitude.

Nowadays, a lot of Taiwanese oolong is lightly-oxidized. This shift began in the late 1970s, as the tea industry boomed in Taiwan. Traditional oolong is difficult to process and can take decades to master. It is also more difficult to brew traditionally-processed oolong. The amount of tea used and other aspects of the brewing method can drastically change the resulting cup, in other words. As demand increased, the industry shifted more towards green tea, which is much easier to produce and brew. Basically, traditional processing refers to an oxidation level of 40-70%, and with a heavier roast. Traditional processing requires more

skill to do well but is often more rewarding when it is done skillfully. We are not opposed to lightly-oxidized oolongs. They can be magnificent—floral, delicate and delicious—but they are rarely as satisfying as their darker, traditionally-processed counterparts, which are deeper, more full-bodied, more patient (meaning more steepings) and with stronger Qi.

Our Tea of the Month was masterfully-processed, and charcoal-roasted in the traditional way. It then sat for two years to allow the roast to cool down, creating a full-bodied and complex aroma and flavor, without any trace of the roast itself. The ideal roast does not leave any roasted or burnt flavor, but rather brings out the potential of the tea. The quality of oolong tea is as much in the processing as it is in the raw material (terroir and season). As the old saying goes, it takes the cooperation of Heaven, Earth and Human to make fine tea. Heaven could be thought of as the right weather (once every seven to ten years), Earth as the trees and environment (a rich, healthy ecology) and Human as the processing skill. Our Tea of the Month has all three: a beautiful healthy garden, a magnificent year (2017) and brilliant processing.

Harmony is gorgeous. It is a masterpiece of a Taiwanese oolong made from gorgeous tea and crafted so well. Each cup is transcendently complex, pulling you in as layer upon layer of fragrance and aroma carry you away. This is, as you can see, amongst our all-time favorite teas. And it is only due to the kindness of a generous donor that we were able to afford sending out such a magnificent tea to drink together. Set aside the proper time to prepare this month’s tea well, as well as to appreciate it. The Qi is uplifting, leaving you adrift in the clouds. If you are interested in getting more of this tea, it will be available on our website, as part of our Light Meets Life fundraiser. (It is fit to be a legend if aged for some years, as well.)



Harmony (和諧)



Li Shan, Taiwan



Traditional Oolong Tea



Taiwanese



~2,000 Meters



Harmony Brewing Guide

功夫泡法導引 GONGFU



We have never made a gongfu brewing guide, and for good reason. Lots of you have requested this, so we thought we could include this in our ongoing brewing guides, where we plan to cover new aspects of tea brewing each month. Before doing that, however, it is important to understand exactly why we have never published a step-by-step guide to gongfu brewing, as this caveat is actually important in understanding gongfu tea in general. Without it, we think this guide would do you a disservice.

In covering the bowl tea ceremonies we practice in our tradition, the method (*temae*) is very important as the steps are the ceremony. The proper method conveys lots of practical and ceremonial significance that is quite deep. The proper procedure also connects us to the past, and all the ceremonies conducted along the same grooves. The method is also an anchor to the present moment, a focus of our meditation and the efforts we put into honoring the occasion and our guests. Finally, the ceremony is like an incantation: there are mysteries above, below and all through it, and method is important on the level of the unknown as well. And although gongfu tea overlaps with these principles, it is also very different.

There are aspects of our gongfu brewing that are also handed down and fulfill the needs we just discussed, but in its essence the only overarching and true guiding force of gongfu tea is what makes the best cup of tea. There are no rules in gongfu tea, only flow. And the flow is dictated by what creates the finest liquor.

In light of that, a step-by-step approach to gongfu tea is dangerous. It can leave you stuck in a method that isn't evolving, opening and changing depending on the tea and teaware before you and the evolution of your skills. For that reason, we always suggest experiments as opposed to brewing guides when it comes to learning gongfu tea brewing.

It is also very challenging to know where to begin or end a discussion on "gongfu method," since we very much consider the selection of tea, teaware, water, charcoal, etc. for *chaxi* as a huge part of the skill, or "gongfu," of tea. Knowing how to choose ingredients is a very important part of what a skilled chef does. A guide such as this starts after this has already occurred, therefore assuming this skill has already been achieved and implemented before we sit down at the table.

One final important point we should make before discussing method in gongfu brewing is that the utensils will be very important in this brewing method. We have discussed the "Four Treasures of Gongfu Tea" in greater detail in previous issues. They are: an authentic Yixing purple-sand teapot, porcelain cups, a teaboat (*cha chuan*, 茶船) and a good kettle and heat source. You will also need a wastewater basin (*jian shui*, 建水). The better the quality these implements are, the greater the final cup.

和諧茶

通過茶自律的道路

With that caveat out of the way, we can cover a bit of the basics that go into gongfu tea. Like other tea ceremonies, gongfu tea begins with rinsing the teaware in front of the guest. This is a show of respect and also represents purification, which is an aspect of most all ceremonies throughout time in all cultures. The water washes away the worldly dust, so that we enter the tea space purified. It also washes away previous tea sessions, so that we can focus on and celebrate the “one encounter, one chance” that is before us.

We wash the pots and cups in gongfu tea much like we do in bowl tea. We fill the pot, which also serves to pre-warm it, and then the cups. The cups are held much like bowls, only smaller: the offhand is the fork of the bicycle wheel and does not move. The strong hand twirls the cup towards ourselves. (In this way, we honor our guests by not throwing wastewater at them.) When the cups are empty, we give them a shake, without the buddha’s palm of the larger bowls, to remove the last bits of water inside.

After washing the cups, we empty the rinse-water from the pot. We then introduce our tea leaves. This could be done with the hand, a piece of folded paper (our tradition) or, in light of this month’s feature, a scoop with a stick. If using the latter, be sure to face the scoop towards your guests and gently guide the leaves into the pot, making sure they are evenly distributed on the bottom. We then rinse the tea itself, also washing off Her worldly dust and purifying Her as well. This is both practical and ceremonial: ceremonial in its purification and practical in that it does get any dust off the leaves and also wakes them up, opening them for the first brew. The duration of this rinse will depend on the type of tea we are brewing. For a ball oolong like our Tea of the Month, a longer rinse is usually prescribed to let the balls open a bit so they do not roll around so much during early steepings, causing them to open unevenly.



It is challenging to discuss the “steps” in gongfu tea, as we mentioned earlier, because they must be founded upon the experiments that create an experiential wisdom as to why we do things a certain way. For now, we will go over some of the steps and in future issues, when we share a tea that is most conducive to gongfu brewing, we can dive deeper into aspects of this brewing method, including reviewing the experiments we should all conduct. (We also have a new YouTube series hosted by Shen Su on gongfu tea brewing experiments.)

The basic steps are simple. We shower the pot, steep the tea, and then shower the pot again. Then, we pre-warm the cups, slowly or quickly, depending on which steeping we are on, emptying the hot water into our *jian shui*. After the cups are ready, we scrape the pot on the side of the boat to get excess water off of it (which would drip into the cups), and decant the tea into the cups. The decantation must be smooth and fluent so that all the cups are left with an even consistency (the liquor that comes out at the beginning of the decantation is lighter than the end). This requires skill, or “gongfu.”

Finally, we often scrape the cups as well, as most of us have not yet perfected a balance of fluency and precision, which means that we most likely spilled some tea in our pouring, since we poured fluently to ensure even consistency of liquor. (This is why a cup tray can also be a useful, though not necessary, tea implement.) This means the cups will have water on them, which we can scrape off on the edge of the tray before handing the cup to our guests.

As with bowl tea, we always bring the first (and only the first!) cup to our hearts, make eye-contact with the guest it belongs to and smile. This should be a heart smile, not the smile we use to pose for photographs. It should be a window to an open soul, welcoming our guest—saying without words that we honor them and we treasure this special occasion to share some tea together.

Later steepings are different in that we only set the cups out without this gesture, which primarily has ceremonial significance. Each steeping then follows this same “formula,” but once again we must steep another brew of the caveat that “procedure” doesn’t really apply to gongfu tea. Most of the “steps” we discussed here will actually change slightly each and every steeping, as factors change, including the duration of each steep.

To learn gongfu tea properly, we recommend lots of experimentation, increasing sensitivity and exploring what makes a fine cup of tea (utilizing the “Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea”). An approach of trial and error, with notes and learning, practice and focus, will take us much further in this discipline than any step-by-step procedure ever could. We are sorry to hammer this point again and again, but it is very important that you do not make this guide into a “way to brew gongfu tea.” Many of you asked, so we thought we would lay out the basic mechanics of brewing tea this way, but you should really set aside the time to do the gongfu experiments, following only one guideline: what makes the finest cup here and now, with this tea and teaware—this very steeping, this very cup! *That is gongfu.*





Brewing Tips

冲泡技巧 完成好茶

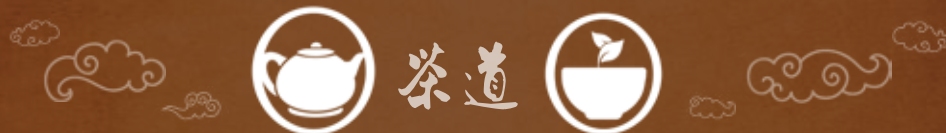
Harmony is a magical tea. As we have discussed in previous issues, one of the main reasons that gongfu tea brewing evolved was to bring out the best from oolong tea, which was born around the same time in the same region. In fact, the term “gongfu tea (工夫茶)” first referred to oolong tea itself. “Gongfu” means “mastery through self-discipline” or perhaps “great skill,” and oolong tea is the most complicated and difficult of all teas to make well. And then, having a masterfully-produced tea, of course tea lovers wanted to develop the skill to finish the tea with the mastery and devotion used to make it. Thus, gongfu brewing was born to take fine oolong tea to its potential. And Harmony is a fine tea, from a gorgeous organic farm, traditionally-processed with great skill. One of the wonderful aspects of tea is that it arrives to us unfinished. It is we who complete the tea with our brewing. Do not feel bad if you do not have the tools or the know-how to brew this month's tea gongfu. There is also a beauty in putting a few balls of this tea in a bowl and watching them open up steeping by steeping. However, the complexity and power of this tea will only truly shine when it is brewed gongfu.

The ideal of gongfu tea is expressed by imagining that we set aside a cup after each steeping and then bring them all out onto the table at the end of the session. When our brewing is done well, this line of cups will look like the palette cards at a paint store. There will be a great difference between the cups at one end and the other, but one should not be able to tell the difference between any one cup and the cups on either side of it. This means that the liquor ever-so-slowly lightens down the line of cups. This is a sign that the tea released its essence in a slow and smooth way.

The slow and smooth unfolding of the leaves and release of their essence means first and foremost that our tea will be more “patient (耐泡),” which means more steepings. A fine tea like Harmony should produce at least twenty steepings when prepared well. If our guests are exclaiming “Wow! This third steeping is so different from the first!” then we need to practice more. If the tea is changing drastically, it means that it is releasing its essence in bursts, which means that it won't last long. To run a marathon, a runner must pace herself. If she sprints, she will tire more quickly.

The factor that plays the biggest role in creating the smooth and slow release of the oils and cellular juices from the tea leaves is temperature. If the temperature fluctuates greatly throughout the session, the essence will be torn from the leaves, and they will be exhausted quickly. We must strive to create a consistent temperature that does not change throughout the session, so that the oils and juices are continually and slowly releasing from the leaves as they very gradually open. This slow and steady opening and flushing of the juices from the leaves is what creates the patience and breadth of a tea session. It is also what allows the tea to reach its full potential, unfolding every nook and cranny of its fragrance and flavor profile for us to enjoy.

All our movements are done gracefully so as not to disturb the tea leaves in the pot, and all our decisions concerning brewing follow only one rule and one rule alone: what creates the best cup of tea! That is gongfu brewing.



Gongfu

Leaves in a Bowl

Water: spring water or best bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: very hot, fish-eye, roughly 95-98 °C

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

Steeping: longer, flash, flash, then growing (especially when brewing gongfu)

Patience: 15-25 steepings gongfu

茶 Showering the pot is a huge deal in gongfu brewing. Make sure to shower the pot both before and after steeping the tea. This will make a big difference when it comes to patience!



茶
器
集

茶則和茶匙

Tea Utensils

SCOOPS & STICKS

著者: Sven Mihai



Scooping the Grace

留起恩典

The first thing I am usually asked is, “How does one become a scoop maker?” Well, as many of you do not yet know me, it seems polite to introduce myself a bit first. I was born and raised in a remote mountainous region of what is nowadays called the Czech Republic. My mother, being herself a child of the '60s, is a painter and flower artist from a family with a long-standing art legacy. Besides her, the two other most important people in my upbringing were my beloved granddads. One was an oriental antiquities collector, skilled metalsmith and passionate hiker. The other one was a lifetime bookworm, photographer, free time woodworker and most importantly an ardent tea lover. It was this granddad with whom I spent most of my first twenty years. Given all of those evenings by the fireplace serving oceans of wonderful tea to each other, all of the wood projects we completed at his centuries-old mountain hut together and all the Eastern philosophy and art we discussed above his treasured vintage books, there was probably no escape for me.

After leaving my birthplace to earn a degree in botany and ecology and to see the world, I got the precious chance to meet my *sensei* during her visit to the U.K. Learning calligraphy and *zenga* from her for over a decade, I acquired my humble brush-skills and was also introduced to other Japanese

masters, who have generously and most patiently trained me in Japanese bookbinding. Besides other projects, this has since enabled me to issue Czech translation *haiku* books of my most beloved Issa Kobayashi in traditional handbound *tōji* design. It was also during those years that I studied *chadō* (Japanese tea ceremony) and *ikebana* (flower arranging) basics and was initiated into the Dharma under the name “Shōchi (承知).”

As for tea scoops themselves, for me it all began in the early 2000s. The first wooden creations I made for my dear friends were practice weaponry for *aikidō*, such as *bokken*, *tantō* and other similar items. Since those wonderful girls and boys were all very much into tea (as was nearly everyone else in my country by that time), tea scoops were just around the corner.

History & Terminology

We can probably never find out when the first tea scoop was made. Still, as per my knowledge, the oldest surviving ones in museum collections are thought to be from the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), when Tea culture moved much closer to the everyday life of ordinary people. Certainly, those antique pieces are much more raw, natural and diverse than most of the unduly processed tea scoops we see ev-

erywhere today. Let us briefly look at some technical terms now.

The tea scoop can be referred to by different names according to a country, region or even context. The most common term is “茶則 (read *chá zé* in Chinese, *chasōku* in Japanese),” simplified as “茶则,” literally “tea ruler.” You may also sometimes see “茶撥,” simplified as “茶拨 (*chá bō*),” meaning “tea measure.” Yet another one is “茶鏟,” simplified as “茶铲 (*chá chān*),” which is often translated simply as “tea shovel.” In Japan, another term would be “茶匙 (*chasaji*),” meaning essentially “teaspoon” or “茶合 (*chagō/sagō*),” which typically refers to a smaller scoop used for sencha (*senchadō*, 煎茶道). In both Koreas, tea scoops are referred to as “차하 (*chaha*).” Some confusion may arise with above mentioned “茶匙,” as in Chinese it is read “*chá chí*” and refers to a tea pick, not a tea scoop. It should also be noted that these picks were used differently in the past, often for removing leaves that got stuck in a teapot’s spout. If we spend some more time with these tea picks, two more Chinese terms for them are “茶針 (*chá zhēn*)” and “茶通 (*chá tōng*),” literally “tea needle,” where the latter term is commonly used to denote a puerh needle today. Given the nature of Japanese teas, which tend to slide down into the brewing vessel on their own, the scoops for sencha were and are traditionally used without a pick.





發現木智慧

Still, if a pick is used, the same term as for a *matcha* spoon, “茶杓 (*cha-shaku*),” is commonly used, especially nowadays.

An eye-catching tool called a “茶熊手 (*cha kumade*),” or “tea rake,” looks like a tea needle with six curved, thread-tied prongs (similar to those found on *chasen*) and is occasionally employed to nicely arrange *sencha* or *gyokurō* leaves in the scoop. One more Chinese word certainly worth mentioning here is “茶漏 (*chá lòu*),” which refers to a wooden funnel used to insert leaves into teapots with small openings—usually along with the use of a tea scoop.

As for materials, various kinds of bamboo and wood have historically

been the most widely used, and that has continued into modern times. Hammered copper, bronze, tin, cast iron or even silver and gold scoops are also being made, typically in Japan and Korea. Other materials include porcelain, clay, enamel, jade, mother-of-pearl (as mentioned in Lu Yu’s *Tea Sutra*, though here in a somewhat different context), antler, horn, tortoise-shell or even ivory, according to the tea school or individual maker’s preferences and ethics. Some modern minimalist glass scoops can also be found, particularly from Taiwanese makers. Speaking of wood, an array of special types have been used, particularly in Japan since the early Edo period (late 17th century), including 埋もれ木 (*umoregi*, bog

oak), 虫刺木 (*mushisaki*, bug-eaten wood), 黒柿 (*kurōgaki*, black persimmon wood), 蝸線木 (*kusarusujiki*, spalted wood), as well as many varieties of 玉杓 (*tamamoku*, burl wood). Traditional techniques of 桜皮細工 (*kaba-zaiku*) and 木の葉細工 (*kono-ha-zaiku*) involve using sakura bark and fallen magnolia leaves glued on wood, respectively.

A sense of poetry is often brought into this artistic craft, as on many occasions the material used for the tea scoop, or even its shape, is reflected in the name that the maker gives to the finished piece. In this way, a chunk of maple can easily become “白鳳 (*Hakuhō*)” or “White Phoenix;” a branch of a dead peach tree becomes



“桃園 (*Momoyuen*)” or “Peach Orchard;” and so on. Other times, even more poetic names are chosen. By now I have seen scoops introduced to me as “春海 (*Shunkai*)” or “Spring Sea,” “耕心 (*Kōshin*)” or “Cultivating the Heart,” or “吉岡 (*Yoshioka*),” which is “Pile of Joy,” as well as many others. Names I have given to some scoops that recently went out of my workshop include: “千秋分裂 (*Senshū Bunretsu*)” or “Split of Ages,” “黒い砂漠 (*Kurōi Sabaku*)” or “Black Desert,” and “鳥目 (*Torime*),” which could be translated as “Bird Eyes.”

Tea scoop making, like the many other traditional crafts of China, Japan and Korea, also has its “圖 (*zu/tú*),” or “manufacturing manuals.” The oldest

surviving ones date back to the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). They describe shapes like “波 (the wave),” “瓠 (the gourd),” “蟬 (the cicada),” “蓮花片 (lotus petal),” “茄 (the aubergine),” “古琴 (the *guzhen*),” “昭彎月 (bright crescent),” “狹橋 (narrow bridge),” “古卷 (old scroll),” “山堰 (mountain dam),” “漁船 (fishing boat),” “蓮葉 (lotus leaf)” and hundreds more, covering every possible shape you could imagine.

Methods & Techniques

This inevitably brings us to the topic of tea scoop makers and making. I am fully aware of being but a humble

beginner, playing with wood, especially compared to countless accomplished Eastern masters who have been creating tea scoops for their entire lives, some of whom are even the 15th generation in their family tradition. Needless to say, most of these true masters feel no need to showcase their work online and are little known outside of Asia. The intense rise of tea culture in the West, especially in the last fifty years, has inspired a multitude of skilled Chajin to try their hands at making tea scoops. In the last few years, this trend has even been intensifying all across Europe, Russia and the Americas. Just in the tiny Czech Republic and neighboring regions there are already several dozen scoop makers crafting pieces.

This diversity is wonderful and beneficial both for us and the people using the scoops we make. I am so glad we can work in the spirit of collaboration and friendship, exchanging design ideas, woodworking tips or even raw materials and tools, without any need to think of ourselves as rivals.

So what techniques go into the making of a tea scoop? For ones made of bamboo, the material is often smoked to darken the skin color and boiled afterwards to remove the odor and soften the material. Diverse, intricate carvings (such as landscapes, calligraphy, flora and fauna) may then

be carved on the outside of the scoop, or less commonly, even on the interior. This style and technique is said to be of Chinese origin but is cherished and carried out in Japan and Taiwan as well. Particular vintage masterpieces in this genre can command immense prices. Some species of bamboo already have a naturally distinctive texture, color or pattern, such as “*madaratake*,” “*kikku*,” “*kurōchiku*” or “*butsumen*” varieties (these patterns are very difficult to translate). Those types are often simply cut to the desired shape and left as they are, highlighting their innate beauty. This is powerful.

On the other hand, scoops made of wood obviously need to be hollowed first, and then the exterior may be decorated if the maker so wishes. Personally, I always try to leave at least one side of the scoop as Nature intended, as it is not possible to invent anything better (at least in my view). Some frequently used finishing methods (besides planing, scraping, brushing and sanding) worth mentioning here include: “*焼杉* (*yakisugi*),” known as “*焼杉板* (*shou sugi ban*)” in the US; stamping (translated as “*三島焼き*, *mishi-ma-yaki*”), leaving the piece in the rain and sun to achieve a natural patina,



or inserting tiny “蟻型 (*arikata*)” bow-tie keys made of wood, rattan or tin to fix cracks and add some feeling of age. Some makers like to dye their creations using walnut peel juice, iron stain, red or black tea or one of numerous other naturally-sourced floral or mineral pigments. Pieces may also be finished with tan-colored “柿渋 (*kakishibu*),” which is fermented persimmon juice, *urushi* lacquer (漆) or even actual tea seed oil (any Asian woodworker uses this to keep their saws, chisels and planes in good shape, so there is always plenty of it in the workshop). More elaborate techniques using other materials in-

clude various styles of “蒔絵 (*maki-e*)” or lacquer with gold painting; “螺鈿 (*raden*),” mother-of-pearl inlay; “寄木細工 (*yōsegi-zaiku*),” wood marquetry; or “肥後象嵌 (*higō zōgan*),” which refers to precious metal inlay. The finishing options are nearly endless.

So, do you need a tea scoop in your *chaxi*? That depends. A tea scoop is, of course, not one of the Four Treasures of Gongfu Tea (the Yixing teapot, tea-boat, cups and kettle/stove). Nevertheless, some people follow the tradition of not touching the tea leaves with their bare hands, so in that case a tea scoop may be a necessity. Other than that, it

can provide a beautiful, cozy nest for those precious leaves while they take a few refreshing breaths before being enlivened in the teapot once again. Furthermore, with a scoop present in the *chaxi*, your guests are able to appreciate and be introduced to the tea you will be serving more fully. If you want to deepen your practice, to be more present and to slow down your tea sessions, a tea scoop may be a good friend, help and teacher in this. At the same time, a truly mastered mind does not need any such crutches. In the end, there is always a great power in simplicity, which is the spirit of Tea.



MAKING YOUR OWN TEA SCOOP

製做自己的茶則

There are innumerable convenient options for one looking to get a tea scoop, which can be found in mere minutes online. Sadly, in addition to the warmhearted tea scoop makers devoted to their craft, there are also people looking solely to capitalize on a trend in Tea culture. Nothing new there. However, I always encourage every Chajin to try her or his hand on at least one piece. There is no need to be afraid that it won't be straight, finely sanded or regular, as those artificial parameters do not determine the beauty or perfection of the scoop anyway—quite the contrary, because the vast majority of such ostentatiously thin and shiny, so-called “perfect” pieces are machine-processed, sometimes even CNC carved to repeat the same shape again and again.

To begin making your own tea scoop, just observe your favorite forest when you wander among the wise, ancient tree brothers with awe, or perhaps simply pick some wood up from the beach after a nice tea session with your dear ones, since it can carry this kind memory forever. Be curious like a child again and check what gems Nature has prepared for you to appreciate. Or maybe a friend of yours comes to you with a piece of nice, weathered mountain wood one day. Who knows? It has happened before. Nothing more than your grandpa's old chisel, a sharp knife and some patience will be needed.

My scoops are born in the very same way. I never buy nor chase any material. There is already enough harm coming to our Mother Earth, and I am in no way willing to further fuel this by ordering exotic woods or other materials from the opposite side of the world. This is the very reason I also try to keep my online presence and data very low, as every post is consuming enormous amounts of dirty sourced electricity to be sustained in the server farms. My beloved mountains and dear friends just simply give beautiful pieces to work with, in the same way the river in my garden provides me with a refreshing

bath every day. There is no need to ask for more. In some cases, the wood has been waiting for ten or more years in my workshop to become your scoop, so Nature apparently shares more than enough with me.

I also do not use any unnecessarily expensive chisels or planes. Nine out of ten tools I work with were commissioned and heavily used by my cabinetmaker great-great-grandfather and are still perfectly usable. I am pretty sure similar ones are waiting in your backyard to be rediscovered and play some scoop games with you. Finishing materials are not a big question for me as I tend to keep my scoops natural, without applying any oil, shellac or wax (unless specifically requested). You may take inspiration from this, as your hands and your lifetime of Tea sessions will do nicely enough. Otherwise, you can try to at least find some locally-made products, as even the above-mentioned tan-colored “*ka-kishibu*” can often be found even in Europe and in the US, not to mention various oils and waxes.

Just look around—broken bamboo or bark pieces are also splendid; old iron has so much raw character; many shell species are ready to be used needing nothing more than to pick them up and clean them. For me, the most charming and genuine scoops are those which are accidentally forgotten by Nature and left unnoticed, even by our animal fellows. One nice byproduct of making or finding one's own scoop is that it prevents the mind from thinking of it as a commodity—as a lump of dead matter, a thing to possess. Rather, it becomes a companion, a friend and a carrier of dear memories.

Does it seem a bit strange to hear all of this from a scoop maker? Well, this is part of my Tea and life journey. I do not consider myself an inventor of any tea scoop shape, nor the owner of any copyright for anything. I am, after all, just one of countless conveyors of the Divine Grace pouring into the world. I am happy when you dear people ask me for advice, and I appreciate when

you are inspired to carve the same scoops as I have, or even if someone brushes calligraphy similar to mine. If at any point in time I can be of some help with my limited knowledge and scoop-making experience, please do not hesitate to contact me in whatever way! (Use the Global Tea Hut app.)

This life of ours is very brief, so everyone needs to make a clear choice: Do I want to smolder and fume around, or do I want to shine? In the end, this is perhaps the essence of all my work. If the tea scoops, books or scrolls I sincerely help to manifest with my very heart and hands foster even a one-millimeter shift closer to inclusiveness and simple kindness in you, after I am gone elsewhere, my life and work will not have been wasted...



茶 There is a real magic to making your own teaware, and a scoop is really the perfect place to start. We have even found wood that didn't need anything other than a tiny bit of sanding; it was gorgeous as Nature left it. If you keep your eyes open as you explore the natural world, you can find many objects that can be used as scoops, tea pillows or other parts of your chaxi.







Carved Dreams

將夢刻進木

茶人: Wu De (無的)

Some teaware decisions are practical. There are definite improvements in pots, porcelain and even water preparation that will make a discernible difference in tea appreciation. Other choices are purely aesthetic. These are also important. Many experienced tea drinkers tend to gravitate towards simplicity. However, this is not higher or better. We have found that for many people, having more beautiful teaware actually improves one's ability to experience the subtleties of their tea. This may be in part because of the reverence and ambience inspired by taking the whole event seriously and constructing an environment that reflects that devotion. A big part of the experience is creating your own unique tea ceremony that reflects your aesthetic, which could be anything from two glass decanters and a strainer to a gorgeous tea table with the best of ware. As Okakura Kakuzō eloquently says in *The Book of Tea*: “In art the Present is the Eternal. The tea masters held that real appreciation of art is only possible to those who make of it a living influence.” Cha Dao has to live in and through us, not be a distant and artificial aesthetic gesture.

Reaching for a tea utensil to unclog a spout and finding that for a moment or two it can stay clogged while fingers gently turn the utensil admiring its elegant simplicity. The carved leaves entwined around the relief of a small bamboo stem are natural and suggestive. Art and tea as one process—the nature of water and leaf imbibed in all aspects of the experience.

Tired of stainless steel and cheap lacquer-covered wood teaware, Ong Ming Chuan decided to devote his free time to the study of bamboo and carving. An art major himself, he traveled to the bamboo forests of Taiwan, read books, studied with teachers and practiced in his free time when he wasn't working as the Art Director of the Taiwan Television Enterprise. Then in 2003, at the age of sixty, Ong Ming Chuan retired and founded the Le Zhu Zhai (樂竹齋) studio and workshop deep in the mountains of Hsin Chu County. He had his first exhibit of tea utensils in 1986, and despite his trepidation that he would disgrace his teachers, he established himself as the name in bamboo teaware. “Tea has always been an Art to me—a time and a way of enjoying a more beautiful

life,” he said when asked why he carves Tea Ze. “I do some sculpture now and then, but my love of tea translates into my art much better than other things.”

Taking the one hour drive up into the mountains, through forest groves, grottoes and rivers, it's easy to see where Ong Ming Chuan gets his inspiration. His studio and home is silent, resting in a beautiful garden where he sits drinking his tea and sketching his next set of tea utensils. He shared tea with us and showed us his recently completed pieces. What makes his work so popular is his ability, like any great sculpture, to maintain a balance between the human creation and the natural movement of the medium—finding natural designs and bringing them out of the bamboo with as little human interference as possible. In the end, that is why his tea utensils complement and perfect any tea table; and that is why his work is in shops and homes throughout Taiwan.

“Bamboo is one of the most difficult mediums to carve; much more difficult than wood. It took a lot of study,” says Ong Ming Chuan. The evenly distributed fibers in the bamboo are tighter than most wood used for carving.

The surface area of bamboo can be at most twenty cm in diameter and often just two cm thick. Ong Ming Chuan travels to the bamboo forests in the southern state of Nantou each season to gather his pieces. He says that moths are often a problem for anyone working in bamboo. For that reason, the best bamboo is harvested in winter when there aren't any moth eggs or other parasitic insects. He then soaks the bamboo in baking soda and water for approximately eight hours to remove certain green nutrients hardening it and killing any remaining parasites. When that is finished, the bamboo will air dry for about three months. Mr. Ong warned not to expose the bamboo to sunlight which would warp it. He says he learned that the hard way.

Mr. Ong says that his education in art definitely helps him, mostly in his sketches and creativity. He makes many sketches on paper before deciding on

a set. He roughly sketches it onto the bamboo and uses a saw to remove the rough piece. Then using chisels, knives and saws as thin as thread, he finishes the detailed work. For years, Ong Ming Chuan pondered how to finish the utensils without using lacquer which is unhealthy and distasteful. Mr. Ong's wife said that it seemed obvious to her that putting lacquer and wood stain into food products is unpleasant. "The answer came to me one morning in a tea session," he says with a huge smile, "Tea is the answer." Mr. Ong cooks the utensils in dark red tea for about four hours and then air dries them for a week. The result is a dark, stained beauty without any of the cheapness or dangerous chemicals of lacquer or wood stain. This is in the spirit of tea, after all.

In 2007, Ong Ming Chuan had a large exhibit in the Taipei museum of art. He brought more than two hundred sets of tea utensils to the exhibit,

including many new designs. "I can only make about one piece every day or two, so I am busy. But at my age, that is a good thing," he said. We were excited to be there and see his work. Every day we scoop tea, unclog a spout or remove the leaves from a pot, we're delighted that someone out there believes in the refinement of tea through simplicity as we do. Ong Ming Chuan's minimalism and beauty accompany and improve any tea table.



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A Journey of Wood & Tea

茶和木的旅程

茶人: Ondrej Sedlak

Tea has changed many lives. I can say for certain that it has changed mine. I am writing this article to share a few insights from my experiences making wooden tea scoops and other tea utensils, which began more than five years ago. By that time, I had already been interested in tea culture for several years, though it was around that time that I met a friend from Taiwan who introduced me to tea more profoundly. A bit later I met Wu De, and that deepened my interest even further. I can recall precisely the moment I decided I would make tea scoops. It was at a tea gathering at the home of Petr Novak and Mirka Randova; there, I saw a hand-carved tea scoop for the first time. I was aware only foggily of these utensils at the time. I remembered having previously seen some simple ones made from bamboo, but this was different. From the moment I held it in my hand, there was a spark that reached deep inside me—it was a magical moment! It took root in me, and after I returned home, I made my first three scoops. I am happy to say that since then I have made many scoops that are in service all around the world. For that, I am very grateful. It means a lot to see my scoops in your *chaxi*!

I come from an artistic family where both my grandfather and father were involved in the arts. My grandfather was a sculptor of stone and wood, and my father devoted a considerable part of his life to painting. Growing up, our house was full of various art pieces. All of this undoubtedly had an influence on me, and although I went on to study music and guitar and eventually became a teacher, it led me here, where I am now. Woodworking has become a great passion and love; I can hardly imagine my life without it.

Searching for Wood

The most important aspect of my work is finding fallen wood in Nature. I started collecting wood on my wanderings around the place I live. Exciting pieces of timber are lying on the ground in the forest or elsewhere; one only need look closely. Finding extraordinary wood has become a great passion, almost an obsession. There is not only a sense of satisfaction in being able to supply the material you work with, but a delight in giving these wooden gems a second life, which is one of the treasures of tea. They have such a beautiful character, marked by

weather and natural forces. In woodwork, Nature is as much the artist as the craftsperson.

For tea scoops and other utensils, the natural thing is to use tree branches found lying in Nature, as they already have a convenient shape and size for this purpose. Small dead trees or naturally broken trees are also a good source material. These usually carry excellent potential and character of which one can take advantage. Wood marked by fungus growth or insect traces is prized for its appearance. Wood never ceases to amaze me, and every time I cut into a new piece of timber, it is exciting to see its inner beauty revealed. It is truly magical: the warm energy the wood continues to carry from its life as a tree when it drank sun rays and absorbed Earth energy. I like to read its grain and count and examine its growth rings to learn more about its life. It feels incredible to hold a small piece of wood that fits in your palm and think it took a century to grow like that. Old oaks have a special place in my heart indeed, and I am fortunate to have a few fantastic pieces in my collection. There is a real magic in holding something far older than you are, and wondering about all it has learned and known in its long life.





Collecting wood is a serendipitous process; it requires deliberate, focused effort, but luck also needs to be present. Here is one story I can share with you as an example...

One day, I attended the wood firing of Kassel kiln; we were helping the firing crew reach the final temperature overnight. The next day, after the kiln had already begun to cool, we went to search in the riverbanks, which were surrounded by marshland, in hopes of stumbling upon ancient bog oak. I had gotten a tip that this rare old wood could be found there. After some time, it started to look as if we wouldn't find anything, but I still decided to check one last place before heading back, as I had a feeling something might be there. Lo and behold, we got lucky and found one tree trunk and a few smaller pieces! They had likely been revealed during a period of considerable flooding years earlier and, unfortunately,

were already decaying. Nonetheless, I salvaged what I could—we are talking about over 6,000-year-old wood. We managed to collect a few smaller pieces and a larger trunk that was partially buried in the marsh, which we split into smaller pieces using a handsaw. You should have seen my face; it was a dream come true! We loaded the wet and heavy pieces into the car and headed back home. But the work didn't end there—such wood needs to dry properly to prevent devastating cracking. In the end, some of the pieces were preserved, and I was able to share that ancient treasure with fellow tea lovers. In addition to the bog oak I found on that trip, I was also able to get some from a friend in England, and later I was given another local find by my cousin, as well as getting some from a friend in Germany. Receiving these pieces of wood has meant a lot to me. They are treasures.

I have gone on countless wood-collecting trips over the years and have accumulated quite a collection. It feels like great luck when I am in the right place at the right time, and sometimes searching for wood leads me to magical places I wouldn't ordinarily wander. Each piece of wood has some sort of story; when I pick up any piece in my collection, I remember exactly where I found it. When walking in Nature, I have my eyes always open for new wood, and every new piece of timber becomes another member of my wooden family. They become my children; I hold them close to my heart!

With time and growing experience, I know better what to look for, developing a kind of inner sense that leads me to places where I can find unique pieces of wood. It means walking, deciding where to go only if and when I am suddenly drawn to a particular spot. In this way, I often find a piece



紋理茶去

with the potential to become a precious jewel. As I mentioned, the wood I find locally in Nature in our old family garden is my primary material, but from time to time someone brings me a piece of wood that they found or do not need.

The Creative Process

For me, the beauty of wood can be seen from several points of view. The first is in the natural, raw state of the wood, bringing the element of unadulterated Nature to our home or *chaxi*. Another is in viewing wood as an organic material, appreciating the beauty of the wood grain and the authentic feel of the wood. Sometimes the pure, simple wood grain is enough; on other occasions one might admire a piece of beautifully figured wood, with the

finesse and elevated character of ornamented growth. Another aspect to be appreciated might be the age of the wood and its origin, which certainly gives the wood its energy and character. Wood from an old, slow-growing tree has more to offer. Wood that has been buried for millennia underground and preserved since ancient times has its own place and uniqueness. Here I can again mention pieces of old bog oak (over 5,000 years old), and recently I was lucky enough to acquire an incredible piece of ancient Redgum from Australia, which is over 9,000 years old. I can't stress enough how fortunate I feel that these unique woods have found their way into my hands, and I can share them with others.

When it comes to the wood I work with, it is hard to say if I have any favorite species. The more I work, the more they all become equal. Sure, there

are certain woods with which I have a stronger connection, and certain pieces in particular. However, in many cases it is more than just the wood itself—it is the story of how the wood came to me or some other factor (similar to our favorite teas). Some of the woods I work with include oak, maple, ash, larch, hawthorn and cherry. At times I also use shrubs or dwarfed hardwoods, which can be very interesting and beautiful and often don't find much use in standard woodworking! I am fortunate in that I can find many of these around the place I live, including rose, buckthorn, elder and lilac. I also can't forget to mention burls and tree roots, which are very interesting and have been amongst my favorites from the very beginning.

Sometimes I start with an idea for the piece I would like to make, while at other times I look through my wood collection and find an inspiring piece.

There are two main approaches I take to making tea scoops: either I respect and try to present as much of the natural state of the wood as possible, or I work with the wood in a similar way as one might carve stone or work with clay, which gives me more creative space. With the first approach, I look for material influenced by natural forces: split, broken, weathered and such. With the second approach, I look for the inner beauty of the wood grain itself and the character embedded in the timber. Both of these methods have their own merits and possibilities and whenever possible, I combine them. Sometimes an organic, “*wabi*” piece is desirable, but one can also appreciate a simple shape or more intricate design. I work with what I have and try to use all of the wood, with as little waste as possible.

A crucial part of my work is the wood finish, so that the natural beauty of the wood grain is presented in the best way possible. It is how the surface is treated, how it is prepared for contact with moisture, that will determine how it will look for the years to come. A smooth, pebble-like feel—sometimes with the natural texture preserved, or occasionally with a rough surface created—is my desired result. The finish is decided for each type of wood in close connection with the function of the piece. Pure shellac resin that I dissolve in ethanol is the most common treatment I use for scoops and needles. However, when I feel the piece benefits from it, I leave it natural. For pieces that require more durability, I use natural hardening oil finish. All of these are natural, as I feel any chemical treatment would go against the grain of tea.

There is one more particular aspect of my craft that I would like to highlight: the creative process itself as a work of mind and body. Through this, I find a deep resonance within my being. There is a physical sensation when I work with wood; all the steps and techniques involved bring me a great deal of joy and satisfaction. They are addictive in a way. I wake up in the morning, and one of the first things I do some days is pick up an unfinished piece and work on it a little, sometimes even before I put my kettle on the stove. Further, there is the working of the mind, which is even more critical for me. When there is genuine

inspiration involved, my thoughts are set aside and my mind becomes clear. There is only the workflow. I am fully connected to the piece of wood I am working on, and the piece reveals itself before my eyes as I carefully remove only what is necessary.

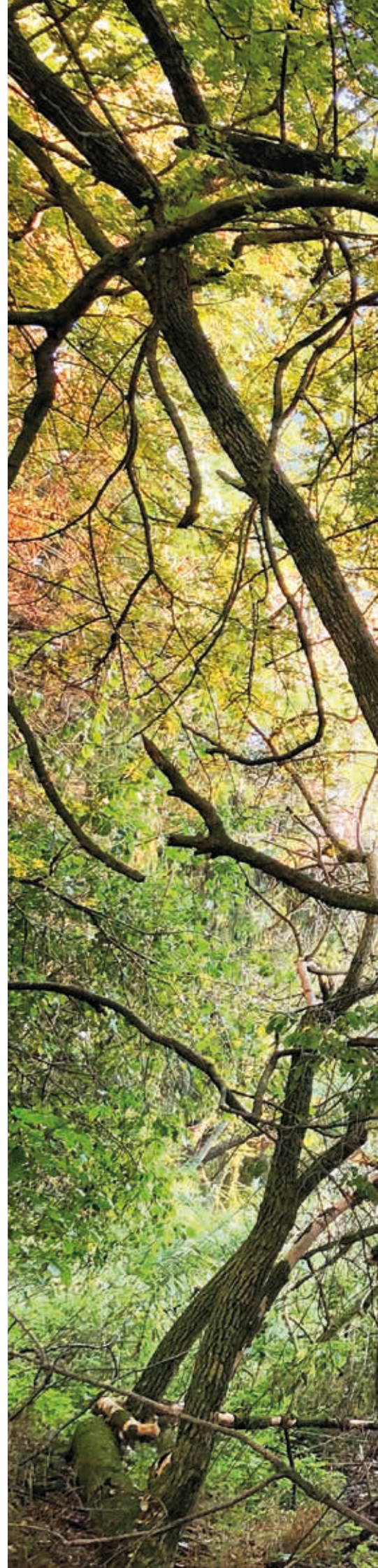
Tea Scoop as Sculpture

The significance of a tea scoop in tea preparation might not be so apparent at first glance. However, since I started using them, it has helped me to appreciate tea leaves a bit more—to enjoy that brief moment before we place them into the pot, or while showing them to tea friends. Also, bringing a wooden element into our *chaxi* is undoubtedly pleasant. For me, I not only see tea scoops as a useful utensil in my practice, but also as a beautiful object that can make my tea session more delightful. As such, my goal is to present the natural beauty of the wood in the best way I can.

There is so much more to talk about, but we will have to leave that for the next time. I would just like to say how very grateful I am to be part of this wonderful global tea community, and to be of service to others through my woodwork! If you would like to follow my wooden journey, you can look me up on the Global Tea Hut app. May the wood be with you!



✿ *Ondrej suggests that the glorious Nature around his home is as much the artist as he is. We find this to be a powerful aspect of the creation of wooden scoops, and something that aligns with tea. As with tea, it takes Heaven, Earth and Human together to make a nice scoop!*









Making Tea Utensils

製作茶器具

茶人: Shen Su (聖素)

If you want to invite something, someone, or some circumstance into your life, there is one main thing you must do: *create time and space*. Whether it's a meditation or tea practice, exercise routine, new job or a piece of artwork, if you don't have time or space for it, you can't expect it to bear roots in your life in a meaningful way. And even when you do create time and space, there are still plenty of challenges along the way that will distract you from your commitments. The very least we can do then, and the most important first step, is to create time and space to invite anything into your life. There is a Buddhist slogan with regards to meditation that "making space for meditation *is* the primary meditation." This is very profound in its simplicity and can be applied to any aspect of your life, including crafting utensils for tea.

I always liked working with wood and bamboo. Like so many others, there's just something about the texture of the grain, the smell of freshly cut wood, the colors that emerge with a natural stain, and that earthy connection wood brings to a home, whether as flooring, a picture frame, spice cabinet or wooden serving bowls at the kitchen table. But my work with

wood, bamboo and other natural materials would always remain a hobby at best until I carved out space and time in my schedule to develop the grain of my own practice, as it were. And even then, I wouldn't consider myself anything more than a hobbyist when it comes to making tea utensils, but with the creation of time and space in my home came the invitation for consistency and a greater commitment to the craft.

My tea teacher taught me to make tea spaces and altars the focal points of my life and to keep them alive and active through regular use and cleaning. This creates a physical reminder to set aside time for the most important aspects of my life. As soon as I walk into my room, I can't help but be reminded to meditate or drink tea. The spaces are right there, and they're beautiful, and they call out to be used. In the same way, I took his advice and created a workbench where I could set aside time for working with natural materials to create utensils for tea. I made it clean and organized, and the invitation was made. Like the Buddhist phrase suggests, the simple act of placing a table and declaring it a space for craftsmanship *was* the primary craft, even if only in its infant stages. I found myself

much more excited to sit down and actually make something with my own hands on a regular basis. It's an amazing lesson, time and again, to feel that thrill and motivation when you make even small commitments and manifest them through the creation of time and space.

Tools: The Rabbit Hole

Once the workbench was in place, it was just a matter of organizing the newly created space with the necessary tools for the job. Like designing a *chaxi* (stage for tea), this is a little challenging because it's easy to add too much just because you've got the space. Oftentimes, it's much wiser to let the space be empty. The utility of a tea bowl is found in its space, which gives it the potential to be full or empty at any given time. Similarly, we don't need too many accoutrements to actually make tea. Though there are countless elements, really all one needs is a bowl, hot water and tea—it's as simple as that. I knew I could make bamboo scoops or gourd ladles with just a small number of tools, but there's something to be said about having the right tools for the job.



This is where the concept of the “rabbit hole” comes into play. Nowadays, *everything* has the potential to lead you down a deep rabbit hole, be it with regards to pens, teaware or tools! If you want the highest quality version of something, it’s out there, and it usually comes at a cost, but cost is relative to perceived value. So, it’s really up to you and what you need for your crafting journey. The further you go, the wider and deeper the rabbit hole becomes. This is where some skillful navigation and self-restraint comes into play. There is a balance to having the right tools for the job and working with the bare minimum of what is actually necessary. If anything, I err on the side of less being more, but I also understand the need for high quality tools that may cost more now but which last a lifetime and help produce a better product or piece of art. It’s inevitable that we will spend some “tuition,” as we call tea and teaware purchased solely to learn what *not* to

purchase, along the way, buying things we don’t really need or at the wrong price. But with the right attitude, these mistakes turn into lessons learned and help us refine our understanding of what is truly necessary to get the job done and done well. Wu De often says that there are no mistakes to a student, only lessons, which is why Chajin cultivate a “beginner’s mind.”

Without a Teacher

There’s a saying that, “when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” This isn’t an excuse to wait for a teacher to learn how to do something. In fact, it is likely the initiative and preparation taken prior to having a teacher that attracts the teacher. This kind of self-discipline and self-motivation demonstrates to a teacher that the student is perhaps ready for formal training. In the meantime, it’s important to just

start whatever it is you’re doing and not use the lack of a teacher to postpone beginning your journey. Sure, it’s a plunge headfirst into endless mistakes, but it’s the individual who has made endless mistakes followed by endless corrections who becomes a great teacher, and as we discussed above, the true student turns all mistakes into lessons anyway. If I had waited for a teacher to provide the spark necessary to start working with bamboo, for example, I never would have started. I was just happy to have a simple knife, a saw, hammer and some sandpaper to start making really rudimentary scoops and tea sticks to give as gifts, and because I had the right attitude and motivation, they even turned out okay from time to time. It’s all part of the creative process and learning curve.

In this day and age, there are also great teachers at our disposal in the form of books, videos, forums, blogs, online groups, workshops and all kinds of other resources. In fact, there’s often



so much information that we have to learn to wade through the scraps and source the highest quality information available. In this age of information, it becomes a necessary learning skill to filter and focus. In some cases, it's difficult to find what we need simply because the information we're looking for is particularly rare or in a different language or simply not available, but YouTube's range of content continues to expand into even the most niche how-to videos. When it comes to bamboo scoops, matcha sticks, or gourd ladles, for example, there are next to no video resources available. However, by searching in different languages and for similar content, you can piece together relevant videos to approximate your needs. This has been another great asset to learning nifty skills without a teacher directly at my side. I also actively reach out to friends who might be able to connect me to someone who can help develop my skills, like a local teacher, Facebook group or another

hobbyist. Just recently, I noticed a handle weaving on a kettle that was clearly done by an experienced artist. I knew who made the kettle, so I contacted them and inquired. Sure enough, they put me in touch directly with the artist. Utilizing all the resources at your disposal is a great way to make progress, especially in the beginning stages of your craft when you may or may not be working directly with a teacher.

Then, of course, there are the examples of great artists to learn from. A lot of my work has been to copy as closely as I can the examples of accomplished artists. There is much to learn by doing this, and you start to understand that in their simplicity lies years or even decades of practice. Certain design elements—like the curvature of the lip of a bamboo scoop—or the way the handle attaches to the body of a gourd, look simple at first glance, but come from a skill that separates the amateur from the professional. Nevertheless, it's always important to approximate

great works of art as beginners and to struggle through it all. We learn by being outside our comfort zone. The goal isn't to perfect the copy, but to learn from great artists with far more skill than we currently have and to ever-so-slightly make contact with the lineage that empowers their work. It's not just creativity, hard work, and the right attitude when it comes to great artists and their craft. It has more to do with lineage and the wisdom passed down from teacher to student over generations, and that can be made visible when you try to copy their work. But even if we're not destined to become great artists ourselves and join long-standing lineages, it's still important to mimic the greats and to appreciate where greatness comes from—which is not the individual, but the accumulation of wisdom gathered and passed on by individuals over time. All art has this kind of transmission, handing down tools, methods and spirit to each following generation.

CRAFTING TEAWARE

As always, it's important to find a balance between function and form. Luckily, as students in a tradition of tea, we are trained to understand and appreciate the utility *and* aesthetic of teaware. Though art for art's sake is completely understandable, teaware "wants" to be appreciated for its beauty and *used* in service. One way to respect beautiful teaware is by using it in ceremony, not just encasing it in glass and admiring it from afar. Therefore, we must not lose function in the form, nor form in the function. They should complement each other in harmony to facilitate the overall purpose of the teaware. I lean towards simplicity in design when making scoops, sticks or gourd ladles, but they ultimately have to function properly. Since I'm not at

the level of making overly aesthetic pieces of art, this balance is easier for me to achieve, especially when the beauty of the natural raw material does most of the work for me. The grain of bamboo is beautiful and richly layered; I surely don't create this effect, but just help to highlight it.

My tea teacher imparted an amazing lesson upon me a few years ago. While I was excitedly recounting the skill and craftsmanship of Master Zhou Qi Kun (周其坤), an Yixing teapot master and dear friend of ours featured in Global Tea Hut's September 2017 issue, he told me Master Zhou's skill didn't lie in his ability to make a teapot from clay, but in his ability to listen to the clay and *allow* a teapot to come through the clay as if it "grew"

from the clay—as if listening to what the clay wanted to be made into. It was a more holistic perspective for me to consider, with the artist participating in the process of creation instead of being the creator. Another example of this was a frog carved from a large bamboo root. It was strikingly beautiful but clear that very minimal work went into it. It was as if the frog was already inside the root and the artist simply removed enough to just reveal its character. I think about this a lot now. I try to ask myself what the least amount of work is I can do to preserve the natural essence of the raw material in a way that is still both beautiful and functional. If I achieve this harmony, of function and form, the teaware can shine in use.



毅力





茶 These are some of the sticks and scoops we have here at the Hut. They are made of a variety of materials—everything from bark to copper. Shen Su has used these for inspiration, learning from the shapes, materials and methods of treating them. You can see that they offer a wide variety of techniques: the skilled carving of Ong Ming Chuan to make bamboo look like it is tied with a knot and rustic, insect-bitten bark left as it is, with but the mildest of sanding.

A Sacred Space for Work

Though I don't actually live in a temple in which to do my work (which in some cases would be ideal), it is possible to carry that mindset wherever you end up working. In fact, my workspace is in the kitchen of our office (mind you, it's a very spacious kitchen and I'm grateful for it). As we already noted, the creation of this physical space is one of the most important steps to inviting a new practice into your life. But it doesn't end there. There is always more work to be done to maintain your practice within that space. Again, because I have learned to make altars and tea the focal points of my life, I made a small altar upon which to offer incense and tea before doing my work. And because my workbench and tools are in the kitchen,

I made the altar suitable for that environment as well, enshrining the god of the kitchen. It's an excellent reminder that while I'm not necessarily doing holy work, I can elevate this part of my life from the mundane to the sacred with just a few rituals, like offering tea, lighting incense and drinking tea myself while I work.

Our work is in part a reflection of the intention we bring to it. This intention has to be nurtured and protected. Especially if it's something we do daily, our practice is threatened by the mundaneness of regularity. True, we are creatures of habit, but we are also creatures that get stuck in habits. Connecting your practice to something much greater than yourself is an excellent way to maintain its strength and your passion towards it. In this way we are less likely to get stuck in

a habit and more likely to nurture the excitement we had when we first invited it into our lives.

I feel very honored to do this kind of work, making teaware and knowing that it will be used by tea lovers the world over. I try my best to maintain this feeling of honor as opposed to feeling like it's a job or even a creative passion. Technically, it's not my job, but the danger of losing perspective and feeling like I have to do it because orders are coming in is there. There's nothing wrong with having a job and making a living off it, in fact, quite the contrary: It's honorable to offer the world something useful through your efforts and skills and to be paid for it. But it's easy to lose connection to the spirit of our work when it gets tangled up in profit. This is a little off topic for this article, though something we must all consid-



er when introducing money into the equation—all the more reason to relate to our work in a sacred way, I think, as all great works are brought into this world when the artist is as closely connected to the highest version of themselves as possible, not when deciding how to charge for it—easier said than done, but all worthwhile pursuits are!

Moreover, like all spaces that are clean, organized, and actively used, it's a joy to enter them. They welcome you with their energy and in a way get charged the more you use them. The creation of this kind of space has been one of the most influential steps in developing my simple teaware crafting practice. I love sitting down, settling into the space through simple rituals, taking a sip of tea, and putting my hands to work. Whenever I need a tool for the job, I know exactly where it is

because everything has been given its place. (This helps in the creation of *chaxi*, as well.)

Sharpening Your Axe

There is a quote that “sharpening one’s axe will not slow down the process of chopping wood.” I wrote it down and keep it near my workspace. It reminds me to not only keep my tools sharp, but also cared for in general, and placed away when finished with. It reminds me that my job starts with the sharpening of tools, not after, and finishes once everything is cleaned up, not before. (This is equally applicable to tea, of course.) Although those two tasks take time, they ultimately facilitate the efficiency of work and creation

of art rather than slowing them down or hindering them. And, yes, there are endless rabbit hole videos on how to sharpen your tools, but joking aside, this quote has a deeper meaning to also sharpen the most powerful tool: *our mind*, which is certainly necessary if we are going to create anything of value in this day and age. While YouTube might have some mindfulness-based videos, what this quote is really pointing towards is that you will ultimately have to sharpen your *own* axe and chop your *own* wood to light the fire of your *own* work, and that your mind, heart and hand are all one in this. And that is what makes any art, whether it be tea preparation or tea utensil creation, a Dao...



SPECIAL OFFER

Handmade Gourd Ladle

MADE BY
THE ONE & ONLY SHEN SU





Over the years, many of you have admired the handmade gourd ladle we use when we serve boiled tea in a cauldron. This is a very special opportunity to get one of these ladles handmade by our very own Shen Su!

Boiling tea is one of our favorite brewing methods here at the Hut and one we use to serve roadside tea to passersby at Hope Market. When done right, it rewards you with rich, deep and delicious bowls of tea that warm you to the bones (which is especially nice during the cooler part of the year).

Boiling tea in a cauldron has the advantage of continuous penetrative heat that is able to bring out the deepest essence of tea. This method is especially suitable for black tea (not red tea, called “black” tea, but “*heicha*, 黑茶”). Of course, there is also magic found in boiling other teas too. Some young sheng puerh, oolongs, white and even green teas are spectacular when boiled and will reveal a side of themselves you never knew was there. If you have not tried boiling some of your favorite teas yet, you are missing out, and we invite you to experiment!

Every detail has an effect on the tea ceremony. From the physical space we create to the mind we approach the task in hand. This is true for and especially noticeable with teaware. Ex-

cellent teaware can make even an average tea “sing,” whereas below average teaware will not be able to bring a great tea to its fullest potential. A good tea utensil can elevate a tea session from ordinary to transcendental.

When used and looked after properly, a piece of teaware not only lasts a lifetime, but can outlast the owner and be passed on to future generations of Chajin. Investing in good quality teaware before investing in tea is a good idea as teas come and go and will be drunk, but a piece of teaware is a companion for life and can turn into a treasured heirloom over time. “Teaware before tea,” as Wu De likes to say.

Considering the *wabi* nature of boiled tea, these gourd ladles, crafted by Shen Su, are a perfect companion to any cauldron. These are made of natural materials which have been sourced by Shen Su himself. Each ladle is fully handcrafted from start to finish, and is therefore a completely unique piece of teaware. We have had the good fortune to experiment with different shapes and styles of ladles over the years and have found this shape of gourd ladle to be our favorite.

Like any piece of good teaware, there should be a balance of form and function. These ladles are both aesthetically beautiful and very practical to

use in a tea ceremony. They are made of natural materials including gourds for the ladle, bamboo for the handle, and rattan wrapped to attach everything without the use of any glue, making them safe for serving tea. Shen makes them out of natural dried gourds which he first carves, then cleans the interior, and finally cures them through multiple boilings in water and tea before attaching the bamboo handle with natural rattan. This process is quite labor intensive and takes about a week to complete as the gourd has to dry out between the different stages of curing. Each one will come with a natural, removable filter to catch tea leaves made out of wood or bamboo. Pressure holds them in while in use, and then you can pop them out for cleaning.

There is only one Shen Su, and therefore also a limited amount of these gorgeous handcrafted gourd ladles. Head over to our website to place an order. If you decide to get one, we hope using it will reward you and your guests with countless tea sessions full of blissful bowls of joy and harmony!

Each handmade (by Shen Su) ladle is 200\$ + shipping

www.globalteahut.org/teaware



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. Therefore, we have 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!

A TEA CONNECTION UNDER THE SKY

🍵: Maxim Ulasevich

My name is Maxim, and I live in a small town in Russia called Lipetsk. Five years ago, I began offering tea ceremonies in the Global Tea Hut tradition in my home, open to anyone who wanted to attend. After years of dedicated practice, tea has become not only a medicine to me, which can help to bring my mind into its natural state, but a way to connect with people who find themselves in different life situations—to show people that the chance to live a human life is a precious opportunity, to encourage people who are ill to persevere, and to motivate those who have almost lost hope. Of course, people usually come to tea ceremonies in search of silence and peace, trying to disconnect themselves from the informational torrents that flow outside our Lipetsk Tea Hut, and perhaps learn something new about tea. They meet people, get to know one another, and begin to discover new talents and

opportunities. A few people come to these ceremonies in a critical state and in search of help.

But today I would like to talk about something different. After two years of ceremonies, I felt compelled to share this medicine with those who, for one reason or another, couldn't come to these events. So, I decided to expand the locations in which I served tea. Over the past three years, I have visited several orphanages, hospices, camps for children recovering after cancer treatment, and festivals for people with disabilities—as well as other places where tea ceremonies might not ordinarily be offered. Everyone has enjoyed these gatherings—they enjoyed the moments of unity and connection, were pleased to experience something new, and appreciated getting attention from the “outside” world.

Tea is a great gift from Nature. I feel very fortunate that I can enjoy a countless variety of teas, appreciate

the beauty of refined teaware, and travel to China, where Tea originated and is still evolving. At the same time, and because of this, I feel an obligation to share what I have learned with others—especially those who cannot or have not met Tea for one reason or another.

With the help of tea ceremony, each of us can learn to relax and rid ourselves of mental blockages. People with disabilities often experience a great number of different blockages, limitations and restrictions—even with the movement of their own bodies, which take root in the depths of their souls. I will never forget the moment when, after a ceremony at a festival for people with reduced mobility, a woman who had trouble walking began to dance. Of course, her dancing didn't look like a prima ballerina from the Bolshoi Theatre, but for her, it was the best dance in the world! (And all of us enjoyed it more than a ballet!)





Giving attention through the tea ceremony is a gift, and that is what I try to offer whenever there is an opportunity. This summer, when I went to serve tea to children going through cancer treatment, I saw how a two-hour ceremony changed the look in their eyes. They brightened with a desire to learn, try and create. That light is likely to fade again after a while, since cancer treatment is a very difficult and tiring experience to go through, but knowing this I am ready to visit them again and serve them more tea. If each of us tried to do something like this, to make a positive impact on others, perhaps there would be more people with light in their eyes, and this would be a merrier world, indeed!

Of course, working with children and silence is not an easy task, as any of us with kids will testify to. Often, they do not understand why they should sit quietly. In those cases, I tell them that if they want to hear what Tea has to tell them today, they should try to keep quiet and listen—listen to the music of the mountains and drink three bowls

of tea with great attention, noticing every sound, feeling every breath and watching what happens. The imagination of children is extremely rich. After a moment of silence, it is always interesting to hear the stories these children share about their experience listening to Tea speak.

Children in orphanages are always happy when they are given the opportunity to chat with adults, and if they get a hot bowl of tea at the same time, it's easy to see the happiness in their eyes. These children often feel abandoned, and care really matters for them. I remember on one occasion a teacher, who had brought children from an orphanage to a summer camp where I offered a ceremony, became interested in tea and its impact on his students. Based on what he told me, after the ceremony they did not misbehave for two days and acted with much more awareness. Because of this, he asked me for help acquiring teaware, and he now shares tea with the children at the orphanage where he works. Not long ago, he wrote to me

that such ceremonies are now a regular occurrence with his students.

Interesting forms and colors, beautiful teaware, pleasant music, hot tea... a medicine that pulls people out of their routine and everyday problems and allows them to spend some time alone with their inner nature. This is something that is necessary not only for those people living an "ordinary" life; I think all people need this! And who knows, maybe in a few years, instead of it being me serving tea from behind the tea table, tea will be served by the girl from the orphanage who, upon hearing about the Tea Sage Hut moving, said, "May the Tea people find a new home soon, just like me." Tea is an act of love and kindness poured into bowls. I wish for everyone in this world to have a hot bowl of this precious medicine! Please help us make that a reality, and maybe there can be peace in this world, bowl by bowl...





TeaWayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and Tea are becoming as the Tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of Tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to share glimpses of such beautiful people and their Tea. This month, we would like to introduce Rob Spinelli.

I began my tea journey in a crowded shopping mall in central New Jersey. I was nineteen and armed with resumes. After obtaining an interview with the manager of a corporate tea retailer, I accepted a cup of oolong. That was my first experience with tea. It was immediately clear that I had discovered a treasure. My imagination exploded in that moment. Misty mountains, moss-covered caves, and high seas coated my vision. My manager told me I would fit right in.

I learned a lot during my two-year tenure with the company. I was proud of our company and felt honored to work with what I understood to be a sacred medicine. However, it was eventually revealed that our tea had a dangerous amount of pesticide residue. I became obsessed with researching the unsavory side of the tea industry. I left the company and set out on an adventure to find clean tea.

I found that Western retailers often exploited the “spiritual” and “medicinal” qualities of tea to market an inferior product. To sift through the noise, I suspended my understanding of tea as medicine for a more linear attitude. When Wu De flew to New York City in 2017, I approached his service with skepticism. He was spiritual and referred to tea as “medicine,” which were red flags for me. Wu De served a large group in silence for over an hour, and with every bowl I felt my walls begin to soften. By the eighteenth bowl, I had been thoroughly saturated with tea spirit. After breaking the silence, he spoke of the importance of clean tea, plant medicine and living in the moment.

Anxious to learn more, I traveled to the Tea Sage Hut a few months after first meeting Wu De. While there, I learned of a lineage that approached tea consciously. They respected the plant and the Earth it comes from. Those at the Hut did not only drink tea, they studied it. Their knowledge was based on hypothesis and experimentation and was information that had been passed down for generations.

I felt a desire to test what I was taught. However, fear of disrespecting the lineage prevented me from serving tea for the next year. In that time period, I encountered a lot of hardship and lost my trust in people. In loneliness, I turned to Tea. Tea encouraged me to experiment with a daily practice, and soon every aspect of my life had been replaced by it. Time I had once spent on drugs, sex and media went to tea.

After six months, it became clear that my practice could only grow if I shared tea with other people. I reached out to someone in the community and they encouraged me to attend a tea ceremony in New York City. I viewed this as an opportunity to practice tea meditation without the distraction



茶人: Rob Spinelli, USA

tion of brewing. After seven bowls, my mind slowed and I became overwhelmed with feelings of love and acceptance. I spoke to those who attended the ceremony after it concluded. In them, I would come to regain my sense of trust, friendship and community.

Inspired by the spirit of tea that was embodied by this community, I began sharing tea with people in New Jersey. Group trips to the mountains for spring water and Global Tea Hut meet-ups in New York City became my favorite activities. The importance of sharing tea with others was no longer lost on me. Even the significance of lineage began to make sense. What started as a safe space for me to heal and grow now allows me to effectively communicate love and acceptance to others. Recently moving to Colorado, I am eager to connect with the tea community here and to share tea spirit with all I encounter.

Inside the Hut

COMING SOON TO GLOBAL TEA HUT MAGAZINE

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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.) Help us to spread the word about Global Tea Hut and Light Meets Life. As subscription increases, and tea/teaware sales rise, our financial power grows and we move closer and closer to phase one, which is to purchase land. Once we have land, we think that the next phases of construction will happen faster and more smoothly.



Have you seen the new “Pan Hu (蟠壺)” teapots we have? We ordered them almost two years ago and they are finally all finished (by hand). We hope you enjoy these precious pots. Find out more on the website!



We continue to host live broadcasts on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube every month. If the timing is not good for you, leave your questions on the app, and Wu will answer them. You can then watch later!



We are thinking of creating an online Cha Dao course in the form of videos that could be downloaded or purchased with included tea and teaware. This would start for beginners, but we could do levels. Let us know if you have any ideas.



It is very sad to announce, but the Annual Trip will be canceled this year. We know that many of you will miss the chance to travel together, not to mention all the marvelous tea sessions and opportunities to learn. However, the planning of these trips requires more energy than we have right now, and we wouldn't want to create a trip that wasn't up to your expectations. We will be back busing around rural China in 2021, full of verve and tea spirit again. We appreciate your understanding and support!

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!



We hope you stay excited for Light Meets Life. We want to involve you in the planning of what we hope you feel is your Center. The more form Light Meets Life takes, the more real it becomes. Please contact us with ideas if you have any: about what you envision for the property and for the experience at ten-day courses. Perhaps you have an idea for a type of course you would like to see when we open. Please share with us your ideas. We hope to create a whole new calendar and curriculum for Light Meets Life.



The Center will be closed indefinitely for obvious reasons. There will be no courses until Light Meets Life. Stay tuned to our social media for more updates as they happen. We will share every detail with you!

March Affirmation

I am creative

Am I expressing myself to my full potential. I am a powerful artist and my tea is an expression of my own inner stillness, truth, wisdom and light. I manifest that in my chaxi and in all the bowls of tea I share!

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www.globalteahut.org

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

GLOBAL TEA HUT

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

