

A close-up photograph of a tea tree branch. The branch is covered in thick, green moss and lichen, particularly concentrated in the center. The leaves are dark green, glossy, and serrated. The background is a soft-focus green field of similar vegetation.

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

November 2020

SPECIAL TEST EDITION

TASTING FOR AGROCHEMICALS

Contents

Issue 106 / November 2020

GLOBAL TEA HUT

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE



THE TEST

This is a very special and exciting issue that we have been planning for years. We are going to try to taste for agrochemicals. This cannot be done perfectly, but the process of learning to become more sensitive to chemicals in tea inspires more environmental awareness, sustainability dialogue and increases our sensitivity to tea.

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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recycled & recyclable



Soy ink

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From the editor

In November, the weather cools down in Taiwan and we can drink more outdoor tea. We start drinking more aged sheng and shou puerh teas, more aged oolongs and roasted, traditionally processed oolongs as well like Cliff Tea. Aged white tea is also great at this time of year to ease the transition from late autumn into winter. Drinking these teas outdoors also helps with acclimatizing the body and for many of us it isn't yet too cold to have outdoor tea, which is perfect.

The trials and tribulations of this year can have the effect of polarizing us across the divisions that separate us. Sides can get entrenched in times of stress, and the divide between nations, groups and ideologies grows vaster and dangerously deep. In Buddhism, we practice six “perfections,” called “*paramitas*.” One of them is “*kshanti*,” which can be translated as “tolerance,” “patience” or even “inclusiveness.” I share this one, as it may be helpful to anyone, from any tradition, in this time of charged emotions. This “inclusiveness” starts with opening the heart. The Buddha taught that a small heart has difficulty dealing with small issues, whereas an open heart can embrace anything. In fact, the first Chinese character for *kshanti* (忍辱) is a knife radical above the heart, suggesting that if our hearts are open enough, we can embrace the sharp without suffering. The Buddha used the analogy of salt in water: if you put a handful of salt into a small bowl, the water will be too saline to drink and cause suffering, but the same salt in a lake has no effect on the water. So opening our hearts means we have room for adversity and for all different types of people, even those who are guilty or carry wrong views.

Out of an open heart comes empathy and an understanding that others also want to live peacefully and safely. If we attack the other side, no one lives peacefully. In order for there to be peace, we have to let others live peacefully, so long as their actions aren't a danger to themselves or others. When we practice inclusivity, we listen (even to wrong views), learning to listen for its own sake. *When you include the other side, there aren't any sides any more...* And there is always a place where inclusion between humans can happen—in fact, between all living beings. This can be challenging and, of course, this lesson oversimplifies things. However, tolerance, patience and inclusivity are part of the Way of Tea as well, and can certainly help us in these very charged times...

This month, we will be starting our second online course, which is all about boiled tea. You can sign up any time and take the course at your own pace, in your own home. Perhaps that is the best part of online courses. This time, our course will be a bit more technical, covering how to boil tea, the history of boiling tea and the types of tea that are best boiled. We also have some great deals on boiled tea sets (including tea and teaware) for the course as well, and all the proceeds will help build Light Meets Life.

This is a very exciting issue of Global Tea Hut and unlike anything we have ever done before. For a long time, we have wanted to try something like this, offering two teas from the same place and processed by the same hands, only one is organic and clean and the other isn't. We suggest reading this issue before trying the teas, and certainly trying the teas before opening the “Results” envelope. Of course, the only real way to test whether a tea has agrochemicals is to use laboratory analysis, but that doesn't mean that the quest to try experiencing the difference isn't worthwhile; it is. In pursuing such sensitivity, we increase our ability to recognize quality in tea, we promote environmental awareness and we start to pay more attention to the effects that food and drinks are having on our minds, bodies and spirits. All of that can lead to a happier, healthier life.

Tea is the second-most consumed substance on Earth after water. This means that a tremendous amount of land and resources go into producing tea. Its environmental footprint is very large and it is not as necessary for our survival as food, so the detriment to the environment is really unjustifiable. Also, we think that the destruction of unsustainable tea production really points in the opposite direction to everything tea is about—relaxation, peace, loving-kindness, hospitality and enjoyment of Nature and what it offers our senses. It is very important that we have as many discussions about tea vis-à-vis the environment as possible and continue to promote sustainability, organics and even living tea to all and everyone who loves tea for any reason. No matter what you love about this leaf, there is no leaf without the tree and no tree without the forest. How do you love a leaf without loving the forest?



—Further Reading—

This month, we highly recommend reading or re-reading the Extended Edition from September 2018, which is all about sustainability, organics and tea production. It has a ton of articles that provide context for the test we are doing in this issue and carries this discussion much deeper, expanding on the environmental impact of tea.

TEA OF THE MONTH



ver the course of this month, we will be testing for agrochemicals in these two oolongs from Zhu Shan (竹山) in Central Taiwan. We highly recommend reading through the issue and tasting/testing the teas before opening the “Classified Results” envelope to find out which tea is which. Hopefully, you will save enough tea to try them more than once, and so having the first experience be a blind taste test is always helpful.

The focus of this special issue is to forward the dialogue on sustainability in tea production. Tea is the second-most consumed substance on Earth after water, so the production of tea takes up a lot of our agricultural space and has a huge influence on the environment. While the ancients considered tea one of the “Seven Necessities,” along with rice, vinegar, firewood, salt, cooking oil and soy sauce, for us it is much more of a luxury. And how can we justify any luxury like tea drinking when it comes at the expense of the environment and harms the earth and the tea we leave for our descendants?

Of course, learning to use our bodies to test for agrochemicals in tea does more than just help us live more environmentally aware; it also increases our sensitivity, allowing us to appreciate our teas at deeper levels and learn to taste quality on our own, paying attention to how teas make us feel.

Our aim was to make these oolong teas as close as possible to one another. For that reason, we purchased the inorganic tea as “maocha (毛茶),” which means “un-fished” or “rough” tea, and then allowed our organic producer and tea friend (茶友) to do the processing of that tea as well. Ultimately, what that meant was that our friend paid an inorganic farmer to go to his place and harvest his leaves as though they were his own, carrying them back to his facility immediately for processing. By ensuring that the same hands and same machines did the processing in the same way, we can eliminate processing as much as possible from what separates these teas. And that can be a strong factor. Not only is there the differ-

ence in skill between two tea producers, which can have a dramatic effect on the resulting teas, but also their attitude and orientation towards tea production. One of the hidden benefits of organic tea production is that it requires a lot more work to produce and is therefore usually only undertaken by farmers who love tea and love the environment. This isn’t a black-and-white line—not all organic farmers love tea and not all inorganic ones lack concern for quality. However, we have found that proportionally more organic farmers care about the quality of their tea and love their trees, which, of course, results in better tea production, a desire to learn and improve their skills and a concern for their customers’ health. And more inorganic farmers put money and production quantity as their bottom line, compromising in other areas of production just as they have by using agrochemicals. All of that does influence the quality of a tea.

We also wanted to keep the processing simple for our Teas of the Month, and so asked the farmer to use a light touch, oxidizing and roasting the teas only lightly and to an equal degree (using an oven so he could control temperature and duration exactly). The teas were also harvested within the same time period to try our best to eliminate any differences due to the weather and were chosen from gardens as close as possible to one another as well. The tea was withered, shaken, fired, rolled and roasted dry in a simple and unpretentious way, leaving them lighter and greener as oolongs that hopefully share as much as possible in common save the method and philosophy used to grow the trees.

The organic trees come from a biodiverse garden with lots of love and care. We often share tea from this place as the farm is co-opted by Master Tsai’s Tea Mountain Preservation Association. We will be selling brewing cups for testing this tea and a whole set with these teas and this magazine indefinitely on our site to help as many tea lovers as possible have this opportunity to try to taste clean versus unclear tea. You can also order a tasting set to brew them more experimentally.



The Test



Zhu Shan Village, Taiwan



Oolong Teas



Taiwanese



~600 Meters



淨



純

Brewing Tips

冲泡技巧 完成好茶

This month, we are tasting for agrochemicals in two teas blindly. We recommend doing the first test blind and then opening the results and trying the test again, this time with a bit of knowledge (placebo?) to help you out. We also highly recommend reading through the magazine before drinking the teas, as there are some great tips for what to look for when you drink them that will help in your test as well. The following pages also explain the goals of this test, the impetus for sending it to you and what it is that this test can and cannot achieve, all of which are also helpful for conducting the experiment. Of course, we also recommend a review of the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea (rewritten in this issue, but also available in many past issues and as a video on our YouTube channel).

There are two ways to approach any A/B test of two teas, teaware or even brewing method: brew them with an experimental approach or brew them consecutively in the way that you are used to brewing tea. Both have their strengths and weaknesses. An experimental approach highlights the teas' characteristics, exaggerating them so they are easier to recognize. However, this method can be very limiting in some situations since you are now testing the tea in a very different way than you plan to enjoy it. If you are choosing teas for purchase, for example, this may lead you astray since the experimental approach is very different, and offers different experiences, than how you plan to prepare the tea for your enjoyment. Brewing the teas consecutively in the way you plan to enjoy them solves that issue, but it also has flaws since it requires remembering the first tea when drinking the second and doesn't afford a back-and-forth evaluation like the experimental approach. (You could design an experimental approach based on your normal brewing if you have double of all your teaware, which may be helpful but will still lean towards the experimental and thus include its strengths and weaknesses to some extent.) Also, experimental approaches cannot be applied to tests of teaware or brewing methods.

For these teas, we recommend trying both approaches—using the experimental approach blindly first, then opening the results and maybe doing one more experiment, and then wrapping up the project by brewing the teas in your usual way consecutively (in the same sitting). This will provide the best results for the purposes we will set out in this issue.

For the experimental approach, we recommend using a testing set, which many farms and tea companies use for doing such comparisons. We have put them up for sale on our website in the “teaware” section. You can read more about them on p. 30 of this issue. They are affordable and will be useful to have around for other A/B tests you want to do in the future. The common method of using this is the “3-gram/5-minute” method, usually just called “3/5.” As the name suggests, you put three grams in the small vessel and steep for exactly five minutes (using a timer). Use very hot water (90–95 degrees Celsius). Then we use a porcelain spoon to test the teas. The spoon is great for smelling the aroma, which we do first by dipping it in the tea liquor and then turning it upside-down, holding it a few centimeters below our noses. We recommend closing your eyes and inhaling very slowly, following the tips for smelling tea covered later in this issue. We also place out a cereal bowl (or any bowl) of very hot water to dip the spoon in between teas, so we do not contaminate one bowl of liquor with the liquor of the other (or use two spoons). After smelling both teas and taking some notes, we then use the spoons to taste them, following the tips we discuss later as well as the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea.

If you cannot wait for a porcelain test set, or don't want to purchase one, you can use two porcelain bowls. Instead of steeping three grams of tea for five minutes, put two grams in the bowl (like leaves in a bowl) and wait three or four minutes, then follow the same instructions, using a spoon to smell and taste the liquor (cleaning it in a third bowl between bowls). You can use ceremonial bowls to do this if that is all you have. The problem with this method is that the liquor will continue to change as you taste/smell it, since the leaves are still steeping in the bowls. However, this method will suffice and can be a fine substitute. If you cannot get a porcelain spoon, then just sip from the bowls and smell the liquor by bending over it or bring the bowls up to your nose.

Any of these methods will suffice for the experimental portion of the test. Then, you can check the results envelope and go back and explore the two teas in greater depth.





The background of the entire image is a close-up, slightly blurred photograph of green tea leaves. At the top, the Chinese characters '淨純茶' (Jìng Chún Chá) are written in a light gray, semi-transparent font. Below this, the English text 'Learning to Taste for' is written in a large, white, serif font, with 'to' on a separate line.

淨純茶

Learning to Taste for

SUSTAINABILITY

CLEANLINESS

QUALITY

BIODIVERSITY

HEALTH

Chemicals



Introduction

We are awakening to the realization that we can no longer ignore humanity's impact on our local and global ecologies. It is up to all of us to reflect on how the ways we live affect the environment. Of course, the detrimental effects of our ignorance on our world also affects us, as we drink the water and eat the produce of Nature, taking back into our bodies much of the pollution we emit into the land, water and air. We are also responsible to future generations of people who will inherit this world, especially with the cumulative effects of pollution and environmental degradation that could upset our descendants' lives in ways we cannot imagine. As individuals and as a society, we should courageously face each area of our lives and discuss the problems, and more importantly the solutions, to all the environmental issues we face. Of course, as tea lovers this means we need to ask important questions about our tea drinking and its affect on Nature.

Millions of hectares of this Earth are devoted to the cultivation of tea. Whether you approach tea as a beverage, a hobby, ceremonially or all of the above as we do, it is important to think about the environmental impact of your tea drinking. If you love tea, and we know you do, it's worth thinking about loving the forest as well. After all, tea is a leaf. How do you love the leaf without loving the environment that makes it? If tea is a beverage to you, wouldn't you want it to be a healthy one? Wouldn't you care to know that your healthy beverage

doesn't harm the Earth, the health of farmers or you yourself? And if tea is a hobby, should it not be important that our pastimes do not harm others? Can you truly enjoy something without any responsibility for Nature and the lives of farmers? And if tea is peace, meditation and ceremony to you, of course neither tranquility nor insight can be won through something harmful.

The negative impacts of agrochemicals on the Earth and the lives of farmers are well-documented. The trio of chemical fertilizers, weed-killers and pesticides destroy local ecologies. When you drive away "pests," you also drive away the organisms that eat those insects, and the organisms that eat *those* organisms, ultimately collapsing an ecology. The same can be said for flora when weed-killers are used. These chemicals degrade the soil and reduce sustainability, and all that is *before* they start affecting human beings. According to the WHO, thousands of farmers die from pesticide exposure every year.

We must never forget the effects our environmental ignorance has on the lives of farmers.

Farmers are the first victims of agrochemicals.

Many organic farmers whom we know in China, Taiwan and Japan started their organic journeys because they or their relatives faced illnesses or even deaths that were directly related to pesticide exposure. Pesticides are poisons. They are designed to harm organic creatures and there is no telling what the long-term effects of consum-

ing them are for each of us. Even in the short term, many pesticides that are widely used at first are later found to be the cause of various illnesses and thereafter prohibited by governments (DDT anyone?). What exactly the "safe" threshold in terms of the amount of pesticides a human can consume is something worth considering, exploring and researching more. No matter what that amount is, however, *zero* agrochemicals will always be better and healthier than any amount!

Beyond our responsibility to the Earth, farmers and our own health, the quality of tea is also at stake. As we often say: *The leaf is the tree's expression of its relationship to its environment.* This is a poetic reminder that tea is its terroir. Terroir means climate, soil, propagation, human culture and all the factors of a place that make the tea from there unique. Tea is its environment, in other words. The leaf doesn't arise out of nowhere; it grows out of the tree and the tree gets the nutrients to produce that leaf from its environment—from the water, soil and sun. If the tree consumes nutrients from a healthy environment, its leaves will also be healthy. Of course, there is much more to a tea's quality in terms of terroir than just agrochemicals. Whether or not it grows on a slope or flatland, the local biodiversity, the climate, the altitude, whether it is a cutting or seed-propagated and then how well it is processed by the producer will all affect its final quality. However, knowing whether it contains agrochemicals is a great start to understanding its quality and footprint.



If agrochemicals were used, we can be confident that in all but the rarest exceptions the biodiversity of the tea was also lacking, that it grew in a plantation of rows where nothing else could grow. We can also surmise that it came from cuttings as opposed to being seed-propagated, which is more natural. And to some extent, the presence of agrochemicals also shows us something about the farmer's philosophy, being one of production as a cash crop over quality. This is not judgmental. Farmers are trying to make a living and not all tea farmers are in it for the love of tea or dedicated to craftsmanship in order to produce quality for its own sake. Others may be ignorant of the extent of the damage such chemicals cause and just using them because neighbors around them do. In the end, farmers are also victims of an unhealthy agricultural philosophy and consumer culture.

We have asked many farmers what we as tea lovers can do to improve the situation and they all tell us that we needn't worry about farmers. The solution is in the hands of consumers. The more consumers are educated to make responsible and sustainable decisions, the more that influence will support the farmers growing organic tea and encourage the ones who aren't to change. If enough of us demand

organic tea, all farmers would have to change! Also, most farmers do know it is better for their land and the health of their families if their farm is clean—they don't spray their own vegetable gardens!

Around here we like to separate tea into three categories. The best tea is all natural, which we call "living tea." The second two types are both "plantation tea," one being organic and the other "conventional." (It does seem silly that organic farming, practiced for millennia, has become "unconventional," while modern, industrial agriculture is now "conventional.") For us, living tea is expressed by six characteristics, each one a category of thought really:

- 1) *Seed-propagated*
- 2) *Biodiversity* in the environment
- 3) *Room to grow* (meaning that the tea is not pollarded nor packed too tightly, allowing tea trees to have space as individuals and room to grow up)
- 4) *No agrochemicals*
- 5) *No irrigation*
- 6) *A healthy relationship* with the humans who tend the garden, doing so with a heart of gratitude for the tea, the environment and their descendants' place in it, along with a love for tea that is translated into a passion to create high-quality tea

Great tea is born out of the congruence of Heaven, Earth and Human. This means that the best climate, rain and sun must meet the right healthy environment planted with healthy trees, which are then harvested and processed with love and skill to produce fine tea.

Unfortunately, if all the tea in the world were produced in gardens of living tea, there wouldn't be enough. Some compromises are necessary for quantity, but this doesn't mean we have to sacrifice the environment in our pursuit of tea—as a beverage, hobby or meditation. Humans are ingenious, and if we only devoted more of our scientific exploration and technological prowess to solving environmental issues instead of causing them, we could make this world a healthier place, indeed. We already have the know-how to clean up much of the air, water and land if we had a heart to do so.

Our choices do matter. No matter why you love tea, it is important to choose living tea or organic plantation tea. Organic tea is much more sustainable and far less toxic to the Earth, the ecology, the farmers who don't then need to handle such dangerous chemicals and for our own health as well. We can vote with our dollars and also help educate tea lovers to make responsible choices!





Here is what Master Tsai Yi Zhe (蔡奕哲), who helped tremendously in this project as he has helped teach and guide Global Tea Hut in so many ways, has to say on the subject:



If it weren't for the advent of industrialized agriculture, with all the exploitation and harm it brings to the natural environment, we wouldn't really need the word "organic," much less a discussion of tea mountain conservation methods. From the ancient times of the "Divine Farmer" Shennong up to the recent past, the farming ideology we've applied to crops and soil has been based on a code of respecting the cycles of Nature, the way it continuously grows and renews itself. We know very well that trash that cannot be reused or recycled has never existed in Nature; all the waste that we generate from farming and from our daily lives can in fact be continuously recycled. There certainly weren't any man-made, non-biodegradable chemical substances being released into Nature in the past.

We who love drinking natural tea have inherited Shennong's ancient wisdom of "detoxifying through tea." We know that tea is a divine go-between, linking us with the Earth. We who love tea have never believed that humans must place ourselves above and aloof from the natural environment; we firmly hold that all living beings on this Earth are equal, and that the cycles of Nature will always reach an equilibrium in the end.

When faced with the formidable power of Nature, an organic tea grower with the right mindset won't simply take the pessimistic attitude of being resigned to adversity. Rather, we'll use our years of labor as a source of learning, an opportunity to accumulate our own experience of Nature.

We can start by trying to imagine ourselves in the place of the plants, to gain a deeper experience of the changes in the natural environment of the tea mountain and learn about the worldview embodied by the saying "the Way follows Nature (*Dao fa zi ran*, 道法自然)." Only when we are physically amid Nature is it possible to really understand it, to put aside our own subjective viewpoint as humans. For this

reason, I often take students deep into the tea mountains to immerse themselves in the tea gardens and experience Nature's many changes for themselves. Sometimes, we try to imagine ourselves as tea plants, to imagine ourselves growing there on the tea mountain; listening to the voice of Nature embodied in the cloud and sun, wind and rain, snow and frost; feeling the power of Nature within us; mastering the rhythm of the four seasons. In this way, we can experience the worldview of the plants. This experience is the daily reality of an organic tea grower throughout the four seasons; all year round they feel what the plants feel, they understand the cycle of the seasons. They are the best placed to understand and apply the philosophy behind organic farming, and the wisdom they accumulate comes directly from Nature itself. If you see the world from a plant's point of view, you're unlikely to draw conclusions out of individual subjectivity.

The phrase "life springs eternal (*sheng sheng bu xi*, 生生不息)" represents the ever-changing, ever-renewing natural environment. It's a founding principle of the organic farming philosophy—but how do we put this principle into practice? "Life" is at the heart of the organic farming philosophy; it's the manifestation of the innate potential of every living being; it's the result of a union between the human and the Divine. Through their contact with Nature, ancient people understood very early on that life cannot exist without death, so they could clearly see the life cycle of everything that lived. So, it wouldn't be going too far to say that the philosophy of organic farming is the philosophy of life.

When we think about the way that life is passed on from generation to generation, the way that it is constantly growing and renewing itself, we become more deeply aware that "life" does not just mean us humans; "life" is all living beings on this planet! Through organic methods and con-

servation, our goal is to help the tea mountains recover from the harm that we humans have caused them, to gradually restore the balance between the tea plants and their surrounding ecosystem, with its insects, birds, animals, trees and plants. I look forward to the day when our successful conservation of the tea mountains leads us back once more to a world where we live in harmonious synergy with Nature and her myriad beings.

茶 *The pesticides, weed-killers and excess chemical fertilizers that the plant does not use all leach into the soil. Over time, this makes the soil more like clay or dust when it is dry. It has no odor, is loamless and feels like dust in the hands. It feels dead, frankly. (We think this photograph captures this well.) These chemicals then leach into the water table since the soil cannot hold moisture very well, polluting other ecologies and sometimes even human water sources. In the mountains, this increases the risk of landslides and other natural disasters as well. Over time, this soil will no longer support tea production and be left fallow for an as yet to be determined time frame. The following page shows organic soil for comparison.*





茶 This organic soil is full of “green manure.” It is soft and rich, with a deep, loamy smell of fermentation and life. We found worms and other insects. Soil really is a whole ecology unto itself—a living, breathing and churning world of microbes, insects and nutrients that cannot be replicated with agrochemicals of any kind.

We also thought we would include the perspective of one of Master Tsai's students, Luo Huai Kang (羅懷慷), in this introduction, since she is a brilliant author and her perspective adds depth to this conversation.



When most consumers first encounter organic produce, they're often astonished by the ugly fruits and vegetables they see when they walk into the store: mandarin oranges with blackened peels, underdeveloped onions, vegetables pitted with holes from insect bites. People can't bring themselves to spend their money on this kind of produce.

How many people have beat a hasty retreat just like that, without really understanding the benefits of organic produce? Given that organic cultivation is so difficult and unpredictable, why are some farmers still willing to adopt these kinds of methods?

Master Tsai Yi Tze once said the following during a teaching session: "There are certain advantages to starting out by exploring and learning about organic, eco-arboreal tea. This is because tea undergoes a roasting process, so even if the leaves have been thoroughly gnawed by bugs, you can't see this until after you've brewed the tea. So, you won't be tempted to dismiss a tea purely on its appearance, and you'll be able to directly experience the wonderful flavor of organic tea and the feeling of lightness it brings to your body. The success of organic fruit and vegetable farmers can really only be determined by the taste of the produce; it's almost impossible to judge based on appearance. It's very difficult for these farmers."

The success of a tea manifests itself in the tea liquor. A cup of good, clean tea with a clear, pure color and a mellow, full-bodied flavor will certainly end the myth that "tea hinders the digestion." With a tea like this, who could possibly care about the appearance of the leaves? In Taiwan, a very high proportion of the population are tea drinkers, so economic incentives have spurred some farmers to raise their production volume by overusing chemical fertilizers, overlooking the fact that often, less than 20% of the fertilizer is used by the plants. If they can't decompose, the excess nutrients

remain in the soil and become residual poison or else are washed out and pollute nearby water sources, eventually making their way into the human body.

Plants that grow in colder regions have a relatively high sugar content due to their slow growth. Thanks to this, Taiwan's high mountain tea became known far and wide, earning great favor with consumers. As a result, the greatest guardian of the soil and water—the forest—was cleared to make way for high mountain tea plantations. As agriculture made its way up the mountains, pollution followed, and over-intensive farming of the soil has led to long-term damage such as mudslides, landslides and even the extinction of certain species.

There are several simple signs that we can observe to determine whether a tea garden has a balanced ecosystem:

1) Plant cover on the soil surface: Conventional farming involves the long-term use of chemical fertilizers, which cause the soil to gradually degrade into a clay-like state. This type of soil has poor water retention and drainage; the only plants that can survive on it are a few hardy lichens. Organic tea gardens don't use fertilizers, or else use only organic ones, so the soil is soft and often covered in low-growing grasses that help with soil conservation.

2) The insect ecosystem: Since conventional tea plantations use chemical pesticides to get rid of bugs, they seldom have a complete insect ecosystem. A well-managed organic tea garden, on the other hand, can make use of the natural food chain to reduce insect damage (for example, spiders can be helpful for pest control).

3) Overall appearance: Just like a patient who has taken medication over a long period of time, tea plants that rely on chemical fertilizers to grow tend to be weaker and more fragile. After the tea leaves have all been harvested, the

bare tea plants can make for quite a desolate scene. In a tea garden with a balanced ecosystem, the tea plants are not overly reliant on human care and have more robust constitutions. The overall impression is one of lush, green abundance.

Organic cultivation was proposed as a solution to these ecological challenges. It involves reducing the amount of fertilizer used and switching to organic fertilizer, as well as employing methods such as biological pest control, manual weeding and growing "green manure" plant cover species around the tea trees. In other words, it reduces any actions that are potentially harmful to the surrounding environment. This farming model must be employed continuously for at least three years before a tea garden can be considered organic.

Like a good cup of tea, whose flavor starts off bitter before evolving into a sweet aftertaste, so it is with organic farming. After the transition period, a tea garden will slowly recover and once more become a complete ecosystem with a stable natural environment. Under normal harvest conditions, an organic tea garden can yield as much tea as its conventionally farmed counterparts, and the flavor of the tea will certainly be just as good, if not superior. Compared to the poor-quality imported tea flooding the Taiwanese market (mostly from Vietnam and Mainland China), the difference in market value becomes even clearer. It's a win-win situation for both the tea growers and the soil. Organic farming produces better tea and a healthier environment for us all.

Each tea garden or piece of farmland is intimately connected to its surrounding environment. Some people say that because of Taiwan's small land area and dense population, there's not much chance of organic farming taking off in Taiwan. But if we all take this negative attitude, who else will take responsibility for the health of our people and the protection of our land?

FINDING CLEAN TEA ON OUR OWN

There are many benefits to learning to use your own senses to find agrochemicals, starting with a set like this. The fact is that there are teas that are certified organic that may not be, or, more often, a vendor claims that they are organic when they are not. Learning to taste the difference eliminates the need for any story. Many great farmers cannot or do not certify their teas. If the tea is selling well, produced sustainably and clean then they have no need for this added expense. In other cases they cannot afford it or do not know how to go about getting certified. But, as Wu De's teacher, Master Lin, always says: "The truth is in the cup."

The quest for clean, sustainable teas is one of responsibility. We start to take account of our environmental impact and align ourselves with those who are striving to find balance with Nature, ensuring healthy environments for our descendants and for the other living beings we share this Earth with. This is a very positive "belief," but as

a concept "environmentalism" may not be enough. As a way of thinking, a philosophy, environmentalism must compete with greed and ignorance—a battle that is certainly being lost at the moment. One can "understand" that plastic is not good for the earth and then forget that "philosophy" on a hot day when a bottle of water is at hand. This doesn't make us bad people, it just makes us human. However, there is a deeper, more powerful experiential truth available to all of us: It is a fact that *we are a part of our ecology*. Our bodies are more than half water—water that was very recently in the clouds. The energy that we use to move, think and talk all came from the plants around us, which got it from the sun. We are the minerals, the water, the air and the sun. These aren't distant forces or spiritual ideas; they are the very real, physical make-up of our bodies.

When we commit to not just a philosophy of "sustainable tea," but to the pursuit of experiential understanding of the difference in our bod-

ies, through our own senses, we are seeking to experience the difference between harmonious and disharmonious agriculture. If we can experience this difference ourselves, and we believe that anyone can, there is no need for a philosophy of "environmentalism," because it will be experientially, deeply and instinctively "known" that harming the environment is harming oneself. We don't need a philosophy to protect those we love. We do so automatically. Many times, people will even altruistically risk their lives without any thought in order to save another human in danger. They don't need to think about it; it just happens. If they would risk bodily harm to help a stranger, they would do so even more vigorously to save their own son, for example. The truth is that our son's body is more than half water, so what we do to the water, we do to our son. If this is a philosophy, we can forget it all too easily when there is profit to be made in polluting the water—profits we paradoxically choose because we



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see them as a benefit to our family, our son. But when we can experience the physical health problems and the spiritual disconnect our pollution causes, and the power clean, healthy water can produce for our bodies and our souls, we will naturally flow in the direction of sustainability and environmental harmony. In other words, the more we experience our connection with the environment, understanding it as part of ourselves it as part of ourselves, the easier it will be to cooperate towards a healthier, greener world.

When we commit to learning how to experience the difference between “clean” and “unclean” tea, we are devoting our heart, mind and body to a path of greater sensitivity. This sensitivity will aid us in many areas of our lives. The fact is that with so many distractions, many of us have started to live semi-disembodied lives. We dwell mostly in the realms of the mind, or get lost in the technology that connects our minds to each other and to data and entertainment.

Tea offers us a path home. Our bodies are our true homes. Tea allows us to return to the body and live in our beings, connected to the wisdom and power that a human body offers, as well as connection to the Nature that flows through us. Through drinking tea, we connect to our senses more deeply—listening, smelling and tasting more. This can expand our experience of life and its richness, opening doorways into a greater appreciation for all the ordinary wonders in our lives. Any of our senses are powerful and beautiful exchanges with the world around us, and we often take them for granted until they are gone. Imagine how happy a deaf or blind person would be to borrow your ears or eyes for a day... Through greater sensitivity, we develop deeper appreciation and gratitude.

Our bodies are also always present, and this present moment is also our true home. All of reality is present, here and now—save our mind, which “wanders” in the past, future and in fantasies. It doesn’t really go anywhere,

it just stops paying attention, distracted by thought or by the human social world, by data and by appearances and the surface of things. Tea teaches us to be more present and thus see more clearly.

By developing sensitivity towards agrochemicals in tea, we are developing sensitivity full stop. This sensitivity will translate into deeper tea lessons, like learning to taste the difference between finer and lower quality teas that are both clean or tasting the difference between teapots, clays, cups, kettles or even brewing methods. Agrochemicals in tea are often far more gross than any of these differences, meaning that if we are unable to sense the difference between clean and unclean teas, we will have a hard time distinguishing between two cups. Eventually, this sensitivity will transcend our tea table and start to affect the way we eat, meditate and live our lives. This is an area where tea drinking as a Way starts to make sense, and you can begin to understand how it is a lifestyle.



DEVELOPING SENSITIVITY

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The good news is that sensitivity in tea can be learned. It is not some inborn talent or unique power. Each generation of new students wonders how their teachers can possibly taste the difference between this and that, thinking that it must be something extrasensory, but it is just the result of plain old practice and experience. Wu De often tells the story of the first trip he took to Yunnan with one of his teachers, Master Zhou Yu, who had a whole table of teas lined up and just from smelling the dry leaves was commenting on which mountain the tea came from and some details about the weather that year, all of which was correct—to the amazement of the tea workers milling around and to Wu himself who was blown away by such sensitivity. But this is just the same as marveling at the sensitivity of a trained athlete, archer, musician or chef. Through practice and effort, they have developed their sensitivity.

Every path is a path from the gross to the subtle. When you start learning Tai Qi, for example, your teacher is happy if you can follow the form in a bumbling, awkward way. Later, she will come and adjust your hand by a millimeter. And after that, she will ask you to start to align your breath with your now-perfect form. Eventually, you will move on to lessons about Qi, or subtle energy, which is what this practice is all about. Similarly, we start with flavor and aroma in tea and move on to mouthfeel and then Qi. The development of our sensitivity is a necessary step in refining our tea practice.

There is a lot of marketing in tea, and developing our own sensitivity means we can know a tea or piece of teaware for what it is, personally and directly. At the end of this article we will include a discussion of the “Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea,” which are a way to expand the discussion of what is “clean” versus “unclean” tea beyond just agrochemicals. In that way, we

can move on from a sensitivity to agrochemicals to an experience of all the factors that affect the quality of a tea:

- 1) The region/mountain from which the tea came
- 2) The environment of the garden; its biodiversity or lack thereof, irrigation, soil fertility, etc.
- 3) The health of the trees and how they were propagated, whether are they are cuttings or seed-propagated, if they are wild or not and natural versus man-made cultivars, as well as their room to grow (space between trees and vertical growth versus pollarding); varietal/cultivar can also play a role in quality as well
- 4) The weather and season the tea was harvested in
- 5) The processing of the tea; the skill of the manufacturer as well as their “heart” or passion for tea
- 6) The storage of the tea—the longer the tea is stored, the more this factor is influential—including humidity and oxygen, relative to the type of tea, the jar used and even the energy of the environment the tea is kept in
- 7) The brewing of the tea, including water, fire, teaware and method

Agrochemicals are in most cases a gross doorway into learning to experience all areas of quality for one’s self. Then our own experience and skill can guide us. Thus, the sensitivity we cultivate through our tea practice can truly change the way we live, increasing our sensitivity in all areas of life. Much of what we learn to develop by being present, clear and open to quality in tea can be applied to sound, hearing music more deeply, for example; to smell, learning to appreciate incense, which often comes easy for the seasoned tea lover; and to food, literally applying these principles to taste and feel what foods are healthy for us, as well as how their production disconnects us from Nature. The benefits of

increased body awareness, sensitivity and presence are endless, improving so many areas of our daily lives...

Heightening Sensitivity

It is very important to note that our senses will never be perfect. We aren’t machines. Our senses are all too easily skewed by biases, emotions and thoughts. It is therefore essential to recognize that there are very real limitations to our senses and ability to experience agrochemicals in tea no matter how experienced or trained we are. No human is a perfect read out for clean tea and anyone trying to be an authority on this is misleading us!

The only foolproof way to verify the presence or absence of agrochemicals in a tea is through lab testing.

This doesn’t mean that learning to taste agrochemicals in tea is not a worthwhile endeavor; it absolutely is, for all the reasons we discussed above: it heightens sensitivity, increases the depth of our understanding of tea and our own bodies, improving our appreciation, and can even help in other areas of our lives, including mindfulness and presence. Beyond that, not all clean teas are certified and not all of us can afford to send all our teas to a lab to be tested, which would make the teas we purchase more expensive than they already are.

When traveling this journey of developing your own skill in judging first whether a tea is free of agrochemicals and then beyond that to learn to evaluate its quality in all of the seven ways we discussed earlier, there is a very helpful approach that can bridge the gap between our own experiences, with all our biases, and the objective, verifiable lab results for a tea. A slight shift in our orientation towards our experiments will change everything.





Rather than concretely assuming “this tea is dirty” or “it has chemicals,” we can instead focus on a softer position, saying “this tea is not for me” or “this tea is not healthy in my body.” As with food, we are recognizing the possibility that what we are experiencing is not some objective quality of the tea, which we could only verify through lab tests, but rather that the tea is interacting with our bodies in a way that makes us uncomfortable. It could be that this tea isn’t right for this season, this time of day or with the diet we have been consuming recently. In other words, we are open to being wrong and are focused on our subjective experience and cultivating the sensitivity of that experience so that it more and more aligns with objective truth. Such kits as this can be very helpful in developing that skill.

To put this simply, a tea that shows signs of agrochemicals could either be unclear and therefore have agrochemicals or it could be a false positive be-

cause it made you uncomfortable for some other reason (quality of the tea, diet, season, time of day, etc.). The fact that there is always a margin of error isn’t that important for two reasons:

1) Whether the tea makes you uncomfortable because it has agrochemicals, because it has quality issues in one of the other six ways or it just doesn’t sit right with your body, it is not a tea for you. No matter what the reason, this is not a tea you should be drinking (at least at this time).

2) The true aim of this whole exercise of learning to taste agrochemicals is to promote more environmental awareness and sensitivity to quality in tea, both of which are real and very achievable goals no matter what your margin of error is at any given time.

There will always be a margin of error using the human body to test for agrochemicals in tea, and of course it is

thus. But if your goals are to be more conscious of the environmental impact of tea drinking, align with Nature and to increase your sensitivity and skill in evaluating tea and in general increase mindfulness throughout all areas of your life, you can certainly improve. Also, though it will never be perfect, you can increase your ability to objectively detect agrochemicals if you try. A human will never be a perfect gauge, but that doesn’t mean we cannot be a gauge at all, especially since lab results aren’t always available.

One of the teachings that Wu De celebrates as one of the greatest practical tools his teacher taught him is that “there are no maybes in tea.” *There is yes and no and all maybes are nos.* This can be incredibly helpful in navigating all areas of tea exploration. From deciding on an Yixing pot to choosing a tea, from verifying if an antique kettle is real to knowing the age of the trees when tasting *maocha*, you won’t choose wrong if you follow this axiom.



A tea is either clean or it isn't. If you aren't sure, don't buy it. The pot is either genuine clay or it isn't; if it isn't, of course you don't buy it, but if you aren't sure, you should also wait. Be patient. Tea is all about patience. Wait for the pot that you are sure is genuine. (Or choose the one that isn't so you can learn something.) Of course, there are exceptions to this. Sometimes affordable maybe-options mean we can buy a "maybe" open to learning whether it is a yes or no later. When it comes to the environment, however, we shouldn't gamble. If we suspect a tea has agrochemicals, we should not purchase it no matter the quality of the experience drinking it. The cost of such "pleasure" is just too high. (Can tea, or anything else for that matter, really bring us true pleasure when it harms people and/or the environment?)

What if a tea feels okay to us, but we later find out it isn't? Well, that was a great learning opportunity. It humbles us and reminds us that no one, no

matter how much tea they have drunk, is perfect at this. We aren't morally wrong, we are mistaken. And if you are learning as you go, there aren't even any "mistakes"—*only lessons!* As long as we stay committed to remaining conscious in our choices of tea we purchase and do our best to support sustainable tea agriculture, we will find the right track. And the more clean tea we drink, the lower our margin of error will get. In fact, the best way to improve our sensitivity to agrochemicals is to drink lots of clean tea and then throw in an unclean sample later. The more you get used to how chemical-free tea tastes and feels, the more obvious the presence of agrochemicals will become. Imagine, for example, if some prankster hacked your phone and added a synthesizer track to your favorite song, which you have listened to hundreds or even thousands of times. Wouldn't you notice it the next time you played that song? Of course you would! Being very familiar with the song, you would

notice the added sounds that don't belong. In the same way, when you get used to how clean tea tastes and feels, the addition of agrochemicals becomes much more noticeable.

There are many ways that we can heighten our sensitivity to agrochemicals in tea and to quality in tea as well, learning to taste all the seven areas that affect tea quality. Though our mind and body aren't truly separate, we tend to regard them differently, so it is worthwhile discussing each one since these are the instruments we will be using in our research. Without a lab to test for chemicals, our body will be the dish and our minds the microscope.

When it comes to the body, we can do a lot to improve our sensitivity in tea—all of which will improve our sensitivity and health overall. The main areas that affect tea tasting are healthy practices that are mostly common sense, starting, of course, with our diets: The cleaner and healthier our diets, the more sensitive we will be.

Healthy diets invariably get lighter and include more plant-based foods. The lighter and healthier we eat, the more the instrument of our bodies will be a good detector for impurities. If we eat a lot of inorganic or unhealthy food, there won't be any background for the impurities in our tea to stand out from. Of course, this applies equally to other areas of our physical well-being, including exercise and sleep. Wu De often says that it is not that eating junk food decreases our sensitivity, but that we have to decrease our sensitivity to eat junk food. If we were paying attention, in other words, we wouldn't enjoy the food (or at least not as much).

We all have different life situations, needs, diets and regimens, as well as different limitations. There is no one-size-fits-all formula other than to say that the healthier one lives, the better one will be at discerning subtleties in tea. This is especially important when it comes to food, the most important medicine we take every day. The same is true for being well-rested on any given day as well as if we are exercising regularly. If we sleep poorly or lack movement, we won't be as present, sensitive or discriminating when we

drink a tea. We have also found that intoxicants can decrease sensitivity in the body and mind, especially if consumed excessively. The lighter and healthier one's body, the better it will be at detecting impurities in tea.

For these reasons, you may want to eat healthier for a few days before conducting the experiment this test kit offers for the first time. It may also help to be well-rested and have some exercise in your routine throughout the week leading up to the test, especially if you choose to do the first round blind, which we suggest. All of these habits will certainly increase your sensitivity.

By far, though, the mind will play a more influential role in our work to become more sensitive to agrochemicals in tea, as well as quality in general. However, it is important to remember that the mind and body are really one system and so there is no line where the influence of one ends and the other begins. The mind chooses healthy food, for example, which then helps clarify and sharpen the mind, and so on. We can even learn to use the mind to experience subtler and subtler sensations in our bodies. Many meditations

focus on this, especially practices that include movement.

Seated stillness-focused meditation is by far the most impactful practice when it comes to increasing sensitivity to all things tea. The major block to experiencing subtle aspects of a tea is a noisy mind. When we quiet our minds, all our senses become clearer—we hear more, smell more deeply and taste so much more. If we can drink tea in a quiet environment and also clear our inner mental chatter, our sensitivity will immediately blossom. Much of our sensitivity is already there, in other words, and is not something we need to practice or develop. Our ancestors all had better smell and hearing than us. Their lives depended on it. In the wilds, you have to try to smell which mushrooms are edible and which are poisonous. Like us with agrochemicals, there is no foolproof way of doing this that will be accurate 100% of the time. But gatherers could get to a place where they were skilled enough to determine the species by appearance and smell, and even pass on this knowledge and these skills to their descendants. (They also very much religiously followed the all maybes are nos principle!)



Similarly, they had to be listening to the sounds around them, as there were predators and maybe enemies nearby. We have these abilities locked in us. We can tune into our surroundings and experience more than we usually do when we are ensorcelled by our minds, living more in our thoughts than in our bodies. Through meditation, we can learn to reverse this and listen, smell and taste much more cleanly after we learn to create some peaceful space around our thoughts, or even tame them into silence altogether for some length of time. Without distractions we are obviously more sensitive.

Silence to learn to listen.

Stillness to learn to feel.

And space to learn to give everything room.

Earlier we mentioned that Wu De often talks about how impressed he was by Master Zhou's ability to discern the mountain and weather with great accuracy (enough to impress all the factory hands watching) just by smelling the tea blind. Of course, that ability comes through experience—

smelling and tasting lots of tea from those regions over years. But it is worth noting (Wu De often does) that Master Zhou meditated for an hour before the tasting session and was closing his eyes, taking deep breaths and calming himself between every tea. Part of what he had mastered was familiarity through drinking lots of tea, but that alone is not enough. He also must be able to quiet his mind down enough to recognize the tea.

We stated earlier that much of what gets in the way of objectivity is our biases, thoughts and distractions. When we calm our thoughts, it is like turning up the volume, making that added synthesizer track that much clearer. When you combine experience (familiarity with the song) with deep listening (meditative mind) you can and will develop your ability to accurately taste agrochemicals in tea, and eventually taste all seven areas of quality, developing the ability to taste which area is at fault for the problem in a tea—is it the weather or the brewing, for example.

In these ways, we come to the place where tea and lifestyle become one, and our quest to become more sensitive to tea becomes a quest to become

more sensitive full stop. Through our love of tea, we become healthier, better people—more aligned with environmental sustainability, understanding Nature and our own bodies as well as living healthy, happy lives.

We would also like to add one final point when it comes to our journey towards higher sensitivity first to agrochemicals and then to the other aspects of quality in tea, which is to have fun! Enjoy learning, growing, practicing and study. Using kits like this does ask us to be more mindful of the environment and the effect our tea drinking has on the health of the Earth, farmers and our own bodies; it is dealing with important issues, but the journey into tea is not a job. This should all come with a sense of fun! This is easier achieved when you acknowledge that there are no authorities in this. We aren't seeking a completely accurate objective lab result, but rather more alignment with our own bodies and lives and recognizing which teas are good for us and which aren't. This dynamic will change over time. Many of us return to the teas we enjoyed when we started and realize that they now make us uncomfortable.



Perhaps they always did, and we weren't paying attention? This doesn't diminish our enjoyment at the time, and we are also free to enjoy the process of learning and developing. The journey really is the goal in tea. There is no destination other than the cup before us now...

Brewing the Teas

For this test kit, we asked Master Tsai to help us find some teas that would be useful for such an experiment. We wanted to keep the teas as close to each other as possible, controlling as many factors as we could so that the only difference would be agrochemicals. For that reason, they were both harvested during the same week. We also took the raw material from the inorganic farm to our organic farmer to process, so that both teas would be processed by the same producer using the same techniques. Hopefully this all evens the playing field as much as possible. Both teas are oolongs from Zhu Shan Village in Central Taiwan.

For this experiment, we recommend starting with some form of side-by-side test. As we discussed in the Brewing Tips section of this issue on p. 5, using a test method to brew the teas side by side is great, but it is also important to then brew the teas in whatever way you usually prepare all your teas—gongfu, sidehandle, leaves in a bowl or some other method. Following the brewing method that you are used to will bring more presence and mindfulness to the experiment and allow you to taste these teas according to the baseline of your regular tea drinking. Don't underestimate the effects that your practice can have on sensitivity and on your ability to discern quality.

It is also a great idea to do these experiments with tea friends, but we suggest refraining from any sharing until the experiment is over. Talking during the tasting not only distracts the mind but it also can encourage bias. Whether you are alone or with friends, we suggest taking a minute or two to calm down, close your eyes and take some deep breaths. We also suggest a calming, deep breath before each time you smell or taste the tea, clearing your mind as much as possible. Focus inward to the degree you can. The calmer

and more centered we are, the more we will be able to discern.

Finally, don't get frustrated if you cannot tell the difference or are wrong. Make the learning process fun and remember that no one, nowhere, no matter how much tea they have drunk is failproof. Learning subtleties requires practice and time. Enjoy all the tea along that journey and learn to enjoy the learning itself. The more we enjoy learning for learning's sake, the faster and easier our progress will be!

What to Look For

Let's go through some of what to look for when tasting for agrochemicals. It is important to remember that some of these qualities can be false positives resulting from other problems in the quality of a tea and not agrochemicals. But it is still worth trying for all the reasons we discussed above. We will discuss these in terms of all teas, not just the two teas in this set.

茶 Aroma: You can smell the dry and wet leaves of the tea, as well as the spoon or empty cup to smell the aroma of the liquor. Calm down and breathe slowly and deeply. Try to ignore what the leaves or liquor smell "like" and focus on the sensation of the air moving into your nose—the *touch of the air* instead of its fragrance, in other words. In particular, try to hone in on two factors: First of all, pay attention to any scratchiness, discomfort or roughness in the air. Again, this doesn't mean you don't like it because of what it smells like. Ignore the fragrance and feel the *sensation/touch of the air*. Does it scratch your nostrils? Is it rough? Is there any discomfort? Secondly, pay attention to how deeply you can breathe the tea in. Does it get stuck in your nostrils and you then have to suck forcefully to pull it up and down or does it naturally flow all the way to your belly? Breathe deeply and as slowly as possible. Feel into the breath with the tea or liquor beneath your nose and sense if it is flowing naturally and smoothly or forcefully and roughly and whether there is any itchy, scratchy roughness at all. Mark down your results. With the dry tea, this can be done for as long as you like, allowing you to calm down and take it slow; with the spoon or bowl/cup, you won't have as long.

茶 Numbness: Sometimes agrochemicals can leave a tingling numbness on the lips or the tip of the tongue. It is usually unpleasant and gritty, leaving a puckery sensation after swallowing. There are some young sheng puerh teas and green teas that can also make the mouth numb or tingly even when they are clean, so this can be a false positive. However, the tingling from green teas or certain types of young sheng puerh passes much more quickly and leaves no unpleasant remains.

茶 Taste: In some rare instances, especially with sheng puerh, we have found that we can taste hints of chemical flavors. They often remind us of burnt plastic. We aren't sure the cause of this, but there are a lot of different types of weed-killers, pesticides and chemical fertilizers and the ideal for those who use them is that they be flavorless, but perhaps some types are not or perhaps the quantity was too high.

茶 Dryness: Oftentimes, teas with agrochemicals will leave the mouth dry. They can sometimes make you want to drink water afterwards, even though you have just consumed a liquid.

茶 Mouthfeel: Learn to pay attention to the *feeling/sensation* of the liquor in your mouth. As with the aroma, try to focus away from what it tastes "like" and whether or not you enjoy that flavor and focus instead on the sense of touch. How does the liquor *feel* in your mouth? Maybe move it around gently. Is it rough? Harsh? Or is it smooth and oily, flowing and gentle? Does it leave your mouth dry or coated after you swallow? Harshness and a sense of separation as though the liquor is spraying when it enters feels rough and unpleasant and may be due to agrochemicals. Getting used to feeling the tea as opposed to just tasting its flavor will be very helpful for understanding agrochemicals and all quality in tea.

茶 The Throat: The throat will be one of the greatest and most pivotal factors in determining if a tea is clean or not. Just as with the mouthfeel, we can focus on whether the tea is rough or smooth in the throat and leaves the throat coated and comfortable or dry and uncomfortable. Beyond that, however, what makes the throat so im-

portant is really the *swallow*. Paying attention to the way you swallow the tea is pivotal for this test. Do you have to push the tea down or does it go down on its own? In other words, do you find yourself consciously swallowing? Is there effort? Also, even more importantly, is there a constriction? Does the throat pinch during the swallow? If you are paying attention, you may find that a tea squeezes/pinches the throat closed during swallowing and that it is not comfortable. This pinch in the throat is a golden key that can unlock a tremendous amount of sensitivity to a lack of quality in tea due to agrochemicals or any other reason. It is one of our most important tools!

☞ **The Body:** After you drink the tea, pay attention to any psychosomatic changes in the mind or body, but espe-

cially the latter. As you drink more tea, especially more clean tea, you will begin to notice things that weren't there otherwise—like the added synthesizer track in your favorite song analogy we discussed earlier. Wu De says he often notices when a tea is unclear in his temples. Others feel stomach issues, headaches or other discomforts or strange sensations. This may mean that a tea has agrochemicals, other quality problems or that it isn't the right tea for you. But knowing the latter is already enough.

☞ **Energy (Qi):** This is the subtlest of all, but worth mentioning. This factor can be looked at in an additive or subtractive way: either there is something added to the experience of a tea or something missing. When you have more and more experience drinking a

particular genre of tea, like oolong for example, and you have drunk many organic, clean examples, you may find that added something that doesn't belong or you may just be left with a feeling that something is missing from a given tea—it lacks spirit. Of course, the latter could just be a quality issue, but it is still worth noting. The wings to awakening in tea are sensitivity and familiarity. The more you combine experience and the familiarity of drinking lots of tea with a sensitive mind and body, the better you will get at evaluating tea. Our body is the medium through which we meet the tea, and it is not just the tea's Qi flowing through us, but rather catalyzing us. It is our Qi as well. Deeper still, the Qi in the tea got there from the sun and rain, and so energy is moving, rather than belonging to tea or us.





TEN QUALITIES OF A FINE TEA

Since the journey of learning to experience agrochemicals in tea leads naturally to tasting quality, we wanted to include a section on what makes a fine tea. As you will see, some of these overlap with what we suggested looking out for above. There is a beautiful blend between art and science in this topic of fine tea, bridging wonder and awe with rationality. It is worth noting that clean tea is not just free of agrochemicals, but also free of off smells, tastes, feelings or energy that could be caused by storage or other factors.

1) *Splash to the upper palate*

This is an excellent quality to start with. It's easy to sense and happens right away with a fine tea. The sooner it splashes and the further it travels up into and across the upper palate, the finer the tea. This is often the first quality beginners sense. Pay attention to how soon upon entering the mouth the tea goes up to the upper palate. Low-quality teas will separate and travel across the tongue or the sides of the mouth while the finest teas splash up immediately. After sensing this, you can learn to distinguish the force with which a tea splashes up. Some teas splash up in a way that transcends the borders of the mouth. Before that, however, learn to taste the way fine teas travel across the top of the mouth.

2) *Travels back on its own*

A fine tea should move effortlessly from the front of the mouth to the back, almost leaving no trace like air. When observing this quality, you will find that lower quality teas stay in the front of the mouth and require extra force to move the tea back. The degree of this force will demonstrate the quality of the tea. The more force, the lower the quality. A fine tea will move back on its own.

3) *Goes down on its own: Easy to swallow*

In the same way a fine tea travels back on its own, it should also swallow effortlessly, as if by itself, without pinching the throat or requiring extra force by us to swallow. This journey down the throat should be smooth and unhindered. While swallowing, observe whether there is a pinch in the throat that causes constriction which forces you to push the tea down. As you increase your sensitivity, you will find it easier to feel this pinch and how it forces the throat to constrict to aid in swallowing the tea liquor.

4) *Smooth, round, thick, structured*

A fine tea should be almost like oil or milk in the mouth. It should be smooth with a rounded structure that is thick and holds together well, whereas lower quality teas are sharp, thin and unstructured in the mouth. Observing the texture of the tea is a great way to develop sensitivity. You can try rolling the tea liquor around in your mouth to feel the texture.

5) *Coating*

Fine teas will coat the entire mouth, leaving it soft and comfortable. As you observe this quality, you will find that lower quality teas will get stuck in the front of the mouth. You can try closing your eyes to see where you feel this tea in your mouth. It should coat the mouth no matter where your attention is focused.

6) *Soothing on the throat*

After a fine tea coats the entire mouth and swallows easily, it should also soothe the throat, making it feel comfortable and coated. You will find that lower quality teas cause the throat to feel dry and pinched as you swallow the tea. There should be no pinching or squeezing sensation when swallowing.

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7) Salivation

A fine tea will cause salivation, unlike a lower quality tea that can dry out the mouth. This is a refreshing sensation that almost feels as if you are continuing to drink the tea even after it has been long swallowed. Pay attention when swallowing to see whether your mouth is filled with saliva. If it feels dry and parched, this is a good sign that it is a lower quality tea.

8) *The fragrance rises up the back of the nasal cavity*

Fragrance is a very noticeable quality of a fine tea. It can be easier to experience this quality as many of us first get into tea through its aroma. You will find that with a fine tea the fragrance rises to the back of the nasal cavity, penetrating further than a lower quality tea, which lingers in the front of the nose. A very fine tea has more fragrance than you can possibly sense, filling your nasal cavity and entire being. Sometimes this can last long after the last cup, long after the tea session is over. Lower quality teas are often more intense and feel like a slap in the face. You will find that fine teas will be gentle, rising to the back of the nasal cavity. This difference in sensation is similar to appreciating incense. You will find that a lower quality incense it can be quite overwhelming to the senses before disappearing, whereas a fine incense will dance gently on the senses for a much longer period of time.

9) *Hui gan (回甘): Minty Coolness on the Breath*

This Chinese term is often mistranslated as sweetness. It is not a sweetness or bittersweet as some suggest. It is rather the cooling, fresh sensation that happens after you brush your teeth or chew on a peppermint leaf. *Gan* is more of a sensation than it is a flavor. It is a feeling of a cleanliness in the mouth, like after you have just rinsed with mouthwash. This is, in part, the reason that tea was traditionally offered after meals. “*Hui*” means to “remember” or “return,” so this term refers to the return of this sensation on the breath after swallowing the tea. Make an “O” with your mouth and gently exhale after swallowing the tea. You should feel a cool freshness, as if you have just brushed your teeth. Without this, a tea is low quality. With fine teas, this can last long after the session, just like the aroma. Sometimes, with the very best of teas, it will even last beyond the next meal!

10) *Deep and relaxing Cha Qi*

We find that some tea lovers talk about energy in tea in relation to the caffeine, or a rush of heat or other gross sensations that sometimes occur when drinking tea. However, these are really more the effect of the Qi moving than the Qi itself. When the Qi moves, we may feel a rush or some heat. Caffeine can be strong in some types of tea and also give us a rush. This is not separate from energy, but what we focus on when talking about energy is the subtle body, which is a bit more elusive. While all of the other qualities are focused around mouth sensations, this quality moves into the subtle sensations of the body. It can be more difficult to observe and experience this quality than the others, so do not feel disheartened if you can't observe this immediately. You can instead focus on the other qualities first, approaching this as a more general sense of relaxation in the meantime, and as your sensitivity increases, you can begin to feel how a fine tea moves through the subtle sensations of the body. As you hone your sensitivity to their more subtle sensations, you will find that teas will enter the body at different points. For example, oolongs enter the subtle body through the head, through those delightful fragrances that rise up the nasal cavity and into the head. Puerh teas enter through the chest and stomach. Starting a meditation practice will help a lot in cultivating the sensitivity to experience these subtle qualities of a fine tea. There are many types of meditation that can help one to get in touch with the subtle body, like Vipassana or Tai Qi.

These are the qualities that we use to define a fine cup of tea. This is the standard we use in our experiments to help us move toward making and serving finer tea. Notice that they do not include flavor and aroma, which are far too subjective. People often say that a tea tastes “like lilies” or “like mushrooms,” not realizing that it doesn’t taste like that to someone who has never smelled lilies or tasted mushrooms. Tea drinkers in southern China have often said that Liu Bao tea tastes like betel nut flowers, a dish served often here in Taiwan. But no American would say that, since they haven’t tried betel nut flowers. What tea tastes “like” is subjective, and that doesn’t even include the evaluation that follows. In other words, the experience of a tea smelling like lilies is very subjective but even more so is the part of us that thinks that is a good or bad thing. That will depend on our relationship to lilies, our memories and many other highly subjective factors. The problem is that then even when we do agree on the quality of a tea, it will be for different reasons—meaning that our concordance was coincidental.

When we use mouthfeel, we go to a level where there is much more objectivity and agreement. If ten people evaluate various outfits, they will like very different ones and the reasons will be even more varied, so that even if three people all choose the same outfit as “best,” it will be a coincidence since their reasons for doing so will all be different—one choosing it because it is purple and that is her favorite color, another because it has lilies on it and his grandmother, whom he adored, always had lilies in the house, and so on. But if we ask those same people to feel the outfit blindfolded, there will be much more agreement. We all “slip into something more comfortable” when we get home. And the reasons would all be similar as well: “smooth,” “soft,” etc. By using to mouthfeel we find a more objective quality in tea—not completely objective but far less subjective than aroma or flavor.

This doesn’t mean flavor and aroma aren’t important; they are. They are just very relative and therefore only important to each of us individually. Adding mouthfeel and energy to your exploration of tea, and your ability to evaluate it, only adds dimension to your appreciation. It adds depth and breadth, love

and joy to your tea journey. At first our attraction to our beloved is physical, but then we get to know them and add so much more depth to our relationships by connecting mentally and spiritually as well. With tea it is the same; sensitivity improves and deepens love and appreciation and the quality of the experience of tea drinking, as well as providing the skill needed to evaluate tea, tea brewing and even teaware.

When trying to observe these qualities, don’t worry if you can’t notice them all in the beginning. Work with what you can observe. That often means focusing on just one or two of the criteria. With time and practice, your sensitivity will increase to the point where you can start to observe more and more of these qualities in fine teas. Remember to have fun when approaching tea in this way. It’s a new and refreshing means to explore tea, not a test worth stressing over. Learn to use them when necessary and drop them when not. These all will apply to knowing if a tea is clean. But the lack of any of these qualities could be due to any of the seven areas of quality in tea that we discussed earlier—not just agrochemicals.



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These sets are great to have around for A/B testing teas for any number of reasons, including testing for agrochemicals. We use a whole row of them when we do the tea reviews for local magazines, often lining up ten or more teas in this way. They are a very affordable and more objective way to approach the blind test of these two teas.

The usual method for using them is to use three grams steeped for five minutes and then decant into the bowls. Before that, slowly smell the dry leaves. Then you can also look at the open wet leaves. We turn the spoon upside-down after dunking it in the liquor to smell that as well. Finally, we sip a small spoonful, paying attention to the criteria offered in this issue. The tea is usually strong, so a spoonful is enough in most cases. We are providing two spoons so you can do this with a friend and clean the spoons between tea liquors using a cereal bowl of hot water, or if you are alone, you can use one spoon for each tea, which is more convenient.



\$22 + shipping per set



Voices from the Hut

For this month, we collected several submissions concerning the pandemic and how this global community has faced these challenging times, as well as the new ways of connecting and fostering tea community to support us. We hope that the well-written inspiration of these tea brothers and sisters from around the world will motivate all of us to reach out and connect with tea, and help us to remember that virtual tea sessions can and do work to foster friendship, support and insight as we all face collective and personal adversities.

If you would like to contribute some writing to Voices from the Hut 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!

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

TURNING THE PANDEMIC INTO A RETREAT

🍵👤: Rivo Sarapik, Estonia

Uncertain times like the pandemic can be challenging and frightening, but they are also a wonderful chance to test what you’ve learned through your practice and to experience things you normally wouldn’t. This is exactly what has happened with me, as well as with other members of the Global Tea Hut international community.

First, some context... It’s the end of June as I’m writing these lines. The state of emergency has ended here in Estonia, and after a month and a half of restrictions, life is slowly coming back to so-called normal. There wasn’t a full lockdown here, but people were told to stay home and keep social distance, and many businesses closed during that time.

Just like in many other parts of the world, those who were responsible for the health and safety of Estonians failed to fulfill their task. Estonia declared a state of emergency in mid-March for the first time ever. This gave the government more power than our democratic nation was used to, so the whole situation struck people like lightning. The messages from our leaders were mixed—initially, they suggested that it was just like another flu and you should treat it like our grandmas would, with goose fat. The sudden state of emergency meant a lot of fear and uncertainty for many. Some people called for a complete lockdown, willing to give up all their personal responsibilities in favor of a reduction in cases.

The pandemic affected the tea community here as well. In Estonia, we’ve organized public tea ceremonies on Fridays for years, and in February we had also started experimenting with one day retreats for a deeper dive into meditation, Cha Dao and self-cultivation. All of these events were canceled.

I had been following the spread of COVID-19 since January, when the first official cases outside of China were confirmed, and it seemed to me from early on that there was no way of escaping it. In a way, I was prepared, but it still hit me hard. Working as a journalist, I was on the front line of bad news regarding the virus every day, so the dose of fear, uncertainty and negativity was higher in my daily life than usual.



Having said that, I was also grateful and enthusiastic. These were historic times, which meant being able to experience historic things. It sparked a desire in me to support others—friends, colleagues and tea people. This is what I'd been preparing for—practicing meditation and mindful living, sharing time and space and tea. What a wonderful chance to give back and to be grateful to have something to share.

As we had been asked to keep a two-meter distance from other people, and public events were canceled, this meant using digital channels to organize ceremonies. We began by trying a couple of ceremonies via Zoom with local Chajin. We scheduled a time, set up a virtual meeting room in Zoom

and provided the session with an hour-long mix of music. I had been skeptical about the use of screens and apps in creating space, but it felt amazingly good to share space and support during that time of uncertainty. Of course, it put more responsibility on the attendees—they needed to create their own supportive physical space and to have tea and teaaware ready. But the depth and power of a ceremony was there.

This sparked the idea to widen the reach of our virtual ceremonies, so we decided to open our morning tea ceremonies to the public, as well as via Zoom (as of this writing, we are still having them at 7:30 every day). We also decided to invite every Global Tea Hut member we knew from around

the world to join us for a weekly sitting every Saturday afternoon. This has grown into a lovely weekend tradition with people from all corners of the world—including Lauren, Gabrielle, Erika, Gordon and Heidi from the US; Laura, Lera, Sean, Tarmo, Viktor, Simon, Karen and Raneta from different parts of Europe; Max from Russia; and May, Jaanus, Shen and Connor representing Asia. This is in addition to all the Estonians (or Elves, as many say) who have joined us for these sessions.

We gather via Zoom, share an hour of silence (accompanied by music inspired by tea) and share reflections after that. These discussions have reminded me of many teachings—here are four threads that keep coming back...





Practice, Practice, Practice

As the world slowed down in March, this meant more time for inner work. Although daily meditation and tea practice have been part of my life for years now, the intention has shifted during these days—to use this unprecedented time as well as I can.

I feel gratitude for having this practice and Way in my life. Sure, I've felt frightened at times, but it has also been a wonderful chance to experience these emotions fully—physically and mentally, while also contemplating the roots of them. Everybody loves sunshine, but these challenging times bring out sides of us we wouldn't normally reach but which need attention as well.

Returning Home

Tea ceremonies and meditation are great reminders to remember—to remember that our so-called “outside life” is just a reflection of our inner world. There is always peace, love, and happiness inside me. Having roots in this practice helps to remind me of it every day.

Meditation is like returning home from a busy street to my true self. If I neglect my meditation practice for long enough, it's possible to get lost in those noisy streets and forget my true nature and be overwhelmed.

Connection & Support

At first, we invited people to our virtual ceremonies personally. Global Tea Hut members we had met in Spain, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Estonia, among other places. But the invitation letter eventually reached other people as well, and we've ended up meeting many new and wonderful friends and Global Tea Hut members. Gathering physically in the same room and at the same time would have been a challenging task even in the best of times, and these ceremonies have provided a wonderful opportunity to sit together with international friends at the same time. It would be easy to be critical about the lack of human connection using digital solutions, but it's also been a great tool to support us when needed the most. It has been great to connect with so many people with whom we otherwise wouldn't.

We are in this together. We always have been...

Ichigo ichie

I have had and served many different Teas over the years, but there are some I've had more regularly, which means I've gotten to know them more deeply. By that, I mean I've learned the true nature of things, which is change. That also means there is always only one chance for anything. One encounter, one chance. *Ichigo ichie*.

Having sessions at the same time, with the same tea, music and people has been a reminder of that lesson. Every session, even every cup is different. Even when it's with the same tea, people, water, teaware, music, etc. Every moment is like this, which reminds me to pay more attention, be more mindful.

Above all, these virtual ceremonies have helped me to grow in humility and gratitude. Humility for our vulnerability and need for connection, and gratitude for having this wonderful bunch of people who find Tea as their guide. These ceremonies, daily meditation sessions and YouTube Live Q&As have provided a foundation for practice during these stormy days. Just like a retreat.

THE TIME WHEN THE COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER

🍵👤: Signe Sillasoo, Estonia

It's the beginning of January. I'm calling my friend. I come up with a completely strange idea: let's have a tea ceremony together the next morning via Facebook. A few days later, I offer a similar idea to meditate together. I have no idea that these strange thoughts will soon become a reality for the whole world.

On March 13th, there is tension, anxiety and electricity in the air in Estonia. A state of emergency has just been declared in the country. Two days ago, the coronavirus was not considered something to be worried about, but now people have to stay away from each other, stay at home, use disinfectants everywhere and watch out for all other restrictions. "This is the moment and time right now when everything we have learned can be tested," I tell my partner when we are standing in a long queue at the store to buy food for the next few days, maybe weeks.

Not knowing that an emergency situation would start on this day, I arranged another strange online meeting a few days earlier: a group meditation with about twenty people via Zoom. One day grows into a months-long practice that lasts into early July and is a nice anchor for these days.

The idea of drinking tea with the Global Tea Hut community soon arises. Since everyone in the world is in a similar situation—at home, holding distance with other people and not knowing what the future will bring in terms of health, work or finances, it is a good opportunity to support each other, to continue with consistent practice, to create space, silence, peace and relaxation around and inside.

For about three months now, people from Estonia, New York, Ireland, Germany, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Italy, Great Britain, Finland, Russia, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and many other places have met on the computer screen every Saturday. Everyone has a teapot and a bowl ready to drink tea together in silence with nice music in the background. Everyone is partly in a similar, partly in a different

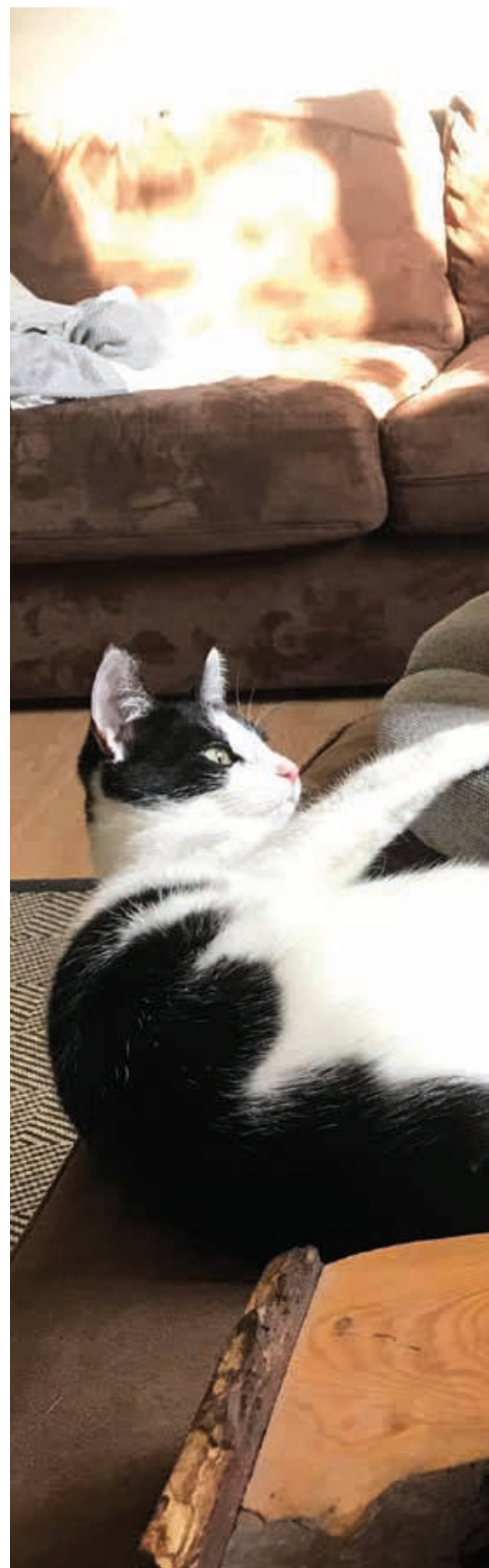
situation emotionally, physically and mentally, but we can always meet in the tea space.

The chaos caused by the coronavirus has provided a completely new and at the same time great opportunity to meet people online whom you would otherwise see perhaps once a year or even less often. It has created a sense of a truly global community. Rivo, Sean, Karen, Simon, Keneth and many others who have become my Saturday companions have also helped to unravel the questions, thoughts and insights that have arisen in this new situation.

And to be honest, I find myself preparing for this ceremony the way I have always done: cleaning the room, bringing water from the spring, making chaxi, selecting the best teas. It all remains, except that the common space in this new situation and in this new world is on the Internet. It is the time when the community comes together, supports each other and grows stronger together. And we will all be that much happier when we do meet face to face again soon.



🍵 *Literally everyone is joining in for virtual tea around the world! "What a cool energy!" A cat, a chessboard propping up a laptop and a bowl of tea and you will be making new tea friends!*



當社群集聚時機





SHOWING UP IN AWE

茶人: Erika Houle, USA

Staying connected is one of the biggest challenges in New York City. There are millions of people, yet it is easy to feel isolated. People are busy, busy, busy. Schlepping on public transportation is no joke. There are a million other things to do and eight million other people to meet. And this was all a big challenge *before* the stay at home order came into effect.

The New York Global Tea Hut community meets every third Tuesday, typically at Puerh Brooklyn teashop. The stay at home order came just before our March gathering. As our local community was already connected digitally via a monthly newsletter, all we had to do was send out an update with a Zoom link. We have continued to gather virtually the past couple of months.

I have found the virtual gatherings to be a really special way for newcomers and those from the greater New York area to join. Our monthly gatherings in person typically consist of one person serving the Tea of the Month for about an hour in silence and then open up for sharing and discussion about goings on. We always kept the option to serve open, yet many are understandably shy or reserved about

serving a group publicly. Even community members who have been practicing for some time have not served the group yet. So, I find it really sweet how everyone serves simultaneously in this online environment. This takes the spotlight off the individual and allows each person to practice. This opportunity to observe others while simultaneously serving is a rather unique way to learn. Newcomers have been able to show us the teaware they have and ask questions that wouldn't normally come up at an in-person gathering.

I have also been joining some of the Estonian-hosted Saturday sittings. Our Elvin friends share a beautifully curated music playlist as we serve for an hour and then we have a discussion. This has been a perfect example of the "global" in Global Tea Hut. A huge smile spreads across my face each time a new video square pops up from another corner of the earth. One can't help but be in awe of how truly special this global community is.

Continuing to meet even in this physically distanced manner feels important even though Chajin often enjoys the opportunity for solitary retreat. The isolation is hitting some folks hard and I want to make sure we keep hold-

ing a container for folks. As a community, it is important that we show up for each other even if (or maybe especially when) the form is unexpected. Tea is the "Great Connector." May we keep letting Her work through us!

This prolonged absence of physical intimacy and touch has become noticeable. The intimacy of looking into each other's eyes, of a warm hug, of hearing each other slurp softly. These are not present for now. Where can we find this intimacy? Can we look more deeply into our bowls? Feel the texture of the teaware more fully? Listen to the clink of the kettle and cups more closely? This inward turn we are all forced to take will result in profound growth that will shine brightly when we get to share tea in person together again. Until then, stay safe and be well.



CONNECTION IS ABUNDANCE

🍵👤: *Thomas Carroll, Canada*

In January and early February 2020, I began noticing the uptick in cases of coronavirus in Asia. Not long after, I came across a few posts on social media from my tea brother Samson in Beijing. I decided to reach out to him and see how he was managing. He said he'd been under self-quarantine for two weeks and that he was well, so I asked if he was open to sharing tea using video chat. He was, and we figured out a time that worked for both of us, given that we live on opposite sides of the world. When the time for our session arrived, I was glad to have a quick chat with my friend before we started, since we hadn't shared tea in close to three years. The ceremony began, and we shared virtual tea space. We could hear each other's pours, glance at each other's movements and share in each oth-

er's silence. I was blown away by the depth of the experience—shocked that a sense of connection like that could happen over the Internet. At the end of my chat with Samson, he showed me something he had written on his white board. "Connection is Abundance." It seemed so fitting.

My second tea sit was of a slightly different tea-nature, although the circumstances were almost the same. A few days after my first sit with Samson, my tea brother Tertti and I had a sit. We had met in Taiwan at the Tea Sage Hut in the spring of 2016 and had been in touch every few months or so ever since. Tertti was self-quarantining due to possible exposure to the virus. During this session, we set up for gongfu tea and I asked him if he would observe my practice and give me feedback on some challenges I was

having. It was nice to catch up and see each other's faces. He offered me some pointers, like slowing down to a greater degree and adjusting my posture and movements, and again the benefit of sharing a calm space grounded me. In Canada at this time, it was still business-as-usual, but I had concern for my overseas friends and was happy to connect with some of them through virtual tea.

My plunge into this new medium arose out of a concern for my friends, as they were in other countries under social restrictions the likes of which most of us had not seen, but after those first experiences I came to believe that the potent effect of virtual tea sits had to be shared further. And I was not the only one—Chajin all over the world started reaching out to each other online, with virtual tea sits



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seemingly starting to pop into existence all around the globe at about the same time. The pandemic was forcing people in this global tea community to seek connection using what was usually a secondary and less necessary medium. In my tea world this was a first.

Spreading Further

By March, I was itching to get back to work. I work seasonally, in spring and autumn, and I was hoping to get some income before the Covid-storm hit—I could see the writing on the wall. At the same time, I wanted to explore these one-on-one virtual tea sits further, so I reached out to tea friends I had met on social media to see if they would be open to sharing virtual tea. I set up tea with Li Ying in Scotland

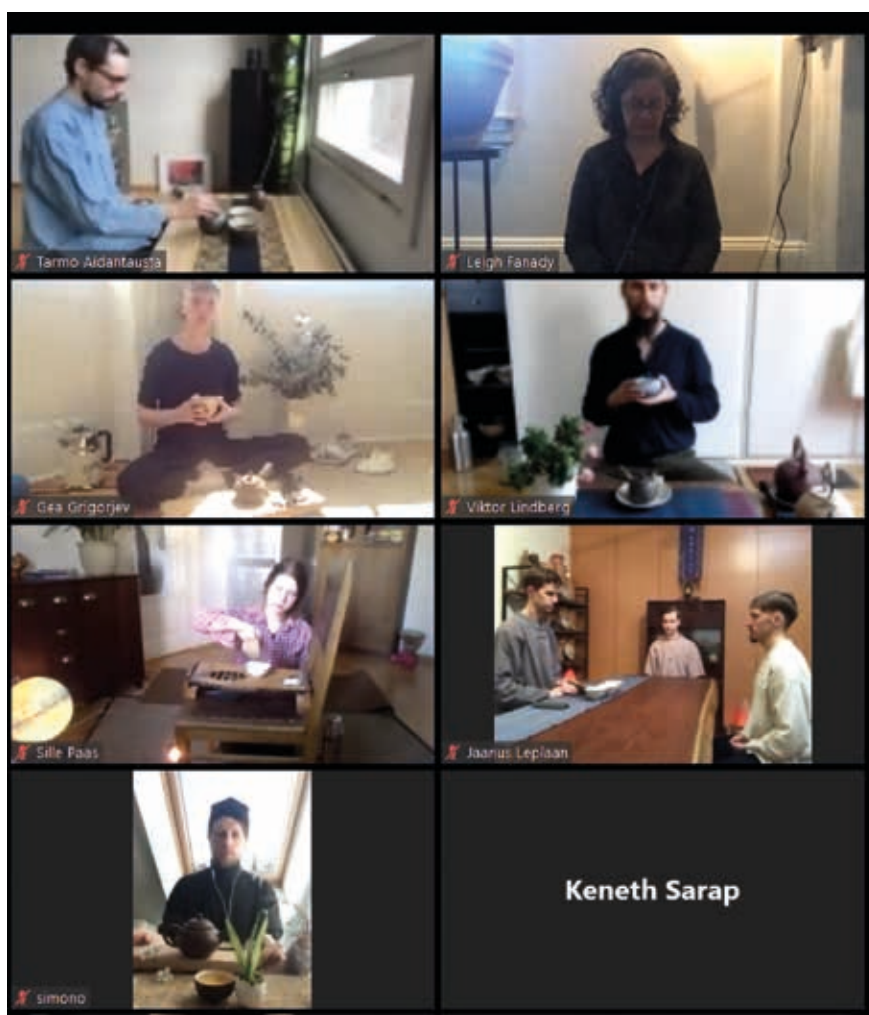
(now in Malaysia), Meg in England, Jessica in Puerto Rico and Rachel in the United States. I was nervous each time, as I had not heard their voices before or seen more than social media posts from them, but my love of tea drove me through that nervousness and self-doubt. I'm so glad for this—I have deeper relationships with them, and with myself, as a result. Through these interactions, I was able to see people experience the online tea magic that I had experienced.

I continued to expand my virtual tea community in the coming weeks, thinking of local tea friends—some of whom I had met in person and some of whom only through social media. I reached out to Cat, Stephanie and Erin for one-on-one sits, and each time I was again wowed by the deep tea spirit working through us. As this

continued, my work season was canceled, social distancing and self-quarantines had taken hold of my city, and the initial surge of panic-shopping had hit grocery stores. And yet, I felt calm. I was grounded and able to help support my community, largely thanks to slowing down with tea.

Coming Together

Around the middle of March, group sits were taking hold in the virtual tea world. In my own experience, the one-on-ones turned into threes—I had sits with Cat and Stephanie in my home province and sits with Li Ying and Laura in Scotland. Then invites came to me for other group sits with new friends to the south,



各地茶會
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and three became five or six or ten. I was part of a few tea groups that were growing.

I entered into April with an abundance of tea connection. I could see Chajin in other parts of the world posting on social media about sits with fifty people. What an amazing, exploding phenomenon to be a part of. On the 8th of April, I sat with a group newer to me. Hosted by Mariana, sharing the sunset and the full moon rise in tea ceremony was one of the most amazing sits I've experienced. I had two guests at my home, and we were connected virtually to a tea group. I don't know if I'd believe it had I not experienced it.

Soon afterwards, I revived a practice I hadn't been doing for a few years. I reached out to Moons in Utah and a few others to start sharing postal mail with tea inside. I loved the opportunity to share thoughtfulness and kindness amidst the uncertainty happening in the world, to take the time to let someone know that they matter with a pen, an envelope and some tea. A few weeks later, I experienced a tea sit where two friends in the group were drinking the teas I sent them. I was so happy to see them happy and know I had played a part in that. I began receiving teas back from them. I love opening tea mail!

Over the Easter weekend, I was in a group sit where grief for my father's passing surfaced. It was difficult. I shared through the tears as best I could with the group. It was a beautiful healing experience. I found that as the sits continued some real hardships were surfacing for our tea family members—loved ones who were sick, not being able to help people we love in person, grieving losses, racism and more. Powerful healing processes were beginning to pour into our tea spaces. That's what these spaces are for: being real with each other. Supporting and healing each other as we all go through this.

Moving Forward

Having a greater amount of time to spend with Tea and meditation, I'm clearer, better organized and more present. My mental, physical and emotional health have improved. I've gone deeper into areas of my life that I might

not have otherwise, or explored in the same manner. And in sharing a virtual tea space, I have made some amazing new friends. What treasures!

These times have also caused me to reexamine my life. If someone were to ask me right now if I would rather have a good job with money in my bank account or have authentic heart connections, I would choose heart connections in an instant. Or so I tell myself. But with my security being disrupted during the pandemic, I've noticed myself falling into a mentality of fear, uncertainty and scarcity at times.

"Oh no, the economy is shutting down!"

"I don't have a job—why did I spend all that money a few years ago?"

"What kind of top-down government are we moving into?"

"How am I going to stay healthy?"

I know that living in heart space is a good idea and the right answer to these and other tests. But my experience this year is showing me that this is a lot trickier in practice. During this extra time at home, I have taken a difficult look at how I have engineered my life. I go to work and sacrifice half of my year for security, away from most of my personal relationships. The other half of the year I invest in what I have found to be good practices for me: I travel, share tea, practice yoga, eat healthy and put time into my important relationships. I look to the future, hoping to retire somewhere and live in these practices all the time. And while there may be some merit to this approach, it now feels like I'm saving up to live in my future heart at the expense of the present moment. This realization has slowly set in as security fears vibrate in and out of my days along with tea sits, meditation and calmness.

May came with some financial relief on the horizon. I had an opportunity to return to work, and so I did. However, I brought this new tea format with me. I began hosting twice-a-week morning sits, and I've also been enjoying evening one-on-one sits a few times a week. This is medicine where I need it the most. I often lose my way,

or at least the depth of my way, in the business of my work season and having tea with others in the tea tribe before or after work has helped to keep depth in my practice and clarity in my path.

Now the end of August is near and I'm still working—it's one of the longest job durations I've yet experienced in this trade, but the medicine of tea and community have carried me through. It feels like somehow Tea brought its magic to me exactly where it would do the most good.

I'll leave you with a fond memory from my first visit to the Tea Sage Hut in 2016, where I asked Wu De about this very issue. It was on my last day there, and Wu De asked me if I had any last questions for him. In my first few days I had asked many, and the answers to many more seemed to have been downloaded into me over the course of my time there without asking. However, this question remained: "When I am the most tired and overwhelmed, usually when I'm working away from home, how do I maintain my balanced self?" His answer was "Sangha," which in Buddhism refers to the community of practice. I still chuckle about how perfect and simple an answer it is. Now, years later, when I'm away from home, tired and trying to reach a healthy balance, I have the medicine of virtual tea sits with you, my tea brothers and sisters across the world. Thank you for this saving grace! Connection truly is abundance.



✿ *Hopefully this article inspires all of you to sit down and share some tea with others in the Global Tea Hut community. Use the app and reach out to more members for group tea sits online!*



THE TRANSCENDING TABLE OR: EIGHT BOWLS ON A PATCHED-UP CLOTH

🍵👤: Simon Osten, Germany

*Like a Gong, as Guesture in Material,
an inviting empty Bowl is waiting; I enter the Room where I was and where I am;
Where they are my Company arrives; Through a transmitting Window gathered here,
some in Darkness, some in Light, all in Distance, but synchronous in the Heart and
mindfilled Now we do unite—*

*Preparing Stillness, and being ready for what it brings;
Greeting Past & the Occasion; Saying Hello in Joy, and asking in uncertainty:
Can you hear? Mute your-self for a while, and the Listening begins—*

*Although no Guests will come two Bowls I place while in the Trees a Wind is rising;
A Cloud from somewhere darkens the Sky, an Atmosphere emerges;
The hot Water is poured, the Vessels warmed, and a few Leaves' Fragrance
fills my tiny Room so mesmerizing—*

*First Drops start slowly drumming on the Roof above;
a sudden Rainfall washes away the city's Sounds and Dust;
Into this First Bowl runs, in gentle circles, the steaming Liquor just enough—*

*Oh You familiar Friend, how well we know, so often met, and humbly brewed again,
oh what a first Encounter, beyond compare, is this initial Sip;
Oh may I be able to complete this precious Work, of Nature & Man—*

*Through the Second Bowl the hot Tea radiates its magnetic Heat;
A Kiss between my Lips & the warmed, cracked-but-smooth, dear piece of Art;
The Palate collects and recollects plenty of verbally known & unheard herbally Tones;
Like a soft, spreading Wave, the Warmth I need, waking up my Eyes and Heart,
energizing the whole Body from crown to feet—*

*Through the Roof-light, slightly open, comes lovely in a refreshing Breeze;
And with it the mysterious Smell brought by a City's Summer-days sudden Shower—*

*During the Third Bowl my softened Eyes wander through the Room,
over Tea-Ware, the Screen, then resting at the Flowers and on a Painting of Geese;
Slowly mingle the Aromas, Emotions and Thoughts; Returning for a Moment of Silence
at the bottom of the almost empty Bowl—*

*Even a heavy Rain outside cannot disturb the Tranquility that unfolds;
A peaceful Heartmind is receptive, connected to the Weather but serene to the Gloom—*

*Diving down in timeless time, from the Fourth Bowl I sip blindly;
Now not needed I close the dividing Sight, and open up to many subtler Notes and Changes;
The Touching Smells the Fragrant Songs the Smoothness of Taste...
An aligning Consonance and synesthetic Show, a Dance of this Occasion's Chance;
Fueled by the Brew all the fleeting Things are coming together in this Vessel so kindly—*

*And then together the various Sounds of Music and Rain decline;
I look up from the Potions puddle, embraced by my Hands, I forgot to empty;
Through the Electric Window, that connects me even farther, comes a peaceful,
happy Smile; And outside the Rain has stopped, and the Sky again begins to shine—*

超越桌子

*How quiet now everything is; The daily Wonders of Weather;
A Sweetness lingers in this so silent Exhalation, while no one ventures out yet,
and all the Animals still hide; I refill the earthen Kettle, spark the Flame and
boil the precious Water, before the Elements are brought once more together,
becoming the Fifth Bowl of Tea—*

*Everything at its Place and all tensions gone, not thirsty but in Love, here is where to enter,
I continue to serve myself within all the world's turbulence this alchemical Liquid Peace;
We come from all Directions, Times and Paths, and Now we meet in this quiet Center—*

*With the Sixth Bowl I hear the Music of the wet Leaves,
also the Garden Birds slowly start singing again; Am I slightly drunken in Happiness?
As if they would respond to the Bird-songs from our Speakers it sounds... a Resonance;
Am I still alone in this Room? Distant Friends, are You on the cushion next to me?
Why can I feel You, the gentle Warmth, the Impulse to hug, the calm Presence of Us?*

*By now I am not sure anymore, where this body is ending;
The tongue dethroned, the borders vague, this absorbed Essence dilutes the delusions;
And from a distance the sounds of Wild Geese ascending—*

*By the Seventh Bowl surrendered to the motions, the Tides of Time;
Then There & Here Now; The Clouds and Feelings, Flavors and Memories;
Different & Same, Presence & Absence; Outer & Inner merged;
Eyes are Ears, the Ears a Nose; The Heart still, the Body relaxed, then, gone;
Rain and Darkness transformed turn into Clarity and Shine;
Traveling on Leaf-Wings, lost in Ancient Forests & found on Mt. Sumeru,
arriving on Mysterious Pass, the Tenthousandthings taking shape in a Rhyme—*

*The Roof has opened and the Heavens are clear;
Walls fall off, and the Room is gone;
No distance of concern, All in the wide focus of Here;
Walls fall off, and the Body disappears;
Everything is in the Heart, all feels near;
walls fall off, and this tea-table transcends time & space;
and from now-here to nowhere drops in silence a tear—*

With the eighth bowl, ~

*A reminiscence and distillation dedicated to a historic
year, its opportunities and modern ways of singular
and regular connection, hold and navigated by a
shared Tea practice/tradition...*



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 Mysha Gardner.

I believe my journey with Tea is much like the journey one has with any healer: They are always near, in the periphery, existing just outside our frame of reference as they silently and diligently do their work. Eventually and inevitably they are called to work with us and us with them. At that point they appear clearly in our path and when we are ready, we take their hand and meander along the path once again, but this time together.

I'm originally from the Pacific Northwest, but I was raised in the Southern United States, specifically Georgia. In my childhood experience tea was sweet and something everyone had a pitcher of in their fridge. A large cup of ice-cold sweet tea was especially good when drunk on a porch swing as the sun set on yet another hot and humid day. In that vein, my Mother always kept a couple boxes of Lipton's in the pantry along with some herbal teas like Chamomile and Earl Grey. Back then the only other "tea" I knew of was a fancier event where people (usually women) would dress up, gather their friends and go to one another's homes in the afternoon to drink tea, snack and gossip. I believe this was a Southern take on a much older English tradition. As I write this, I'm realizing that even at a young age I still had some insight into the spirit of Tea; how it brings people together, how it connects and most importantly, to me anyway, how it's a healing salve that grounds and soothes. This salve would become ever more apparent to me as I grew into an adult and found myself making a cup of green tea first thing in the morning to sit with outside, a ritual without a name or a reason other than finding calm and connection before I started my day.

A few years ago, my dear friend and Global Tea Hut member, Tracy Conti-McCarty, opened up her home to a few of us to come together and sit for an early morning tea ceremony. When I arrived, I knew little to nothing of what I would experience. I had some understanding of tea, and some understanding of ceremony, but the two together I couldn't fathom. Sitting in that first ceremony, I remember worrying I'd be the only person who hadn't sat before and I vaguely remember an element of interest in the alchemy of what made it a ceremony, but bowl by bowl the thinking gave way to being present within the experience and being present gave way to dropping inward and going within gave way to stillness. The strongest takeaway I had from that first sit was the feeling of peace I had during the sit and the inspiration to learn how to share that peace with my community. Being an African-American woman in the United States brings about unique and heavy stresses. Burdensome unending worry around justifiable fears bring about an existence where certain states of being are sorely needed, even prescribed, and yet seemingly out of reach. Feeling at peace for once, I wanted to learn how to cultivate that peace and share it through tea.



茶人: Mysha Gardner, USA

Afterwards Tracy shared with me how I could go about becoming a Global Tea Hut member and took me under her wing to help me learn more about our shared love, Tea. Through Tracy I was introduced to the late Marharlika "Mikki" Sage who would eventually sell me my very first sidehandle and tea bowl from Taiwan and then I was absolutely hooked. I sat by myself for tea every day and took any opportunity I could to help Tracy and Mikki as waterbearer for their tea Ceremonies. Helping with water would eventually lead me to AyAm, Jessica Kollar's space in Playa Del Rey, and home to a really special tea community led by Tian Wu, student of Wu De. Through my personal practice and my service in various tea ceremonies I came to deeply cherish the relationship I was forming with the Leaf and I began to share that with my community. Small sits, but powerful just the same... It's been truly beautiful to hold space, serve tea and cultivate moments of stillness where the world can fall away and we can just peacefully be.

Tea is prevalent in almost every culture around the world. It brings us together; it enriches us; it grounds and brings us peace. What better plant to cultivate a relationship with and build a community around? So very grateful for Global Tea Hut and this beautiful community and all the knowledge you have so generously shared through the magazine, classes and in person over the years. Raising a Bowl to you all and hoping that our paths cross someday.

Inside the Hut

COMING SOON TO GLOBAL TEA HUT MAGAZINE

茶主题: Incense & Tea

茶主题: Chaozhou Gongfu Tea

茶道

茶主题: Yixing Masters

茶主题: Tea & Food



This month, we are launching our second on-line course, which is all about boiled tea. Boiled tea is one of the very oldest methods of preparing tea. This course is a bit more technical than the Intro to Cha Dao that we did last time, focusing more on the details of how to get started boiling tea, including three different methods of boiling tea, deeper exploration of water and fire for tea, the teaware you need and much more. You can take the course at your own pace, in your home starting on November 21st.



We are excited to launch some tea books on our website, including some of the projects that Wu De worked on before Global Tea Hut. We have some great puerh, tetsubin and ginbin books as well!



Amazing teas continue to roll in from friends. We have a really cool storage set if you are interested in aged/aging puerh and a beautiful 2007 cake called "Heavenly Rhyme."



Join us for monthly live broadcasts on our YouTube channel. You can submit your questions beforehand on the app, and that way they will be answered whether you watch the video live or not. Let's explore tea together!



We are offering free tea for anyone who wants to write for the upcoming Food & Tea issue in January. We want an article about how your tea practice has affected your diet and/or cooking experience (and vice versa). Each article should also include a vegan recipe to share with the community as well. This is a great way to share the love around the world, as we all cook great food and share tea together in this annual tradition. We hope to make this year's issue all about the community!

Center News



We made an offer on the property we mentioned in previous issues. The owners will have to think about it and get back to us. We think they may want to sell it too far above market value but are staying positive. In the meantime, we continue to look at other properties every week, exploring all our options.



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 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 your ideas with us. We hope to create a whole new calendar and curriculum for Light Meets Life. And it is *your* Center, after all!



We continue to offer day visits should any of you find yourself in Taiwan. As restrictions lift, Taiwan may be a safe destination for those of you looking to travel this year. Stay safe and sound, with our prayers.

November Affirmation

I am the Earth

Do I take this planet for granted? Do I walk here as though this is where I travel like a tourist? I am this planet and its health is my health as well.



www.globalteahut.org

*The most sustainable (X2) tea magazine in the world!
Sharing rare organic teas, a magazine full of tea history, lore, translations, processing techniques and heritage, as well as the spiritual aspects of Cha Dao. And through it all, we make friends with fellow tea lovers from around the world.*

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