



2014 WILD TEA BUDS, SHENG PUERH DEHONG, YUNNAN, CHINA

The cracked, old gourd rises up out of the steamy water like a dragon mounting skyward from a foggy lake. With the mastery of one who has poured the ten thousand bowls, the master deftly swings the steaming gourd by its bamboo handle to your bowl. In the same motion, his other hand appears with some strange leaves in, as if summoned from some magic space beneath his robe. He scatters the small handful of buds into the bowl and the water swirls out of the gourd in cloudy rivulets, twirling the leaves round in dervish prayers. He rests the old ladle on a special branch he's found for that purpose—perfectly-shaped, with a crevice that has received the handle after many thousands of pours. Smiling, he gestures to your bowl, also picking up his. You nod and raise the old, worn bowl to your lips. The liquor is as clear as the water that still boils in the old urn on the fire, but its bright fragrance betrays a hidden depth. The tea is magnificently limpid. It rushes up your sides and purges your mind and body. With each sip, you feel refined. And you can see the same mirrored in the old master's eyes—now glimmering with an inner light...

Such magical bowls echo through all the tea we share, in every bowl or cup. The last few months, we've explored some teas that were interesting not just in the experience of drinking, but also because they allowed us to explore some of the history of tea, the different kinds of processing and to understand more about the genres and varieties of teas. However, we don't want to get off balance, turning our tea practice into an intellectual pursuit. We don't want to get lost in the intellect, despite the fact that the tea world is intriguing. If we did focus only on an approach of tea as hobby, we'd miss out on the bowl the old master is offering. Hanging around tea shops in the market, we'd walk right by the trail that leads to his hut.

The heritage of tea is much older than any modern processing methodology, dating back to tribal times. In those days, the processing and preparation of tea were very simple. Tea was thought to be "immovable", un-transplantable in other words, so there was no such thing as domesticated tea trees—all tea was discovered. Certain old trees were famous, and some even had names. After finding a tree, the drying of the leaf was also done very simply. The tea was picked and sun dried. The brewing then consisted of tossing a few leaves in a bowl and adding water, or perhaps boiling the leaves themselves. This

process was shared between shamans and handed down to their apprentices over generations.

These ancient shamans used tea to commune with Nature. They were the priests and sacred teachers of their people. But their role didn't end there. They were also advisors to the councils that decided the tribe's fate, as well as the doctors and healers in charge of the physical and spiritual well being of their people. They carried tea in their medicine pouches and brewed it, amongst other herbs, to heal their patients. It was said that a single bowl of the right tea could heal anything. What do you think?

We humans often have a very myopic view of life, regarding the current milieu as the end-all of human experience. Sometimes it's difficult for some people to see out of the modern perspectives on tea, as an agro-industry for example. Nevertheless, why should tea be defined by the ways it's grown, processed or brewed nowadays? Such limitations will only hold us back in many areas of our tea journey.

It is interesting to learn about the history of tea, the processing and types, etc., but such intellectual knowledge can also get in the way of a great tea experience. Some of the best tea sessions we've ever had were with people who knew very little about tea, its history or lore, or even how their tea was made. It's not necessary to understand all that goes into making a song and building all the instruments in order to enjoy some music. And many musicians will tell you that sometimes it's better you don't read musical notation or understand the inner workings of a piano; it can get in the way.

One of our teachers had a humorous, Zen-like way of dismissing linear questions about a tea. When someone would ask how the tea was grown, he would reply, "Why, you want to start a tea farm?" And when someone would ask how a tea was processed, he would similarly smile and ask, "Why, you want to open a tea factory? I thought we were here to *drink* tea!" He wasn't being rude or arguing against their question, but pointing out that the mind that produced such a question wasn't the mind most conducive for a tea ceremony, or even necessarily for enjoying tea. You can't thoroughly enjoy a cup of tea and discuss tea processing at the same time. You can't be fully present onto a tea's aroma while discussing tea history. There is no amount of information that will make you better at tea brewing, serving or drinking. These are experiential skills.

Despite the fact that our practice is in the heart, it is nice to understand a bit about the kinds of tea, how



Notice how different these are from normal tea buds

they are made, their history, etc. Such information is especially useful when evaluating and/or purchasing tea, as there are a lot of gimmicks in the tea market (or in any industry). It can also be fun to drink an aged Liu Bao whilst simultaneously exploring the rich heritage, history, processing and appreciation of that tea. At the same time, it is nice to be able to have an off switch to the mind—to approach tea the way the ancients did, as leaves and water. In doing so, our bowl is but an extension of the old master’s...

A balanced tea journey is so much more rewarding, one that involves an intellectual understanding of tea as well as the ability to rest in the heart and approach tea as sacred space.

Our tea of the month is the perfect chance to connect with the older, deeper and non-linear aspects of tea. In this day and age, many of us have lost our connections to the sacred—in ourselves, our friends and even Nature. We no longer connect very deeply, not even with our own families. Tea like this month’s is good medicine for that.

There is not much by way of the intellect to understand about this tea. It is unprocessed. It doesn’t fit neatly into any genre of tea, and all you need to know about it is found in the bowl. Still, we’ll tell you some details about where it comes from, too.

As we have so often discussed in these magazines, Yunnan is the source of all tea on earth, and home to a tremendous amount of tea varietals, mutations and natural distinctions. The wild tea trees that grow in the different mountains often have their own distinct characteristics. Seed-propagated tea, grown in biodiverse forests with room to grow, is what we call “Living Tea”. And every tea seed is unique, resulting in a great variety of trees even on a single mountain. Over these last years of Global Tea Hut, we’ve explored several mutations from Yunnan, including the famed purple-red tea we all love. This month’s tea is a similar mutation.

One of the varietals of ancient trees common in certain areas of Yunnan produces a very unique bud every year, one that has a thick skin around it. Such trees can be found in Lincang, Dehong and a few other regions as well. Our tea of the month comes from Dehong. The trees are ancient, several centuries old. This tea comes from nearby to the trees that produced the Sheng brick tea that we sent out in October of 2013. They are, of course, very different, as the buds on these mutated, wild trees are unlike any other kind of tea. This tea isn’t quite a white tea, nor is it Puerh. It escapes our conceptual categories.

The buds on these trees often arrive earlier than other tea trees. Our tea is extremely fresh, having just been plucked in February of this year! It has arrived at

Tea of the Month

your door directly after drying—super-fresh! The buds are sun dried. That's it for processing. *Like the ancient shamans, the tea was found, plucked and dried.* Now it's up to you to add the heat and water. What else is tea but leaves, water and heat?

The liquor is bright and clear, with hints of citrus and pine. It whispers of hikes up through the forests where it was born. In drinking it, you might imagine a time when all tea was so simple—sun dried leaves from old, wild trees that were untended by Man. It cleans the blood and digestive system, as well as the mind and spirit.

You feel refreshed and open, as if your pores were just scrubbed, when drinking this tea. It also suits the spring, having such amazingly fresh vibrancy in it. We hope that you enjoy this amazing chance to return. Lao Tze said the Tao is a returning... to what, we wonder...



Brewing This Month's Tea

Over the last few months, several of you have asked us to include some brewing advice each month. And we've known that a lot of the members of Global Tea Hut are new to tea and would benefit from such advice. At the same time, we have some reservations. Whenever anyone asks Wu De what his favorite tea is, which is often at lectures, seminars, etc., he always answers, "tea made with love." Each of us has to find the way that connects tea to our hearts, our lives and our understanding of the Sacred. Each of us must find our own insights and truths. You can't be afraid to make mistakes and learn, as you get better at brewing tea. While we can offer you some suggestions based on the five brewing methods of our tradition, we don't want you to be limited by our advice—neither in the sense that you think you must prepare the tea this way, nor that if you do you should follow a formula to the letter without learning to use your own palate and heart.

This month's tea is for us very much a bowl tea. Bowl tea is the oldest method of tea brewing on earth, dating back before the pyramids. We brew bowl tea for meditative stillness, simplicity and sharing space with people we care about. Bowl tea is also the simplest brewing method. Any small bowl will do, like a rice bowl for example, if you haven't got a tea bowl. Start by rinsing off your bowl with hot water. Then gently scatter a few of this month's buds into the bottom of the bowl (five to seven—or more if you like your tea stronger). Add some boiling water to the side of the bowl, dancing the buds in a circle and carrying them under the water so they open up uniformly. Use water with small to medium-sized bubbles, rather than a full rolling boil. As you sip, try holding the bowl with two hands, centering yourself over it.

It is a good practice to not multitask when drinking tea. In fact, try not setting the bowl down until it is empty. This doesn't mean you have to drink it faster; go as slow as you like. But even as you sit holding it, Tea is still communicating to you. Watch these glorious buds open up; feel the warmth in your hands and smell the aromas wafting up into your face. See what happens when you drink just three bowls in this way, alone or with friends. It may just change your life!

(There is a video up on our YouTube channel demonstrating bowl tea. You can watch it at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sajjLoRe9P4&feature=c4-overview&list=UUUVI_Qhcg-GSkf57HmcAp_YA)

