

FORMOSAN Black Dragon

A BASIC INTRODUCTION TO TAIWANESE OOLONG TEA

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We'd like to start with a special thanks to Li Guang Chung, whose research was invaluable in creating this introduction.

Taiwan is truly a tea paradise, full of bountiful tea varieties, tea culture and events, teaware artisans and masters. A Chajin can turn any corner and find another tea lover to share another perspective over a cup or two. The island's wealth of tea is way beyond the scope of even an extended issue of Global Tea Hut. There is more oolong variety than we can explore, let alone all the other kinds of red and green tea the island offers. If you look at it, the island itself is shaped like a tea leaf!

Our journey through Taiwanese oolong will be geographical. Like all true Zen masters, Tea has always been known by the mountain She comes from, since She is one with Her terroir. A few of the teas shown on the map to the right are varietals/processing methods—Baozhong, GABA, Eastern Beauty and Tieguanyin—but the rest are locations. We will move from the general to the specific, starting with an overview in this article and then moving into the history of Taiwanese tea, changes over time, varietals and then some informative articles on specific oolong regions and farmers. So let Guanyin flick her magic waters on us and let's climb up on this black dragon. He's gentle, and will guide us well...



Wen Shan 文山 / Pinglin 坪林

Baozhong (包種)

GABA (佳龍)

Muzha 木柵

Tieguanyin (鐵觀音)

Beipu* 北埔

Eastern Beauty (東方美人)

*also found in Miaoli (苗栗)

Taichung 台中

Li Shan (梨山)

Da Yu Ling (大禹嶺)

Nantou 南投

Mingjian (名間)

Dong Ding (凍頂)

Shan Lin Xi (衫林溪)

Yu Shan (玉山)

Chiayi 嘉義

Ali Shan (阿里山)



Oolong is the richest and most refined of tea chests, filled with so many varieties and kinds of tea that you couldn't explore them all in a lifetime. It is technically defined by the fact that it is semi-oxidized, but that barely sketches an outline of this huge genre of tea—especially since “semi-oxidized” can mean everything from ten to seventy percent. When you add to that all the different mountains oolong tea comes from, the varieties of trees and variations in processing, you have a huge map, spanning Taiwan, Chaozhou and Fujian mostly. We'd truly need the “black dragon” this tea is named after to fly through the rich heritage, history and variety of oolong. But what a journey that would be!

When talking about genres of tea, it is always important to remember that the popular statement “all tea is one plant and the differences are in the processing” can be very misleading indeed. There is some truth in that statement, but authors who use it rarely qualify it as much as they should.

Different processing methodologies were developed locally over time and are as much a part of the terroir as the rain, sun or soil composition. And these regional variations in processing grew alongside certain varieties of tea. The masters who lived and worked with these leaves were listening to them, and that conversation was often responsible for the evolution of any given processing methodology. In other words, oolong processing was developed over time to suit certain varieties of tea because that is what brought out their greatest potential. The farmers mastered their craft by processing the tea the way it “wanted” to be—for lack of a better word, we use “want” to describe the nature of the tea. Just as water “wants” to flow downhill, these leaves *wanted* to be oolong. In that way, oolong is as much in the varieties of tea as it is in the processing. And that is true for most of the other seven genres of tea as well (red and black tea can be exceptions to this rule, but not always). While you could process tea

leaves from Wuyi mountain like a green tea or an artificially fermented black tea (not red!), they would not be nearly as good as green tea from a green tea varietal or Liu Bao black tea. Furthermore, they wouldn't be as nice as the oolong made from the same leaves!

And this evolution continues on in every tea-growing season, even now. If you travel to Wuyi, for example, and watch a true master make oolong tea each year, you will see a lot of variation from year to year. The overall methodology used to describe oolong production is as general and rough a sketch for what actually happens as any basic understanding of an artistic process is. In any art, the basic formula is always a very abstract and simplified explanation of what the practitioner knows much more intimately, subtly and with complex discrepancies. Similarly, when a beginner watches a master brew gongfu tea, he or she tries to grasp the basic steps of pre-warming the cups, showering the pot, steeping the tea, showering the pot again, and so forth. But to the master, there are great and very important subtleties that change these steps from tea to tea, like the height from which you pour water into the pot, for example.

The master farmers are changing the way they make tea each and every season. Everything from when they pick—which day and what time of day—to how long they fry the tea to de-enzyme it will change based on the weather and season and how the tea looks and feels to them. This means that their processing must suit their trees and terroir, and not as some fixed methodology, but rather as a changing and adaptable process that, like any skill, requires them to intuit and then modify their processing to suit the current leaves. In that way, oolong is as much the terroir and trees as it is the processing methods.

Oolong tea is the most refined and complicated of all tea production, requiring the greatest skill to make. The processing can refine or ruin a tea. Each kind of tea finds its quality in a ratio between these three things:

1. *The trees and the environment/terroir.*
2. *The farming methods, viz., organic or not, fertilized or not, irrigated or not, etc.*
3. *The processing/drying of the tea leaves.*

With puerh tea, for example, the quality is almost exclusively in the first of these—the trees and the environment. When producing a fine oolong, however, all three are equally important. It's not enough to have great tea in a nice environment, since the complicated processing will have as much to say as Nature. This is true of all tea, as a manifestation of Heaven, Earth and Human energies, but none as profoundly as oolong tea.

The basic steps that make up all oolong production are harvesting, withering, de-enzyming, rolling and roasting. But these steps are a part of almost all tea production. What really sets oolong apart is the withering/shaking. Because oolong is a semi-oxidized tea, it is withered in a very particular way—both indoors and outdoors. Oolong is traditionally withered on big, round bamboo trays that are stacked on shelves, allowing for airflow underneath. (Though production in larger quantities as well as more modern, mechanized processing, means that it is also often withered on large tarps outside on the ground.) As we discussed earlier, there are infinite subtle variables in the withering of fine oolong tea. We have even seen a master lick his thumb to feel the humidity during indoor withering, and then ask his sons to bring a can full of charcoal to place in the back right corner of the room where he felt the humidity was too high.

During the withering, oolong tea is also shaken. This shaking is the most distinctive feature of oolong tea processing. It helps to bruise the cells and further the oxidation of the tea. When you see a master pick up one of the big round trays and dance the leaves around with grace, you may think that it looks easy—



until you try it and toss all the leaves onto the ground (or in your face). Like all stages of fine tea, this too takes great skill. The best shaking will just bruise the cells at the edges of the leaf, which will be apparent when you brew the tea. When the shaking is done masterfully, there is a redness only at the edges of the tea, all around each leaf. Nowadays, in a world of quantity over quality, most stages of tea processing are done with machines. The shaking is done in a large machine that turns around on an axis and tumbles the tea, bruising it, but not with the precision that a master can manage by hand.

Oolong tea is either ball-shaped or striped, depending on how it is rolled. The rolling is done to further break down the cells in the leaf and to shape the tea. Striped tea is rolled flat across large, ridged bamboo mats. Ball-shaped oolong, on the other hand, is rolled in twisted-up bags. You can tell a lot about a tea by looking at the shape of the balls or stripes. Hand-processed tea, for example, will have a variety of shapes, sizes and twists in the balls or stripes, whereas

machine-processed tea will be much more uniform.

After withering/shaking, the second most important part of oolong processing is the roast. If a farmer is roasting their tea themselves (as opposed to selling *maocha* to a shop), they will usually just roast the tea dry—to arrest oxidation and stop the processing—until all the tea is finished that year. They don't have the time to keep up with all the tea coming in, and rarely sleep during harvests. After the picking and initial processing of the *maocha* is done, they will then roast the tea slowly and with care, knowing this is one of the most crucial stages in the production of fine oolong tea.

Traditionally, all oolong tea had higher oxidation and roast than what you see these days. The range of oxidation that defined the genre of oolong was much smaller for the first few hundred years of its development. Most old-timers can't stand the lightly oxidized, greener tea that is popular these days. Some say that "if it looks like a green tea and smells like a green tea, then, well..." That trend began in

Taiwan in the late 1970s and became predominant in the 1980s. And the shift toward greener oolong also had to do with terroir and varietal.

As we have discussed in previous issues, the majority of Taiwanese oolong tea is produced from *Ching shin* trees, which were brought to Taiwan from Wuyi. They are very sensitive trees, which get sick easily. As Taiwan started to develop infrastructure and prosper in the 1970s, tea culture grew in popularity and farming started to increase. Marketing moved production into higher altitudes where *Ching shin* trees thrive. Higher altitude farms receive less sunlight and the tea leaves therefore respond well to light oxidation. Again, the innovations in processing were a result of changes in terroir. This can't be stated enough, especially since so many authors mistakenly promote the idea that all tea is one plant and that the differences in kinds of tea are just based on the arbitrary decisions made by farmers who choose to process their tea as white, red, black, oolong, etc. And if you are reading between the lines, as good teawayfarers,

you can perhaps see the more profound truth hiding between the rows of tea trees: *there is no tea tree of itself.*

Saying that there is no such thing as a tea tree of itself seems obvious, but necessary to state. We so often forget to connect the dots because our rational mind is all about dissection and analysis, fragmentation and exploration of conceptually cut-up parts. There is no tea tree. Not really. Tea is an environment. Tea is the soil, the weather, the water, the rocks and mountain. Oolong tea is not a formula in a textbook. (Show me a farmer who uses a textbook to process his tea!) Neither is it in the leaves alone. *Oolong tea is a certain terroir*, one that includes a particular processing methodology that suits the environment, trees and leaves of that place. It is also the culture and heri-

tage that has been developed, refined and passed on that processing wisdom from generation to generation.

And so you can understand how traditionalists might not see tea in such simple categories as “oolong,” especially when the whole industry has so radically transformed in a single generation. Generally speaking, we find that most tea lovers will slowly migrate towards deeper, darker and more full-bodied teas over time. But that doesn’t mean we don’t enjoy a lightly roasted oolong now and again. They can be spectacular! But a nice heavily roasted oolong at the height of winter can change your day, and maybe even your week. There is a power and breadth to an oolong that has been crafted in the traditional way. It coats the mouth and throat and has a lasting *huigan*.

Lightly oxidized oolong teas, processed by machine, lack character. They are standardized and too uniform, season to season and cup to cup.

Background

Taiwan has developed a reputation for the production of fine oolong such as *Bai Hao* (Eastern Beauty), *Dong Ding*, *Baozhong* and several other varieties of high-mountain oolong tea. Modern business practices and agricultural research have combined with Taiwan’s ideal humid mountain climate to foster one of the most dynamic and influential tea markets in the world. This contemporary success story is built on a firm foundation, as the island has for centuries been an important hub for tea and



tea culture, though not without an environmental price. Its tea culture dates to at least the eighteenth century. Even classic Qing Dynasty Chinese books compliment Taiwanese tea production and mention its centrality to the people's way of life. According to one such record, there were wild tea trees in Taiwan as far back as the mid-1600s, though it was not until the Yongzheng reign (1723-1735) of the Qing Dynasty that the Taiwanese began to harvest and sell the tea from these trees.

However, the tea trees developed over the past two hundred years in Taiwan are not related to those native wild tea trees memorialized in such historic records. Most Taiwanese tea is instead descended from the plants and traditions of Fujian province in China's southeast, just a few hun-

dred kilometers across the Taiwan Strait. This is true of processing and of varieties. (The exception to the latter would be the Three Daughters of Taiwan: native varieties we will discuss in depth later on in the issue.) The ancestors of today's tea masters brought their trees from Fujian to the highlands of Taiwan, along with the skills and knowledge necessary to produce the fine assortment of oolong that has become so famous around the world. The processing methods found in Taiwan today can be divided roughly between the northern and central regions of Taiwan, corresponding to the proximate regions of northern and southern Fujian.

As mentioned before, the two main types of oolong in the world can be categorized according to the shape of their leaves, which are either

striped or ball-shaped. These two distinctive shapes correspond to the original birthplaces of oolong: the northern part of Fujian along the Danshui River for the long and thin striped oolong like Wuyi Cliff Tea, which is the very first oolong of all, and the southern tight ball-shaped oolong, which came after the northern striped tea, exemplified by *Tieguanyin* (Anxi Iron Goddess). The northern Fujian striped oolong migrated to the hilly regions of the northern half of Taiwan and the southern ball-shaped oolong was brought to the central highlands via Muzha in the north. This is a categorization based on processing, not varieties/cultivars, which we will discuss later on in the issue. (Most consumers are satisfied with understanding the processing and brewing of their teas and rarely explore varieties.)



With an understanding of the two categories of oolong based on processing (striped vs. ball-shaped), let's take a closer look at the types of Taiwanese oolong in those terms:

**Northern Danshui River Tea:
Baozhong (or Pou Chong) &
Bai Hao (Eastern Beauty)**

**Origin:
Northern Fujian, Wuyi Cliff Tea**

**Date of Import to Taiwan:
1810 AD (Qing Dynasty, Jiaqing)**

The oolong from the northern region of Taiwan is primarily stripe-shaped, consistent with the tea trees and processing techniques imported from the banks of the Danshui River in the early 18th century. The most famous of these are *Baozhong* (*Pou Chong*) and *Bai Hao* oolong. (There is the exception of Taipei's Muzha *Tieguanyin*, which is farmed and processed in a more southern fashion. It is, in fact, where the southern-style tea landed in Taiwan, after which it spread to the central highlands.)

Taiwan began producing *Baozhong* as early as 1810 when immigrants from Quanzhou, Fujian cultivated tea trees to make flowered tea, like jasmine green tea, for export. In the early 20th century, the export market collapsed with the chaos of World War II. Taiwanese tea producers shifted their focus to the domestic market, which demanded finer quality tea. This turned out to be a positive change, as it forced them to research and develop the skills to generate natural floral fragrances from tea without using actual flowers. Since then, *Baozhong* has been bred and processed to emphasize the aroma and complexity of its fragrance, with a flowery fullness as the goal of fine *Baozhong*. Of all the oolong Taiwan produces, *Baozhong* is the lightest in oxidation (sometimes as low as 5%). Its elegantly narrow and naturally curved shape reveals its Wuyi heritage, but unlike the heavily oxidized and roasted



Cliff Tea of Wuyi, *Baozhong* acts as a bridge between green tea like *Long Jing* or *Bi Lou Chun* and the versatile world of oolong. It offers a unique light taste, fresh and green, while at the same time presenting the floral fragrances of oolong. *Baozhong* is named after the packaging it was once wrapped in, which distinguished it from other Taiwanese tea.

Another famous Taiwanese striped tea is *Bai Hao* oolong (Eastern Beauty). Its distinctive flavor is a result of a natural chemical reactive process, borne of the interaction of the tea with its surrounding environment. In the summer, the population of leaf-hoppers (katydid, *Jacobiasca formosana*) reaches its peak, and most of the tender tea leaves are eaten by these insects. As a natural self-defense mechanism, the tea trees begin producing higher concentrations of polyphenols and tannins. These natural chemicals mix with enzymes in the insects' saliva, causing the tea leaves to begin oxidizing before they are picked, which produces a rich, fruity and floral aroma. *Bai Hao* oolong is further distinguished by the fact that it requires three to four thousand leaf tips to make six hundred grams of tea, where the same amount of another tea is usually made up of about one thousand. It is the most oxidized type of Taiwanese oolong (70-80%), and is only harvested in Hsinchu and Miaoli counties during the summer season.



**Central Mountain Area:
Dong Ding Oolong &
High-Mountain Oolong**

**Origin:
Southern Fujian, Tieguanyin**

**Date of Import to Taiwan:
Qing Dynasty, Kangxi Period**



The processing methods of southern Fujian's *Tieguanyin* arrived in the central part of Taiwan as early as the Kangxi reign (1661–1772). Its characteristic round shape comes from a special cloth-wrapped rolling that also imparts a unique aroma to the tea. The tight shape limits the surface area of the leaf that is exposed to oxygen, enhancing and preserving freshness. This is very important for high-mountain oolong. If it becomes stale, it loses its wonderful floral fragrance. The most influential examples of this tea are Lugu's *Dong Ding* oolong and high-mountain oolong.

Dong Ding oolong originally referred to oolong harvested from the three villages of Pin Ding (another name for Dong Ding), Yung Long and Feng Huang in Lugu Township, Nantou County. Since then, it has come to mean oolong from anywhere in Lugu. In the olden days, when farmers had to walk to the tea farms and carry the harvested tea leaves back on foot, they had to tighten their calf muscles as they hiked. In the Taiwanese dialect, “*ding*” refers to this action. Every day, they climbed up and down the constantly foggy, slippery and cold mountain paths. “*Dong*” describes these cold and slippery roads. Hence, the name of the tea, “*Dong Ding*” alludes to the mountain hiking the farmers did in order to bring this tea to market.

Dong Ding oolong has undergone some changes since the days when the leaves were carried up and down the mountains on farmers' backs. Traditional *Dong Ding* oolong was oxidized more (~60%) and roasted less than those we see today. This is because more oxidized teas have a more consistent quality. When walking was the only means of transportation, it was vital to process the tea with higher oxidation, as the leaves would start oxidizing the moment they were picked. Tea farmers and merchants could store this higher-oxidized oolong safely for

several years without the help of modern innovations like refrigeration and vacuum- or nitrogen-sealed packaging. Today's more lightly oxidized (30% or lower) and more roasted style of *Dong Ding* oolong was fashioned by and for the annual Lugu Tea Competition. The lighter oxidation allows the judges to more easily inspect the nature of the tea leaves. Lighter-oxidized *Dong Ding* relies on a heavier roasting to bring out its mellowness and complexity, which is unique to this tea. Recently, many farmers in Dong Ding have returned to higher oxidation as well.

“Formosa High-Mountain Oolong” is a generic name that refers to all oolong tea harvested from plantations more than 1000 meters in elevation. Such farms originated in the 1970s in Mei Shan, Chiayi County. Farmers in Mei Shan originally depended on dragon eye fruit (*long yan*) and bamboo farming. In the 1960s and '70s, they faced financial hardship when the demand for bamboo and wood decreased. Local governments noticed the achievements of the tea industry in neighboring Lugu County and decided to help local farmers plant tea trees and learn the processing skills needed to revitalize their economy. The higher elevation (Mei Shan: 1100m vs. Lugu: 700m) and humid and foggy climate made the oolong produced in Mei Shan an immediate success. Its thick, refined consistency and rich, refreshing floral aroma quickly won the hearts of many tea drinkers in Taiwan. Following Mei Shan's success, tea farmers have been continuously trying to develop tea plantations at higher elevations. Nowadays, the most famous high-mountain growing regions are Yu Shan (1400m), Ali Shan (1600m), Shan Lin Xi (1700m) and Li Shan (2500m). Higher elevations have become synonymous with higher-quality tea produced in more favorable and hopefully organic environments.



Master Lu Li Zhen
roasting oolong tea.

Processing of Taiwanese Oolong

From the ethereally fragrant *Baozhong* to the caramel *Dong Ding*, from the intoxicatingly fruity Eastern Beauty to the teas grown at heights of thousands of meters, the Taiwanese oolong family presents an enchanting and unique tea experience for all tea lovers. But its diversity can be at times confusing and daunting. Oolong tea is an art, requiring the most skill to make and brew, and should therefore be appreciated with an artistic mind. When we were discussing this month's tea with Mr. Tsai, he said that no two oolongs are alike, especially these days with a range of oxidation from as low as five percent all the way up to eighty with Eastern Beauty. "There are so many steps, and each one so subtle. Every time a hand or even machine touches a batch of leaves it does so differently. This influence results in a unique tea." Oolong is processed in

the following basic steps, each with infinite shades:

Harvest/picking (*cai cha*, 採茶)
Outdoor withering (*shai qing*, 曬青)
Indoor withering (*liang qing*, 涼青)
Shaking (*yao qing*, 搖青)
(Shaking & withering are repeated)
Firing (*sha qing*, 殺青)
Rolling (*rou nian*, 揉捻)
Roasting (*hong pei*, 烘焙)
(Often repeated)
Sorting (*fan ji*, 分級)

To fully understand the diversity of oolong tea, one must understand the interplay of three factors that characterize each oolong: degree of oxidation, roasting, and age. Of course, the cultivar of the tea plant also plays a decisive role in the overall aroma and taste, which we will discuss in another article soon.

Oxidation is one of the defining elements of all tea. In general, people categorize oolong tea as partially oxidized during processing. On the oxidation spectrum, oolong tea traditionally spanned from 30 or 40% to 70%. However, nowadays the high-mountain oolong (for example, the Li Shan, Shan Lin Xi, or Ali Shan oolong of Taiwan) may have an oxidation degree below thirty percent. *Baozhong* certainly does.

Once you enter the oolong world through the oxidation window, you immediately face another two important factors: degree of roasting and age. Roasting and aging the tea can both be thought of as post-production influences. Though they are different in many ways, you can think of them as commensurate, so that aging a tea throughout the years is like roasting it for longer periods.



Roasting of Oolong ***(hong pei, 烘焙)***

Taiwanese oolong tea masters have inherited the roasting skills so essential to Wuyi Cliff Tea and Anxi *Tieguanyin*. Proper roasting of an oolong should achieve the following goals: (1) stabilize the tea quality; (2) correct the aroma and taste; and (3) increase the mellowness and complexity. Traditional oolong roasting can be a very time-consuming and labor-intensive process, especially for oolong such as *Dong Ding* and *Tieguanyin*. Roasting was often done by hand over hardwood charcoal fire, and the tea had to be monitored constantly by sight, smell and feel. Even today, when modern machinery has mostly replaced roasting over charcoal fires, experience and patience still play vital roles in the success of oolong roasting. It is common for oolong such as *Dong Ding* to undergo several days of roasting, and *Tieguanyin* to take weeks.

Constant attention is required, as any negligence during the lengthy roasting may ruin the whole batch.

A good roasting not only achieves the three goals mentioned above, but will also leave the tea free from any sharp or harsh firing or charcoal/burnt/roasty flavors. Every stage of oolong processing should complement and encourage the potential of the tea without leaving any trace of itself. The ideal roasting retains the existing floral quality, adds a mature fruity aroma and blends the two in harmony. It enhances the taste to create a lingering and penetrating experience that not only entertains the mouth and throat, but resonates smoothly with the body, changing the way the tea enters the subtle body or flow of Qi. In general, oolong tea may undergo additional, heavier roasting steps, beyond the first, for the following reasons:

- 1. To lower the tea leaf moisture content to about three to four percent so that the aroma and taste remain consistent over a longer period of time.*
- 2. To remove undesirable smells, especially any grassiness, usually due to an insufficient kill-green (sha qing) process.*
- 3. The high temperature during roasting causes complex chemical reactions among tea leaf components. Two major reactions are (1) the Maillard reaction: the carbonyl group of the sugars reacts with amino acids, and (2) caramelization: the oxidation of certain sugars. Both reactions result in brown-colored and aromatic components, and hence the more amber-colored liquor with more complex aroma that comes from a more roasted oolong.*

As a general rule of thumb, the roasting degree usually aligns with the oxidation degree. A higher-oxidized oolong can undergo a higher degree of roasting to develop a robust and complex aroma and taste. A lightly oxidized oolong, on the other hand, is better with light or even no roasting.

Roasting decisions are also largely affected by the consumer market's preference. Take *Tieguanyin*, for example: Anxi of Fujian province in China and Muzha of Taipei city in Taiwan are both renowned for their *Tieguanyin*, but their styles are totally different. Anxi *Tieguanyin* has little to no roasting these days, as the market has shifted to a floral aroma from the cultivar, which came on the heels of Taiwan high-mountain oolong's success. On the other hand, the sourness and sweet, pungent aroma of Anxi *Tieguanyin* hasn't caught on in Muzha, which still follows traditional heavy roasting to caramelize and mellow the aroma into something more mature and fruity.

Aging

Enjoying aged oolong is an unfamiliar experience for most tea drinkers. Puerh, we know, generally gets better as it ages, but fewer of us know that something similar actually happens to oolong. While lightly oxidized oolong tea is generally understood to be best when drunk fresh, it can also be stored for years and improve with time—even though they are not the ideal candidates for aging. We all have limited space to store teas, so it is often better to choose a more heavily oxidized/roasted oolong, such as *Dong Ding*, *Bai Hao* or *Tieguanyin* for aging.

We must distinguish between intentionally aged oolong and oolong that has exceeded its shelf life but is still left around. The latter accounts for more so-called “aged oolong” on the market. If a shop does not sell a tea and tosses it in the back, the conditions for aging will be less than ideal and the resulting tea will be inferior to a well-aged oolong. An aged oolong is the kind that has been carefully

selected and stored by the owner so that its aroma and taste will develop over a long period of time, maybe tens of years.

Aging an oolong can significantly improve its mellowness and develop more complexity in the aroma and flavor. Aging oolong is not like aging puerh, where biological activity plays an important role in the transformation of the tea. Puerh requires a certain degree of humidity and air circulation, but aging oolong, on the other hand, is best in an environment low in humidity and oxygen. This means that many of us in this community, who live in places that are less than ideal for puerh aging, can

This means that many of us in this community, who live in places that are less than ideal for puerh aging, can still age oolong. Generally, a more robust oolong is selected and placed in a glazed, earthenware jar. It helps to completely fill the jar so that there is less oxygen inside.

still age oolong. Generally, a more robust oolong is selected and placed in a glazed earthenware jar. It helps to completely fill the jar so that there is less oxygen inside. The jar is then sealed, often with wax, and stored in a cool place without sunlight or humidity. More oxidized or roasted tea is usually drier and therefore ages better.

Past to Modern

Since early Chinese settlers brought tea plants and their processing skills to the island, the knowledge of oolong and tea horticulture has been significantly refined and improved. A thriving Taiwanese tea culture has arisen as a result of three factors: (1) Nature: the perfect growing conditions for tea trees and the rich geographic landscape of Taiwan itself; (2) Timing: the economic boom in Taiwan since the '70s fueled the domestic market's demand for finer teas, creating a competition

that forced farmers to improve their product; and (3) The people: the hard-working, honest and creative tea producers in Taiwan are always refining their skills.

Today Taiwanese oolong has become one of the hottest tea fashions in the world. Taiwan's precious high-mountain oolong has even had a large impact on conventional oolong production in mainland China. Still, Taiwanese oolong faces a formidable economic challenge in the global market. More and more teas that bear the name “Taiwan,” “Formosa,” *Dong Ding*,” “*Bai Hao*,” etc., are not really from Taiwan and only marginally resemble the original quality.

These forgeries abound in Asia and the West, promising tea at cheaper prices but without the quality for which the originals have become famous. To overcome this problem, Taiwanese tea farmers, producers and merchants must continuously strive to improve and refine the quality of genuine Formosa teas and courageously introduce them to the world market.

We also would like to see Taiwan shine as a bright example of organic tea farming. As an island, Taiwan is protected by the sea, and could very well become the first fully-organic tea region in the world. This would surely put Taiwan at the forefront of oolong production again!



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