

# Global Tea Hut



## NEWSLETTER #3, APRIL 2012

The weather gets cooler round each bend of the mountain path. But you find yourself breathing deeper, savoring the way the clean air fills your body and soul. There are still some patches of snow here and there, retreating from spring's verdure, and the evergreen trees sway in the wind, oblivious to the seasons. Their fragrance reminds you of how old the earth is... As you round the next corner, you find an old gnarled tree looming over a small clearing; its giant branches set the rays of morning sun to music, dancing shafts across the grass. Beneath the rocks the old tree is married to, you find a simple hut that looks as if it's been in the clearing as long as the tree. The smoke from the chimney is inviting... You push aside the burlap flap and allow your eyes to adjust. A kettle sits boiling on the coals, and its steam curls like incense in and out of the single shaft of sunlight that enters through the window. The old man's eyes glitter smilingly as he reaches for his pot and cracked bowls...

And so we find ourselves here in this ancient hut yet again. It's grown once more, and there is a greater verve in the eyes of those seated around us. It's certain that we've all had a few bowls already, and the spirit of tea is coursing our veins, brightening our eyes—even in the dim light. We don't need to say as much as before, either, as we've come closer to understanding one another in this space. The small ego-perspective gives way to the universal—the foreground and background somehow changing places. We find ourselves mirrored all around, and there is a great love in our eyes, love for our true selves.

For a moment, let us set down the focal point of our ego-centered world—let the figure grow hazy as its ground comes into focus—and then we can look out as whirling specks in a great and vast universe, like so many bits of leaves floating in the bowl.

Watching this hut grow with every gathering has been such an amazing joy. In the last two introductions, we've discussed firstly that we mustn't view this as a financial transaction. We aren't selling anything; it is a gift exchange. And it should bring us closer together as a result. In the second issue, we began by discussing how connected we all are through this global hut. No matter where you drink your tea, or when, someone else is joining you in spirit. Just over those mountains out your

back window is another house, and in another tearoom there's a brother or sister of yours sharing the same tea. Now, we'd like to begin a discussion on the nature of that spirit.

When tea fell into *Shen Nong's* old metal *ding*, it reached out to become human. And it has embraced our fate as completely as its own roots embrace the earth. This simple Leaf, in becoming human, has also shared our collective fate: wars have been fought over it, empires built and crumbled, marriages and funerals, friendship and enmity, all float like so many dregs in its liquor. Even today, tea spans the human gamut, from the depths of greed and environmental destruction to the highest of spiritual states...

And tea need not be drunk in any certain way. It is an artless art. Tea is a great social lubricant, making new friends and celebrating the old; it is a great beverage, delicious and uplifting in its own calm way; and it is an incredible spiritual tool as well. So in this endless variety of tea ways, where is the spirit of Global Tea Hut? Of course, we don't want to define the way you drink this tea, or any tea for that matter. But if you can, we ask that you try to share this tea in a spirit of community; of global roots and the sewing of Cha Dao seeds across this earth, our only home.

We believe that schools and centers where there is no financial motivation are necessary, especially since so much information in the tea world is governed by vendors—not all of which are bad, of course. Without merchants of the Leaf, we'd have none to share with you, after all. And there are indeed some great ones seated here amongst us. Still, there is also a need for wisdom beyond any and all self-profit—tea shared in the ancient spirit of leaves and water. Join us in this community of earth-minded tea lovers, sharing a bit of time and space in this great galaxy of being—sharing a bit of each other as well.

Take these simple leaves, one pouch of many scattered across our earth, and plant them deep in the soils of your inner self. Water them, much more than just once a month, and they will sprout trees of insight. Sooner than you know it, you'll be plucking leaves from your own garden and sharing them with the next traveler that rounds the bend into your own clearing...

# Your Tea of the Month, April 2012

## 2012 Spring Qing Xiang Oolong, Nantou Taiwan

This month's tea is filled with the love and care of some amazing people we'd like to introduce to you. Many of you who have been to our center know about the great influence Master Tsai has had on all that we do. He is a teacher, a brother and a great tea sage—one that will surely constellate our sky along with the tea masters of ages past. He shares tea and wisdom with a spirit we tea lovers have all encountered, freely given the way tea trees open their crown and offer leaves to passerby. When you begin to understand how lovingly tea longs to be human, you more easily recognize its spirit shining in the eyes of tea brothers and sisters like Master Tsai.

Master Tsai studied tea for more than twenty years, often dreaming of a place where he could share his bliss with others. He knew that wisdom is nothing if not shared with the world. Of course, the Dao made way for him and his *Long Cui Fang* (龍翠坊) teahouse was created. The two characters “Long Cui (龍翠)” in the name come from the classical novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*. It was the name of the place where one of the characters, Miao Yu, lived. Miao Yu was the one who understood tea best.

Amidst the hustle of Taipei, *Long Cui Fang* is a gem. There is no sign or billboard outside. It is tucked away in a small alley, and known only to those who seek. Tea is by appointment only, and when you arrive there is not any tea for sale on display, only spirit.

As you read this you might be wondering if this is an advertisement, which would run contrary to everything Global Tea Hut stands for. If you are asking yourself whether you will have to read about teahouses and/or vendors every issue, don't worry. We can't advertise *Long Cui Fang* to you because we have never felt that it was a place to simply go and buy tea. Master Tsai is generous with his tea and wisdom, and the fact that all the tea is kept in a back room where it won't disturb those who are there to enjoy a cup of pure tea says a lot. He donated this month's tea with great enthusiasm and joy, and not a trace of self-promotion. We are full of such gratitude and praise for him because of how much he has taught us, and because the praise is honest and worthy.

Master Tsai's card expresses his philosophy best: “Lost, Trained, Found”. In his words: “In this loud world, full of such dust, we all lose our heart (lost), after cultivation (trained), we again find our heart (found). One day we naturally breathe in and then out, realizing that we actually never lost anything. Our heart was always with us!”

Master Tsai has done a lot to promote organic teas, helping farmers get certified, convincing them to change to sustainable agriculture, and even buying trees in Wuyi to protect them. He does a lot of work in sustainable tea production that we, as foreigners, could never do. And he does it selflessly and with a humility that fills the room. With a full and open heart, we pray that all of you have the chance to meet and learn from him—to be changed by his wisdom and loving-kindness the way we have been.



We have been discussing a lot about so-called “real” tea: propagated by seeds, in ecological gardens where the trees are allowed to grow up large, and given the space to do so. But as we mentioned before, this kind of tea has a glaring defect, which is that there will never be enough of it for us all. For that reason, we’ll need some plantation tea as well. And this issue isn’t black or white. Don’t dismiss the quality of properly grown, organic tea—plantation or otherwise! Remember, we like to focus only on whether a tea is living or not, and this month’s tea, as you’ll soon see for yourself, is definitely alive.

Our Tea of the Month for April is a green oolong (*Qing Xiang*) from Central Taiwan. These lighter oolongs are a great introduction to Taiwanese tea. They are fragrant and clean, with a refreshing aftertaste. And when they are organic and alive, like this one, their simplicity and clarity draws you in.

Our tea was grown in Nantou County. The farmer’s name is Mr. Xie, and his family has been growing and producing tea for three generations. Besides their greener oolong, presented here, they also produce traditional charcoal roasted teas, GABA, and even some red tea. Perhaps we’ll have some of their other teas for you in future months. In 2002, the Xie family farm passed MOA certification.

MOA stands for “Mokichi Okada Cultural Services Association International.” It was created by Mokichi Okada (1882-1955), who started three great projects in his lifetime: a “Mokichi Style Detoxification Treatment” for land, “Natural Agriculture, Drinks and Food” and “Fine Arts and Culture”. These three projects created affiliated groups of people with common goals to help each other. His overall aim was “to allow humanity to expand and flourish, helping create healthier people, families, regions, countries and culture”. His Japanese NPO natural agriculture culture movement created the *Da Ren* farm in 1982, and then in 1991 developed standards for healthy, organic agriculture. They began to set up branches and create a social system for theory and practical cooperation amongst farmers in Japan.



In April of 1990, a group of people who cared about Nature and were concerned about environmental pollution wanted to change the situation in Taiwan. They joined the Japanese MOA International Association and created a sister organization to educate farmers and legally certify organic foods and drinks. This Taiwanese foundation was formed to explore and seek health and happiness for mankind and to guarantee environmentally sustainable MOA natural agriculture, expecting this ideology and the sustainable agriculture techniques behind it to spread all over the world.

MOA certification is rather rigorous and they do a great job of ensuring sustainable, organic agriculture without much of the bureaucracy or financial interests that trouble a lot of organic certification worldwide. Watching for the MOA certification on teas is a good way to enter the world of organic Taiwanese teas.

Master Xie’s farm is a beacon of light for tea lovers. He truly loves tea and cares about the earth from which it springs. He knows his tea is alive, and that his conversation with it will play a large role in its development, as a parent’s efforts greatly influence the adult any child is to become. And from his hands this tea was “Lost, Trained, Found” at *Long Cui Fang*, where it sat amongst other great works, and a spirit as close to tea as any other. We hope that you feel some of this life in its embrace, and can recognize all the care within it. I look deep into my cup and see the faint image of these great tea sages reflected there, like the past legends that have gone on to become stars...

*\* As we mentioned last month, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized. Brew the tea as you wish, with slightly cooler water. You may want to use half the bag or so per steeping.*



# THE MOTHER OF TEA

In 1883, a group of Japanese tea mystics had just returned from China where they had gathered some precious mountain spring water for tea. The waters were healing and transcendent. They had already enjoyed marvelous tea on their journey. Their intention had been to brew such amazing tea for their fellow *Chajin* (men of tea) at home. In the true spirit of tea, they were full of a desire to share with more and more tea lovers. However, in an act of true selflessness, they placed the precious jar of water deep beneath the source of the Yodo river, which flows into Kyoto and at that time provided all its water. In that way, they shared their precious spring water with the whole city, and who knows if its effects aren't felt even now by some unknowing tea lover sipping sencha just outside the city.

There is no easier, simpler way to improve your tea than water. Water is the medium of tea. Since ancient times it has been known as “the Mother of Tea”. Like tea, water is incredibly sensitive, taking the shape of whatever container it is placed in, adapting and flowing with the contours of the land—it has always been a tremendously important Daoist symbol. In fact, the Dao itself is often called “the Watercourse Way.” Water always finds the easiest route, flowing through, under, over or around obstacles effortlessly. It also always seeks the lowest place, teaching us the power of humility. When we put ourselves beneath the lessons we wish to learn, they flow into us.

The ancient fascination with water, especially by tea mystics, hasn't gone from the world. In Japan, Masaru Emoto has published a two-volume series called *Messages from Water*. In his experiments, he photographs water crystals that are flash-frozen. He has compared crystals from healing springs and polluted waters, as well as the differences between water that was exposed to love and joy versus that exposed to hatred. The positive waters form crystals that are beautiful and symmetrical, whereas the negative crystals are discordant and ugly. Half the earth is water; and the human body itself is 75% water, so it is easy to see why *Chajin* have always sought out magical waters to compliment their teas.

There is an old Chinese saying that a great tea is ruined by poor water, but an average tea can be made great with special water. It's a shame that we have deprived ourselves of the great variety of water that was once available to tea lovers. In

ancient times, water was divided into Heaven and Earth, and they tried many kinds of water with certain teas: water from snow or rain, and maybe even snow melted from certain locations or times, like the first snow to gather on the lower branches of a plum tree. And from the earth they took water from certain springs and streams, or even rivulets in the center of great rivers, like the famed “Tiger's Eye” that once rotated in the center of the Yellow River and was renowned for its ability to enhance a certain kind of green tea. Tea sages carried magical waters in gourds, stored them in stone urns and went to amazing lengths to fulfill the alchemy of tea.

I sometimes imagine myself by some ancient spring, brewing up the Elixir of Life with its crystal waters; or inside a hut melting snow from the highest peaks to steep my old-growth Puerh from the lowest jungles—bringing sky and earth together through my human efforts. Such poetic visions transport me to other times more akin to the magical spirit of tea. Perhaps it was the tea that told me tales of its past, reminding us all of a cleaner, brighter earth that could be again, if we but change our ways. In the meantime, let's discuss some ways we can improve our tea through water in this day and age.

## Source

The source of your water is paramount. Since Sky/Heaven water is pretty much out of the question, we are left to find healing Earth waters. There may still be some places where snow or rain could be used for tea. If you find yourself in such a place, be sure to experiment; and raise a cup for us all. For the rest of us, though, water is mostly going to be about finding good earthly sources.

Traditionally, Earth water was divided into: spring, stream and well. And they were generally ranked in that order qualitatively. However, relying too much on Ming Dynasty water notes betrays the true spirit of tea, which is experiential and present. The world has moved on. It is interesting to read about the water/tea combinations of past ages, but we must focus on the tea in front of us, and how to improve it. All the books and scholarly notes, translations and definitions won't make a better cup of tea. In fact, they can sometimes get

in the way. It is nice to fly on the poetic visions of Tang Dynasty tea, but applying the water wisdom of that age to this one is foolish, and unrealistic. They had different tea, different water and a very different alchemy than we do. Nowadays, there are definitely wells that are better than springs, and springs that are better than wells. Perhaps even back then there were such exceptions. It is dangerous to think that all X's are better than all Y's, as Nature always provides plenty of exceptions. It is not as if the old tea masters compared every single well to every single spring. I don't think this was their point anyway; rather, they were suggesting that in general spring water is better than well water because of the minerals, altitude and the fact that the water flows a bit, and that movement is important. Still, this is a generalization, not a law. And without experiential wisdom, all the quoting in the world won't improve your water or tea.

There are some general principals we can use to navigate our exploration for good water. For example, it is always better if you can gather water yourself, rather than buying it in a bottle. The act of fetching water puts a bit of your energy into your tea. It makes it real, and demands respect. Every week we hike up the mountain one hour to gather the week's water for the Center. This ritual is transcendent, and the tea that we prepare on that day—when we return back home—is always some of the best, lit up with the morning's stroll through the mountains and the love for our favorite water. If you are unable to gather water from Nature, try to put a bit of your energy into the act of getting water in other ways. You could walk to the store rather than driving, for example—filling your water with intention and power, rather than viewing it as a means to an end. We should learn to respect our water as much as we respect the tea, and feel grateful for the role it plays as medium to our tea spirit.

Pay attention to the differences in your water. Don't just read that spring water is better than well water. Instead, gather water from a well and, if possible, from a spring and then taste them side by side. Use them for different teas. The best water for one kind of tea may not necessarily be the best for another. Lu Yu wrote another, now lost, book on water for tea. These old lists of which water was ideal for which tea were composed out of real, practical and experiential wisdom. The tea mystics of the dynasties were out experimenting with different water/tea combinations, so why should we do any less? Sure, we have less variety to choose from, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to find the best of what is available to us.

In general, waters that move a bit are ideal. But you also don't want water that is crashing, expending its Qi. The water should not be too still either. It is also helpful if there are some minerals in the water—too little and it will seem flat, too much and it will be heavy and cloudy, leaving residue behind on your teaware and a flavor in your tea. Pay attention to the differences between water drawn at different times of day. There is an amazing quality to dawn water, as it is full of the Yang energy of an awakening world. It is deeper and richer than water from the same source gathered in the afternoon or evening.

When tasting different waters, we look for water that is smooth and rich. Pay attention to texture in your mouth. Roll it around in your mouth, without slurping or aerating it. It should feel silky and smooth, as if the atoms are together and aligned. After you swallow, is there a pinch in your throat? Good water slides down comfortably. It also coats your mouth and throat, lingering for a long time. How long can you feel the water throughout your mouth after you have swallowed it? Great water also quenches your thirst deeply. After we hike up the many hundreds of steps to our favorite spring on a hot day, we are sweating and thirsty. Even a single, small metal cup of this spring water completely quenches your thirst and penetrates deeply into every part of your body. Finally, try different waters with a tea that you are incredibly familiar with. In this way, you will surely find a water that is ideal for you.



## Storage

The second way to improve our water and tea is storage. This is yet another way to develop respect for tea, further ingraining it into our life, as we begin to live a life of tea. Tea fills us and permeates our lives. It becomes a part of all that we do in this way.

Your storage jar need not be anything fancy, just a simple glazed urn. If you are unsure about the quality of the clay, use something glazed. Unglazed clay can really influence the water dramatically.

Water should be stored similarly to tea, away from sunlight and in a place where the temperature stays cool and constant. This is why plastic bottles are not ideal. Plastic is an unstable molecule and therefore breaks down into the water. It also allows light to enter, causing temperature fluctuations throughout the day. Storing your water in a jar will greatly improve the quality of your tea. Always scoop from the top with a pitcher or *hishaku*. When water is still, the lightest water rises to the top. That water is ideal for tea, with more Qi and breadth. We often give the very bottom water to the plants at the Center.

Try to honor and respect your water the way you do tea. As we mentioned above, Mr. Emoto in Japan did experiments photographing water crystals exposed to prayers and other emotions, as well as music. Every time we fill a kettle of water at the center, we first pause before the urn and put some loving-kindness (*metta*) into it. We all know that our mother's food is better than the food at a restaurant, because of the love she puts into it. Why should water be any different? In fact, water is even more sensitive than food. Fill your water with gratitude. This water will become 75% of your body after you drink it. It sustains you and gives you life. Ask it to fulfill your tea, and bring out the best in it. Introduce it to your tea, inviting it to come and enhance your session. You will soon see a difference in your tea and life, by respecting water in this way.



*Positive Crystal*



*Negative Crystal*

## Water as Life

Water is half our earth and three-fourths of our being. It is so intimately connected to this life we live: It is not just a part of us, but is us—fundamentally. Honor and respect water, not just as the Mother of Tea, but also as the flow of your life, from rain and sky to mountains and ocean, and back to sky again. Change flows like water. Water moves the way the Dao does, and so we can learn about infinity watching from the bank of a river.

Our tea is dry, unmoving and brittle leaves. It is the water that awakens it and brings it to life. The water begins the flow of a tea session. Use the time while your water boils the way all the tea sages, past and present, have used such time: for meditation and contemplation. Wait for the “wind to sough the pines”, signaling the beginning of tea's movement.

This very water we drink has traveled through millions of other human bodies, and we now find ourselves drinking Genghis Khan, as well as all the tea sages that have ever been. Drink of the amazing spring water those Japanese masters put beneath the Yodo River, for it is still here on this earth, in you and I. Water flows through these global cycles—sky and earth, rain and river—to our very kettles, then through our pots and into us. As this stream of water flows by our tea, do you notice how effortlessly these leaves join its currents? The tea so naturally falls into the stream of hot water, going with its flow on its way to us. We should also live like this. We should also make tea like this, so that we too are just another eddy in the stream...





## What is a tea expert?

*For future issues, submit questions to [globalteahut@gmail.com](mailto:globalteahut@gmail.com)*

There is an ancient tradition of a student serving tea to his master, and if she accepts it is a symbol of her acceptance of the student as well. In our courses, we sometimes tell the students this and then drop a *koan* into the center of the room: Why then am I serving you tea? There is always a stunned silence as they await the answer that will thunder and lightning the darkness into sudden clarity, like any good solution to a *koan* should. Do you see the answer? Pause and think about it....

The resolution is always a focusing of what is already there—a look into simplicity and presence: The real teacher is always the tea. We are here to learn from it, and the Nature out of which it speaks. Preparing tea is indeed a way of bowing before our master and asking her acceptance. And you'll know when she takes you in, accepts you.

In many Zen traditions there is a wonderful appreciation for the beginner's mind. Such a mind is open and awake, humble and alert. A beginner's mind is fertile and free, with an unbounded enthusiasm for growth. The expert, on the other hand, thinks he knows and therefore stops looking. They say the ocean is the most powerful force in the world because it puts itself beneath all others. Humility is real strength, as it allows for limitless potentiality.

All good teachers are also good students. Rikyu designed his tearoom to have a very small entrance, which was based on some humble fishermen's huts he had seen near the coast. Everyone—lord, merchant or peasant—had to bow down and crawl inside, leaving their pride with their shoes at the door. This is the spirit of tea. We wash the teaware and tea as a symbol of this: removing the dust of the world. We are all monks and nuns in this space, having set down our masks, egos, social statuses, financial statuses, etc.

Nothing can hinder your journey down any path as much as thinking you know already. To know is to dismiss; to fail to see the unique beauty of each moment. The world of tea is vast and deep, and a thousand lifetimes would never be enough. When you go to a farm and see them shaking the oolong leaves, you may think it looks easy; but when you try it, you will realize just how difficult it is, and how long it would take to master. Does this make the farmer who has mastered such processing

skills a tea expert? Others write books on the history of tea, or the kinds of tea and their processing. They are merchants, and have learned a lot of information about tea. They can satisfy your curiosity about most tea matters in an amazing way. Are they then tea experts? And what about the monk, deep in the mountains: he has never processed tea and doesn't have much tea history or information, but he can brew tea like no other. His hands move with a great calmness and fluidity that betray decades of practice and skill. Is he a tea expert?

Actually, finding a confidence and capability in any skill—including tea—is only an intermediate stage. We start out so beautifully: with radiantly open eyes, full of fervor to learn more about tea. Then we begin to learn some information and develop some skill in preparation. Perhaps we travel and learn about tea mountains, or even participate in some tea processing. This is all wonderful. We now have the ability to share tea with others. We can articulate our experiences and begin to travel deeper into tea. Our Leaf begins to communicate to us and we start to embody the spirit of tea. But mastery only comes when we come full circle and embrace the not-knowing. The difference between the innocence of the child and that of the master is vast, however. The child is pure and bright, but soon an ego will grow and the innocence will be lost. The master brings consciousness and awareness





to innocence. He represents innocence that *knows* it's innocent. This is very much in harmony with our human purpose, our Dao. Nature has always been beautiful; it has always been serene. We bring awareness to this. Through us Nature is beautiful and *knows* it's beautiful. Through us Nature is serene and *knows* it's serene.

Osho often said there are three kinds of fools in the world: the simple fools, who don't know and don't know that they don't know. They are ignorant. The complex fool is what we all become after years of education. The complex fool also doesn't know, but he *thinks* he does. The last kind of fool is the blessed fool, who knows that he doesn't know. In his words: "The blessed fool is the greatest possibility of understanding because he has come to know that knowledge is futile, he has come to know that all knowledge is a barrier to knowing. Knowledge is a barrier to knowing, so he drops all knowledge and becomes a pure knower. He simply attains to clarity of vision. His eyes are empty of theories and thoughts. His mind is no more a mind; his mind is just intelligence, pure intelligence. His mind is no longer cluttered with junk; his mind is no longer cluttered with borrowed knowledge. He is simply aware. He is a flame of awareness."

After the intermediate stage, we return to a state where we don't need to show off anymore. We are as interested in learning as we are in sharing, and in learning from the sharing. The master no longer wants or needs to be an expert. Others may see her this way, but she definitely doesn't feel that way or live from that space. She rests in intelligence.

The Cha part of Cha Dao is the easy part. It's the Dao that is hard. And all the best teaware and tea information won't change people if it is prepared with pride. A simple bowl might leave a much greater and longer-lasting impression. This isn't to say that tea information is useless. There is a lot to learn and enjoy in learning about teas, their history, where they come from and how they are made. But without Dao in equal measure, everything becomes expertise, everything becomes a competition. Which tea is better? Which is worse? Your brewing is better than hers, and hers is better than his. The comparative mind has its place, and discrimination definitely plays a role in our growth, but when it consumes us it leads to snobbery and we forget that the most important aspect of all tea—from history to production, preparation to spirit—the greatest part of good tea is heart.

Simple bowl tea prepared from out a pure heart will be wonderful, and we'll connect through

it. The best teas prepared in condescension and pride will leave us separate, and often argumentative. After thousands of tea sessions, we find the ones with heart to be the most memorable, not the fanciest or most expensive.

The fact is that there are no tea experts. Stay in a state of intelligence. Don't ever lose the passion for exploration and growth. Don't ever stop learning. In Japan, this practice is called "*Kaizen*". Keep this word and its virtue with you always. *Kaizen* means that we remain students, choosing to learn something even on our last days alive. It means that we don't ever put boundaries around our limitless souls. There is infinite creativity and growth in us all. Never limit your own potential in tea. Practice growing and learning. All situations are either teachers or teachings. The people we meet and the different teas we drink are here to teach us or to be teachings themselves. And even when we get to the point where we start teaching others, sharing our wisdom, there is still a great learning in that process.

Paradoxically, we can only achieve mastery of tea when we let go of the desire to master anything. When we put ourselves beneath the tea and bow down, it will flow into us. And then it will flow through us and help change others as well. In surrendering to our limitless growth, and wearing *Kaizen* as a talisman near our hearts, tea begins to find its way in through the cracks in our ego—prying them apart so that the light can shine through, the light of the world. And in that ancient starlight, we find the warmth of our true home...



# APRIL GONG FU TEA-BREWING TIPS

Last issue we explored the relationship temperature has to tea brewing. Preservation of heat from kettle to guest is one of the four principals of Gong Fu tea. There is a lot to this, inner and outer. The tea should be embraced in peaceful heat that doesn't fluctuate. This heat is the conveyer of tea, extracting its essence and carrying it into our bodies. It also causes the tea to spread throughout our bodies.

Of course, no law is absolute. The Dalai Lama often says that true understanding of a rule includes the understanding of when to break it. There are great green, white and yellow teas that offer a very different kind of drink when steeped at cooler temperatures. Much of what they have to offer is transmitted through fragrance, and so heat plays a lesser role in their preparation. This month's green oolong could be seen that way. If your green or white tea is organic and high-quality, however, you could try steeping it at higher temperatures as well. This won't produce an inferior liquor, just a different one. Lower quality green, white or yellow teas will just demonstrate their faults more evidently steeped in such higher temperatures. Always playfully experiment and grow in tea wisdom!

For the most part, temperature will play a huge part in learning how to brew tea properly. For this month, try experimenting with showering your teapot. Brew four steepings in a row: in the first do not shower the pot at all. Then, in the second, shower the pot before adding water; next, try steeping with a shower after adding water only. Finally, shower the pot both before and after adding water. What is different in each of the teas? How is the mouthfeel affected? How about the Qi?

The earlier steepings will indeed affect the later ones in such an experiment. The ideal way to do it would therefore to have four identical pots and cups. This is difficult, though. We've only ever done the experiment this way once. Doing the steeping consecutively should be enough for you to recognize the difference, despite the influence of earlier steepings.

Remember to use a tea that you are very familiar with, and please not the Global Tea Hut tea. Use less leaves than you usually do, so that the flavors and aromas don't interfere with your ability to distinguish differences in more subtle aspects of the tea, like mouthfeel and Qi. If you are doing these experiments, you are on the way to becoming a Gong Fu tea master!





*Teaching in Siberia*





# THE GREAT CONNECTOR

Tea is a great connector. It connects us to Nature, both within us and without. It becomes us, bringing with it the spirit of the mountain and forest. Plants are also connected with cosmic forces, converting sun, moon and starlight into substances our bodies can ingest. And nothing unites people like tea. While a Muslim, Christian and Jew may argue if they discuss religion or politics, they will arrive at a great and lasting friendship if they meet and share tea.

As you drink tea, you will realize more and more of the ways tea connects us, and more of the phenomena it bonds us to. We thought we would share with you some of the insights we have had about why tea links us to Nature and each other in general—leaving you to find the specifics.

We believe that our bodies, hearts and souls have inherent receptors to tea, and that tea connects to a human body in profound ways. Perhaps chemists will day have more to say about the molecular aspect of this, but we are referring to a bond that is deeper than the physical, measurable bonds.

One of the origin legends of tea is that the Divine Farmer, Shen Nong, was meditating near a tea tree when some leaves fell into his boiling water. When he drank it, he exclaimed that it was “the greatest of all Chinese herbs!” Like most ancient myths, there are many layers and depths of wisdom in this story. First and foremost, it is a testament to human ignorance of Nature. The holy sage, who was a great lover of Nature and a healer who knew of thousands of herbs, sat right next to the most powerful of all herbs completely unaware that it was there. We can only imagine the old trees discussing his ignorance and sighing—literally sighing in the wind—at his failure to heed their signals. Finally, a few small leaves volunteered to jump in. On another level, this story is about how tea wanted to be human. It reached out to us. It was calling us. And when we pick up the line, like most plants it starts the conversation with a resounding: “Finally...”

Perhaps the receptors we have for tea were developed over these thousands of years interacting with it. That would explain why some people seem to have more of them, and why tea speaks to them so fluently. Perhaps our ancestors simply drank more tea. As romantics, though, we can't help but believe that we had such receptors long before those leaves ever fell into Shen Nong's old ding that day. Like lovers waiting to meet, tea and man were looking for each other. There is great poetry in this sentiment.

Tea speaks to us in magical ways if we but learn its language. It doesn't speak in words, but through sensations and inspirations, and sometimes visions. It binds us in so many ways, telling us of our own origins in the plant kingdom. Try quieting down and interacting with your tea on the level of spirit. Its Qi holds vast tomes of forest words, and will tell you the tea's story.

Perhaps when we connect to Nature we also see the kinship in each other, recognizing our common inner source—the place in our hearts where we are one. Whether or not we open our physical and spiritual receptors to tea consciously, we can definitely channel what we do with the increased connection and inspiration that comes as a result. Tea is marvelous when channeled into meditation or contemplation, focusing and clarifying our Samadhi. It is also a tremendous aid in creative pursuits, allowing us to work harder and more beautifully when our art comes out of the spirit of tea. And when its added energy is pointed towards the heart, a calm joy arises and we find it much easier to love the world and each other, which is why we believe that tea will play a pivotal role in the arising of the Heart into consciousness on this earth.

There is a tea legend that a great war was to occur because two nations were suspicious of one another, though the other was actually not intending to attack unless their neighbor did first. A tea immor-



tal appeared before both kings and asked the court to drink a special tea at their war councils before deciding to invade. Years later, when matters had reached a critical point, war councils were indeed held in both the capitals. One of the kings remembered the immortal and had the magic tea brought out, thinking it would give his generals the supernatural foresight to strategize a victorious campaign. When they drank the tea, however, they were filled with great peace and understanding. They realized the karmic ties they had with their neighbors, and saw how families had crossed the borders over the last hundreds of years and that a war would pit cousin against cousin, and even brother against brother. They immediately sent envoys to the other capital seeking peace and offering to open their borders to their neighbor. The king

pleaded for the other king to meet him at the border. They met and shared the same tea again, discussing the old tea mystic that had visited them both. Tea allowed them to see the world with new eyes, unclouded by separation.

Try exploring the ways in which tea connects: to yourself, Nature and others. Work on the ways you can channel its spirit into the human realm, through spiritual work (sadhana), creative projects, or even towards an opening of the Heart. We believe that the more tea becomes human, the better. Look deeply into your bowls, my friends, and you might just poke your head up through some other cup in China or distant Siberia perhaps...





# THE ROAD HOME

*This article was written by our very own Dan Smith.*

I came to Taiwan in search of tea, and I'm so thankful I did. Back in Oregon, everyone I knew certainly thought of me as the 'tea guy'. I worked in a tea house inside a Suzhou-style Chinese Garden, operated my own tea service for tastings or events and loved nothing more than the chance to share a cup or two. It was obvious to everyone that it was my passion. At that point, I already knew that tea was my path. It had stayed with me for quite a few years, each year bringing new discoveries and knowledge. But it still seemed somewhat far away and hazy, and I knew I could learn much more in China or Taiwan. I was moving along an unlit path grasping at this and that: trying things out, buying tea online (sometimes locally too) and reading books. And through it all, I was drinking tea, and absorbing a little of its medicine. It seemed only natural to everyone that I would move on to Taiwan to learn and experience more. A little familiar with Taiwanese tea culture, I dreamed of high-mountain Oolongs, fine Puerh and Aged Oolongs. The potential was certainly great; the horizon bright, but I had no idea that I would learn so much and find such deep connection here. I would meet my teacher who would guide my way and completely refresh my love for tea.

Taiwanese people have tea in their blood and in their bones. The vast majority of them are from Fujian and have been drinking tea for many generations, whether it be here in Taiwan or back in the Mainland. There are so many tea experts here and there are countless things to be learned from them. However, to my surprise, I started down the Way of Tea, guided by a fellow American whose from a Midwestern town that is actually quite close to where I was born, though both of us moved away long ago. I was introduced to Wu De by our mutual friend and tea brother, Paul, but with little ado. He simply told me with assurance that he was the best person I could get in touch with in Taiwan.

One visit to meet him and the wheels were set in motion. He saw his student and I my teacher. We set no date to start classes but I think we were both rather inspired on that day a few years ago. I was amazed by his collection of tea and teaware, but even more by his approach. He had an intimate familiarity with tea. He didn't want to conceal this, show off that; didn't want to sell me anything, only to

give. A wonderful, big silence filled his tea space. He gave me many cups of tea, a fantastic lunch and his book. I was living in a small town in central Taiwan at that time and was lucky to befriend a fellow American who had been living in Taiwan for years, and whose love of tea was developing slowly over those years. I tried to share my impressions of Wu De and his tea space with him but couldn't quite communicate it. He could see that I was very impressed. I told him he had to come up to Miaoli with me next time. That visit was another great day and we both eagerly agreed to start coming on a weekly basis for tea classes. Shortly after that, Kaiya—the author of last month's article—would join us. The tea center was alive, and it has grown so rapidly since.

We started with water, the Mother of Tea. After our first class, I began using a storage jar, searching out mountain springs and comparing what was available in the stores. It was no great surprise for me to hear that one must give great respect to water in tea brewing. I already knew this, but only abstractly, like one knows a fact in a book. I had experimented with water some in America, but not much further than comparing a few store-bought bottles. I paid attention to temperature and tried not to over-boil. I wasn't looking at what I was storing it in, what I was boiling it in and how I was heating that vessel. I wasn't comparing those waters side by side in a patient manner. So here I was in an environment that places great importance on sensitivity and honing ones abilities. There are so many wonderful teachings that I have learned here, bringing me to two of the basic and most fundamental of the many teachings I've absorbed:

The first is that we need to go down to a tea's level in preparing it. We shouldn't try to manipulate it, make it conform to our schedule or make it perform for us. The Leaf is our greatest teacher and a reminder that we are also part of Great Nature. We need to at least meet it halfway if we are to receive its goodness. Patience, reverence and sensitivity are all necessary in tea preparation, and the basis for a bountiful tea experience. Working on this sensitivity in all things tea requires work and many reminders from your teacher. This work leads to experience and Gong Fu, something you can never learn by reading a book.



The second lesson closest to my heart is that all things are alive and vibrating with their own energy. The materials in all teaware interact with the tea, the preparer and the guests. I was amazed to learn the rather noticeable impact that different types of stoneware and metal can have on tea and water. There can be a magical alchemy in preparing and serving tea for others. We come to know that our bodies are mostly water, and within all that water is empty space vibrating with energy—enlivened with Qi. We then realize that water is extremely sensitive. It is influenced by solid matter, movement, stars, the moon, magnetic fields, music, the weather and perhaps primary in tea preparation, our thoughts and emotions.

Tea had been right before all of my senses day in and day out for years, and yet I was aware of all this only conceptually. Maybe I could have realized some of these insights and explored them more deeply on my own, but I would need many more lifetimes to make such progress. Now with our tea classes, our Center, I had a forum and teacher to direct and guide me.

At the tea center studying with Wu De, I have realized so much more fully how tea is an excellent vehicle for becoming more sensitive and getting in touch with all that's around us; how to slow down and do things right so that your experience is deeper and more fulfilling. I needed a teacher to tell me directly: "Straighten up, pay attention and get to work!"

It is truly great to see our tea center blossoming and growing. I am overjoyed to see that this tradition is finding listening hearts all over the world and hope to share many bowls of tea with all of you during your coming visits to Taiwan.



In my wildest dreams, I never imagined I would ever be so far north, sharing tea with Siberians. And as the miracle of life has unfolded, and I now find myself looking down on the Gobi and Mongolia—heading home to Taiwan—I feel just the opposite, like it couldn't have been any other way; and like the people and places I've made friends with have always been in my heart. I want to share some of my journey with you, so you'll know and love your Russian tea brothers and sisters the way I have come to. And hopefully you will also be inspired by the awakening of the heart that is happening all over the world, and tea's great role in this change.

Siberia is an ancient land deep with a power and wisdom all its own. The word "Siberia" in Russia is akin to "suffering" as it has long been a place where prisoners and dissidents went to escape civilization. The weather is harsh, of course, and many of my new friends like to joke that Siberia has no summer but two winters, one white and one green. There is a mystery in the people here, as they seem on the outside to mirror their environment's cold harshness, only to erupt in love, joy and laughter at the slightest tickle. You've never, ever been truly hugged until you've been hugged by a Russian.

And then there's Nature itself, which extends on and on—way beyond any words I could ever put to paper, and whiter still. The forest has a living mind, and you know how easily its imagination could swallow you, even looking out at the great expanses from the window of the train. Here the cedars ring and the white birch everywhere dance to their songs. Having a bit of Native American blood myself, I couldn't help but look out and wonder how my ever-so distant ancestors survived winters here: I see their black eyes full of firelight through the fire smoke, but I can't read them. They are too mysterious and we're too far apart, as if that fire spanned an abyss.

### *Irkutsk*

Our first stop was amazing. We traveled to Irkutsk by Trans-Siberian rail, covering more than a thousand kilometers in twenty-four hours. The endless hills and forests and rhythmic rocking of the train put me into a kind of timeless trance. Endless tea prepared by my student Max made the trip magical, and as the spirit of tea returned to me—or I to it—I began to see why it had summoned me to this distant land.

And then all the doubts and all the wonder I had felt about my trip to Russia exploded when

we stepped down onto the platform from the train and into the huge hugs of the two Romans. I don't think that any of the writing skills I've ever had would suffice as far as these two go. In Russian, the name "Roman" is pronounced "Roma". And these two Romas have been great friends since childhood, binding them in so much more than name alone. I instantly understood that I had loved them long before we'd ever met in this incarnation, as if our brotherhood echoed in my soul, telling me of other teas drunk in other times. And nothing, not even the language or cultural barriers, could keep it in. Have you ever loved someone instantly? Have you ever felt the inexplicable sensation that someone you just met was already in your heart long before you met them? Meeting Roma and Roma was like that for me. It felt like they were manifested projections from out my own heart, and though we grew up at different times and on opposite sides of the world, and even at a time when our countries were actively disagreeing with one another, they were my elder brothers the whole time. Right there on the platform we were having a family reunion after a lifetime apart.

The Romas are not only best friends, but they work together. They own a chain of rehabilitation centers where people come to be healed of various spiritual and/or psychological problems—everything from drug addiction to losing weight and learning to eat healthy food. They told me something that inspired me to the core: they have had great success in using gongfu tea to help addicts achieve and maintain sobriety. For me this was like coming full circle, because my first clear and living spiritual memories are all associated with my own time volunteering in such rehabilitation. I was helping addicts before I was serving tea, and so seeing the tea work together in this magical way touched me very deeply.

We held an excellent workshop at their headquarters and many people were changed by the tea. After we left, Roma sent word that Irkutsk was drowning in a giant wave of tea spirit. We also got to spend some time in the mountains near Lake Baikal deepening our understanding of why we were brothers, and from whence these powerful bonds.

Both of the Romas (Roma y Roma) are powerful mentors to me, and I have been forever changed by their love. I admire all of what they are doing so much. They are great lovers of tea; and therefore, if you look deep enough into your own bowl, you might just find them there. I know I sure did.

## *Novosibirsk*

Back in Novosibirsk we held one of the most amazing tea workshops of my life. It felt like one of those momentous spiritual gatherings in which all those present have waited lifetimes to meet and hold council together. The two days slipped in and out of time, as we drank liters of great tea, and often felt timeless—like we had been sitting in the tea house for years. Originally, we planned to meet from 10am to 6pm, but both days we found ourselves still drinking tea at 10pm. It was a magical gathering, and everyone left in a very calm, loving space.

More and more I find that what we are doing with this tradition is just a part of the movement of the Heart into the consciousness of the world, and that tea is just one of its mediums—for me, the best. I keep meeting people that I know are already embodying tea spirit, and manifesting it in their own way. And as tea becomes human, it never, ever stops with the transformation of that person alone. It ever and always wants to be shared, affecting all those who come near the one who is filled up with it. Teaching through a translator was an incredible experience for me. Firstly, it forced me to slow down and be more aware of my big mouth. Secondly, it allowed me to watch more carefully as the people took in what I was sharing, which is not usually possible when you are speaking. It is amazing to say something and then be afforded the chance to look on quietly as the person absorbs what you are saying.

The spiritual readiness of people in Russia explained why I had been summoned there, and why the soil is so fertile for tea. Very soon we will have a sister center and all our websites and materials will be translated to Russian. Of course, volunteers were coming out of the woodwork. Most places I go, people can feel the transformative power of the tradition I bring and many of them tell me they feel like they've been a part of it since before they met me. I tell them that it's because this tradition comes out of tea, and they were already drinking tea, of course.

And that brings me to the second great insight of my trip. More and more as I hold these workshops, I find that when I say something from the depth of tea—in the ancient way—the person looks up at me and says, “That’s like when I...” and then goes on to relate some specific tea-related application of the wisdom I am trying to convey as it was

previously manifest in their own personal experience. They already knew it, in other words. And they knew it in their own way, and in a living way much more powerful than the traditional stories I’ve come to tell. The tea taught it to them. They just hadn’t articulated it before. This happened several times with the Romas, and again in Novosibirsk.

## *Tomsk*

In Tomsk we held our final workshop, and I can’t think of a way I would have rather spent my last day in Siberia. We drank tea all day, and I was once again honored to share my love for the Leaf. Russian teahouses have a very casual atmosphere, and are as much social clubs as they are places to enjoy and learn about tea. There are cushions all over the floor and people are as likely to sit cross-legged and look at you attentively as they are to lounge about or even lay down completely. They feel wonderfully at home in them, and I later found out they have “movie nights” like we do at our center, which made me smile to no end.

The casual vibes in public places make Russians seem very warm. On the train, people walk around and share food with everyone else. Max wasn’t just making tea for me on our long train journeys, but very often carrying the traditional Russian glasses clanking to a neighboring compartment to share with a sweet old lady or two. I loved how comfortable people felt during our workshops in Novosibirsk and Tomsk, enough to lay down and listen with a contented smile while their neighbors engaged me with intense, and often deep, philosophical questions.

If my account of my time in Siberia seems over-emotional or too full of flattery, think again. I honestly believe that I have not only *not* exaggerated anything, but perhaps even undervalued the love for tea in this account. I leave a bit lighter, having left a chunk of my heart behind in Russia.

And so, let us raise our cups to our northern tea brothers and sisters. May the seeds of this tradition grow strong and beautiful in Siberia. May the people there be awakened through tea to their true heart of presence and loving-kindness. And may tea spirit spread from there to all beings...



# TEA WAYFARERS

*From now on, we plan to introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you each month in these newsletters. We hope that this helps us all get to know each other better. 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 the tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to show you some glimpses of such beautiful people and their tea. Since Wu De went to Siberia this month, we thought we'd introduce you to your brother Maxim.*

**M**ax Shvedov was born on 25th, July 1987 in Abakan, Russia. After high school, he entered Tomsk State University, moving one thousand kilometers west to do so. In 2010, he graduated from University with Bachelors and Masters degrees in international relations. He then entered graduate school to study Orientology at the Institute of TSU. He still lives in Tomsk and now teaches Chinese and works as a translator.

Max fell in love with tea at an early age, buying his first tea set with money his grandfather had give him for his 16th birthday. Since then, many things have changed in his life situation, but never his love for tea. He says tea has taken him many places, and in each place he's met beautiful people. "I had been drinking tea for ten years, but only last summer did I have my first true cup. I remember every detail of that day when I stepped into the Center, Tea Sage Hut. I spent two glorious days at the Center, met my teacher and brothers, who I felt I had always known and been searching for. Here was a place that embodied the spirit of tea I had always longed for."

Max has tilled the fertile soil in Siberia, where we plan to open a center in the next few months. He embodies so much of the spirit of this tradition, leaving others impressed by it and the changes it has made in his life. He will hold weekly tea gatherings at our new center, and organize workshops to host teachers from Taiwan—thereby watering the plants that we know will take deep root,

like the ancient and wise cedar guardians of this antediluvian land.

We should all feel proud to count Maxim as our tea brother. His humility and grace are inspirational. He is one who truly serves tea, and will play a large part in the awakening of Heart into the consciousness of this Earth, through the medium of tea.

You can reach Maximushka at:  
**[teasagehutr@gmail.com](mailto:teasagehutr@gmail.com)**



# CENTER NEWS

The Global Tea Hut website now has a forum up, where we can all discuss this month's tea and ask or answer questions, as well as share our experiences. It is a great way to meet some of your brothers and sisters in the hut. Come and join us:

**[www.globalteahut.org/forum](http://www.globalteahut.org/forum)**



We are planning to launch a free video series of teachings this April, from our center here in Taiwan. Wu De will give some teachings on tea and share some life wisdom each week. We aren't sure where we will host the videos, but we are excited about them indeed. Any ideas?



There are currently almost 50 people in Global Tea Hut from all around the world, countries like Spain, Russia, Estonia, Australia, New Zealand, America, Canada, USA, the U.K. and Taiwan. We have passed the cost of our center, 1000 USD per month, and are now saving towards some of our long and short term goals. You can read about them on our site. We are so overjoyed to be a part of this abundance and exchange.



If any of you are interested in seeing these newsletters in color, you can read them on the Internet at the GTH website, under the link for 'newsletters'. Some of the photography is worth taking a peak at.

Wu De will be in LA from April 19th through the 25th to attend the Tadasana Yoga Festival in Santa Monica and serve tea with our beloved brother and sister, Colin and Taylor. Wish them well! I'm sure we will be hearing all about it in the next issue.



Next month we will be giving out two scholarship subscriptions of one free year of Global Tea Hut. We plan to do this for every 50 people that sign up. If you know any good candidates let us know.



Let us know about what you think of Global Tea Hut so far, either by contacting us or expressing your thoughts on the new forum. We would love to hear your comments or criticism. We are here to serve and make this experience better for everyone, bringing us all closer together.

**[www.globalteahut.org](http://www.globalteahut.org)**

**[www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)**

**[www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org)**

**Be happy!**

-ROMA

