

THE MEANING OF
TEA



*To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

—WILLIAM BLAKE



THE MEANING OF
TEA

A TEA INSPIRED JOURNEY



Scott Chamberlin Hoyt

Edited with Commentary by
Phil Cousineau

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SONG OF TEA

LU TONG



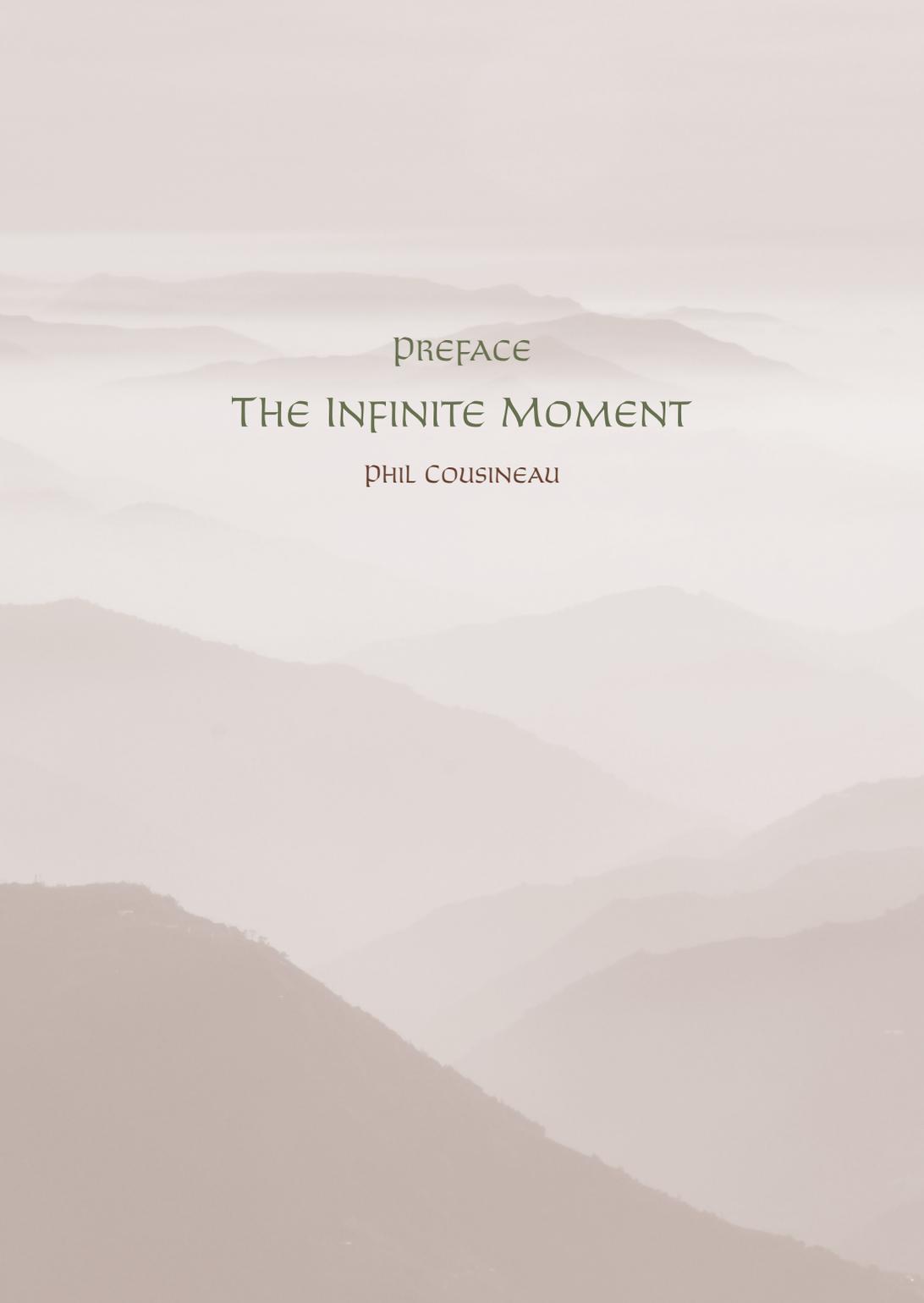
*The first drink sleekly moistened my lips and throat;
the second banished my loneliness;
the third expelled the dourness from my mind;
the fourth broke me out in a light perspiration;
the fifth bathed every atom of my being;
the sixth lifted me higher to kinship with the immortals;
the seventh is the utmost I can drink.*

—LU TONG, TANG DYNASTY

TRANSLATED BY JOHN BLOFELD,

The Chinese Art of Tea





PREFACE

THE INFINITE MOMENT

PHIL COUSINEAU

The eminent scholar John Blofeld's translation of Lu Tong's beloved poem about seven cups of tea provides this book with a glorious metaphor. On the wings of that mythic number, this book proceeds in seven cups, or parts: India, Morocco, USA, Japan, France, Ireland and England, and Taiwan. This structure reflects and honors the seven locations where the interviews took place, and together they suggest stages in an exhilarating journey in the discovery of the elusive meaning of tea.

Naturally, it is edifying to learn about the history of tea, which has been told and retold in terms of botany, sociology, psychology, metaphysics, politics, and business. Some modern scholars, such as Liu Tong, have even argued that the tea business has been so powerful that it actually changed the course of history, as evidenced by the Tea-Opium Wars in China and the Boston Tea Party.

In fact, the world's bookshelves groan under the weight of hundreds of books that present myriad facts about the famous *Camellia sinensis* plant that has blessed history. For instance, historians believe tea was discovered in China more than 5,000 years ago. The first historical record of tea appeared in *Erb Ya*, a Chinese dictionary dating back to 350 BCE. Four billion cups a day are sipped around the world, and there are over 5,000 varieties grown in more than a dozen countries. Tea contains over 400 chemical compounds, and the caffeine in plants such as tea may very well be nature's own insecticide.

In the realm of venerable legend it was said in ancient China that there were 62,000 known benefits in the plant world, but over time, 40,000 of them were lost. That left 22,000 benefits that could be attributed to a single plant, which happens to be tea. The raft of remaining benefits included the elimination of fatigue, the alleviation of stress, the lifting of energy, the warding off of disease, the gifts of harmony and tranquility, fraternity and focus, and countless more attributes, giving rise to one of its most popular epithets, "the lusty leaf."

Still, numbers only tell the outer story. The inner story is always where meaning dwells, and is best told personally, through the reflections of people whose lives have been devoted to tea. Thus, one question threads this book together: "What does tea mean to you?" What does it mean to grow it, sell it, drink it, cut business deals, or arrange

marriages and funerals over it? What is it that *moves* people to bare their souls over a cup of tea? By *meaning*, I mean its value, its virtue, its inner significance, its intent, and its purpose.

Exploring this mystery dimension of tea has been a daunting task. Tea does not easily surrender its secrets. But, as Lu Tong subtly suggested, the more tea you drink, the more relaxed, serene, companionable, healthy, patient, and wise (if the gods allow) you become.

Similarly, over the course of more than fifty interviews from Taiwan to India, Ireland to Tea, South Dakota, the meaning of tea unfolds in these pages one sip, one cup, one person, at a time. The more you read here, the more you will come to appreciate the “22,000 benefits” of tea.

A favorite Chinese proverb says, “A tree has its roots, a stream its source.” So it is with this book. Its roots and its source lie in the curiosity of Scott Chamberlin Hoyt, whose film, *The Meaning of Tea*, sparked the creation of this book. For most of his life, he has been a devoted tea drinker. When traveling widely abroad, he heard scores of tributes to the world’s most popular beverage, and began to wonder if there was anything universal about tea and what ultimate value and purpose it might serve. So, in 2006, he embarked on a quest with a documentary film crew to explore the idea of tea as a potentially underutilized salve for the modern world. Along the way he interviewed a wide variety of people about what tea meant to them in their personal, business, social, and spiritual lives.

On the long and winding road of making the film, the crew gathered one hundred and twenty hours of footage. From this treasure trove they created an inspiring and informative seventy-four-minute film, which left a wealth of wonderful material “in the vault.” This book is the result of sifting through more than two thousand pages of transcripts and gleaning from them the most meaningful passages from that hard-won footage to form a book that contains an unprecedented range of voices from tea pickers and plantation owners to street sellers, teapot makers, tea tasters, plus a few eloquent tea scholars.

The choir of voices here chimes in on some other familiar aspects of tea discussed above, and its uncanny ability to strengthen one’s spirituality and even gladden the heart.

Beyond these valuable reminders of tea's remarkable powers, this collection of interviews lends new perspectives on the way we regard and drink tea. Questions during the filming opened up rarely discussed aspects of the tea world, such as the notion that it is a gift of the gods, a friend of the muses, infused with spiritual energy, and that it smoothes the path of conversation.

Tea is all of these things and more—or less? This delicious ambiguity was voiced best by the great seventeenth-century Japanese tea master Sen no Rikyu, who described his way of performing tea ceremony as *Wabicha*, or “the tea of simplicity.” He wrote:

*Tea is nothing but this:
First you heat the water.
Then you make the tea.
Then you drink it properly.
That is all you need to know.*

More recently, San Francisco tea entrepreneur Roy Fong said, in one of the finest interviews here, that the wisdom of tea is inexhaustible. “The beauty of it,” he says, “is that it allows you to directly communicate with nature.” He adds that if you take the time and trouble to learn about the long journey that the tea made to reach you—the soil, the growing, the shipping, the refining—then you will better experience its complexity, perhaps even appreciate what he calls “the spirits of tea.” This depth dimension of respect for tea, he promises, repays us with infinite dividends. “Then you will understand a little bit more about the true meaning of life.”

Since the mid-1990s, tea has played a vital role in what might be called the “Slow Life” movement in Europe and the United States, where the cult of speed has driven many to the edge of exhaustion. Untold millions of people are realizing that more is not always more; sometimes *less is more*, if it means we are able to savor rather than gorge on life. In this spirit, tea offers more than mere liquid refreshment. It provides a daily opportunity to enrich our lives by relishing our time, which can lead to more energy, efficiency, and even happiness.

Perhaps that is what Thich Nhat Hanh, the Cambodian Buddhist monk, meant when he said, “We are most real when we are drinking tea.”

The suggestion of the deeper meaning of tea is beautifully revealed by the following passage from the worldwide bestseller, *Three Cups of Tea*. A Balti tribesman, in Pakistan, is addressing the author, Greg Mortenson, who has returned there to build schools for the people who helped save his life:

The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die. Doctor Greg, you must take time to share three cups of tea. We may be uneducated. But we are not stupid. We have lived and survived here for a long time.

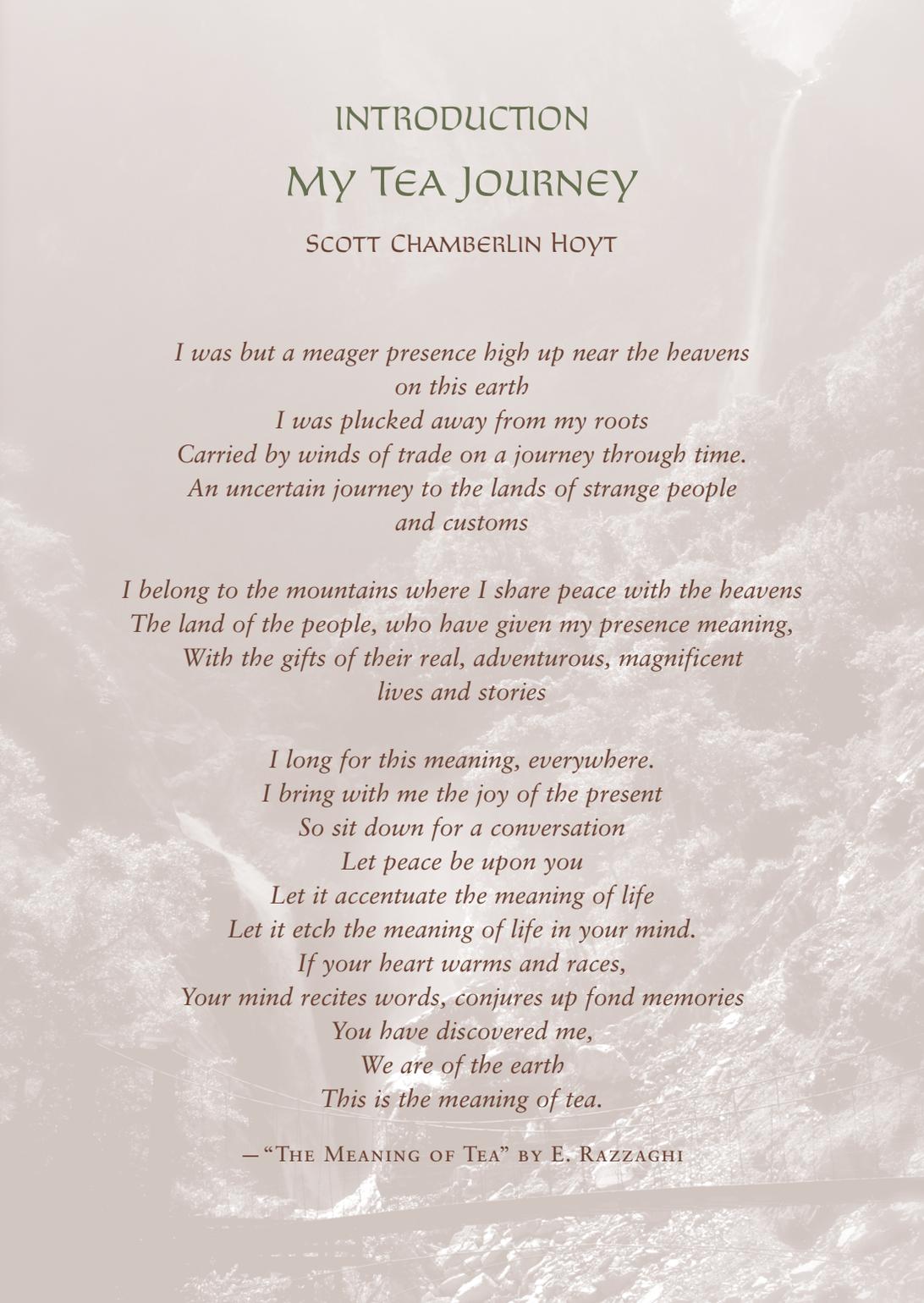
And now it is time to have a cup of tea and enjoy the following interviews, which are offered to the reader in that spirit of celebration. Together, they serve as a reminder that it is possible for each of us to find the tea that speaks to us, the tea that makes us calmer, more compassionate, more observant, and more respectful of the natural world from which we came.

If we do, we may come to understand what was meant by Ogata Ihachi's eighteenth mysterious inscription on the side of his tea bowl: "In tranquility, the universe is great." For many, the meaning of tea and the meaning of peace in our own lives converge there at the bottom of the teacup as one.

Or as the Beatles sang, so simply, in "All Too Much":

*"Show me that I'm everywhere
And get me home for tea"*

—PHIL COUSINEAU
SAN FRANCISCO, MAY 2008



INTRODUCTION
MY TEA JOURNEY

SCOTT CHAMBERLIN HOYT

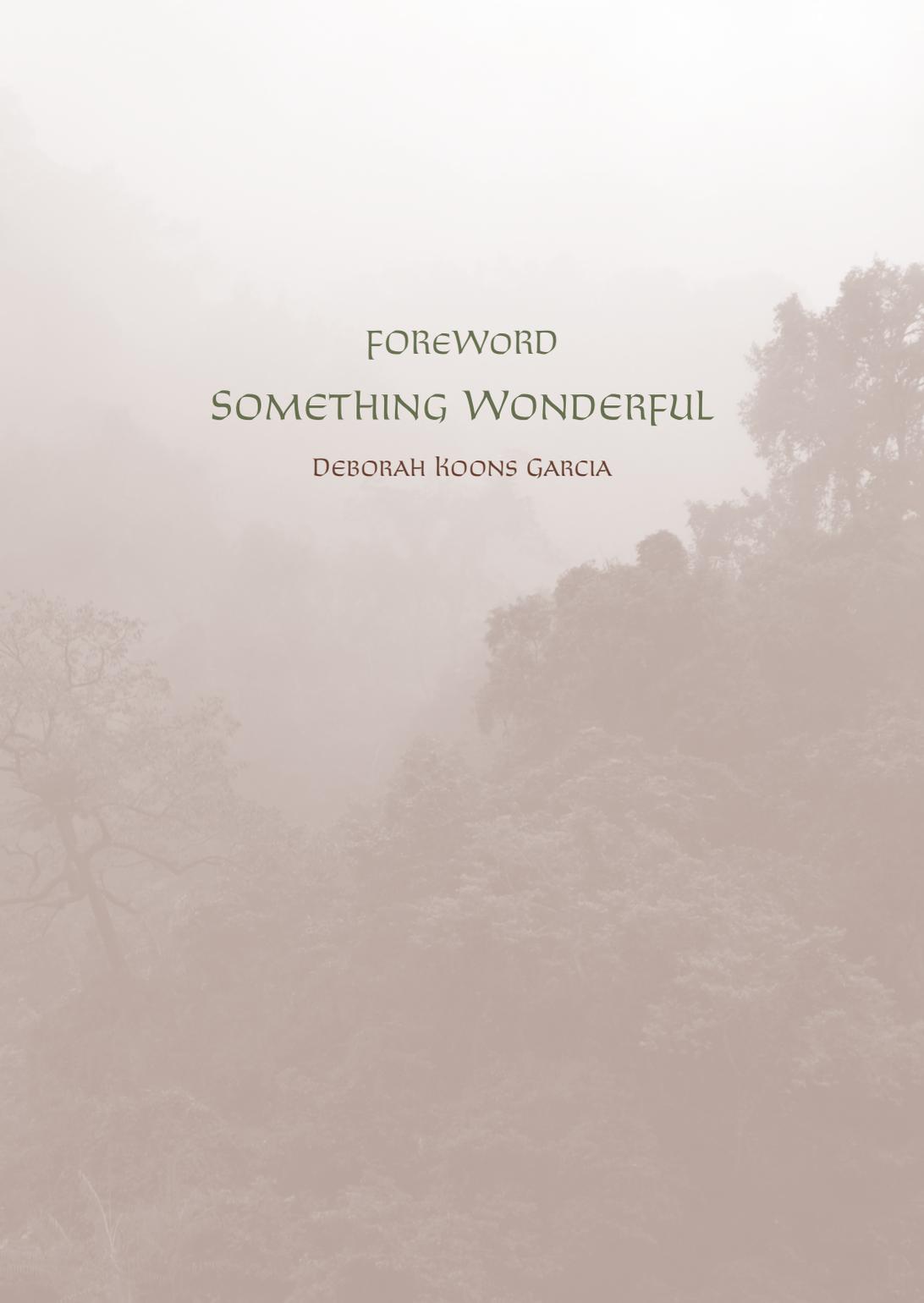
*I was but a meager presence high up near the heavens
on this earth*

*I was plucked away from my roots
Carried by winds of trade on a journey through time.
An uncertain journey to the lands of strange people
and customs*

*I belong to the mountains where I share peace with the heavens
The land of the people, who have given my presence meaning,
With the gifts of their real, adventurous, magnificent
lives and stories*

*I long for this meaning, everywhere.
I bring with me the joy of the present
So sit down for a conversation
Let peace be upon you
Let it accentuate the meaning of life
Let it etch the meaning of life in your mind.
If your heart warms and races,
Your mind recites words, conjures up fond memories
You have discovered me,
We are of the earth
This is the meaning of tea.*

— “THE MEANING OF TEA” BY E. RAZZAGHI

A misty, sepia-toned photograph of a dense forest. The foreground is dominated by a large, gnarled tree on the left side. The background shows rolling hills and dense foliage, all shrouded in a soft, hazy mist. The overall tone is warm and atmospheric.

FOREWORD
SOMETHING WONDERFUL

DEBORAH KOONS GARCIA

I didn't come face to face with a tea plant until I was in my thirties, on a hillside in China in 1988. As I walked through the rounded shrubs, I picked a few leaves and felt subtly thrilled that I held in my hand actual tea, the herb, which could have been growing in that place for thousands of years. I thought of the leaves of tea, the idea of tea spreading out into the world, affecting trade, politics, taste, culture. I marveled that humans had managed to select that particular plant from all that nature offers and cultivate it through millennia. On the same trip, I was told by our Chinese guide that when she was a girl, she had been pulled away from her parents during the Cultural Revolution, because they were professors and intellectuals in Beijing, and sent to a remote region and forced to work in the tea fields where she almost died from exposure.

After our visit to these tea fields, we went to a tea garden where we drank the tea they grew there, Green Dragon Tea. It was delicious, fresh, green, alive, tasting of the plant itself. I bought a tin and took it with me back to California. I began to enjoy that tea, the fruit of my travels, and soon my morning ritual involved sitting down first thing with a cup of green tea and meditating. I found the green tea did calm and focus my mind. It's said that Buddha became enlightened then had a cup of tea. For me, that cup of tea starts my day and encourages me to try to move towards a more enlightened existence.

I had not really had much of a relationship with tea before I stood in those fields in China. In the 50s when I was very young, we had tea parties with imaginary tea, our teacups set out on a cloth on the grass in Ohio, and I remember the neighborhood boys, brothers included, riding their bikes through our tea party, attacking it with peashooters. We had other tea parties sans tea, sitting cross-legged at the bottom of a pool, shooting up for air between sips. I'd had hot tea in the Caribbean one time when a friend and I developed a wicked sunburn for which the local remedy was drinking hot tea while we were basted with vinegar. In high school and college I'd gone to various ladies teas where I'd taken the perfunctory cup of tea. When I visited England the first time, I'd been amazed to see everything stop in the late afternoon while everyone sat down to tea and cakes. As a filmmaker, I had tea-

dyed clothing to cut the dreaded white glare. My friends moved from soda pop to iced tea, while I eventually took to sparkling water and cappuccino.

I had appreciated the power of tea—the economics of tea, the way tea shaped international trade for centuries, tea and technology, ships designed to get tea to market faster, the role of tea in the triangle trade route. I knew about the Boston Tea Party, the classic just-say-no of the activists of that time. I understood the importance to so many people, across cultures, of the ritual of taking tea as a civilizing act. I had a Zen friend who studied the Japanese Tea Ceremony every week for years. But until I stood in a field and felt the leaves in my hand, and drank tea in the place it was grown, the whole tea thing was just theoretical. Somehow for me, it took connecting plant and place and excellent tea, before I appreciated tea itself.

But now that I have my own personal relationship with my favorite cup of my favorite tea, it's a different story. I take my tea with me when I travel, and make it myself on planes, in hotels, my reminder to myself to connect into a calm, focused place. I feel the health benefits of tea, all those anti-oxidants fighting back. I know I can get really wired on cappuccino but I can probably prevail more effectively on tea.

Was tea the first truly globalized product? Tea as connective tissue, as a spur to get bigger and faster and more? Reading Scott Chamberlin Hoyt's wonderful book and watching his beautiful film, I learn much that sets me pondering the amazing substance called tea. How remarkable that more tea is consumed every day than all the other prepared drinks put together! I was raised Catholic and back in the 60s, I felt very strongly that the elimination of the Latin Mass was the beginning of the end of the mojo of the Catholic Church. Did they not realize how powerful having the same ritual performed on the same day in the same language all over the world was? They watered the whole thing down—they took the mystery out and mystical started slipping away.

Tea has maintained its sense of mystery and the mystical. We humans like and need our rituals, and sharing tea involves some of the best, from the imaginary tea party of young girls, to the cultivated exactness of the Japanese tea ceremony to the social ritual required out

of politeness, to offer and say yes to a cup of tea, enjoyed by host and guest, in almost any country around the globe. It's a comfort, it's refreshing, and it's real.

In the future, what will we be doing with and to our tea? Will they try to genetically engineer it so a pumped up version of tea can grow anywhere using machines? The corporate food industry wants to turn tea into yet another grab, gulp and go consumer item, stuff we drink in our car between cell phone calls. As we power down our world and use less because we have less, I have a feeling old-fashioned tea and the rituals surrounding it will survive. It may get from field to distant shores by a new kind of clipper ship, driven by wind, a slow boat from China. Tea may seem to the aficionados of the future ever more precious, ever more valued. Right now we can appreciate that tea is hand cultivated and hand picked, that it is being enjoyed everywhere, a kind of global connective tissue.

Sometimes it seems to me that this planet is turning into one big Mad Hatters Tea Party and we are like Alice, just wanting to get up and leave, proclaiming 'It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!' Or things may progress in a different direction. With care and conviviality we could reshape our world, and be free to enjoy in peace a cup of tea that sustains and heartens us. I hope so.

—DEBORAH KOONS GARCIA
AUGUST, 2008

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
THE WORDLESS REALM



WITH
JAMES NORWOOD PRATT



JAMES NORWOOD PRATT

There is a wonderful legend about the origins of the “Big Red Robe,” or “Great Scarlet Cloak” tea, what the Chinese call *Da Hong Pao*. This refers to the robe of office. It was the badge of office of a very high mandarin in the Song Dynasty, who fell ill unto death and credited his recovery to drinking tea from this particular patch of bushes up in the Wuyi mountains. When the mandarin recovered, he made a pilgrimage to stand in that place on the terrace beneath the Tianxin Cliff in the Wuyi mountains, where that tea had come from. He spread his cloak over the bushes, and others would be expected to kowtow. From that time on, those plants have been called *Da Hong Pao*—the “Big Red Robe.” Eight hundred years later, that same patch of bushes still wakes up from hibernation every spring and puts forth a few new leaves, and tea is made. The whole canyon is full of their offspring. Not all of the plants there may be eight hundred years old, but some of them date back that far.


*Opportunity must
not be lost while the
gods smile.*

—LI JING, TANG DYNASTY

There is a varietal unto itself. When you stand in Nine Dragon’s Nest, which is the name of a famous canyon in China, you

understand the art of feng shui as if you have never understood it before: *feng*: wind, *shui*: water. The truth about anyplace lies in which way the wind blows, and which way the water flows; that is the lay of the land. In this canyon, the walls rise steeply. The sun can only come onto the plants directly from around eleven to one, and the wind can only blow from a certain direction and the water only has a certain flow. These are factors why Da Hong Pao tastes so peculiar. There is nothing else that can taste like Da Hong Pao. When you remove these plants and take them somewhere else, the tea from them doesn't really taste like the down-home Da Hong Pao, either.

For all of these reasons, this is one of China's legendary teas; it is very rare. The real thing can't come from anywhere else; it can't come from any other bush; and there is never going to be very much of it. This tea is always made in that dark Oolong style that is so beloved of the people of China. It is now regarded as an old-fashioned way of making Oolong, but it brings out a richness that you wouldn't believe any plant could show you. I shall say no more about the beauties of Da Hong Pao. I am omitting, I assure you, a great deal.



In the fifties when I was in high school, I learned the magical words for the first time. Of course, I learned about words like witchcraft, which were redolent with romanticism, and other ideas concerning magic. This is the same thing that makes Harry Potter a phenomena among young readers today. I carried it to ridiculous extents and wound up using the Latin that I had been taught to read of the Middle Ages. Through these portals of wisdom, I entered the spiritual path. It's not long after you discover a path such as this, that you lose interest in exercising power over other human beings.

This study of cultism, which lasted until I was about thirty years old, is over now. Of course, this is a subject of infinite interest, but I don't have room in my library anymore



Any object, intensely regarded, may be a gate of access to the incorruptible eon of the gods.

—JAMES JOYCE, *Ulysses*

for all my books. I have now taken a bold step and decided to part with some, possibly a big box, of my library of esoteric matters.

There is so much to be said about tea, because it exists in a realm beyond words, one that can only be entered by poets ready to use metaphors. A beautiful tea is really a tea to write poetry by. It would be my companion as I gazed out over the bay alone, I would choose a special time to have a tea this special. Tea itself I think of as a metaphor. After all, it's up there with acupuncture and fung shui and all of the other Taoist arts. Taoism is something embedded in nature, something that we have lifted from nature to experience it more directly through this medium of tea. If we are not really a body, then what is in tea that is affecting us in this way?

Tea is actually as much a spiritual being as we are. The actual leaf that was steeped in your teapot is just the envelope that the spirit of tea has arrived in. Tea can be a portal to that wordless realm, which was one of the definitions that Lao Tzu gave to it. He said when you are confronting this realm, there is nothing else to do but be silent and have the deep experience of knowing that *you are that realm that you are seeking*. That's what tea teaches.



THE INHERENT MEANING

Does tea have a meaning? I don't know. I don't believe life has a meaning that can be written down on a piece of paper. It's not what you'd find on a piece of paper or in a stream of words. If tea has a meaning, it is one that we will never capture in a book or a poem. However, this is not to say that tea does not have an existence; this is not to say that tea doesn't have an effect on you. One of the effects that tea has had on every people who have used it is to inspire myths.

Where did tea come from? Who could possibly have come up with the idea of plucking this particular leaf from this particular bush and processing it in this particular way so that it yields this particular delicious beverage? What makes tea delicious, anyway? At the core of tea is its bitterness, so you see there is *something else*.

A Chinese proverb that I have always treasured says, "Tea is bitter, like good advice." That's the metaphor; that's the meaning. Where did it come from? Everybody who has loved tea has had to ask that question, and the answers are various. I have collected about seventeen origin stories so far. Some of them are creation myths, the ones from the homeland of tea in China. Others are cultural myths, such as the tale of Shen Nung, the legendary emperor, who was trying all of the herbs in China so that he could launch the herbal medicines. Of course, he had to have an antidote for those that are poisonous. He found that the leaf of the tea plant did this the best.

The story about the eyelids of Bodhidharma is another favorite creation story. He probably existed and lived in the 500s. He's the man who came to China from India and taught Buddhism. The Chinese also credit him with introducing Zen. But he is also the patron saint of tea, because Zen spread along with the teachings of Bodhidharma. There are countless myths.

Sitting by myself, tea is my solace in solitude, one of my favorite companions. Many of the teas I drink are those that I write poetry by, and these are totally different from teas that you might listen to music by, or teas that you would invite a friend over to share.

Tea does unlock the secrets of your heart when you are seated across the table from a fair tea maker, and you began to exchange per-

sonal stories and important information. I believe one of the secrets of tea throughout history is that it makes us *talky*. Look at me. Tea is the universal social solvent, you might say, because it makes us exchange matters of the heart with one another more easily.

Those of us who have come to tea as a livelihood, as a calling, believe that tea has called *us*. We didn't choose this livelihood—but we found this calling and the tea is making us its examples. We are simply the way-showers. Not everybody is going to go into the tea business, but those who do are much happier and better off. Tea makes my body sing and dance on a molecular level; that's exactly what it is doing to us.

A philosopher friend pointed out to me very recently the important difference between taking time and making time. This is tea you would make time for. In this respect, we are in some way the servants of tea. We are taking it to more people and sharing it not only with our friends, but with customers whose names we don't even know, such as the people who read my books. I seldom find out who exactly they are,

but a lot of strangers have told me how tea has led them to a whole new understanding of what life can be like.


PR: *Do you still wake
happy but aware of
your mortality?*

JG: *Yes, though
sometimes I have to
have a cup of tea first.*

—PARIS REVIEW
INTERVIEW WITH POET
JACK GILBERT, 2002

So we are not the only ones to make this discovery. I think everybody who realizes this in some way wants to pass it on. This is the same as being eager to share tea that you have found with somebody who doesn't know about it. You are compelled to say, "Oh, come sit down, I have a new tea to show you."

For me, it is a deep enjoyment to have this spirit inside us. Eventually, we discover as if we feel we can't have too much of it. We come to realize that with a great tea we are in the presence of a great work of art. In fact, we are living in a time in America where tea defines a sort of sociocultural frontier between the people who are trying to go faster and faster and the people who are saying, "No!—I have gone as fast as I wish. I need to go the other way!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN
THE REAL BENEFITS



WITH
WU SHENG-BEN, LIN KU-FANG & CHANG FU-CHIN



WU SHENG-BEN

This evening sky may bring snow. Come enjoy a cup with me.

—PO CHU-I, CHINESE POET, (772–846), TRANSLATED BY SAM HAMILL

Seen here on his rooftop at tea time, Wu Sheng-Ben is a Hakka from Hsin Chu, originally the land of the aboriginal people of Taiwan. He has been studying tea for over forty years, during which time he has helped create the history of Yu Lan Tea. When he began to cultivate tea, the land was neglected, wild, and heavily forested. But the virgin soil was rich enough for the tea plants to flourish. “When I was young,” he says, “I didn’t understand a thing about tea growing, but because I had an agricultural high school education, I easily learned and became skilled.”

WU SHENG-BEN: The origin of the name for our tea is interesting. The president of Taiwan, Lee Teng-Hui himself coined the name. Upon drinking it, he proclaimed our tea's aroma to be like Yu Lan's flowers, so he named it Yu Lan Tea.

During the time Mr. Chen Ting-Nan was governor it was possible for individuals to join the Tea Grower's Association. So small villages could grow excellent tea. As a result, the tea market opened up and the lives of villagers were improved. When Governor Chen special ordered our tea as a retirement gift for his workers, many other government agencies and corporations were inspired to purchase their tea from us.

During this early period, our women workers here didn't know how to draw or pour tea properly. They invited tea masters to come and teach them the proper tea skills. After the women learned to draw tea properly they were able to make truly quality tea for our customers. Our price dramatically rose from one to ten to one hundred dollars per kilogram. This was a time when our manufacturing business was growing.

When Mr. Chiang Ching-Kuo, over in Dong Ding, touted the health benefits of tea, the price for Yu Lan Tea went up from thirty to three hundred dollars. After a while, everyone learned the news that this old mountain was growing good tea. The rate for our tea leaves kept increasing up to thousands of dollars. Of course, the farmers' lives also improved while everyone was making a profit.

In the ensuing race to produce good tea, more and more people joined in on the clamor, which was similar to the recent spring tea competition when so many different growers won awards. Overall, our success illustrates that the soil and climate here are good, and so by the grace of nature we are able to make excellent tea.

When drinking tea you should focus on your heart. When you think of the word *tea*, the word *heart* should also come to mind. Ask yourself, "Is this astringent? Is it aromatic? Is there a rhythm in the flavor?" These considerations are important. For those who don't understand these aspects, it is like a cow drinking tea. They will probably drink a big cup in one gulp. However, people who understand tea drink tea differently—slowly and mindfully.



*It quenches thirst.
It lessens the desire
for sleep. It gladdens
the heart.*

— SHEN NUNG, 2737 BCE

When former President Lee Teng-Hui coined our product's name, he gave the first cup to the first lady. After he toasted her, he lightly inhaled the aroma of the second cup and drank it with a deep purpose. Then he said, "This Jin-Xuan tea is excellent. Its fragrance can be compared to a flower's."

CHALLENGES

As I have said, in recent years there has been a heavy traffic increase in our tea business. Not only people from Taiwan buy more tea from us, but more and more tea lovers from Japan, Korea, and the United States flock here looking for the best tea. Many foreign visitors want to drink good tea and don't haggle about price. We always give them a fair deal, because all of us here are honest. Recently, some Chinese-Americans and Chinese-Canadians visited us and drank our Yu Lan tea and said how great it was. They invited us to come to America and Canada to grow tea.

When our guests ask why our tea leaves are so superior, I tell them the reason is that our native tea gardens are at medium-altitude, which is a climate that is not too cold and not too hot. If the weather gets warm early, the tea will bud early, and the leaves will be thin. Of course, only thick-leaf tea will have rhythm in the flavor. Temperature variances here also mean the picking season runs later. The quality of our water is also excellent. It is not chalky and does not contain iron. We don't use wet ground to grow tea. I have high regard for the safety and quality of water. I hope all tea farmers will abide by and stick to this principle. Furthermore, the climate, topsoil, and thermal balance are suitable. Good water and good soil determine if the quality of tea will be good.

Water and air pollution are problems that tea growers face alone. The current government proactively encourages the farming sector not to spray pesticides. Instead, we are encouraged to use appropriate fertilizers. If we want to plant a crop tomorrow, we first inform the farming sector assay office. Then we bring in some tea leaves, which they will test to verify that the leaves don't have pesticide residue. If you pass the test for five straight years, the government awards you a certificate that affirms you are a model tea grower. I have been elected to the list of Top Ten Exemplary Male Tea Farmers in our country, and my daughter has

A Tea Farmer's Benefits of Tea

The many famous benefits of tea are described in an old legend. It is said that a deity ate some poisonous herbs and used tea leaves as an antidote. The story makes clear that tea leaves have a detoxifying ability. They also quickly rid you of fatigue. If you often get sores, tea reduces inflammation and pain and rejuvenates you. This truth is pointed out by the old adage: "Steep a cup, it will clean you up."

Now I want to impart to you the health benefits of tea. Remarkably, tea drinkers' bodies are very healthy, with a low risk of diabetes. Tea can quickly rejuvenate us. You can see from the pliancy of my hair that tea can fortify our bodies. After people reach forty, their skin may develop black spots; they often get wrinkles. If you take a look at my eighty-year-old complexion and my healthy palms, you will see I haven't drunk alcohol. I only drink tea. Otherwise, it would be difficult to attain this healthy tone in my skin. Another benefit is that taking a bath in tea is good for your skin. Everybody jokes with me about this. They ask me how old I am, and when I tell them I am eighty, no one dares believe me. They ask, "How can you possibly be eighty? You're pulling my leg!" I just reply, "No one's willing to say they're old. Everyone just wants to be youthful."

In Taiwan, we believe we must share good things with others. I'm not telling you just because I am a tea person, but because tea is good for you.

—WU SHENG-BEN

been selected to the Top Ten list for female growers of tea. From all these factors you can tell that Taiwan is a precious island. So our leaves are superior. As a result, our tea steeps better than other leaves.

HOW TO SAVOR TEA

During tea drinking, you should hold the cup with your palm facing up and toward yourself, with the back of your hand facing out—or else you are being discourteous. This drinking pose shows you have good manners.

When drinking tea, let it swirl and stop for a moment in your mouth so your nose also senses it. Then swallow the tea by letting it flow down your throat. The tea swirls in your mouth, allowing you to feel its astringency, and pushes its aroma to your nose. This way, you can taste the tea's complex flavor and slowly drink it, enjoying its sweetness and rhythm.

There is a saying about afternoon tea: “Drinking tea makes friends.” This adage expresses my deepest feeling about tea. Tea drinkers are generous; their hearts are calm and collected. Many of the people who come here to drink tea have become my sincere friends, like brothers or like family to me. What I’m saying is that “tea people” are very genuine in their actions.

Drinking tea also helps maintain your body’s nourishment. If you’re very nervous or ready to yell at someone, your bad attitude makes you even more nervous. You will never interact well with other people. In society we shouldn’t be nervous; we should be calm and collected. You need a firm understanding of your own heart. You should let this understanding show when you talk to others so the social atmosphere will be placid and people will take notice of you and concentrate on what you are saying.

If you treat your clientele this way, you will make your greatest friends. You can calm the storm brewing inside you by drinking a cup of tea so your “temper” will become “tempered” and you will settle down. If you do so, a certain breadth of mind will take over and you will not want to fight with anyone.

These skills are the real benefits of drinking tea. But they are very difficult to attain. Everyone should practice these skills. Everyone should drink tea as often as possible.





LIN KU-FANG

For some people who like to drink tea, it's just tea. But for me, a professor of music, drinking tea isn't simply the act itself. In Chinese culture, we say it has more than one dimension, just like music. It is far more. Tea can induce happiness. With different types of tea we can actually taste different moods and aspects of life. It is a confluence of art and the exchange of friendship. While meeting friends over tea, we make observations about life. What is revealed during the consumption of tea is something integral—*people reveal themselves*.

A person who is steeped in tea culture believes he cannot complete himself alone. He must have an exchange with another person, someone to reflect himself in order to complete his life. That is why we use the idea of the four seasons and the different stages in life to describe the dimensions of tea. Through this activity, I'm not only enjoying life, I'm also *observing* it.

Regarding the seasons and the weather, we can take it a step further and say that drinking a certain tea has to do with how you feel. We can choose a specific type of tea for a specific mood. When we're faced with a certain type of friends, we select the ideal tea to receive them. Tea reflects our overall concern for culture and the surrounding environment, and brings out our philosophical expressions.



CHANG FU-CHIN

There are three things that are all important to get the best flavor out of your tea, namely the teapot, the water you use, and how you heat it.

In the tea world there is a saying that the pot is the father of tea, the water is the mother of tea, and charcoal is the friend of tea.

—MASTER LAM KAM CHUEN, *The Way of Tea*

CHANG FU-CHIN: I come from a farming family. We farmed different kinds of crops on this land before. The reason that we have Tie Guan Yin here is because in 1980, the government made a big effort to promote it. Over a period of time, Tie Guan Yin covered most of this area. In 1980, many people now in their fifties and sixties were still young when they decided to plant a great quantity of Tie Guan Yin. That's why it became well-known throughout the world.

Gradually, as the tea workers began to age, the industry itself started to decline. That led to the current situation, which is more like tea tourism than an educational industry. We plant seeds and teach visitors about tea.

I chose this path after my military service because this tea way of life was passed down to us from our ancestors. We have the duty to pass it on to our children. That's our tradition. If we don't maintain

what we have this generation, then we're not doing right by our next generation. Tie Guan Yin was brought over from China by our forefathers. It flourished over here in Taiwan. We shouldered a heavy responsibility to carry on. I believe I would be letting my ancestors down if I let this tea tradition die.

When I was young, around seventeen or eighteen, I wasn't paying as much attention as I am now to tea. When I started to have responsibilities, like feeding my kids, my interest in tea grew as well. The reason why I stayed is really because of the competitiveness of the outside world. By remaining here, I don't need to compete fiercely. I can just carry on what was passed to me. I can provide for my family this way. If I couldn't feed my family, then it's possible that we'd leave, too. But at least for now, society has treated me warmly. Maybe our children won't have the same interest in tea, but that's hard to say. Every year we have two tea competitions here in Mucha province. If we don't place in the competition, or show some accomplishment, then our reputation and profit will suffer. Eventually, I won't be able to feed my family and won't be able to work in this business anymore.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Today, we bring the tea baskets up the mountains. If we talk about tea farming, we have to talk about hard work. I get up around six or seven in the morning to start the prep work for our tea workers. We bring bamboo baskets up the mountains and make some tea. The pickers usually arrive around seven o'clock to pick the greens. We have four rounds throughout the day, from ten to noon, then at two and four in the afternoon, to pick up the tea greens to dry. The age of our three tea pickers—



“Among the kinds of teas, the bitter still excels the sweet, but among them all, these tastes can both be found; We know not indeed for whom they may be sweet or bitter; We’ve picked till the ends of our pearly fingers are quite marred.”

—FROM *A Ballad on Picking Tea in the Gardens in Springtime*

who we call *masters* because they are all elderly—adds up to over two hundred years. They're grandmothers and to be honest, we're a little worried. The land in Mucha is hilly. When the seniors go up these slopes, it's easy for them to fall, if they don't watch their steps carefully. So we feel we have a big responsibility for them. If your grandmother went to your backyard to pick tea, you'd worry about her, too.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE PLANTATION

We're constantly learning as we're processing tea. The knowledge behind roasting Tie Guan Yin is very deep. Starting from our teenage years, up to our 20s and now 30s and 40s, we're learning all the time. The learning is endless. One year you can come up with a good tea, and then a decade or two later, you come up with an even better one.

When we're making tea, our state of mind is important. A good tea needs the right coordination of several steps like natural sunlight or indoor drying. I was recently telling a customer that if I had a fight with my wife today, the tea I would make wouldn't be any good, because if I'm in a state of anger or feeling down, my sense of smell and touch wouldn't be the same. When we're making tea our state of mind is important.

As for weather, I prefer to make tea on rainy days. As for the spring or fall teas, I like fall much better. As part of our education, we've served tea to all types of customers. Some customers go on and on about how awful our tea is but end up buying the most. What we say in Taiwanese is that the ones who criticize the products are often the most expert buyers. Only when you keep criticizing my tea do I have room to improve. On the other hand, if someone was going to come to give me pointers about tea, but kept complementing it, then it's over. The tea will remain at that level forever. However, if you can pinpoint the mistakes—either in your fertilization or drying—it's all very helpful. It's the same in life. In the process of making tea you come to see the meaning of life.

There are different steps, including drying and rolling, that will affect the overall quality of tea. The information we receive from the previous generation of tea masters will teach us well if we're humble. Most likely, those tea masters in their sixties and seventies won't teach you anything. The reason is that they guard their knowhow. They

won't tell you what they know. How should I put this? They would probably pass their so-called secret knowledge on to their own children, but they won't teach it to you directly.

When we try to understand tea processing we need to look at the entire process. At Tie Guan Yin, the manufacturing is very important. When we encounter a problem during the roasting process, the elder master won't tell you that the fire is too high or whatever the problem is. But if you have the right intention, you'll observe and experience things on your own. If you roast the tea too long and it burns, he'll probably give you a hint. But you need to experience it yourself; you need to pay careful attention. We believe we've gotten good results if consumers validate our quality. Then we feel comforted. Therefore, we won't hesitate to produce the best tea.

ORGANIC TEA FARMING

Our generation has come to be concerned about the environment, which is very different from the time when we were little. About two-thirds of my tea is organic. We cannot choose our environment, but in my opinion, we can change it. In terms of tea, the land is something that was passed on from our ancestors. The soil at Mucha has already been acidified because it is an old tea-farming area. We started to change the soil into organic soil when I joined the farm associations in the 1990s. We used things like garlic and wood vinegar repellent to get rid of insects. About ten years ago, I started doing organic tea, because we cherish the environment we had when we were little and don't want to continue destroying it.

For example, tea leaves are most vulnerable when they're about ten days old, after they sprout. But we have a lot of bugs on our land and they act the same as humans. They eat to survive. However, we don't necessarily have to kill them; we just have to repel them. So we use an organic repellent, which won't kill the insects. It just gets rid of them. And we only need to use it once a week for three or four weeks.

In organic farming, this is the best method to change the soil. But for those of us farming around the city, it's unlikely for us to come up with organic fertilizer. The cost to grow tea is more than to buy it. For example, it costs a hundred dollars for twenty-five kilograms. The farm associ-

ations are promoting organic fertilizers, so there're some government subsidies in these organic fertilizers and it won't cost us a lot to use it. By now, a lot of consumers can accept the quality of tea that doesn't use insecticide. To be honest, the quality of the tea isn't as good, because it has a little flavor from the insects. But for health reasons, organic is much better.

Once you're surrounded by nature, you feel like you've been embraced by it. There are a lot of things that you can't find in the city. It's not something you can buy with money. Many things in nature require time and observation for you to experience and understand. If you have a chance to spend time in the mountains, you realize there are things in life you don't need to mind or argue over. Slowly, when you return to your office or when you're with your colleagues and friends, your mind will remain open and you won't mind so many things.

Today, everyone feels stress. At Tie Guan Yin we feel stress if our tea does not come out well. But if you change your surroundings, you change your mood. When you have tea with a couple of friends and they listen to you—even if you whine when you talk—your mind will automatically relax.

Of course, you can say that there are plenty of tea beverages in the city, but it's just not the same as the actual making and sharing of tea with friends here in the mountains. If you were to come up to the mountains and experience having tea here, I would say it would be much better for you.



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