

The Spirit ~ of ~ Tea Making

by Margaret Ledoux



*People are brought together for a purpose.
When in harmony they will discover the path
they will walk together.*

— Margaret Ledoux

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I*ntroduction* ~

In both Britain and France, where I grew up, tea is a classic drink taken black or with milk and sugar or infused with different herbal flavours. An unforgettable four years in Taiwan introduced me to a different approach to tea and tea drinking that I would like to share with you.

The tea ceremony of Japan is well known and appreciated for its precision and beauty of setting and movements—a far cry one might think from the more down-to-earth approach of the British cup of tea or the French herbal infusion. Yet the English, too, developed tea drinking as an important practice either to start the day well, or to calm the nerves after an upsetting experience, or to enjoy socialising in a relaxed and happy environment. In France, in my experience, tea is also considered more relaxing than coffee, to be preferred whenever a soothing beverage is more appropriate.

Truly, there are many ways of appreciating the brew both through the way in which it is served as well as the way in which the tea leaf itself has been prepared to release its own particular flavours.

Today, tea drinking is becoming increasingly popular throughout Europe. At the same time the health benefits of tea are also becoming recognised and authenticated.

In Taiwan I discovered the delicate oolong teas, which contrast strongly with the better-known, astringent black teas from the Indian subcontinent, or the powdered, bitter green teas of Japan.



The East India Company developed the tea trade principally with the black teas of India, Sri Lanka, and China. The tea traders in Taiwan, realising that competition with these black teas would be extremely difficult, decided to develop the quality of the lesser-known but equally delicious oolong tea.

Where black tea is completely and rapidly oxidised, oolong is partially oxidised to release polyphenols that provide the delicate sweetness, the vast palette of aromas, and the health benefits of antioxidants that characterise the tea.

In Taiwan, oolong tea is appreciated in a similar way to great wines—according to colour, body, aroma, and taste. The region and height above sea level of the tea plantation can affect these qualities. Teahouses—from the simplest to the most sophisticated—are found in every corner of the country, each offering their preferred range of teas.

It is in Taiwan that the ancient traditions of cultivation and processing have been respected, maintained, and developed. Taiwan produces extraordinary teas which, as I discovered and came to ap-



preciate during my years there, can be greatly enhanced by entering into the ancient spirit of tea making.

And so dear reader, I would like to share my journey into the world of tea mastery, made with my dear friend Christi Lin and our tea master Nancy Chao, by introducing you to the art of tea making. Like all good journeys, we will start at the beginning with a brief history of tea drinking and the basic differences in tea, before exploring the delightful practice of Taiwanese tea tasting—that precious moment stolen from life’s hectic day to nourish individual well-being, and when shared with friends, cement relationships.

The journey would not be complete without a closer look at Taiwanese oolongs, the search for quality, the importance of processing, our personal selection, and an overview of the benefits tea drinking may bring to our health.



From left to right: the author, Nancy Chao, and Christi Lin.

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My most sincere thanks go to Nancy Chao, (Chao, Huimin) tea master and connoisseur, and to my dear friend Christi Lin, without whose support, encouragement, and advice this book would never have been possible. It is indeed thanks to Christi who said, 'If you really want to share your love of Taiwanese tea then you must first become a tea master!' She then introduced me to Nancy and to each and every possible person who would provide insight and information on my journey, guiding me in a way that only a friend and tea enthusiast could.

My thanks also go to all those we met along this path of discovery and enjoyment. I would particularly like to thank Jacky Shaw for his invaluable participation in this project; Lisette Lu; Peter Lee and Joann Chu of Kien Yu & Co. (Taipei Tea Merchants Association and Taiwan Tea Exporters Association); the Shan Wai Shan Tea Gardens; the Wang family, tea processors and exporters; Sophie Hong; Reni Roxas; Weng Domingo; and my many friends who read drafts and encouraged me down the long road to completion.

None of this would have been possible of course without the support of my dear husband, Guy, to whom I give many heartfelt thanks.

❧ About the Author ❧

Margaret has travelled the world both as a health consultant and as a diplomat's wife. Born in the UK she left her home country in 1978. She met and married her French husband in 1981 and now holds both British and French nationality. She lived with her husband in Taiwan from 2007 to 2011. During this time, she learnt to appreciate Taiwanese oolongs and the spirit of friendship and sharing that accompanies tea drinking.

However, it was when they moved to the Philippines that Margaret felt the need to share her growing passion for Taiwanese tea. Feeling unwell soon after her arrival in Manila, she received a large tin of oolong from a Taiwanese friend, with the instruction to drink a mug of tea thrice a day. The medicine worked and her desire to share her experience was born.

Seeing her sincere interest in the oolongs of Taiwan, Margaret's friend Christi engaged tea master Nancy Chao to teach them the art of tea appreciation.

Back in Europe, Margaret plans to continue sharing her passion using her skills as tea master through regular tea tastings.

Her journey of discovery continues.

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