

# Chinese Tea and Gongfu Tea Ceremony

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Chinese tea has always resonated with me since a young child, and me growing up with the temple, I would always go see the monks to have tea with them. They would brew up a tea called Pu Erh, which there are two types; and the one they would brew would always be the ripe kind. This, I assume because the taste of ripened Pu Erh is quite similar to the taste of Tibetan yak butter tea, which is piping hot strong ripened Pu Erh or Hei Cha blended with churned thick yak butter. This tea is incredibly salty and is not my favorite, but it surely does its job in the -40 degree mountains in Tibet! As early as 65 BC, the Ancient Tea Horse Road was taking place between China and Tibet, Bengal and Myanmar. It was vital, as many of the ancient Buddhist traditions were brought back from Tibet and Myanmar. The tea was carried in shapes of bricks, and were traded off for Tibetan horses to be used in different wars. So therefore, the main staple for the Tibetans were Chinese Pu Erh tea mixed with yak butter to warm the body, and also gain immense amount of calories. As growing up as a Tibetan buddhist, I see the inter-connection of China and Tibet, and how one needed another to survive. Pu-Erh tea, mixed with hot butter was the deal for the cold, however, the hot areas in China also relied on teas to cool down. The Chinese uses tea in a variety of ways, and produces many types to suit the needs of different individuals.

In ancient China, people would use hot and cold as a measurement of how warming or cooling a food substance may be, and will use certain foods during certain seasons to avoid overheating or catching a cold. They believed that within everyone's body, there is chi, which is a natural energy that resides within one's body. When a person is healthy, it was considered that the person has a good flow of chi and the right balance of hot and cold. So, for example, during the summer, the people would eat watermelons and tofu to balance their inner heat with colder foods. Green tea, is well known for being a colder typed tea, as well as fresh sheng Pu Erh tea and fresh white tea. Many green teas are very nutty, vegetal and savory, as well as have a very cooling sweet aftertaste. White teas and Raw or Sheng Pu Erh teas when aged become warm, and can actually become a awesome drink to have during the winter times. However, black teas and oolong teas don't necessarily improve with age. This is because during the process of production, the enzymes in the tea were completely killed and the tea becomes "dead" in a way. Green tea cannot be aged, and actually the quality will drop as the tea becomes more and more oxidized. Many Pu Erh teas start off with having very similar flavor profiles with green teas, but with age the taste becomes more and more mellow, and eventually will taste like Chinese medicine with hints of rawness and plum. In China, it is believed that there are more than 600,000 different kinds of teas, all coming from *Camellia Sinensis*. How tea affects us is really incredible, as the method of infusion also affects the resulting taste of the brewed tea and the energy that comes with it.

The Chinese tea practice, or Gongfu Cha, is a very practical and a great way to drink tea. This is because of mainly two things. First, it is because brewing Gongfu style will not only make your tea taste better,

but is a meditation on its own. Brewing Gongfu style requires you to understand the tea, feel the tea, and become one with the tea. It is not just a ritual, it is not just about brewing the tea; but is about connecting yourself with your environment and the people around you. Also, brewing Gongfu style will insure that you are enjoying every part of the tea. From smelling and viewing the dry leaves, smelling and observing the wet leaves and finally enjoying every infusion, brewing Gongfu style allows one to concentrate one hundred percent on the tea. Yes, brewing tea using a tea bag or western style may be more convenient and time efficient; the results of the experience will be very different. Every infusion, every sip, every moment that you interact with the tea using the Gongfucha method will be slightly different, as the pour of water, pour from the pitcher to the cup and so forth will be unique. That being said, the environment, and who you are making tea for will also affect the results of the brewing session. For example, when there is a live performance of Guzheng or Guqin in front of the tea brewer, and is a part of the tea ceremony, it will bring the tea ceremony to life. When good tea is enjoyed in a very peaceful and in a beautiful scenery, one's senses will open and the tea ceremony will become extraordinary. In my life, Chinese tea and the tea ceremony are very significant, and is something I cherish to heart. It is something that is full of energy, vitality, and is something that can be studied and persevered over a lifetime.