

The Global Tea Initiative at UC Davis

Katharine P. Burnett

In 2015, the University of California, Davis launched the Global Tea Initiative for the Study of Tea Culture and Science (GTI). GTI is now transitioning to become the Global Tea Institute for the Study of Tea Culture and Science. GTI is committed to producing tea research with a global perspective and supporting research on tea from anywhere in the world, in any discipline, and with any methodology.

GTI's mission is to promote the understanding of *Camelia sinensis* through evidence-based research. Its goals are many. They include fostering knowledge about tea through colloquia and symposia, lecture series and workshops, and through the extended



Global Tea Initiative with photograph of Tea Garden Village, Qinghai. Photograph courtesy of Zhong Zhao, Green Camel Bell NGO, China.

efforts of research and teaching on campus and through national and international partnerships and exchange; developing a curriculum for undergrads and grads, as well as extramural courses for industry specialists and the general public. When GTI becomes an institute, we envision a dedicated building with tearooms and gardens, exhibition space for narrating the stories of tea culture and science around the world, meeting and teaching space, a sensory theater, and more. Although *Camelia sinensis* is the primary focus, GTI scholars acknowledge not only that many things are consumed as tea, but also many diverse tea cultures exist around the world. All merit study.

Students are eager for formal classes and research opportunities. Some of us are already making this possible in our home departments. This year, seven GTI members team-taught a trans-disciplinary First Year Seminar on *Global Tea Culture and Science*, a course aimed at new students on campus. This course is providing the basis from which to build a permanent course on *Global Tea*

Culture and Science, and then the curricula on *Global Tea Culture and Science*. GTI aims to collaborate and partner with scholars, research institutes, and the tea industry nationally and internationally. With its broad mandate for research and teaching across the disciplines and from a global perspective, GTI aims to work collegially and flexibly with others, with an inclusionary attitude.

Katharine P. Burnett Associate Professor of Art History at UC Davis, is Founding Director of UC Davis's Global Tea Initiative for the Study of Tea Culture and Science at the University of California, Davis. Her interdisciplinary research explores how cultural values are manifested in art, what it means to collect art, and now also, what we can learn about cultures and societies through studying individual and diverse tea cultures. For more information about GTI, please contact Katharine Burnett, kpburnett@ucdavis.edu. To inquire about supporting the program, please contact Assistant Dean Charlene A. Mattison, cmattison@ucdavis.edu

The globalization of Chennian and Qingxiang

Shuenn-Der Yu

Studying the globalization of 'aging' (*chennian* 陳年) and 'fresh fragrance' (*qingxiang* 清香) allows us to understand how Taiwan has influenced the development or resurgence of Chinese tea art and culture in recent years. How the flavors known as *chennian* and *qingxiang* were discovered or created, recognized, and evaluated across Asian markets has been the focus of my research for the past fifteen years. Few Taiwanese knew of Pu'er tea before the 1990s; nonetheless, the fervor for Pu'er emerged in Taiwan, rather than in Hong Kong where this aged tea had been stockpiled for decades. The craze then spread back to Hong Kong, and soon to Guangdong, Yunnan and Northeast Asia.

While Pu'er tea was gaining significance in trade, the high-mountain tea (*gaoshancha* 高山茶) from the tea plantations in the high mountains of Taiwan (established in the late 1970s), quickly became Taiwan's most popular tea. Remarkably, the flavor preference and appreciation rituals in Taiwan had a profound influence on other kinds of partially fermented teas. The popularity of Pu'er and high-mountain tea led to the emphasis of two new flavor categories—*chennian* for the former and *qingxiang* for the latter.

In fact, *chennian* was a newly defined taste for Pu'er by Taiwanese tea merchants and experts in the late 20th century. The development of *chennian* revealed the socio-cultural and historical processes wherein value was allocated and meaning was constructed by the tea merchants, collectors, consumers and the government. Pu'er tea from Yunnan was first introduced to Taiwan in the 1970s through Hong Kong, but this 'stinky' tea was not well accepted by Taiwan's popular tea culture that highly appreciated fragrance. Nonetheless, the sophisticated tea art in contemporary Taiwan, which was advanced by the government to increase domestic tea consumption, facilitated the invention of appreciation rituals and evaluation standards for Pu'er tea. After years of exploratory research in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Taiwan tea merchants and experts established an evaluation scale for Pu'er tea according to the degree of aging; the longer preserved Pu'er tea has better taste and thus has higher value.

In the late 1980s, as the tension between mainland China and Taiwan started to relax, Pu'er tea became better recognized and accepted by the Taiwanese under the 'China Fever' (*zhongguo re* 中國熱). The return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 also accelerated the growth of the Pu'er tea market in Taiwan;

the Hong Kong tea traders sold off their aged Pu'er tea to Taiwanese merchants because of the uncertain future of Hong Kong's economy. The Pu'er tea fad was developed in the mid-1990s in Taiwan, and soon spread to the rest of Asia and the world. Today, one aged tea cake can be sold for as high as 100,000 USD. Along the globalization of the Pu'er tea products was the legitimization of *chennian* as the criterion to evaluate Pu'er and other aged teas. This criterion also had an influence on the fresh teas; for example, big-tree tea (*dashu cha* 大樹茶) of better leaf quality for potential aging is preferred in the market.

Qingxiang (fresh fragrance) has a different story. It has been widely used to describe the fresh aroma of tea in Taiwan both in history and in modern times. However, in the mid-1990s, *qingxiang* was adopted to describe the unique flavor of high-mountain tea to distinguish this newly invented tea from Oolong tea. This *qingxiang* flavor partially depends on the special materiality of tea leaves from high altitudes, but mainly is the result of a deliberate manipulation of the manufacture process to create a new tea.

Thus, the life history of *qingxiang* reveals the co-evolution of technology to ensure



Tea tasting with double cups (*shuangbei pinming* 雙杯品茗) were invented when high-mountain tea became popular in 1980s. Photograph courtesy of Shuenn-Der Yu.

this flavor is consistently produced and well appreciated. For example, a hot-air withering machine was used to counteract the fickle weather in mountain areas and to stabilize the chemical reactions; a new utensil (the sniffing cup) and a new style of tea tasting with double cups (*shuangbei pinming* 雙杯品茗) were invented to promote this *qingxiang* flavor. As *qingxiang* has become a preferred taste in Taiwan, it gradually transformed the flavor, aroma and values of other teas in Taiwan, as well as in Fujian, Yunnan and North Vietnam. Teas now tend to go through reduced fermentation and baking to produce a similar *qingxiang* flavor. For instance, Anxi County

in Fujian started to produce the *qingxiang*-style variation of *Tieguanyin* (鐵觀音) called 'green *Tieguanyin*'. On the other hand, since high-elevation cultivation is considered the key to achieve the *qingxiang* flavor, a concept called 'mountain-top aroma', similar to the idea of French terroir, which emphasizes the micro-environmental ecology and local flavor of teas, has become the predominant factor in determining the qualities and thus values of high-mountain tea.

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Puer tea cakes are being sun dried in Yiwu, the famous Puer tea production/distribution center since the Qing times. Photograph courtesy of Shuenn-Der Yu.