

# Tea Here Now

January 2007

## “Tea is the Bridge of Friendship” *-an old Chinese saying*

As Donna and I have recently returned from our tea-related trip to Asia we are beginning a series of informative and enjoyable articles. Our journey began in Kyoto, Japan, where we immersed ourselves in ancient tea traditions and culture and completed itself in Taipei, Taiwan, surrounded by elegant tea gardens at the foothills of Jade Mountain National Park. Our excursion to the tea lands was beyond compare, singular and unique in the expression of tea hospitality and filled with unforgettable impressions of people and places, rare sights and sounds.

### **Part I- Taiwan tea**

What is a tea friend? We believe it a person you meet who shares your mutual enjoyment for tea and who enriches your own experience by their own appreciation of this “miracle of vegetation”. A tea friend rejoices in the other’s enjoyment and desires to share what they know and understand with you. A tea friend is generous with both their tea and their time. In Taiwan we met and were escorted about the island by friends such as this!

Taiwan, also known as Formosa, means “beautiful island” and indeed this land was a pure joy to behold, an aesthetically pleasing place. Our escorts were three very knowledgeable tea men who took us to four of the major tea growing regions across the island in pursuit of great tea. Jackson Huang, Tea Master and former president of the Taiwanese Tea Growers Association, his brother Thomas Shu of ABC teas of Los Angeles, and our dedicated driver Abpoo(?). We crossed the central mountain through stately bamboo and cypress forests to visit directly many tea farmers, farm factories, and tea rooms to experience the heart of Taiwan’s famous Oolong tea.

These brothers helped us refine our sensibilities as they demonstrated what to look for in good tea: fragrance first, color in the cup, taste characteristics, and very importantly how to examine the brewed tea leaf. We observed how to distinguish the various levels of baking and we are now better able to compare one tea with another. This is no small task, for many of the different teas have an inviting fragrance but may lack in other important attributes. They taught us what we ought to be looking for in a balanced and well-rounded Oolong.

The teas we learned most about and drank to our delight were: Semi-ball Pouchong tea, also known as Tung Ting; High Mountain tea, also known as Ali Shan; White Tip Oolong or Oriental Beauty, signature tea of Taiwan; and Wenshan Baozhong tea. In our future articles we speak at greater depth to these teas qualities and their production process.

Our heartfelt thankfulness and gratitude cannot be fully described in words. Only the old Chinese aphorism which begins this article comes close “*Tea is the Bridge of Friendship*”. This for us is part of the essence of **Tea Here Now** and we suggest that you reread the chapter from our book *Tea and Hospitality* to enthuse your new year!

In the Spirit of Tea  
*Lhasa and Donna*  
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