

Title:

Rediscover Tea - A Personal Story

Word Count:

873

Summary:

Tea takes me home each and every day with its refreshing and reflective aroma and taste, even though I am oceans and continents apart from my root.

Keywords:

Article Body:

I grew up in a tea farm about 20 miles from Taimu Mountain in eastern Fujian province of China. Fujian is one of the major tea growing regions in China. The famous Oolong tea Iron Goddess (aka Tie Kuan Yin) is from southern Fujian. Taimu Mountain is the origin of the exotic White tea.

I spent most of my early childhood in a tea farm with my parents and three brothers and a sister along many other families and their playful kids.

The farm is very large with two separate locations on two different mountains several miles apart. Aside tea growing and processing, the farm also grew crops and raised boars. The farm was state owned. The majority of the workers were young single man and women. Some of them just graduated from high schools. This is during the time of Cultural Revolution when every graduate was sent to a remote farm to learn from the physical work. For most kids, there was no chance to go to college at that time. We all lived in the same apartment building and shared a big dinning hall. It was like a big family.

As a kid, I went to the tea garden with my mother and other women to pluck the tea leaves during the day. My father who was the accountant inspected and weighed the leaves at the workshop. The women were paid according to the weight of the leaves they plucked. Night time was when the tea processing began. The farm mostly produced green teas. The processing involved the drying of tea leaves by firing and frying. The process was continued overnight. The workers took a break in the mid night and had snacks, typically a bowl of congee or noodle. I along with other kids would stay late until it was snack time so that we got our share. It is not because we helped in any way; it was just because we were kids. Some times, we even slept in the workshop. We would take a large

linen bag used for storing tea leaves and used it as a sleeping bag. One night, my cousin tied my older brother's bag while he was sleeping sound. Later on, my brother woke up and tried to go to bathroom and could not get out. Unfortunately, he wet himself.

After tea leaves were processed, some of them became broken. The broken pieces need to be separated out from the whole leaves by hands. I would join my mother and other women in this effort. Picking out the smaller broken pieces was a painstaking manual process and required a great deal of eyes and hands coordination. The faster one could pick, the more she would handle and the more she would get paid. The outcome was inspected to make sure the tea is free of broken pieces.

Our farm was not a tea refinery where teas are further processed and packaged for final distribution to stores. The coarse teas were transported by feet from the farm to a refinery in the town many miles away. This was the time when we got to go with to visit the town and get our hair cuts, get good snacks and buy industrial products made in big and famous cities like Shanghai.

I moved to my home town about 30 miles away to live with my grandparents and to attend school when I was about eight years old. Since then, I only visited the farm during the summer break.

Chinese people recognize tea as one of the seven necessities of living. Every family, poor or rich, one person or several generations under the roof, all have tea and use it as a way of receiving and entertaining guests. It is a custom that you greet a guest with a bowl of hot tea. Most of times some home made snacks are also served along with the tea. There was no soda, no ice cream when I was a kid. Only tea and the courteous receptions I got from other families as I visited them. Those moments are in my sweet memories and are very much missed as I now live a modern life in the industrialized society full of all kinds of gadgets and gizmos along with the fast and convenient sodas and ice creams, thousands of miles away from where I am from.

I came to the states at the end of 1990 as a graduate student. Since then I have joined millions of people here in the pursuit of prosperity. I worked at one job to another, moved from one city to another. I raised one kid to and now two and tried to make the ends meet. Soda had taken the place of tea with its convenience when the fast-paced living leaves me with no time and no mood for tea. I had no tea for about 15 years until two years back when I went to visit my home town and brought back some teas. Now I am reunited with tea and started enjoying and learning more about it.

Tea takes me home each and every day with its refreshing and reflective aroma

and taste, even though I am oceans and continents apart from my root.