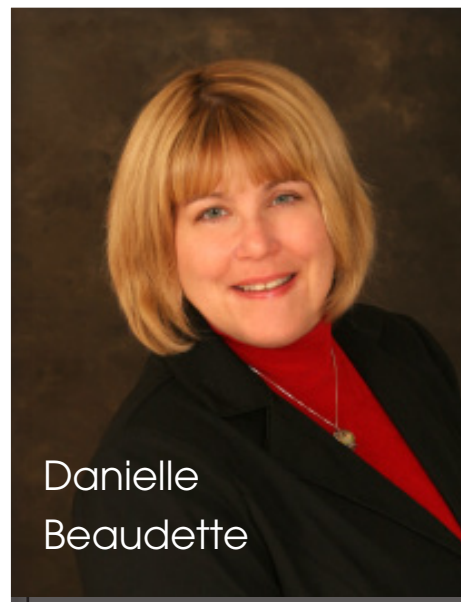


# Taiwan's Treasured Tea

By Danielle Beaudette



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Beaudette

In October 2011, I journeyed on The Taiwan Oolong Study Tour, organized through the Taiwan Tea Institute by Thomas and Josephine Shu. This intensive week and a half-long tea trip included visiting Taiwan's tea gardens, observing hands-on tea making in the factories with tea masters, and visiting tea museums, tea houses, temples, tea

farmers and their farms, and scientists. It would be impossible to discuss the entire trip in one article, so I will focus on a specific tea I discovered – Oriental Beauty – which has become one of my favorites.

We visited an organic tea garden in Mingjian, Nantou. The owner, Mr. Cheng Cheng-Ching and his wife

**Along the wild path to the organic tea garden.**



greeted us at the side of the road. We walked for some time through the outskirts of one of their tea gardens, occasionally through very thick brush along thin, winding, wild paths to reach the farthest side of the garden. This was the only access to the organic tea garden. Here, the tea bushes were

surrounded by natural forest and isolated from the other tea fields. Mr. Cheng explained that they also grow ginger and osmanthus on this estate, which they blend with some of their teas. The ginger is planted between the young tea plants until the tea plants grow large enough to be harvested. Afterwards, the ginger is moved to another area of young tea plants.

The organic tea produced in this tea garden is in limited supply and highly sought-after. It was here that I saw the largest spider I've ever seen (the Chinese name for the spider means "human face")! They said that these spiders are brought to catch the green tiny leaf hopper bugs (also called tea



jassid). Mr. Cheng explained that the organic tea leaf cultivar (Chin sin da pan), known for its soft center, attracts these leaf hoppers. As I continued on my journey, I learned the importance of these little bugs.

The leaf hopper bugs have a long history in Taiwan, and are more often associated with organic Oriental Beauty tea which is regarded as the



**Preparing tea for withering.**



**Tiny leaf hopper on tea leaf.**

best oolong tea in the world. This tea and the leaf hoppers have a history that dates back to the 19th century. The new tea farmers moved to Formosa (Taiwan) from the Fujian province in China to start a new life. They grew and exported tea to the West, and of course the better the quality, the more money they would get. At first these leaf hoppers were a nuisance to the farmers because they didn't think they could sell these tea leaves because they looked damaged by the bugs.

Legend says that Mr. Lee, a tea farmer, showed John Dodd (a tea merchant from the west) the tea, which was more of a Bao Zhong type of tea. Mr. Lee introduced him to the Hakka people making the tea. Because of the appearance of the tea, they put the tea to the side to harvest other crops and the tea continued to oxidize and turned red in color. The western merchants recognized the red color tea but the Hakka people wouldn't sell it to them and tried to turn the merchants away. They kept raising the price so the western merchants wouldn't buy it. Dodd finally bought the tea at a high price and upon returning home, explained to the westerners how he had to beg for the tea. He told the Queen this was only good enough for them. The tea turned out to be so good that Queen Elizabeth II of England called it "Oriental Beauty" due to the multiple colors of the leaves. She compared the leaves to a 'beautiful lady.' The

farmer bragged to his friends how much money he received for the tea, so in Formosa, they named it "Pong Fong Cha" or bragger's tea.

Although this tea was originally harvested in the low altitude plains of northern Taiwan, it is now primarily grown in the Hsin Chu County between 1000 and 2000 feet in elevation. Many farmers use the organic Chin sin da pan varietal, as these organic plants tend to attract more of

### **Organic Oriental Beauty tea.**



the leaf hoppers. They appear during June and early July. These bugs are actually critical to the amazing flavor of the Organic Oriental Beauty tea. When they bite the leaf, it changes its chemical make-up, starting the oxidation of the leaves. This creates unique compounds that give the tea its flavor.

The tea pluckers harvest the two tender leaves and leaf bud at specific times in the morning to produce this spectacular tea. This is a limited tea that undergoes a special production process in the factory. It is oxidized to approximately 70%-80%, then baked,



**Tea pluckers in Taiwan.**

and rolled with repeated wok drying. It is critical not to dry the leaf too much because the tender leaves need to stay intact. This tea should be brewed for only a minute or two, and can be steeped multiple times. It is a full bodied oolong tea with a bright amber infusion and floral aroma. With subtle fruity hints of peach and notes of sweet honey, it is intoxicating and worth the price it still demands today!



**Danielle and Mr. Yen at the Wenshan Tea Farm.**

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