

Oriental Beauty - This exotic “Champagne of Tea” is probably the most fascinating of all Chinese oolong teas. It has been said that Longjing (Dragon Well) represents the best of the best of Chinese green teas and Oriental Beauty represents the best of the oolongs.



Once upon a time, Oriental Beauty was originally known as Formosa Tea among the Europeans. In the past, this tea was very popular and people enthusiastically looked for it. At that time, it was said that 15kg of Oriental Beauty

was equivalent to the cost of a house in Taiwan. The reason why people love this tea is because of its sweet fruity flavor. The secret of this flavor is caused by tiny green insects that attack the tea leaves beginning early summer onwards. The tea leaves that are bitten by green insect will change into yellow in color and the tea leaves produce an antibody which gives its fruity flavor. It is very tedious work for the tea farmers to select and pluck only the leaves that have been attacked by green insects. Not only must the tea garden be maintained without using pesticides, it also needs a lot of good luck to get this tiny insect to come by & bite the leaves.

1. History and Culture

Once upon a time, legend has it that a farmer left his tea garden as he was too busy to look after it. His tea garden was terribly attacked by a large number of green insects. All the bitten tea leaves changed into yellow in color. Nevertheless, he still processed the tea leaves as he could not afford to give up his tea. To his surprise, the tea processed from insect bitten leaves gave a very strong fruity flavor. Coincidentally, a European tea merchant noticed this tea & he loved its quality very much that he paid a very high price for it.

The processing method of Oriental Beauty has evolved over the years. According to the older generation, during their young age, the method of making Oriental Beauty was quite different. In any case, there is no change in plucking of tea leaves and the selection of only the leaves that have been bitten by the green insects. Usually each twig consists of one bud and two leaves.

2. Production Area

In Taiwan, most of this tea is grown in the central Taiwan in Hsinchu and Miaoli counties. Oriental Beauty is only made from the tea leaves that are attacked by the green insects which appear during June to July. However a lot depends on luck and nature as to whether or not the insects return to the same tea garden. The farmer has to keep his tea garden as natural as possible with the hope that green insects will return each year. Due to the increasing demand of this tea, mainland China has also started to produce the tea in some regions such as Huangshan, Anhui province .



The Yellow Spots seen below the green fly (center) is the evident that tea leaf has been bitten by the green fly.

3. Cultivar and Plucking

Oriental Beauty is made from the cultivar called 青心大有. During June to July, many green insects attack the tea garden. The insects like the juice of young leaf and the bitten leaves will change color from green to yellow. It is said that the tea garden sometimes emits a sweet fragrance caused by the leaves that have been bitten.

The mechanism of the formation of the mysterious fragrance is yet to be fully revealed. We assume that the tea leaves bitten by these insects will subsequently produce some kinds of



antibody. Usually the antibody of plants is called Phytoalexin. It is known that there is a type of Phytoalexin which gives a fruity aroma. It is a small molecular substance called terpenoid. Possibly this substance has something to do with the flavor of Oriental Beauty.

A non-pesticide Tea Garden is necessary to attract the green insects to the tea garden. But this alone is not sufficient. It also very much depends on luck.

The tea leaf bitten by the green insects turn into a yellow color and its shape also changes.

Plucking is carried out by selecting only the tea leaves which have been bitten by green insects. Only one bud and two leaves are carefully plucked by hand.



4. Processing

Sunshine Withering

After plucking, the tea leaves are spread out over the ground under the natural sunshine. It is called Sunshine Withering. Usually clouded weather is ideal to grow this tea in order to avoid excessive damage to the tea leaves. If the sunny weather continues, a

black cloth is used to cover the tea leaves to block out the harsh rays of sunshine. With sunshine withering, moisture inside the tea leaf gets evaporated and oxidation is moderately triggered. The tea leaf will gradually start releasing a refreshing aroma.

Indoor Withering

The method of oxidation for oolong tea is completely different from that of black tea. After the sunshine withering is completed, tea leaves are conveyed into the factory and spread over a sheet. The tea leaf used for Oriental Beauty consists of only a single bud and two leaves, which is different from that of regular high mountain oolong tea that utilizes 4 to 5 leaves. As the moisture content of the tea leaf is generally higher than that of regular high mountain oolongs, the withering process for Oriental Beauty takes a much longer time. With a longer withering period, it accelerates the hydrolysis and oxidation process which in part is what generates the unique sweet flavor and taste of Oriental Beauty. The tea leaves are then tossed onto a bamboo tray. This agitation and tossing, causes friction which in turn causes the tea leaves to oxidize. The tray is then placed on a rack. This process is repeated several times. This is the oxidation

process. The process happens naturally by the oxidative enzymes triggered when the tea leaves get bruised. The oxidation of Oriental Beauty takes a longer time than that of regular oolong teas and as the tea leaves are tender and fragile, the process is carried out in a very gentle manner. Once the tea master finds that the degree of oxidation is sufficiently achieved, the tea leaves are then sent for heat treatment in order to halt further oxidation. If this is not carried out swiftly, the tea leaves will keep on oxidizing and eventually turn into fully oxidized, black tea.

The number of rotations and the time needed for the oxidation process is based on 3 main factors - moisture content, flavor and color of the tea leaves. Making the decisions regarding these processes requires highly trained, skilled and experienced tea technicians and the final quality of tea depends on how this process is carried out. The technicians must follow closely the instructions of a tea master who needs to be exceptionally skilled in knowing exactly what the tea needs. Each lot of tea that goes through the process is different and so the process needs to be tailor made to suit each lot. Weather conditions, plant growth, the season, humidity levels, the tea growing region and many other factors affect the tea leaf that is being processed and the tea master needs to be aware of all of this as well as have a feel for the individual leaf.

Rolling

At first, tea leaves are rolled by a rolling machine. For Oriental Beauty, the usual process for oolong tea of bag rolling is not carried out in order to protect the tea leaves from cracking. Strong rolling process can destroy these delicate tea leaves, which can then cause the taste of the tea to be bitter, astringent and impure. The rolling process is done with moderate pressure and motion. During the rolling process, the temperature of tea leaves drops and the leaves become brittle. They are then heated in a drum at 60-80 degrees Celsius to soften them. If the pressure of the rolling is too hard, the tea leaves will develop a different stronger taste; on the other hand, if it is too soft, the tea will have a weaker taste. This same rolling and softening process is repeated several times. Again each lot of tea is processed differently depending on the condition of tea leaves, the moisture content etc. The skilled tea master has to carefully examine the condition of tea leaves each time and then apply the most suitable amount of rolling and softening in order to get it just the way he needs to be to make the finest quality tea possible. It requires a great deal of precision and expertise.

After this rolling process is completed, the tea leaves are then dried to reduce the moisture content to 5%.

Storage

Oriental beauty should be kept in comfortable environment. It is not necessary to store in a cold temperature. The longer Oriental Beauty tea is stored, the more it matures. Its taste becomes smoother with time and gives a more elegant fruity flavor. Excess humidity, direct sunshine and exposure to odors from other foods should be avoided at all costs. Store in a dry place.

5. Quality Inspection Method

General appearance of the tea Leaf

Oriental Beauty tea leaves should show five colors - red, white, yellow, green and brown. Tea leaves which contain a high concentration of white buds is generally an indication of a good quality Oriental Beauty tea. A high quality leaf is one that has been extensively bitten by the green insect. Usually those leaves tend to be very weak do not stay intact on the stem.

Consistency

Good quality tea consists of tea leaves with consistency in size and shape. The same shape indicates a good technique in tea making process and good material and equipment used.

Foreign matter

There should be no foreign material such as bits of fiber, bamboo, piece of wood, sand, stone etc.

Flavor

Good Oriental Beauty tea produces a very strong fruity muscatel flavor. The flavor and color should be consistent for several infusions.

Liquor

Bright, transparent, golden yellow/orange color.

Taste

Very smooth and mellow with a sweet after taste.

Brewed Tea Leaf

Tea leaf consists of 1 bud and 2 leaves. Usually, high quality tea has loose leaves as the leaves are extensively attacked by insect which in turn weakens the tea leaves and easily drop off. If the size of stem is small it indicates an early batch of harvesting, which usually means better quality. The size of the tea leaves harvested in the latter part of the season are usually much bigger and the intensity of flavor is weaker.

6. Recommended Brewing Method

The characteristics of Oriental Beauty are the fruity flavor, the very smooth drinking feeling and the sweet after taste. Many customers are afraid of brewing oolong tea as it seems very difficult. However it is not that difficult once you understand the theory.

At first, bring the cool water to boil. Use soft water for preparation of tea. The water processed by distillation or reversed osmosis is not suitable for brewing tea. These water contains no minerals and it will cause tea to become tasteless. If normal tap water is used, it is advisable to use a filter. Boil the water just before brewing tea. It is very important to boil water so as to

evaporate the chlorine and other types of contaminated substance in the water. Do not continue boiling for more than a few minutes as the character of water may be converted to hard water.

The important point for brewing oolong tea is:

1) Use boiling water. 2) Avoid drastic decreases of water temperature. Although with green tea, the sweet taste of the tea comes from the amino acid which can dissolve in water at lower temperatures, with oolong tea, the primary taste of the tea comes from poly phenol and its oxidized substances. Those substances can only be dissolved in the water at a high temperature. So you cannot enjoy the real taste of oolong tea if it is brewed at a lower temperature. **The taste of oolong tea very much depends on the brewing method.**

Brewing step 1



Use a glass or porcelain tea pot. It is important not to share the same clay tea pot which has been used for other oolong teas or pu-erh tea.

Brewing step 2



Pour hot water into the tea pot and fill up to 70%. This is to heat up the tea pot. If the pot is not warmed up, the temperature of water will drop drastically. This will affect the taste and flavor of tea.

Brewing step 3



After 20 seconds, pour out the hot water from the tea pot.

Brewing step 4



Usually 1g is equivalent to 25ml of water. For the small tea pot of 200ml, about 6g of tea leaves is sufficient, which is equivalent to 2 table spoons.

Brewing step 5



Brewing step 6



Place the tea leaves into the warmed tea pot. It is important not to touch the tea leaves in order to avoid contaminating it.

Brewing step 7



Pour in the hot water. Try not to agitate tea leaves too much so as to preserve the delicate taste. Water temperature should be 80 degree C for Oriental Beauty tea

Brewing step 8



Gently place the lid and leave it for 2 minutes (1minute for 2nd infusion).

Brewing step 9



In the mean time, pour off the hot water from the pitcher into the glass or tea cup to warm it up.

Brewing step 10



Pour the tea into the pitcher. By using a pitcher, it enables the tea to be kept at a uniform concentration.

Brewing step 11



Pour all the tea into a pitcher down to the last - which is the most concentrated.

Brewing step 12



Pour out the hot water from the glass.

Brewing step 13



Pour tea into cups starting from the right side to be served for the guests. The cup on the left is for the host.

Brewing step 14



For this exclusive tea, serving it in small quantities is better so as to enjoy and appreciate its flavor to the fullest.

Brewing step 15



Aside from preparing this tea using glassware as we have shown above, it is also fine to use English tea cups or China tea ware.

Brewing step 16



This is the right color of Oriental Beauty. If the color becomes too orange, it is an indication that the brewing temperature is a little too high.

Brewing step 17



The leaves shown here are on the professional inspection cup. If the tea leaves are of good quality, the brewed leaves should give off a strong aroma as well.

Storage of tea leaves

Recommended Storage Method

Avoid direct sunshine, high temperatures and a humid environment. Keep the tea leaves in a well-ventilated place. **Oriental Beauty will undergo further maturation if it is being kept in an comfortable atmosphere. It will become more fragrant and sweet.** Oriental Beauty tea can be stored for more than 5 years. But it will be matured enough after being kept for a couple of years. Due to the very low moisture content of tea leaves, Oriental Beauty tea can easily absorb odors from its storage environment. Therefore it is important to ensure the bag or tea canister to storage container is tightly sealed. Extensive storage and maturation of Oriental Beauty tea will increases its flavor and sweet taste while its aroma becomes weaker. In Taiwan, Oriental Beauty that has been stored for a long time is highly priced.

(Some excerpts of this article are courtesy of Akira Hojo – see <http://www.hojotea.com>)