

2025 Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies

# *Why Study Taiwan?*

*Reflections from Puer Tea and Tea Art Culture*



Bamboo Tea Gathering 2006 (Provided by Tranquil Chrysanthemum Tea Academy)

**Professor YU Shuenn-Der (余舜德)**

(Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica)

## First Lecture

# Taiwan and the Globalization of Puer Tea

## The Role of the Taste of Aging

**4:30pm**, 29 April (Tuesday)

Rooms 8 & 9, Faculty of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies



Drying tea leaves in Yunnan



## Abstract

Puer tea was historically produced in Yunnan and consumed in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Tibet. In the mid-1990s it became a fad commodity in Taiwan, and its popularity later spread back to Hong Kong, Guangdong, Yunnan, and then the whole of mainland China, and also to Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. This lecture analyzes how and why Taiwanese tea aficionados, who knew little about Puer tea before the 1990s, played such an important role in its globalization. I argue that historical contingencies, especially Hong Kong's returning to China in 1997, gave Taiwan the opportunity to import aged Puer tea that had sat in Hong Kong warehouses for years; more importantly, Taiwan's sophisticated tea culture provided fertile ground for the development of a taste for aged Puer that elevated its value and turned its acquisition and appreciation into a fad. This taste for aged tea has since come to be the foundation of the Puer tea market since the tea's value is now reckoned according to its degree of aging. Puer has even been traded like futures or stocks, which also has propelled the globalization of its consumption. The case of Puer tea suggests that, following Appadurai's suggestion that we attend to five cultural flows (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes), when studying globalization, we may also benefit from focusing on "sensescapes," the intense cultural flows of sensory information around the world.



A Lahu minority woman panning tea leaves, Hekai, Yunnan.

## Second Lecture

# When a Local Invented Tradition Becomes Heritage Culture for All of China

## The Paradox of Taiwan's Tea Art

**2pm**, 1 May (Thursday)

Rooms 8 & 9, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies



A contemporary tea set (Provided by Tranquil Chrysanthemum Tea Academy)

## Abstract

This lecture will analyze how a local, not to say parochial, tea practice popular in southern China was developed by the Taiwanese tea community into modern-day “tea art.” Taiwan’s tea art has been accepted as a “traditional” tea culture across China since the 2010s. Deliberately choosing the term *chayi* (tea art) instead of the more formal *chadao* (the tea way) to brand the practice’s easy-going nature and everydayness, Taiwanese have, since the 1980s, developed the original Chaozhou *gongfu* tea ritual into a form of cultural performance and an art genre. Diverging from traditional Chinese tea practices and the Japanese *chadao* legacy, *chayi* has been described as an “invented tradition” by various scholars. This lecture will trace contemporary tea-art culture from Taiwan’s failure to continue tea exports to the rise of the so-called tea-art salons, the KMT government’s “Revive Chinese Traditional Culture Movement,” and efforts of teahouse owners to counter the stigma of associations with the Japanese legacy. All these efforts made way for a new art form and tea practice that has been eagerly taken up by mainland Chinese tea communities that embrace it as an area of traditional culture lost during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This phenomenon once again proves that Taiwan, supposedly on the cultural periphery, plays an important role in influencing the Chinese cultural core. It also brings to our attention the fact that while Taiwanese tea-persons use tea art to construct a distinctly Taiwanese cultural identity, they nonetheless must claim that it is also part of Chinese heritage when they travel across the Taiwan Strait to teach it to mainland tea communities. These paradoxes signify the complicated nature of cultural exchanges between the two sides.

## The Speaker



**Professor YU Shuenn-der (余舜德)** is Research Fellow in the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He received his Ph.D. from Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis. His research interests involve political economy, consumption and the anthropology of senses, and his field research has focused mostly on Taiwan and Tibetan Yunnan. He has edited a few volumes including 《體物入微：物與身體感的研究》(Objects and Bodily Experience) (National Tsing Hua University Press, 2008), 《身體感的轉向》(The *Shentigan* Turn) (National Taiwan University Press, 2015) and *Food Cultures and Technologies* (Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica 2022). He is also the guest editor of a few journal special issues, including “Bodily Cultivation as a Mode of Learning” (*Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* 2009), “Stimulants and the World Around It” (*Journal of Chinese Dietary Culture* 2010), “In Memory of G. William Skinner” (*Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* 2010), “Food Authenticity and Transnationalism” (*Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* 2016), “Reinventing a Tradition: East Asian Tea Cultures in the Contemporary World” (*Asian Journal of Social Science* 2022), and “Sense-Making, Consumption and Identity” (*Journal of Chinese Dietary Culture* 2024).