

Thomas Jeppe  
*Asiatische Adlernase*

EDITION TAUBE

**Thomas Jeppe**  
**Asiatische Adlernase**

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

COORDINATED BY

THOMAS JEPPE

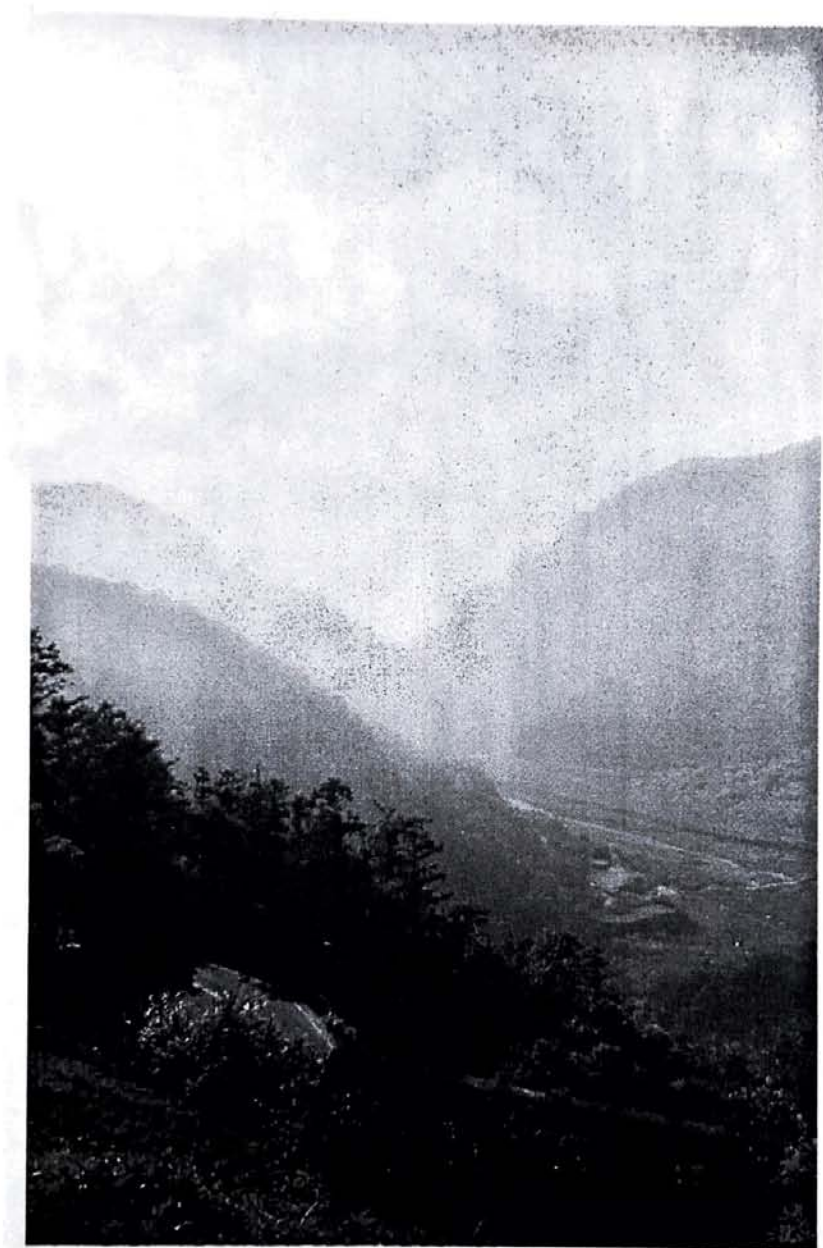
WITH FLORIAN BARON

AND THOMAS BALDISCHWYLER

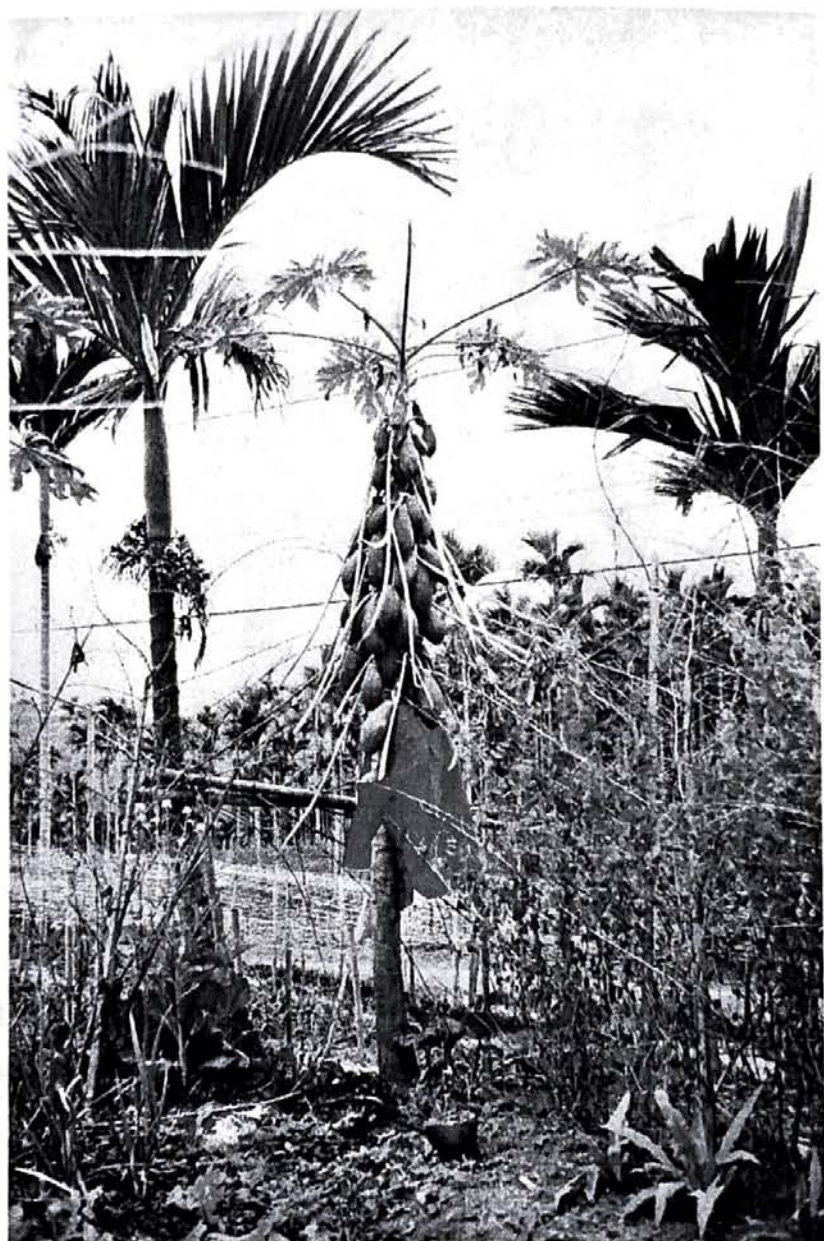


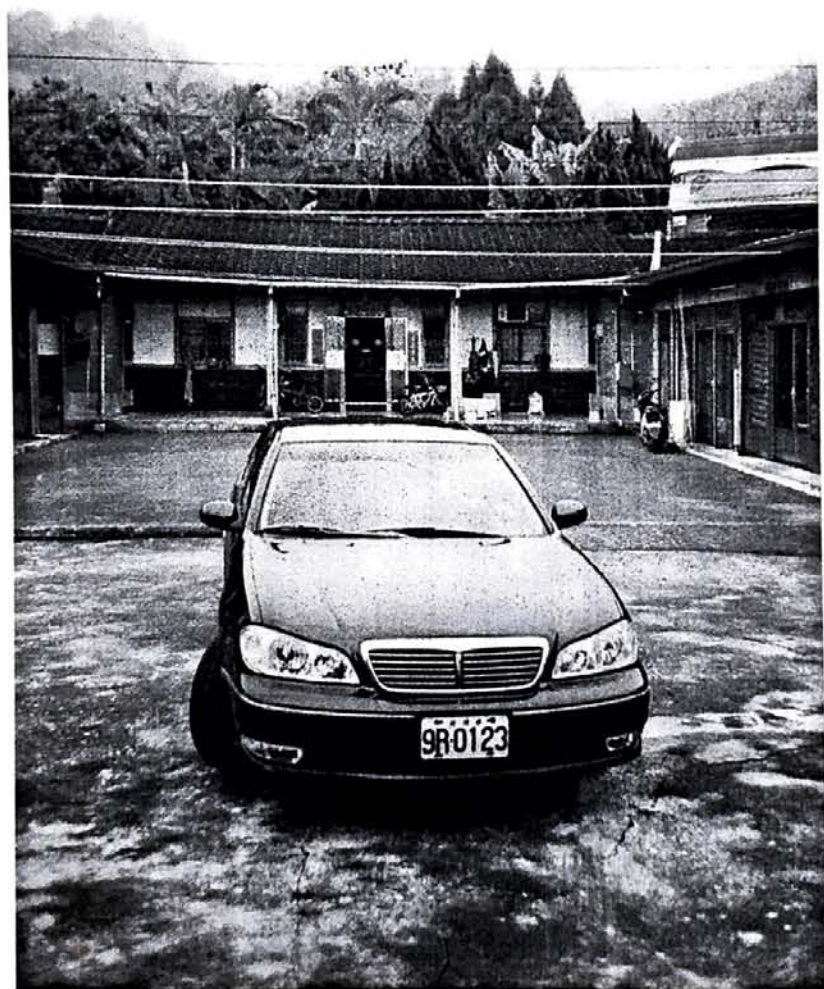
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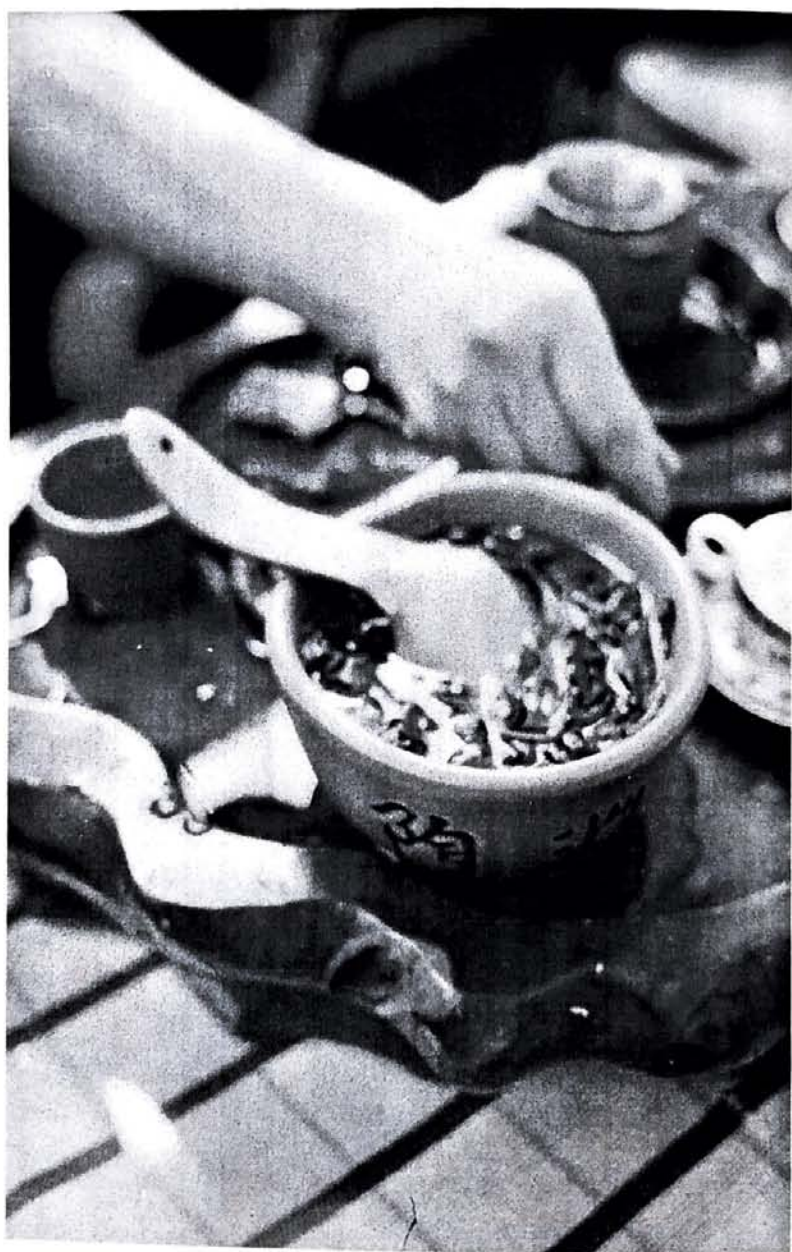
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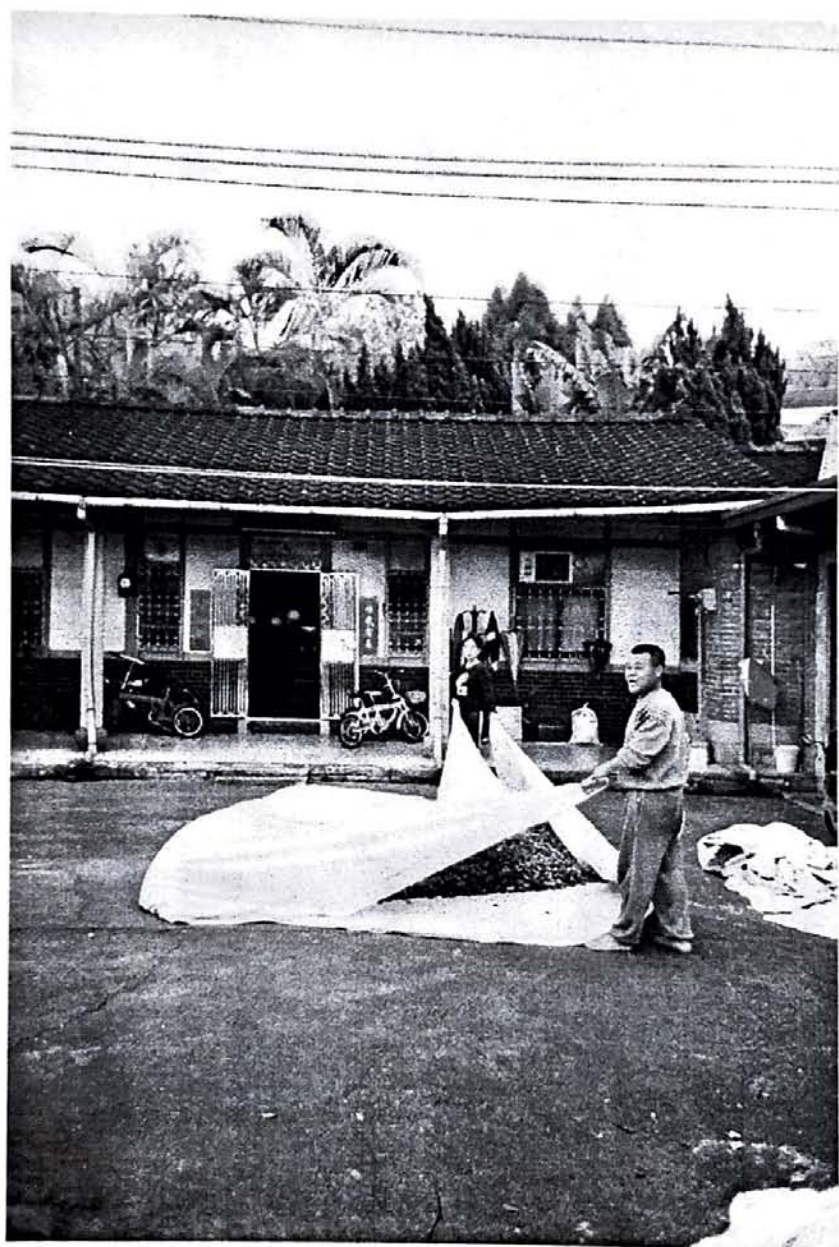




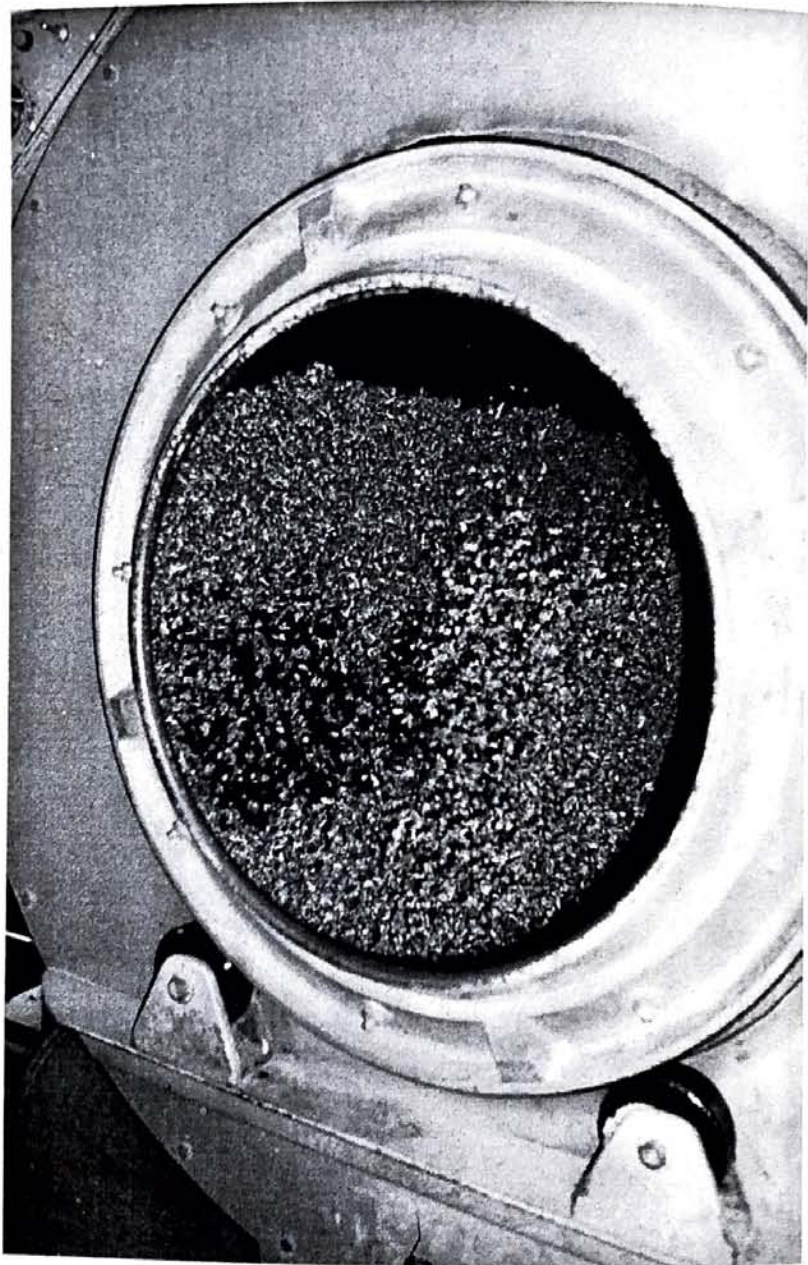


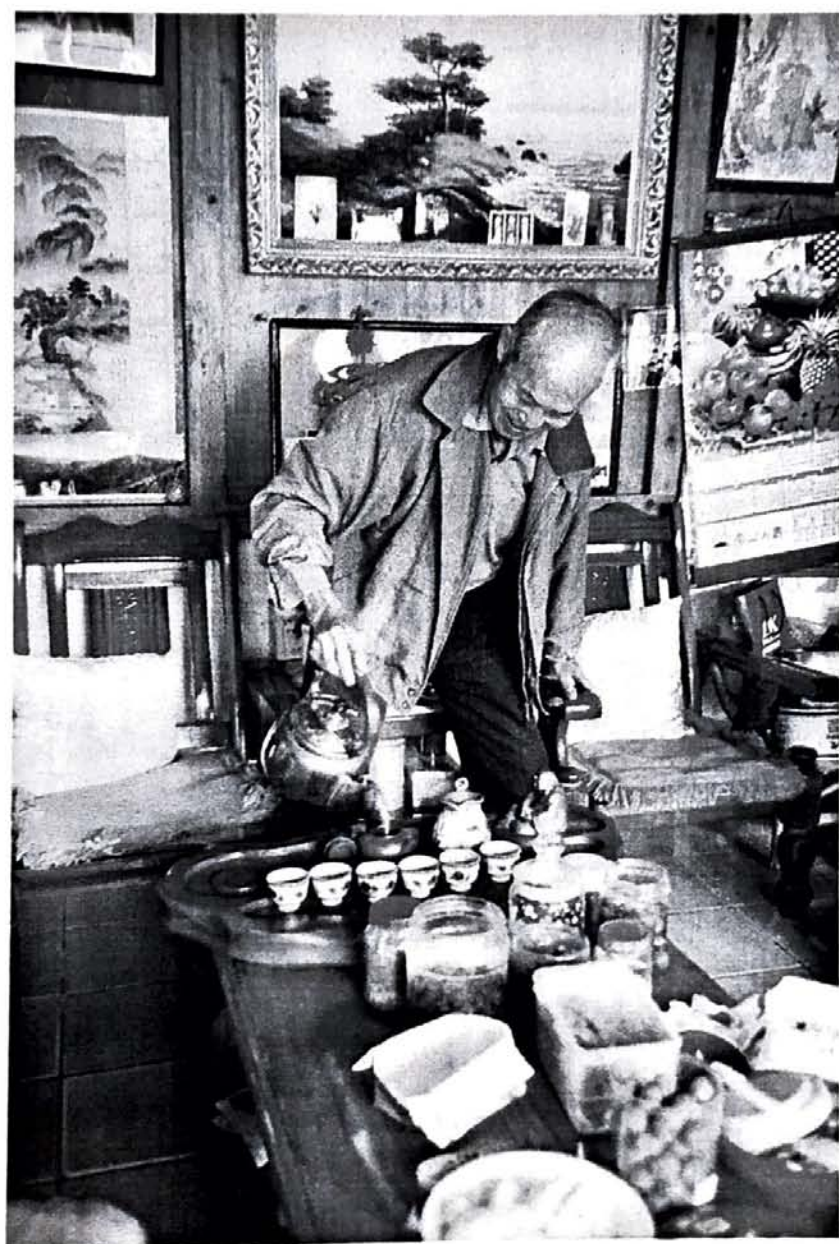
















HAMBURG,

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BARON—Like everybody in Germany, my parents and I drank tea in the morning, black tea from England. It's a habit of people who live in North Germany to drink tea like it was coffee. Though after this time with my parents, I stopped drinking tea at all. Ten or twelve years ago I met a tea dealer here in Hamburg. She explained to me a little bit more than I knew, and it was a new world, in a way. I started reading books, doing research, but eventually it didn't hold my interest. After that I made a one or two year break from tea.

I got back into tea because of the tea blog of a Taiwanese woman in Zürich, Meng-Lin Chou. She wrote in a way that I never expected really exists: "If the wind came from the west you can see it in the leaf" and "If I see a leaf I can tell you what time of day it was picked," and "The production is good when ..." so on and so on. She had really technical instructions about it. I contacted her and we met several times and she gave me the link to my Taiwanese tea teacher Chen



Huangtan. This was her teacher; she learned there for several years. This was really a different world.

Now having had this teaching, Taiwan is for me the land of tea. I spent several months there last year. If you go to Taiwan or to China, you sit there and you have a tea master or a farmer sitting in his farm, you say hello, sit and take your place and drink a lot of tea in very small concentrated shots from this Gaiwan cup. The tea is mostly Oolong, and if it is produced well you can cook it maybe twenty times with every brew tasting a little different. The character of the taste is always changing – the sixth time, it's maybe a little bit sweeter than the first time. You drink maybe 30 cups in an evening. This is typical for Chinese and Taiwanese tea.

It's hard to be a real tea drinker here in Germany because you don't get a picture of the product. The problem is that it's very hard to get knowledge because you cannot compare. If you get to see two or three different versions of one tea, you see "Okay, this leaf is too thin, this is too fat, maybe this is no leaf at all!"

In Hamburg there's not one good tea shop. Berlin, Cologne and Munich each have one, Bern and Zürich have each one really good shop and in Paris there's maybe the best tea shop, but that's it for the

whole of Europe. The shop in Paris, they have the tea knowledge, especially of Taiwanese and Chinese tea. There's a concierge at the door, and he smells if you smoke or if you have too much perfume on your skin, or even if you're too sweaty, and he tells you it's forbidden to come in because the tea is so sensitive that it's impossible to enter if you smell strong. This might sound extreme but it's a good sign. If there is no smell at all, it's a very good tea shop; if there's a lot of smell, like in every tea shop, it's a very bad tea shop with not much understanding of their product. Tea gets the taste of the room in one second if it's not in a proper tin. Here, for the people in Germany, it's normal that it smells *gemütlich*, like vanilla, or bergamot, they love it.

BALDISCHWYLER — What I think is very interesting, this tradition of tea shops in Germany was something that came out of this alternative culture of the '60s and '70s. It started with jasmine tea that was not around in the time before, then all kinds of aromatic flavour teas; the 'hippie shit' came about.

BARON — This kind of tea is not really the pure tea we talk about. It's mixed up with very special, very strong oil. For example, jasmine tea, one of the most famous teas, if you look at it, it has some white flowers in the leaves. If you have a lot of flowers, it doesn't

change anything, because these flowers don't smell at all. It's just for your eye. They produce a very concentrated oil and they mix it with this tea. This oil is where the quality lies, not in the flowers. Even teabags are normally a sort of dust. It's the baddest ingredient on earth, in the tea world. It's like dirt, in a way. It's not really a leaf any more.

But this is exactly why I like this tea thing. These ideas about quality gave me another perspective for trying to understand things in general. Especially when I worked in art, always having this question of whether it's good or bad art. If you have a tea and you see how it was made, you can definitely say whether it's good or bad. Like a well made table – you can understand it.

BALDISCHWYLER—So tea is functional as a table is functional.

BARON—Yes. Like a product.

BALDISCHWYLER—But you know this quote from Plato, where he is comparing the artist to someone who is building a table?

BARON—Maybe in Plato's time, it was easier to do something like this. Art now is different. I had

the impression, especially in conceptual art, that so many charlatans are on the road with no ideas about what they are doing, but they try to give their work a very complicated and super intellectual look. And then you have along with it the word Adorno or something, and you think "Okay, maybe I don't understand it but it must be something serious." For me it got so confused in the end that it was not easy to say whether something was good or bad art.

BALDISCHWYLER—The effect is that there is no good or bad art.





BARON—No, it's not always possible to say. I believe in art still of course, but for me tea was a kind of relaxing idea of understanding things. To see this leaf here, and to have it in your hand, you can really feel it. A good high mountain tea, it's not falling apart so fast. If it's very bad, the structure is very thin, and normally it breaks very easily. In art, it's not so simple. The whole idea of art, since Duchamp of course, is that you don't have to bring something out of the history of art into the art of the present. In tea, or other things, you have to bring it in, because it's really feelable that it's different without it. Tastes change always, but some things are definitely better when they're made well.

For this reason I became interested in tea. You have two basic tea plants, the *chamelia synensis* which the Chinese cultivate since about more than two hundred years before Christ. In the beginning of the 17th and in the 18th century, they brought tea to Europe as an exotic high society gift. But over the years it became more and more popular even to the public because it was a real and healthy drink alternative. You have to imagine that people in these times had dirty water or alcohol to drink. A lot of people were always drunken in a way. This was not the time when you call a guy who is drunk a lot an alcoholic; alcoholism didn't exist, it was normal. And so they tried

to change this behaviour with tea. The tea they drank in these times was completely different to what we drink now. It was basically green tea, because what we call black tea did not exist back then.

Then in the early 19th century they found the assamica plant, the plant you make black tea out of. So it was only two hundred years ago, this type of tea that everybody in Europe drinks now started. The synthesis is more for green tea. You can produce both kinds of tea from both plants, but the usual one outside Asia now is assamica.

Most of the recent plants are small bushes. It's very hot in these countries where you can cultivate tea, it's 40 to 50 degrees Celsius, very humid. They cultivate these plants at waist height for easy picking. If you go to Hunan in the south west of China, wild tea trees grow to be twenty metres high. With mass production, we've bred them to be smaller. Nowadays the factories often pick leaves with a machine like a lawn mower. But some special teas like for example the Silver Needle are only possible to pick by hand, because you need one special part of the tea.

My teacher has a handful of farmers to educate making the tea in a traditional Taiwanese way. It's a lot more work than doing it in a normal factory and

even in Taiwan we met a lot of farmers with no real idea of the right way. My teacher came to the wilting rooms, and the farmers started bringing it out to the oven to dry it, and he said "No – wait maybe another 90 minutes, then it will be fine, not now." This guy knows really a lot about tea. Not many people really have this knowledge. There are so many things to take care of, and you can make a lot of mistakes. This is the reason tea is a super complex thing.

In Taiwan they concentrate on producing Oolong teas. These are teas between green and black tea. I will describe some of the most famous ones.

Alishan is one of the highest mountain ranges in Taiwan, and there you have high mountain tea, which is very famous; one of the most popular teas there, growing at 1.000 metres to 2.400 metres.

Then you have Pouchong, the greenest tea. The leaves are completely different – they are rolled differently. Oolong normally is rolled like a ball. Pouchong is more a slim roll. You do not find this tea often outside of tea shops in Taiwan. Even there it's not easy to get super good qualities.

Tie Guanyin is a famous tea cultivated nearby Taipei from a special plant which is roasted in a different



way that has a very strong but fruity flavour. A lot of coffee drinkers prefer this compared to other teas because of its strength.

Another famous tea is Oriental Beauty, a tea that was bitten by insects. If the plant is in a perfect climate and temperature and so forth, some small insects come and bite the leaf. When the insect bites a leaf, the direction of the stem changes. Then, when the insect bites the next leaf on the stem, it changes direction again, like a zig-zag. After this, the leaf gets very sweet and like honey. It's one of the best teas in Taiwan. This is very hard to produce, because the farmers have to take care of a lot of things. If the plantation is not organic, the little insects say "No, don't want to." People try always to give you fake Oriental Beauty tea, because they're super expensive. 100 grams starts at 60 Euros in Europe, and it's getting up to 150 Euros or even more. Normally they would get maybe 2 Euros for regular tea. Of course, you can spot the original by some elements like for example the zig-zag stem.

There is also a business of old tea, with many tea collectors in Asia. I love old teas, and the evening is a good time to drink old teas because they make you super calm. The oldest tea I drank was from 1924. You can store tea as long as you want to. This is another type of tea where they try to sell you fakes.



BALDISCHWYLER—What is the price of this old tea? Is it like wine? Is it about the general quality of the tea?

BARON—It depends. Now, because you have a lot of Japanese tea collectors, these old teas can be super expensive. 2009 they sold one of these old tea forms for more than \$100,000 USD in Hong Kong at a tea auction. It's like the art market.



If you store tea for twenty years, maybe it's getting better, maybe it's getting really worse. The idea of old tea in the beginning was to make it transportable over the very long routes from China to Asia or to Russia. So they found a way to make a pu-ehr, this pressed disk shape, to put ten or twelve together and to put it on the horse. And after one year of travel, the tea was older and had a different taste. Now they cultivate this idea.

JEPPE—So the idea of tea improving with age only developed when tea culture started to spread. It's a product of the time needed to transport tea from one place to another. Whereas this was never an essential quality of tea previously; it's quite accidental.

BARON—It's an accidental idea of making tea. But pu-ehr developed into its own species with very different and special effects to your body, different to all the other teas. Some even say it fights cancer. But obviously the idea of really having old tea now, these days, is a kind of fashion too. The Japanese are crazy for old tea, which is not the Japanese tradition. It's always expensive at the tea restaurants in China. But you find mostly very bad qualities. For example, if there was too much water in the leaf during production, and they dried it too early, then when you drink it it's really sour etc. If the tea in the beginning is not well produced, twenty years later or fifty years later it will still be bad.

In Taipei I was invited to an event by some artists who did traditional singing. They had an apartment with super exclusive old furniture, no air conditioning, very old style. There I met this crazy tea guy. A retired policeman. He drove us at midnight from this singing event to his house which was two or three hours by car. He was the second biggest tea collector in Taiwan, and he's just collecting old tea. His house was definitely strange, with this small wooden tree table, and the light, there was always neon light everywhere. They have a completely different style idea of cosiness. He opened up really old rare teas, and cooked it for us. His special way, different to everybody else. He was really a freak.

So old tea can be taken very seriously. I like it too, because the flavours remind me of earth. Which is maybe esoterical, but it's related really to the ground. It's old wood, earth, really basic flavours. For me it's also nice to drink history in a way.

Of course, with these special teas, you have to take care of the water you are using. The Chinese wrote in the 17th century books about water, in these times it was not easy to get good water.

JEPPE—Where was it not easy to get good water?

**BARON**—Everywhere. Because the people didn't have treatment plants in the cities, it was nearly impossible. If you go to the river and there's something bad in it, that's all you have. I have just read some excerpts from those books, and they say for example you have to take your boat to the middle of the river when the sun is coming out, drift one hundred metres to this direction and then take a shot of this water; or take the first water of the hill of some special mountain, and this water is the best at the first of February and so on. Very complicated and based on the fact that clear water was not coming out of taps.

Water temperature is also always a topic for books. Japanese green tea, 60 to 80 degrees Celsius; black tea, boiling water; and so on. Normally, nearly every tea is okay with boiled water, but the good green teas and some Oolongs are super fragile. If you drink it with too hot water, the tea is destroyed, because it's so sensitive. The Chinese as you can see, they are a little more practical guys, so you can drink most teas there with boiled water or sometimes a little bit cooler.

I met a French guy in Taipei. He was really crazy about tea, he lived in Taipei since ten years. He has a blog with always beautiful arrangements with flowers, and he sits all the day in his apartment doing this while his wife is earning money. He brought



water, when I met him, he told me "It's very special water, I was last weekend three hundred kilometres to the source to get the water, because this was the day my teacher said to me to get water out of this river." For me, okay, it was okay water, but I'm not a freak like that.

BALDISCHWYLER—Maybe it's this misunderstanding that from back in the days, when it was really important going to the river to take the water at this time, and now the freaky transition into nowadays.

BARON—I believe in ideas of different water – But for daily use you find perfect bottled water here in the supermarket too. I buy Volvic, and the best for my taste is Spa from Belgium. If you have Vittel, there is too much nadium in it, it's too salty.

BALDISCHWYLER—What about the tap water in Hamburg? Have you checked it? Someone told me that the tap water in Hamburg, out of all the big cities in Germany, is the best water and the nearest to mineral water.

BARON—For some teas it's okay, they're called 'safe drinking teas.' You can use any water and the tea will make it. But if you have a sensitive tea and you use normal water, the tea is destroyed.

BALDISCHWYLER—The novel *Au Rebours* by J.K. Huysmans was one of the most important books for Dandyism in the end of the 19th century. His protagonist created a liquor organ, sitting in his house, playing this organ and every type of liquor comes out. When I saw your tea shelf, it appeared to me like this: a 'tea organ.'



**BARON**—Indeed, the Dandyism from the 19th Century was always about sophistication; to bring things to the highest point. Unlike China, the foreground was not craftsmanship or tradition but more an idea of to be hysterical at its best. It was the time of the hysteria, followed by Neurasthenia which was the mental sickness of the 19th century in Europe. Now we have the time of bore out and burn out. Time for tea again!

**JEPPE**—This is an interesting chronological connection. Tea perhaps began to have this treatment of prestige and refinement at the tail end of the Decadence movement at the beginning of the 20th century, for which *The Book Of Tea* [Okakura Kakuzo] would be the catalyst.

**BARON**—A very important book. But everything in this book is about Japanese ideas of tea. The Japanese world of tea is completely different. The Japanese are crazy about freshness. For *Sincha*, the earliest picking in a tea year, they pay money like hell.

The finest tea you can have in Japan is called *Gyokuro*, 'shadow tea'. It's one of the most expensive teas there, but it's not easy to produce. After a period of sun, they put shade cloth over the complete plantation, and they try as long as they can to leave

the leaf under the protection without dying. Because the sun is missing, the tree has to produce chlorophyll, and the leaf is getting more and more green and intense. When you open it again, the leaf is picked and processed. This has a super high chlorophyll content.

Another very popular one for them is Matcha. I drink this every morning. It's a tea powder made out of good quality green tea and pulverised into dust. In the Japanese Chado it's very complicated; to drink it in the traditional way it can take hours. If I do it, it takes twenty seconds. [laughs]

BALDISCHWYLER—What just came to my mind, my ex-girlfriend who studied with me at art school, after her final examinations, she started Kyudo [Japanese archery].

BARON—I do Kendo nearby, the Japanese way of the sword. People do also Kyudo there.

BALDISCHWYLER—It's interesting for me that people like you or my ex-girlfriend, you go from the art world towards this Eastern tradition. She's nearly only doing Kyudo and working for money and doing Kyudo and working for money and doing Kyudo. Maybe it's over-contemplating.



BARON—But I guess it's this idea of going into something that's completely different, that has a kind of system and its own world. For some it might be a transcendental idea or a philosophical idea, but for me it's a really something more basic. I like perfection and knowledge.

In tea I love craftsmanship. To taste and see if it's well made. I would say this is a kind of 'pure pleasure.' Like a good chocolate, or like a good steak.

The Japanese way of tea, Chado, is completely different. In Chado, tea is like a tool to make it easier get in the zen idea. It would also work without the tea, but tea makes it a little bit easier to have something to talk about in zen. I did the Chado also, but for me it's not really the way. There's something in it that I don't need.

JEPPE—I was reading *The Book Of Tea* about tea rooms in Japan. They would build a room, it would be very stripped back and parts of the room would be unfinished so that, in a way, your imagination takes over in finishing the space. Very sparse, very simple, and seemingly very impoverished. Always the smallest room in the house, ten square feet. But they also say that there's as much effort and thought put into constructing this room as there is any mansion.

**BARON**—This has to do with the idea of the Japanese culture, and the Chado. When you start the ceremony, first you have a waiting area in the garden. You wait, and you sit there, the master's assistant gives you a light green tea, you drink it and feel a little easy and calm down. Then you have this door that is not really a door, it's very low so you have to stoop to get in. Then you are dropped in this 'tea room' world, where you lose every connection with the world outside.



The tradition started in the 13th century and was strongly cultivated and spread in the 15th century, when Japan had an idea of finding a new structure in the whole country. They had a lot of warlords at this time. This was when the big tea masters wrote their books, and Rikyu was one of the most important tea masters who gave Chado a form and a face. There is a story about him inviting three warlords in his tea house. Like ordinary soldiers they were not really cultivated and more proletarian guys. They had a very strong mind and super knowledge of war, but not really culturally refined. These guys came in with their armour and weapons, and the door was so small that they couldn't enter without taking their weapons off. This was an affront for them. So they had to put their weapons outside, they were super aggressive, then they had to stoop to enter – which is not okay for a warlord, they are normally standing tall. After one minute their aggression level was so high, they said “Okay, at the moment the tea master comes in, we are killing this idiot.” They sat there seething. Then the master came in, in his very traditional way, opening the door like so, every step being very important, and the tatami, your right foot has to go like this – it's very complicated to walk in a tea room. This master entered in a very smooth way like always, and these guys calmed a little bit down, “Okay, let's wait and see what happens; he has one chance.” Then he cooked the tea, gave



them a little bit of tea, and the taste was super good, they were saying "Nice taste, not bad, nice looking tea pots we have here; okay, let's take another tea." Then they drank two teas, and after that they said "Hmm, it's somehow okay, we don't kill him; we ask him to come to our castles to teach us. We would love to learn this idea of making tea." And this was the step in the bigger tea culture in Japan: a lot of warlords getting in, cultivating their lives. This tea society had really money. So they used not these poor ceramic materials like I have, they had gold, very heavy materials – really Prolo styles like the Russians and the Rolex. Even the drinking methods they had were different, boisterous, not these refined moments we associate with it now. Beneath a lots of different tea schools in contemporary Japan there is still a samurai influenced tea school.

This was one step in tea culture gaining popularity. Today the idea of Chado didn't change much. The tea room is about finding a place to calm down, having a little nice thing like tea or some sweets, which are always going together. It's not really about tea, it's more about a situation you are in, going outside of the normal life you have, going out of the daily mood problems; just being there. It's a kind of Buddhism idea. This is what the Japanese try to find, even with Kendo and Kyudo; it's not really about battle – it's about finding a way to be really present.



JEPPE—This quote from *The Book Of Tea* – “The greatest pleasure is to do an act by stealth and to have it found out by accident;” the culture of tea being “the art of concealing beauty so that you may discover it, suggesting what you dare not reveal.” So really, rather than a direct statement, it’s a quiet and almost hidden gesture.

BARON—This is the art in the tearoom. I went, and I couldn’t understand a word but they translated some of it to me, and it was a in a way a boring discussion always. The tea master brings his pottery, so there are some very important things in the tea house. At one special moment he shows this, for example, tea bowl to you. And you look at it very carefully. You are on your knees, which after thirty minutes hurts very much, but you have to smile all the time, and say “Ah, this is a nice tea bowl. Where did you find it?” And the tea master says “Ah. I remember it was a nice day in Kyoto. A neighbour of mine said ‘Look at the sun; isn’t it nice?’ and at this moment, I saw the bowl, shimmering somewhere ...” [laughs]. Always like this. Then after a couple of minutes, you say “Thank you master for explaining me this wonderful story, I won’t forget it in my lifetime.” And he says “You’re very welcome. But have you seen this one ...” [laughs]. One hour later, the show is done.

BALDISCHWYLER—Drinking is how much time, in this procedure?

BARON—Not really much time, maybe ten percent.

JEPPE—Is there an understanding of how funny this is?

BARON—No it's not funny for them. For them it's really a kind of honour, to see these super things. For me it's, in a way, funny, but of course it's not funny at all. It's the same for Kendo: I try to understand. They say "Okay, in this moment you make a move, and you move until he or you are dead." This is always the idea – taking responsibility for your behaviour and being present. If you take the tea bowl, in this moment, you have it here, so there is nothing else, just the moment. If you drink, you drink. There is nothing else but drinking. If you draw your sword, be ready to fight. It is always the idea of doing exactly what you do in this moment and nothing else. It's hard to learn for a European.

With this, Japan will always be a mystic thing for me. In Taiwan and China it's easier to understand the ideas of tea. They are more about hedonism, in a way. They love eating, they love good tea, they love all these things that I like too.

JEPPE—The Japanese way of tea is very aestheticised, but I'm really interested in this Taiwanese form, where despite the fact that it is an expert culture, there is less focus on the physical appearance of the surrounds. In Taiwanese tea rooms, where people might drink under fluorescent lights, no attention paid to the interior, perhaps this situation makes it more about the social event. In this photograph of you having lunch with your tea teacher in Taipei, I saw that they had newspaper pages instead of a tablecloth?



BARON—Yes, to cover the table.

JEPPE—Is that normal there?

BARON—Well, in the tea masters house they do it every day. If you do the same tea study trip to Japan, you would get a different image. It was never like our idea of 'nice' in Taiwan. Except for the very high places for tea, but they were very expensive and not the normal places for tea. It's a different idea of cosiness.

JEPPE—It is seemingly not an idea of cosiness.

BARON—No – the cosiness happens between the people. But everything surrounding the people is not something that we would call nice. But if you are in these rooms together with them, you don't have the feeling that something is missing there. Trousers are trousers, that's it, they are good for two legs. They don't have the idea of style like here. Their fashion is obviously not influenced by international design standards.

JEPPE—Why not?

BARON—I don't know. Of course, there are some style-conscious people, but mostly you don't see it.



JEPPE—So it sounds like a place where the framework for a contemporary culture of aesthetics and a sense of idiosyncratic personal style are missing in a way.

BARON—I went searching for this. I visited a super underground club in Taipei to see a punk concert. I arrived and it was really like a student club here in the smallest German town. There is no real subculture in Taiwan.

BALDISCHWYLER—Like what I had with Breakcore music before I visited Australia: I knew there were people who make Breakcore in the strangest countries, and I thought this spread of subculture was everywhere, that something like this in Taiwan would exist.

BARON—It does not. I'm quite sure. I tried to find the punk rock idea, and even the handmade subculture in a way, and even the club culture. This one club was run by Americans who lived in Taipei for a couple of years, Americans with a typical ideal of gold chains and baseball caps. The club usually played Jungle music and these guys would MC in the baddest way I ever saw. "Hey, Taipei, Taipei! Everything cool here okay!" What is up with these guys? But the Taiwanese locals came in and they took pictures of the "event"

to show their friends in school, to say "Ah, I saw the coolest party in Taipei last night." Nothing happens in these places. It's really not fun, it's not cool. Just drinking for the ex-pats, who try to copy their culture, but it always fails a little bit.

BALDISCHWYLER—But it is a good feeling to be in such an uncool place.

BARON—It was a incredible trip because different things are getting more important. First the super gentle people. Of course this really high tea level and the superb food.

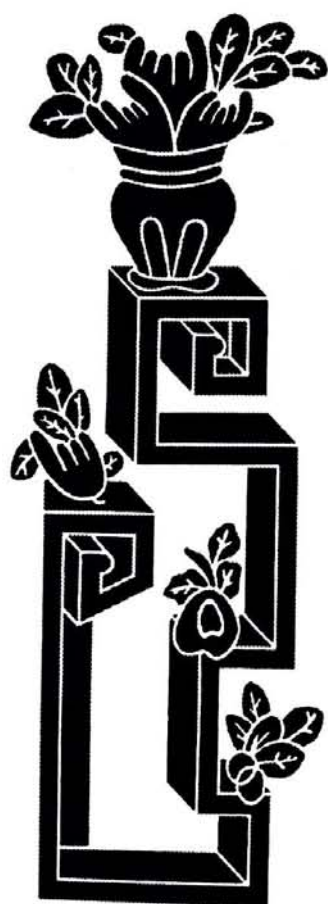
JEPPE—This is a crucial point, because these are the conditions in which tea culture is developed and maintained. These conditions are not in Europe, and the tea culture is not in Europe.

BARON—But they started with tea culture a long time ago in Asia.

JEPPE—Yet there has been tea in Europe for some centuries. So tea becomes a symbol of this very complicated situation. It comes from a place that is fundamentally different to our own, and the question is whether there is a way of making the core elements of this culture relevant. Because it seems that in this

form, that Florian is talking about, the conditions that make Taiwanese tea function are not present in Europe. Or anywhere else but the East. What can we take from it to make it work, for it to be meaningful for us?

BALDISCHWYLER—So we have this cultural context in which the tea ceremonies are held, and this cultural context is totally without any prestige etc, but the long singular culture lineage that they have is this tea. The tea is something like the ritual to structure the days with history.





JEPPE—So how do you start a ritual where there isn't one? How do you build it in Europe?

BALDISCHWYLER—You mean, when you are inspired by this ritual from another culture, how can you transcribe the ritual to your culture?

BARON—I don't know; this is something I thought a lot about. Because of course it's artificial to celebrate tea here like there. This ceremonial equipment I normally don't use. I use tea a lot less formally in my daily life. But it's more complicated to put it in your daily life because you don't always have the right hot water, then getting the materials in this country is not so easy. If you know where you can buy it, you could get one hundred grams of this super tea, but it's not really normal like Taiwan. You saw the farmers there, with garbage bags full of tea being scooped out. This is normal. It's not pretentious. Over here, everything is very quickly pretentious, because we pull it out of its context. The hardest thing is to bring in a tea culture in Germany or somewhere else in Europe and to make it normal. For us it's normal to take out a teabag from the Rewe supermarket, Rooibos Vanilla, put it inside your cup with hot water, and you drink this. The boys say "I don't like tea, I drink coffee," the girls say "I love tea, it's so cosy," and this is what you think about tea. This is it.



But I did take some steps to bring tea here properly. My first idea was to open a tea bar here in Hamburg, like the Starbucks coffee concept in Asia. Let's found it, we'll do tea drinks with green and black tea, very fancy for advertisement people and art guys and so forth. It can work, I'm quite sure. In the end we didn't make it because I had problems with the business partners after half a year. But I continued thinking about bringing tea into our society in a new way. We asked people about this, but not many of them understood it. You have to break a lot of rules, and a lot of ways people are stuck in.

I met some tea freaks from Frankfurt, young boys maybe 24, 25, and they looked like typical 'It-Boys,' very slick. Their tea dealer does very high class Japanese teas, and they told me they are very in this Frankfurt Elektro music scene, and they do tea parties in the summer time in the River Main drinking highly concentrated Matcha powder tea – the drug idea, where you're really flashing and hysterical in a way – and then they dance. After I met these people, I thought if these people do it, I can make it so everybody is doing it. Maybe. But this is a long way. This will never make it to German daily life; I don't know how to bring it in.

Even when I went back to the lady who introduced me to tea twelve years ago, I went there and we

talked about tea again, and now I'm completely different and know more than her, and she's completely closed. She doesn't want to talk to me about tea. I don't know why. The people who are a little bit more in tea in Germany for their tea knowledge, they think they have the secret and it's impossible to be better than them. Which is stupid, because this is a culture of talking, and comparing, and living tea, in a way.

BALDISCHWYLER—But this is the competitive society problem, when you come together with people with the same interests, you always have this sense of competition. It's good to meet people where it's not competitive, where it's not about "I know more than you know." What you said about the guys who always keep it a big mystery – it's something against progression.

BARON—Not a good ground for tea parties.

JEPPE—It's not good for business, but perhaps in the end it is good for the culture.

BARON—That you don't exchange knowledge? I don't think so.

JEPPE—More the broader implication, that tea culture can only exist under certain conditions. It

thrives in Taiwan, but it can't work here. It has a really intense locality that cannot be broken.

BARON—This is really anti-global, and this I think is really good. You have to go to the source. It's too hot for me there, it's too humid, there are tiled floors even in the bedroom, I don't like it, it's ugly, but this is the best place for tea. So I have to go there. And this is in a way okay.

BALDISCHWYLER—Be happy that you are not into Gammelfisch from Sweden. The only place that you can eat it is Sweden because it is forbidden everywhere else. This old fish, and it's stinky, and they have tents where they give the fish to the people, because all the flies would come and they would not be able to eat the fish. They eat it in a tent, and part of the people have something on their noses because it's stinking so massively.

BARON—You tried this?

BALDISCHWYLER—No, I saw a documentary. Good that it was not a 'smelling-TV.' And it was no joke. So it's really nice that there are regional traditions that only exist in certain parts of the world. We have this time where cultural globalisation is not a bad concept, because it helps to tear down prejudices, etc

etc; this is what I think of when I come from an idealistic point of view. But on the other side, it's really beautiful what you just said, that it's just possible to have this tea in Taiwan, that it's just possible to eat the stinky fish in Sweden. There are these two sides.





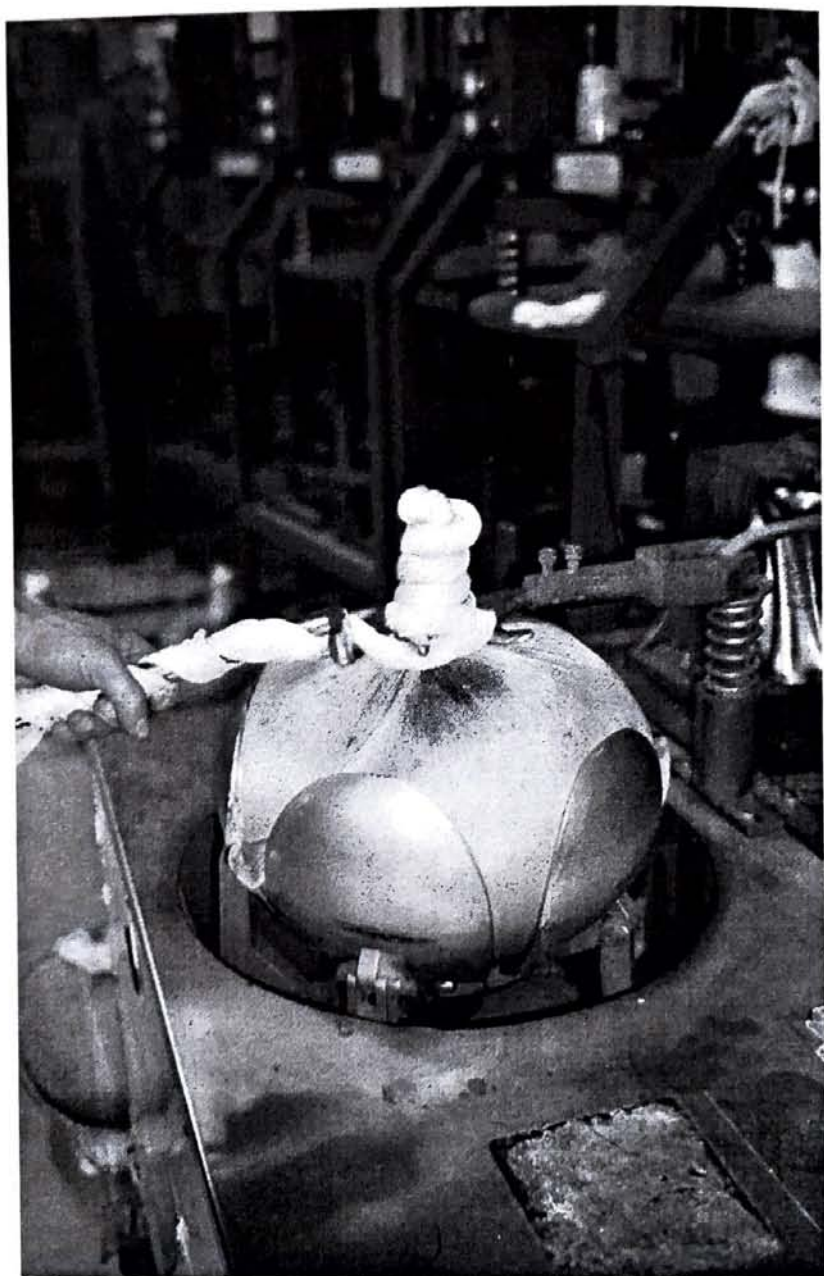






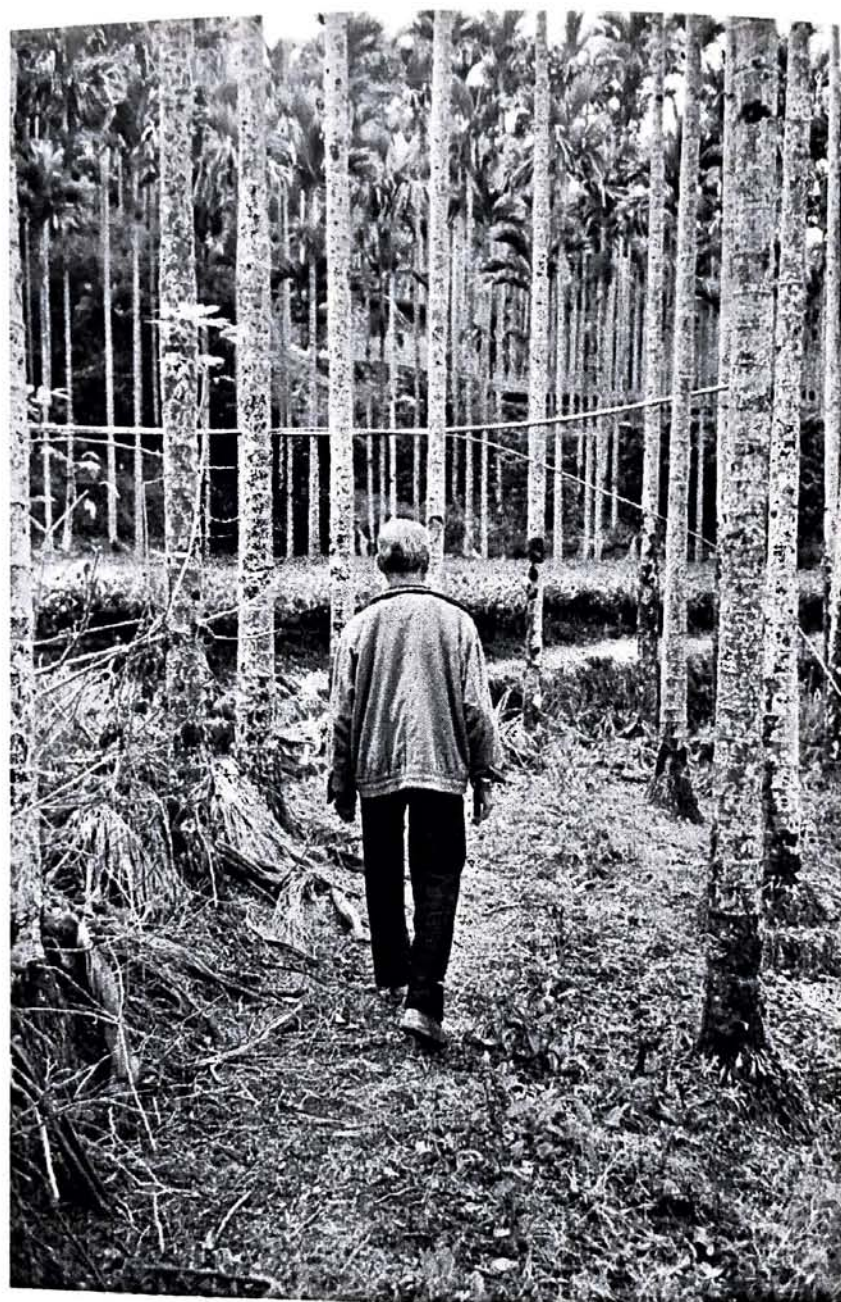












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All photographs taken in the Alishan Mountain Ranges, Taiwan, 2012. Following our discussion, I travelled to Taiwan to visit tea farms and collectors in an effort to better understand the role of tea in Taiwanese culture, and the reasons why it cannot be transposed to the West. This burdensome fantasy, the restructuring of European tea vernacular through Eastern tradition, remains a fraught combination of form and context.

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