

# THE OOLONG ALCHEMIST AND HIS ELIXIR

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Satoricha's journal covers various topics, including tea and hospitality. However, it wouldn't accurately represent Satoricha's style if it didn't include stories about diverse journeys, and it wouldn't even be Satoricha's journal if methodologies such as T.E.A. (Transmit, Engage, and Acquire) weren't applied.

This writing is intended to take you on a journey from the comfort of your home to a place where the magic of nature meets the mastery of a tea artisan. The protagonist, Sean, is nicknamed the "Oolong Alchemist" due to his passion and skill in producing this complex tea. Through his company, [Trilliant Tea Industry](#), Sean is dedicated to perfecting Oolong tea production in Taiwan so that he can share the beauty of his country with the world through cups of this fascinating elixir.

First, we must fundamentally understand Oolong and why some consider it a complex tea. Oolong is one of the six types of tea made with the leaves of *Camellia Sinensis*; its name reflects the processing process.

This tea is produced by taking the first four top leaves of the tea bush, excluding the buds (ERKENS, 2022, page 227), details that the upper leaves are the youngest of the bush; these are characterized by being smooth, soft and delicate, the Oolong is distinguished by its partially oxidized process, which makes it one of the teas with the most extended production process. Two unique factors affecting taste in Taiwanese Oolong are the Tropic of Cancer and Jacobiasca Formosana.

As you can see, several aspects that influence Oolong. In order not to miss even the smallest detail of each of these, I've decided to divide them as follows:

1. Oolong 101 (Basics)
2. Tropic of Cancer
3. Jacobiasca Formosana
4. The alchemist and the creation of his elixir

These will be the topics that we will address in the installments of "The Oolong Alchemist and His Elixir" and will be referred to as "our agenda."

## OOLONG 101

Sean H. (2024) mentions that Oolong's definition is understood simply and almost at once: "It is a partially oxidized tea." The complicated thing is comprehending it. Sean provides a very digestible explanation of Oolong and why there are different ways of understanding it. This is because there are two interpretations of Oolong:

1. Asian interpretation
2. English interpretation

### Asian Interpretation:

It covers Asian countries which have Mandarin as a language, such as China, Taiwan and some parts of Vietnam, and Indonesia. It begins with China's pioneering knowledge of tea production at the time (in the 1900s approx.) and Taiwan's need to hire tea masters to teach and produce tea; however, in 1890, the Taiwanese took the knowledge learned from China and improved its practices by innovating in oxidation processes, and this would remain the case until after World War II, Taiwan government established a public organization called Tea Research and Extension Station or by its acronym "TRES" which has developed over 400 cultivars from which the best are chosen to make Oolong. This has allowed Taiwan to be a leading country in the production of Oolong.

### English Interpretation:

Unlike the previous one, this one does not include English-speaking countries. However, it includes countries influenced by the Brits in tea production, such as India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, to mention a few. It covers different Oolong production areas.

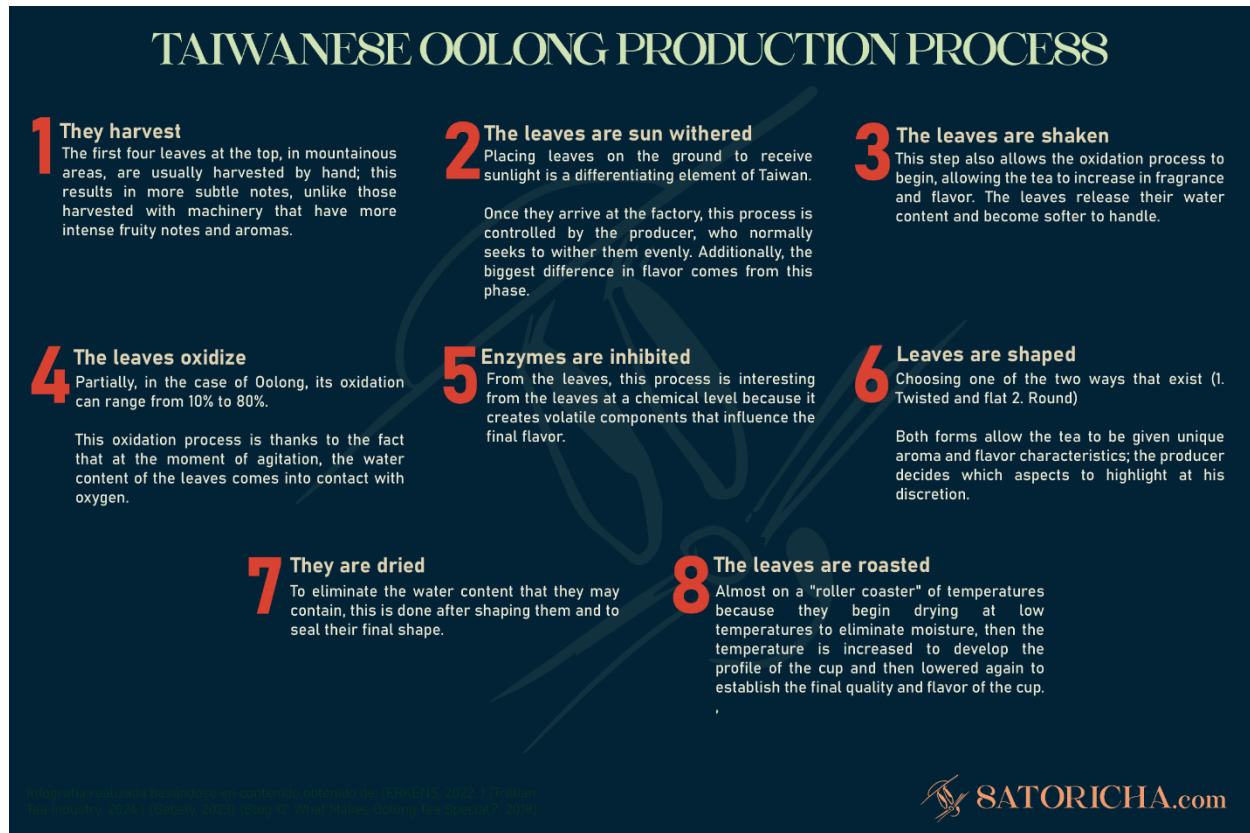
A key point that establishes a significant difference between the English and Asian interpretations is that these countries still maintain the cultivars and knowledge learned from China (obtained since approximately 1850). We could say they have a more traditional approach because their practices and cultivars have mostly stayed the same over the years.

But why is there such a noticeable difference between both perspectives? This is because China, around the 1850s, did not have much knowledge, and the concept of Oolong was still in process. What was produced at the time was technically green tea and black tea. The oolong tea production skill in the middle 19th century was much similar to the "white tea" nowadays, and it took another fifty to sixty years for Asian interpretation to improve the oxidation methods to have the prototype of oolong as we see today.

In fact, Saria (2023) states that it has been more than one hundred fifty years since the British brought Chinese tea to Darjeeling and more than three-quarters of a century since they left, but the Indians continue to process tea the same way the British did, instead of learning from their Asian counterparts.

These two interpretations are just the tip of the iceberg, and it is something that is not usually talked about much because it is much more extensive than the summary presented above. Usually, the literature tends to focus on the process involved in the production of Oolong.

This type of knowledge is best understood in situ. With a learning-by-doing method, but because on this trip, the condition is to stay home, you have an infographic at the bottom that seeks to explain the process of oolong production a little more visually.



The infographic provides a summary of tea production, focusing on the production of Taiwanese Oolong. However, the different types of tea share some steps.

Since now you know the process that Oolong entails, I can mention that Sean highlights four of the eight steps in the production of Oolong as key; these are:

1. The Harvest
2. Oxidation
3. Shaping the leaves
4. Roasting

It is not common for someone to select or summarize something as complex as Oolong in such a straightforward way. One might think that Sean's years of experience allow him to catalog which processes are key and which are not. I differ; although knowledge and expertise are essential, they are nothing if the person cannot go beyond their meaning in search of the true essence, which I believe Sean has achieved.

I will give myself the privilege of interpreting these four steps that Sean mentions:

- **The Harvest:** Everything in life has a beginning. Some are easier, like the harvest using machinery, and others are more complex, like the harvest by hand. However, both have the possibility of becoming something extraordinary thanks to the unique characteristics that each way of harvesting provides.
  
- **Oxidation:** This process is achieved after the leaves are shaken and fractured. It is like the different adversities we face daily: We are shaken, and something in us fractures. However, as Sean mentions, in this process, the "spirit of the oolong" is found; in our case, it is no different. The lyricist Irving Berlin understood this very well, encapsulating it in the phrase, "Life is ten percent how we make it and ninety percent how we take it."
  
- **Shaping the leaves:** At this point, the producer decides what attributes he wants to highlight from his Oolong through the shape he selects; in our case, we cannot change our natural shape, but we can cultivate ourselves (Lamarre (2017) poses an exciting metaphor by comparing our brain to a garden, instead of a computer, and highlights the importance of nurturing it daily. This mental garden consists of three fundamental ecologies:
  - **Physical Ecology:** Encompasses everything we consume, from food to drinks. As the saying goes, "You are what you eat." This includes eating habits, medications, and any other substance we ingest.

- Cultural Ecology: How much do we value our attention? Often, we disperse our attention without considering priorities. Companies have understood this and exploited it effectively. While they invest large sums of money to capture our attention, we give it away without considering the consequences. Besides having a high value, our attention defines who we are. So, what are we consuming?
- Spiritual Ecology: This dimension is not linked to any religion but focuses on the question: What is our purpose in this life experience? This ecology is attached to the motivations and values beyond the material aspect and defining our existence.
- Roasting: This is where the final quality of the Oolong is sealed; the producer must use his experience and knowledge to capture the essence of the Oolong so that it can later be enjoyed in a cup; in our case, what is our roast? Or, if I rephrase the question, what imprint do we leave in this life? This question invites us to reflect on the impact we have on others. It does not take power, wealth, or influence on impact someone's life; we often do it without realizing it; the question is, do we do it positively or negatively?

If you haven't noticed, all these steps depend on the producer, or if we use it in our analogy, it depends on us.

Well, they say that a lesson should be long enough to generate curiosity and short enough to generate interest. That is why the first installment of the Oolong Alchemist and his elixir ends here.

I will cover the rest of our agenda (Tropic of Cancer, Jacobiasca Formosana, The Alchemist and the creation of his elixir) in subsequent installments.

Satoricha ~

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