



From the Heart of China

Gongfu Tea Ceremony

The Chinese Tea Ceremony, or Gongfu Cha (工夫茶) is an ancient style of carefully, methodically drinking tea with a traditional Chinese tea set. The traditional Gongfu tea set includes a tea table, a teapot or gaiwan (盖碗), three small tea cups, a set of tea tools to aid in serving, and a kettle.

Knowledge of the exact origin of the ceremony has been lost to time. Although it is well documented that the Northeastern region of Guangdong Province, called Chaoshan, was the first place to make it a common part of daily life. Today it's in every household there, and even babies grow up practicing the art of Gongfu Cha.

Officially, the Gongfu Tea Ceremony is a 21-step process which takes careful practice, hence the name gong-fu, a play on words kung-fu. Whenever you visit an authentic Chinese tea shop, they will undoubtedly offer some form of gongfu tea service, often with exaggerated hand motions or entertaining tricks.

In reality, locals in the Chaoshan region don't take the ceremony so seriously, nor do they practice or even remember all 21 official steps. They don't even think about it when they serve tea – it's just the way they do it. Unlike the Japanese tea ceremony, the Chinese tea ceremony is not done simply for the sake of ceremony. Rather, the gongfu tea service developed naturally as a way to get China's myriad of teas just the right flavor. Regardless of the level of showmanship, Gongfu Cha is a beautiful cultural art form that offers tea the respect it deserves. It's also an amazing way to meditate and relax, adding to the already powerful health benefits of tea.

For your reference, here are the official 21 steps for Chaoshan Gongfu Cha:

1. **Explain the tea service** to the guests.
2. **Wash your hands.**
3. **Light the charcoal** (traditionally olive pits) in the clay tea stove.
4. **Pour the water into the tea kettle** (a long-handled, clay teapot).
5. **Bring the water to a boil**, using a feather fan on the coals to sufficiently heat them.
6. **Warm the serving teapot** by pouring the hot water in and over it.
7. **Warm the tea cups** in the same fashion.
8. **Place the tea to be infused on a piece of white paper.**
9. Use the paper to **guide the tea leaves into the teapot.**
10. **Wash the tea leaves with hot water**, pouring this first infusion over the tea cups and teapot (to keep them warm). Be sure to then discard this first infusion by dumping all tea in the cups and teapot out on the tea table.
11. **Pour hot water into the teapot a second time** (this time to be consumed), being sure to keep the kettle 20 centimeters (8 inches) above the teapot.
12. **Use the teapot lid to smooth out any bubbles** on the surface of the tea in the teapot.
13. Put the lid back on the teapot and **warm the teapot again** by pouring hot water over it.
14. **Warm and wash the cups again** by pouring hot water over them and rolling one inside another using tea tongs, being sure to get all the edges submerged in the hot water. Cup washing should only take seconds to perform.
15. **Pour the tea from the teapot into the first cup**, being sure to keep the teapot 4-5 centimeters (1.5-2 inches) above the cups.
16. Quickly move the teapot to the second and third cups, being sure to **pour the tea evenly into every cup.**
17. **Make sure every drop is dripped into the cups.**
18. **Serve the guests** by gently moving a tea cup in front of each one and politely asking them to drink. Extra guests beyond three must wait for the next round, and the same three cups are reused.
19. **Before sipping, guests should first smell the tea.** Hosts will also often offer the teapot lid for guests to smell. Smelling is very important because 90% of the taste of tea is in the smell.
20. **Everyone is to take sips of the tea and savor the taste.** Connoisseurs often loudly slurp the tea and swish it around in their cheeks to be sure all taste buds are engaged.
21. **Everyone should smell their empty cup after drinking.** The teapot or gaiwan lid will often be offered as well.

This process is repeated each time the tea is served, and a single serving of tea (3-8 grams) can be reused 4-8 times, until the flavor has faded. Depending on the speed of consumption, the warming steps may be left out if not needed.