

# THE KNOWLEDGE WITHIN THE FLAVOR OF TEA: THE MYSTERIOUS SUBSTANCES WITHIN THE FLAVOR OF TEA AND ITS STORIES

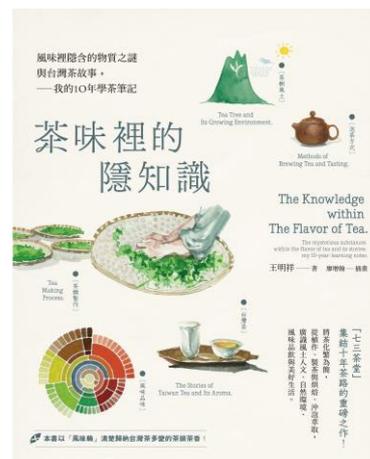
## 茶味裡的隱知識：風味裡隱 含的物質之謎與台灣茶故 事，我的 10 年學茶筆記

*Tasting tea is about much more than just flavor and aroma. Sean Wang reveals the stories, secrets, and science behind the world's favorite drink by taking us through the entire process from tree to cup.*

Tasting tea is about much more than just flavor and aroma: behind the finished product hides an abundance of stories, cultural knowledge, and science. Master tea taster Sean Wang takes us into the world of Taiwanese tea and shows us the entire process from seedling to cup.

*The Knowledge within the Flavor of Tea* moves chapter-by-chapter through each fascinating stage of tea production, from the relationship of tea varieties to their environment to the actual labor of harvesting and preparing tea leaves. Sean introduces us to the six “colors” that classify the tea world in general (green, teal, red, white, black, and yellow), then dives more deeply into tea produced in Taiwan. As he describes the farming, harvesting, and production of these teas, he educates the reader on how to buy, how to prepare, and what to expect in the cup.

As engaging as it is informative, *The Knowledge within the Flavor of Tea* is Sean Wang's distillation of over ten years' experience working with tea



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in Taiwan. It provides us a window into a tradition that literally brought the world together, and in which Taiwan's contribution shines brightly.

## Sean Wang 王明祥

Sean Wang is a licensed expert tea taster and the founder of 7 Teahouse in Taipei. He has studied tea from both cultural and scientific perspectives, pairing extensive reading and research with long periods of residence in the tea hills of Taiwan.

# THE KNOWLEDGE WITHIN THE FLAVOR OF TEA: THE MYSTERIOUS SUBSTANCES WITHIN THE FLAVOR OF TEA AND ITS STORIES

By Sean Wang

Translated by Anne Henochowicz

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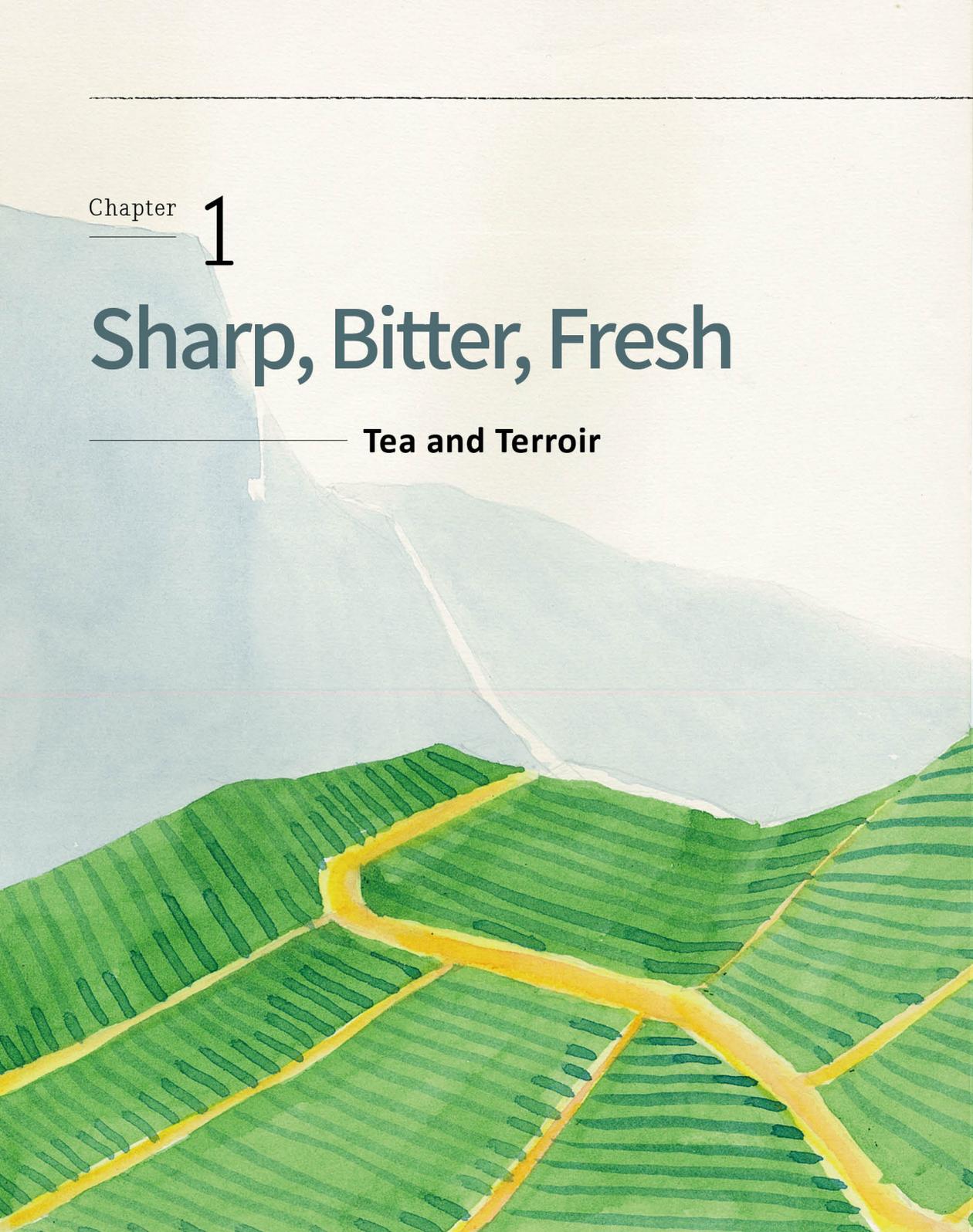
Chapter

1

# Sharp, Bitter, Fresh

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Tea and Terroir

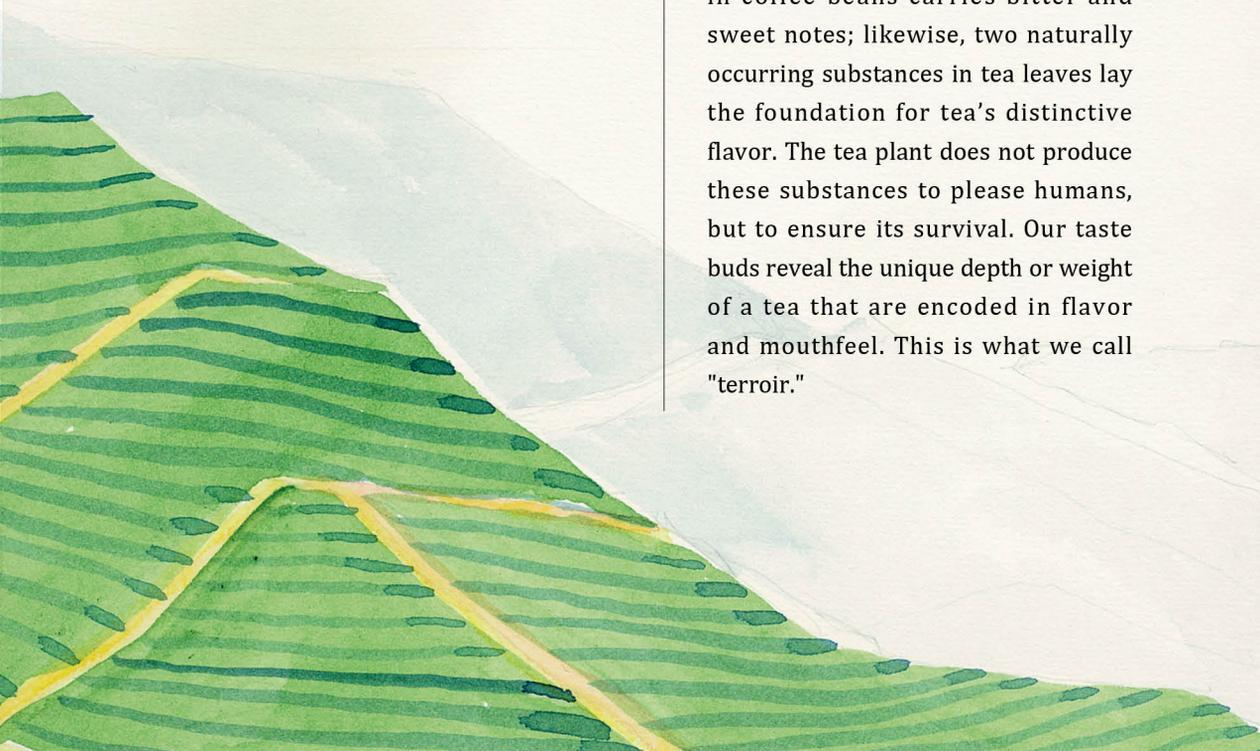
A watercolor illustration of a tea plantation on a hillside. The foreground shows terraced tea fields with rows of green tea bushes, separated by yellow paths. The background features a misty, blue-toned mountain range under a pale sky.

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The Astringent,  
Bitterness and Sweetness Taste  
of Tea.  
Tea Tree and Its  
Growing Environment.

"Tea, wine, and coffee will never fill our bellies, but they can bring us closer to the life we want to have..." Tea leaves, fermented grapes, and coffee beans all produce tastes that make you want to savor the moment as well as their flavor. It's not just about kicking back and drinking something delicious; the connoisseur can also delight in the story behind the finished product by paying close attention to hidden flavors.

The tannins in grape skins give wine its astringency and subtlety; the caffeine in coffee beans carries bitter and sweet notes; likewise, two naturally occurring substances in tea leaves lay the foundation for tea's distinctive flavor. The tea plant does not produce these substances to please humans, but to ensure its survival. Our taste buds reveal the unique depth or weight of a tea that are encoded in flavor and mouthfeel. This is what we call "terroir."



# Tea Tree, Tea Leaf, Tea Blossom and Seed.

Tea plants bloom and set seed in the winter. The mature seeds fall to the ground, where they will sprout and grow into the next generation of tea plants. There are two main varieties of the tea plant, or *Camellia sinensis*: the "Chinese small-leaf" and the "Assam large-leaf." Each are distinct in height and in the size of their leaves.

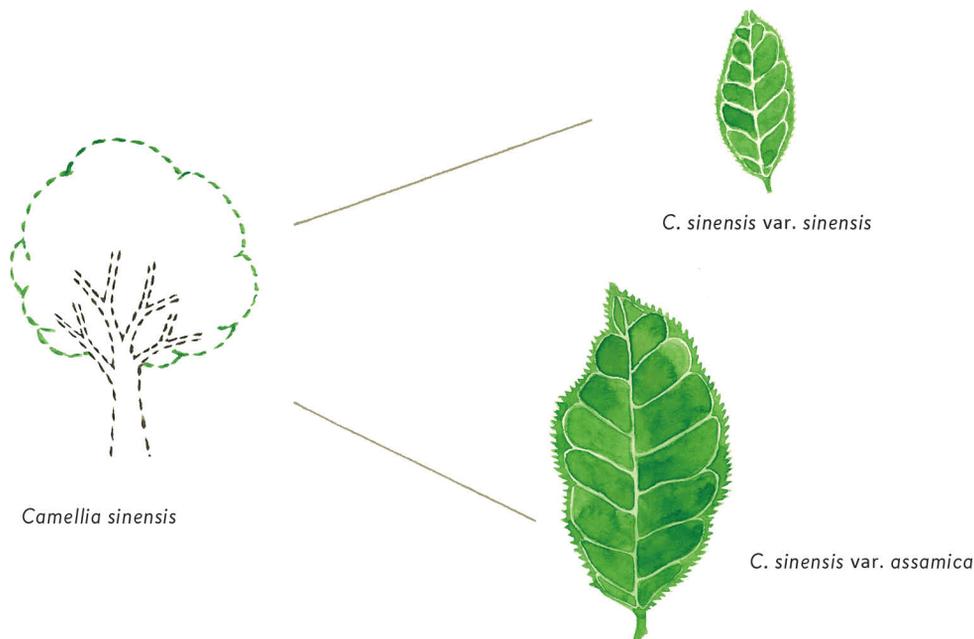


## Tea Tree

*Camellia sinensis* belongs to the group of "perennial, woody, evergreen broadleaf trees". In other words, the tea plant is a broadleaf tree with a long life span that grows throughout the year and stays green throughout the winter, rather than dropping its leaves. In general, a tea sapling will be ready for its first picking about three to five years after it is planted. Its yield will continue to increase until it reaches full maturity at about eight years, and it will produce its best yields in the following twenty to thirty years.

In the mountains of southwestern China, large tea trees can live up to one hundred years. Tea trees grow year-round, which is why we often hear that there are four seasons for tea harvesting. In some of the warmer growing regions, the plants are so vigorous that they may be harvested five to seven times per year. Tea is thus classified as a high-yield plant.

*Camellia sinensis* belongs to the genus *Camellia* of the Theaceae family. The species is further divided into the two main varieties: Chinese small-leaf / small-leaf (*C. sinensis* var. *sinensis*) and Assam / large-leaf (*C. sinensis* var. *assamica*). These two varieties may be subdivided further into a number of distinct varieties. The large-leaf variety comes from tropical and subtropical regions such as India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and southwestern China; while the small-leaf variety grows in subtropical to temperate zones, such as China's southern provinces, Taiwan, and Japan.



Tea may be broadly categorized as Chinese small-leaf / small-leaf and Assam / large-leaf. While the leaves both varieties have serrated margins, small-leaf tea leaves are distinguishable by their relatively small size; moreover, the leaves of the large-leaf variety are generally wavy in shape.

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## Tea Leaves

As evergreen broadleaf trees, tea plants keep their bright- or dark-green leaves year-round. When the leaves are still tender buds, they are wound tightly, with the back of the leaf facing out. This visible part of the leaf is covered in fine white hairs. As the leaf matures and opens, its back rotates down, and it gradually sheds its hairs. Mature tea leaves are either long and slender or broad and elliptical; all have serrated margins. The veins rise

prominently on the back of the leaf, with the main vein branching into seven to ten vesicles to either side. These branches extend across a third of the leaf, then curl upward to form a network of undulating capillaries.

Overall, the tea plant will grow five to six new leaves every season. In cool spring weather, it takes five to seven days for a leaf to reach maturity, while in the warm weather of summer it usually takes only five days. The leaves grow in a spiral pattern along the branches, which maximizes their exposure to sunlight within a limited space.

In addition, the harvest grades of flowery orange pekoe and orange pekoe are determined by counting from the position of the young leaf [along the branch]. The leaf bud is the "heart," while the tender leaf is the "first leaf." This is followed by the second leaf, the third leaf, and so on. The higher the "leaf count," the more mature the leaves. Leaves become more fibrous as they age.



The leaves grow in a spiral pattern along the branches, maximizing their exposure to sunlight in a limited space.