



HERBAL MEDICINE

"Pu Cha" Use in Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Happy Chinese New Year of the Rooster, America! We have relocated to China, and the Spring Festival is in full swing. Fireworks, pageantry, party life and warm smiles abound during this two-week celebration of the beginning of the Chinese lunar calendar. Tea enthusiasts anxiously await the "spring flush" buds to emerge in one to two weeks, bringing their fresh, vibrant, aromatic character to our palate for our pleasure - and for our health.



Yunnan couple displaying bricked *pu cha* (*shu* style) in tea shop.

All green tea varieties target the *jue yin* (Liver) meridian with their moving, cooling, detoxifying essence. Of course, foods "in season" are generally most appropriate for our consumption. Of particular benefit to the Liver is the *pu-erh* variety of *camellia sinensis*.

Pu-erh (also spelled *puh-er* or *puer*) *cha* shares its name with the town located in the epicenter of the area in Yunnan province where it is grown. "*Pu cha*," as locals refer to it, enjoys a long history. Its trees are the tallest, and considered to be the oldest living (and dead) *camellia sinensis* specimens in all of China. Many believe it was the first *cha* identified - by a human being, that is - about 1,700 years ago! The plant is cultivated in tree form, rather than being cropped into a chest-high shrub like other tea varieties commonly are. The leaf is processed in either green fresh dried (*sheng*) style or dark oxidized (*shu*) style. Both styles are available in either loose leaf or bricked form.



Yunnan loose leaf *nuoshan pu cha* (*sheng* style).

Pu chas are unique in that they are aged for 6-10 or more years to bring out their best flavor. *Sheng pu cha*'s taste is more pungent and bitter than most other green tea varieties. (Other greens tend to be sweeter and mellower tasting). It also infuses more tea taste per gram than most other greens do. *Shu pu cha* has a distinct and rather unusual pungent, earthy taste, yet is sweeter and

more mellow than the *sheng* style. I prefer the *sheng* taste, myself. The *sheng* style is cooling, and the *shu* style is warming to our system.

Traditional Chinese medical action on the body to lower blood fat (cholesterol) is the single most outstanding attribute to the *pu-erh* variety, specifically, over all other varieties of *cha*. It is the preferred tea drunk by Mongolian herdsman, whose diet consists largely of red meat, milk and butter. They consume the tea after meals to aid in digestion, and to treat gastrointestinal stagnation.

A modern Chinese herbal formula out of Shanghai used to lower cholesterol, lose weight, detoxify and enhance the skin lists following ingredients: *pu-erh*, gynostemma, lotus leaf, cratageus, cassia, alisma and mordica (amounts not given), and other ingredients.

Look forward to our upcoming article, "Green Tea Formulas to Beat the Heat," this summer!

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