



## Of tea, tranquility and biodiversity on Mount Wuyi

Ancient tea trees (front) grow side by side with various plants in Masu, a village at the center of Wuyishan National Park. — Wang Yong

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**B**aixian, baixian! Look, there's a beautiful baixian!" I exclaimed as I saw a rare bird bimbbling on a rocky mountain road flanked by dense forests on one side and valley brooks on the other.

"The bird, with long and white feathers on its back and a black plume on its belly, cast a calm glance at us as we slowly drove downhill. With an easy gait, it walked toward a sloping forest, together with two other birds, which looked olive in color.

I was sitting next to the driver, so I had a clear view. Thrilled by the encounter with three rare birds, my wife and two friends sitting in the back seats of our minivan stretched their necks for a better view. They burst with joy when they caught a glimpse of the "trio" tootling along, unstirred by a carload of strangers.

It occurred to me that the rare birds must have believed they were rambling on their home turf.

### High-altitude tea mountains

Our happy encounter with *baixian*, or silver pheasants, happened on the afternoon of November 3, when we left our brookside inn in Masu, a pristine village at the heart of Wuyishan National Park, Fujian Province. Wuyishan means Mount Wuyi. My subsequent researches show silver pheasants are strictly protected wild animals. Male pheasants have white feather with thin and dark streaks, while female ones are generally olive, with varying streaks on their bellies.

We had stayed in the village for three nights and four days, exploring high-altitude tea mountains where the world's black tea originated. There I saw for the first time many 300-year-old tea trees, whose trunks were covered with moss that exuded a lingering cool fragrance.

I found, also for the first time, that antique tea trees grew among a vast variety of plants ranging from bushes to bamboos and pines. Without a local guide, I would have found it difficult to differentiate a tea tree from a sea of surrounding shrubs.

The rich diversity of plant species, in which old tea trees find themselves, is a key character of a high-altitude tea mountain. In contrast, tea gardens on low-lying hills or plains usually feature well-tended tea trees only.

On the tea mountains in Masu, which are about 1,000-1,500 meters above sea level, no pesticide or chemical fertilizer is used. All the plants, including tea trees, grow naturally in the wild, absorbing the best from the elements.

"Frost is a natural pest-killer," said Zhang Mingqing, a senior tea expert, as we stood by a cluster of 300-year-old tea trees on a mountain slope about 1,000 meters above sea level. He and his elder brother Zhang Biqing are now the sixth-generation tea growers. Their ancestors came to cultivate tea mountains more than 300 years ago.

Zhang Mingqing and I enjoy a common interest, we both like the simple beauty of biodiversity on a tea mountain. As we looked down into the remote valley, we saw a myriad of green and yellow leaves waving or wafting in autumn wind. The whole scene looked