

# Common Oolong Cultivars in Taiwan

Edited by : Guang-Chung Lee @ [Hou De Asian Art & Fine Tea](http://www.houdeasianart.com/)  
August 25, 2005

## 1. Chin-Shin (Green-centered) oolong

The most widely cultivated oolong cultivar in Taiwan. Its raw leaves (just harvested) usually demands higher market price than other oolong cultivars from tea plantations of the same elevation. Especially for high-mountain tea plantations (elevation > 1200m), Chin-Shin oolong becomes more dominant, if not exclusive, than other cultivars. According to Taiwan's Council of Agriculture, more than 50% of tea plantations in Taiwan grow Chin-shin oolong as their major cultivar. It produces excellent quality BaoZhong, and not uncommon to see people in Taiwan double and triple check if the Dong-Ding oolong or High Mountain oolong they are buying is genuinely from Chin-Shin oolong. The only downside is its relatively weaker growth and disease-resistance.





## 2. Soft-stem Oolong

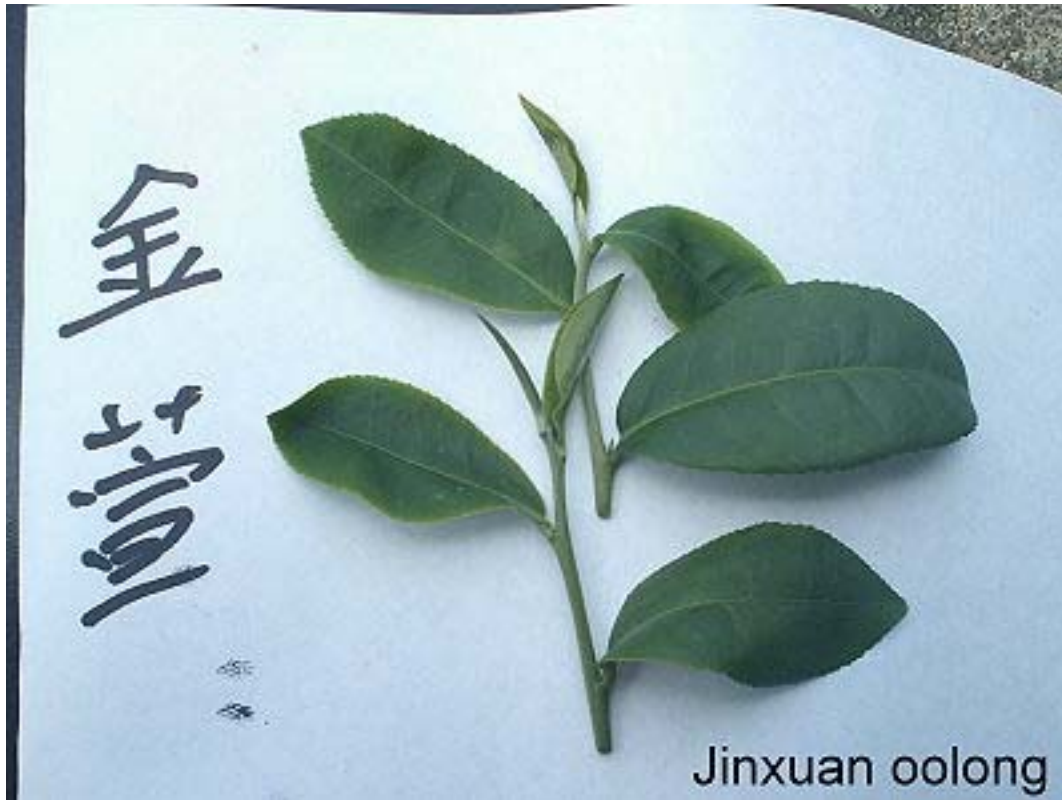
Sometimes people confuse Soft-stem oolong with Chin-shin oolong. In fact, Soft-stem oolong is the original oolong cultivar introduced to Taiwan from Fujian, China in mid 19th century. Legendary says the scholar Mr. Lin Feng-Chi from Lu-Gu (Deer Valley) brought back 36 soft-stem oolong seedlings from Wu-yi, Fujian. 12 seedlings were planted in Dong-Ding Mountain as a gift to his friend who financially supported his travel to China. People said if were not for Mr. Lin, we would not have the world-famous Dong-Ding oolong. Of coz, this legendary is heavily doubted as the timeline does not seem to match (Mr. Lin actually died BEFORE soft-stem oolongs were introduced to Taiwan!). The Chin-shin oolong we just discussed is an improved version of soft-stem oolong by Taiwan's Tea Research Institute. At least, in the eyes of tea farmers, these two are different cultivars. Soft-stem oolong has even weaker growth rate and disease-resistance than Chin-shin oolong. So it has been largely replaced by Chin-shin oolong in most area. Only a few farmers still grow soft-stem oolong out of nostalgia or special orders from clients.



### 3. Jinxuan Oolong (TaiCha #12; 27-son)

During WWII, Japanese occupied and colonized Taiwan. They did a lot of field researches of Taiwan's tea cultivars. So when they left after WWII, they also left behind a well-established tea research institute. From 1945, Prof. Wu continued the research and tried to develop new cultivars from about 5000 seedlings that Japanese left. Not until 1982, "TaiCha #12" was officially declared for a unique and new oolong cultivar that has higher growth rate, very charming "creamy" aroma, and better disease-resistance. Because the tags that indicated TaiCha #12 cultivar in the research field said "2027", many farmers got used to call the new cultivar "27 son" before it got its official name. The original researcher, Prof. Wu, chose the name "Jinxuan" (day lily) in memory of his mother.

Since its introduction, Jinxuan gains increasingly popularity among tea farmers and consumers. Its growth rate can be 30%~50% higher than the more traditional Chin-Shin oolong. And its unique "creamy", sometimes sugarcane-like, aroma and soft liquor quality especially attract a lot of female consumers.



#### 4. Jade Oolong (TaiCha #13; 29-son)

Following a very similar story as Jinxuan, Jade oolong was officially named TaiCha #13 in 1982. The tag in the research field said “2029”, so many farmers are still used to call it “29 son”. The original researcher, Prof. Wu, gave this cultivar a name “Jade”, in memory of his grandmother.

Its growth rate is slightly weaker than Jinxuan, but still about 20% higher than Chin-shin oolong. It has a looser growth form, and is not easy for machine-harvesting. So it did not receive as wide popularity as Jinxuan initially. However, it has very unique and intense floral/orchid aroma so becomes more and more admired.



#### 5. Si-Ji (Four Season) Oolong

Si-ji oolong is a naturally hybrid cultivar found in tea farmer “Da To Hwei” (Big-head Hwei)’s plantation in Mu-Zha, Taiwan. So people sometimes call it “Da-To-Hwei son”. It was introduced to Ming-Jian, NanTou by the tea farmer Lee Chai-Yuan. Its strong growth rate immediately acquired a lot of attention and popularity among tea farmers. Mr. Lee thought the name “Da-To-Hwei son” is not very exquisite, so he gave it a new name “Si-Ji Chuan” (Four-season Spring) to signify its strong growth rate in all four seasons. Sometimes people call it Si-ji oolong.

Si-ji oolong has an intense floral/fruity aroma. Comparing to Chin-shin oolong, the aroma has a “wider” feeling. However, just as its original name people feel its aroma is not as exquisite as Chin-shin oolong. It is more popular in low to medium-elevation tea plantations in Taiwan.



## Conclusion

Just like many things out of Asia, the name “oolong” can be very confusing. Most people say “oolong” refers to a semi-fermented type of tea. But, the name “oolong” also refers to a family of tea cultivars as discussed in this article.

You almost can use any of the oolong cultivar to make green tea, oolong tea, or even black tea, by varying the processing parameters. So the name “Dong-Ding oolong” or “BaoZhong” you usually see do not tell what oolong cultivar was really used to make this tea. You need to ask your tea vendors, and a good tea vendor should be happily provide you the complete information.

We hope through an article like this, we could have a better chance to find genuinely good Formosa oolongs from the very turbulent and gimmick-filled market we are all facing.