

## Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino

30th edition, 2019

### ***The tea gardens of Dazhangshan***

*Wuyuan, Jiangxi, People's Republic of China*

#### **Prize statement**

The Scientific Committee of Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche has unanimously decided to dedicate the thirtieth edition of the International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens (2019) to *The tea gardens of Dazhangshan* situated in Wuyuan County in the north-east of Jiangxi Province, in south China.

The local tea estates are located on the rolling foothills of Mount Dazhang: undulating plantations with distinctive tidy rows of hedges bounded by the forests above and by the rice paddies in the valleys below.

The tea plant (*Camellia sinensis*) – which originates in this corner of China – has shaped the local contemporary landscape that reflects history, projecting into the future the value of a rural environment where humans have established a harmonious relationship with nature.

Today the farms of Dazhangshan have joined up as an association to regulate production, maintaining important links between the many farming families and this rural area, taking care and responsibility for a land that expresses a sense of beauty and equilibrium between nature and human culture when cultivated in this way.

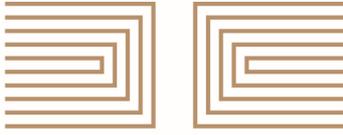
The Dazhangshan cultivations lie in the heart of a region described as China's "golden triangle" of green tea production whose ancient history is documented in *The Classic of Tea* by Lu Yu (703-804), which speaks of the tea grown in the "mountain valleys of Wuyuan".

In 2001, motivated by the unique qualities of the local product, a group of tea growers from the rural county of Wuyuan, which has a population of about 340,000, decided to join together to form an association named after the area where the plantations are situated: Dazhangshan. There are currently a dozen or so farms run by around two hundred and fifty farming families and workers. The farms extend over a total area of around 140,000 *mu* (approximately 9,300 hectares), of which 7,938 *mu* (529 hectares) are planted with tea grown according to the principles of organic farming.

The landscape has acquired its unique appearance through a combination of ceaseless human care and the current farming systems in use that have consolidated its profound links to ancient cultural traditions and resulted in compliance with the exacting standards of organic farming. In 2001, the Dazhangshan Organic Tea Farmer Association became Fair Trade Certified (FLO International) thanks to its constitution and farming practices, and to the "Law on the self-government of the rural population of the People's Republic of China". FLO membership and other forms of certification have helped to promote the production and exportation of Dazhangshan green tea to international markets as well as improving the living conditions of the rural population directly involved in production at local level by means of important targeted measures in the education and social sectors.

Before reaching this place with its vast "tea cultivations", evoking the concept and meaning of "garden" through the Chinese etymology, the research and studies carried out for the various editions of the Carlo Scarpa Prize have consistently drawn attention to the value of the relationship between humans and their care for the land, which must be the starting point of every exploration of landscape, whether a legacy handed down to us or whether it is the legacy that we are responsible for building for future generations.

Our work emerges from the journey taking us from the traces of the splendour of an Arab-Norman garden in the centre of the Mediterranean (*Maredolce-La Favara*, Palermo, 2015 Prize) to *The wild apple forests of the Tien Shan* (Kazakhstan, 2016 Prize), a "site of biodiversity and origin of cultivated landscapes". We can also evoke other paths of research, like those revealing significant figures and places linked to the theme of memory and the return to a land of origin;



from the struggles of the Bosnian farmers in the villages of *Osmače and Brežani* on the plateau above Srebrenica (2014 Prize) to the singular mission of an artist – César Manrique – transforming the volcanic soil of his home island Lanzarote into a garden (*Jardín de Cactus*, Premio 2017). Each of these places also reflects our desire to bring together experiences, words, and policies that have become part of a life plan in the physical space concerned. Recognizing the meaning of history and of personal experience in landscape, and discovering new links to the rural world and its practices are just some of the themes re-emerging through the Carlo Scarpa Prize studies carried out in the context of that vast macrocosm that is China, finding points of contact and forms of reciprocal learning, even in a tiny microcosm like that of Wuyuan County.

The Carlo Scarpa Prize identifies a series of values and teachings in the places and in the experience of the Dazhangshan tea cultivations that can stimulate a proactive reflection on historic and contemporary Chinese rural landscapes as well as a wealth of suggestions that are part of a culture that is aware of the current environmental and social emergencies affecting our entire planet with the aim of diffusing a more enlightened and far-sighted approach to caring for the land.

Its vast surface and huge population make China one of the key players in the process of change affecting our planet today. Considered both the main culprit and victim of these global transformations, China is also our greatest hope for a paradigm shift. Despite the contradictory nature of its general policies – leading to vastly differing interventions in both ecological and social sectors – the rural landscape of Dazhangshan and the ordinariness of its cultivations exemplifies the multifaceted environmental, economic, and cultural approach that must be pursued in contemporary agricultural systems in order to tackle the risks resulting from the rift that has come into being between humans and their environment in the Anthropocene as well as to seek new positive relationships.

It is for these reasons connected to the universal value of place and to its links to the most pressing problems facing contemporary landscape that the Scientific Committee of the *Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche* has decided to present the *Carlo Scarpa seal* to *Hong Peng*, president of the Jiangxi Wuyuan Dazhangshan Organic Food Company and responsible for the *Dazhangshan Organic Tea Farmer Association*.

The Prize now in his hands is an expression of closeness to the people in a place representing the harmonious encounter between the many aspects – economic, ecological, ethical, and aesthetic – that come together in a landscape. It recognizes the role played by their work in drawing attention to the need for a more mindful relationship with the earth and its fruits, both in the context of these “gardens” rooted in their immediate surroundings and in the wider shifting reality of the contemporary “tea routes” that take leaves that are the expression of profound cultural and ecological values from this corner of south China to the rest of the world.