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MAGAZINE

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和敬清寂

CHANOYU
AND
THE RITUALS OF

Tea
Drinking

STEPHANIE HOLLAND



ILLUSTRATIONS
KAZUYO OSHIMA

CHANOYU

Meaning “HOT WATER FOR TEA”

Chanoyu is a Japanese art form with the focus of preparing and serving a bowl of tea with a pure heart.

“Unfortunately, there is not an exact translation for Chanoyu,” says Keiko, a student of the London branch of the Urasenke School of Tea. Also known as “Sadou” or “Chadou”, Chanoyu means “hot water for tea”, however the ritual preparation, serving and drinking of matcha (powdered green tea leaves) is far more symbolic than this literal translation might suggest. “It exists to preserve the tradition and culture of Japan,” says Estuko Takahashi, 68, from Hokkaido. Keiko confirms: “Many will say that it is the art form that represents Japanese aesthetics; Chanoyu incorporates most of the Japanese traditional manners, arts and crafts.”

Widely referred to as “Japanese Tea Ceremony”, preparing, drinking and serving matcha is only one aspect of Chanoyu. Alongside its role in the preservation of Japanese culture, it is also a platform for spiritual exchange between people, where host and guests participate with sincerity and gratitude. For the host, the ritual preparation transcends the occasion itself. “It is considered one of the many ways to experience the stillness inside yourself, through the ritual and repetition,” adds Mizuki Suzuki, 36, from Tokyo.

With a rich history of evolution that spans six centuries, it is no wonder that Chanoyu is a cherished art form. Although matcha was introduced to Japan in the eighth century, it was not until the latter part of the fifteenth century that Chanoyu appeared as an activity with its own culture and form. The idea of tea was all but forgotten in Japan until the arrival of Zen monk Eisai (1141-1215), who brought with him Zen Buddhism, tea seeds, and a book called “Kissa Yokoki” (“Drinking Tea for Health”). His arrival would change the culture of tea in Japan.

“Kissa Yokoki” praised matcha as an elixir that strengthens the internal organs and lengthens life. Shogun Minamoto no Sanemoto (1192-1219) put these claims to the test by drinking a preparation given to him by Eisai to cure a hangover. Wildly impressed by the results, the role of tea in Japanese culture was sealed and a new way of producing and drinking tea took root. Keiko points out: “Buddhist philosophy influenced Chanoyu not only in form but also gave it a spiritual basis”.

“It all started with the monks drinking matcha in the temples. In the next few centuries, the matcha drinking custom spread to the nobility, warrior classes, finally reaching the common people.” By the fifteenth century tea had become the drink of choice. Large informal tea gatherings called “chakai” and the development of instructions for preparing the room and utensils were the two key developments that further transformed the culture of tea, and Chanoyu was born.

Among the many credited with the evolution of Chanoyu, it was Sen no Rikyu (1522-91) who influenced its transition from “play” to a spiritual activity. Using his keen eye for beauty, he created original utensils such as tea bowls that introduced a wabi (quiet simplicity) aesthetic and the notion of “wabi-cha” (tea of simple and quiet simplicity). This style of Chanoyu continues through three Sen Family branches, including Urasenke. Rikyu said: “What is tea? Simply boiling water, making tea and drinking it.” It is thought that the simplicity of Chanoyu creates an enduring charm that enables it to maintain its relevance today.



*When both the host
and guest have exchanged
their minds,
Only then does the
water truly boil.
Since the garden path
is a way
Beyond this
transient world
Why not shake off the dust
Which soils the mind?
What is tea?
Simply boiling water,
Making tea and drinking it.
Know that this
is fundamental.
The garden path,
the hut, the hosts and guests
All are whipped together
in the tea and are without
distractions.*

Sen no Rikyu,
(1521-91)

In modern Japan its influence and style is widely recognised. "There are religious ceremonies in temples and shrines all over Japan, where tea is served for the deities by the Grand Tea Masters. The Chanoyu architecture is still studied, copied, and used by architects. Kaiseki meals served in Japanese restaurants have their origins in Chanoyu," Keiko reveals. Despite the influence of Chanoyu in modern Japan, don't be mistaken; this is not the way that people prepare and drink tea on a daily basis! "It's a hobby people take up," says Estuko. Mizuki agrees: "Chanoyu is only taken up by those who are interested in it as a hobby or to learn traditional etiquette. Some of us grow up without any experience of Chanoyu."

Young women and, more recently, young men take Chanoyu lessons to learn traditional Japanese etiquette, while non-Japanese study the art form to experience the serenity, order and peaceful calm instilled by the experience. What does the ceremony involve? Keiko explains: "The host prepares the garden, house, tearoom, cooks the meal to be served and makes the sweets representing the best in season, fetches the best water from a well for the tea, chooses matcha, flowers, incense, charcoal, arranges the flowers, and carefully chooses the utensils that will express the theme for the gathering." Themes might express harmony (wa), reverence (kei), purity (sei) and tranquillity (jakui); they might also reflect the seasons and other tea-related events. Guests discuss the utensils, arts and crafts, history, knowledge and seasonal feelings.

The ritual preparation together with the meticulous attention to detail and precision creates a unique experience. "Who would then deny that when I am sipping tea in my tearoom I am swallowing the whole universe with it and that this very moment of my lifting the bowl to my lips is eternity itself transcending time and space?" reflects Daisetz T. Suzuki in his book *Zen and Japanese Culture* (co-authored with Richard M. Jaffe).

"The main aim of a practitioner of Chanoyu is to be able to invite guests and welcome them with utmost refined Japanese hospitality. To achieve it one needs to have an open heart with no prejudice or self-complacency," says Keiko. "When one starts learning and practising Chanoyu one will naturally be able to integrate harmony, respect and purity in one's life. Starting from very small gestures of respect, not only to human beings, but also to nature and inanimate objects; naturally handling objects with care; being able to concentrate on the task at hand; finding time to oneself even in the most chaotic times." These principles are known as *Wa Kei Sei Jaku* (harmony, respect and purity).

Although the preparation, serving and drinking of tea in the UK may not reflect the notion of 'wabi-cha', we drink it with gusto: according to The Tea Advisory Panel, 40% of our fluid intake today will be tea! Although from the same plant, *Camellia sinensis*, green tea is reportedly healthier than black. It is packed full of compounds called polyphenols that have high levels of therapeutic activity, most notably EGCG which inhibits the enzyme required for cancer cell growth, according to the latest research conducted by Purdue University in the US. We are learning what the Chinese have known for almost five thousand years: green tea is good for general health and wellbeing and longevity.

It comes as no surprise, then, that matcha lies at the core of a cherished art form. As an anchor for tradition, a platform for spiritual exchange and a meditative practice for the soul, Chanoyu has a place in the hearts and minds of many, regardless of age, gender and experience. "It is and it will always be (important). It heals our soul," reflects Mizuki's mother, Ryouichi Suzuki, 76, from Tokyo.

WHITE TEA IS THOUGHT TO BE RICHER IN ANTIOXIDANTS THAN GREEN TEA AND IS USED IN CHINESE MEDICINE TO DETOXYFY AS WELL AS BOOST THE IMMUNE SYSTEM.

ROOIBOS IS FULL OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS, HIGH IN FLAVONOIDS WHICH HELP WITH ALLERGIES, AS WELL AS ALPHA HYDROXY AND ZINC THAT ARE EXCELLENT FOR THE SKIN.

NETTLE TEA IS RICH IN CALCIUM, AMINO ACIDS AND VITAMINS, MAKING IT HELPFUL FOR URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS, REDUCING BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS AND ELIMINATING BACTERIAL AND VIRAL INFECTIONS. IT IS ALSO FANTASTIC FOR THE SKIN AND HAIR!

DANDELION TEA CONTAINS A RICH SOURCE OF NUTRIENTS AND OTHER COMPOUNDS THAT HELP TO DRAIN YOUR LIVER AND GALL BLADDER, MAKING IT A GREAT DETOX TEA.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:
KAZUYO OSHIMA IS A TALENTED ILLUSTRATOR, CONTRIBUTING REGULAR DESIGNS TO YOGA MAGAZINE. AS PART OF HER ON-GOING CHARITABLE WORK, KAZUYO HAS CREATED A SERIES OF UNIQUE POST CARD SETS (INCLUDING ILLUSTRATIONS USED IN THIS FEATURE), WITH ALL PROCEEDS BEING DONATED TO THE JAPANESE TSUNAMI APPEAL FUND. SEE HER WORK AT [HTTP://QOMIMI.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://qomimi.blogspot.com)

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WAY OF TEA IS GIVEN ON THE FIRST AND THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH AT THE "WAEI-AN" TEAROOM IN THE URASENKE GALLERY OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

VISIT URASENKE.ORBIX.CO.UK
FOR MORE DETAILS.

The (Japanese) character for harmony also reads 'gentleness of spirit' (yawaragi) and to my mind 'gentleness of spirit' seems to describe better the spirit governing the whole procedure of the art of tea.

Daisetz T. Suzuki in his book
Zen and Japanese Culture
(coauthored with Richard M. Jaffe)
On the experience of drinking tea in a tea room

*When tea is made with
water drawn from the depths of mind
Whose bottom is beyond measure,
We really have what is called cha-no-yu.*

Toyotomi Hideyoshi,
patron of the art of tea,
16th century

