



The Book of Tea

Kakuzo Okakura, Elise Grilli (Foreword)

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Now available in a gorgeous hardcover slipcase edition, this "object d'art" will be sure to add grace and elegance to tea shelves, coffee tables and bookshelves. A keepsake enjoyed by tea lovers for over a hundred years, *The Book of Tea Classic Edition* will enhance your enjoyment and understanding of the seemingly simple act of making and drinking tea.

In 1906 in turn-of-the-century Boston, a small, esoteric book about tea was written with the intention of being read aloud in the famous salon of Isabella Gardner, Boston's most notorious socialite. It was authored by Okakura Kakuzo, a Japanese philosopher, art expert, and curator. Little known at the time, Kakuzo would emerge as one of the great thinkers of the early 20th century, a genius who was insightful, witty—and greatly responsible for bridging Western and Eastern cultures. Okakura had been taught at a young age to speak English and was more than capable of expressing to Westerners the nuances of tea and the Japanese Tea Ceremony.

In *The Book of Tea Classic Edition*, he discusses such topics as Zen and Taoism, but also the secular aspects of tea and Japanese life. The book emphasizes how Teaism taught the Japanese many things; most importantly, simplicity. Kakuzo argues that tea-induced simplicity affected the culture, art and architecture of Japan.

Nearly a century later, Kakuzo's *The Book of Tea Classic Edition* is still beloved the world over, making it an essential part of any tea enthusiast's collection. Interwoven with a rich history of Japanese tea and its place in Japanese society is a poignant commentary on Asian culture and our ongoing fascination with it, as well as illuminating essays on art, spirituality, poetry, and more. *The Book of Tea Classic Edition* is a delightful cup of enlightenment from a man far ahead of his time.

The Book of Tea Details

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From Reader Review The Book of Tea for online ebook

umberto says

First published in 1906, this classic work written in English having only seven short chapters is something rare and essential to those interested in Japanese culture. It is rare because few Japanese writers have written in English, even Natsume Soseki who studied in England in 1901-1903

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natsume_Soseki) wrote most of his stories and novels in Japanese. Moreover, it is essential since reading this book would broaden our understanding on how and why tea in Japan has long been appreciatively admired, consumed and treasured.

When I read Chapter 1 The Cup of Humanity (8 pages), Mr Okakura has impressively amazed me as a well-read writer due to his writing scope concerning Dr Samuel Johnson, the great lexicographer, whose tea consumption was legendarily recorded. A reason is that I know his tea addiction from reading his monumental biography by James Boswell, therefore, it is my delight to read this section:

Samuel Johnson draws his own portrait as 'a hardened and shameless tea-drinker, who for twenty years diluted his meals with only the infusion of the fascinating plant; who with tea amused the evening, with tea solaced the midnight, and with tea welcomed the morning.' (p. 15)

Historically, this extract would inform us on this amazing drink preferably hot, it seems to me:

The tea plant, a native of southern China, was known from very early times to Chinese botany and medicine. It is alluded to in the classics under the various names of Tou, Tseh, Chung, Kha, and Ming, and was highly prized for possessing the virtues of relieving fatigue, delighting the soul, strengthening the will, and repairing the eyesight. ... The Taoists claimed it as an important ingredient of the elixir of mortality. The Buddhists used it extensively to prevent drowsiness during their long hours of meditation. (p. 22)

And what would you do with some tea itself nearby after reading this revelation?

... It was of such a beverage that Lotung, a Tang poet, wrote: 'The first cup moistens my lips and throat, the second cup breaks my loneliness, the third cup searches my barren entrail but to find therein some five thousand volumes of odd ideographs. The fourth cup raises a slight perspiration, -- all the wrong of life passes away through my pores. At the fifth cup I am purified; the sixth cup calls me to the realms of immortals. The seventh cup -- ah, but I could take no more! I only feel the breath of cool wind that rises in my sleeves. Where is Horaisan? Let me ride on this sweet breeze and waft away thither.' (p. 25)

Sara ? says

In questa breve opera Okakura ci illustra l'orientalità dell'Oriente servendosi del tè come simbolo. In origine medicina e solo successivamente bevanda, il tè arrivò ad influenzare anche la ceramica cinese (Lu Wu, poeta che formulò il Codice del Tè, ritenne che il colore ideale per la tazza da tè fosse il blu, poiché esaltava il verde della bevanda), e Okakura ci narra delle sue origini, della sua storia antica e della sua diffusione, per poi concentrare l'attenzione sulla sua importanza come simbolo in Giappone. La cerimonia del tè, infatti, è caratteristica peculiare di questo paese ed ebbe origine dal rituale zen: essa, più che una cerimonia

propriamente religiosa, è un sacramento di carattere sociale, un vero e proprio rito che sancisce la sottomissione e l'obbedienza tipicamente giapponesi agli antenati.

Una lettura scorrevole ed istruttiva che non risente del secolo trascorso da quando è stata scritta e che soddisfa la curiosità di chi, come me, voleva saperne di più sul consumo di questa bevanda da un punto di vista storico, artistico e filosofico.

Lubna ALajarmah says

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Kirstine says

“Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life.”

It's not a book about tea, in the sense that it's not about how to drink your tea, what sorts you can get and what fancy properties they have and should you put milk in it or not. However, it does explain why this golden beverage might hold such sway over us, even today:

“There is a subtle charm in the taste of tea which makes it irresistible and capable of idealisation. Western humourists were not slow to mingle the fragrance of their thought with its aroma. It has not the arrogance of wine, the self-consciousness of coffee, nor the simpering innocence of cocoa.”

Having been written in 1906 you'd think it'd be a bit dated, but it could just as well have been written today. What Okakura has to say about art, philosophy, nature, and the gap between Eastern and Western civilizations, and how to bridge it, is as relevant and as spot on today as it was a hundred years ago. It's a bit scary really, but goes to show, perhaps, how delicate a thing it is to understand a different culture, and how delicate and slow you have to go in order not to ruin it. He simply does it all by talking about tea, and how it can help you understand all these things.

A few teasers on some of the things he has to say about **art**;

“We must remember, however, that art is of value only to the extent that it speaks to us. It might be a universal language if we ourselves were universal in our sympathies. Our finite nature, the power of tradition and conventionality, as well as our hereditary instincts, restrict the scope of our capacity for artistic enjoyment. Our very individuality establishes in one sense a limit to our understanding; and our aesthetic personality seeks its own affinities in the creations of the past. It is true that with cultivation our sense of art appreciation broadens, and we become able to enjoy many hitherto unrecognised expressions of beauty. But, after all, we see only our own image in the universe,—our particular idiosyncracies dictate the mode of our perceptions. The tea-masters collected only objects which fell strictly within the measure of their individual appreciation.”

human nature, our culture and nature itself;

“Scratch the sheepskin and the wolf within us will soon show his teeth. It has been said that a man at ten is an animal, at twenty a lunatic, at thirty a failure, at forty a fraud, and at fifty a criminal. Perhaps he becomes a criminal because he has never ceased to be an animal. Nothing is real to us but hunger, nothing sacred except our own desires. Shrine after shrine has crumbled before our eyes; but one altar is forever preserved, that whereon we burn incense to the supreme idol,—ourselves. Our god is great, and money is his Prophet! We devastate nature in order to make sacrifice to him. We boast that we have conquered Matter and forget that it is Matter that has enslaved us. What atrocities do we not perpetrate in the name of culture and refinement!”

philosophy;

“The usefulness of a water pitcher dwelt in the emptiness where water might be put, not in the form of the pitcher or the material of which it was made. Vacuum is all potent because all containing. In vacuum alone motion becomes possible. One who could make of himself a vacuum into which others might freely enter would become master of all situations. The whole can always dominate the part.”

and so on, and so on. It is on the whole a very enlightening read on many subjects, all of them centered around tea and its many abilities.

“The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about man and nature. It is hygiene, for it enforces cleanliness; it is economics, for it shows comfort in simplicity rather than in the complex and costly; it is moral geometry, inasmuch as it defines our sense of proportion to the universe.”

So if you want to know about the history of tea, the cultural significance it had and still has, and the philosophy that surrounds it and that it's cultivated through the ages, then this is what you need to read.

Even if you are an avid coffee drinker and would never dare look upon a cup of tea, then you will learn a thing or two from this.

Deniz Balc? says

Çay i?i Uzak-do?u'da özellikle Japonya'da bizdeki gibi yalnız bir içme al??kanl??? de?il. Eylemin yap?lmam amac? ve ?ekli, oldukça spiritüel baz? ?eylere dayand?r?lm??. Hem ruhani bir eylem olarak yap?lan, hem de estetik seremonilerle bir haz alma, dinginle?me arac?na dönü?ürülen çay olay?na, onlar?n gözüyle bakmak için kitap en do?ru tercih. Zaten önemli bir klasik say?lmakta bu kitap. Ancak daha ayr?nt?l? ve pragmatik bilgiler sunaca?? yönünde beklentim vard?. Bekledi?ime göre oldukça sade kald? kitap, o yüzden üç y?ld?z verdim.

6/10

Aubrey says

Meanwhile, let us have a sip of tea. The afternoon glow is brightening the bamboos, the fountains are bubbling with delight, the soughing of the pines is heard in our kettle. Let us

dream of evanescence, and linger in the beautiful foolishness of things.

4.5/5

The last time I felt what this book conjured up in me, I was in Medieval Art, transcribing the parts of cathedrals in relation to aspects of religion, art, and space. Approaching the choir on high through the humbling nave, raising the eyes up to regard icons and murals as the voices lifts up in *Kýrie, eléison*, the intersection of westeast aisle and northsouth transept ensuring that should the images not be there, you will still be embodied in the Stations of the Cross. I've forgotten most of the terminology, but the essence is still there: that contextual crossroads where seemingly disparate pieces of your life come together, granting you a glimpse of all the myriad backbones of history converging onto a single point, nothing more than a moment and an insight and you.

I may have much more of the Occidental than Oriental in the marrow of my bones, but the little I've picked up of the Japanese culture so far was enough to set the appreciative tone regarding this particular work. It is a peculiar one in the way of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the writing in no way implying the publication date of 1905 and a position betwixt the earlier *House of Mirth* and the later *White Fang*. The title is also misleading, or rather the tricky type that lures your assumptions in and laughs as they run. This is indeed a book of tea, but tea in terms of history, in terms of movements both religious and aesthetic, in terms of a life of culture entire in the word *chanoyu*, the way of tea grounded in the fundamentals of philosophy, art, and the lifeline of Japan. Those of the so called West, be prepared to bear for once the scrutinizing eye, and with patient thoughtfulness you will be guaranteed to learn.

However, with every facing off between Japan and the all too encroaching powers of the author's day, there is a bevy of insightful knowledge and beauteous states of mind, ranging from discussion of the architecture of tea-rooms to essays on the meaning of flowers in relation to the tea ceremony and all manner of schools in between, all of which concern themselves as heavily with thought as they do with tea. Taoism and Zennism are here, both explained and expanded upon from China to Japan until finally, Teaism itself develops. For such a small packet of papers, this book packs quite the punch.

The whole ideal of Teaism is a result of this Zen conception of greatness in the smallest incidents of life. Taoism furnished the basis for aesthetic ideals, Zennism made them practical.

If I said much more, I would have to delve into summary, so I will leave it to you readers to discover this small, yet potent, piece of literature. Chances are you will never look at anything the same way again, and will simply have to mull a while in order to regain your bearings. Over a cup of tea, perhaps?

For a moment [cherry blossoms] hover like bejeweled clouds and dance above the crystal streams; then, as they sail away on the laughing waters they seem to say: "Farewell, O Spring! We are on to Eternity."

????? says

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Banzai says

Okakura Kakuzo writes that he is "not a polite teaist." This is true. In the Book of Tea, he more or less shames the world, in particular his own countrymen, for subscribing to Western aesthetics. He also makes it clear how he feels about said aesthetics and the junk art coming out of the cluttered, cheap and materialistic culture of 19th century Europe and America. That said, I didn't like this book because I'm a self-deprecating whitey.

I liked this book first and foremost because it's pretty! I might have been ashamed to list that as my number one appeal, but after reading the book I'm quite proud. As far as books go, this one is the perfect size, looking lovely on my bedside table whether open, closed, or in the romantic cardboard sleeve it came in.

Second, for the inky portrait of Okakura Kakuzo in the front. He's looking off to the distance, lifting a cigarette to his jaw like some Confucian Marlboro man. The portrait says in eight thousand ways what an introduction couldn't about the opium-induced ire I'm about to launch into.

Third, (because any aestheticist does things in threes or fives) for passages such as these, where he is so irritated at the violent, soul-less populace for leaving the minimalist ritual of his romanticized East, he forgoes talking to the reader entirely and chooses to address the flowers instead:

"Tell me, gentle flowers, teardrops of the stars, standing in the garden, nodding your heads to the bees as they sing of the dews and the sunbeams, are you aware of the fearful doom that awaits you?"

In all seriousness, the book is an important historical record of a time when many of Asia's ancient art and treasures were in danger of being lost forever due to being considered "unfashionable." Kakuzo and a band of artists and intelligistas from several countries formed the Kanga-kai to preserve Japanese art technique and tradition. And yes, you do learn about tea. Take it from me and don't try to wrap your brain around dates and key figures in Asiatic history. Choose, instead, to transcend the words and embrace the lyrical nature of the lesson intended.

Rowena says

This book was just wonderful. It discusses the history of teaism in Asia (mainly Japan but also China). It's written in a very poetic and philosophical manner. Not only does the book talk about tea, it also talks about how tea has influenced Japanese culture, especially Japanese cuisine, clothing, literature and art.

I learned some quite surprising facts. For example, onions were added to tea in some places, and tea-drinking was considered to be an occupation of depraved people!

The book also goes into detail about the Japanese tea ceremony and how Japanese tea houses are built in a specific way for atmosphere. Everything is exact : the decor, the utensils, the clothing of the participants, the asymmetric nature, the seemingly fragile architecture...It's quite amazing the amount of detail that goes into conducting a tea ceremony.

There are also many myths and legends added anecdotally. Also, some information on Buddhism and Taoism and Confucianism was included, as well as poetry. As a lover of flowers, I enjoyed the ode to flowers.

One of favourite quotes is "But I am not to be a polite Teaist. So much harm has been done already by the mutual misunderstanding of the New World and the Old, that one need not apologize for contributing his tithe to the furtherance of a better understanding." I wholeheartedly agree with this! Additionally, "we have developed along different lines, but there is no reason why one should not supplement the other." Hear, hear!

Okakura is definitely very patriotic. (Side note : one of my Japanese co-workers told me that Okakura was forced to commit seppuku (Samurai ritualistic suicide) as he was heavily involved in politics.) On one hand, he bemoans how the West supposedly looks down on Japan and then he displays ethnocentric qualities himself, especially when he noted that Western homes have a "vulgar display of riches." Hmm.... That was my only gripe with this book. I will definitely be re-reading it.

Bushra says

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Mohamed Al says

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Matt Riddle says

The Book of Tea by Okakura Kakuz?

Too little tea, we learn, was a Japanese expression used in reference to a person too busy to stop and smell the roses. Too much tea, then, refers to a person so busy smelling the roses he has little time for much else. In my humble estimation, Mr. Okakura had a little too much tea in him.

The Book of Tea makes a number of interesting points. I agree with its author that we Occidentals tend to downplay the Orient's contributions to such fields as philosophy, religion, art, music, etc. -- although I would guess that's probably a lot less true today than when the book was published in 1906. I also agree with the

author's contention that Hesperian displays of art and culture tend toward 'promiscuity' and could do well to take lessons from the East's more minimalist traditions.

Okakura loses me, however, when he tries to make of Teaism a religion -- specifically, Taoism in disguise. I have no quarrel with the cultivation of refined aesthetic sensibilities, but I consider such cultivation to be an accomplishment rather than a virtue. This might seem like splitting hairs, but I believe it's a very important distinction. For me, cultivating refined sensibilities is something akin to working very hard to learn to swim a mean 100M backstroke. Kudos to you if you've done it, but if you haven't it's a lack of accomplishment on your part rather than a moral or ethical failing.

Okakura's would-be marriage of refined aesthetic sensibilities with virtue reminds me very much of the Russian concept poshlost. We have no good English translation of poshlost is because it combines characteristics which our English-speaking tradition does not [thank goodness!:] necessarily combine: ethical or spiritual bankruptcy with common lack of taste. Even my main man Anton Pavlovich -- who in *The Cherry Orchard* pokes great fun at the concept -- falls victim to it in *Three Sisters*. Natasha's wearing of colors which clash is undeniable evidence of her poshlost and a dead giveaway that by the end of the play she will become the shameless adulteress and household tyrant she does. How many of you believe that a failure to recognize which colors clash represents an unambiguous signal of turpitude?

I consider myself to have great taste in literature and rather plebeian taste in food and drink. Much as I might like sometimes to pretend to the contrary, I don't actually believe that my enjoyment of Gogol' or Twain makes me the moral superior of some other sad schmuck enjoying his Grisham or Crichton or Louis L'Amour. Nor do I believe the tea master's appreciation of his briskly whisked goodness renders him my spiritual superior as I enjoy my skim milk and peanut butter sandwich.

P.S. It has been kindly brought to my attention that I've neglected to mention Okakura's offer of the tea master's gentle, contemplative Taoist perspective as a native Japanese alternative to the stern, imperialistic Shinto perspective gathering steam in Japan at the time *The Book of Tea* was written. That's an inexcusable oversight on my part, especially given that I've read *The Rape of Nanking* by Iris Chang. Okakura's meditative appeal against the strident militarization of his homeland's culture is eerily foreboding of the atrocities shortly to come in his countrymen's near future. I would heartily recommend that anyone with an interest in modern Asian history read *The Book of Tea* and *The Rape of Nanking* back to back.

Sidharth Vardhan says

In the trembling grey of a spring dawn, when the birds were whispering in mysterious cadence among the trees, have you not felt that they were talking to their mates about the flowers?"

Wow!

"True beauty could be discovered only by one who mentally complete the incomplete."

Just wow!

"Rikiu loved to quote an old poem which says: "To those who long only for flowers, fain would I show the full-blown spring which abides in the toiling buds of snow-covered hills."

More wow!

"The tea-master, Kobori-Enshiu, himself a daimyo, has left to us these memorable words: "Approach a great painting as thou wouldest approach a great prince." In order to understand a masterpiece, you must lay yourself low before it and await with bated breath its least utterance."

Wow ad infinitum!

Proper review:

"Meanwhile, let us have a sip of tea. The afternoon glow is brightening the bamboos, the fountains are bubbling with delight, the soughing of the pines is heard in our kettle. Let us dream of evanescence, and linger in the beautiful foolishness of things."

Beautiful writing all around. In terms of prose, it has to be the best Japanese book I have read. Okakura's purpose is to show west the depth of thought that is contained in simplicity of Eastern culture, Teaism in particular. Teaism is a culture/life style in Japan which values things like modesty, simplicity etc - in many ways very opposite of consumerism that plagues present day world. Besides general history of tea and Teaism, the author discusses a bunch of other subjects - such as need of a dialogue between West and East, religions (Taoism, Budhism, Jainism etc), flowers, poetry, translation, philosophy, art, aesthetics, architecture etc within a very short space and without ever discarding his beautiful prose.

About Taoism:

"The ancient sages never put their teachings in systematic form. They spoke in paradoxes, for they were afraid of uttering half-truths. They began by talking like fools and ended by making their hearers wise. Laotse himself, with his quaint humour, says, "If people of inferior intelligence hear of the Tao, they laugh immensely. It would not be the Tao unless they laughed at it."

About Translations:

"Translation is always a treason, and as a Ming author observes, can at its best be only the reverse side of a brocade- all the threads are there, but not the subtlety of colour or design."

Philosophy:

"One day Soshi was walking on the bank of a river with a friend. 'How delightfully the fishes

'are enjoying themselves in the water!' exclaimed Soshi. His friend spake to him thus: 'You are not a fish; how do you know that the fishes are enjoying themselves?' 'You are not myself', returned Soshi; 'how do you know that I do not know that the fishes are enjoying themselves?'''

Art criticism:

An eminent Sung critic once made a charming confession. Said he: "In my young days I praised the master whose pictures I liked, but as my judgement matured I praised myself for liking what the masters had chosen to have me like."

More quotes:

"The primeval man in offering the first garland to his maiden thereby transcended the brute. He became human in thus rising above the crude necessities of nature. He entered the realm of art when he perceived the subtle use of the useless."

"Man at ten is an animal, at twenty a lunatic, at thirty a failure, at forty a fraud, and at fifty a criminal."

"Tell me, gentle flowers, teardrops of the stars, standing in the garden, nodding your heads to the bees as they sing of the dews and sunbeams, are you aware of the fearful doom that awaits you? Dream on, sway and frolic while you may in the gentle breeze of summer. To-morrow a ruthless hand will close around your throats. You will be wrenched, torn asunder limb by limb, and borne away from your quiet homes. The wretch, she may be passing fair. She may say how lovely you are while her fingers are still moist with your blood...It may even be your lot to be confined in some narrow vessel with only stagnant water to quench the maddening thirst that warns of ebbing life."

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

Just a few things:

* If you find yourself moving 13 times across 4 cities in 3 states over a period of less than 3 years, you'll notice that your bedroom looks more and more like a Japanese tea room each time.

* Monzaemon Chikamatsu is referred to in this text as the "Japanese Shakespeare." Will I be seeking this man's work out as soon as possible? Damn right! Pfft...don't threaten *me* with a good time.

* "We have an old saying in Japan that a woman cannot love a man who is truly vain, for there is no crevice in his heart for love to enter and fill up. In art vanity is equally fatal to sympathetic feeling, whether on the

part of the artist or the public." Where does this philosophy of art and ego leave someone like, say, Salvador Dali or James Brown? Yes, I just used those two names together for the same illustrative purpose.

* You know that Churchill quote about being a liberal at twenty and a conservative at forty? Screw that quote. This one's better: "Man at ten is an animal, at twenty a lunatic, at thirty a failure, at forty a fraud, and at fifty a criminal."

* This book is about art, architecture, philosophy, comparative Eastern spirituality, interior design (yep), meditation, simplicity, life, death, love, hate, desire, debauchery, flower gardening, Eastern/Western relations and perceptions, and, uh...what else? Oh yeah, tea.

* Dear children of the world: "Tell me, gentle flowers, teardrops of the stars, standing in the garden, nodding your heads to the bees as they sing of the dews and sunbeams, are you aware of the fearful doom that awaits you? Dream on, sway and frolic while you may in the gentle breeze of summer. To-morrow a ruthless hand will close around your throats. You will be wrenched, torn asunder limb by limb, and borne away from your quiet homes. The wretch, she may be passing fair. She may say how lovely you are while her fingers are still moist with your blood...It may even be your lot to be confined in some narrow vessel with only stagnant water to quench the maddening thirst that warns of ebbing life." How lovely is that?

* This is a beautiful and informative work. What else do ya need, huh?

Amal says

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Carol says

That ending. Wow.

Steven Walle says

This was a very good book on the history of tea and its importance in the eastern cultures. Tea started out as a medicine and grew itself into a beverage. The book also speaks of the religion of Japan of Teaism.

I recommend this book to all.

Enjoy and Be Blessed.

Diamond

mai ahmd says

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valleys says

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