

Chado

Cultivation of Self Knowledge and Inner Peace

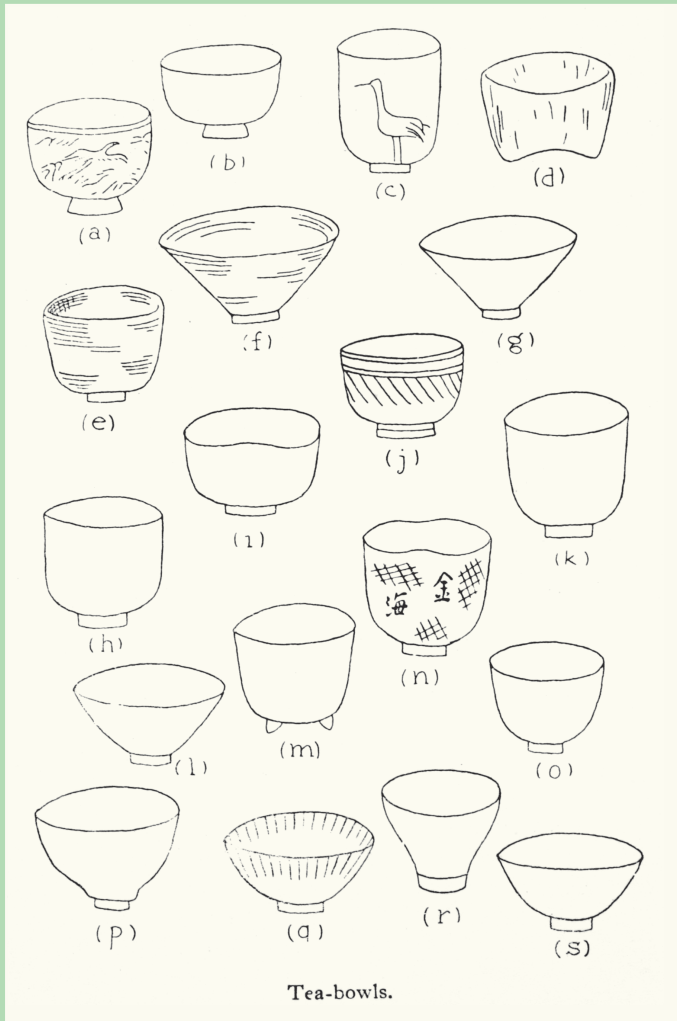
by Scott Sôshin Rogers

In Japan, *Chado*, the Way of Tea, involves the preparation and drinking of *matcha*, powdered green tea, seemingly a very simple act in itself. However, when orchestrated by a master, the event becomes a spiritual occasion wherein the participants experience a suspended passing of time and a connectedness to their surroundings through the shared sensory and refined spatial aesthetic. The *Chado* experience enables the participants to transcend the mundane world in the midst of a mundane activity.

What stands unique to the tradition of *Chado*, typically known in western societies as the tea ceremony, is its celebration of the transience of the human condition. This notion is expressed in the phrase, *ichigo ichi e*, literally, one chance, one meeting. This signifies that each moment in our existence is truly unique and exquisite and when we share a bowl of tea — now — is a moment never to be repeated and, as such, is the moment when we reveal our true nature.

This practice of the preparation and service of *matcha* green tea is unique to the time and place where an attendance is held and is understood within the field of practice as a ‘way’, reflecting the Taoist concept in which an enlightened person reaches to the depths of one’s own inner being while thoroughly in harmony with the task of everyday life. For although there are proscribed formula and guidelines to each element of the preparation and service, an accomplished practitioner is one who has gone beyond the ‘rules’ and responds to each ebb and flow of the occasion in a thoroughly sincere and ‘unconsciously natural’ manner, which is as true to the rhythm of breath and heartbeat of the participants as to the timeliness of the movements and conversational flow.

Above: A diagram of a tea house set in a garden (or roji), with a waiting pavilion on the left and the tea room on the right. (*Cha-no-Yu: the Japanese tea ceremony*, by Arthur L. Sadler.)



The tea ceremony requires special implements, such as this teaspoon and matching holder. (*Sado no Genryu*, vol. 4, Kyoto, Tankosha.) Tea bowls can take a variety of shapes and sizes. (*Cha-no-Yu: the Japanese tea ceremony*, by Arthur L. Sadler.)



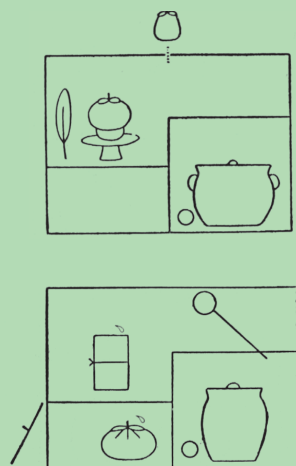
During the tea occasion, normally ordinary, mundane acts are transformed into a heightened drama through whole-hearted attentiveness and sincere exchanges among the participants. *Chado* is the pursuit of performing in the continuity of spirit to reveal one's true nature.

Chado links back to the Zen Buddhist tradition wherein grasping the moment is the heart of the practice. The practice of drinking tea in a ceremonial manner originated in China at Buddhist temples where, prior to long sessions of meditation, the monks would imbibe rich tea concoctions as a means of quieting the mind while bringing the desired stimulating effect of the tea. This practice was eventually adopted in Japan within a wider range of activities that defined the acquisition of scholarly and spiritual cultivation when the Zen priest Eisai (1141–1215) introduced tea to Japan. At first, tea was established as a medicinal beverage suitable for maintaining health and vigour. Tea eventually came to be

consumed as a beverage of refreshment at public events held at temples and shrines, and sold by itinerant tea vendors at scenic settings.

The form of tea service prevalent in Japan at the shogun's palace and the residences of warrior leaders during this early period, although not known in detail, is believed to have followed a variant style of preparation conducted in Buddhist temples in China. The preparation was conducted in an anteroom adjacent to the formal 'banquet-style' room where the guests, typically those of superior social standing, would receive and drink the tea. Once prepared, the tea and other additional accompaniments to the tea would then be ferried into the larger, more spectacular setting of the banquet room. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that on these occasions, emphasis was placed on the grandeur of the service to the eminent guests. The selection and arrangement of utensils manifested in this tradition referred to as 'aristocratic tea' tended to reflect the formal,

Diagrams have long been used to suggest possible arrangements of tea utensils; these are described in the 1593 *Nanboroku* — ‘A Handbook on the Way of Tea’. (*Sado Koten Zenshu*, vol. 4, Kyoto, Tankoshinsha.)



‘Kneading tea leaves’, c. 1890, hand-coloured photograph. (*Hyakunemae no Nihon*, Tokyo, Shogakkan.)

stylised taste of the imported Chinese objects. This formula of preparation and service was aesthetically principled by the expression ‘elegant and sensuously beautiful’. The occasion for sharing tea was merely a display of splendour to satisfy the tastes of the powerful warlords and those in the higher social order. The power of the occasion rested on the eminence of the wares. The association of tea as a spiritual pursuit had yet to occur.

The eventual emergence of the *wabi-cha* style of tea, developed first by Murata Shuko and ultimately refined by Sen Rikyu, was more in keeping with the Zen Buddhist principles of humility and simplicity and established a manner of practice that has continued to this day.

The *wabi* ideal emphasised non-attachment through simple and quotidian things, using the environs of a small tea hut in which to prepare and share the tea experience. Approximately three square metres, the room was reminiscent of a hut used for contemplative retreat, a tradition already legendary as a means toward spiritual cultivation and self-knowledge.

Harmony between host and guest

What does occur between host and guest when they share a bowl of tea? The host does, in fact, exercise great detail in preparing for tea and receiving guests to create a setting and mood for a harmonious experience. When people gather for tea they are purposely taking the time to remove

themselves from the hubbub of daily affairs and, if but for a brief period, thoroughly immerse themselves in the preparation and partaking of tea.

After the formal greetings have elapsed there is an elevated sense of awareness among the participants that there is only each other within the tearoom space right now. A scroll imparts insightful perception and directs the mind to suitable poetic or spiritual reflection. A spray of flowers juts forth from a simple container made of bamboo or a basket perhaps. The iron kettle is warm and emits a breeze-like sound reminiscent of wind through the pines. A waft of incense fills the farther reaches of the mind to recall one’s truest inner self. Then there is the tea itself; fresh and green with a delicate fragrance that some liken to freshly cut grass. The greenness may evoke poetic sentiments; for some perhaps, it may suggest the verdure of home grasslands once here but no longer to be found within the modern day, busy lifestyle. The tea is refreshing and calming as well. The participants are now feeling present within their space and there is a natural ebb and flow to their movements and conversation.

A tea event is an exchange of giving and receiving wherein harmony is realised between the host and guest. This can be a very simple experience yet often so difficult to attain because people are very commonly not able to just be in harmony with their own nature. And for this reason participants of *Chado* practise the art for many, many years. Even over a lifetime.

Harmony, when realised in *Chado*, is something greater than each individual yet inclusive of all the sounds, tastes and textures within the setting. Everything is experienced in an integrated totality. The participants leave the tea space feeling purified and spiritually uplifted. They have, at its best, realised a moment in time that is transient yet eternal when experienced within the true, sincere heart of things.

Tea practice — not simply about form

Many people are under the false impression that *Chado* is really nothing but form. It is commonly believed that *Chado* is simply a pretence modelled on predetermined ritualistic movements and forms. Form, *kata*, is certainly an aspect of *Chado* but not the end in itself. Instead, form is the vehicle of discipline through which the practitioner cultivates and refines the inner self and focuses the mind.

The most important part of a tea person is their *kokoro*, or spirit, which is invisible on the outside but part of their being or *sugata*. *Chado* is really about whether the eyes of one's heart are open. Diligent practice of *Chado* can lead to this awakening.

The rules of tea are guidelines and may be learned and acted out by anyone who cares to remember them. However, to exercise the flow of *Chado* with true heart intent is where the concept of *michi* ("way"), or the tao of tea, begins. Only when mastery of the form and rules in tea are attained is one able to go beyond the rules and lose oneself in the sincere practice and serving of tea. Then one is said to have attained a state of heart realisation.

It is important to understand that *Chado* is not really about form nor is it limited to the cultivation of superficial aesthetics. *Chado* is an expression of one's true inner nature. Reflecting the idea 'the world is not the world; therefore, it is the world' as expressed in the Diamond Sutra, the contemplative practise of *Chado* is a means to transcend one's self-centred projections and be at one with the selfless nature of reality.

To quote a stanza from the late master of tea, Hamamoto Sôshun:

*Chanoyu*¹ must be made with the heart,
Not with the hand.
Make it without making it,
In the stillness of your mind.

Scott Rogers is a Tea Master within the Japanese Urasenke tradition of *Chado*, and is undertaking a Masters degree with the Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies at the University of Melbourne.



Part of the intricate instructions for *Kagetsu*, or 'tea procedure'. (*Chanoyu Quarterly: tea and the arts of Japan*, no. 49.)

Note

- 1 Literally hot water for tea, the term *Chanoyu* is a more classical term. *Chado*, however, is used to express the art of tea in terms of its liberating aspects as a 'way'.