

Understanding Tea Objects Through Sixteenth-Century Practitioner Diaries

Lesson Plan: Understanding Tea Objects Through Sixteenth-Century Practitioner Diaries

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Creation Date: December 2, 2024

Keywords: chanoyu, tea, ceramics, close-looking, visual analysis

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Target Audience:

Undergraduate students, Graduate students

Duration:

1 class session

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the historic context of tea utensil appreciation
2. Understand the importance of close-looking in chanoyu
3. Develop skills in object handling and visual analysis

Potential Courses to Include this Lesson in:

- Art History courses
- Japanese Culture courses
- Any course focusing on chanoyu/Japanese tea culture or global tea cultures

Assigned Materials:

- Assigned readings by education level (see files)
- Tea diary entries (see files)
- Images of tea utensils (see files)

Activity/Procedure:

- **Prior to class:** Distribute readings for students to review and discuss in-class.
- **In-Class:**
 - **Topic overview/lecture:** Provide overview of sixteenth-century tea diaries and their significance as primary sources for understanding an important period of cultural development for chanoyu.
 - **Optional:** Overview of tea diary entries about the tea leaf storage jar named Chigusa.
 - **Discussion:** Discuss assigned tea diary entries; option to organize into breakout groups for informal discussion before the larger group discussion.
 - **Object-handling:** Depending on available resources, the instructor can bring a few ceramic/metal/wooden/plastic mugs or cups. Alternatively, the instructor can ask students to bring their favorite mug/tumbler for coffee or tea. As a group, have an object handling session with a primer on basic etiquette. Discuss the characteristics of the different vessels based upon the object viewing guide attached.
- **Assignment:**

Students will write their own diary entry describing an object of their choice. This can be an object that they have access to and can touch/use or a historic object. Student papers on accessible objects should focus on shape, size, heft, texture, color, ornamentation, and any other distinguishing physical features. They should attach a photo of the object, and, if they would like, a sketch of it. Using sixteenth-century tea diary entries as their basis, they can also choose to note other details about their viewing such as date, time, place, other individuals present, weather, music/sound (if any), etc. If they prefer to write about a historic tea utensil, they can choose one of the two examples listed in this lesson plan.

Background Information for Instructors:

Close-looking and handling of objects has been an important part of chanoyu practice, where the host, but also the guest, has the opportunity to view works of art in an intimate setting and (in most cases) physically interact with these objects. In essence, tea utensils have a dual purpose of being functional objects for the preparation and presentation of tea, as well as being objects of aesthetic appreciation.

In the fifteenth century, tea practitioners were primarily interested in *karamono* (Chinese objects), Chinese antiques from the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties that ranged from hanging scrolls of calligraphy and painting to ceramic tea bowls made for the preparation and drinking of powdered green tea, called matcha in Japanese. However, by the sixteenth century, as older collections were dispersed and wealthy merchants gained power as influential tea practitioners, practitioners also repurposed utilitarian storage jars from China as tea-leaf jars, elevating them by giving them personal names, such as Chigusa. As chanoyu practice expanded and evolved to include objects made in Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, it became crucial for tea practitioners to determine the best objects for their collections through close-looking.

Sixteenth-century diaries kept by tea practitioner-merchants are a window into this period practice of close-looking and examination of tea utensils. Each assigned entry notes the date, time, location, host, and guest(s) of a tea gathering and includes a list of the tea utensils selected by the host. Some entries have written descriptions and even sketches of the objects that the diarist saw at tea gatherings, such as hanging scrolls of painting and calligraphy, tea leaf storage jars, tea caddies, and tea bowls. By reading tea diary entries about a tea-leaf jar named Chigusa, which appears in multiple sixteenth-century tea documents, students will learn how tea aesthetics developed through the close examination of the art objects appreciated within this cultural context of chanoyu. Through the in-class object handling session, students will also learn basic object handling etiquette and cultivate skills in close-looking. The assignment to write a tea diary entry about an object of the student's choosing will demonstrate each individual's synthesis of textual and visual analysis.

Discussion Questions:

Tea Diary Entries about Chigusa:

- What aspects of a given tea utensil do these tea practitioners seem to focus on?
- What details did the diarist note about the object? What detail in these entries stood out to you?
- What do these descriptions reveal about how sixteenth-century tea men interacted with and evaluated tea utensils?
- What aspects of the tea gathering environment/context do you think impacted the way tea practitioners looked at and evaluated these objects?

Object Handling:

- What details matter to you when you evaluate a mug for drinking coffee/tea or a storage container for coffee beans/tea? Do these entries

change your perspective/preferences?

Relevant Vocabulary:

- Please refer to the Glossary in Class Handout 1

Evaluation:

- Did the student pay attention to the details noted by tea practitioners in their diary entries?
- Did the student connect object descriptions in the tea diaries to the images and video they saw of the tea leaf jar named Chigusa?
- Did the student gain proficiency in the basics of object handling?
- Did the student engage with the practice of close-looking to arrive at any details about a given object, straightforward or unexpected?
- Did the student engage with the observations of other students with regards to their analysis of tea diary entries about object-handling?

Other Sources/References for Instructors:

Webpage for the tea-leaf storage jar, named Chigusa:

https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg_F2016.20.1/

Video of Dressing Chigusa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M48VBjCbE5Y>

Sixteenth-Century Tea Diary Entries that Refer to Chigusa (See course handout 1)

Object Handling Etiquette (See course handout 2)

Images of tea utensils (See course handout 3)

Assigned Materials:

Undergraduate-level readings:

Cort, Louise Allison, and Andrew Mark Watsky. *Chigusa and the Art of Tea*. Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2014.

- Takeuchi Jun'ichi, "Prologue: When Karamono Became Tea Utensils," 25–29.

Graduate-level readings:

Ching, Dora C. Y., Louise Allison Cort, and Andrew Mark Watsky. *Around Chigusa: Tea and the Arts of Sixteenth-Century Japan*. Princeton, New Jersey: P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, in association with Princeton University Press, 2017.

- Oka Yoshiko, "The Changing Value of 'Things': From Gusoku to Dōgu," 39–50.
- Morgan Pitelka, "Chinese Ceramics and Warrior Sociability in Sixteenth-Century Japan," 53–70.
- Melissa M. Rinne, "Chigusa's Mouth Cover and the Maeda Clan," 157–177.

Cort, Louise Allison, and Andrew Mark Watsky. *Chigusa and the Art of Tea*. Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2014.

- Cort, Louise Allison, "About Chigusa," 34–71.
- Takeuchi Jun'ichi, "Prologue: When Karamono Became Tea Utensils," 25–29.
- Takeuchi Jun'ichi, "'Seeing' Chigusa in 16th-century Tea Records," 119–129.

Handouts

- [Handout 1](#)
- [Handout 2](#)
- [Handout 3](#)

Credits/Acknowledgements:

National Museum of Asian Art in cooperation with Omotesenke Fushin'an

Andrew M. Watsky

Takeuchi Jun'ichi