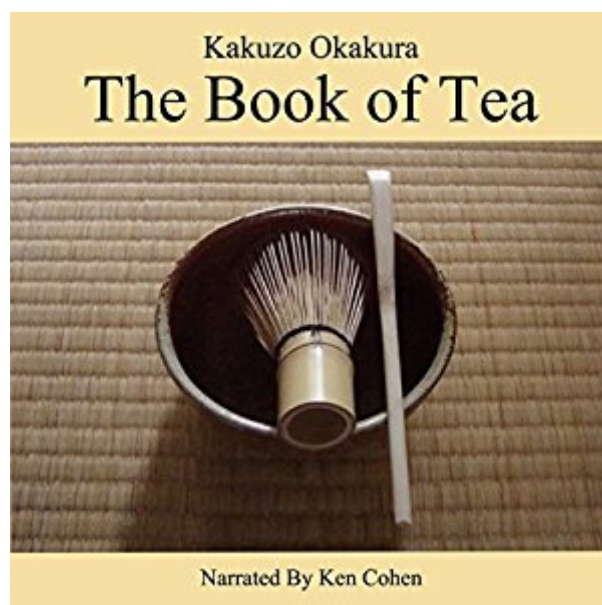


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The Book Of Tea



Synopsis

The Book of Tea is much more than a book about tea. It's a celebration of the arts and culture of Japan, and a portrait of tea ceremony, the "Way of Tea", as the pinnacle of Japanese spirituality and artistic life. Written in 1906 by Kakuzo Okakura, curator of Chinese and Japanese Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and a noted scholar and art critic, this modern classic traces the history of tea from its early medicinal uses in China, through the development of Chinese tea culture, and finally to the role of tea in Japanese Zen, culture, and politics. In the process, Okakura weaves together the philosophies, myths, history, and poetry of China and Japan. He introduces us to tea masters, emperors, and warlords, and brings us an appreciation of the transient beauty of life that is at the heart of Japanese artistic ideals. Okakura wrote The Book of Tea in English, and his elegant prose mirrors the refined artistry of the Japanese tea ceremony. Narrated by Ken Cohen, himself a student and practitioner of tea ceremony in the Urasenke tradition, this audiobook captures Okakura's vision of how "Teaism" can transform us and the way we see ourselves and our world.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 2 hours and 2 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Listen2aBook.com

Audible.com Release Date: December 30, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B019WXBJZA

Best Sellers Rank: #45 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Language Instruction > Other

Languages #604 in Books > Reference > Foreign Language Study & Reference > Instruction

Customer Reviews

This book is a quick and informative introduction to the philosophy underpinning "Teaism". The book outlines how tea masters tried to live their lives according to the simple grace of the Japanese tea ceremony. For those looking for detailed instructions on conducting a tea ceremony, look elsewhere. But for those who want a handbook on a way of life, read further

Published in 1906, Okakura's *Book of Tea* espouses that tea is the foundation for a system of life, a philosophy, and its associated benefits all conspire to bring together that which is fundamental, holistically and spiritually. From Taoist and Zen upbringings, Teaism (not a typo!) comes with an admixture of the two as a world-philosophy, disposition and mindset. Being in the here and now and as Okakura writes: "The whole ideal of Teaism is a result of this Zen conception of greatness in the smallest incidents of life." (308) And beyond the philosophy which is the work's pertinence, we are given a glimpse of the importance of the things of everyday life and how they should be approached, also we get both an education in tea-making and architecture. It's a pretty neat, quick, read if you have any interest in Eastern Philosophy / Religion. Broken into brief segments the work includes: 1. The Cup of Humanity. 2. The Schools of Tea. 3. Taoism and Zennism. 4. The Tea Room. 5. Art Appreciation. 6. Flowers. 7. Tea-Masters. The work begins with Okakura's reaction of the end of Japanese Isolationism (mid-1600's to mid-1800's), the bemuddled feeling of the people when they've realized that their governments xenophobia has led them to all sorts of bizarre conceptions and contrarily, that Westerners also have laid many poor misconceptions upon the Japanese people. However, the binding, humanitarian element throughout the discourse between the east and west, the thing that weaves together our humanity, has been the reverence and esteem toward good tea. "The white man has scoffed at our religion and our morals, but has accepted the brown beverage without hesitation." (53), since at least 1610 when the Dutch East India Company brought tea first to Europe. The second part of the work deals with the beginnings of tea. It focuses on preparation: boiled (Sang), whipped (Tong) and steeped (Ming) - (100). Okakura acknowledges that the Western world is bereft of the prior two methods because Europe entered the picture at the end of the Ming Dynasty (in China: 1368-1644). He elaborates on the preparation methods, detailing them finely and with the care one would expect of a teaist. The third segment of the book brings about a discussion regarding Taoism and its component philosophies as they relate to both enhancing characteristics of Zen and Confucianism, the major players in, then, Eastern philosophy / religion. The major tenants include: present-mindedness, laughter at absurdity, an easy demeanor and path, way, means, mode of being, existing, in the world. The fourth section puts on display the tea-room and it introduces the tea ceremony. Much time is given the architectural process and much thought put into criticizing Western architecture for using oft repeated styles and this is usually coupled with, upon strolling the inside, a lack of modesty so great as it regards material matter, that one is stricken by its indecency. Whereas the tea-room was a small, non-descript, humility begging structure, which may have one or two decorations and

seat no more than usually 5 at a time. A very intimate gathering, and one full of custom as Okakura goes on to explain in the sixth section during his analysis of the use of flowers during the tea ceremony. Sections 5 and 6 are brief and deal mainly with what truly appreciating the respective titles means (art, flowers) and their usefulness and symbolism in Japanese culture, and specifically as it may relate to the tea rooms. Here is learned a snippet of some of Japan's earliest competitive decorative florists: the Ikenobos (Formalistic School)! But Okakura finds that to be a topic which would be too long discussed and probably insubstantiate a work about tea. The work concludes with a summary of how a tea-master lives his life and directs his abilities. There is found here much accreditation, justly due, to the inventions of Japan's tea-masters. Quotes: "Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence." (3) "scarcely any attention has been drawn to Teaism, which represents so much of our Art of Life." (24) "Teaism is the art of concealing beauty that you may discover it, of suggesting what you dare not reveal." (78) "Teaism was Taoism in disguise." (192) "People are not taught to be really virtuous, but to behave properly. We are wicked because we are frightfully self-conscious." (229) "How can one be serious with the world when the world itself is so ridiculous!" (231) "But, after all, we see only our own image in the universe, - our particular idiosyncrasies dictate the mode of our perceptions." (505)

A classic worth reading that tells everything about TEA and its origin. "Tea", a native drink from China has reached all over the world and is now considered as the most highly consumed liquid after water, by human beings. This Oriental drink is considered sacred by the East due to its colour, odour, taste and medicinal characteristics. It was officially introduced to the European countries in the sixteenth century. It is surprising to learn through this book that teaism has its own schools of evolution, The Boiled Tea (Caked Tea), The Whipped Tea (Powdered Tea) and The Steeped Tea (Leaf Tea), representing the spirit of age they prevailed during the Tang, The Ming and The Sung dynasties of China respectively. Also called as Tou, Tseh, Chung, Kha, Cha and Ming, this drink was highly prized for possessing the virtues of relieving fatigue, delighting the soul, prevent drowsiness, strengthening the will, repairing the eyesight and alleviate rheumatic pains. "The Chaking" - the Holy scripture of Tea, written by the famous Chinese poet Luwuh, details everything about the tea plant and its leaves, method of identifying and gathering the suitable leaves for best quality tea and finally the making of the beverage from how to boil to how to drink. Tea has become a religion of the art of life in Japan also, where it grew to be an

excuse for the worship of purity and refinement. Both Taosim and Zennism are said to be associated with the spirit of Tea and entire Chinese ideology seemed to have been influenced by this golden beverage. Finally, the importance and sanctity of a Tea Room (the Sukiya) in the Chinese and Japanese cultures is very impressive. Flowers and their arrangement in the Oriental homes also is linked to the great spiritual depths of knowledge nurtured by great emperors of China like Huensang. The birth and the Art of Flower Arrangement has been simultaneous with that of Teism in the fifth century. The link is well established by the great Tea masters of China and Japan as a distinct religion by itself. Pros: The philosophy entwined behind the great history of Tea is mind boggling. No one would ever think that a whole set of ideologies revolved around Chinese dynasties through the influence of Tea. The simplicity of the Oriental cultures is attributed to the doctrine of Teism in contrast to the explicit display of riches in Western culture. The beauty of flowers and their service to mankind was really fantastic. It is astonishing to learn that all the celebrated gardens of Japan were laid out by its tea masters once upon a time. Even great arts like pottery, textile designing, cooking, serving, painting etc were linked to the involvement of the tea masters of the Orient “simplicity and naturalistic being the catchwords. Nice to learn about the Tea Conferences of Japan. Cons: There is a lot of philosophy and spiritual teachings included in this book which doesn’t seem to have much relevance to Teism. It only seemed to have been fitted in for better presentation of the book. My rating is 2.5 out of 5

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