**TEA READINGS : AN ENTERTAINMENT FOR ‘TWO CULTURES UNITED BY TEA’**

**AT THE BANQUETING HOUSE (HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES), 15 SEPTEMBER**

**READERS: Reiko Takashina, William Horsley and Jenny White**

**SCRIPT: William Horsley**

**DEVISED BY: The Japan400 Executive Group**

**Reader: JENNY**

"Tea, whose fame should over all plants be raised

None, says the God, shall with that tree compare

Health, Vigor, Pleasure bloom for ever there

Sense for the learned and beauty for the fair."

**Reader: WILLIAM**

“Tea is the most wonderful medicine for nourishing one’s health; it is the secret of long life. On the hillsides it grows up as the spirit of the soil. Those who pick and use it are certain to attain a great age.”

**Reader:REIKO**

“..We [Chinese]love to drink it constantly. We have no regular time for it; we drink it when we like, and not merely for refreshment. It is a form of sociability, a unifying element whenever friends may meet.”

**Reader: WILLIAM**

Arthur blinked at the screens and felt he was missing something important. Suddenly he realized what it was.

‘Is there any tea on this spaceship?’, he asked.

**Reader: JENNY**

Those four quotations that you’ve just heard were from a poem ***‘In Praise of Tea’*** by **Peter Anthony Motteux,** who came over here from France in the late 17th century; an early Japanese eulogy on tea written in the year 1211 by the scholar-monk **Eisai**; that observation about the unifying quality of tea was penned by a Chinese traveler to these islands in the 1930s called **Chiang Yee**; and lastly **Douglas Adams**, who managed to get a mention of tea into ***‘The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy’***.

**Reader: REIKO**

So tea has even made inroads into outer space!

This afternoon we invite you to join us in an exploration of tea -- to find out why it is so widely celebrated, both in literature and in people’s daily lives, across the world.

**Reader: WILLIAM**

Tea has been much idealized down the centuries. It’s been held up as a sort of magic potion, a cure-all - a miracle drink.

**Reader: REIKO**

Tea also has other marvelous properties. It brings people-together, it breaks the ice, and it cements friendships.

**Reader: JENNY**

We have just been privileged to watch Akira Matsura performing a very special tea ceremony, the *kencha*, in honour of his own ancestor and King James the First, as well as the rather motley crew of men from these islands who went on that very first sea voyage to Japan 400 years ago.

And here is **Okakura Tenshin** – a great Japanese chronicler and evangelist for tea. He wrote what’s come to be regarded as the ‘tea bible’, ***the Book of Tea***, in 1906.

**READER: WILLIAM**

There is a subtle charm in the taste of tea which makes it irresistible and capable of idealization.. It has not the arrogance of wine, the self-consciousness of coffee, nor the simpering innocence of cocoa.

**Reader: REIKO**

And tea has been much favoured by the great and the good, by kings, emperors and statesmen -- such as **William Gladstone**: -

**Reader: WILLIAM**

*“If you are cold, tea will warm you. If you are too heated, it will cool you. If you are depressed, it will cheer you. If you are excited, it will calm you.”*

**READER: REIKO**

And yet, throughout its long rise to its present status as the world’s favourite drink, tea has not been without its critics – even enemies.

**Reader: JENNY**

Indeed, at various times tea has been much associated with strife and conflict. It was denounced by some as a subversive and corrupting social influence. And it was directly linked with at least one revolution – the Boston Tea Party was a protest against tea duties in 1773 that sparked the American War of Independence.

**Reader: REIKO**

But tea has also inspired writers, essayists, diarists and poets, down the ages and on every continent. Here’s **T.S. Eliot** on ***‘The Naming of Teas’***:-

**Reader: JENNY**

The naming of teas is a difficult matter

It isn’t just one of your everyday games

Some might think you as mad as a hatter

Should you tell them each goes by several names

For starters each tea in this world must belong

To the families Black or Green or Oolong

Then look more closely at their family trees

Some include Indian along with Chinese

**Reader: WILLIAM**

..And Japanese, of course! Nowadays tea is sort of universal, it’s everywhere. But it wasn’t always so. Dipping back into the historical record we find that tea, after taking root across the east many centuries ago, was seen as an exciting and peculiar novelty when it first came to the attention of Europeans about 400 years ago. One of the early western travelers who reported on the phenomenon was **Francesco Carletti**, a Florentine merchant and travel writer who visited Japan in 1598. He recorded his fascination at the cult of tea-growing and drinking that he saw there.

**Reader: REIKO**

“There is a certain leaf which they call cha or thé which grows on a plant somewhat similar to the box-wood tree -- though different from it in having leaves three times as large, as well as being evergreen, and in producing a scented flower something like the damask rose.

Of these leaves they make a powder, and this after being put in hot water, which they keep always on the fire for the purpose, they drink, more as a medicine than for pleasure, as it is of a somewhat bitter taste. But it leaves the mouth in a pleasant condition and has other good effects on those who drink it.”

**Reader: JENNY**

Much later, in the early 1900s, **Okakura Tenshin** mapped the spread of tea from the east to the west. It amounted to a kind of global conquest by the deceptively modest-looking leaf. Once tea had entered any territory, it was there to stay.

**Reader: WILLIAM**

At the end of the sixteenth century the Hollanders brought the news that a pleasant drink was made in the East from the leaves of a bush…In 1610 ships of the Dutch East India Company brought the first tea to Europe. It was known in France in 1636 and reached Russia in 1638. England welcomed it in 1650 and spoke of it as “That excellent and by all physicians approved China drink, called by the Chinese Tcha, and by other nations Tay, alias Tee.”

**Reader: JENNY**

Okakura also recorded the obstacles that tea faced on its westward expansion. The more popular and widely desired tea became, the more barriers were placed in its way - in the form of punishingly high taxes and voices of disapproval. Tea was effectively outlawed for the masses, as smugglers moved in, illegally, to fill the swelling market demand.

**Reader: REIKO**

**William Cobbett,** the radical and in many ways progressive 18th century reformer, was one of those who fulminated against the evils which, he said, arose from the simple act of drinking a cup of tea.

**Reader: JENNY**

*“I view the tea drinking as a destroyer of health, an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, a debaucher of youth and a maker of misery for old age.”*

**Reader: WILLIAM**

And Cobbett was not alone. One of the fiercest attacks on tea came from the pen of another celebrated 18th century writer and pamphleteer, **Jonas Hanway**. Hanway argued that tea-drinking would ruin the nation, because of its increasing prevalence among the working classes, and he associated the drinking of tea with the drinking of gin.. Children born to poor mothers were dying, he claimed, because their mothers were spending all their money on tea and drinking this ‘liquid fire’ while breast-feeding..He warned that this would lead to a decline in the healthy male population, with terrible consequences, because eventually there would not be enough fit men for the army!’

**Reader: JENNY**

So what lay behind this venomous opposition? According to the **UK Tea Council,** which promotes tea and its all-round benefits, the explanation is simple:-

**Reader: WILLIAM**

“..Not everyone agreed that tea was an appropriate drink for the working classes. Indeed, from the early eighteenth century well into the nineteenth century a debate raged among middle and upper-class commentators about the benefits or otherwise of tea drinking - and particularly about whether the lower classes should be allowed to drink tea at all. This was partly based upon a consideration of whether tea might be injurious to health … but also partly based upon snobbery, and a belief that the poor existed essentially to serve the needs of the rich.

**Reader: REIKO**

But the critics of tea met their match in **Dr Johnson**. This was his riposte to Jonas Hanway and those other blinkered critics of tea. Samuel Johnson called himself…

**Reader: WILLIAM**

*…A hardened and shameless tea-drinker, who for twenty years diluted his meals with only the infusion of this fascinating plant; whose kettle had scarcely time to cool; who with tea amused the evening, with tea solaced the midnight and with tea welcomed the morning.*

**Reader: JENNY**

And in the end tea triumphed, as it has done practically everywhere, winning over whole populations in the East and West alike. Visitors from far away marveled at the English love affair with tea:-

**Reader: REIKO**

“Tea is still believed, by English people of all classes, to have miraculous properties. A cup of tea can cure, or at least significantly alleviate, almost all minor physical ills, from a bruised ego to the trauma of a divorce or bereavement. This magical drink can be used equally effectively as a sedative or stimulant, to calm and soothe or to revive and invigorate. Whatever your mental or physical state, what you need is a ‘nice cup of tea’.”

**READER: JENNY**

That was the conclusion drawn by that 1930s Chinese visitor to Britain, **Chiang Yee**, in his entertaining and well-observed book, ***‘The Silent Traveler’***

**Reader: REIKO**

But tea also has ‘something else’. It has such powerful effects on the bodies and souls of those who drink it that it has also been portrayed as holding some kind of mystery – a gateway to contentment, or even to transcendental thoughts. Here’s our old friend, **Okakura Tenshin**:-

**Reader: WILLIAM**

It is in the Japanese tea ceremony that we see the culmination of tea ideals. …Tea with us became more than an idealization of the form of drinking; it is a religion of the art of life. The beverage grew to be an excuse for the worship of purity and refinement, a sacred function at which the host and guest joined to produce for that occasion the upmost beatitude of the mundane.

**Reader: JENNY**

And Okakura was quick to spot a certain similarity between the elaborate rituals of the tea ceremony which he knew in his own country and the distinctive rituals of the English afternoon tea party. American Japanologist **Christopher Banfey** wrote about this in his book about Old Japan entitled ***‘The Great Wave’.***

**Reader: WILLIAM**

It suddenly dawned on [him] that the synthesis of East and West could be charted in the stunning spread of tea across the world: Okakura, in a flash of inspiration saw that the formal tea party as practiced in New England was a version of the tea ceremony. “The afternoon tea is now an important function in Western society. In the delicate clatter of trays and saucers, in the soft rustle of feminine hospitality, in the common catechism about cream and sugar, we know that the Worship of Tea is established beyond question.”

**Reader: REIKO**

And Okakura’s insight was confirmed by **Henry James**, a Bostonian. In ***‘The Portrait of a Lady’*** he wrote this:-

**Reader: JENNY**

There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the *ceremony* known as afternoon tea.

**Reader: WILLIAM**

The essential rules of the *‘English* tea ceremony’ were examined in close-up by Colin Spencer, the author of a book on British Food. He makes the point that the ritual as practised in England placed the whole emphasis on manners and breeding (or the appearance of it), and it put women – especially those of a certain seniority -firmly in charge of proceedings.

**Reader: JENNY:**

But all this proved just too much for that visitor from China, **Chiang Yee**. In his own diary about his life in London he records how he struggled hard to fit in to the stuffy high society of England in the 1930s. But the mysterious rules of behavior which he encountered at those ‘afternoon tea’ gatherings in high-class drawing-rooms obviously defeated him.

**Reader: REIKO**

As we were passing the teapot from one to another, I thought I ought to be polite, so I offered to pour the tea for the lady who sat at my right hand side. I had also learned to ask her whether she would take milk and sugar, and she answered, “Yes”. But I poured milk in first and then the tea. The lady suddenly noticed what I was doing and hastened to say with warning finger raised, ‘tea first!’. She insisted on my changing the cup. I was very surprised and asked myself why she should be so particular; however, I obeyed her order! Later a young Chinese lady told me that she was thankful not to be an English hostess, because she would have to remember how many pieces of sugar her husband liked to have in his tea, and also the number of pieces of sugar for each of her husband’s friends.

**Reader: WILLIAM**

China is the undisputed home of tea, and Asia is still the continent where it is mainly grown. Yet tea has somehow come to be seen as something quintessentially English. **Kate Fox**, a British social anthropologist, the author of ***‘Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour’***, suggests that the English passion for tea is really an antidote to the fear of embarrassment. Like the weather, tea gave them something to talk about!

**Reader: JENNY**

…Tea-making is the perfect displacement activity: whenever the English feel awkward or uncomfortable in a social situation (that is, almost all of the time), they make tea. It’s a universal rule: when in doubt, put the kettle on. Visitors arrive; we have our usual difficulties over greeting protocol. We say, ‘I’ll just put the kettle on’ ~~-~~ A bad accident – people are injured and in shock: tea is needed. ‘I’ll put the kettle on.’ World War Three breaks out – a nuclear attack is imminent. ‘I’ll put the kettle on.’ You get the idea. We are rather fond of tea.

**Reader: REIKO**

But tea can also be a metaphor for much deeper thoughts and emotions – even among the English. The English poet laureate, **Carol Ann Duffy**, was moved to write this personal ode to tea. It is entitled simply ***‘Tea’***:-

**Reader: JENNY**

I like pouring your tea, lifting

the heavy pot, and tipping it up,

so the fragrant liquid streams in your china cup.

Or when you’re away, or at work,

I like to think of your cupped hands as you sip,

as you sip, of the faint half-smile of your lips.

I like the questions – sugar? – milk?

and the answers I don’t know by heart, yet,

for I see your soul in your eyes, and I forget.

Jasmine, Gunpowder, Assam, Earl Grey, Ceylon,

I love tea’s names. Which tea would you like? I say

but it’s any tea for you, please, any time of day,

as the women harvest the slopes

for the sweetest leaves, on Mount Wu-Yi,

and I am your lover, smitten, straining your tea.

**Reader: WILLIAM**

That reference to the famous tea-growing hillsides of the Wu-Yi mountains in south-eastern China reminds us that China remains at the centre of the tea universe. In China, too, tea sometimes appears in literature as something that has the power to shake people out of their settled routine or stale ways of thinking. Take this anecdote recounted by the medieval Japanese monk, **Eisai,** in his scholarly manual ***Kissa Yojo ki*** – Drinking Tea to Prolong Life. It illustrates the Buddhist tradition of Ch’an dialogues, known in Japanese as *koan* -- riddles or mind-menders. The episode concerns a certain Master Chao-chou.

**Reader: REIKO**

Chao-chou once asked a newly arrived monk, ‘Have you ever been here before?’. The monk answered, ‘Yes, I have’. The Master said, ‘Have a cup of tea!’. Again he asked another monk the same question and the monk replied, ‘I have never been here before’. The Master again said, ‘Have a cup of tea!.’

Later the head monk asked, ‘Master, how is it that , when one monk has been here before, you say, ‘have a cup of tea’ and when another has not been here, you say, ‘Have a cup of tea’?

The Master called out, ‘O head monk!’ The head monk replied, ‘Yes, Master?’

The Master said, ‘Have a cup of tea!.’

**Reader: JENNY**

In Okakura’s mind, too, tea possesses a mystical dimension. He expounds the idea of tea as an expression of the ancient Chinese philosophy and religion known as Taoism. Okakura speaks of ‘tea-ism’ – or, as some people now call it ‘the way of tea’, as a guide to the good life :-

**WILLIAM**

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.

**READER: REIKO**

It will soon be time for us to clear away the literary teacups of this little homage to tea. But before we go, we should invite some of the great names of English literature to deliver their parting shots.

**T.S Eliot** again –this is from ***‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’*:-**

**Reader: JENNY**

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

And for a hundred visions and revisions

Before the taking of a toast and tea

**Reader: REIKO**

And **Rupert Brooke**, dreaming of The Old Vicarage, Grantchester

**Reader: WILLIAM**

“Stands the Church clock at ten to three?

And is there honey still for tea?”

**Reader JENNY**

(aside) “Honey’s off, dear!”…

**Reader: REIKO**

And an English tea party in a royal palace would hardly be complete without us stepping briefly into Wonderland, where we find Alice at – where else? - *The Mad Hatter’s Tea Party*!-

**Reader: JENNY**

'Really, now you ask me,' said Alice, very much confused, 'I don't think…'

'Then you shouldn't talk!,' said the Hatter.

…This piece of rudeness was more than Alice could bear: she got up in great disgust, and walked off; the Dormouse fell asleep instantly, and neither of the others took the least notice of her going, though she looked back once or twice, half hoping that they would call after her: the last time she saw them, they were trying to put the Dormouse into the teapot.

'At any rate I'll never go there again!' said Alice as she picked her way through the wood. 'It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!'

Just as she said this, she noticed that one of the trees had a door leading right into it. 'That's very curious!' she thought. 'But everything's curious today. I think I may as well go in at once.' And in she went.

**Reader: REIKO**

And the last word must go to **Okakura Tenshin**, our trusty guide through the surprising and subversive story of tea. The Japanese sage must have drunk a few cups of his favourite nectar before waxing so very lyrical, as he does in this passage from ***the Book of Tea***: -

**Reader: WILLIAM**

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

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

**(ENDS)**