

Whispers of Tea: Tracing Cultural Threads through Tea  
Rituals and Rooms in China, Japan, Britain and Ireland.



Niamh McGeoghegan

# Table of Contents

.....	1
<i>Whispers of Tea: Tracing Cultural Threads through Tea Rituals and Rooms in China, Japan, Britain and Ireland.</i> .....	1
<b>1.1 Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>2.1 Literature Review</b> .....	3
Harmony in Leaves: Exploring the Soul of Chinese Tea Culture .....	3
Blossoms of Tranquillity: Embracing the Spirit of the Japanese Chanoyu.....	5
In the Embrace of Tea's Soft Glow: A Ballet of Elegance and British Splendour.....	8
<b>3.1 Methodology</b> .....	9
3.2 Research Approach .....	9
3.3 Primary Research .....	10
3.4 Secondary Research .....	10
3.5 Data Collection .....	13
<b>4.1 Findings</b> .....	13
4.2 Finding Whispers of the Orient .....	13
4.3 Finding Serenity in Solitude .....	14
4.4 Findings of Gilded Excellence .....	15
4.5 In the Warm Embrace of Finding Hearth and Home .....	16
4.6 Conclusion of Findings.....	17
<b>5.1 Comparative Discussion</b> .....	17
5.2 Comparison Conclusion .....	18
<b>6.1 Conclusion</b> .....	19
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	20
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	21

## 1.1 Introduction

Tea is a beverage enjoyed worldwide; it serves as a source of refreshment and a symbol of cultural identity and social interaction. Tea preparation, serving and consumption vary across different cultures, reflecting traditions, beliefs, and customs. Beyond the act of drinking tea, tea rituals show the intricacies of culture, shaping the space where these rituals happen. This dissertation aims to delve into space and the culture inhabiting it within the context of tea rituals, focusing on Chinese, Japanese, English and Irish traditions.

The significance of tea extends past consumption, the act is sociable, and it influences the spatial design of tea rooms and the behaviours of people and culture within those spaces. By juxtaposing tea rituals from diverse cultures, this study aims to understand how cultural norms, historical contexts, and societal values influence the design language and spatial arrangements during a tea ceremony.

Central to my understanding of culture influencing a space is the comparative analysis of Chinese, Japanese, English and Irish tea rituals, and the interior around the ceremony. Each culture possesses its own set of rituals, etiquettes, design of the space and journey around tea, reflecting the heritage of its culture. This dissertation aims to uncover the spatial configurations of these cultures, understanding the ways culture influences the organization, design and utilisation of the space dedicated to a tea ceremony. My main objective is to find links between where the tea ritual began in China and compare it to our modern-day tea ritual in Ireland by following the history of where tea rituals have been passed down from i.e., historical Japanese and English tea rooms. By studying the interior design of these spaces, I can see how culture shapes our understanding of interior design and architecture.

## 2.1 Literature Review

### Harmony in Leaves: Exploring the Soul of Chinese Tea Culture

Drinking tea as a source of fulfilment began with the Chinese emperor Shen Nung. As he sat under a tree with a hearth full of boiling water, leaves fell into the water from above which infused the drink. This led to the mastering of herbs and spices to create and design the art of tea as seen in Figure 1. (L. K. 1996) Chinese culture has asserted its strong customs through the medium of dining that shows community and respect through seating orders and spatial design.



Figure 1 Contemporary Chinese tea board – (OSAKAKA)

The custom of consuming tea reached its height in the atmosphere of tea houses, functioning as a signature activity representative of residences rich in cultural traditions and reflecting the long-lasting influence of the Chinese dynasties.

Chinese teahouses are designed with region in mind, depending on where the teahouse is determines which herbs will be served. Teahouses in rural China have been meticulously crafted within lush gardens, artfully designed to resonate with the shifting nuances of the passing season. Like Chinese mealtimes, tea houses bring people together, nurture relationships and show respect (Bakall, 2019). Under the roof of upturned eaves, adorned with intricate carvings and tiles featuring traditional motifs. (As illustrated in Figure 2.) The teahouse is a standalone building made of a timber frame structure showcasing the talents of local Chinese carving on elaborately decorated beams.

The interior design of Chinese tea houses usually displays scrolls showing landscapes or traditional brush paintings to contribute to the surrounding cultural heritage. Calligraphy upon scrolls featuring poems and philosophical expressions in appreciation of art and culture hang on walls. (Xia, 2018). Washi paper window coverings allow for the natural diffusion of light to create the atmospheric qualities intended for a place of rest (Khan, 2014). Seating mats are placed with cushions for guests to sit cross-legged, as illustrated in Figure 2. Low wooden tables are placed throughout the grounds of the tea house for patrons and encourage the continuation of tea drinking throughout China.



Figure 2 Wen Zhengming, Depiction of a historical Chinese tea ceremony and contemporary tea room in China (Lindsey. S)

Chinese teahouses often have a courtyard to encase nature in one's mind and the main entrance to the teahouse is usually beautifully carved with a moon gate entrance (Blofeld, 2022). This transition is a passage from the outside world into a sanctuary nestled within the landscape, serving as an invitation for visitors to partake in the serenity of the teahouse. Carved panelled doors with traditional Chinese filigree line the elevation of a Chinese teahouse (Blofeld 2022). The Chinese teahouse is region-specific with paths and reflecting ponds to provide a sense of tranquillity to welcome one to the home of tea. There are panels of ornamental screens with Chinese mythology to create semi-private spaces on the grounds of the teahouse (Xia, 2018). Once inside, there may be collections of Yixing teapots. In public city teahouses, there may be a tea station with tea masters to produce new teas that again reflect the change in seasons.

Rooted in the soil of Chinese culture, these sanctuaries beckon visitors to partake in more than just tea. They offer a sanctuary where souls gather, conversation flows like a river, and bonds are woven amidst the fragrant steam of brewing leaves. Here, within the embrace of nature, the teahouse becomes more than a mere setting - it becomes a living embodiment of Chinese customs and values. It's a space where the art of conversation blossoms, where the exchange of ideas fosters the growth of vibrant communities, and where every sip of tea carries the essence of cherished connections.

### Blossoms of Tranquillity: Embracing the Spirit of the Japanese Chanoyu

The custom of tea time has been ingrained in Eastern society, with origins that extend back to the Chinese dynasties and a gentle influence that has spread to neighbouring countries such as Japan. This beloved custom has not only persisted through the ages, but it has also changed and found a permanent place in the very fabric of family life.



Figure 3 Contemporary Japanese tea ceremony and traditional study of tea materials (Left Shelly Keenan, Right Ryūkyūkyō Shinsa)

The tea time ritual in Eastern homes is more than just a daily ritual; it becomes a bond that unites generations. Here, at the centre of domesticity, tea rooms become havens of elegance and tranquillity where design and utility coexist to raise tea to a whole new level.

The simple rules of a Japanese tea ceremony or ‘chanoyu’, meaning the way of the tea, are carefully designed to be a serene place for a tea ceremony. The room is often small and detached from the main house within a lush garden or natural landscape (Fieve & Waley, 2013). To enter, a low door or ‘nijiriguchi’ requires guests to bow upon entry to symbolise their respect for the ritual. (Muza-chan, 2013) Historically this was to prove samurais wouldn’t have weapons on their bodies when entering the tea house as seen in Figure 4



Figure 4 Japanese Tea House (B. Sullivan) / nijiriguchi doorway (Naduca)

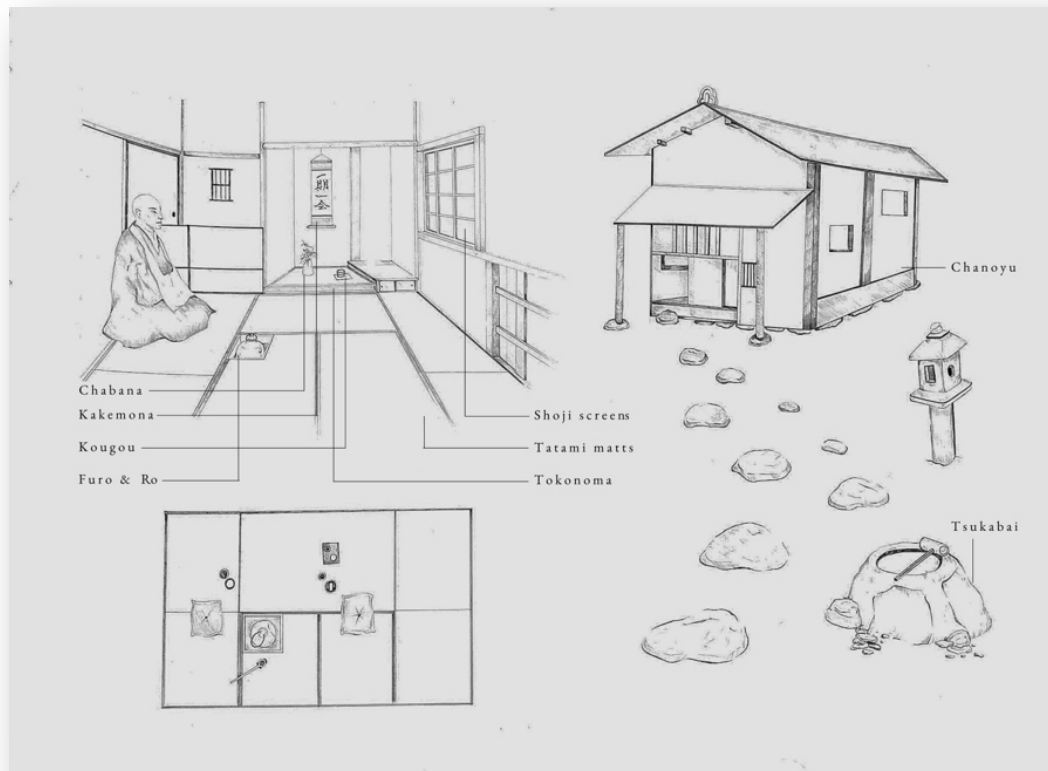


Figure 5 Graphic study of Japanese tea room (Niambi McGeoghegan, Authors Own)

The flooring of a Japanese tea room is covered with tatami mats, a traditional Japanese flooring made from rice straw and woven rush and the arrangement of these mats is placed to form a “T” shape within a grid (Acar, 2020). Shoji screens are translucent paper screens similar to Chinese design that allow natural light to be diffused throughout the space (Acar, 2020). One of the most important focal designs of the Japanese tea room is the tokonoma, an alcove, where a scroll or ‘kakemono’ and a seasonal or regional-specific flower arrangement, ‘chabana’. A simple pottery piece or ‘kougou’ may be displayed here to hold the Japanese matcha for the upcoming ceremony (Acar, 2020). Items in the tokonoma reflect the seasons in the tearoom’s locality and set the tone for a tea gathering. The furo and ro are the hearth of this space, this ensures the water is boiled and easily served, which can be found in the centre of the space. In winter seasons this is used to heat water however in the summer this is covered by the tatami mats (Sidorova, 2023) (Acar, 2020). The ceremony host sits in the ‘seiza’ position on tatami mats with one hand on the lap during the ritual with their guests. (Kurihara, 2023) The host determines the seating arrangement for the other guests and reflects the hierarchy and statuses of those attending.

The tea room in Japan like in China is also connected to the garden, or roji and can be seen in Figure 5. The path and journey to the tea house are carefully designed (Fieve & Waley, 2013), with stepping stones and lanterns or symbolic elements that prepare one for the upcoming ceremony. The season is integral when designing tea spaces. Cherry blossoms, maple trees and types of regional mosses are selected to blend colours throughout the year and then get reflected through the design of the chanoyu or tea ceremony. (Acar, 2020). Water features would be included for auditory senses, and a tsukubai would allow guests to cleanse their hands before entering the ceremonial tea house with seated areas, ‘machiai’, to pause and reflect (Quinn,

2019). The auditory senses are important for the teahouse to thrive as the journey from exterior to interior is integral to this ceremony.



Figure 6 *Roji and path to Japanese Chanoyu (Tea House)* Left – (Stanley Milton) / Right (Maikoya)

Within the serene confines of a Japanese tea room, the essence of culture unfurls delicately like steam from a hearth. Here, every element is meticulously curated to serve as a canvas and conduit for an ancient ritual, embodying the essence of Japanese tradition. Symbolism, woven into every gesture, whispers the timeless morals cherished by the Japanese culture. This creates an intricate etiquette that guides participants through the ceremony with grace.

### In the Embrace of Tea's Soft Glow: A Ballet of Elegance and British Splendour

In British culture, elegant tea ceremonies thrived in the Georgian era. After the spread of tea from China to Europe, notably Italy, for tea's proposed medicinal qualities the act of drinking tea thrived in high society. In manors throughout Britain, dinner was becoming later in the day, affluent duchesses seized the drinking of tea as an act of saving oneself until dinner. (Johnson, 2015). To set the scene of one's afternoon tea, the room would be adorned with elegant wall panelling and wainscoting, with ceiling mouldings featuring intricate designs of the Georgian era. Soft muted pastels, creams or florals dominated the interior (Davies, 2023). The featured room would showcase gold ornamental frames with oil paintings depicting landscapes or large-scaled mirrors. Large windows would be framed with colossal curtains or heavy damask in contrasting pastels reflecting the room wall colours (Davies, 2023).





*Figure 7 Contemporary British tea table Doty Warmley Left*



*Figure 8 Historical British tea Philippe Mercier Right*

The tables in Western afternoon tea were typically circular and made from mahogany with pressed lace doilies atop. In the cases of wealthy guests bone China tea sets would be used where transparency of the porcelain material would give off the impression of serious influence and status. Silver and ironstone tea sets became the norm for everyday tea rituals among friends (Marks, 2020). In summer, afternoon tea became an exterior pavilion event, with flowers to adorn the picturesque space around guests (Austen, 1982). Western tea culture saw importing materials for their teapots and dishware from China and the tea leaves and herbs themselves to elevate their status, still evolving the Western tea ceremony from where it had begun. As illustrated in Figure 7, tea was an event with a myriad of teapots, saucers and cups.

In Western culture, the interiors where tea rituals unfolded became embodiments of power and status, shaping the very fabric of societal culture. As tea culture flourished, interiors were curated to mirror the essence and purpose of these regarded traditions.

### 3.1 Methodology

#### 3.2 Research Approach

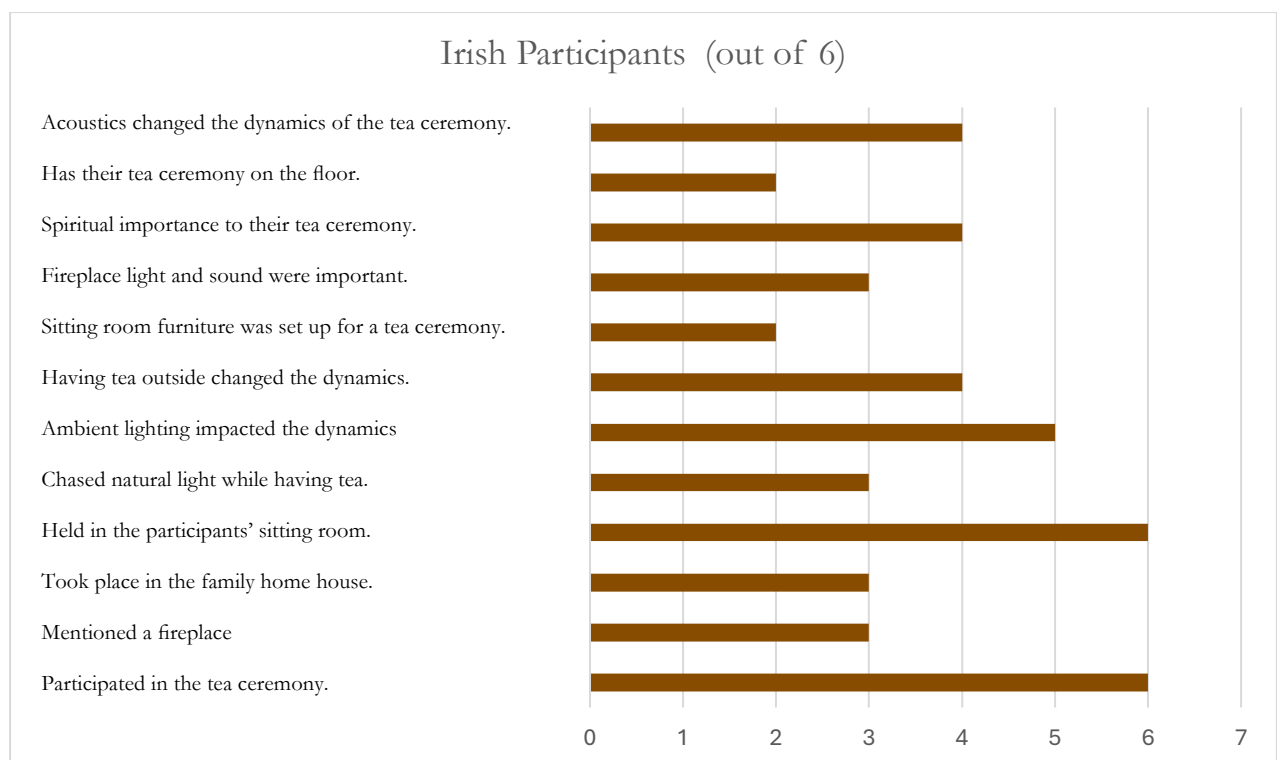
The approach for this research was to understand how culture inhabits space, particularly how tea culture impacted the design of a tea room in historical China, Japan, Britain and Ireland in a modern context. The main approach was to conduct secondary research on academic literature and historical paintings depicting the ceremony. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Irish people to collect data on the design of an Irish room where tea was the primary activity.

### 3.3 Primary Research

To comprehend how Irish people enjoy tea and its associated interior space, I conducted interviews and open discussions with individuals of Irish descent. These interviews concerned the aspects of tea consumption and the characteristics of their surroundings and emotions. Following the requisite ethical protocols, interviews were conducted after obtaining formal consent. These interviews were recorded and accompanied by note-taking to capture salient remarks, this served as foundational data.

The interviews were transcribed and reviewed using the Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method, with insights documented in a dedicated sketchbook. After transcription, a thematic analysis was undertaken, identifying recurring descriptions across the interviews. Additionally, supplementary information about the historical evolution of Irish tea rituals was sourced from tea manufacturers' websites. This included the historical context of tea consumption, including depictions of tableware and practices prevalent during the 1900s. This archival investigation facilitated a comparative analysis between historical and contemporary tea ceremonies.

Extracting the data from interviews, visual representations in bar charts were generated to facilitate an understanding of the recurring spatial design associated with tea consumption within domestic settings. The graphical representations, as shown below, became useful for finding the predominant characteristics and common themes in Irish homes. This then informed further research on where the heart of drinking tea is in an Irish domestic home.



### 3.4 Secondary Research

The investigation began by understanding how culture influences space and my comparative study of tea rituals by studying historical paintings. By following the flow of tea distribution

backwards starting in China, followed by Japan and onto England which spread finally to Ireland. Finding written literature on the origins of a tea room interior during the Renaissance of tea proved difficult so, studying historical paintings by various artists became my main source of research. 'The Night Revels of Han Xizai' by Gu Hongzhong, and 'Tea Drinking Under the Wutong Tree' by Tang Yin are examples of paintings from the Han and Ming dynasties that depict tea ceremonies and works by Ren Yi who painted daily life in China. From these paintings, I was able to find commonalities between cups, teapots and how stoves were pieced together from 900 AD to 1400 AD, this allowed me to find out how tea culture began outdoors and slowly became an interior activity and how that interior space became a social activity in China.



Figure 8 The Night Revels of Han Xizai Gu Hongzhong - Continuous Handscroll

This methodology continued into my learning of Japanese culture, investigating paintings by Toshikata Mizuno who painted works of tea rituals in Japan. This research came from looking at paintings and finding the common themes in each of the interiors, learning what material the cups and teapots were made from, looking at how people interacted with the space around them

in the paintings – asking myself questions on what made this space different to the Chinese spaces in my research. This began to make a timeline of the paintings in the context of cultures my research involved, looking at the difference between early-age materials and new-age materials in a historical and rural context. I began asking myself research questions and recording my findings, how did people sit during their tea ceremony, was it isolated or was it centred around people and interaction, what materials were being used on the floor and walls, did the people partaking in this ceremony want natural light as part of their ritual. These questions I asked myself during my investigation of paintings drew conclusions and commonalities across daily life in Japan and gave me the methodology for my writing.



Figure 9 Tashikata Mizuno - Japanese Tea Ritual (Historical)

In a British context, literature, ‘Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875 – 1975’ by Perilla Kinchin and Fiona Anderson provided insight into the Victorian era tea ceremonies, which provided text on the design of a British tea room, and from that I understood the culture that inhabited the room in which the tea took place, societal norms, and the shaping of social interaction between high-status people. This book also provided the deeper context of the interior spaces of the tea ceremony, it provided key details about the design and set-up of a Victorian interior. This information was collected over a broad study of British tea rooms and then I found common links and themes of those rooms. I then began looking at museum exhibitions, to see the materiality and tea room set up to back up my findings and common themes. Fowler University at UCLA curated an exhibition of historical artefacts of a tea room through time with an in-depth exploration of Victorian-era tea materials from cups and saucers to tables, fireplaces and curtains. Looking at museum exhibits and watching antique recreations of spaces by teams of restoration designers and architects led me to find the elements that make up an interior space that held tea rituals. By studying individual components, i.e., the layout and

arrangement of chairs against the design elements prevailing during the mid-1850s, This methodology allows me to highlight design features, the materiality of the space, the orientation of furniture and the use of natural light in the space. Understanding common themes and then completing a larger comparative study to find out what was the overall design of the tea room interior, the reason for the tea ceremony happening and why British people during the Victorian Era were having a tea ceremony that heavily reflected their interiors. My methodology was again collecting imagery, literature and museum recreations and establishing common findings to then understand why and how the culture of British inhabitants was having a tea ceremony and changing their interior design of manors.

### 3.5 Data Collection

This information from the historical Chinese, Japanese, British and modern Irish context of a tea ritual allowed insight into the materiality, orientation and design of a space where culture was at the forefront. There were now common themes of each space and how people interacted within that space, this information was then shown graphically.

This graphic study would give me an efficient way of noting the common themes that appeared from the conducted research. These findings were then drawn in graphite on four different pages – each displaying a culture and the interior design of the space surrounding a tea ceremony. The research completed from literature studies, paintings, documentaries and exhibits would become a selection of drawings depicting the interior space of a tea ritual. Compiling a graphite drawing selection of the primary interiors where tea had been shared would show the difference in materiality, furniture and lighting.

## 4.1 Findings

After completing the literature review, analyse how tea influenced culture and space in Chinese, Japanese, British and Irish tea ceremonies. The findings were as follows:

### 4.2 Finding Whispers of the Orient

Within Chinese tea customs, the space reflected people, communication and a strong relationship with the surrounding landscape. In a contemporary setting, Chinese tea customs maintain a profound connection between landscape, people, and communication. This communication happens between people and with the environment – the exterior informs users' mindsets to relax and partake in communication. The interior of a Chinese tearoom is specific in materiality, incorporating historically styled filigree and diffusing natural light. The design of this interior is integral for supporting conversation and communication between people –mirroring not only the participation of people but also having a dedicated space for fostering relationships.

The interior design of this space centres on seating arrangements, fostering a shared experience of conversation and tea tasting with locally sourced varieties. Historically having dark interiors with the use of lamps would naturally infuse the communication between people during the Han dynasty. There would be different mugs and dishware and materiality depending on the season the tea ceremony would be celebrated. Overall this ceremony survives by focusing on people and having tea to elevate a shared experience. This is shown today by having darker interiors, and

using diffused lighting to achieve that – darker interiors provide a sense of safety during conversation.

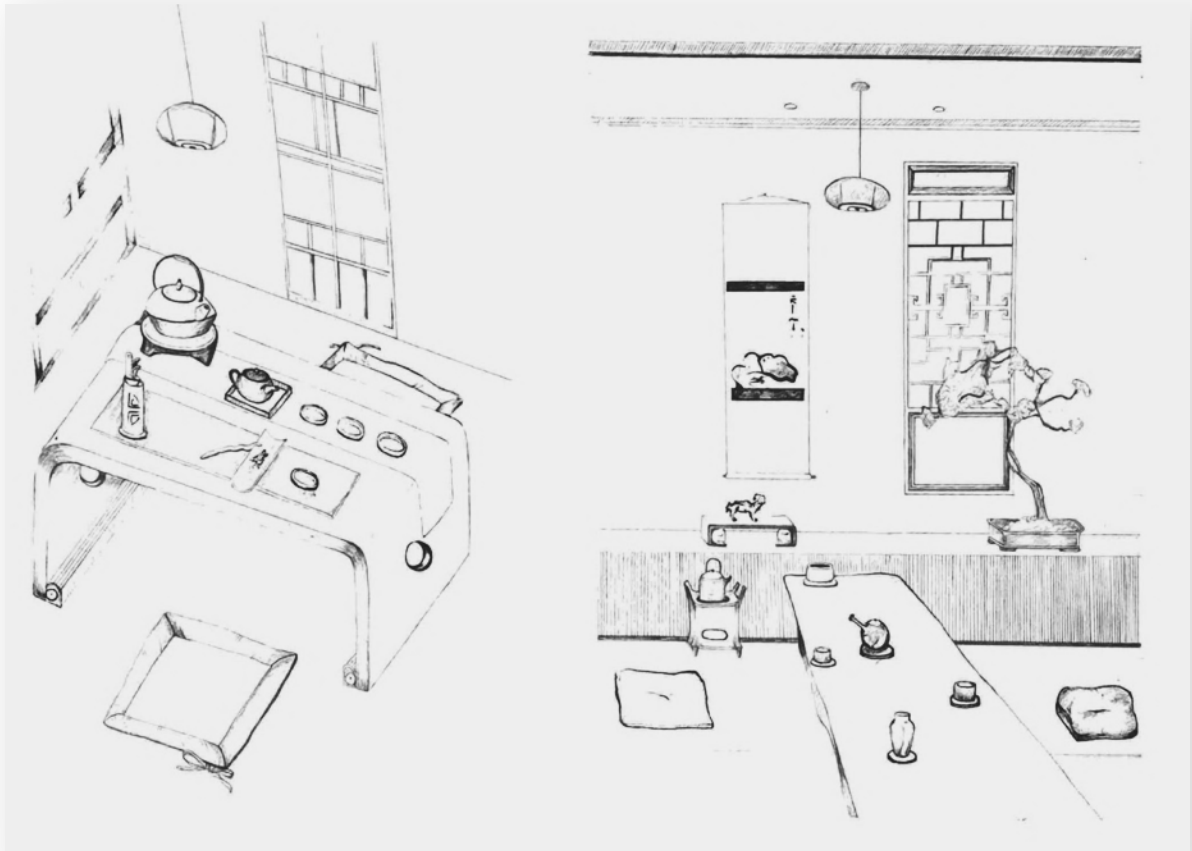


Figure 10 Graphic study of Chinese tea room (Niamb McGeoghagan, Authors Own)

### 4.3 Finding Serenity in Solitude

Japanese tea culture in a modern rural context follows spirituality, a journey and transition from the outdoors and exterior of the house, guiding one through the landscape towards a tea room. Minimalism and focus on spiritual design elements deliver this tea ceremony. Japanese culture believes in simplicity and focus during tea ceremonies. This activity is focused on spirituality, respecting words on scrolls, pottery and flowers depending on the season and ceremony.

The action of sitting on tatami mats placed upon the ground receiving utensils for tea from the ground and placing those items back into the earth are poised. The furo and ro placed within the tatami mats are rooted within the ground. The space encourages using minimal materials, and what materials are used are natural and from the locality. The tea ritual itself has herbs selected specifically for the chosen ceremony celebrated, the seating order is prearranged concerning the host.

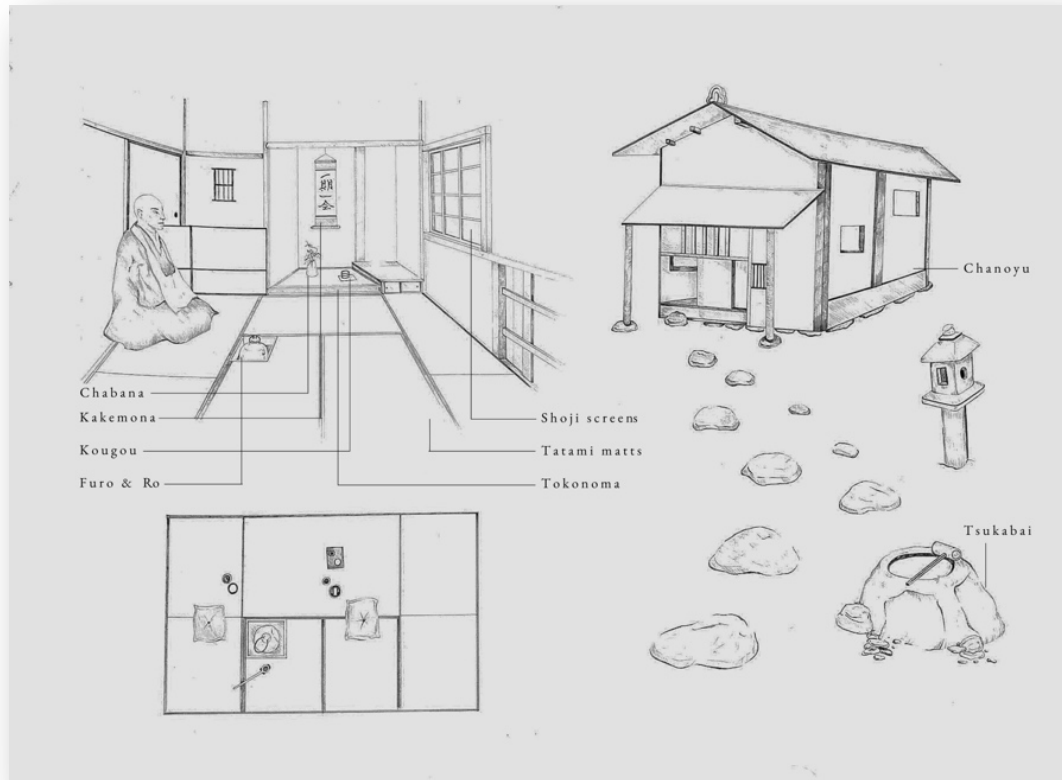


Figure 11 Graphic study of a Japanese tea room (Niamb McGeoghegan, Authors Own)

#### 4.4 Findings of Gilded Excellence

British tea culture historically held wealth, elegance and status within society. Floor-to-ceiling floral motifs and imported Chinese dishware completed this tea ceremony exuding the position of upper-class people in Britain. Originally a medicinal herb sold by wealthy voyagers on journeys through spice routes to nobles in Britain. As the tea leaves were of upper-class quality, elegant people of society in England used tea as a means of elevating position and power. British tea rooms would lose the spirituality associated with China and focus on communication between social groups.

Materiality used in historical British interiors where tea was shared typically consisted of circular mahogany tables, with lace doilies embellishing the glossed surface. Floral patterns and contrasting pastel fabrics framing large windows dominated the space. The room reflected what the tea leaves stood for, wealth, elegance and societal norms for the Victorian and Georgian eras.

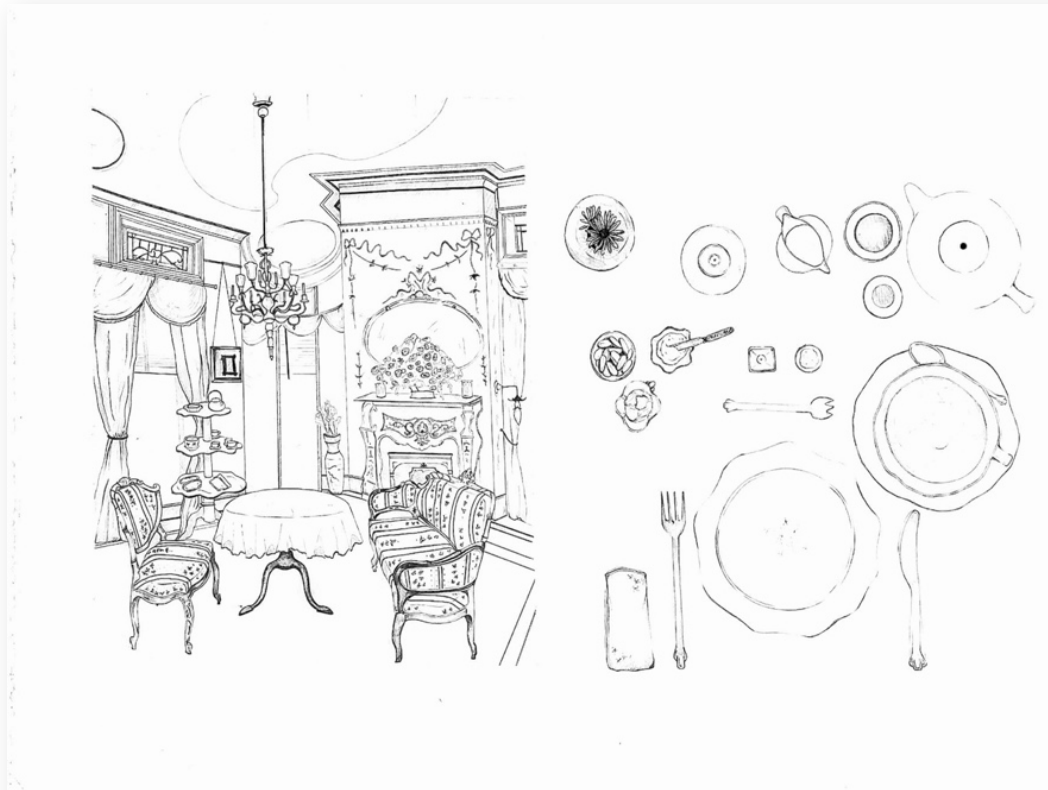


Figure 12 Graphic study of British tea room (Niamh McGeoghegan, Authors Own)

#### 4.5 In the Warm Embrace of Finding Hearth and Home

The Irish context of tea has evolved significantly from its neighbour and influence in Britain. The way tea is consumed in Ireland has roots in family, communication and friendship. Tea in Ireland is ingrained within its culture, it is an informal act among friends and family to offer companionship. Consuming tea is an act of bonding and relaxation, a breath from completing tasks. “Giving someone a cup of tea is like a gift”, one interviewee explained, tea in Ireland is shared among families and typically consumed in family homes. “We usually sit in a circle, and talk to each other – it makes us happy to share tea”, the same interviewee said. Four interviewees mentioned arranging furniture in their family sitting room to face one another, it allowed people to be present while consuming tea. “It’s intimate, having tea with someone while you face them” The emotions present while having tea is the experience for Irish people, whether it relaxing after a day of work or coming back to the ‘home house’ it was consistent that tea has become a breath of quiet and intimacy with yourself or one another.

Having a fire seemed to elevate this experience, the lighting, noise and heat affected people. The fire is said to be the heart of the home while enjoying tea alongside conversing with people, “the fire affects us when we’re all sitting together”. Irish people expect a certain ambience while consuming tea, having warm-lit lamps paired with the fire encourages tea culture in Ireland to thrive. “Bright light doesn’t relax me... noise makes it difficult to engage with my parents.” Tea culture in contemporary Irish homes isn't a ceremony, this is an activity involving tea that is shared among parents and family to converse. There is no single interior design style or rules



dedicated to tea consumption in Ireland. Family, friends and sofas with imaginary name tags become the ceremony.



Figure 13 Graphic study of an Irish room where tea was the primary activity (Niamh McGeoghegan, Authors Own)

#### 4.6 Conclusion of Findings

Established themes with each tea ceremony were as follows:

Chinese culture led the spread of tea throughout the world and has strong links to landscape and the origin of tea. Their dynamics focused on conversation and being connected to the interior space as well as the exterior.

Japanese culture has a strong spiritual belief behind the tea ceremony and the journey to their interior space through the exterior landscape and that journey continues with the use of materials reflecting the nature outside.

Historical Western culture was to exude wealth and elegance within society with imported materials and the idea of medicinal teas from China. The orientation of furniture, materials and décor was to showcase wealth and status in the society.

Modern Irish culture is about home and family, feeling safe and belonging to an interior space that allows for conversation and relaxation.

#### 5.1 Comparative Discussion

With tea and its culture originating in China, being adopted by Japan, sold to Britain with the promise of health and passing through to Ireland we begin to see how sharing tea consumes a space.

Spirituality within the space was apparent in Japanese and Irish tea consumption research. For Japan, this was the action of respect and reflection and having space to communicate that activity. (Muza-chan, 2013) Irish tea consumption follows the same dynamic: having a safe and

comfortably designed space that allows one to rest, reflect and communicate with each other. Chinese culture also shares the need for having tea, teahouses serve the opportunity to nurture relationships by having a dedicated space to communicate between friends and family.

Whilst Japan find their journey to the tea ceremony as important as the interior itself, having a connection to nature and the landscape is also apparent in an Irish context. Japan has held this ritual for thousands of years whereas Ireland is being studied in a contemporary context. Irish interviewees agreed the acoustics aspect of nature prompted a positive reaction (i.e. sounds of birds and windows pointing toward the rugged landscape). China alongside Japan resonate with the exterior design of the space, choosing local shrubs and flowers to decorate the landscape that are designed to bloom depending on the season of the ceremony. (Blofeld, 2022) Historical British tea ceremonies also held importance to exterior elements of their tea ritual, having pergolas decorated with in-season flowers to elevate their tea consumption.

Lighting in each culture varied, and Chinese tea houses opted for having a darker atmosphere for the interior space. Using diffused and ambient light allowed communication between people to flow easily. Having an ambient lit space with artificial lighting creates a sense of safety in design, colour psychology influences emotions and this case proves safety and comfort in warm-tinted artificial lighting. Likewise in Irish interiors, this lighting continues for tea consumption, interviewees opted to have artificial lamps for their comfort. Having an ambient light cast from the fire in the typical Irish family home was important for lighting. Similar to the design of a Chinese teahouse, the comfort of talking with ambient lighting helped users feel protected during their tea ceremony.

In Japan and comparably in British culture natural lighting was often welcomed, with rural Japanese tea houses using thin layers of washi paper to cover the building's exterior to allow diffused light to enter the space. British Victorian and Georgian tea rituals had tall large windows framed with fine draping curtains for light to spill into the space.

Furniture used during a tea ceremony varied from culture to culture. In Irish and British contexts, there is and was a heavy use of furniture in the space. British culture during the Tea Revival showed off status and hierarchy, this was achieved by having an abundance of furniture typically made from mahogany wood. In an Irish tea room, there is a use of furniture but each selection is important, interviewees had spoken about having specific seats chosen in their family homes. Each family member has a dedicated seat for having a tea ceremony, the arrangement is significant. Furniture is arranged to face one another according to the interviewees, this provokes communication and focus on people during the tea ceremony. Whereas, in Japan, there is a lack of furniture, this is to focus on the act of tea itself. The historical Japanese tea ritual focused on spirituality, and abundant furnishings would distract from this. The users needed to have a space to pay respect to others. Users of this space placed themselves on floors constructed of tatami mats and connected themselves to the ground. Similarly, historically in China, people sat on the floor, and cushions provided comfort beside low tables. This was for Chinese travellers originally to be able to pack their tea materials and stow on horseback without the clutter of chairs.

## 5.2 Comparison Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey of tea and its cultural significance spans the world and centuries, flowing through China, Japan, and Britain, and finally finding its unique expression in Ireland. Across these cultures, the act of sharing tea transcends mere consumption, becoming a ritual imbued with spiritual, social, and environmental elements.

## 6.1 Conclusion

Ultimately, the examination of tea rituals in Chinese, Japanese, British, and Irish cultures highlights the significant impact of cultural standards, historical backgrounds, and society on the design configurations seen in tea rooms. Each culture adds its traditions and beliefs to its tea ceremonies, influencing the places where these rites are performed.

Chinese tea rituals place the value of connection and conversation within a space anchored in community and respect. The teahouse's interior decor reflects the customs of many locales and functions as a centre for communication to thrive. The use of natural materials improves the experience, while the darker atmosphere encourages dialogue and strengthens relationships.

Japanese tea ceremonies, on the other hand, are venues that are thoughtfully created to support a journey of respect. This is the embodiment of spirituality and mindfulness. Natural materials and minimalism produce calm spaces that highlight a person's connection to the ground. The tea room's spiritual atmosphere is enhanced by the careful attention to detail and furniture arrangement.

Rich interior design and imported materials are valued in the elegant and prestige-driven historical British tea culture. Following the voyages, teas were said to have medicinal qualities making tea ceremonies demonstrations of social status, with intricate décor and lavish furniture.

The emphasis of contemporary Irish tea ceremonies has shifted to the home and family, with rooms created to be cosy and intimate. A sense of security and connection is created by the acoustics and ambient lighting, and family connections are fostered by consuming tea.

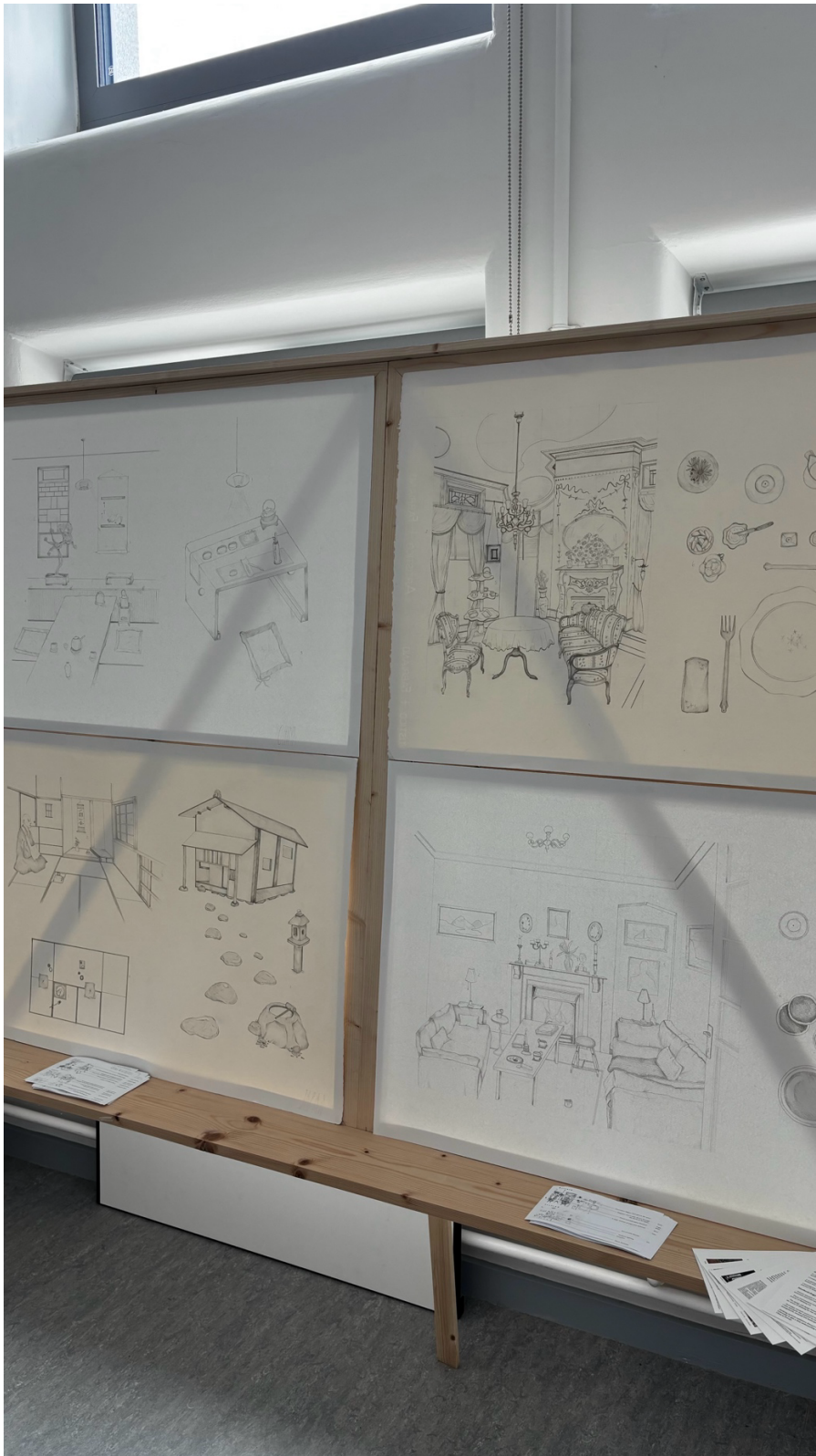
It is clear from a comparative study of these many tea rituals that culture has a significant impact on the layouts and design decisions made for tea rooms. Every culture infuses its tea consumption with unique values and customs, transforming the settings in which these rituals take place, whether those goals are community building, spiritual advancement, status, or family bonding.

In essence, the act of sharing tea transcends consumption; it becomes a cultural expression, social connection, and personal reflection, enriching lives across the globe for centuries.

## Bibliography

- Acar, A. (2020) *What are the simple rules of the tea ceremony room? Tea Ceremony Japan Experiences MAIKOYA*. Available at: <https://mai-ko.com/travel/culture-in-japan/tea-ceremony/what-are-the-simple-rules-of-the-tea-ceremony-room/> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Austen, J. *et al.* (1982) *Emma*. Harlow: Longman.
- Bakall, S. (2019) *The Tranquil Teahouse in a Chinese Garden, Suite*. Available at: <https://suitepdx.com/scene/tranquil-teahouse-in-a-chinese-garden/> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Blofield, J. (2022) *Chinese art of tea*. S.l.: Routledge
- Davies, R. (2023) *Victorian Interior Design 101: All about the style that screams 'more is more', Architectural Digest*. Available at: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/victorian-interior-design-101#:~:text=Victorian%20interior%20design%20is%20a,visitor%20in%20its%20rich%20world.> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Fieve, N. and Waley, P. (2013) In *Japanese capitals in historical perspective place, power and memory in Kyoto, Edo and Tokyo*. London: Taylor and Francis, pp. 89–89.
- Khan, C. (2014) *The documented history of Japanese shoji screens, Asian Furniture Blog*. Available at: <https://www.tansu.net/blog/blog/japanese-shoji-screens-history/> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Kurihara, J. (2023) *Is Seiza really the traditional way to sit for Japanese people? Iromegane*. Available at: <https://www.iromegane.com/post/is-seiza-really-the-traditional-way-to-sit-for-japanese-people> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- L. K., Y. (no date) *Teas Wonderful History, Chinese historical & cultural project - Teas wonderful history*. Available at: <https://www.chcp.org/teas-wonderful-history/> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Marks, T. (2020) *The tea-rific history of Victorian afternoon tea, The British Museum*. Available at: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/tea-rific-history-victorian-afternoon-tea> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Muza-chan (2013) *Masterpieces of Japanese traditional architecture, Nijiriguchi, Muza*. Available at: <https://muza-chan.net/japan/index.php/blog/masterpieces-japanese-traditional-architecture-nijiriguchi> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Quinn, T. (2019) *Tea garden, Portland Japanese Garden*. Available at: <https://japanesegarden.org/garden-spaces/tea-garden/> (Accessed: 19 December 2023).
- Sidorova, A. (2023) *Seasonal tea ceremonies in Japan, Owlcation*. Available at: <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/Seasonal-Tea-Ceremonies-In-Japan> (Accessed: 19 December 2023)

# Appendix A



Exhibition