



Chawan

The tea bowl is part of the tea ceremony in Chinese and Japanese culture.

It has a function alongside all other aspects: the enclosed garden, the tearoom with its low gate, the austerity of the materials (wabi-sabi), the paper roll, the vase with flowers, the built-in fireplace, the sound of the bubbling water in the metal boiler and the purifying water in the stone basin. All this under the eye of the tea master and his guests. All these elements, carefully chosen in relation to each other, breathe the spirit of 'zen'.

The tea bowl in this ritual does not only exist on its own. The apparent ease and quantity of that kind of ceramics produced in the West seems surprising to me. Why are so many tea bowls made in Europe today?

Is there an equal number of rituals and tea huts available, or are these creations merely a reflection of the original ritual? It is beyond doubt that the great Eastern traditions have influenced ceramics in the West. Does this a priori mean that this influence also applies to the minds of its creators? Is the culture - which is unfamiliar to us - sufficiently assimilated? Have its sources been thoroughly studied or have we all ended up in the pitfall of imitating the external form?

Not only our knowledge of oriental glazes, baking techniques and design is important, but above all the spirit from which they have originated. This requires study and time and especially abandoning the conditioning of conceptual and ego-focused thinking. The process of contemplation, discipline and familiarity with the emptiness remain - when lacking 'direct experience' - just rational concepts and hence lack the power to transform.

Even our intuitive and spontaneous expressions are usually rooted in the personal rather than the larger energetic field. Nevertheless, a true creative act materializes in a current moment in time and space, and can never be fully achieved by reliving the past, by just imitating or reshuffling what already preceded it. By using the dynamic force within ourselves in the here and now, we discover a beauty that does not arise from an unchanging self but from an ever-changing relationship and transformation within and beyond ourselves.

The road is not only object but also subject coexisting with nature and the environment. In contrast with the egocentric superiority and human arrogance by which we want to grasp nature and in which the fixed mind



does not allow for change. Once beyond this fixation the ego can get rid of it and this energy can manifest itself through us.

If we look deeper, through the form and towards the essence of the tea ritual, we see that these too are just one of the many expressions of that same spirit: the deep unity with nature and the beauty of simplicity, the loss of object and subject, the spirit of susceptibility, of compassion and hospitality, of offering each other temporary shelter in an environment stripped of its excess.

From the same inspiration, new forms are always possible, not only in the field of ceramics but in various fields, beyond the straitjacket of pre-existing ones, as an expression of living reality.

Geert van der Borgh