

OBJECT IN FOCUS

## Tea sipping under willows



China

Qing dynasty, 1644–1911

Ink and color on silk

10 1/4 x 10 3/4 in

Gift of Charles Lang Freer. F1909.247e

### Describe

It is a hot summer day. Willow trees stand lushly along the river bank. Under the shade, three robed gentlemen sit on the ground enjoying some tea. The scholar on the left, bareheaded, is pouring tea from a teapot for himself after having served his friends. The other two have on a fisherman's hat and an official's cap. The three figures are likely recluse scholar-officials. With tea in hands, they are about to start a lively conversation. Beside them, a servant is fanning a portable stove to boil some more tea. Surrounding the scholars are portable shelves filled with teaware. They are of various colors, sizes, and shapes. Small in size, this album leaf is finely painted with exquisite details.

### Analyze

Tea was first used in China in ancient times as a medicine. It became a popular beverage during the Tang dynasty (618–907) when the first book on tea was written. Tea was compressed into dried tea cakes, then ground and brewed in water. During the Song dynasty (960–1279), tea was made from finely ground tea powder. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Chinese people began to drink tea by soaking dried tea leaves in boiling water inside a teapot. Chinese people continue to drink tea this way today.



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## Interpret

Tea drinking has been an essential part of Chinese culture for centuries. Through the practice of generations of elites and Buddhist monks, tea tasting evolved into a fine art. Elites and monks were so fond of tea that they developed rituals around it and required certain ways to cultivate and prepare the tea. They also designed special teaware for its making and drinking. Tea culture remains an important part of life in present-day China. Tea is served at holiday parties, social gatherings, or when guests come to visit.

## Inquire

- Let your eyes wander all over this artwork for at least thirty seconds. What do you notice? What does this artwork make you think about? What questions do you have?
- Use the [zoom feature](#) to notice all the details. How do you think these men feel about the outdoors? What do you think is their attitude towards tea? What are the clues that make you think this?
- Write a narrative about this artwork. How might these men know each other? What might they be talking about?

## Resources

View this object online at <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1909.247e/>

Learn more at <https://asia.si.edu/teachingchina>







