

MEDIA ONLY: Allison Peck, 202.633.0447
asia.si.edu/press
pressAsia@si.edu

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Chigusa and the Art of Tea

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The power of seeing, the power of naming. Japanese collectors in the sixteenth century used the compact tea room as the setting for interacting with objects. Looking closely at form and surface, they singled out exceptional works and gave them personal names. These named objects could develop a reputation and a history as they were displayed and used in tea gatherings. “Chigusa and the Art of Tea” shows how one Chinese storage jar was transformed into a vessel worthy of display, adornment, and contemplation. Diaries of tea events reveal what the writers admired about the jar named Chigusa, which appears in the exhibition alongside other cherished objects—Chinese calligraphy, Chinese and Korean tea bowls, Japanese stoneware and wooden vessels—used during this formative era of Japanese tea culture.

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Tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa
China, probably Guangdong Province,
Southern Song or Yuan dynasty,
mid-13th to mid-14th c.
Stoneware with iron glaze
H: 41.6 cm
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art



***Tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa
with mouth cover and ornamental
cords***
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art

The mouth cover for Chigusa is new, made by Tsuchida Yūkō in 2013; the cords for tying ornamental knots are from the Japanese Meiji era (late 19th–early 20th c.)



***Tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa
with mouth cover, securing cord, and
net bag***
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art

The mouth cover for Chigusa was tailored in Japan using Chinese silk from the Ming dynasty (15th c.); the cord for securing the mouth cover is from the Japanese Meiji era (1868–1912); the silk net bag is Japanese from the Muromachi or Momoyama period (16th c.).



Tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa and its innermost storage box
 Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art

This storage box for Chigusa, the innermost of three, is Japanese from the Edo period (1615–1868), and is made of lacquered paulownia wood.



Tray for the inner storage box of the tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa, with ornamental cords and storage envelopes

Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art

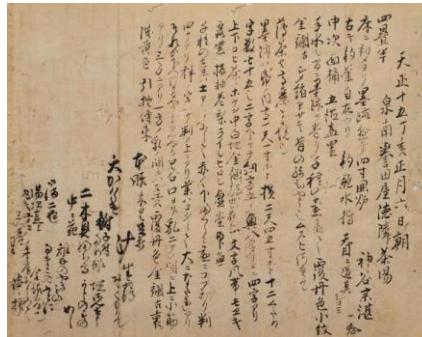


Set of three nesting storage boxes for the tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa
 Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art

The outer storage box is the most recent, from the Meiji era (late 19th–early 20th c.). The middle box, formerly the outer box, is from the Edo period (1615–1868), and is made of cedar stained with persimmon tannin. The inner storage box, from the same time period, is made of lacquered paulownia wood. All three are Japanese, designed to nest within one another.

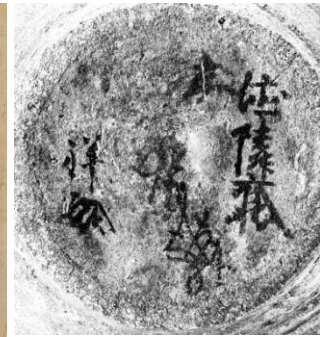


Documents associated with the tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa
 Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art



Record of viewing the tea-leaf jar named Chigusa, transcribed from a tea diary entry dated 1587, 1st month, 6th day

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1633–43
 Ink on paper
 35.7 × 45.6 cm
 Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art



Ciphers of past owners on the base of the tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa
 Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art



Hand mill for grinding tea leaves into powder

Japan, ca. 2006
Granite and wood
19.8 x 30 cm
Courtesy private collection



Tea caddy named Ueda Bunrin, with lacquer tray

China, Fujian or Guangdong province, 13th c.
Stoneware with iron glaze, lacquer
5.8 x 17.2 cm
Courtesy private collection



Kettle for boiling water for tea formerly owned by Insetsu, the first known owner of the tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa

Japan, Muromachi period, late 15th–early 16th c.
Cast iron and bronze
17 x 29.1 cm
Courtesy of The Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya



Tea bowl formerly owned by Insetsu, the first known owner of the tea-leaf storage jar named Chigusa

China, Fujian province, Southern Song dynasty, 13th c.
Stoneware with iron glaze, copper rim
6.8 x 13.3 cm
Courtesy of The Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya



Jar with design of mynah birds

By Nonomura Ninsei
Japan, Kyoto, Edo period, 1670s
Stoneware with colored and silver enamels over white glaze
30.5 x 24.1 cm
Courtesy Asia Society and Museum, New York