

## The Noumena and The Tea Bowl

*By: Ben Gufford*



In Eastern aesthetics, the essence of the tea bowl is in its balance between the paradoxical quantum nature of being both an object and not an object. This undefinable aesthetic makes the tea bowl a sacred expression. Immanuel Kant suggests, “We know the noumenal world to exist because human sensibility is merely receptive, it is not itself sensible and therefore remains otherwise unknowable to us.” This echoes Lao Tzu’s suggestion of the

Tao and harkens to mind the essence of the tea bowl as a paradox of aesthetics and a pointer to the greater nature of the mind.

A chawan is meant to disappear in the experience of drinking tea . . . confirming the root philosophy of Zen as expressed through the tea ceremony and influenced by Hindu philosophies. “Schopenhauer was among the first thinkers in Western philosophy to share and affirm significant tenets of Indian philosophy, such as asceticism, denial of the self, and the notion of the world-as-appearance.” Further, Schopenhauer noted, “aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful consists, to a large extent, in the fact that, when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves.” This experience of tea in ceremonial form signifies the importance of experience beyond self, experience of the deeper given connectedness poured into us by, through, and with that of nature, consciousness, and the universal experience. We are as much a container of experiences as the tea bowl.

The tea bowl is a simplistic beauty, a subtle wind of unspoken words and a graceful reminder of essence and function, (ch’e-yong 體用); a universal expression from out of mu (無).

“For in a cup, all time comes together -- past, present, and future -- and all lose themselves inside! The works have become my teachers, instructing me about the history . . . Most of the mass-produced products companies spew out each year become obsolete the next. Most speak of nothing but the greed of the mind. For this reason, I give my support to the creators of beauty in a clay cup.” - Robert Yellin, Hand-made Objects Have Soul of Their Own, Japan Times, September 17, 2003. [Robert Yellin](#)

