

# Installation Art Presentation of Tea Culture Symbols: A Case Study of the Installation of “Divinity and Naturality”

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## Abstract

As a significant component of China's rich traditional heritage, tea culture has increasingly attracted scholarly and public interest in recent years. Contemporary artistic expressions of tea culture have become progressively diverse, encompassing tea ceremonies, spatial design, literature, painting, and digital media representations. However, artistic works related to tea often remain confined to the replication of physical objects and scenes. Notably, thematic installation art that seeks to interpret the deeper meanings embedded in tea culture remains relatively underexplored. This study undertakes an analysis of the aesthetic imagery inherent in tea culture and interprets its symbolic and spiritual dimensions through the lens of visual narrative. It articulates the thematic concept of "Avenue Nature" as a foundation for the creation of installation artworks. Using the "Divinity and Naturality" series as a case study, this paper investigates the conceptual development, material application, and presentation strategies employed in tea-themed installation art. This creative approach aims to stimulate deeper reflection on and appreciation for the cultural essence of tea. During the creative process, tea and tea extract are employed as symbolic materials. The integration of varied media and artistic techniques is used to express the philosophical principle of "Great Avenue Nature," a core idea rooted in ancient Chinese tea traditions. The concept of "Avenue Nature" reflects a harmonious unity between humanity and the natural world, consistent with the tenets of Daoist and Buddhist philosophy. Within Daoism, this harmony is viewed as a structural alignment between the individual, society, and nature.

**Keywords:** Tea Culture Symbols, Installation Art; Avenue of Nature, Chinese Tradition.

## INTRODUCTION

Tea has long held a revered position within Chinese civilisation, serving as both a daily ritual and a vehicle for cultural expression. Its evolution from a simple beverage to a symbol of philosophical thought reflects its deep integration into the fabric of Chinese society. The term “tea culture” began to be formally employed during the 1980s and 1990s<sup>1</sup>. In its broader definition, tea culture encompasses both the tangible aspects associated with tea and its intangible, spiritual implications. Chinese tea culture possesses a profound historical lineage, with tea evolving beyond its material properties to embody the ethos and lifestyle of the Chinese people. As societal and cultural transformations continue to unfold, tea culture is consistently infused with renewed spiritual significance. Central to this cultural framework is the concept of the “tea ceremony” or the notion of “tea Zen taste”. Through the practice of “tea meditation”, practitioners seek to merge tea with Zen philosophy, thereby constructing a contemplative realm through which they may apprehend a more authentic connection with the world<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout its evolution, tea culture has assimilated elements from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, producing symbols shaped by humanistic insight and philosophical reflection. Over time, these symbols have become integrated into the fabric of daily life, influencing cultural identity and individual consciousness. In their introspective engagement with tea, the Chinese people have progressively developed a stable set of ideological principles and value orientations, encapsulated in the core ethos of tea culture<sup>3</sup>. The aesthetic imagery of traditional Chinese tea culture is expressed not only through the spiritual dimensions of Zen and Daoism<sup>4</sup>, but also via the narrative tradition cultivated during the Tang and Song dynasties. Various artistic components such as the elegance of tea art, the craftsmanship of tea utensils, and the spatial aesthetics of tea environments are integral to the tea experience, offering layered aesthetic value from multiple perspectives. This rich tradition has gradually endowed tea drinking with the inherent aesthetic qualities of Chinese classical culture.

The selection of tea culture symbols as a thematic basis for installation art holds particular significance<sup>5</sup>. This approach enables the expression of ancient tea culture’s spiritual essence through visual storytelling. It facilitates the representation of both historical and contemporary China to international audiences, underscoring the depth and continuity of Chinese civilisation. Furthermore, the installation format allows for a reimagining of artistic interaction, highlighting the relational dynamic between artworks, individuals, and their material surroundings. Ultimately, this form of expression prompts critical reflection on the nature of artistic creation itself. The aim is not merely to recreate traditional imagery but to deepen the viewer’s emotional and intellectual engagement with the cultural essence of tea. By using tea and related materials as expressive elements, the installation connects the visual language of art with the philosophical values embedded in Chinese heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Interpretation of Tea Culture Symbols from the Perspective of Visual Narrative Visual Narrative of Tea Culture Symbols Tea Ceremony**

As a cornerstone of intangible heritage, tea culture continues to reflect the evolving interplay between tradition, identity, and artistic expression. Tea culture occupies a distinctive place within Chinese tradition, not only as a daily practice but as a vehicle for expressing layered philosophical, aesthetic, and spiritual meanings<sup>6</sup>. Rooted in the interwoven influences of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought, the ritual of tea extends far beyond the act of drinking. It invites contemplation, encourages a sense of harmony between self and nature, and reflects a cultural inclination towards simplicity and introspection. Over centuries, this tradition has taken on symbolic dimensions, evolving from tangible practices into metaphors that speak to impermanence, renewal, and inner clarity<sup>7</sup>. The classical tea ceremony, for example, embodies more than elegance or etiquette, it represents a cultivated state of mind attentive to presence and quietude.

Early literary accounts provide critical insights into how tea became a vehicle for philosophical expression and cultural refinement. These foundational texts reveal the transformation of tea from a practical necessity into a symbol of aesthetic and spiritual life. Within this tradition, the role of tea extended beyond taste to embody values of harmony, clarity, and contemplation. Lu Yu’s *The Book of Tea*<sup>8</sup>, written during the Tang Dynasty, offers a comprehensive discourse on the art of tea appreciation<sup>9</sup>. The work integrates the philosophical principles of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into the act of tea drinking, laying the foundational spirit of the Chinese tea ceremony<sup>10</sup>. The notion of the “tea ceremony” transcends the physical qualities of tea to enter a spiritual and philosophical domain. It represents a form of cultural refinement and ideological cultivation, often regarded as a core element of Eastern cultural tradition. Through the practice of tea tasting and the appreciation of tea aesthetics, individuals internalise the contemplative insights of Zen Buddhism. This synthesis of meditation and tea consumption fosters both physical discipline and mental clarity, enabling a deeper engagement with spiritual experience and artistic sensibility.

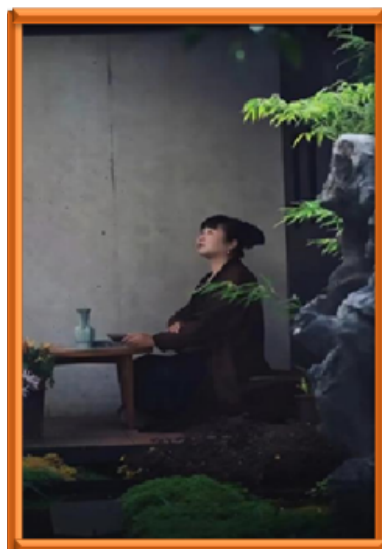
The tea ceremony simultaneously embodies two dimensions: firstly, the essence of “Zen tea taste”<sup>11</sup>, and secondly, the procedural act of tea preparation. When analysed through the framework of visual narrative, each ritual element and spatial arrangement within the tea ceremony can be interpreted as symbolically significant. These elements collectively form a visual aesthetic language unique to tea culture. Such symbolism facilitates a deeper understanding of the values it conveys namely serenity, reverence, composure, and introspection which lie at the heart of tea culture’s spiritual dimension.

### **The Spiritual Understanding of Tea Culture Symbols Naturality**

As artistic practice has developed, contemporary interpretations of tea culture have moved away from literal depictions, turning instead to more conceptual and symbolic forms. Installation art, in particular, has become a meaningful medium through which artists explore the ephemeral and reflective qualities of tea<sup>12</sup>. By using tea leaves, infusions, and residues as materials, artists reframe the sensory aspects of tea as markers of time, memory, and transformation. The inherent natural textures and hues of tea lend themselves well to these expressions, resonating with long-standing aesthetic principles that value subtlety, transience, and restraint<sup>13</sup>. Such works often resist overt ornamentation, favouring minimalist approaches that leave space for the viewer’s own reflection and emotional response.

In China, tea represents more than a mere beverage; it carries a distinct spiritual significance, symbolising the refined and unadorned nature of traditional Chinese culture<sup>14</sup>. It particularly reflects the minimalist and natural aesthetics of Zen, thereby forming a symbolic representation of Chinese tea culture that integrates Zen philosophy. In contemporary practice, the act of tea drinking is less about alleviating physical thirst and more about experiencing the tranquil, purified atmosphere of the tea space. This environment, along with the meditative state facilitated by “tea meditation”, fosters a sense of inner calm and spiritual balance<sup>15</sup>.

When tea is consumed in solitude, it often takes on an introspective function, embodying a sense of personal care, self-restoration, or a contemplative lifestyle rooted in tea. It also provides a means for perceiving the underlying order of the universe. This reflective process forms the conceptual basis for the theme of “nature” within the installation’s philosophical narrative. Drawing upon the Zen tea concept of “Great Avenue Nature”, this thematic direction encourages reflection on enduring existential questions related to life and time<sup>16</sup>, while guiding individuals toward deeper awareness of the inner self. The concept of “Great Avenue Nature” is visually communicated through the act of solitary tea drinking, as illustrated in Figure 1, emphasising the unity of Tao and nature. In this context, tea installations do not merely showcase artistic skill but function as immersive environments where philosophical ideas take form. They reconnect the viewer with the ordinary yet profound rhythms of life, often drawing upon the Zen-inspired notion that simplicity holds the potential for awakening<sup>17</sup>. Whether through the integration of tea-stained materials or the symbolic layering of natural elements, these artworks challenge modern tendencies towards material excess and invite a quieter, more inward-looking engagement with the world.



**Figure 1:** Feeling “Naturalty” in a Person Drinking Tea

The concept of “Tao” not only originates from nature but simultaneously embodies it; Tao and nature exist in a dynamic unity, functioning as both distinct and inseparable entities<sup>18</sup>. In essence, the Tao is nature, and nature represents the Tao<sup>19</sup>. As Tao forms the central axis of Chinese philosophical thought, and is understood as synonymous with nature, it logically follows that “naturality” constitutes a foundational characteristic and essential element of Chinese cultural identity<sup>20,21</sup>. Accordingly, approaching the study of Chinese tea culture through the lens of nature aligns directly with the core symbolic and ideological tenets of tea culture.

## Artists’ Exploration of Artistic Creation on Tea

### Theme Embodiment and Display Media

Since antiquity, the evolution of tea culture has been accompanied by the emergence of a significant body of tea-related calligraphy and painting. However, within the domain of contemporary art, relatively few artists adopt tea as a central creative medium. Among the notable exceptions are Jiang Ji’an and Li Hongcheng. Jiang Ji’an, for instance, transforms the ordinary act of tea drinking into a form of contemporary ready-made painting. His works often involve tea-stained silk surfaces upon which individual tea leaves are collaged, resembling the letterhead of classical Chinese poetic correspondence. The composition as a whole evokes the appearance of a page from an ancient thread-bound Chinese manuscript. The centrally featured bottle not only serves as a representation of a tea vessel but also functions as a broader metaphorical container, suggesting philosophical associations with both “vessel” and “Tao”. This layering of meaning achieves a conceptual elevation from the material to the metaphysical.

In Jiang Ji’an’s practice,<sup>22</sup> tea leaves and tea infusion serve not only as physical media but also as carriers of symbolic meaning, particularly reflecting a “view of nature”. By incorporating everyday tea-related elements into his ready-made paintings, Jiang conveys a dialogue between the ritualistic aesthetics of literati art and the lifestyle of the intellectual class. His works articulate a profound link between the material essence of nature and the poetic sensibilities of human. As demonstrated in Figure 2, Jiang Ji’an’s integration of tea leaves into silk compositions symbolises the poetic and philosophical dimensions of literati aesthetics.

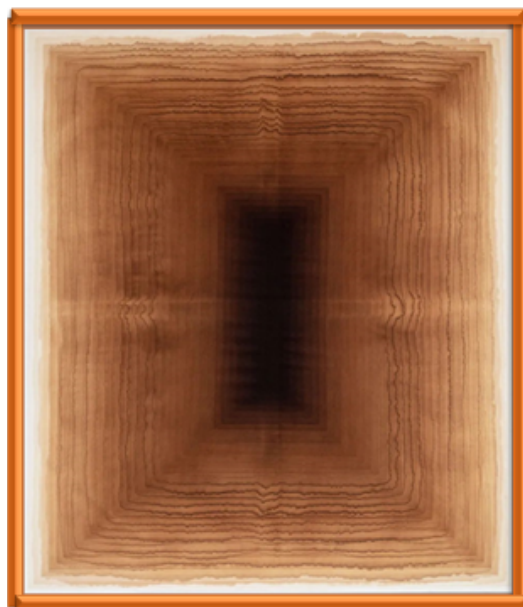


**Figure 2:** Spring and Autumn Dew, 2018, 126×51 cm, Ready Made Painting (Tea)<sup>22</sup>

Li Hongcheng,<sup>23</sup> an alumnus of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, selects tea as his artistic medium, blending pigments with latex before applying them onto canvas either by syringe or brush. His creative process begins with a conceptual framework, using tea and its infusion to evoke profound and ineffable insights and emotions. The “Missing 21 Grams” series, initiated in 2019, involved the repeated boiling of Pu’er tea cakes until the tea infusion lost its colour. Subsequently, the residual tea leaves were dried anew to produce tea residue cakes. These two forms the fresh tea cake and the tea residue cake are positioned at opposite ends of a scale, yet the balance leans toward the fresh tea cake. This imbalance invites contemplation as to whether it is the tea molecules, the air, the passage of time, or some intangible element that is absent.

When a weight of 21 grams is placed upon the tea residue cake, equilibrium is restored. Li Hongcheng’s repeated application of tea infusion onto the canvas results in delicate layers and subtle ripples, embodying a tension between rigorous control and unpredictable chance. This technique reflects his meditative engagement with the spiritual realm beyond material existence. Through the medium of tea, Li articulates his understanding of life and investigates

the interconnectedness of humanity, environment, and nature. Li Hongcheng's exploration of existential weight and transience through layered tea infusions is reflected in Figure 3, which highlights his meditative creative process.



**Figure 3:** MISSING 21 G NO.17 140 X 188 CM Pu'er Tea | Cotton | 2019<sup>23</sup>

### **Presentation Method and Connotation Display**

Jiang Ji'an employs a distinctly Chinese ideological approach to engage with his subjects, utilising the method of “observing things with things,” the artistic technique of “objectifying things,” and the philosophical stance of “taking things according to things.” This methodology expresses a profound Chinese cultural ethos, allowing the intrinsic nature of objects and their representations to mutually reinforce one another. Through this, Jiang reinterprets the quotidian poetry and imagery characteristic of literati life, encapsulating the dialectical interplay between Buddhist concepts of existence and non-existence. His work eschews grand narratives, instead conveying elevated philosophical ideas through subtle and nuanced means. Although each symbol within his compositions may appear understated, they harmonise to form a cohesive whole. For instance, his principal imagery is composed of blackened, dried tea leaves devoid of conventional aesthetic appeal, deliberately refraining from pursuing formal beauty. Jiang's metaphysical examination of tea enables this natural material to attain a poetic aesthetic and resonate with the sensibilities of contemporary art.

Conversely, Li Hongcheng's approach emphasises simplicity and purity to the degree of meditative creation. He establishes a unique communicative and expressive framework that connects the individual with the cosmos and nature, inviting the audience to perceive the world through the lens of “Zen tea taste.” His work thoughtfully navigates the relationship between conceptual ideas and formal expression. This philosophical reflection encourages a reconsideration of the surrounding world, fostering respect for even the most minute forms of life and a humble acknowledgement of human limitations, while inspiring the pursuit of infinite knowledge and wisdom. The repeated application of tea infusion upon paper creates similar yet distinct marks, manifesting the natural variations emerging from the regulated movements of the artistic process.

## **THE CREATIVE PRACTICE OF THE “DIVINITY AND NATURALITY” THEME INSTALLATION**

### **The Theme and Conception of the Creation**

In contemporary art practice, the fusion of traditional cultural themes with modern visual expression allows for deeper interpretive engagement. Within this context, tea culture serves as a rich source of symbolic meaning, offering fertile ground for conceptual and aesthetic exploration. The concept underpinning the “Divinity and Naturality” themed installation art aims to convey the spiritual essence of ancient tea culture to a wider audience. It seeks to

depict an idealised spiritual abode characterised by harmony between humanity and nature, thereby embodying the theme of “Divinity and Naturality” through the lens of oriental wisdom inherent in traditional Chinese tea culture. To develop a clearer conceptual framework, extensive background research was undertaken, involving the review of numerous academic sources, a thorough understanding of the tea-making process, and an examination of artworks by other artists addressing the theme of tea. This preparatory work provided the foundational knowledge necessary to construct the creative framework and to experiment with installation art.

Investigation into the tea production process revealed that the variations in status and colour among different teas are not primarily attributable to differing tea plant varieties, but rather to the diverse tea makers involved, the distinctive production techniques employed, and the resulting transformations that occur<sup>24</sup>. Analogously, human life unfolds through a variety of experiences that shape individual existence, leaving behind rich narratives borne of these encounters. Consequently, the use of “signs” as symbolic elements for visual storytelling was adopted. Tea and tea infusion were selected as linguistic components, with cotton paper serving as the principal medium<sup>10</sup>. The narrative quality of “signs” was accentuated through the deployment of diverse materials and forms. This approach led to the creation of multiple installation works centred on tea cultural symbols, which explore the breadth and depth of visual language, expand the expressive scope of tea culture symbolism, articulate the spirit of ancient Chinese tea culture, and ultimately manifest the concept of the “Avenue of Nature.”

### **Material Selection and Device Implementation**

The material serves as the medium through which the artist actualises the creative process, with its inherent natural and stylistic properties influencing and inspiring the resultant artistic effect. The “physical” attributes of materials impart a novel expressive language to the artwork, thereby enhancing its external communicative capacity. Attention to the “physical properties” of materials is an essential and fundamental aspect of artistic practice. The artist’s varied use of materials and techniques reflects the distinct expressive forms and visual characteristics inherent to each medium, while the unique advantages of individual materials reveal their particular texture and aesthetic qualities<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the deliberate engagement with materiality not only shapes the creative outcome but also deepens the viewer’s experiential and interpretative engagement with the artwork. Ultimately, an artist’s mastery of material properties becomes integral to conveying nuanced meanings and enriching the visual dialogue between artwork and audience.

In the installation art themed on ancient Chinese tea culture, the intent extends beyond merely presenting tea as a material; it also seeks to convey the Zen spirit embodied in the natural laws of the universe that underpin Chinese tea culture<sup>26</sup>. To discover an appropriate mode of visual expression, extensive experimentation was conducted involving printing and dyeing with tea leaves of different hues, utilising materials such as cotton, twine, cotton paper, and transparent substrates. During the installation process, the display of tea leaves in various colours, the arrangement of objects, and the spatial rhythm were all employed as components of the artistic language to articulate the concept of “nature”. Continuous reflection on the expressive potential of these symbolic languages constitutes the core of the work.

### **The Visual Expression of Natural Imagery in Tea Culture Symbols**

The objective of creating the “Divinity and Naturality” tea culture theme is to convey the spiritual essence of ancient Chinese tea culture, to manifest its aesthetic and Zen philosophies, and to embody the thematic concept of the “Avenue of Nature” within tea culture<sup>27</sup>. Visualising such an abstract notion and expressing it through installation materials presents significant challenges. Within traditional Chinese culture, natural imagery is esteemed for its simplicity and authenticity. Accordingly, this artistic creation employs fundamental materials derived from primal nature, emphasising the distinctive qualities of material language. The work intentionally transcends conventional visual language boundaries, refraining from the deliberate pursuit of formal beauty, instead utilising straightforward arrangements to reveal the “humanistic sign aesthetics” intrinsic to tea culture<sup>28</sup>.

To enhance public comprehension and aesthetic engagement with the installation, the scale of the works is enlarged, allowing viewers to move among the pieces and genuinely experience the enigmatic qualities of natural and mundane elements. This immersive approach evokes a comprehensive visual experience, influenced by aspects such as shape, colour, and texture of tea. By invoking Buddhist concepts, the installation prompts reflection on time and life, inviting viewers to examine their own souls and achieve self-healing<sup>29</sup>, through the philosophical wisdom inherent in tea culture.

## ANALYSIS OF THE INSTALLATION WORKS ON THE THEME OF “DIVINITY AND NATURALITY”

This artistic project seeks to materialise the abstract philosophies of tea culture through immersive installation works. Completed in December 2023 and showcased at the Chiang Mai Culture and Arts Centre Gallery, the “Divinity and Naturality” series comprises nine installations in total. From these, three key works, “Six Dust Illusion,” “Void Past,” and “One Leaf and One Bodhi” have been selected for detailed examination to elucidate the conceptual approach and investigative process in the creation of tea culture symbolic installation art.

### Analysis of the Installation Works of “Six Dusts Fantasy”

China’s diverse and vibrant tea culture has given rise to the classification of six primary types of tea, each distinguished by its unique status, colour, aroma, and flavour. In this artwork, the attempt has been made with various hues of tea to evoke the transient and illusory nature of the mortal world. To fully accentuate the chromatic qualities of the tea infusions, transparent glass bottles were selected, suspended in mid-air using fishing lines, and subsequently filled with tea liquids of varying colours. The artwork, entitled Six Dust Illusion, functions as a meaningful representation of the symbolic dimensions within Chinese tea culture. The title draws upon the Buddhist concept of the “Six Dusts,” which correspond to the six sensory faculties: the eyes (colour dust), ears (sound dust), nose (fragrance dust), tongue (taste dust), body (touch dust), and mind (thought dust).

The term “illusion” conveys the fleeting and deceptive nature of the superficial and complex material world, which is inherently ephemeral. The varied colours, aromas, and tastes of the tea within the bottles symbolise the “six dusts” meeting the diverse sensory experiences of individuals. It is increasingly common for people to misunderstand tea culture by valuing only the rarity or luxury of tea, overlooking its deeper connotations. As the notion of the “Six Dust Illusions” suggests, “Everything in the material world is like a dream, a bubble, dew, or lightning” all external phenomena are transient causes, constantly in flux, and the physical and mental states within individuals also perpetually change <sup>30</sup>. By utilising the outward appearance of tea, the research seeks to encourage viewers to reconsider their perspective, engage with the fundamental essence of tea, reflect upon their own life experiences, and ultimately attain a state of harmonious, unattached silence <sup>9</sup>.

It also invites contemplation on the dialectical interplay between external illusory appearances and inner reality. The symbolic interpretation of tea as a sensory metaphor is effectively realised in Figure 4, where suspended infusions represent the Buddhist notion of “Six Dusts.” Upon explaining the significance of the “Six Dust Illusions” as articulated in Buddhist terminology, the audience suddenly grasped the philosophical message embodied in the work namely, the endeavour to perceive the essence beneath outward appearances and to investigate the interplay between the true nature of existence and the illusions presented by the complexities of life <sup>31</sup>.



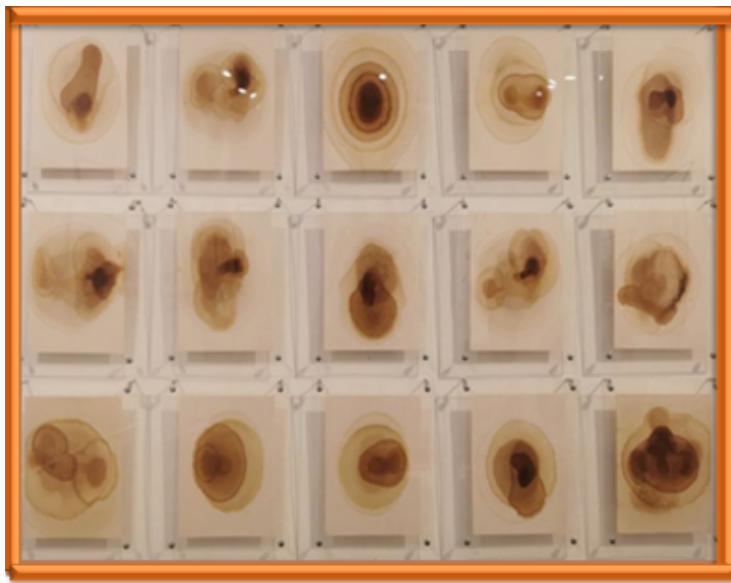
**Figure 4:** Six Dust Illusions, Installation (Materials: Tea, Glass Bottles, Fishing Line)  
Source: Authors Own Investigation



### Analysis of the Installation Works of “Void Past”

The hue and intensity of tea exhibit remarkable richness, offering expansive spatial dimensions <sup>32</sup>. For this work, a substantial sheet of cotton paper was selected, and a dropper was used to apply tea juice onto the central area of the work. Once the initial infusion had been fully absorbed and dried, the dripping process was repeated using tea juices of varying colours for the second and third applications. Intriguingly, although each droplet was deposited at the same central point, the resultant natural flow patterns differed due to the variable contraction of the cotton paper upon successive wettings, which caused the paper to form irregular concave and convex undulations. Consequently, the tea layered concentrically, continuously generating novel visual forms. This spontaneous and generative artistic method embodies a contemporary sensibility while closely aligning with the intended representation of the concept of “nature.” Upon completion, the final outcome invariably surpasses expectation, revealing uncontrolled, organic growth patterns that are both unique and captivating. Despite the consistency in materials and technique, the final manifestations remain distinct, reflecting a naturally occurring creative process imbued with Zen-like spontaneity. Hence, the piece was titled “Void Past.”

“Void Past” visually articulates the passage of time and the trajectory of existence. Within Chinese Zen Buddhism, there is a proverb: “Bodhi is not a tree, a mirror is not a stand, originally there is nothing where can the dust arise?” This aphorism conveys a state of purity, an ideal of “non-action” characterised by emptiness a heightened stage of enlightenment <sup>33</sup>. Similarly, the Tao Te Ching addresses the concept of “emptiness,” described metaphorically as “loneliness.” Chapter 25 states: “Lonely and solitary, independent and unchanging. The lonely has no sound; few, empty and formless. The independent is unmatched. The lonely has no meaning. Silence is heard; colour is visible; formlessness can be grasped; no image is sought; no name is called; nothing can be imitated thus; the clouds are lonely. The independent has no pair.” This passage reflects the formless nature of the Tao and its absolute, infinite qualities <sup>34</sup>. The unpredictable diffusion of tea on cotton paper in Figure 5 visually articulates Zen concepts of impermanence, spontaneity, and the formless void.



**Figure 5:** Void Past, Installation (Materials: Tea Juice, Cotton Paper, Acrylic Board)  
Source: Authors Own Investigation

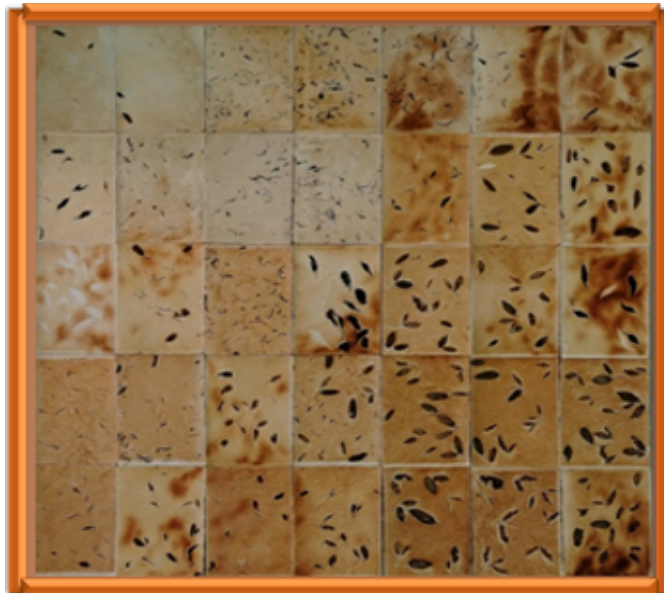
### Analysis of the Installation Works of “One Leaf and One Bodhi”

This artwork aims to symbolically capture and preserve the essence of tea leaves after brewing, representing the cyclical nature of life and death inherent in tea. Inspired by a traditional folk workshop that incorporates flower petals and leaves into handmade paper pulp to create intricate patterns, this piece was created by immersing tea leaves into pulp within a sink. The title, “One Leaf One Bodhi,” is derived from the phrase “One Flower, One World; One Leaf, One Bodhi,” which originates from the Buddhist Lotus Sutra (The lotus sutra), reflecting profound Eastern cultural insights into nature and life. It suggests that every leaf holds the potential for enlightenment and Bodhi, signifying that each minute element contains the possibility of awakening. The term “Bodhi” is a transliteration of the ancient

Sanskrit word meaning enlightenment and wisdom, referring to sudden spiritual awakening. This artwork invites viewers to contemplate the interconnectedness of life, nature, and spiritual awakening through the humble tea leaf's transformation. By embodying cycles of growth and enlightenment, the piece emphasizes the profound wisdom found within everyday natural elements.

Upon brewing, tea leaves release their essence into the liquid; the remaining leaves are considered residues. Having undergone the processes of picking and germination, the tea leaves symbolically experience death, and through brewing analogous to awakening and resurrection they release their life force, aroma, and flavour to the drinker. This moment marks the completion of their mission before their eventual disappearance. The life-death cycle of tea parallels human existence, characterised by stages of birth, ageing, sickness, and death, all ultimately insubstantial, while emptiness remains eternally constant, representing true existence. This concept aligns with the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra, which states that after the negation of all dharmas, including the five aggregates, the true nature emerges: "It is the emptiness of all dharmas, which is neither born nor destroyed, neither rejected nor pure, and neither increased nor decreased" <sup>35</sup>.

Through this work, viewers are invited to reflect on life, experience an epiphany of truth, and attain a transcendent state. The creative technique draws inspiration from Jiang Ji'an's ready-made artistic approach and is influenced by the Japanese aesthetic concept of "mono no aware," which appreciates the beauty of impermanence, as seen in the integration of tea leaves into the paper pulp, evoking a sense of withered, frozen beauty. Figure 6 captures the transformation of brewed tea leaves into embedded symbols of enlightenment, echoing the cyclical and ephemeral nature of existence. The audience's attention is naturally drawn to the vibrant tea leaves embedded within the work, evoking a sense of harmonious rhythm. The specimen-like leaves, either buried or presented within the pulp, reflect the repetitive cycles inherent in the laws of nature. The extent to which viewers' understanding and empathy resonate with the conceptual framework of the creation is especially noteworthy <sup>36</sup>. This interplay between natural symbolism and audience perception underscores the artwork's capacity to evoke reflection on life's perpetual rhythms. Ultimately, it is through this shared recognition that the piece achieves its profound communicative and emotional impact.



**Figure 6:** One Leaf and One Bodhi, Installation (Materials: Tea, Tea Juice, Pulp)  
Source: Authors Own Investigation

## CONCLUSION

The themes of "divinity" and "naturalness" express the spirit of ancient tea culture through visual symbols. These ideas guided the creation of tea-themed installations that invite reflection on life, nature, and respect for living things, inspired by Zen philosophy. Audience responses showed the works helped people think deeply and feel emotionally connected. The artworks combine materials and knowledge from fields like botany and philosophy, using artistic

judgement to convey meaning. By engaging with the pieces, viewers recall memories and discover deeper social and artistic significance, fitting the idea of the “Avenue of Nature.” This work also points to future uses of tea culture art in healing and therapy.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Subsequent research could benefit from examining audience responses to assess the emotional resonance and interpretative depth elicited by tea-themed installation artworks. Employing structured interviews or soliciting open-ended reflections may yield richer understandings of viewer interaction and interpretation. Cross-cultural comparative analyses might illuminate divergent or shared perceptions of tea symbolism across global contexts. Additionally, the integration of digital media, such as virtual or augmented reality installations holds promise for enhancing both accessibility and interactivity. Interdisciplinary collaboration with academics in fields such as philosophy, design, or anthropology could offer further conceptual sophistication. Investigating the potential therapeutic applications of tea-based art in public environments or clinical settings may also prove fruitful. Longitudinal documentation of audience experiences could help gauge the enduring impact of such installations. Expanding the scope of these artworks to include outdoor or community-oriented spaces may foster greater cultural engagement and visibility.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This study adopts a primarily conceptual approach, which restricts its capacity to evaluate interpretative or emotional impacts. Its focus on a single artist and exhibition potentially limits the applicability of findings to the broader landscape of contemporary installation art. The research is situated within a specific cultural framework, and audience reactions may differ significantly across other contexts. Variables such as age, cultural background, or prior familiarity with tea traditions have not been explored, which could influence viewer reception. The absence of perspectives from independent critics or curators may also limit interpretative diversity. Symbolic interpretations are largely grounded in philosophical discourse, which may not be universally relatable. Claims regarding the therapeutic potential of the artworks remain hypothetical, as they are not underpinned by psychological theory.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

This investigation underscores the capacity of installation art to communicate traditional cultural motifs through contemporary forms. It posits that tea, serving simultaneously as a material medium and a metaphorical device, can invite introspection and facilitate aesthetic contemplation. The study suggests that such artistic expressions may contribute to a deeper public engagement with intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, there appears to be scope for broader educational applications and therapeutic exploration. Ultimately, this research proposes new avenues for integrating cultural memory with modern artistic practices, expanding both the reach and resonance of installation art.

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