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# TRANSLATION

## The Old Tea Seller

### The Life and Poetry of Baisaō

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

*A man known as Baisaō dwells by the side of the Narabigaoka hills. He is over eighty years of age, with a white head of hair and a beard so long it seems to reach to his knees. He places his tea implements and utensils in a great wicker cabinet of bamboo and ports it around on his shoulders. He makes his way among the woods and hills, choosing spots rich in natural beauty. There, where the pebbled streams run pure and clear, he simmers his tea to offer to the people who come to enjoy these scenic places. Social rank whether high or low means nothing to him. He does not care if people pay him for his tea or not. . . . His name is now known everywhere. But no one has ever seen an expression of displeasure cross his face, for whatever reason. He is regarded by one and all as a truly great and wonderful man.*

—FALLEN CHESTNUT TALES<sup>1</sup>

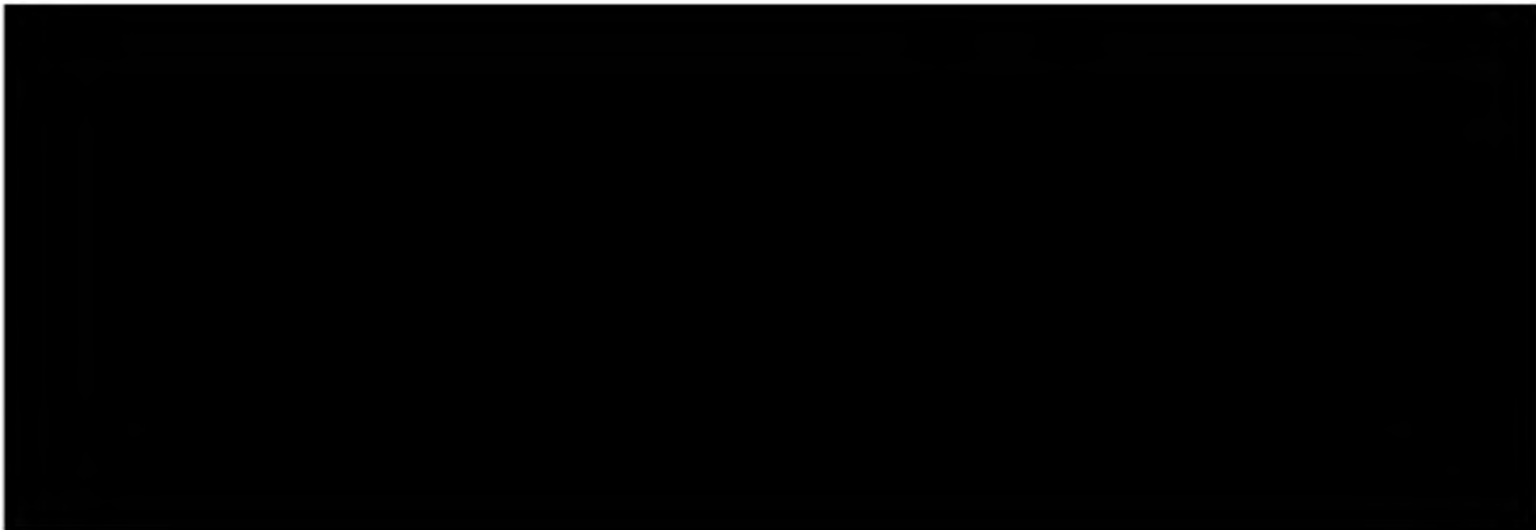
#### *Introduction*

In the fourth month of 1724, at the age of forty-nine, the Ōbaku priest Gek-kai Genshō left the small Zen temple in the countryside of Kyushu that had been his home for thirty-eight years and set out in the direction of the capital at Kyoto, some five hundred miles distant. After a decade about which little is known save that it was probably spent wandering around the region of the Kansai, he took up residence at the age of sixty in a small dwelling on the banks of the Kamo River in Kyoto. There in front of his house, he began to earn his living as a tea seller.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ochiguri Monogatari* 落葉物語. Quoted in *Sencha nyūmon*, Ogawa Kōraku, Osaka, Hoiku-sha 1976, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Baisaō seems to have used an inferior grade of tea, somewhat like today's *bancha*, made out of chopped leaves, stalks, and bits of wood taken from the trimmings of the tea plant. While he called his tea *Sencha* (literally, "simmered tea"), his method of brewing



*Portrait of Baisaō attributed to Sakaki Hyakusen. Inscription (verse 18, p. 115) by Baisaō.*

As the opening quotation from a contemporary essay shows, Baisaō,<sup>3</sup> “the Old Tea Seller”—to use the name by which he is best known—came to be a familiar and respected figure around the capital. He formed close friendships with men at the center of the city’s artistic, literary, and intellectual activity, among them the leading Japanese poets, writers, painters, and calligraphers of the day. His life was by no means easy. While he was usually able to earn enough to buy the small amount of rice that he needed to sustain himself, the poems describe times of great extremity, when he was both foodless and penniless.<sup>4</sup>

Baisaō remained a Buddhist priest for about ten years following his move to Kyoto, in spite of Buddhist regulations that forbid priests to earn their own living. Then, at the age of seventy, he discarded his Buddhist titles and returned to lay status. By his eightieth year, his hand-to-mouth existence began to take its toll. Bothered by severe back pains, he found it impossible to carry his tea equipment around any longer. He burned his bamboo carrying cabinet and other of his implements, and henceforth limited himself to selling tea from his shop, which now, after many moves, was located in the Okazaki district of Kyoto.

In 1763, at eighty-eight, an edition of his Chinese verses was published in

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it was different from those of the *Sencha* schools of modern Japan. He first brought water to a boil in a teapot over a brazier, then added the tea leaves and simmered them briefly over the fire.

<sup>3</sup> The original pronunciation was Maisaō.

<sup>4</sup> Baisaō did not charge a fixed price for his tea. Instead, he set out a slotted section of bamboo to encourage customers’ donations. Beside it he propped a handwritten sign: “You may give me any amount you like for my tea, from a hundred in gold to half a *mon*. It’s up to you. Have it free if you wish. I’m sorry I can’t let you have it for less.” To assure the point was not missed, engraved on the bamboo coin tube itself were the words, “A trifling sum dropped in this tube for the tea you drink can keep me from starvation. Customers, do not grudge one paltry *sen*.”

Kyoto. Entitled the *Baisaō Gego*, "Verses of the Old Tea Seller," it contained a frontispiece portrait taken from a likeness painted by his friend Itō Jakuchū, one of the foremost artists of the time. A leading scholar-priest of the Shōkoku-ji, Daiten Kenjō, contributed a brief introductory life. The book appeared in the seventh month of 1763. That same month Baisaō died, at the Gengen-an, a small hermitage south of the Sanjūsangendō Hall. In accord with his final instructions, his remains were cremated, ground into dust, and sprinkled into the Kamo River.

This selection consists of translations of a little over half of the ninety-eight verses in the *Baisaō Gego* 賣茶翁偶語, and the biography by Daiten mentioned above.

#### Bibliography:

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2. *Baisaō*, Morita Shiryū, ed., Bokubi-sha, Kyoto, 1962.
3. *Baisaō*, a selection from 1, revised considerably by Awakawa Kōichi, Kichūdō, Kyoto, 1962.
4. *Baisaō Shūsei: Ihin, iboku, gego, denki*, Shufunotomo-sha, Tokyo, 1976.
5. *Baisaō*, catalogue for an exhibition of Baisaō's calligraphy, portraits, and effects held at the Saga Prefectural Museum in 1983.

## Daiten's Life of Baisaō

Baisaō, "the Old Tea Seller," was born into a family named Shibayama at Hasuike, in the province of Hizen.<sup>1</sup> He left home to enter the Buddhist priesthood at the age of ten, receiving the religious names Genshō and Gekkai.<sup>2</sup> His teacher was the Zen priest Kerin Dōryū of the Ryūshin-ji in Chikugo, who was a Dharma heir of the Chinese Ōbaku master Tu-chan Hsing-ying.<sup>3</sup> The exceptional gifts that singled Baisaō out from ordinary men showed themselves at an early age. Once, he accompanied his teacher Kerin on a visit to the Mampuku-ji, the head temple of the Ōbaku sect at Uji, south of Kyoto. While there the chief abbot Tu-chan called the young boy to his quarters and presented him with a verse—a sign his unusual excellence was already recognized. Thereafter, he devoted himself with even greater vigor to his religious practice.

At the age of twenty-one he contracted a debilitating bowel ailment, which made it impossible for him to take care of his own needs. But he was fired with a spirit of determination, and resolved to visit other Buddhist teachers around the country. Even before his illness was completely cured, he cinched up his robes, put on his sedge hat, and set forth on a pilgrimage. His journey took him ten thousand leagues northward to the city of Sendai, where he called on a priest named Gekkō at the Manju-ji.<sup>4</sup> Gekkō granted him permission to reside in the training hall.

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<sup>1</sup> He was born on the 16th day of the fifth month, 1675. Hasuike 蓮池 is now part of the city of Saga, in Saga prefecture, on the island of Kyushu.

<sup>2</sup> Genshō Gekkai 元昭月海.

<sup>3</sup> Kerin Dōryū 化霖道龍, 1634–1720, was one of many Japanese Zen priests who affiliated themselves to the Ōbaku school after it was introduced to Japan in the mid-seventeenth century by the Chinese priest Yin-yuan Lung-ch'i (Ingen Ryūki in Japanese pronunciation). Kerin studied with Yin-yuan and with Yin-yuan's successors Mu-an (Mokuan) and Kao-ch'uan (Kōgen); he finally became an heir of Mu-an's disciple Tu-chan Hsing-ying 獨湛性榮, 1628–1706 (Dokutan Shōkei in Japanese). Tu-chan was among the original contingent of Chinese priests who arrived at Nagasaki with Yin-yuan in 1654. In 1682 he became the fourth abbot of the Mampuku-ji. Kerin took Baisaō to visit the Mampuku-ji in 1687 for the ceremonies honoring Tu-chan's sixtieth birthday.

<sup>4</sup> Gekkō Dōnen 月耕道稔, 1626–1701, was originally a disciple of the Rinzai master Umpo Kiyō at the Zuigan-ji near Sendai. After Umpo's death, he studied Ōbaku teachings with Mu-an; Kerin Dōryū was also a student of Mu-an at the time. Upon receiving Mu-an's seal of approval, he switched his allegiance to the Ōbaku sect. In 1696 he was given

He remained at the Manju-ji for several years, practicing diligently both day and night.

Before it was over, Baisaō's pilgrimage took him throughout the land. He visited many eminent priests of both the Rinzai and Sōtō Zen schools. He studied the precepts from a Vinaya teacher by the name of Tandō.<sup>5</sup> During one period, he sequestered himself at a single location, and remained there, alone and penniless, devoting himself singlemindedly to his Zen practice.

Once he holed up on the summit of Thunder Mountain<sup>6</sup> in Chikuzen, twenty leagues high. He sustained himself on water and crudely-made wheat dumplings, and descended into the valley to bathe himself in the tumbling streams. A summer of such ascetic practice brought him some measure of attainment. But he was still not satisfied.

He could regularly be heard to say:

"In the past, when Zen master Fo-yen asked his chief monk Shih-ch'i to succeed him as head priest, Shih-ch'i refused.<sup>7</sup> 'It is like a physician piercing a patient's eye with his golden needle,' he explained. 'If his hand errs by even a hair's breadth, he will blind the patient. It is better that I remain as a student and continue my training.' I always keep that story in my thoughts by way of admonishment. If I were really capable of responding freely to all students with the spontaneous means of a real Zen teacher, then I should go out into the world to help other people. But just to arm myself with a smattering of learning and strut around with my nose in the air, calling myself a Zen teacher—I would be ashamed to do that."

His pilgrimage over, Baisaō returned to the Ryūshin-ji. There he served in the post of temple steward for the next fourteen years until the death of the head priest Kerin. He recommended that his brother-monk Taichō be made Kerin's successor.<sup>8</sup> Then, free at last to do what really suited

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the Manju-ji in Sendai by his student Date Tsunamura, the head of the ruling Date clan.

<sup>5</sup> Tandō Eshuku 滿堂惠淑, d. 1720, taught at the Anyō-ji in Ōmi province (Shiga prefecture); later he retired to a hermitage in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto.

<sup>6</sup> Ikazuchi-yama 雷山 (also Raizan), is located twenty-five kilometers north of the city of Saga, on the border between Chikuzen and Hizen provinces, not far from Baisaō's home. Baisaō's retreat took place sometime in his late twenties.

<sup>7</sup> Fo-yen Ch'ing-yuan, 1067–1120 (Butsugen Seion in Japanese). Shih-ch'i (Seki in Japanese).

<sup>8</sup> Taichō Genkō 大潮元晴, 1676–1768, a brother monk of Baisaō, was widely known

his nature, he set out for Kyoto.

He believed that the propriety of a Buddhist priest leaving his temple to live in the secular world depended on the mind of the priest involved, not on external circumstances. He did not believe that anyone who desired to lead a genuine Buddhist life of self-improvement should attempt to gain the devotion and charity of the lay community by exaggerating the virtue of the priesthood.

For those reasons, he began to earn his living as a tea seller.<sup>9</sup> He called his establishment the Tsūsen-tei, "the Path of the Immortal Sages."<sup>10</sup> He chose a dwelling place in the outskirts of Kyoto. From there, he went out to sell tea at spots around the capital celebrated for their scenic beauty. Among his favorite haunts were the Hall of the Great Buddha, the iris pond at the Sanjūsangendō, the maple-forested streams of the Tōfuku-ji, the western hills, and the Tadasu woods.

The utensils that he used to make tea, he carried from place to place in a portable cabinet of woven bamboo. He would set up his brazier, then ladle the pure stream water into the teapot with his gourd dipper, and before long the steam from the simmering tea would begin to rise curling and billowing into the skies. As he fanned the fire in the brazier, a wonderful aroma filled the air. Those who came to partake of his tea marvelled at its exquisite sweetness. The coins that they put into the offertory bamboo tube afforded Baisaō the bare means of gratifying his hungry stomach. Before long, the name of Baisaō, the Old Tea Seller, was known throughout the land.

There was an ordinance in effect in Baisaō's home province of Hizen which required all residents to obtain an official permit before they travelled outside the provincial borders. And all inhabitants, even members of the Buddhist clergy who wished to visit other parts of the country for purposes of religious pilgrimage, had to return to Hizen after a period of ten years to have their permit renewed.

When Baisaō returned to Hizen from Kyoto at the age of seventy, he applied for permission to leave the priesthood. At the same time, he petitioned the provincial authorities to have his name registered at the Kyoto

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for his learning and literary skills.

<sup>9</sup> Buddhist precepts forbid priests to earn a living through trade.

<sup>10</sup> Tsūsen-tei 通仙亭, literally, "the shop that leads straight to the immortal sages." Baisaō uses this name for his tea stand but it refers at the same time to Baisaō himself.

bureau of the Hizen clan as a member of their delegation, desiring thereby to avoid the ten-year limitation on his stay in the capital. As Baisaō was well known to the clan officials and they were aware of his character and integrity, his petition was granted.

He thereupon gave up his religious names and adopted in their place the lay name Kō and the style Yūgai.<sup>11</sup> At the time, he explained with a smile that "being a poor man, I have nothing to do with food, and being old man, nothing to do with a wife. A thin robe of ordinary hemp is a fitting garment for a tea seller's life." Then he set off in buoyant spirits for Kyoto. From that time forth everyone referred to him as Layman Yūgai.

Baisaō wrote poems for friends in Chinese and Japanese, about a hundred in number.<sup>12</sup> They date from both before and after his reversion to lay life. They all tell of the refined simplicity of his life—an existence such as was never seen before. And yet the old man's purpose did not lie in tea; it merely took the name of tea. People did not notice that the scrupulous routine of his everyday life was itself a religious practice.

His final years were spent in the district of Okazaki in Kyoto, caring for his frail and elderly body. He took his tea utensils and burned them (an inscription he composed for the occasion is found among his poems), then he closed his gate and refused all visitors.<sup>13</sup> In that manner he lived out the rest of his life.

I write this in the thirteenth year of Hōreki (1763). Baisaō, now eighty-eight years old, is reported to be still hale and hearty.

Tankai Jikujō<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Kō Yūgai 高遊外.

<sup>12</sup> Few of the Japanese poems are extant.

<sup>13</sup> This statement is doubtful.

<sup>14</sup> Tankai Jikujō 淡海竺常; a literary style of the Zen priest Daiten Kenjō 大典顯常, 1719–1801, who was perhaps the closest of Baisaō's friends in the Zen sect. Daiten was celebrated for his scholarship and literary gifts, especially his Zen poetry. He started religious life studying Ōbaku Zen at the Mampuku-ji, where one of his teachers was Taichō Genkō (see note 8 above); he then moved to the Rinzaï temple of Shōkoku-ji in Kyoto. He served as an emissary of the Japanese government in negotiations with Korea, and spent time on Tsushima Island serving in that capacity. He published over seventy works, including collections of religious verse, books on Zen, tea and related subjects.



## Baisaō's Verses

### 1. TEN IMPROMPTU VERSES

i

I set out to transmit  
The teachings of Zen,  
Revive the spirit  
Of the old masters;  
I settled instead  
For a tea seller's life.  
Worldly fame and success—  
What does it really mean?  
The coins that collect  
Inside this bamboo tube  
Keep ultimate need away.

ii

I've opened shop this time  
On the banks of the Kamo.  
Customers, sitting idly,  
Forget host and guest.  
They drink a cup of tea,  
Their long sleep is over;  
Awake, they then realize  
They're the same as before.

iii

I emulate old Chao-chou:  
"Have a cup of tea!"

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1 i. *lines 9-10.* A coin-tube (*zeni zutsu* 錢筒) fashioned out of a section of bamboo. See introduction, note 4.

1 ii. *ln. 2.* The Kamo River runs from north to south through the center of Kyoto.

1 ii. *ln. 4.* The Zen meaning of host and guest is also intended here.

1 iii. *ln. 1-2.* A teaching phrase of Zen master Chao-chou Ts'ung-shen, 779-897 (Jōshū Jushin in Japanese). e.g., Chao-chou asked a new monk: "Have you been here

I've stock for a thousand years,  
 But no one's buying.  
 If only you would come  
 And take one good drink  
 The ancient mental craving  
 Would instantly cease.

## iv

The older I get the keener  
 I feel my native clumsiness.  
 My old friends all jockey  
 To be first in the world.  
 They pity me alone and poor—  
 "A shadow his only friend."  
 I just keep on selling tea  
 To earn the rice I need.

## v

After all these springs and autumns  
 My beginner's mind still unchanged;  
 My nature's strange and crazy bent  
 As strange and crazy as before.  
 I sit here amid the city streets  
 Red dust far as the eye can see—  
 An empty boat, bobbing perilously  
 On the fitful worldly waves.

## vi

The peerless tea of Kenkei,  
 Blazoned with phoenix and dragons,  
 Who would trade a single sip

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before?" "Yes, master, I have," he replied. "Then have a cup of tea," said Chao-chou. Later, another monk came, and being asked the same question, replied, "No, master, I haven't." "Have a cup of tea," said Chao-chou. One of the senior monks was puzzled and asked his reason for saying the same thing to the two totally different responses. Chao-chou called out the senior monk's name. When he replied, "Yes, master," Chao-chou said, "Have a cup of tea."

1 iv. /n. 6. Proverbial for loneliness and helplessness.

For thousands in gold?  
 You have it served to you  
 Right by the palace walls.  
 But business? Sparse as ever.  
 I'm not even covering costs.

## vii

I know my carefree ways  
 Seem crazy to the world,  
 Hiding in the urban chaos  
 To gratify my silly whims.  
 Who said "his shadow is  
 The poor man's only friend"?  
 I've twelve Teachers with me  
 In this idle life of mine.

## viii

Going all the way to China  
 To seek the sacred shoots,  
 Old Eisai brought them back  
 And sowed them in our land.  
 The taste of Uji tea is infused  
 With Nature's own essence;  
 A pity people speak only  
 Of its color and its scent.

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1 vi. *ln.* 1-2. The name of a Chinese tea (Chien-hsi 建溪), after the district where it was grown. Perhaps it was a brick tea, stamped with figures of phoenix and dragons.

1 vii. *ln.* 5-6. See 1. iv above.

1 vii. *ln.* 7-8. The "twelve Teachers" refer to twelve of the traditional utensils and implements used for making tea.

1 viii. *ln.* 1-4. Myōan Eisai, 1141-1215; the Zen master regarded as the founder of Zen in Japan; also traditionally credited with introducing the tea plant. His work *Kissa yōjō ki* ("Tea Drinking as a Means of Prolonging Life") advocated the benefits of tea drinking. The tea seeds he brought back from China were planted in Kyushu (close to Baisaō's birthplace) and also at the Kōzan-ji temple near Kyoto, whence they were transplanted to Uji, south of Kyoto, which became in time Japan's most celebrated tea-growing area.

## ix

Waves roil in the clay pot;  
 The wind's thin wail begins.  
 The tea that I brew here  
 I offer to all mankind.  
 Why is it that they fail  
 To know its real taste?  
 Sitting alone, simmering tea,  
 I rise above my fellow men.

## x

Lift high the crystal cup  
 Monju raised on Mount Wu-t'ai;  
 Drink with the mouth-gates shut  
 To savor the wonderful taste.  
 Don't say there's no Dharma  
 To be found at my place—  
 Nothing whatever is lacking  
 Here at the Tsūsen-tei.

## 2. THREE VERSES ON CHOOSING A LOCATION FOR A DWELLING

## i

This morning I moved smack  
 Into the middle of town;  
 Submerged in worldly dust,  
 But free of worldly bonds.

1 ix. *ln.* 2. The "wind" is the "pine breeze," a poetic way of describing the sound of the boiling water in the teapot, said to resemble a breeze passing through pine branches.

1 x. *ln.* 1-2. From Case 35 of the *Pi-yen lu* (*Hekiganroku* in Japanese). Asanga, founder of the Consciousness Only School, makes a visit to Mount Wu-t'ai, the dwelling place of Monju (Manjusri) Bodhisattva. En route, he stops for the night in a temple where Monju appears to him and offers him some tea. Monju holds up a crystal tea cup and asks Asanga if they have such things in the south where he comes from. Asanga answers that they do not. When Monju then asks what they use to drink tea, Asanga cannot answer.

1 x. *ln.* 8. Tsūsen-tei 通仙亭, "the shop that leads to the immortal sages." It also refers to Baisaō himself.

I wash my robe and bowl  
 In the Kamo's pure stream,  
 The moon a perfect disc  
 On the rippled surface  
 Of its watery mind.

## ii

I'm dwelling in the turmoil  
 Of downtown city streets,  
 Living poor and companionless  
 Save for a single scrawny staff.  
 I've learned to use silence  
 Amidst the ceaseless urban din,  
 And take life as it comes to me,  
 So everywhere I am is true.

## iii

This aimless shifting east and west,  
 I even have to laugh myself.  
 But how else can I make  
 The whole world my home?  
 If any of my old friends  
 Come round asking for me,  
 Say I'm down at the river  
 By the second Fushimi Bridge.

## 3. A VERSE FOR THE SHOP

I brew tea on the brazier  
 To offer to my customers—  
 Passers-by, don't overlook  
 The price—only half a *sen*.  
 But one cup of it will purge  
 All the cares from your heart;

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2 ii. *In.* 7–8. Well-known saying of Lin-chi I-hsuan (Rinzai Gigen in Japanese); from the *Records of Lin-chi* (*Rinzai-roku* in Japanese).

2 iii. *In.* 8. This was the second of three bridges located on the busy Fushimi Highway, near the Tōfuku-ji Temple.

The pleasures of Tsūsen-tei  
Are deep and long-lasting.

4. THE OFFERTORY BAMBOO TUBE

An old derelict of a man  
Appeared from the West  
With a poor sort of Zen  
And not a penny to his name.  
Selling tea he manages  
A few grains of rice,  
His whole living contained  
In a slender bamboo tube.

5. SELLING TEA BY THE TSŪTEN BRIDGE

I'm the old tea seller  
Who lives by Sanjō Bridge;  
I've come here to brew  
The pure water of Tsūten.  
Young men, don't tell me  
My price is too dear,  
You get autumn leaves as well—  
And all for half a *sen*.

6. SETTING UP SHOP AT THE RENGEŌ-IN

This place of mine, so poor  
I'm often even out of water;

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4. *ln.* 1-2. Baisaō "came from the West" (i.e., Kyushu), just as the first Zen patriarch Bodhidharma did when he brought Zen to China.

4. *ln.* 8. See note 1 i.

5. *ln.* 2. An important bridge spanning the Kamo River near the center of the city, originally built in 1590.

5. *ln.* 4. The waters of the Sengyoku-kan, 洗玉瀆, "Jadewash Brook," flow through a ravine of celebrated maple trees within the precincts of the Tōfuku-ji Zen temple, in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto. Tsūten-kyō 通天橋, "Bridge to Heaven," is the name of the covered bridge that crosses the brook. The waters of the Sengyoku-kan were prized for their sweetness and purity and were much sought after by tea-drinkers. The Tsūten Bridge was one of Baisaō's favorite haunts.

6. The Rengeō-in 蓮華王院 is the proper name for the famous Sanjūsangendō, the

But I offer you an elixir  
 That changes your very marrow.  
 You'll find me in the pines,  
 By the Hall of a Thousand Buddhas,  
 Come take a drink—who knows?  
 You may reach Sagehood yourself.

7. INSCRIPTION HUNG ON A BRANCH AT THE TSŪTEN BRIDGE

Red leaves streaked with autumn frost  
 Dress Tsūten Bridge in rich brocade.  
 Yellow tea shoots fused with white  
 Brew the spring by Jewash Brook.

8. SETTING UP MY SHOP IN A GROVE OF TREES  
 IN FRONT OF THE HŌJŪ-JI

In a grove of tall bamboo  
 Beside an ancient temple  
 Steam rolls from the brazier  
 In fragrant white clouds;  
 I show you the path of Sages  
 Beyond this floating world,  
 But will you understand  
 The lasting taste of spring?

9. SETTING UP SHOP UNDER THE PINES IN FRONT  
 OF THE GREAT BUDDHA AT THE HŌKŌ-JI

I'm selling tea in a pine wood—  
 Customers one after another;  
 One thin *sen* will buy them

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“Hall of a Thousand Buddhas.” It was surrounded by pine forests in Baisaō's day, with a famous pond of iris flowers in front.

7. See note 5. *ln.* 4.

8. The Hōjū-ji 法住寺 was located about half a kilometer southeast of the Rengeō-in. Its wells were noted for their fine water.

9. A great Buddha, constructed on orders from Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1589 in imitation of the one at the Tōdai-ji in Nara, was enshrined in the main hall of the Hōkō-ji 方広寺 temple, just north of the Rengeō-in.

A cupful of the spring.  
 But gentlemen, don't laugh  
 At my beggarly existence:  
 Poverty never bothered men,  
 They're bothered by being poor.

10. A POEM FOR MY OFFERTORY BAMBOO TUBE

Fanning up the pine winds  
 Simmering tea day after day  
 I quicken men's minds  
 To the path of the Sages.  
 If you wish to understand  
 What Lu T'ung really meant  
 First empty your purse  
 Into this bamboo tube.

11. *A certain gentleman in southern Kii province sent me a gift of "yellow fangs" [tea]. By selling the tea I made from it, I was able to collect some money in the bamboo tube. I wrote this poem to thank him for his kindness.*

Far far over cloud-swept trails,  
 A transmission—mind to mind;  
 A gift of tea from a distant friend  
 Arrived and relieved my poverty.  
 Converted into a handful of rice  
 It keeps the life-thread whole;  
 Sad that an old man's eating  
 Must depend on a bamboo tube!

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10. *In. 6.* Lu T'ung 盧同 (in Japanese, Rodō), T'ang scholar and poet, known for his love of tea and his *Song on Tea-drinking* (Ch'a-ko 茶歌; see note 12 *in. 7-8.*). Baisaō called himself a descendent of Bodhidharma in Zen and a descendent of Lu T'ung in tea.

11. Kii province: modern Wakayama prefecture. "Yellow fangs" 黃牙 describes the color and shape of the new tea shoots.

12. *In. 4.* Yu-ch'uan [tzu] 玉川 [子] (Gyokusen-shi in Japanese). A literary name of Lu T'ung (see note 10).



## 12. OPENING SHOP BY THE TSÛTEN BRIDGE

I'm set up here for business  
 Beneath a canopy of white cloud  
 In a landscape so rich and rare  
 Yu-ch'uan would gape in wonder.  
 I have a Way that ushers you  
 Straight through to the Heavens;  
 You won't need six cups  
 To reach the Sages' realm.

13. SETTING UP SHOP ON A SUMMER NIGHT BESIDE THE IRIS  
POND AT THE HALL OF A THOUSAND BUDDHAS

The iris pond has flowered  
 Before the old temple;  
 I sell tea this evening  
 By the water's edge.  
 It is steeped in the cups  
 With the moon and stars;  
 Drink and wake forever  
 From your worldly sleep.

14. *The priest Seki Shōnin, hearing that I had changed my place of residence, presented me with a verse; I wrote this one using the same rhymes.*

I've brought my brazier  
 Beside a temple pond;

---

12. *In.* 5-6. A play on the name Tsūten, "Bridge to Heaven."

12. *In.* 7-8. "The first cup moistens the lips and throat. The second cup breaks the feeling of loneliness. The third cup seeks out the parched bowels and finds nothing but a piece of prose five thousand words in length. The fourth cup raises a slight perspiration, and all life's ills disperse through the pores. The fifth cup purifies you completely, physically and spiritually. The sixth cup conveys you to the spirit-realm of the immortals. The seventh cup can no longer be imbibed, yet you experience a gentle breeze rising under your arms carrying you aloft." From Lu T'ung's *Song on Tea-drinking*. See note 10.

13. See note 6.

14. Nothing is known of Seki Shōnin 石上人

Pine wind from the teapot  
 Drifts across the water  
 Filled with the aroma  
 Of the immortal liquid.  
 The townspeople as usual  
 Fail to grasp its true worth—  
 In vain at my waist  
 Hangs an empty purse.

15. *The Master of Gushisai was a studio name used by Mr. Iwata of Osaka. His style was Genzan. Although I don't know much about his life, I do know that he was a man of upright character. While he was sick and confined to his bed, he composed a waka poem to send to me. After he had finished writing it down, the Master of Gushisai passed away. His elder brother Sōhō had the poem mounted as a scroll and brought it to me, explaining the circumstances under which it was written. Gladly accepting it, I wrote a verse to offer to the spirit of the deceased. I took it and gave it to Sōhō, who displayed it as an offering in the family shrine.*

You left behind for me  
 A verse of rare excellence.  
 I hummed it once or twice  
 Gazing upward at the heavens,  
 Then offered you a cupful  
 Of my own special tea:  
 Don't say Chao-chou Zen  
 Doesn't have any taste!

(Your poem contains an allusion to Chao-chou's saying, "Have a cup of tea!" The final lines of my verse touch on this too.)

---

15. Gushisai-shujin 求志齋主人 Genzan 玄山. Nothing else is known of this man. His brother Sōhō 漱芳 is better known by his literary name, Ōeda Ryūhō 大枝流芳. Proficient in flower arrangement, incense, and *Sencha*, he authored a number of works on these subjects, including *Seiwan Sawa* 青湾茶話 "Seiwan's Talks on Tea" (1756). He was praised by the writer Ueda Akinari, a later student of tea, as second only to Baisō in his skill at choosing tea and water for *Sencha*.

15. *In.* 7-8. See note 1 iii.

16. INFUSING TEA UNDER THE PINE TREES  
ON A SUMMER DAY

I alone love the idleness  
Of long summer days  
Beside a fragrant brazier  
Under ten thousand pines;  
The sweltering heat  
Of the human world  
Cannot reach here;  
Nor need I seek  
The rare landscapes  
Of the Sages' realm.  
I ladle my water  
From pure Otowa springs;  
My tea is grown in China  
(I have it sent from home).  
Life's greatest joy  
Is to be free from care,  
Yet still the world laughs  
At my mind's crazy turns.

17. SETTING UP SHOP BY THE TSÛTEN BRIDGE

I've packed my basket of tools  
Among the fallen yellow leaves;  
Pine-cones burn in the brazier  
To summon up the pine wind.  
The secrets of Tsūsen-tei  
Are not concealed from you:  
Just forget about the flavor  
And know its true rich taste.

18. *It was toward the end of the year, the fourth year of Gembun (1739).  
I had had no customers. The bamboo tube was completely empty.*

---

16. *ln. 12.* Otowa 音羽; the name of a spring at the Kiyomizu Temple.

17. *ln. 4.* See note 1 *ix. ln. 2.*

*Seeing a house, I went up and begged some money from the owner.  
To thank him, I promptly wrote this verse.*

Year almost over.  
Money tube empty.  
Racked with hunger.  
I went to you and  
Begged a hundred *mon*.  
A dipper of water  
To a gasping wretch,  
But at least I'll see  
The new year in again.

19. IMPROMPTU

Brewing tea with brook water  
Atop the porcelain brazier  
I wear a robe and tattered hat  
Brown with fume and tea smudge.  
Don't think I'm some old gaffer  
With a wild-eyed love for tea,  
My purpose is to waken you  
Out of your worldly sleep.

20. SELLING TEA IN A BAMBOO THICKET

Sheltered in the shade  
Of a tall bamboo grove  
I make tea at the brazier  
For folks who come my way.  
Serving customers quietly  
By a woven bamboo fence,  
My earnings—a container  
Of unexhaustible spring.

21. SETTING UP SHOP UNDER THE PINE TREES

In the deep green shade  
Of a thousand tall pines  
White clouds billow

From the pine-cones  
 Stoking the brazier fire;  
 I move here and there  
 Under the pine boughs, and wait—  
 But no one comes.  
 Alone with my undrunk tea  
 I sit in the pine breeze.

## 22. GOING TO BREW TEA BY THE KAMO RIVER

Shouldering the tools of trade  
 I leave my snailshell dwelling  
 Choose water from a clear spring  
 And I'm off to the Kamo River.  
 You'll find no worldly taste  
 Simmering inside my teapot;  
 Nor do I have a need  
 To seek the realm of Sages.

## 23. SIMMERING TEA AT THE TÔFUKU-JI

Cloud-piercing pine trees  
 Soar at the blue sky;  
 Dew-flecked bush clover  
 Pushes at the autumn wind.  
 As I go down to the brook  
 To ladle the pure water,  
 A solitary white crane  
 Comes fluttering my way.

## 24. TAKING FRIENDS TO DRINK TEA IN THE TADASU WOODS

Making the most of autumn  
 I've come with two friends

---

23. Tōfuku-ji 東福寺, one of the five head temples of the Rinzai Zen sect, is famous for the beauty of its maple forests. See 5. *ln.* 4.

24. Tadasu-no-mori 鞆の森: a forest of tall trees surrounding the Shimogamo Shrine

To brew the clear water  
Of Kyoto's finest spring;  
Its sweetness, still as ever  
Is a taste of another world;  
Pure talk over simmering tea,  
We reach the hidden depths.

25. SELLING TEA AT THE TÔFUKU-JI

Hawking tea at my age  
Grows sillier by the day.  
Hard need is another joke;  
Not a scrap at home to cook.  
So below the forests of maple  
That redden Good Sun Peak  
I beg coins from passers-by  
Nursing what life remains to me.

26. GOING TO THE SHÔKOKU-JI TO SIMMER TEA  
UNDER THE MAPLE TREES

Outside the palace an ancient Zen temple  
With a redolence four hundred autumns old;  
Its main gates face regal imperial walls,  
Its pond encircles soaring temple roofs.  
A pine wind sighs inside the brazier,  
A teapot hidden in wreaths of steam.  
Beneath the maples I bid my guests sit;  
Sipping my tea, all desires cease.

---

at the confluence of the Kamo and Takano rivers in northern Kyoto. There is a spring east of the main shrine buildings where clear waters constantly bubble up. Two streams, the Izumi-kawa and Semi-no-ogawa, run through the grove.

25. See note 23.

25. *In* 6. E'nichi-no-mine 惠日峰. The Tôfuku-ji is called E'nichi-zan, the "Mountain of the Auspicious Sun."

26. The Shôkoku-ji 相国寺, another of the five head temples of the Rinzai Zen sect. At the time, its southern borders paralleled the northern walls of the imperial palace.

## 27. THREE VERSES ON A TEA-SELLING LIFE

i

I'm no Buddhist or Taoist  
 Nor Confucianist either,  
 I'm a blackfaced whitehaired  
 Hard up old man.  
 You think I just prowl  
 The streets selling tea?  
 I've got the whole universe  
 In this tea caddy of mine.

ii

When I left home at ten,  
 I turned from worldly fame,  
 Now I'm in my dotage,  
 A layman once again.  
 A black bat of a man,  
 A joke even to myself,  
 But still the old tea seller  
 I always was.

iii

Seventy years of Zen  
 I got nowhere at all  
 I shed my black robe  
 Became a shaggy crank.  
 I have no business with  
 The sacred or profane,  
 Selling tea is all I do—  
 It holds starvation off.

---

27 ii. *ln.* 5-6. I suppose he means that it is hard to tell whether he is a priest or layman; like a bat, which was thought to be neither beast nor bird but something in between. Helen Waddell, describing the "wandering scholars" of the Latin Middle Ages who were "driven out by the laymen and turned away by the priests," quotes a contemporary source who says: "Bats are we, that find no place either with beast or bird" (*The Wandering Scholars*, Anchor Books, New York, 1961, p. 207).

## 28. IMPROMPTU

I've rented a shop by the Narabi hills  
 At the western edge of the city.  
 I come and go as I please  
 And take things as they come,  
 Boiling clear water in the pot  
 Kindling the pine-cone fire  
 Summoning customers to the shop  
 For a cup of my humble tea.  
 It's a plain and simple life  
 Like those clouds in the sky,  
 Secluded in the hidden depths  
 Of a thousand green bamboos.  
 The food I need is provided  
 With the aid of the bamboo tube;  
 The earnings of a lifetime  
 Are measured in cups of tea.  
 Now that Yu-ch'uan's fish-eyes  
 Have roused me from my slumber,  
 Who's got time to ramble off  
 To Huang-ti's land of dreams?  
 The world has no idea  
 How little I really earn;  
 They all say I'm an odd old man  
 Enjoying a poetic retirement.

29. *A poem for the recluse Kameda Kyūroku, written in the summer of the third year of Kampō (1743). I was sixty-eight years old. I had moved my tea shop to the eastern edge of the Narabi hills. The seasonal rains started and did not let up for over a month. I had no customers, my bamboo coin-tube was empty, and I had nothing*

---

28. *In. 1.* The Narabi hills 嵯峨ヶ丘 (Narabigaoka) are a group of three low, domed hills which are a conspicuous landmark in the western part of Kyoto.

28. *In. 17.* Lu T'ung's term for the bubbling of the water in the tea pot, in his *Song on Tea-drinking* (see note 12. *In. 7-8.*).

28. *In. 20.* Huang-ti, the Yellow Emperor, one of the most famous of China's legendary rulers. He visited a utopian land called Hua-hsu in his dreams, where the people enjoyed perfect freedom and bliss.



*left to eat. Kameda Sensei heard of my hardship, and made a special trip to bring me some food. I wrote him a verse to express my gratitude.*

I had no tea, no food.  
 The coin-tube was bare—  
 I was like a gudgeon  
 Gasping in a wheel-rut puddle.  
 Thank you for what you did:  
 The special trip. The food.  
 Bowl and dipper replenished,  
 Fading life is nursed along.

30. *Hōryū Kei sent me a poem. I wrote this one following his rhymes.*

Sheer chance made us neighbors  
 When I moved my shop here;  
 You paid a visit to my brazier  
 And brought a splendid verse.  
 I sell flowers. I sell the moon.  
 But no one comes to buy them;  
 The pure breeze at the sixth cup  
 Can't be reckoned in worldly coin.

31. *I received a gift of tea from the abbot of a certain temple, some of the year's first growth from the Ekkei region in Ōmi province. There was a verse enclosed, and I composed one myself following its rhymes.*

Devoting myself to selling tea  
 Covered with the worldly dust  
 Has spread the foolish rumour

---

29. Kameda Kyūroku 亀田朝樂, (d. 1758; eccentric painter and calligrapher noted as convivial drinker. At one time he and Baisaō lived in the same neighborhood. A celebrated story tells of Baisaō going out to buy *sake* for his inebriated friend.

29. *ln.* 3-4. A saying based on a story in the "External Things" chapter of the *Chuang Tzu*. Proverbial for acute desperation.

30. Hōryū Kei 芳隆慶. Nothing is known of this priest.

30. *ln.* 7-8. See note 12. *ln.* 7-8.

31. Ekkei 越江. A tea-growing region on the eastern side of Lake Biwa in Ōmi pro-

I'm one of Kyoto's idle loafers;  
 At dawn, a knock on my gate—  
 A gift of tea from eastern Ōmi.  
 It conveys me to the world  
 Of Yu-ch'uan's perennial spring.

32. IMPROMPTU

I'm confirmed in my zany ways,  
 Out of step with the world.  
 Peddling tea for a living  
 Goes with the natural grain.  
 A quiet mind and a plain life  
 Excels the finest luxury;  
 A content mind and tattered robe,  
 Better far than finest silk.  
 At dawn I dip from the well,  
 When I leave I carry the moon;  
 I shoulder my brazier at evening  
 And come back trailing the clouds.  
 This is how I've learned to live—  
 The life of an old tea seller—  
 Rambling free of material things  
 Beyond the clash of 'pro' and 'con'.

33. IMPROMPTU IN LATE SUMMER

Deep in a bamboo thicket  
 Living the few years left  
 I sit leisurely by myself  
 Free from all external ties.  
 I planted flowers out back—  
 The forms of emptiness;  
 I listen to the soundless voice  
 Of the rocks below my window.

---

vince (present Shiga prefecture).

31. *ln. 8.* See note 12. *ln. 4.*

33. *ln. 14.* Reference to the Zen maxim explaining Zen as "a special transmission outside the Buddhist scriptures."

I stop and rest by the river edge  
 To the sound of sutra chanting;  
 I stroll slowly by the pond  
 In the faint perfume of lotus flowers.;  
 If anyone comes asking  
 What 'Special Transmission' means,  
 I tell them it's found clearest  
 In the everyday doings of life.

34. IMPROMPTU, AT THE END OF THE YEAR

The years of a man's life  
 Spin like the wheels of a cart;  
 Beyond the cave of immortals  
 Is a world of timeless spring.  
 Chin-deep in the city dust  
 I leave no tracks or traces;  
 But even when I'm traceless  
 My presence is never concealed.

35. MOTTO FOR MY ROOM

Solitary I walk  
 The world of men  
 Where coarse tea  
 And watery gruel  
 Are never enough.  
 Unalarmed I pass  
 The King of Hell  
 Who serves red-hot  
 Cakes and liquid lead  
 In ample portions.

36. ROAMING EASTERN IWAKURA

Climbing into the emerald hills

---

34. *In.* 3-4. Ref. to a Taoist fairyland inhabited by immortals, reached by passing through a cave.

36. The village of Iwakura was located in a valley north of Kyoto, below Mount Hiei. Eastern Iwakura would have put Baisaō close to the base of the mountain.

Far above the dust of the city  
 The green pines, the crimson trees  
 Are Nature's own unspoiled shapes:  
 A weave of majestic silk brocade  
 Adorning all the mountainsides,  
 Revealing the infinite virtues  
 Of the Universal Buddha himself.

37. IMPROMPTU ON MY BIRTHDAY

The years haven't passed me in vain,  
 I'm wrinkled and gnarled beyond repair;  
 Yet all this fuss about a birthday  
 Still embarrasses me terribly.  
 What have I done? Consume food.  
 Pass idly through 'last night's dream'.  
 Even now within that dream  
 I clearly see my eighty springs.

38. CHOOSING A DWELLING NEAR THE SHŌGO-IN TEMPLE

Taking sedge hat and staff  
 I've shifted east of the Kamo  
 To a pure and healthful site  
 Just right for my poor old bones.  
 Rows of high pines—rustling  
 Like the strummings of a lute:  
 Bamboo in the yard—clicking

---

36. *in.* 7-8. I.e., Vairocana Buddha, the chief object of worship of esoteric Buddhism, which teaches that the entire cosmos is the body of Vairocana, and all existences in it manifestations of it

37. On his eightieth birthday (seventy-ninth by Western count), Baisaō's friends presented him with verses and gifts. The verses are still extant.

38. *in.* 6. An expression found in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Engaku-kyō* in Japanese).

38. Baisaō left the Rinkō-in subtemple of the Shōkoku-ji on the 1st day of the tenth month, 1754, and moved east across the Kamo River to Okazaki village, near the Shōgo-in 聖護院 (Tendai) temple. He described his new dwelling as being at the end of a row of several dozen tall pine trees, to the east of a bamboo thicket, beside the main road to Ōtsu on Lake Biwa, heavily travelled by ox carts and other traffic.

Like the sound of struck jade.  
 Outside my window is a street  
 Runs straight to the capital.

Inside, a newcomer to Shōgo-in  
 An old man from another world  
 Sits all alone in a tiny room  
 Beyond the thoroughfares of men  
 In a spiritual landscape  
 That has no limits.

39. A VERSE TO ADMONISH MYSELF

Your life is a shadow  
 Lived inside a dream.  
 When you know it's unreal  
 You transcend 'self' and 'other'.  
 If you pursue fame, the glory  
 Of a prince won't suffice;  
 If you take a backward step,  
 A gourd of water is all you need.  
 When no matter is in the mind  
 Emotions quiet of themselves;  
 When mind is not involved in matters  
 You find suchness everywhere.  
 When each person can grasp  
 These truths for himself  
 His mind is pure and clear  
 Like heaven's empty void.

40. THREE VERSES IN PRAISE OF MYSELF

i

Ahh!—this stone-blind jackass  
 With his strange kink in the brain.  
 He turned monk early on in life,

---

40 i. *ln.* 17-18. The Tsūten Bridge has appeared before (see note 5. *ln.* 4.). The "Moon Crossing" is the famous Togetsu Bridge at Arashiyama in western Kyoto.

Served his master, practiced,  
 Wandered to a hundred places  
 Hunting the Essential Crossing.  
 Deafened by shouts, beaten with sticks—  
 He had a hard time of it.  
 Weathering all that snow and frost  
 He still couldn't even save himself;  
 He was big-headed, brazen-faced,  
 Made a great fool of himself.  
 Growing old, he found his place.  
 He became an old tea seller,  
 Begged pennies for his rice.  
 That's where the pleasure lies,  
 Selling tea by the Tsūten Bridge,  
 Under blossoms at the Moon Crossing.  
 But start talking about the flavor  
 Right then you're completely astray.  
 I think of Minister Wang long ago—  
 Knowing friends have always been rare.

ii

Beard on his face white as snow  
 Scrabbly head hairs every which way  
 Thin stick propping an aged body  
 Wrapped in a recluse's crane robe.  
 He shoulders his bamboo basket  
 And walks the Eastern Hills alone  
 Peddling tea for his livelihood  
 To nurse his feeble life along.

---

40 i. *In.* 21-22. Wang Ta'i-fu 王太傅; a ninth century Chinese official and noted student of Zen who figures in a famous koan, "Turning Over the Tea Kettle." *Pi-yen lu*, Case 48. To Baisaō, he represents the truly enlightened man who understands the meaning of both Tea and Zen.

40 ii. *In.* 4. Described in the ancient literature as woven of crane feathers, indicating the seeker of immortality, the crane robe (*kakushō-e* 鶴髦衣) was the traditional garment of recluses. Commonly, it was white in color, with black borders, approximating the markings of the crane. A crane robe that Baisaō wore, light blue with black borders, is still extant (a photograph is given in *Baisaō Shūsei*, p. 36).

He's not a Buddhist or a Taoist  
 He's not a Confucianist either:  
 He's just an isolated old crank  
 A dull grizzleheaded ignoramus.

iii

What's the tea seller  
 Got in his basket?  
 Bottomless tea cups.  
 A two-spouted pot.  
 He moseys around town  
 Earning what he can,  
 Toiling very hard  
 For next to nothing.  
 Blinkered old drudge  
 Just plodding ahead—

BAH!

41. *Words written upon committing Senka to the fire. Senka, "Den of Sages," is the name of the bamboo-work basket into which I put my tea equipment when I port it about from place to place.*

I've been solitary and poor for a long long time. Never had land—not even enough to stick an awl into. Senka, thanks to your help, I've grown to an old age. We've been together to the spring mountains, beside the autumn streams, selling tea under pine trees, in the deep shade of bamboo groves. You have enabled me to eke out the few grains of rice I needed to keep going like this past the age of eighty. But now I've become old and feeble. I no longer have the strength to use you any more. I'll have to finish out the years that are left to me by "hiding myself inside the Great Bear." I would hate to think that after I die you might be defiled by falling into

41. *Senka* 仙窠. This occurred in 1755.

42. *In. 9.* The expression "hide oneself inside the Great Bear" (Ursa Major) (*hokuto-ri ni zōshin-su* 北斗裏藏身) describes the enlightened person's exercise of the Marvelous Activity, which leaves no traces whatever. The phrase occurs in the records of the T'ang master Yun-men Wen-yen (Ummon Bun'en in Japanese). A monk asked Yun-men, "What is the expression 'penetrating the Dharma-body'?" "Hiding oneself inside the Great Bear," said Yun-men.

worldly hands. So I am eulogizing you and committing you to the Fire Samadhi. Enter forthwith amidst the flames, and undergo the Great Change. As you do, what words can I say to commemorate the occasion? Let me think. Yes, now I have it:

After the world-ending kalpa fires have consumed all things,  
Will the green hills still not soar into the white clouds?

With these two lines of dedication, I commit you to the flames.  
The fourth day of the ninth month, the fifth year of Hōreki (1755).  
Kō Yūgai, eighty years old.

*The preceding book of verses by the Old Tea Seller accurately portrays the circumstances of his daily life. It is just the way that he lived. Some people may read old Baisa's poems and get the wrong idea: that he led a pleasant, unprecedentedly carefree existence the likes of which will never be seen again. If such were true, it would mean that Old Baisa was merely a man of tea who chose to lead a solitary, reclusive life. No. His reclusiveness and things like that were altogether secondary. Readers, please do not make the mistake of prattling with parrot-brained wisdom about Baisaō and tea!*

*The Old Tea Seller's brother in the Dharma Daichō Rōryō<sup>□</sup> humbly wrote this afterword in winter of the first year of Kampō (1741).*

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<sup>□</sup> Daichō Rōryō: see Daiten's *Life*, footnote 8. Daichō wrote this afterword fourteen years before the poems were published, when they were still in manuscript.