

MIJOLOGÍA APLICADA

Matcha

Vol. 01

Agust 26

Mijología

(mi.jo.lo.gí.a) n. (Spanish)

Etym. From the Spanish term mijo, an affectionate expression of closeness used in several Latin American countries, and the combining form -logía, from the Greek -logía, meaning "study," "treatise," or "discipline."

1. A discipline that studies lifelong learning as a process of exchanging knowledge, experiences, and perspectives among lifelong learners.
2. An approach based on the idea that every person can be both teacher and learner, regardless of age, experience, position, or specialization.

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Letter from the editor

"That is why adopting a completely static approach toward knowledge or holding onto unchangeable beliefs can become deeply harmful.

Personally, I hope I never become one of those people in the future. And without a doubt, I believe we should all be mindful when we see someone within a community beginning to impose that kind of mindset on others."

There is so much to share that, fortunately or unfortunately, written words know no limits beyond the willingness of those who write them and the curiosity of those who read them.

We live in a reality where we are more connected, yet perhaps less present. An era defined by immediacy, where content often seeks to convey an idea in only a few seconds. Amid this pace, spaces such as journals, libraries, newsletters, and now this volume that introduces *Mijología Aplicada* remind us that there are still places where we can pause, learn, and share knowledge.

Because although the way we consume information has changed, the need to understand, reflect, and connect with the stories behind each piece of knowledge remains unchanged. This volume was born from precisely that intention: to approach matcha not merely as a beverage, but as an expression of culture, dedication, and a particular way of understanding life.

It is fascinating to consider how such a small leaf can bring together so many people, cultures, and stories around a single moment. To see it only as a leaf would be a limited perspective; because, in reality, this "simple leaf" is the meeting point of a living culture that is continuously shaped by those who exist behind every cup of tea: from the person who planted and cared for it, to the one who prepared the infusion and chose to share it with someone else.

The same applies to written words and the knowledge that lives within these pages. Their value does not lie in remaining stored away, but in traveling, reaching new readers, and becoming the starting point of new stories. Every shared idea is an opportunity for someone else to continue a path that began long before.

Therefore, all that remains is to express gratitude to every author who shares their knowledge with the hope that their words will find someone who may begin as a reader and, over time, discover the desire to write, create, and share as well.

Within this spirit lies the conversation with the guests from *Sanko Matcha*, a reminder that behind every cup there are people, experiences, and journeys that deserve to be known. Their stories remind us that learning does not end when a book is closed; many times, that is where a new journey begins.

Today, the words contained in this volume are placed in the hands of the reader. May each page find the person who needs to read it, may each idea inspire new questions, and may, with time, someone who arrived as a reader discover their own way of sharing knowledge.

These are just some of the words, labels, and narratives that surround matcha today.

It seems everyone knows what matcha is, yet the more important question remains: How many people truly understand it?

As with every anniversary edition of Satoricha's Journal, we begin not with answers, but with questions, questions that encourage us to look beyond the obvious. We seek voices capable of offering fresh perspectives from their own fields of expertise, because understanding tea has never been simply about memorizing names, regions, or production methods.

These anniversary features may appear to be a departure from our usual editorial path, but in reality, they represent exactly the opposite. They are an opportunity to explore tea from new angles and to remind ourselves that understanding it is a lifelong pursuit, one that, much like tea itself, is cultivated over time.

One of those questions lies at the heart of this conversation: Can a tradition that spans centuries coexist with a deeply technological ecosystem, where science, engineering, materials, design, and innovation work together not to replace tradition, but to preserve it?

That question, perhaps, best captures the essence of Sanko Matcha.

Under the leadership of Ryan and Sam, the company has become a meeting point between Japanese tea tradition and a contemporary vision of innovation. Yet to understand how they arrived there, we must first return to where their journey began: a desire to understand tea beyond the cup.



Back in the classroom

The story begins at the Penn State Tea Institute, an interdisciplinary program dedicated to the study, education, and preservation of tea culture.

Ryan served as its second director, while Sam became its third. More than an academic institution, it was a place where different tea traditions could meet and interact: the Japanese chanoyu schools of Urasenke and Omotesenke, the Korean tea ceremony, and the Chinese gongfu cha tradition.

The Institute also hosted seminars led by internationally recognized tea practitioners. It offered immersive learning experiences in Japan, China, and Korea, allowing students to encounter tea within its own cultural landscapes.

It was this constant dialogue between traditions that sparked one of their most important questions.

Sam noticed that while conversations surrounding Chinese gongfu cha and the Korean tea ceremony openly explore cultivars, origin, and processing methods, these topics often seem to take a secondary role within Japanese chanoyu.

Not because they are less important, but because the focus shifts toward something broader: the experience of the ceremony as a whole.

That contrast planted a fundamental question: How can we understand not only the tea that reaches the bowl, but everything that exists behind it?

And that search did not remain confined to the classroom.

Can science predict the taste of tea

One of their research projects set out to answer a question that seemed almost impossible: Could data predict the flavor of a tea?

Back in 2012, long before artificial intelligence became part of everyday conversation, they combined sensory science, statistical analysis, and AI to develop models that linked a tea's sensory profile to variables such as origin, age, and even consumer preferences.

What began as an academic research project eventually evolved into something much larger. It became a sensory analytics company whose technology found applications far beyond tea, reaching industries such as wine, beer, soft drinks, and food.

Yet even after building two successful ventures, both Ryan and Sam felt that something was still missing.

The answer, in retrospect, seemed both simple and inevitable: More tea.

More specifically, more matcha. And that is how [Sanko Matcha](#) was born.



What is Sanko Matcha?

When Ryan explains what Sanko Matcha is, he doesn't begin by talking about a company. He begins with a problem.

After years of studying tea, Ryan and Sam identified a fundamental limitation in the world of matcha: producing consistently high-quality, freshly ground matcha still relied on traditional stone milling. This artisanal process is difficult to scale and even harder to reproduce with precision.

Their solution was as ambitious as it was unconventional: To develop a countertop machine capable of replicating the physical principles behind a traditional Japanese stone mill.

But the goal was never simply to automate craftsmanship.

Sanko Matcha's technology is designed to control critical variables throughout the grinding process, including tea compression. It incorporates ceramic grinding mechanisms and an active cooling system that dissipates heat during milling, helping preserve the sensory qualities of the matcha.

According to Ryan, developing this technology has required more than two years of continuous research and refinement. Yet as the machine took shape, another need became increasingly clear: The need to share knowledge.

After years of research, they had come to believe that the future of tea would depend not only on better tools, but also on better conversations.

That conviction gave rise to the [Specialty Matcha Podcast](#), a platform that brings together producers, researchers, and tea professionals with a simple but ambitious mission: To take knowledge beyond the small circle of specialists and make it accessible to anyone who wants to understand matcha on a deeper level.

So...

What is Matcha, really?

Knowing the depth and complexity of our guests, we decided to begin with one of the most difficult questions by returning to the very basics: What is matcha?

Today, we live in a world where the most literal interpretation of the word often seems to prevail: if something is ground into a fine powder, it is suddenly labeled as "matcha."

That is how terms such as "brown matcha", which is often nothing more than powdered hōjicha, or "black matcha", typically made from activated charcoal, have entered the market.

Which raises an uncomfortable question: At what point did we stop expecting matcha to actually be tea?

So, how do Ryan and Sam define it?

Their first response is a disclaimer: It depends on whom you ask.

For them, matcha is a finely milled powder produced from tencha, a shade-grown green tea that has been steamed during processing before being ground into powder.

You may agree with that definition or not, but it is the framework through which they understand matcha.

(Psst... I happen to agree. As far as I am concerned, activated charcoal isn't "black matcha.")

Why Matcha? Because it's trendy?

Not at all. Rather, because of destiny

Ryan recalls that the first time he tried matcha was from a can of Teavana. Later, he encountered it again through his studies in the Omotesenke tea school.

For him, matcha became associated with a very specific experience: spending 20 minutes or more sitting in the seiza position, patiently waiting as the body slowly begins to remind you of its existence. And after surviving the ceremony, an usucha accompanied by a wagashi became the perfect reward.

Beyond the flavor itself, it was the complete experience, the atmosphere, the ritual, and the emotions surrounding it. A moment that became a treasured memory and, years later, continues to stay with him.

For Sam, however, matcha represents a connection with his own origins.

Born in China and later moving to the United States during his childhood, he always looked for ways to reconnect with his cultural roots. In many ways, he and matcha share a similar journey.

Matcha traces its origins back to China during the Song Dynasty, when powdered tea was part of a refined tea tradition. Later, this practice largely disappeared in China during the Ming Dynasty, while it continued to develop in Japan, eventually becoming deeply connected with the cultural expression of chanoyu.

Today, interestingly, China is also experiencing a renewed interest in rediscovering and exploring this historical tradition once again.

For that reason, we can say that matcha entered Ryan and Sam's lives not simply as a beverage. It arrived as an experience, a cultural connection, and an ongoing question.

As they themselves summarize:

“The journey has really been about understanding what makes a product meaningful for people.”

Before Sanko Matcha, they spent years working with artificial intelligence and the food and beverage industry, helping companies better understand consumer preferences and create products that were not only different, but genuinely better experiences.

That same mindset naturally carried over into matcha.

Because behind a simple bowl of tea lies a much more complex question: What truly defines highquality matcha, and how can we better understand the elements that make it exceptional?



A conversation beyond the cup

From this point forward, we invite you to join in the conversation.

The following section presents the interview in a question-and-answer format. To make the reading experience clearer, the questions will be highlighted in **bold**, while the answers will be identified using the initials of each participant:

R: Ryan

S: Sam

This transcript aims to remain as faithful and closely connected as possible to the original conversation. However, when transforming an oral interview into a written format, certain adjustments in structure, organization, and wording are necessary to create a clearer, more fluid reading experience while preserving the meaning and intention behind the interviewees' ideas.

More than a simple transcription, this section seeks to preserve the essence of the conversation: the reflections, nuances, and perspectives that emerged while discussing matcha, its history, its evolution, and the future of this tea culture.

We invite you to accompany us through this exchange of ideas.

¿ What truly defines a high-quality matcha? or, perhaps a better question:

What does “Specialty” mean in the context of matcha?

R: Well, the coffee industry typically uses the Q Grading system, and if I remember correctly, any coffee that scores above 80 or 85 points enters the specialty category.

It is a system based entirely on sensory evaluation, which is fascinating because it means that coffee from anywhere, regardless of where it was grown or how it was produced, can achieve specialty status as long as it meets that evaluation framework.

With matcha, fortunately or unfortunately, it does not work the same way.

There is no simple or particularly strict definition of what “specialty matcha” means. Instead, we find different categories and terms that, in many cases, are commercial constructions.

For example, “Uji Matcha” is a created term; it is not a statement of quality. In fact, it is not even strictly a statement of origin. It is a registered trademark and part of a legal framework.

The same applies to expressions such as “ceremonial grade.” That is why defining it clearly is so difficult.

The way I see it, specialty matcha should preserve all the information that explains why that tea is good.

In other words, it should be a unique and irreplaceable product, where its provenance and characteristics remain connected to the product itself.

For example: a Samidori cultivar grown in Wazuka, harvested by hand or machine, produced with a combination of natural and synthetic fertilizers, and processed using a radiant heat tencha oven.

Those are precisely the details that explain what makes that tea special.

And if we are also talking about a specific harvest from a particular year, then we are dealing with a singular product.

You cannot simply replace it with another one.

Perhaps you could find one from a neighboring town, but when you know the producer and have access to all of those detailed characteristics, the product stops being interchangeable.

In contrast, Uji Matcha functions much more like a commodity. As I mentioned before, Uji Matcha is a registered trademark. The requirement is that the product must be processed within Kyoto Prefecture, but the leaves themselves can come from cultivation areas located in Mie, Shiga, Nara, or Kyoto.

That means you could create Uji Matcha using 100% tea leaves grown in Mie, as long as the final processing takes place in Kyoto.

Likewise, you could use tencha grown entirely in Uji and processed there, and also call it Uji Matcha.

The raw materials are interchangeable.

In that sense, what exists beneath the trademark are units of a commodity where we often have very little information about the details behind them. It is a completely fungible product, and the system can be more or less flexible depending on how its rules are defined.

That is why, to me, a specialty product is one whose characteristics cannot simply be invented or substituted.

The legal definition of Uji Matcha can change, but the history, origin, cultivar, producer, and specific conditions that make a tea unique cannot be artificially created.

S: I completely agree. And I would add something else about this framework.

The fact that there is a system for defining a specialty product does not mean that the same system can automatically be applied to another product.

We have seen many people coming from coffee, wine, and even other tea categories trying to use those same criteria to understand specialty matcha.

However, those approaches often do not work.

I think the most obvious example is the concept of terroir.

In coffee, wine, and many other specialty products, people constantly talk about terroir, region, and geography. But that approach does not necessarily apply to matcha

With the right cultivar, the correct fertilizer formula, proper cultivation methods, well-executed processing, and even using the same machinery, you could theoretically reproduce almost the same flavor profile... even on the Moon.

Matcha depends surprisingly little on where it is produced, and that is truly fascinating. The factors that actually influence the final flavor are different: the cultivar, the fertilizer formula, the processing methods, and how equipment such as the tencha oven or shiage machine is used.

Ultimately, any factor that directly impacts the sensory outcome of the product. I would consider all of these elements part of the specialty spectrum.

Anything that can be perceived, tasted, or observed, that is, the tangible characteristics of the product and the factors that create them, is what, from our perspective, forms the framework for defining specialty matcha.

Evolution or Tradition? Is there really a choice?

While innovation allows matcha to continue growing and reaching new audiences, at what point does it risk moving away from the practices and values that have shaped its identity?

With the rise of innovations such as ready-to-drink (RTD) matcha, automatic alternatives to the chasen, and new matcha-based recipes, how can we find a balance between evolution and tradition?

S: I think tradition is, in many ways, a concept that is often misunderstood. Because within any living culture, today's practices become tomorrow's traditions.

Evolution is always happening along the way. As long as a culture remains alive, as long as there are people who continue participating in it, who see it as part of their identity and lifestyle, that culture will inevitably change over time.

And if you are truly an extreme purist or traditionalist, I would argue that you are not actually viewing culture as a continuous practice. You are treating culture as a frozen snapshot of a historical moment.

But culture is not that. Culture is something alive.

That is why, when we discuss innovation, I believe intention is what truly matters.

The question is: Are you innovating to create a better product? To improve an experience? To contribute to the well-being of people, a community, or an industry?

If an innovation contributes to any of those aspects (or even all of them) then I believe we are looking at good innovation. They are, in reality, refinements and improvements within a living culture.

However, if innovation seeks to damage the existing system or simply generate greater economic returns by sacrificing product quality or even consumer health, then I believe we are looking at bad innovation.

There are two sides to the coin, and I strongly believe intention is a fundamental element in this discussion. Especially because we are seeing many examples of this within the world of matcha.

The use of different fertilizer approaches, shortcuts in processing methods that may increase production volume but result in significantly lower quality, or even the addition of chemical additives to intensify color or alter flavor.

I would consider those examples of bad innovation

R: There are shortcuts. And ultimately, it depends on how much other people actually care.

Japan faces a serious and concerning problem with the disappearance of many traditional crafts.

There are countless stories of artisans who are the only people capable of producing a specific type of textile, a particular technique, or a unique craft. And the moment that person stops practicing it, that entire art form and body of knowledge disappears forever

Japan is an aging country from a demographic perspective; it is even facing population decline.

But beyond that, cultures and practices that survive (or disappear) are part of a Darwinian process. And every Darwinian process has different factors that determine whether something continues or fades away.

One of the most important factors is: Do people actually care?

Because, for example, the way I often see chanoyu presented to the world feels incredibly unappealing.

The first lesson many people receive in chanoyu is often something like wari-geiko. In my case, it was learning how to walk inside the tea room and being scolded for not wearing white socks.

It can be an extremely boring experience.

And you could argue that this process selects the right people: those willing to go through that learning journey and accept tea being transmitted exactly as it has always been practiced. But it is not necessarily an effective way of encouraging new people to enter that culture.

About a year ago, we had a very interesting conversation with someone in the industry who strongly advocated for traditional sencha preparation.

There is an entire culture surrounding the use of the kyūsu (the Japanese teapot for loose-leaf tea) and the kyūsu industry itself in Japan is also disappearing. It is a very sad story.

Many people simply do not want to deal with the complexity of preparing loose-leaf tea anymore.

I know many people criticize the ready-to-drink (RTD) tea bottles produced by large beverage companies.

When we worked at AI companies, we collaborated with many of those companies, and we have to say: their products taste genuinely good. It is almost a modern miracle of food technology that you can provide enjoyable green tea anywhere in the country, through any vending machine, hot or cold.

We thought that was incredible.

And that is precisely the problem.

It is too easy.

In fact, for most people, the tea they prepare themselves using a kyūsu will probably taste worse, because they do not know how to prepare it properly, they do not have the right water, they cannot measure the exact temperature, or perhaps the tea itself has lost freshness.

It is one of thousands of factors that can influence the final result.

And, in a way, you could argue that the tea industry and tea cultures simply have not been adaptive enough when it comes to making people care, to encourage them to prepare tea at home, build a practice, or create a ritual around it, interestingly, I think matcha has been very successful in this regard.

Many Western matcha companies, through concepts such as “your matcha moment” or “your morning ritual,” are creating new ways for people to develop a relationship with the product.

In some ways, we could even say they have been more successful than Japan itself in building that daily connection with tea at home.

Beyond the tea ceremony

Can the principles of Wa, Kei, Sei, Jaku, and Ichigo Ichie survive in modern matcha culture?

In other words, can the values traditionally cultivated through chadō still be practiced within our contemporary reality, or have they become limited exclusively to the ceremonial space?

S: I think the current popularity that matcha is experiencing will naturally lead a portion of those people toward that world. And I think that is something very positive, even for traditional tea culture and the tea ceremony itself.

More and more people are being introduced to matcha, and among them there will always be a group that begins to feel curious about the culture behind the beverage. I think that is wonderful.

At the same time, I believe that, at this point in its history, matcha has been removed from its original cultural context and has become something with its own identity.

Today, matcha is a product that can be appreciated on its own. Many people can enjoy it without necessarily knowing all the cultural elements surrounding it, and still find value and meaning in the experience. I think that is also something positive.

In fact, that is often the foundation of any beverage that reaches a truly global dimension. If we look at coffee or wine, neither of them today is inseparably tied to a single culture or a single country.

They have become globalized products.

And this globalization is not limited only to consumption; it also extends to production. That is exactly what we are beginning to see with matcha. Today, we find matcha production in Korea, mainland China, Taiwan, and even India. We are also seeing it emerge in northern Thailand.

In fact, we recently interviewed a friend in Bangkok who works with tea producers in Chiang Rai who are currently cultivating matcha.

Some people argue that matcha must necessarily come from Japan because they consider it an exclusively Japanese product.

But I would respond that matcha originated in China and later traveled to Japan. From its very beginnings, it was a product that crossed borders; in a sense, it has always been international, and that has been part of its history for centuries.

Today, thanks to industrialization and the expansion of cultivation, more people are able to enjoy matcha.

R: Yes. I think these philosophical principles represent the very spirit of chanoyu. And interestingly, I feel that they are both the easiest and the most difficult things to understand.

Because, ultimately, what does it really mean to create a unique moment during a gathering? What does it actually mean to speak about respect, purity, or tranquility?

Take chanoyu as an example. There is an entire series of deliberate movements dedicated to cleaning and purifying the utensils: first with a dry silk cloth and then with a slightly damp linen cloth.

However, the utensils should already be clean before the natsume and the other implements are placed in front of the guests.

So why clean them again?

Because the purpose is not merely hygiene. What is being expressed is a level of intention and conscious attention behind every single gesture. And that is precisely what saddens me when I see many people who, for example, prepare matcha in a café and claim that they are “respecting tradition.”

You often hear statements like: “We only use a chasen and whisk every bowl by hand because we want to respect tradition.” Or “We use a hishaku, an iron kettle, or certain traditional utensils because we want to honor the tradition.”

But in reality, that perspective focuses only on the external form, it focuses on the objects and the visible elements of tradition, but not on the spirit behind them.

They say they respect tradition because they whisk every bowl by hand, but then their chasen is covered in black mold, filled with hardened matcha residue, and they are using a bowl that has not been washed all day.

That is unpleasant.

And from my perspective, it means they have completely lost sight of what respecting tradition actually means. Because the spirit is what truly deserves our attention.

The problem is that this spirit is not easy to learn.

Unless you have experienced genuine immersion in chanoyu and have taken several lessons, I would say at least five, it is very difficult to truly feel it.

It is not enough to simply observe the movements.

Someone needs to explain their purpose, you need to see them repeated many times, and gradually internalize the deeper teachings of chanoyu. That is why the best matcha cafés I have visited are not necessarily the ones that reproduce the traditional form most accurately, but rather those that capture its spirit.

I think, for example, about MTCH. If you observe the way they work carefully, you will notice that their movements deeply reflect the spirit of chanoyu. However, they prepare matcha using a plastic whisking bowl. That would be unimaginable within a traditional tea ceremony.

When preparing cold matcha drinks with milk, they even use a resin whisk. None of that is traditional.

But the way they maintain their workspace, the way they welcome every person who walks through the door, how they allow customers to observe what they are doing, and the attention they give to recognizing every visitor...all of that reflects the spirit of chanoyu.

One of the fundamental principles of this practice is that everyone is equal within the tea room, however, in many establishments, when a delivery driver arrives to pick up an order, they are treated as if they were the least important person in the room.

At MTCH, the opposite happens. They welcome them with a smile, greet them, offer them a seat if their order is not ready, and treat them with the same consideration they would give any other customer.

And that is precisely the spirit we should try to preserve

I believe we still have so much to learn from chanoyu

S: Yes, I completely agree.

Ultimately, chanoyu and a modern matcha café are serving very different audiences.

But the spirit of chanoyu has always been the same: that the host does everything possible to provide the best experience for their guests, and when you truly internalize that way of thinking and apply it to a contemporary café, it is natural that many things will be done differently.

Today, you are serving people who live fast-paced lifestyles. You cannot dedicate the same amount of time to carefully warming every bowl or boiling water just so everyone can hear the sound of it. In chanoyu, there is even an expression describing that moment: the sound of boiling water is compared to the wind passing through a pine forest.

But in a modern café, that simply is not possible, but, that does not mean abandoning the spirit of tradition.

What you do is dedicate your ability to thinking about how to provide the best possible experience for the consumer in front of you. That may involve optimizing utensils, adapting preparation methods, and designing a workflow that responds to the needs of that specific environment.

Naturally, those solutions will be different from what we would find within a tea ceremony, but the spirit remains intact.

The objective remains exactly the same: That every guest, every customer, has the best possible experience.

Let us now discuss a topic that often generates significant debate: ethnocentrism within the matcha

Do you consider ethnocentrism a factor that strengthens the market, or does it represent a risk for its future development?

Although Japan has been responsible for preserving and refining matcha production over centuries, today other countries are also becoming part of the supply chain, either by producing matcha themselves or by cultivating tea leaves that are later used in Japanese matcha production, similar to how Vietnamese tea can play a role in Taiwanese oolong production.

In this context, does an exclusive preference for Japanese matcha, or even for specific origins such as Uji, represent a legitimate concern for quality and tradition? Or is it a form of ethnocentrism that could ultimately limit the growth and evolution of the industry?

R: It is difficult to answer.

As we move into the future, Chinese matcha is still something very new.

We are still trying to determine the exact timeline, but the earliest farms we have found in mainland China using Japanese cultivars appear to date back to around the 1990s.

Many of the modern matcha-producing regions in mainland China are only three to five years old.

For example, Guicha, the largest matcha company in the world, produced around 4,000 tons of matcha in 2024 or 2025, a volume comparable to Japan's entire annual production.

And although the company is associated with Guizhou, it only began producing matcha in 2017. We are truly still in the early stages of this industry.

A few years ago, much of that production was of relatively low quality. Many farms were not using shading, many were relying on cultivars that were not well suited for matcha production, and even when shading was used, the milling process was often inadequate.

In many cases, it was simply a product labeled as "matcha" to be added to cookies and sold for a few dollars at an Asian grocery store somewhere in the world. It was not genuinely competitive with what we understand matcha to be.

However, that perspective is now outdated. Today, there are Chinese producers capable of creating a product that, based purely on sensory characteristics and in blind evaluations, can be almost indistinguishable from average-quality Japanese matcha.

And this brings up an important point: the market is not made up of a single type of consumer.

There is a kind of curve. On one side, you have consumers who do not care about origin at all. Then you have a middle group, who probably care more about price than provenance, but they do care about flavor, because if a product tastes bad, they will never buy it again. And finally, you have consumers who are willing to spend significant amounts of money on an exceptional product.

Everyone exists somewhere along that curve, but then you have businesses, which are probably the most rational buyers in the market.

An individual consumer might fall in love with a romantic story: a shaded Asahi cultivar from Hanzu, Shirakawa, Uji, and decide to spend \$50 or \$100 per kilogram. That is not necessarily a rational purchase decision. It is driven by emotion, personal connection, and enjoyment.

But the most important buyers in the market are businesses, because they purchase larger volumes and buy more frequently, and normally, they are not purchasing “Japanese matcha latte.” They are simply purchasing “matcha latte.”

One of the biggest contributions of the international matcha market (especially outside Japan) has been the creation of the “ceremonial grade” category.

Because many consumers care more about whether a matcha is considered “ceremonial grade” than whether it is specifically Japanese.

And I think that may eventually create challenges for the Japanese matcha industry. Today, we can already find Chinese matcha with excellent flavor profiles for around \$70 to \$100 per kilogram, with consistent availability. Additionally, many of these producers developed their production specifically with export markets in mind, meaning their pesticide residue levels can easily meet U.S. requirements and, in some cases, even European standards.

Meanwhile, a Japanese mid-tier matcha of comparable quality may cost around \$150 to \$250 per kilogram, and some of that product may have residue levels that make export more difficult.

For that reason, I believe we are going to see a huge wave of Chinese matcha entering the market, but this also introduces a much more complex human dimension.

Many of these Chinese projects are supported by local governments, and there are actually good reasons behind that support. One of them is poverty alleviation.

Many of these producing regions are extremely poor. If you compare an average rural Chinese tea farmer with an average Japanese tea farmer, the difference is enormous.

The Japanese farmer generally operates within a developed environment: they have access to education, social security, vehicles, bank loans, and greater opportunities.

Meanwhile, many rural Chinese farmers are not living in starvation, but they are facing completely different economic conditions: lower incomes and fewer growth opportunities. For those local governments, tea represents an important opportunity.

Tea cultivation has a particular advantage: it can grow in areas where many other agricultural activities simply cannot, so, from a human perspective, seeing these Chinese producers succeed could actually be a very positive thing.

Returning to Japanese matcha and whether this is good or bad, I think Japanese mid- and low-tier matcha will be the segment that suffers the most.

Many businesses simply do not value the fact that a product is Japanese enough to justify paying a significant premium, and those who truly value Japanese origin will likely purchase at the top end of the market.

So, I think the middle segment is about to receive a very significant shock over the next ten years.

I do not know whether that is good or bad, it is simply market dynamics.

The difficulty is determining how to evaluate the situation. On one side, we are talking about lifting thousands of people out of poverty in China, but on the other side, it comes at the expense of a declining Japanese industry, where many producers are unwilling to take risks, innovate, or make major changes.

The average age of Japanese tea farmers is around 65 years old, and in some regions it is even higher. Many are simply preparing for retirement.

So, whether this is good or bad depends entirely on the perspective from which you evaluate it. It depends on the lens you choose.

S: I largely agree. I think that was a very comprehensive review of the current situation.

But looking at the long term, I believe we are still at a stage where the main goal is to make the overall market larger.

Japan simply does not have enough production capacity to supply the entire world.

Today, Japan produces around 4,000 tons of matcha per year, I believe we are now closer to 5,000 tons, but that amount is not enough for a beverage to become a global trend, and certainly not enough for it to become a sustainable global culture.

I think the development of Chinese matcha, Korean matcha, and even future matcha production in India or Thailand is creating precisely the foundation needed for this product to remain a truly global category.

And I believe this new cultural formation will eventually benefit Japan as well.

Because, ultimately, we are creating a new product category for the entire world, right now, I think the most important thing is staying relevant, remaining visible and present in people's lives.

The matcha shortage we experienced last year was genuinely concerning.

It was frightening because it showed that consumers are willing to move away from the product if they simply cannot access it, and I think that would be a very negative outcome

Historically, matcha has oscillated between two dimensions: a tool for human connection and an expression of social status. Today, we are witnessing how the rise of matcha within the wellness industry has linked it to concepts such as luxury, lifestyle, and exclusivity.

Are we entering a new stage where matcha is once again becoming a symbol of status, moving away from its original role as a shared experience and a space for human connection?

R: It is already happening.

For example, with the oil crisis in Iran, the countries most affected are those with limited oil reserves and a high dependence on energy imports. In Southeast Asia, this has had a significant impact. We have spoken with many friends in Thailand who tell us that the economy is not performing well and that growth is slowing down.

And if obtaining an average good-quality matcha drink in Bangkok still costs between five and six dollars, from an American perspective that might seem like a reasonable price. However, compared to Thai wages, matcha becomes a luxury product.

It is equivalent to paying for three delicious meals. In other words, it would be similar to someone in a Western country spending thirty or forty dollars (or even more) on a good lunch.

Many people had already developed a habit around matcha. There were probably more affordable options available, but as prices continue to rise, those consumers are switching to other products. And habits are incredibly powerful.

It is genuinely unfortunate. As prices increase, we are seeing culture withdraw in certain places because people simply can no longer afford to participate in it.

I do not think this is necessarily happening in places like California or New York, but it is happening in countries where people genuinely want to be part of that culture and consume the product because they enjoy it.

In fact, I think we should all recognize the role China is playing within the matcha supply chain. By contributing significant production capacity, China helps keep high-quality matcha more accessible.

For example, a fifty-dollar can of Japanese matcha could potentially cost one hundred and fifty dollars if this additional supply from other countries did not exist. In reality, this helps Japanese matcha culture reach more people who genuinely value its origin.

At the same time, it keeps prices within a more reasonable range. It is still an expensive product, but it does not become completely inaccessible. Actually, I think we need more Chinese matcha to protect Japanese matcha.

If we truly want matcha to remain a shared culture rather than becoming exclusively a luxury product, more people need to be able to access it. It should not become something that only a small elite can afford in cities around the world.

Additionally, we are at a very important moment because this category is still extremely young.

Ten years ago, matcha was a niche product. It was difficult to find.

And something fascinating, (which we have discussed with several matcha brand owners) is that many young people are completely skipping coffee. There is an entire generation that is not developing a relationship with coffee and instead wants to drink matcha every morning.

When we think about becoming an adult, we develop relationships with different products and habits. One of those is our relationship with caffeine.

Although it is something we do not always like to discuss within the tea industry, caffeine is a substance with addictive potential. If you drink tea every day and suddenly stop, your body notices, so when someone begins developing that habit as a teenager through matcha, the effect compounds over time.

That teenage girl in New York who decided to start drinking matcha every day could potentially become a regular consumer for the next eighty years.

Now imagine that multiplied by thousands or millions of people. That is cumulative growth.

It is an enormous opportunity for the entire industry, but we need two things: reasonable prices and high quality. And Japan cannot achieve that alone.

S: I completely agree. I think it truly helps matcha remain relevant in front of consumers, and I am specifically referring to Chinese matcha.

Because this is a fundamental element for any specialty product. If we look at specialty wine or specialty coffee, there is always a massive supply chain of more accessible products that supports and surrounds that premium category.

You still have instant coffee. You still have supermarket wine. And you need that broader consumption base for a specialty product to remain present in people's everyday lives.

I think Chinese matcha is fulfilling exactly that role: it is helping this category remain relevant for everyone, and yes, I believe that is extremely important.

Think about wine. Imagine if only Bordeaux and Burgundy existed, and there were nowhere else in the world where wine could be produced. That would never allow wine to become a truly global beverage.

We have discussed how matcha can evolve without losing its essence, how it can cross borders, and how it can adapt to new audiences. But in the end, beyond origin, price, or preparation methods, one essential question remains:

How can we truly experience matcha?

R: Personally, I taste a tremendous amount of matcha for work purposes. I rarely drink it simply for pleasure, and when I do, I find that I enjoy matchas that have a strong individual expression, those that show a more defined personality.

I love zairai matcha. I enjoy that it has a certain bitterness, that it is aromatic, and I appreciate the way it makes my body feel.

Matchas with extremely high levels of umami (those experiences that feel almost like an "umami explosion") are intellectually fascinating and are generally considered among the highest-quality products. However, personally, I much prefer teas produced through more natural cultivation methods.

Recently, I have become very interested in teas produced without pesticides and without fertilizers. In fact, I personally have concerns about the level of pesticide use in tea production.

I do not have enough technical knowledge to make a definitive critique of the subject, but I have heard enough to be concerned about long-term consumption.

Because from a traditional Japanese perspective, matcha was not necessarily designed to be consumed every day. And if you are producing a product that was originally intended to be consumed once every few weeks, the way you approach pesticide use is different from creating a product that people will consume daily.

There are stories of Japanese tea farmers who have experienced serious health complications due to excessive pesticide use in their fields. Because of this, I have personally become much more interested in these types of cultivation methods, even if the teas produced through them may not have that intense umami profile.

Now, the counterargument to my perspective is that this applies to almost all Japanese agriculture. In other words, even when eating something like a carrot or an apple, we are also consuming significant amounts of pesticides. Therefore, if this were truly a problem, it would be a much broader issue and we would already be observing its effects across many other agricultural products.

That is a reasonable argument, but I still believe this is a topic that has not been sufficiently studied.

For people who are exploring new flavor profiles, my recommendation would be to try a matcha that has undergone some level of roasting.

The classic Yame profiles, especially some from Hoshino Seichaen, are incredible.

The first time I tried one of those matchas, it was a revealing experience. Discovering chocolate or hazelnut notes within matcha, when you are used to thinking of matcha as something primarily vegetal or grassy, creates a genuine moment of discovery.

That moment of "oh, now I understand," so that would be my recommendation for introducing matcha to someone who is still exploring this category.

S: Yes, I think Ryan and I are completely aligned when it comes to flavor preferences, recently, we tried something truly special from a tea producer currently based in Uji.

It was from Baisan Nakamura. The owner originally studied tea in Kagoshima, but later returned to Uji to refine his technique and develop his own product.

He uses a very delicate, small-scale roasting process for tencha, which he then transforms into matcha with an incredibly distinctive profile, the result is a matcha that tastes like cacao and chocolate. It has an extremely silky texture, a very smooth mouthfeel, deep fragrance, and notes reminiscent of nuts and seeds.

It was truly extraordinary, and that connects with one of my personal criticisms of matcha: sometimes it can become a little monotonous.

The range of flavors within matcha (especially traditional styles) is not always as broad. If you compare it with other types of tea, such as oolong or pu'er, there is an enormous variety of aromatic and sensory profiles to explore. You can find completely different expressions, each highly characteristic of their origin and production methods, with matcha, however, the spectrum can sometimes feel a little more limited.

That is why I believe any experimental approach that seeks to discover new flavor possibilities within matcha deserves to be celebrated. Personally, I also greatly enjoy those kinds of explorations.

If you could go back to the beginning of your journey and share one piece of advice with your younger self, what would you tell them?

What would be your Tea Wisdom?

R: I think my Tea Wisdom is more related to building businesses and starting new projects:

“The perception of progress is not linear.”

Sometimes I feel like I accomplish the equivalent of an entire year’s worth of work in a single day, and other times I feel like I spent an entire month without achieving anything at all.

But that is precisely the nature of the process: a long, slow, and consistent journey. Everything usually takes longer than you expect. However, some moments feel like major breakthroughs or enormous discoveries.

But, in reality, those moments were probably just the result of spending weeks hitting your head against the wall, trying to find a solution, an idea, or a new direction.

And ultimately, it was that continuous effort, that frustration, and that discomfort that led you toward a better outcome.

S: **“Stay curious and stay critical.”**

Because we have seen and experienced many situations like this. I am referring to what we might call "armchair experts" or Tea-gurus within the industry: people who, at times, are simply very difficult to interact with.

They often have extremely rigid belief systems, and those beliefs are frequently based on incorrect or outdated information. The problem is that this mindset can discourage any kind of questioning, learning, or adaptation in a world that is constantly changing.

Because tea is a living culture. All tea cultures around the world are living cultures. They involve real people who participate in them, create them, transform them, and enjoy them.

That is why adopting a completely static approach toward knowledge or holding onto unchangeable beliefs can become deeply harmful.

Personally, I hope I never become one of those people in the future. And without a doubt, I believe we should all be mindful when we see someone within a community beginning to impose that kind of mindset on others.

Glossary

C

Chado. Chado, also written as Chadō, and commonly referred to in English as the Japanese Tea Ceremony, is a spiritual and aesthetic discipline focused on the refinement of the self. In Japanese, it is known as a “dō,” meaning a “way” or “path.” The word chadō literally means “the way of tea.” (Urasenke, 2026)

Chanoyu. Literally meaning “hot water for tea.” It is one of the traditional terms used to refer to the Japanese tea practice and often emphasizes its artistic, aesthetic, and ceremonial dimensions. Unlike other terms associated with the way of tea, chanoyu places greater emphasis on the aesthetic experience of preparing and appreciating tea. (Tezumi, 2026)

Chasen. A tea whisk made from a single piece of bamboo, divided into numerous fine strands. It is used to blend matcha powder with water and create a light, frothy preparation, or to incorporate it until achieving a denser and more concentrated texture. (Tezumi, 2024)

Commodity. (basic product or raw material) Resources and raw materials essential to sustaining civilization and the global economy. Although the term may suggest something ordinary or lacking distinctive value, a commodity is characterized precisely by being a product without a differentiated identity. When a product becomes a standardized good (commoditized), it loses elements of differentiation, recognition, or brand-associated value compared to consumer goods with their own identity. (Natal, 2026)

Cultivar. A term used to refer to a plant variety selected or developed through human intervention. Unlike naturally occurring varieties, cultivars result from selection and breeding processes aimed at obtaining specific characteristics, such as higher yield, better adaptation, or increased resistance. (Arevalo, 2026)

D

Darwinian Process. An evolutionary theory proposed by Charles Darwin that explains the evolution of species through the process of natural selection. It was introduced in his work *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and suggests that favorable traits tend to be preserved and passed on through generations, allowing organisms to adapt to their environment. (García & Sachs, 2020)

E

Ethnocentrism. The tendency to consider one’s own culture as the primary reference point for interpreting and evaluating other cultures. It involves analyzing foreign customs, values, or practices through the perspective of one’s own cultural standards, which may lead to judgments influenced by stereotypes, learned beliefs, or a limited view of the world. (Montagud & Lennon, 2025)

F

Fungible. A term referring to something that can be depleted, deteriorated, or cease to exist through use or consumption. (Diccionario de la Lengua Española, 2026; RAE–ASALE, 2026)

G

Gongfu cha. An expression meaning “preparing tea with skill developed through time and effort.” It refers to a style of tea preparation based on practice, dedication, and mastery of technique. (Path of Cha, 2023)

Ceremonial Grade. A term used to indicate that a matcha is suitable for traditional preparation and consumption. It emerged as a way to distinguish higher-quality matcha from lower-quality products that have appeared in the market due to the growing interest and popularity of this product. (Tezumi, 2024)

H

Hishaku. (Bamboo ladle) A utensil used in the Japanese tea ceremony to scoop and serve water during tea preparation. (Keiko, 2026)

I

Ichigo-ichie. One life, one encounter. (Tezumi, 2026)

J

Jaku. Tranquility. (Tezumi, 2026)

K

Kei. Respect. (Tezumi, 2026)

Korean Tea Ceremony. Korean tea ceremonies share similarities with the traditions of China and Japan, although they present a less formal and rigid structure than Japanese tea ceremonies. Their practice places greater emphasis on naturalness, harmony, and appreciation of the present moment. (UK Tea & Infusions Association, 2026)

Kyusu. A traditional Japanese teapot, generally made of ceramic or clay, specifically designed for preparing green tea. It usually features a side handle and an integrated filter that allows tea to be poured while preventing leaves from entering the cup. (Think Japan, 2026)

M

Matcha. The name given to tencha once its leaves have been ground into a fine powder. Only after this grinding process can it be referred to as matcha. (Global Japanese Tea Association, 2021)

N

Natsume. Lacquered wooden containers primarily used to store and present matcha intended for the preparation of *usucha* (thin tea). They are part of the traditional utensils used in Japanese tea preparation. (Tezumi, 2026)

O

Omotesenke. A school within the Japanese tea tradition that prepares matcha through a gentler whisking method, intentionally leaving a small area of liquid tea visible on the surface. This characteristic highlights the color and clarity of the matcha, placing greater importance on its appearance and visual purity rather than on a frothy texture. (Yasuda, 2026)

Q

Q Grading. A coffee evaluation and classification system based on standardized cupping protocols and sensory analysis. It allows the assessment of coffee quality, characteristics, and profiles through criteria internationally recognized by industry professionals. (Specialty Coffee Association, 2026)

R

RTD. (*Ready to Drink*) An abbreviation meaning “ready to drink” and referring to beverage products that contain a prepared liquid mixture intended for immediate consumption. These products generally only require refrigeration before serving and are designed to provide convenience with minimal preparation.

S

Sei. Purity. (Tezumi, 2026)

Seiza. A traditional sitting posture performed while kneeling with the back straight and hands placed on the thighs or floor, used as an expression of respect and greeting. It represents a bodily alignment that combines physical, symbolic, and social aspects within Japanese tradition. (Deeper Japan, 2026)

Sencha. A type of Japanese green tea recognized for the shape of its processed leaves, which take on an appearance similar to fine pine needles. It can be produced from both shade-grown leaves and leaves exposed directly to sunlight. (Global Japanese Tea Association, 2021)

T

Tencha. Processed tea leaves intended to become the prized green powder known as matcha. Its name refers to its purpose, as it can be interpreted as “tea for grinding,” since these leaves are the raw material used to produce matcha through the grinding process. (Suzuki, 2020)

Terroir. A concept referring to the combination of natural, cultural, and historical factors that influence the characteristics of an agricultural product. It includes elements such as climate, soil, environmental conditions, cultivation practices, and the identity of a region. Rather than being limited to a place of origin, terroir helps explain how a specific environment contributes unique characteristics to a product, distinguishing it even from others produced in nearby areas. (Satoricha, 2026)

U

Urasenke. A school within the Japanese tea tradition that prepares *usucha* through vigorous whisking, creating an abundant, fine, and uniform foam that covers the entire surface of the bowl. The result is a matcha with a creamy, smooth, and light texture, similar to a mousse. (Yasuda, 2026)

Umami. One of the five basic tastes, characterized by a sense of depth, intensity, and persistence on the palate. Although it is often described through references such as tomato, broth, or cooked foods, its identification may vary according to each person’s sensory memory and experience. In beverages such as Japanese green tea, umami does not imply a literal taste of these foods, but rather a complex gustatory perception that provides a sense of richness and fullness.

It can be understood as a flavor that begins gently and in balance, rather than as something bland, and gradually develops into greater intensity. Its main characteristic is an enveloping sensation that remains in the mouth even after the food or beverage has been consumed. (Satoricha.com, 2023)

Usucha. A term meaning “thin tea.” It is a matcha preparation made with a smaller amount of powder and a greater proportion of water, whisked until creating a bright green beverage with a light and frothy texture. It is one of the most common ways of preparing matcha and the image many people associate with this tea. (Sugimoto Tea Company, 2026)

W

Wa. Harmony. (Tezumi, 2026)

Wagashi. Traditional Japanese sweets that represent the essence of each season through their shapes, colors, and ingredients. They are considered edible works of art designed to stimulate the senses through their appearance, taste, aroma, texture, and even the names they are given. (The Government of Japan, 2026)

Wari geiko. A learning method that consists of breaking down the movements and actions required for the tea ceremony into smaller parts, practicing each element individually until mastering the fundamentals. It is one of the first practices undertaken when beginning the study of the tea ceremony. (Sakura, 2026)

Wellness. A concept that understands health as a continuous process that extends beyond the absence of illness, ranging from a state of poor health to the achievement of an optimal level of holistic well-being. (Global Wellness Institute, 2026)

Z

Zairai. A term meaning “native species” that refers to tea plants grown from seeds rather than those reproduced through controlled propagation techniques. In Japan, this type of plant represents a very small proportion of total tea production. (Global Japanese Tea Association, 2024)

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MIJOLOGÍA APLICADA

This volume presents the transcript of the conversation held with Ryan and Sam from Sanko Matcha, special guests of Satoricha.com's third anniversary, as part of the Questions & Answers section.

As part of Mijología Aplicada, this conversation represents an exercise in learning and knowledge exchange through the experiences, practices, and reflections of those who are part of the world of tea.

We preserve their contribution as part of [Satoricha's Library](#): a space dedicated to gathering and sharing diverse voices, stories, and insights related to tea and hospitality.

If you know stories, practices, or reflections that deserve to become part of this library of knowledge, we warmly invite you to [get in touch with us](#).

