

Japanese Spirit Based on Japanese Tea Culture

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හිරු නැගෙන දේශය නමින් විරුදාවලි ලත් ජපානය වර්තමානය වන විට ලෝකයේ කුන් වැනි ආර්ථික බලවතා බවට පත් ව සිටී. ආර්ථික වශයෙන් මෙන් ම ආධ්‍යාත්මික, සදාචාරාත්මක හා සංස්කෘතික අංශවලින් ද ඉතා ඉහළ තත්ත්වයක් ළඟා කරගැනීමට ජපානය සමත් ව සිටී. එරට සංස්කෘතිය හා බැඳී පවතින සුවිශේෂ සම්ප්‍රදායයක් වශයෙන් “තේ කලාව” හඳුන්වාදිය හැකි ය. ජපන් ජාතිකයන්ගේ ජීවිතය, තේ කලාව සමඟ කොතෙක් දුරට සම්බන්ධ ව පවතී ද යන්න පිළිබඳ විග්‍රහ කිරීම මේ ලිපියේ අරමුණ යි.

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සංස්. පී. ඒ. අමිල මදුසංක, ජයමල් ද සිල්වා, දිල්ෂාන් මනෝජී රාජපක්ෂ,
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The Pleasure of Tea

When a guest arrives at a home or office in Japan, tea is served before any other preliminary. The warm reception of the guest can in fact be said to begin with this cup of tea. The Japanese culture of hospitality represented by this act, sprinkled through with a variety of aesthetic concerns, was systematised through the development of tea ceremony.

The rules of tea ceremony must be understood not as mere formalities but as a kind of training that is focused upon in order to reach a special goal. A person operating within the rules of tea ceremony finds the five senses working at their fullest. The movements of the body are naturally restrained. The five sensory pleasures of tea are as follows: the pleasure of viewing the arts and crafts of the tea utensils; the warmth of the tea bowl in your hand and its softness as you bring it to your lip; the taste of the tea and food; the smell of incense smoldering in the tea room; and the sound of the water as it is ladled from the kettle, and of the gentle ringing of the gong. In addition, the guest enjoy the intellectual pleasure of grasping the intention of the host by reading the selection of different utensils. It is the mobilisation of these senses in the course of the tea gathering that is the goal of tea ceremony.

Not only the guests experience pleasure from the hospitality of the host in tea ceremony; the host receives special treatment from the guests as well. The guests and host entertain one another, making progress and experience of the tea gathering a collaborative enterprise enacted between two parties.

The beverage consumed in tea ceremony is of course Matcha, powdered green tea. This is the type of tea that was drunk in twelfth century China, though today it exists only in Japan. Tea is made from the leaf of a plant known as *Thea Sinencis*. It can be divided

into four groups according to the manufacturing procedures. Green tea contains of tea leaves that have been picked, quickly heated to prevent fermentation, crushed, and dried. Partially fermented tea consists of tea leaves that have been picked, rested for a time, crushed, and allowed to partially ferment before being heated. Black tea consists of leaves that have been picked, allowed to wither, crushed, and then left to ferment entirely before being heated and dried. The final type, known as Dancha in Japanese, is made by taking any of the three teas above in its pre-dried state, putting it into a mold, allowing it to harden, and then heating and fermenting it.⁵

The first type green tea can be divide into two sub-categories according to heating production method: tea that has been parched over a flame, and tea that has been steamed. Most Chinese teas, are made by the former process, most Japanese teas by the latter. Among Japanese teas, we find two further categories: leaf teas, such as Sencha and Gyokuro, and powdered tea, Machcha. More than 800 years ago, powdered tea was the only form of tea in Japan, before leaf tea become common. Today, powdered tea is only used in tea ceremony. Leaf tea is the daily drink of most Japanese.⁵

The first stage in the production of powdered green tea is to put a cover over the high quality tea plants when the first buds began to emerge. As the buds and leaves grow upwards to seek the sunlight, and the chlorophyll increases in number. The chemical compound known as theanin, which lends tea its distinctive flavor, also increases via this process. The buds and leaves become soft, and the color becomes clear. Soon the leaves are picked, steamed, and dried without being crushed. The stems are separated, and the remaining leaf is collected. Historically, this product was stored in a tea jar, but today it is kept refrigerated in a factory until ground into a powder with a stone mortar.⁵

Powdered green tea is generally put into a tea bowl in a serving of 1.5 grams and stirred with hot water by a bamboo tea whisk. This is known literally as “standing the tea” which refers to the careful process of extracting the flavor and fragrance of the tea.

When tea was first introduced to Japan from China, as well as when it was first introduced to the West, it was praised for its medicinal applications. Approximately 800 years ago, the Zen monk Eisai (1141-1215) wrote in his track, *Kissa yojoki* [Drinking Tea for Health], that tea was credited with strengthening the internal organs and pro-longing life. In fact, an invigorating feeling, the soothing of eye pain, and the general lucidity that accompany tea drinking are the result of caffeine. Monks drank tea to stay alert during meditation, and eventually the practice of drinking tea spread into society from the network of temple. The extension of the life span, mentioned in *Kissa yojjoki*, has also been scientifically proven, and is a result of tannin in tea known as catechin. The effect of catching have only recently been discovered, and though proven to be a cancer inhibitor, research is still being conducted. The basic effectiveness of cateching against high blood pressure, heart disease, influenza, and colon infection, however, has been confirmed. Catechin is naturally found in its greatest quantity in green tea.^{iv}

Another compound found in green tea is Vitamin C. Vitamin C in green tea is not broken down by heat, so it can be absorbed by drinking the hot beverage. This form and quantity of Vitamin C is found only in green tea, and is hardly present in black tea.^v

Tea ceremony is often appreciated as a spiritual and an artistic pursuit, but the health benefits must also be seen as one of the most important pleasure of tea. The objective of tea ceremony is thus a lifestyle that is physically healthy as well as spiritually and aesthetically full of pleasure.

The Establishment of Steeped Tea and the Formation of Tea Ceremony

The origin of the cultivation and consumption of tea can be found in China approximately 2000 years ago. By the eighth century, tea had developed to the point that Yu Lu wrote the oldest tea text known as Chajin (The classic of Tea), showing that tea had already become a key element of Chinese culture.⁶

Tea was first transmitted to Japan around the beginning of the ninth century, in the Heian period, but does not seem to have been widely popular. The late twelfth century, The Zen monk Eisai traveled to China, and reintroduced tea upon his return to Japan. His Kissa Yojoki (Drinking Tea for Health), which explain the medical efficacy of tea, is considered one of the founding texts in the history of tea in Japan.

In the fourteenth century, tea spread from the monastery to warrior society, as well as into the lives of common people, taking root in the culture of daily life as a recreational beverage. Before long tea was popular in warrior and aristocratic society as an “art of play”. The drinkers began to use art objects imported from China to decorate so- called Shoin rooms, characterised by a decorative alcove, staggered shelves, decorated doors, and Tatami flower mats. People gathered at these sites to drink and identify different flavors of tea. The banquets and tea gatherings thus flourished among warriors and nobles during the fifteenth century.⁷

From the late fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century, however, an opposing strain of tea developed that did not embrace the use of luxurious imported object or the playful consumption of tea at lively parties. This new development was Wabi tea, in while domestically produced ceramics, such as Shigaraki and Bizen, were used, and the goal was mental discipline.

The term Wabi, which roughly translates as, “rustic” or “subdued” is discussed elsewhere in this volume.

Murata Shuko was the first person to add the essential ingredient of “spirit” into the mixture of tea ceremony. In a text addressed to one of his disciples, for example, titled Kokoro no fumi (Letter of spirit), Shuko`s attitude towards tea is clear. He wrote “It is vital that we harmonise Chinese and Japanese taste”, indicating that foreign and domestically produced objects could be skillfully matched in the tea gathering. This is the birth of the Japanese aesthetic of wabi, making Shuko the founder of wabi tea.

The Spiritual Background of Tea Ceremony

As mentioned elsewhere in this publication, the practices of tea culture-originally imported from China-did not become available to people of all status groups and social classes until after the fourteenth century, in Japan`s medieval period. A spiritual leap was required for the practice of drinking tea to become popularised at the national level as a distinct culture of “the way of tea” (sado), with its particular set of forms and aesthetics. This chapter will explain the spiritual Landscape that forms the background of tea culture.

Japanese tea ceremony is based on two main concepts. Ichigo Ichie the only chance in a life time is one of them. According to this concept host and guest must show as much sincerity and hospitality as possible in serving and relishing tea at a tea party in recognition of its being the once in a life time encounter. Such opportunity as happened “only here and only now” may never visit to host again. Host make his best to show his sincerity, friendship, and hospitality to guests as well as a host. It also means that although host may be able to meet guest often or someday, host must face

and receive guest by telling to host himself that it could be the last time and never again. Believing this concept Japanese try to make the opportunity most important and they arrange tea ceremonies as their best to make their guest happier and the day unforgettable.

wabi sabi enjoyment of a quiet, simple life free from worldly affairs is the another concept of Japanese tea ceremony. Wabi was developed into the positive thought that loneliness and the absence of beauty led to freedom from material and emotional worries. They point out the beauty to be found in simple things. Japanese used to see the beauty in each and every thing in the world. They use cracked pots and plates to tea ceremonies and they see a different eternal beauty through them. Especially it is a beauty based on simplicity, loneliness and transiency of worldly affairs. Japanese have realised the Buddha's saying of "Nothing is eternal" and it is not a pain for them but a beauty of reality.

Sabi by itself refers to the natural progression of time, and carries with it an understanding that all things will grow old and become less conventionally beautiful. However this describes as "Sabi" carry their age with dignity and grace. At the heart of being Sabi, is the idea of authenticity. Japanese arrange tea rooms, tea gardens, tea ceremony equipment according to the concept of wabi and sabi and they see an eternal beauty through quietness, simplicity and loneliness in wabi and sabi.

As Sri Lankans Japanese used to express their emotions through poems. It was the major way of expressing their feelings in past. Thus there can be seen number of Japanese traditional poems based on pleasure of tea and tea ceremony. In the document Namporoku, which is believed to be a record of the words and deeds of Sen no Rikyu, Rikyu's teacher Takeno Joo cites a poem by the great classical poet Fujiwara no Teika to explain the essence of tea.

Looking about
Neither flowers
Nor scarlet leaves,
A bayside reed hovel
In the autumn dusk⁸

Through this episode may be apocryphal, it helps us to get a sense of the state of tea culture at the time. Joo wanted tea practitioners to turn inward in search of a deeper spiritual truth, while still embracing the tradition of using ornate, important objects as tea utensils.

Another example of a poem that express the spiritual essence of tea is a poem by Fujiwara no Iketaka, quoted by Rikyu

To those who wait
Only for flowers
Show them a spring
Of grass amid the snow
In a mountain village⁹

Yet another example by the monk Jien, was quoted by Rikyu in a discussion of tea gardens: he composed the following poem:

Piles of oak leaves
Not yet stained crimson
Along a path to a temple
Hidden deep in the hills,
How solitary and sad it feels¹⁰

Here we see Joo and Rikyu, the two men who helped bring about the maturation of tea ceremony, using the classical poetry of Japan's medieval period to express the spiritual essence of tea.

These poems do not describe beauty that is perceived directly with the eyes. Rather, the poet were interested in exploring an aesthetic state using “the eye of the spirit”. The condition of beauty that is revealed in their poetry symbolised by the solitary, desolate landscape of an autumn twilight or mountain village. This is different conventional notions of beauty, being primarily concerned with refined simplicity and stillness.

One of the first signs of the origin of this spiritual aesthetic can be found in th fifteenth century, when the tea became increasingly popular at all levels of Japan. One poet from this period, Shotetsu, divided tea practitioner into three groups: tea aesthetes, tea drinkers, and tea nibblers. Tea aesthetes took good care of their tea utensils and greatly enjoyed the practice of tea. Tea drinkers could distinguish between different types of tea. Tea nibblers, by contrast, attended tea gatherings just because it was something enjoyable to do, rather than out of any particular love of tea. This shows that s class of people was developing that approached tea not simply as a diversion, but as a serious pursuit.

It was also in the fifteenth century that tea practitioners began to emerge who had strong senses of aesthetics, and among these was Murata Shuko. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, Shuko wrote that it was not necessary to discriminate between domestic and foreign tea utensils. In the same text, he refers to tea as a “path” or a way, and describe the proper spiritual approach to the learning and teaching of tea. Shuko is considered to be the founder of “the way of tea” because he attached great importance to the aesthetic and spiritual objectives in the practice of tea ceremony. We must remember however, that he was guided in this by the aesthetic sensibility of medieval poetry, as well as by one school of medieval Japanese Buddhism namely Zen.

End Notes

1. Haga Koshiro and Martin Collcutt, “The wabi aesthetic through the ages” Paul Varley and Kumakura Isao, eds. *Tea in Japan: Essays on the History of Chanoyu*, pp.1-5.
2. <http://japanese-tea-ceremony.net/>.
3. *ibid.*
4. Cha-No-Yu by A. L. Sadler, 1934, *Japanes Tea Ceremony*, pp 10-12.
5. *ibid.*
6. <http://www.tea-kyoto.com>.
7. *ibid.*
8. Haga Koshiro and Martin Collcutt, “The wabi aesthetic through the ages” Paul Varley and Kumakura Isao, eds. *Tea in Japan: Essays on the History of Chanoyu*.
9. *ibid.*
10. *ibid.*

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