



Comments on the Session 4

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Translated: Jenine Heaton

Today's talks were truly diverse, covering ancient to modern times, and geographic locales from Japan, China, Eurasia, East Asia, and even the West. Tea is a discipline that has been scarcely researched by scholars, but is a truly important subject. This forum on tea is probably unparalleled in the world.

One comment I would like to make about the importance of this forum is that of the four major luxury items—alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee—only tea originated in Asia. There is value in focusing on the globalization of Asian culture from the perspective that tea extended its reach from East Asia to Europe, and then to the entire world. Further, the spread of tea involves not only its being a preferred beverage, but its having the unique trait of being valued for how it is prepared, infused, and imbibed. Diffusion of the tea culture also required a concomitant etiquette, from the spiritual culture of philosophy and ethics, to an aesthetic that included everything from tea utensils to receptivity to tea. As that metaphysical culture migrated from China to Japan, and then on to Europe (mainly to England) it underwent acculturation in every country with which it came into contact. In Japan, this was designated as the green tea culture, while in England, it became the English black tea culture. Here I will discuss the interrelationships, cultural role of each, and the effects achieved from the viewpoint of cultural exchanges and comparative cultures. In terms of the problems of cultural interface and interaction, the culture of tea constitutes a most interesting history.

Much of the history of tea was made in East Asia during the 16th and 17th centuries, although tea has a very long history. It has been assumed that tea came into Japan from China, but this theory is now in question. To borrow the expression coined by Sasuke Nakao, an internationally acclaimed botanist, the “Asian

crescent” is a laurel forest zone that extends from Yunnan, through the south of the Yangtze River, and from Taiwan through the vicinity of Okinawa to Kanto in the Japanese archipelago. It is possible for tea to grow naturally in each of these regions. Eisai’s *Kissa Yōjōki* (The Tea Health Handbook) contains the first known botanical definition of tea in Japan. Thanks to Eisai’s definition, native Japanese varieties of tea were discovered in various regions throughout Japan. In other words, the tea plant was already growing in Japan, which is why the history of tea begins with Eisai’s definition in the *Kissa Yōjōki*.

Later, a culminating point in the history of tea in Japan was the creation of a tea ceremony culture that derived from a unique Japanese philosophy located in Sakai, and its aesthetic of *wabi* (understated elegance) and *sabi* (quiet simplicity). This was the tea that Professor Nishimura just described as a fusion of hardness and softness. It was the Jesuit missionaries who arrived in Japan over the sea routes in the 16th century who were impressed with this tea. The missionaries had known absolutely nothing about tea until they arrived in Japan. Silk had already been introduced to Europe from China in much earlier times. But tea was not yet known in Europe even in the Middle Ages, let alone much earlier. It was only discovered by Europeans when they crossed the seas to Japan and China. The tea they saw in China was served on trays to welcome visitors or as a medicine effective for treating various illnesses. The tea they found in Japan, however, was completely different.

This can be seen in the first volume of Padre João Rodrigues’s three-volume *Historia da Igreja do Japão* [History of the Japanese Church]. In this volume, Rodrigues, who sailed from Portugal in 1577 and served as an interpreter in Japan, developed the theory of Japanese tea ceremony culture. He wrote this work in Macao based on documents he had collected on the subject over the thirty years he lived in Japan and until his departure in 1610. Frequent reference to tea ceremonies is made in his correspondence to the General Superior Office of the Institute of the Society of Jesus. It is thought that no other book traces the theory of the tea ceremony from its historical origins to the philosophical and ethical significance of the formalities involved in a cup of tea. In the first volume of *Historia da Igreja do Japão*, Rodrigues emphasizes the regular exchange of gifts between Japanese when visiting each other, a social practice not seen in the daily lives of Europeans. He also mentions the reciprocal hospitality he observed at formal Japanese banquets, and extrapolates that tea must play an important role

because such banquets culminated in the serving of the beverage. Rodrigues's insight is based on the understanding that the final tea became independent of the banquet, and esteemed as a ceremony that encapsulated the essence of hospitality between Japanese.

During the social upheaval of the Warring States period, it was literally impossible to maintain the banquet as a form of traditional hospitality. Such discord most probably generated an even greater necessity to strengthen interpersonal ties in some new format. What the tea ceremony masters, Takeno Jōō, Imai Sōkyū, Tsuda Sōkyū, Yamanoue Sōji, and Sen no Rikyū, built in Sakai were small teahouses where the tea ceremony could be performed independently of formal banquets. At the zenith of personal distrust that prevailed during this time of social ferment, utmost care was taken to ensure the safety of those who frequented the small teahouses. Even samurai were compelled to hang up their swords on a rack by the entrance outside the teahouses. To ensure that samurai could not enter the teahouses wearing their armor and helmets, they were made to crouch to pass through the tiny opening to enter the teahouse. In addition to these measures, the tea master would then methodically take the tea out of the *natsume* (juzube tea container), put it in a tea bowl, and then pour boiling water over the tea, all in front of his guests. The sequence of actions demonstrated that there was no poison in the tea. The tea was then drunk by each participant in turn. This was obviously also done to prove the tea was safe. Such actions gave rise to a strong bond of trust between the tea master and his guests. The subliming of the hospitality of tea into one philosophy and aesthetic is unique to Japan's tea culture. That is, Sen no Rikyū and his disciples, including Yamanoue Sōji, formulated the philosophies of tea called *ichigo ichie* (cherishing each encounter, which will never be repeated), and *wakei seijaku* (harmony, reverence, purity, and tranquility).

Thus, the tea that Rodrigues discovered in Japan was not merely a beverage. Rodrigues was impressed by discovery of a culture that did not exist in Europe. This culture was based on Confucian philosophy and the ethics of the tea ceremony, in particular interpersonal relations that involve the "Five Constants" of benevolence, justice, politeness, wisdom, and fidelity, which were important for the facilitation of mutual trust through tea. In 1609 tea and tea culture were exported to Europe on board a Dutch ship, which sailed from Hirado, Japan. This was the first exporting to Europe of Japanese culture.

I don't think we can consider the impact of this tea in isolation. Europeans

were not impressed merely by the tea itself, but by the ceramics (pottery) that arrived with it. Asian ceramics and tea go hand-in-hand. Europeans admired the coalescence of silk, sugar, spices, cotton—and Japanese and Asian culture in general. This is called *chinoiserie*.

With this *chinoiserie* as the backdrop, England established the East India Companies in 1600 to obtain Asian goods. Initially, spices constituted the primary import product, but eventually, silk, Indian cotton textiles, and finally, tea became the principle imports. This tea was not the green tea of Asia, but black tea. The British developed the method of adding milk and sugar to drink this tea. In order to accommodate increasing imports and the demand for Asian commodities England focused on developing a self-sufficient system for importing goods. This involved the acquisition of colonies in the Caribbean Islands for sugar plantations, and the procurement of slave labor to work the plantations (the slave trade), and of sugar plantations in the West Indies. There were sea explorations for tea seeds and seedlings, the war with the American colonies over the tea tax (the American War of Independence), trade friction between Britain and China over tea imports, the Opium Wars, the colonization of India and the discovery of tea in India. We could even conclude that in contrast to the metaphysical culture of green tea developed in Japan, the black tea that was shipped from China to Britain as part of material culture led to the rise of black tea imperialism. The British decided to grow tea and make ceramics themselves. Even when the British went to the effort of bringing in tea plants that still had their roots, however, they could not transplant them. Further, the first European country to develop ceramics was Holland, which established workshops to recreate Asian cultural goods based on ceramic technologies from China and Japan. People came from England, Meissen, and France to acquire the technology to take back with them. At the end of the 17th century they had mastered the technology and taken it back to their own countries; at the beginning of the 18th century, ceramics such as Wedgewood, Meissen, and Sèvres appeared. But as Professor Sakuraba mentioned in her presentation, European emperors desired to display their Asian ceramics even before this time. Considering this background, I believe we should continue to pursue further research in the area of tea.