

Lecture

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Japanese Traditional Culture  
“The Three Ways of Tea · Flower · Incense”

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 At *Abeno-Harukasu*-Event Hall  
in Osaka, Japan

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#### 梗概 ●

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日本の伝統文化の中に数多く成熟してきた様々な芸道の中でも、特に代表的な三つの道、茶道・華道・香道について、それらの成立の歴史と、内容と特徴、そしてそれらの意義と真意を説明する。

#### *Summary* :

Numerous arts have matured amidst Japan's traditional culture. This paper explains the establishment, history, contents, characteristics, significance and secrets of three of the most representative arts: “the way of tea” or *Sa-dou* / *Cha-dou* 茶道, “the way of flower” or *Ka-dou* 華道 and “the way of incense” or *Kou-dou* 香道.

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#### ● Introduction:

Japanese traditional culture has been passed down from the mythical era and has matured through the seasons amidst abundant, tranquil and beautiful

natural surroundings.

Japanese culture is rooted in Shintoism 神道, and it has been influenced by Buddhism 仏教. It has also been shaped by continental culture brought to Japan through Japanese envoys to *Sui* 隋 and *Tang* 唐 Dynasty China (*Ken-zui-shi* 遣隋使 and *Ken-tou-shi* 遣唐使). These diverse influences were aesthetically integrated and refined into a unique Japanese culture.

Many of these skills and arts were classified as aesthetic vocations and training methods known as “a way” or *michi* 道.

Here, I will introduce three representative ways of tea, flowers, and incense. Together, they have been called *San-dou* 三道 (“the three ways”), or *Cha-Ka-Kou* 茶・花・香.

## ● Tea:

Tea was first brought to Japan from southern China as a medicine. It was included, together with various Buddhist ceremonial tools, amongst the treasures dedicated by the Emperor *Shomu* 聖武天皇 (701~756), to consecrate a newly-made Buddhist statue at *Tōdai-ji* 東大寺 temple in *Nara* 奈良, in 752.

Early in the *Heian* era (794~1185), the Emperor *Saga* 嵯峨天皇 (786~842) rowed a boat on the pond of *Osawa* 大沢の池 of the *Saga* imperial villa 嵯峨離宮, where he savored tea in the manner of the Tang dynasty poets.

At the beginning of the *Kamakura* period (1185~1333), the monk *Yosai* 榮西 (1141~1215) brought tea seeds from *Qin* (宋) Dynasty China together with *Rinzai* Zen 臨濟禪, and incorporated the drinking of powdered green tea or *macha* 抹茶, into the rituals of the Zen Temple 禪寺. He also gave the seedlings to another monk, *Myoe* 明恵 (1173~1232), at *Kozan-ji* Temple 高山寺, *Toga-no-o* 桐ノ尾 in the capital *Kyo* 京 (present-day Kyoto). The tea came to be cultivated afterwards in the whole region surrounding the capital.

At the beginning of the *Muromachi* era (1336~1573), the taste of the tea which grew up at *Toga-no-o* 桐ノ尾 in *Kyo* 京 came to be considered to be of superior quality. People called this “original tea” *hon-cha* 本茶 and other regions’ tea “non-tea” *hi-cha* 非茶. They thereupon invented a tea-tasting game. Court nobles, samurai families and other men of culture would assemble in a large room of approximately 18 *tatami mats* (≒36m<sup>2</sup>) in size.

The game, called “*Cha-Kabuki* 茶カブキ” or “*To-cha* 闘茶” (“tea competitions”) was very popular among feudal lords and court nobles.

It was also called “*Kara-mono-cha* 唐物茶 (“tea with imported treasures from China)” because Chinese paintings, calligraphic works, vases and tea utensils were placed as decorations in on the ornament shelf *Oshi-ita* 押板 (today more commonly known as the *Toko-no-ma* 床の間 (“alcove”) in the new style room or *Kaisho* 会所).

## ● Flowers:

Since ancient times, people have offered flowers to gods and Buddhas.

Flowers are arranged in vases in front of the Buddha as a traditional *Zashiki-kazari* 座敷飾 (“room decoration”).

Each flower is a definition of beauty, and a flower arrangement is a creation of beauty. We can condense the truth of the scenery of nature by arranging flowers, and we can symbolize the Utopia or *Jo-do* 浄土 where gods and Buddhas are waiting for us.

Japanese people love not only the flower in bloom but also its buds before blooming, as well as fallen flowers scattered on the ground or on water. We refer to flowerless pine branches with evergreen leaves, and maple branches with colored leaves as which shall died flower.

Japanese people even call the ideal beauty of poems and performing arts “a flower” or *hana* 花.

One can thus see how the Japanese people's fascination with the charm of flowers inspired a concern with methods of display and appreciation.

### ● Incense:

It is recorded in the oldest chronicles of Japan, the *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀, that in the third year of the Emperor *Suiko* 推古 3 年 (595) a branch with a rare fragrance washed up on *Awaji* Island 淡路島, and was accordingly presented to the Imperial Court.

Since then, incense has been produced and sold as an offering to Gods and Buddhas to protect the sanctuary of the Imperial Court, and to provide court nobles with an exquisite fragrance.

The Tale of Genji or *Genji-monogatari* 源氏物語 (1001?) by *Murasaki Shikibu* describes various customs surrounding incense in the lives of the nobility. Such customs included mixing many diverse high quality incense materials, and using them to fragrance the air (*taki-mono* 薰物), comparing the quality of different incense materials (*ko-asase* 香合), and scenting their clothes with incense (*utsuri-ga* 移香).

In the *Nanbokuchō* era (1336~1392 南北朝), the *Basara daimyo* バサラ大名 or extravagant and ostentatious feudal lords indulged in luxury past times when visiting the capital. Such entertainment included the new game of "incense tasting" (*Monko* 聞香) using aloe wood incense (*Jinko* 沈香).

In this game the participants sampled various incenses, and competed for the prizes in return for guessing what scent the incense was.

### ● The art producers or *Dohō-syu* 同朋衆:

The *Ashikaga shoguns* employed artisans known as *Dohō-syu* 同朋衆 in their courts. The *Dohō-syu* were Buddhist priests who were well versed in

Japanese and Chinese classical literature. They were good at displaying paintings and calligraphic works and arranging flowers (*Tate-hana* 立花) as room decorations. They organized collaborative poem competitions (*Renga-kai* 連歌会), tea ceremonies with utensils from China (*Karamono-cha* 唐物茶) and incense tasting games (*Monko* 聞香). They could also design and construct many beautiful gardens.

The most historically renowned *Doho-syu* are *No-ami* 能阿弥, *Gei-ami* 芸阿弥, and *So-ami* 相阿弥, three generations of *Doho-syu* who served the 8<sup>th</sup> shogun *Ashikaga Yosimasa* 足利義政 (1436~1490). Their birth is thought to have been low class, but they rose socially under the *Ashikaga shogunate* through their cultivation in classical culture, literature, and aesthetics. These men became versatile artists, general culture producers, and cultural policy advisors.

Before long, the governance of the *Ashikaga shogunate* 足利將軍政權 became weak, the *O-nin* Civil War (*Onin no ran* 応仁の乱) (1467~1478) broke out, and the age of Civil War (*Sengoku-jidai* 戦国時代) (1467~1590) began. People who excelled in the arts sought to survive the confusion of the world by continuing to hone and mature the practice and philosophy of each art.

Some of them were assigned as masters of Japanese poems *waka* 和歌 or collaborative poems *renga* 連歌 etc. to local feudal lords *Daimyo* 大名. Moreover, talented entertainers arose amidst diverse social classes such as priest, samurai or merchant, serving masters who remained in the capital. A new era of art, aesthetics and philosophy was rebuilt by their efforts.

## ● The way of Tea or *Sa-dou* / *Cha-dou* 茶道

The capital was burnt down and destroyed in the course of the *O-nin* Civil War. People's hearts began to be filled with a view of life as something transient and empty (*Muzyo-kan* 無常観), and artistic aesthetics increasingly embraced qualities such as quietness (*Sa-bi* 寂び), mortality (*ka-re* 枯れ) and

coldness (*hi-e* 冷え). A new tea gathering style, *cha-no-yu* 茶之湯, became popular amongst both the nobility and commoners. The host would serve a bowl of green tea to his guests in a small tearoom, using ordinary utensils. Tea taken this way in refined hermitages was called *wabi-cha* 侘び茶, or the rustic tea ceremony.

It is said that *wabi-cha* was first established by *Shuko* 珠光 (1422~1502) who was a Buddhist monk of *Syomyou-ji* temple 称名寺 in the former capital of *Nara* 奈良. Later, *Sen-no-Rikyu* 千利休 (1522~1591), a merchant of *Sakai* 堺 is considered as the master who completed it. *Sen no Rikyu* served the ruler *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* 豊臣秀吉 (1537~1598) as a master of tea ceremony and also achieved the role of his political adviser.

The three sons of *Sen-no-Soutan* 千宗旦 (1578~1658), the third generation of the *Sen* family (*Sen-ke* 千家), were divided into three schools corresponding to the three sons' families: *Omote-sen-ke* 表千家, *Ura-sen-ke* 裏千家 and *Musha-no-koji-senjisen-ke* 武者小路千家. These schools, together with many others, have inherited *Sen-no-Rikyu*'s spirit of tea through the way of tea or *Sa-dou* / *Cha-dou* 茶道 to the present day.

## ●The Way of Flowers or *Ka-dou* 華道

The monks at *Rokkaku-do* temple 六角堂 in *Kyo* 京 were skilled at creating flower arrangements to present to Buddha statues. In particular, *Ikenobo Senkei* 池坊専慶 was recorded as a master of flower arrangement or *tate-hana* 立花 (“standing flowers”) around the year 1462. Following that, *Ikenobo Senno* 池坊専応 (1482~1543) wrote the book “*Ikenobo-Senkou-Kuden* 池坊専応口伝” to theorize the technique of *tate-hana* 立花.

Thereafter, in 1594 *Ikenobo Senkou* the First 初代池坊専好 (1536-1621) put up a flower arrangement to welcome the ruler *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* 豊臣秀吉 (1537~1598) at the residence of a daimyo, *Toshiie Maeda* 前田利家, and in 1629

this he and his successor *Ikenobo Senko* the Second 二代池坊専好 (1575-1658) acted as the judges of an exhibition of *tate-hana* 立花 at the Imperial Palace held by the Emperor *Gomizuno* 後水尾天皇 (1596~1680).

From the middle of the Edo era (1603-1868) onward, great numbers of men and women of all ages began to learn the way of flower or *Ka-dou* 華道 under the guidance of many teachers across Japan. These days, we can learn it by many traditional schools of flower, for example *Ikenobo-ryu* 池坊流, *Saga-goryu* 嵯峨御流, and *Ko-ryu* 古流, and many new schools established after *Meiji* era (1868~1912), for example *Ohara-ryu* 小原流, *Sogetsu-ryu* 草月流 and *Adachi-ryu* 安達流.

And by many other schools, the way of flower has been inherited until today.

## ● The Way of Incense or *Kou-dou* 香道

In addition to earlier incense games, *kumi-kou* 組香 was developed as a new style of game in which contestants sampled incense and responded with *waka* 和歌 poems or tales or *monogatari* 物語 from classical literature.

The new *kumi-kou* 組香 games were refined by the court noble *Sanjonishi Sanetaka* 三条西実隆 (145~1537) and the samurai *Shino Soshin* 志野宗信 (1441~1522).

For example, one of *kumi-kou* 組香, “*Genji-kou* 源氏香” refers to the Tale of Genji or *Genji-monogatari* 源氏物語. Another, “*San-seki-kou* 三夕香”, refers to three poems about sunset. It is said that hundreds of types of *kumi-kou* 組香 have been developed so far.

In the *Edo* period (1603~1868), each became the *Oie-ryu* school 御家流 and *Shino-ryu* school 志野流, and both school has been inherited by adding a wide range of people as a disciples of the way of incense or *Kou-dou* 香道 across Japan. The current masters of the two schools are *Sanjonishi Gyosui*



(1962～ ) and *Hachiya Sogen* (1939～ ).

Through these schools and through many others, the way of incense has been inherited to the present day.

## Conclusion

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In this way, *cha-no-yu* 茶之湯 (tea), *tate-hana* 立花 (flowers) and *kumi-ko* 組香 (incense) gained the patronage of new rulers after the age of Civil War *Sengoku-jidai* 戦国時代 (1467～1590), in the *Azuchi-Momoyama* era 安土桃山時代 (1573～1603). Eventually, in the *Edo* period 江戸時代 (1603～1868), the ways of tea, flowers, and incense were loved by a wide range of people.

By the guidance of many masters of tea, flowers and incense, the spirits and skills of each way have been passed down to the present day.

Japanese people have stylized various aspects of the culture of everyday life as accomplishments or *gei-dou* 芸道. They are known as “the way” or *michi* 道 which leads us to enlightenment. We have made them into training hall or *dojo* 道場 through practicing skills of them.

Three of the representative accomplishments or *gei-do* 芸道 are “the way of tea or *Sa-dou* / *Cha-dou* 茶道”, “the way of flower or *Ka-dou* 華道”, and “the way of incense or *Kou-dou* 香道”. These are,

“The way of tea or *Sa-dou* / *Cha-dou* 茶道” is the way of training our spirits through serving a visitor with tea.

“The way of flowers or *Ka-dou* 華道” is the way of training our spirits through creating ideal spaces with flowers to represent the Utopia where gods and Buddhas dwell.

“The way of incense or *Kou-dou* 香道” is the way of training our spirits through tasting exquisite fragrance and answering in classical literature contexts.

We can be disciples of these accomplishments and can achieve the cultivation of the heart in these ways by repeating lessons of these skills. We can learn courtesy, sharpen our sensibility, enjoy Japanese and Chinese classical literature, and succeed the heart and the sensitivity as the Japanese. In other words, we can become a strong, right, and beautiful Japanese person.

Japan is full of ways to enlightenment, for approaching gods and Buddhas.

Welcome to Japan, a country blessed by gods and Buddhas.

Thank you very much.

**Special thanks for the review**

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