The Tea Ceremony:: A Transformed Japanese Ritual

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THE TEA CEREMONY: A Transformed Japanese Ritual

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*This report analyzes the role Japanese women play in the traditional art of the tea ceremony (*chado*) and its meaning for their lives. It is based on data collected for a larger study which explored the ways in which a cultural art transmits its practice and values to Japanese and foreign learners, conducted in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Yokohama, Japan, from 1983 to 1985. Using the Urasenke school, which accounts for approximately 70 percent of all practitioners as a case study, this report explores the impact of women's participation as professionals and students on the organizational structure and activities of the school. Interviews with 31 teachers and 55 students, professionals, and amateurs provided the data to explore the ways in which the art has accommodated women's interests.*

Chado (the Japanese tea ceremony) is one of the arts a woman learns as part of preparation for marriage. Considered by Westerners to be a "woman's art," chado's significance in Japanese culture is underestimated. Although seemingly only a means for subjugating and training women for subordinate roles, chado is also a provider of a place where women are in control of their lives. As teachers, they can support themselves. As teachers and students of a traditional art form, they obtain respect and prestige in the community; they learn skills in management, decision making, and organization beneficial in other areas of life; and they influence one of the major streams of art and aesthetics in the society.

This report analyzes the role Japanese women play in this traditional art and its meaning for their lives. The teaching of chado in Japan today depends upon the efforts and expenditures of women. If women were to abandon the study of tea, it would have significant impact upon the modern practice of the art.

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HISTORY OF CHADO

Chado began as an activity exclusively for men. When brought to Japan from China in the eleventh century, it was part of Buddhist meditation practices in the monasteries (Castile 1976; Tanaka 1973). By the 1600s, its practice had spread from the monasteries to the court, the military, and wealthy upper-class merchants. Its practice and ideological basis was established during this period by three main tea masters: Murata Shuko, Take no Joo, and Sen no Rikyu. Chado was a commitment of life for the sake of art (Kato 1975), and the fundamentals for the practice of chado in architecture, philosophy, crafts, flower arrangement, food preparation, and basic forms of the tea ceremony were developed.

In the following period, Sen Sotan, Kobori Enshu, and others ensured the continuation of the art by transmitting it to disciples who preserved it by memorizing and teaching the social and technical aspects of the ritual. Their descendants further codified and systematized the art, which was owned by the head of a household and passed on as an inherited form of wealth.

During these early periods, participation by women was limited. Court women were taught chado by some of these masters (Castile 1976; Sadler 1962; Sen n.d., 1979), and the wives of the grand masters helped their husbands to practice chado in their homes in supporting roles in preparation, cooking, and cleaning. Women did not have access to all of the ceremonies (in some schools of chado, some rituals are still secret and transmitted to select disciples only, and some are expressly forbidden to women) and were not allowed to perform publicly or teach what they learned until the nineteenth century except possibly inside the family, and certainly not as a means of earning a living.

Two crucial events affected the development of chado and the role of women in chado in modern times. As a result of the impetus of foreign contact, the Meiji Restoration (1864) ended the role of the Shogunate military dictatorship and brought in government by a civilian oligarchy under imperial auspices. Under the leadership of the heads of the two major Sen schools of chado (Omotesenke and Urasenke), the traditional arts came to be seen as a means by which the new rulers could spread to the newly made nationals of Japan the values of loyalty and service to the emperor (DeVos 1978; Kogani 1981; Masatsugu 1982). This trend opened up the study of chado to social classes previously excluded and to women, as chado was redefined as part of the role of mothers in raising future generations. This expansion of participation in the art helped to find financial support for these arts, as their traditional source of income, patronage from the great *daimyo* (ruling mili-

tary families) and court families had disappeared when these people lost their economic base.

In 1894 women's participation in chado was further expanded when Ennosai (XIII Urasenke grand master) allowed women to be certified to teach professionally. For upper-class women, it was a way to earn money without compromising the status of the family or undermining the relationship between husband and wife. The traditional arts, newly considered a function of the nurturing role of women, were acceptable employment for upper-class women because they did not have to leave their homes and work in public. For young girls of all classes, study under such women was considered beneficial as a form of training for marriage.

The second major event to affect the participation of women in chado was the social upheaval following World War II and the later prosperity of the 1960s. During the war and just after, chado practice suffered as people had little money to spend on luxuries. World War II again brought the Japanese to question the efficacy of their traditional culture in the face of military defeat. Chado had to redefine itself and its place in society. Participation by women was encouraged, and chado was cast in the light of preserving and teaching cultural practices and values. As the country's economic situation improved in the 1960s, a nostalgic longing for things Japanese and the money to indulge in them made chado a prestigious activity for those who could afford it.

In the practice of chado in the 1980s, the organization of teachers and students and the activities that accompany learning chado have been modified to include activities of special interest to women (Mori 1985). At the larger study sites, classes in cooking and lectures on traditional arts and practices are made available. Instruction in flower arranging or wearing kimono may also be included. Study tours of museums and famous tea houses are organized, including places like China and Hawaii. Teaching seminars are offered to update teachers' skills and add new ones like teaching chado in English. This expansion was in response to student demands to accommodate chado to a modern, more Western, yet still Japanese life-style.

Thus, over its 400-year history, an art form that was primarily engaged in by men for most of its practice is now primarily identified with women. This report is based on data collected for a larger study (Mori 1988) that explored the ways in which a specific cultural art (chado) transmitted its practice and values to Japanese and foreign learners and the meaning studying chado has for its students. The study concluded that chado has modified its structure to accommodate changes in the social structure of Japanese society, the interests and goals of those who study it, and the challenge to transcend national

boundaries. This report focuses on the influence of the increase in women's interest in chado and their impact on the nature of chado practice and study.

The inclusion of women as professionals and students in the Urasenke school of chado has affected its practice in the following ways: It is seen as a way of preparing young women for marriage and public social life; it allows public social escape from the isolation of the nuclear family in the urban setting and in old age; it provides an avenue to explore and express personal creativity; it is a public activity that is positively evaluated for women; it is a source of personal enjoyment and pleasure; it provides an arena for the development of managerial skills and self-confidence; and for the professional, it can provide a source of income and economic independence.

DATA SOURCES

Urasenke, the largest school of chado in Japan, was chosen as a case study. The center of a network of relationships, Urasenke accounts for approximately 70 percent of all practitioners in Japan and 98 percent of all practitioners outside Japan.

Six men (all full-time professionals) and 25 women teachers (who teach in more than one setting), including one Buddhist nun, were interviewed. The teachers ranged in age from 33 to 82. The students included those training to be professional teachers (16) and those who considered themselves amateurs (39). Six of the students were men, and 49 were women. The students ranged in age from 18 to 65. Observations included teachers who were not interviewed, and more of those teachers were men (Mori 1988).[1] Settings for observation and interviewing were chosen using the following criteria: distance from the center, which influenced degree of closeness and supervision by the *iemoto* (grand master); size of the residential area (large city, rural); intensity of study (professional training or amateur; daily, weekly, or sporadic lessons); and type of study situation (institute, junior college, temple, private home). Study sites included Konnichi-an (Urasenke headquarters where various study groups take lessons from the grand master), Urasenke Semmon Gakko (three-year junior college granting a certificate in teaching the tea ceremony, accredited by the Ministry of Education), town teachers (people who teach in their homes), Buddhist temple, and three branch study centers (see Table 1).

Three main research methods were used: participant observation as a student attending Urasenke Semmon Gakko in Kyoto from 1983 to 1985; in-depth interviews with 31 teachers and 55 students in several sites in Kyoto,

TABLE 1: Urasenke School of Chado Teachers and Students, by Setting, Site, and Gender

	Setting[a]				
Site	*Temple*	*Dojo*[b]	*Toda*[c]	*Shiotsuki*[d]	*Private*
Tokyo					
Teachers					
Men	0	1	0	0	0
Women	1	3	5	3	3
Students					
Men	0	0	1	0	0
Women	2	7	7	5	3

	Gakuen[e]	*Private*
Kyoto		
Teachers		
Men	4	1
Women	5	5
Students		
Men	5	0
Women	11	3

	Private
Yokohama	
Teachers	
Men	0
Women	2
Students	
Men	0
Women	5

a. Some teachers and students go to more than one setting.
b. The Urasenke Branch Training Center in Tokyo.
c. Branch established by the Toda family to teach chado on behalf of the Urasenke family.
d. Branch of Urasenke established by the current Grand Master's older sister, Yaeko Shiotsuki, in Tokyo.
e. Urasenke Semmon Gakko, a three-year junior college established and run by the school.

Tokyo, and Yokohama; and observations of teaching and other situations relevant to the topic. All teachers and students who were interviewed were observed in the lesson setting at least once, and many were observed as often as five times a week over a two-year period. The teachers and students were also observed in their homes.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF CHADO

The social structure of chado has retained the ranking and series of relationships of a feudal household in its grand master-teacher-student hierarchy but has incorporated Western forms of group organization for auxiliary interest groups. The house headship system (*iemoto seido*) of the Urasenke school is a hierarchical structure of ranks based on hereditary relations to the head of the school, knowledge of tea preparation and tea culture acknowledged in the form of certification, and occupational positions. The ranking is basically: grand master (*iemoto*—a hereditary position), high-ranked professionals (*gyotei*—men who are given a title and position and who teach and serve the grand master at his direction), professionals in training (*mizuya*—men who are trained in tea and serve in the house as houseboys or disciples), lecturers (*kyosu*—men and women hired to teach in several locations in the system), teachers (*sensei*—men and women who teach in their own homes or elsewhere with the permission of the grand master), and students (*seito*). All teachers and students are considered students of the grand master.

The position of grand master is inherited by the first son of the family (*Wakashosho*), who is trained in the position through the study of chado at home and at a Zen monastery and by assisting his father in performing various public functions at shrines and temples. When the grand master reaches the age of 61, he begins to turn over some of these functions to his son, and at 72, he retires from public performance of tea except for special occasions. The gyotei rank is conferred upon men who have either served the family as official houseboys or are the sons of families who teach Urasenke-style tea as a family occupation in other parts of Japan under grant from the grand master. Instructors are those who serve at the schools and practice centers directly under the control of the Sen family. As the Urasenke school is a family business, members of the Sen family are placed in important positions in the business and professional activities of the school.[2]

In this hierarchy, women are found in all of the positions except the top three (Mori 1986). Decisions for the running of the school are made by the grand master with advice from the high-ranked professionals, who form a standing advisory committee, and members of his family (men and women) who also take other positions within the system. These decisions concern not only the running of the system (who works where at what) and his family concerns (the numerous ceremonial and business activities) but also the fundamental practice of the art (permission to perform and teach, utensils allowed, public performances allowed), and the disciplining of those who disregard these directives.

Teachers who are not professionals or direct employees of the grand master are organized in a system of local chapters and study groups. These chapters are mostly headed and staffed by women who make up the majority of the membership. The further away from direct contact with the Sen family (both physically and hierarchically), the greater the autonomy of the teacher. The chapters handle local functions, teacher training, and provide support for activities of the grand master when he visits those areas of Japan and abroad. The local chapters provide opportunities for the teachers to put on public tea presentations, where their students demonstrate what they have learned to family, friends, and other chado professionals and students and where people meet to socialize and celebrate cultural events such as Children's Day or the arrival of a distinguished guest. They are the avenue for the sharing of creative ideas, changes in chado practice, and anecdotes of chado history and lore. They are the main vehicle for the transmission of directives from the grand master.

WOMEN AND CHADO

Women are mostly professional teachers and student amateurs. They are also supporters of chado as spouses to men who are utensil dealers, craftsmen, professional teachers, and promoters. Craft families closely associated with chado have a household headship family system similar to that of the tea schools, so men inherit the occupation, names, titles, and business relationships. Most of the promoters are men. These include tour organizers; book, magazine, and newspaper writers and publishers; directors of art and other schools and institutions where chado is taught; and stores and smaller shops where utensils are sold. However, Yaeko Shiotsuki, the present Urasenke grand master's older sister, manages two practice centers of her own, lectures widely on etiquette, has published 17 books on etiquette and culture, and had her own television program.

The positions in which women have their greatest impact are as teacher, student, and supporter. In these positions, women spend their time mostly within the tearoom and the lesson setting. It is difficult to separate the roles of teacher and student, as teachers in one setting are students in another, and women who have studied for a period of time are often set to teach beginners. As one teacher noted, "Teaching Tea Ceremony is not something you decide on your own. Tea is something that you only learn. But Dr. Sen, he has a 'feeling of my road' so now I am just walking."

However, chado offers different things to those who are primarily teachers. Women who become teachers set their own hours, choose their own students, control their work environment, and predominantly work with other women to put on public events. As a young teacher whose mother is also a teacher said:

> I did not start at my house. I was asked to go to a company to teach for a while. It was a good opportunity for me to leave the house for a day. This occurred about 20 years ago. This was the first time I taught independently. But at home I am only a helper. I used to teach in a separate area which was part of a room. My mother and I decided to divide the room in half.

The working conditions of a teacher of the traditional arts such as chado have an attraction for many women over the jobs available in business and industry and do not compete with home responsibilities (Mori 1988). The opportunity to be in a beautiful setting, surrounded by beautiful utensils, with a calm atmosphere, interacting with people they like and doing relaxing and spiritual activities is a very positive attraction for women. As a student in Tokyo said:

> What's important is the harmony and respect between the host and guest. To make that occur. If the host has it and if the guest has it, that feeling too, then the making of tea and the utensils used help to create that feeling between them.

At the same time, in the role of teacher, women are able to make choices and decisions about their daily practice, financial situation, and interaction with students.

In the role of student, it is women's study and fees that maintain the system. Through study of chado, Japanese women learn skills and etiquette of use in daily life and social interactions. They learn not only how to make a bowl of tea using a variety of implements, but much more important, how to control the body (to move gracefully, to be well balanced); how to control a situation (physically — what objects to put into the room, and socially — how to manage the human interaction in the room); and how to feel self-confident. The theory is that "nothing can be really learned until it works through the nerves and muscles" (Suzuki 1959, 38). As one of the Urasenke lecturers pointed out to her students:

> Tea is a medium. *Temae* is like a script. Tea is structured because it wants to liberate the mind, not the body. Body programmed, mind elsewhere.

In practice lessons and performance situations, students are given opportunities to make choices and to execute and evaluate those choices. As a beginning teacher who had just graduated from Gakuen told her students:

> I . . . was pleased to be able to identify the utensils properly and invent an acceptable poetic name for the tea scoop. I called it *susuki* (pampas grass). This is always a problem as we use the same scoops, but each of us must invent names appropriate to the season.

All students have experiences observing the manufacture of craft items. Some experience opportunities to make them. Many take lessons in other related arts (flower arrangements, calligraphy, gardening) after starting chado, or they begin chado after studying these arts as a way of learning a significant source of form and use of these arts. Thus, in learning chado, women are taught all the traditional arts and as a result, are perceived by other Japanese (who may or may not study chado) as intelligent, cultured, talented, and worthy of esteem.

Most of this study time is spent with other women. Although often the teachers are men, frequently their main assistants or disciples in training to be teachers are women. As an older student noted:

> I come here not only because of tea, but there is much social interaction with the people who are also studying tea with me, and the personality of the teacher. All those factors have inspired me to continue tea for 14 years without taking a day off from practice sessions.

In other social and work situations in Japan, the act of preparing and serving tea is an expression of deference and dependence, a dominant symbolic act expressing the asymmetry between men and women (Lebra 1985; Pharr 1981, 1984; Smith 1987). In chado, the host and guest roles are held by either men or women, and considerations of rank do not determine who takes these roles. Chado does not present many situations in which women as status inferiors are required to celebrate men's status superiority through the performance of tea ritual or are exposed to humiliation by men. As a lecturer at the Urasenke branch in Tokyo said:

> It is sort of like a salon. They talk about their problems and other things, and catch up with the latest news about themselves for the past week. People who are about the same age discuss their problems and try to solve them together. Others who work come to relieve their stress at my place.

Chado's training in social interaction skills offers women a variety of ways to provide for some of their personal needs: In chado, women learn calligraphy, poetry, history, and literature. They also acquire domestic skills, such as cooking, gardening, entertaining, and etiquette. They are taught how to put on, choose, and care for kimonos. Students and teachers make utensils and learn the variety and history of various crafts. Chado is a socially sanctioned way for women to go off by themselves to museums and shrines, and so it

offers them valued personal time. As an older woman whose children are grown said:

> My husband tells me that as long as I continue, I won't get senile. Since I am old, and there is nothing for me to study, he tells me to continue studying tea, and don't let all this time I spent studying go to waste.

Another student who has been studying chado for eight years remarked:

> I have a friend whose husband passed away. Her daughters persuaded her to study tea, also because they say that by doing tea, you will be well mannered and will lead a good life which is calm and composed. They want their mother to lead a happy life like mine.

The personal self-fulfillment that chado offers was expressed by one professional woman, who said:

> Tea has been a very fortunate experience for me. I have been able to think faster and do things without wasting time. I can also be watchful of the things around me and work together with others to achieve a goal.

A 60-year-old woman responded to the question, "What does your family think about your studying chado?" as follows:

> They say that I look the happiest when I practice tea. As for myself, it is an enjoyment and also a hardship. It is a part of my life, and I cannot think of a life without practice, or quitting it.

A student whose children are grown said:

> This may be simple, and I am ashamed of the fact, but I really like chado and tea in general. When I am at home, I spend the whole day just doing housework. But when I am practicing tea, I can have the time to myself, and no one can bother me. I try to make that time as much as possible. I do simple housework and then study in the tearoom most of the time.

DISCUSSION

The women teachers and students interviewed preferred chado and other spiritual and cultural pursuits to working alongside their husbands at company jobs they identified as oppressive and not particularly rewarding (Mori 1988). Their views reflected acceptance of the limitations placed on them by Japanese society and rationalizations for the pursuit of activities that are peripheral to rather than part of the core of the economic and political life of Japan, but they also reflect the pursuit of artistic endeavor as a form of personal improvement. It is the one area in Japanese society where self-

indulgence is acceptable. It is also a rejection of male roles and jobs as criteria to evaluate women or as a way of life women must adopt to be considered valued members in society. While most expressed regrets that their husbands were unable to join them in their cultural and spiritual pursuits, their participation in chado has not been just to do what men do. Participation in chado has enhanced the stature of women in their homes and communities.

Within the structure of the Urasenke iemoto system, women still hold lower positions, and their ability to devote all of their energies to chado is doubted, as the roles of wife and mother are expected to compete with dedication to the art. However, women family members and teacher employees challenge the view that only men are able to hold high-ranking positions in the school and devote themselves to the performance of time-consuming duties. Women's entry into the professional aspects of chado has not diminished its prestige, but they must still be allowed to prove themselves capable of fulfilling demanding roles.

Although Japanese society is still a world divided between men and women, with men predominantly active in the public sphere, women have used to advantage the places open to them, such as chado, where they are able to pursue individual goals; exercise limited control and choice; gain skills, training, and self-confidence; and somewhat influence the course of their lives and the lives of those with whom they come into contact.

NOTES

1. Access to information about the tea schools is difficult to acquire. Attempts to survey tea schools by the Prime Minister's Office and UNESCO have been ignored; therefore, a systematic random sample was not possible. The researcher was able to gain access for interviews and observations because of direct support from the members of the Sen family and their supporters. All interviews were done by referral from the grand master and his family, teachers, and students.

2. The wife of the present grand master of Urasenke is principal of the Urasenke Gakuen, a professional school accredited by the Ministry of Education. His brother is manager of the school's business interests. His second son is president of a mail-order utensil company sponsored by the school. His older sister manages two separate study centers in Tokyo.

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