

# The Spirituality of Chadoh, the Tea Ceremony

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In this talk I will consider the history of Chadoh, the Japanese Tea Ceremony, and will try to focus on its spirituality.

It was Priest Eisai of the Zen sect who first introduced tea to Japan, explaining how to make Matcha (thick bitter green tea used in the tea ceremony), and how to serve and drink it. This took place at the end of the twelfth century, when Japan was changing from the Heian Aristocratic Era to a time when the Samurai were becoming powerful. During this transition Japan was politically unstable and one natural disaster followed another. Buddhism lost its influence and Japanese society was dominated by the rule of “the strong eat the weak.” People were afraid that the end of the world would come soon. They suffered physically as well as spiritually and they drank much alcohol all day. Society was in chaos. At this time Priest Eisai worked for people’s salvation through the use of tea, serving tea while praying and performing incantations. In this sense, he used tea as a new kind of medicine.

Zen monks also began to use tea as a stimulant to avoid sleeping during meditation and to help their concentration. The use of tea spread throughout Japan among the Buddhist priests and monks, and eventually other classes of people began to drink tea as a daily custom. This is how Japanese people came to drink tea.

By the fifteenth century various tea drinking styles had developed. One famous style was the Ogasawara Style, which prescribed rules about the appropriate clothing to be worn during tea ceremonies. Common people wore formal Samurai costumes, priests wore formal Buddhist costumes, and aristocrats wore their own formal costumes. During this period Tea Master Nohami developed a style for the tea ceremony and top-ranking Samurai welcomed the complicated and formal procedures. However, one Nohami apprentice, Juko, stressed the spirituality of Chadoh rather than the use of elaborate ceremonial forms and styles. Juko reformed Chadoh by encouraging people to discard their selfishness. He viewed the tea ceremony as an occasion where the participants’ humble attitude should be expressed through simple styles. During the tea ceremony the hosts respect their guests and the guests respect the hosts. Thus, the tea ceremony starts from a position of mutual respect, and the hosts distribute Buddha’s grace among their guests. This was the ideal tea ceremony that Juko envisioned.

The spirituality of Chadoh is therefore made up of two focal points, the materials, *suki*, and the people, *furumai*. The materials are the tea room and tea utensils. When choosing materials, it is necessary to pay attention to the spirits of *wabi* and *sabi*. The spirit of *wabi* means choosing materials that will produce a calm and simple atmosphere in the tea room. The spirit of *sabi* means choosing very old but artistic utensils.

In the sixteenth century, Tea Ceremony Master Senno-Rikyu drastically simplified the tea room, believing that in a simply-styled tea room one could find mental amenity and freedom from this world.

However at the same time, Shogun Toyotomi spent huge sums of money to build a deluxe all-gold tea room as a way to demonstrate his supreme political power. Thus, these two people held quite different tea ceremonies following their interpretation of its significance.

The focus on people, *furumai*, is developed through association with other people. In the tea ceremony world we often hear the term “one meeting in life.” This means that each tea ceremony should be regarded as unique, so both the hosts and their guests must give their full attention to conducting ceremony.

The importance of empathy with other people and the need to understand strangers is more important than ever. Nowadays internationalization is accelerating and we have many chances to be exposed to different cultures. Furthermore, the information age brings more and more information to each of us. In today’s uncertain world, we are exposed to constant stress and fear. I believe that the spirituality of Chadoh can liberate us from this stress and fear through its very simple and formal style.

The fundamental spirit of Chadoh is based on mutual respect and mental serenity. Chadoh is not concerned with appearance but rather is a matter of mind. The mental unity between the hosts and the guests comes from their mutual respect, their pure association, and the serene atmosphere of the tea room.

Focusing too much on the cost of the materials used for the tea ceremony may cause meaningless competition and, as a result, the spirituality of Chadoh may fade. Only the artistic value of materials combined with the primary focus on the people involved can encourage us to strive after a greater and more beautiful spirituality. It is here that we find the everlasting value and charm of the tea ceremony.