Rowena Hann

Matcha Tea Ceremonies- The Spirit of Japan

What is a tea ceremony? Many may ask themselves this question in hearing the term, without truly knowing what it is, why such practices take place, and how much work and effort is involved in the very process. Tea ceremonies are not ordinary tea gatherings as one may think. They take much planning, preparation, skill, and patience to be able to be performed correctly. So, what are matcha tea ceremonies? Why are they held? What reflections do they have on Japanese culture? These are some of the questions that will be addressed throughout the course of this brief paper.

Preparing for a tea ceremony often starts with the selection of a location, typically a tearoom. After a location has been chosen, invitations are the next aspect organized. Like many invitations, they are chosen for their aesthetically pleasing nature and sent a few weeks before the planned date, giving guests plenty of time to prepare. After invitations have been sent, the tearoom must be prepared with the appropriate décor and embellishments. Decorations for the tearoom are typically chosen by which season is in bloom, but also by what time the ceremony will take place such as day or night. These adornments include decorative mats/rugs, a single vase of flowers, and tapestries on the walls.

Preparation of the tea starts with making a thick mixture. As stated by the tea republic, a thick matcha mixture is made with a blended 3:1 ratio, the ratio consisting of 3 tsps of matcha and 1 cup of hot water mixed thoroughly. However, before serving, the host first offers delectable sweets to the guests, as the sweetness pairs nicely with the bitterness of the matcha. Once the sweets have been served, the tea is then served to the guest of honor in a tea bowl, before being passed to the other guests to enjoy. After the thin batch is served, the host then prepares a thick mixture consisting of a 1:1 ratio. Then, after each round of tea has been served and the dishes have been cleaned thoroughly, they are often passed around and examined at the guest of honor’s request. The guests then thank the host for the delectable tea and sweets before departing.

As Dorinne Kondo mentions in her book *The Way of Tea: A Symbolic Analisis*, for many Japanese people, tea rituals serve as ways for them to highlight their skills in performing such practices, as they take much dedication and skill to become talented in the art. Others, on a deeper level, perform tea ceremonies to “Physically divest” themselves and their guests of “reminders of the everyday world,” (Kondo 300) entering what they consider the spiritual world once the ceremony commences. The heart of all Japanese tea rituals is their spiritual aspect, showing that this is the most prominent reason why Japanese people have for holding tea ceremonies.

In tea ceremonies, the spirituality they hold serves as an escape from one’s everyday life. The slow and extensive process involved in these rituals allows guests to tap into their own spirituality and take in everything, letting it resonate with them. Also, extraordinarily little to no verbal communication is also observed, making symbolic gestures and motions a key aspect of the ritual, as Kondo mentions. “The interaction of various sensory media creates a multiple layering of meanings” (Kondo 301), meaning that there are so many levels and layers to these rituals that one could say are the literal embodiment of spirituality. As is mentioned in the, “Significance of Japanese Tea Ceremony Values with Ceramic Art Interpretation”, to describe it more simply, tea ceremonies symbolize harmony (both of body and soul), along with purity, respect, and tranquility.

Sources Cited

Kondo, Dorinne, Man, “The Way of Tea: A Symbolic Analysis,” Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, New Series Vol. 20, June 1985, pp. 287-306

Adibah Ali, Rusmadiah Anwar, Oskar Hasdinor Hassan, Ham Rabeah, Kamarun, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, “Significance of Japanese Tea Ceremony Values with Ceramic Art Interpretation,” Volume 106, 10 December 2013, Pages 2390-2396

India International Centre Quarterly, Chanoyu: The Japanese tea Ceremonies, Vol. 3, No. 2, India International Centre, April 6, 1976, pp. 159-161

Willman, Anna, “The Japanese Tea Ceremony,” Department of Asian Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 2011, <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jtea/hd_jtea.htm>

Mori, Barbara Lynne Rowland, Gender, and Society, “The Tea Ceremony: A Transformed Japanese Ritual,” Vol. 5, No. 1, Sage Publications, Inc., Pg. 86-97

Cartwright, Mark, “Japanese Tea Ceremony,” May 30th, 2019, World History Encyclopedia, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Japanese_Tea_Ceremony//>

Pure Leaf, Matcha 101: Introduction to Matcha, 2020, <https://www.pureleaf.com/us/matcha-101-introduction-to-matcha>

The Republic of Tea, “How to Host a Japanese Tea Ceremony, July 18, 2016, The Republic of Tea, <https://the.republicoftea.com/tea-culture/how-to-host-a-japanese-tea-ceremony/>