

Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture Working Paper Series,
Number 7

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European Missionaries’ Experiences of the Way of Tea 茶道
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February, 2013

http://icc fla.sophia.ac.jp/other_pages_pdfs/HIOKI_1302.pdf

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Silent Dialogue and “Teaism”: A New Perspective on European Missionaries’ Experiences of the Way of Tea 茶道 in Late Sixteenth-Century Japan

This paper explores historical interactions that took place between European Jesuit missionaries and Japanese tea masters in the late sixteenth through early seventeenth centuries, and it reconsiders the missionaries’ experiences of the way of tea in view of their “silent dialogue” with Japanese Buddhism; especially the Zen Buddhism, whose ethos is critically integral to the practice of tea ceremony. Whereas the Jesuit strategist of Japan mission was more intent upon the social function of tea gathering and concerned about making connections with political power players by accommodating the Japanese custom, a few other European missionaries delved into the religio-aesthetic aspect of the way of tea. Their experiences as they appear in historical accounts can be considered profound interreligious dialogue, despite the lack of doctrinal discussions or religious confessions.

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1. Introduction

In addition to this ordinary way of drinking cha, the Japanese have another special manner, which the Chinese lack, whereby they entertain guests of whatever quality and rank, even the lord of Tenka himself. In this way, ordinary people of inferior rank, yet of gentle birth, who practice this manner of cha, may invite any lord or noble to it, and he may not decline on account of the person who invites him unless he has some prior engagement.

(João Rodrigues, Historia da Igreja do Japão¹).

This paper sets out to present a historical case study on the distinctive features of Japanese tea ceremony that work to accommodate a religio-aesthetic “space” for interreligious encounter and dialogue. In particular, this paper looks back on early modern Japanese history and explores some pioneer European missionaries’ experience of the way of tea 茶道 (*chadō, sadō*) in the late sixteenth through early seventeenth centuries. Special attention will be paid to the fact that the early Japanese tea ceremony, especially the kind held in the rustic teahouses built in private gardens, was deeply inspired by the ethos of Zen Buddhism, and it called for complete indifference toward worldly values, such as the attendants’ social standing, their cultural background, ethnicity, and religion.² Hence, in a unique and somewhat ironic way, the quiet teahouse that was originally built to achieve the Buddhist realm of “nothingness” in a secular environment provided the Catholic missionaries with an egalitarian space for some fruitful cross-cultural and interreligious encounters with Japanese tea practitioners, including the most powerful warlords and wealthy merchants of the time.

In Japan, by the end of the sixteenth century, the great tea master Sen’no Rikyū 千利休 (1522–1591) had transformed the preceding custom of tea drinking into “the way of tea” that seeks the practitioners’ spiritual progress through the act of preparing and sharing a cup of tea in solemn tranquility.³ The establishment of the way of tea in the mid-sixteenth century coincided with the blossoming of Catholic missions in Japan that began in 1549 with the

1. Michael Cooper, ed., *João Rodrigues’s Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2001), 282.

2. Though in those days, women were excluded from the tea ceremony as a rule. They were however, allowed to participate in the outdoor tea party/picnic.

3. From the literature on *chadō*, I find studies by Denis Hirota and Theodore M. Ludwig very useful in relation to the religio-aesthetic aspect of the tea ceremony. Denis Hirota, *Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path* (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1995). Theodore M. Ludwig, “The Way of Tea: A Religio-Aesthetic Mode of Life,” in *History of Religions*, 14/1 (1974), see esp. 41–50.

arrival of the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506—1552) in Kagoshima. The European missionaries were aware that the origin of the tea ceremony was closely associated with Zen Buddhism, and Rikyū's way of tea had implicitly maintained Zen spirituality, even though the practice appeared entirely secular. The missionaries, however, not only participated in tea ceremonies, but some of them became familiar with the way of tea close enough to enjoy the meditative atmosphere of the space and to appreciate its religio-aesthetic worth. Furthermore, the missionaries recognized the positive impact of the way of tea on the spiritual growth of Japanese Christians, such as Justo Takayama Ukon 高山右近 (1552—1615), who was also a famous tea master.

How was the relationship between Japanese religions and Christianity at their early encounter? What was the common form of interreligious dialogue in late sixteenth-century Japan? Overall, the relationship was a hostile one. Japanese Buddhist schools rejected Christianity and confronted the western religion as much as the missionaries aggressively denied Buddhism and Shinto.⁴ For the Buddhists, the missionaries were foreign intruders and a threatening presence against their assumed position in politics; and for the Christian missionaries, the Buddhists were evil idolaters and an obstacle to their evangelizing mission. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that some of the intellectual exchanges between the missionaries and the Buddhists, carried out in the form of rational disputation, turned out to be peaceful interreligious dialogue.

On the one hand, the hostile aspect of the relationship culminated in acts of iconoclasm: destructive action committed against material symbols of religion, such as religious architecture and statues. While both sides engaged in iconoclasm, probably the Christian attacks against Buddhist temples were more evident. The Jesuit records do not report the missionaries' direct engagement in the act, but they certainly did their part in driving Japanese Christians to destructive action through their preaching against idolatry.⁵

On the other hand, the relatively peaceful facet of their interactions included some formal conversations on religious beliefs and practices. The Jesuit sources describe the con-

4. So far, there is no study comparing the missionaries' attitude toward Buddhism and Shinto. In my view, the Jesuits confronted the Buddhists all the more, since in those days, the Buddhist temples held significant political power, especially in major cities. Also, on the missionaries' view of Japanese "idolatry," see Masakazu Asami, *Kirishitanjidai no Gūzōsūhai* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2009). Michael Cooper, ed., *They Came to Japan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 333—48. Georg Schurhammer, *Der Weg der Gotter in Japan* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1923).

5. Regarding the account of Christian iconoclasm against Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, see Hirokazu Shimizu, *Shokuhō Seiken to Kirishitan* (Tokyo: Iwata Shoten, 2002), 171—5. John Whitney Hall, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 334.

tent of the exchanges that took place between the missionaries and Buddhist priests of the Yamaguchi region in 1551 as belligerent.⁶ It must be remarked, however, at this time, the exchanges between Christians and Buddhists remained rational despite the disagreements, and did not develop into violence. It even seems that at the end of the conversation, both parties had a fruitful dialogue and gained some first-hand knowledge about the other religion.⁷ Besides having direct conversations about religious doctrines, the Europeans eagerly gathered information about Japanese religions through the Japanese converts, and also by visiting the famous temples and shrines in the manner of “sightseeing.”⁸

The difficult relationship between Christianity and Japanese religions, consisting of both conflict and common interest, continued in this way for some decades. Then, in 1587, the Japanese ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (d. 1598) surprised the European missionaries by issuing the first anti-Christian edict out of the blue, declaring that “Japan is a country of native god” 日本は神国たる処 and also accused the missionaries of the destruction of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. 神社仏閣を打破之由. Although Hideyoshi’s edict was not strictly enforced, in 1612, the Tokugawa Shogunate 徳川将軍 issued a stricter, countrywide ban on Christianity, followed by the expulsion of foreign missionaries and a number of leading Japanese Christians in 1614. Finally, in 1639, the Tokugawa Shogunate banned all European contacts, with the exception of the Dutch merchants, and enforced a strict religious proscription until 1873.

In view of this historical background, one may wonder why the Jesuit missionaries allowed themselves to participate in, and even to enjoy, a tea ceremony that was undeniably Buddhist in origin. I argue that it was due to the ideal of egalitarian inclusiveness that the early Japanese tea ceremony embraced. In practice, it meant welcoming anyone with an open mind, to share tea and enjoy the quiet, contemplative atmosphere in the rustic teahouse surrounded by beautiful woods. I intend to emphasize that the physical isolation of the space of tea ceremony created a valuable in-between space for people from diverse cultural

6. Renzo De Luca, “Shukyōtaiwa to shite no Yamaguchi no Tōron,” *Kirishitan Bunka Kenkyūkai Kaihō* 119 (2002), 1–32. I would like to thank Fr. De Luca for his valuable references and comments on this paper. Also see, Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness* (Rorschach: UniversityMedia, 2012), 23–32.

7. According to the Jesuit reports, there were eight occasions when Buddhist priests visited them at the residence of Ōuchi Yoshitaka and engaged in doctrinal conversation. What is important in the context of this paper is that the Jesuits described the attitude of the Buddhist priests as rational, and that they recognized the need to understand the concept of “nothingness” in Buddhism, although they misinterpreted the concept. De Luca, *ibid.*, 17–23. App, *ibid.*, 26–7.

8. See Charles Ralf Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549–1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 56–72. N. Frances Hioki, “Early Christian/Non-Christian Encounters as Comparative Theological Resources,” in *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue*, issue 5 (2010), <http://irdialogue.org/category/journal/issue05/>

and religious backgrounds to share a common experience.

In what follows, I will first illustrate the characteristics of the Japanese tea ceremony, particularly in view of its advantage as a space of cross-cultural and interreligious encounters. Second, I will review the history of the tea ceremony with a focus on its relation to Zen Buddhism. Third, in reference to primary sources, I will investigate how the Jesuit missionaries observed the tea ceremony and appreciated sharing a cup of tea with the Japanese. Finally, I will explore the formative impact of the way of tea on the spiritual progress of early Japanese Christians.

2. Teahouse 茶室 (chashitsu) as a Space of Cross-cultural and Interreligious Encounter

2. 1. The Variety of Tea Drinking Customs in Japan

In sixteenth-century Japan, there were generally three different manners of ceremonial tea drinking other than the ordinary, daily tea. One of them existed as social etiquette, the proper way to receive a respectable guest to a household: the male guest was met by a servant at the main entrance, ushered to the reception room, and received a cup of tea while he waited for the master of the house. The second type was an intimate tea gathering: a group of male guests, usually no more than three, drank tea prepared by the host in the small teahouse built in a garden. It was this type of tea drinking that developed to be the way of tea.⁹ The third was the outdoor tea party, where a number of people gathered to enjoy a picnic in an open space, accompanied by music and dancing.

For the purpose of this paper, the most important manner of tea drinking is the second. Before moving on to discuss the way of tea, however, I will briefly review the particularities of the first and the third manners of tea drinking that were important in terms of the construction of the fields of power in feudal society.¹⁰ That is to say, the first type (formal

9. On the history of the way of tea in general, see Tadachika Kuwata, *Chadō no Rekishi* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979). Historians offer different perspectives to trace the development of the way of tea, which occurred gradually between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. One of the important views, which I do not mention in this paper, is to see the development as an emergence of distinct Japanese aesthetics of *wabi*. See Hirota, *Wind in the Pines*, 80–92. Ludwig, “The Way of Tea,” 47–8. For sociological views on the history of the tea ceremony, see Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 120–6; Moran Pitelka, ed., *Japanese Tea Culture: Art, History, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

10. For the social function of tea gathering and the structuring of the field of power, see David Slusser, “The Transformation of Tea Practice in Sixteenth-Century Japan,” in Pitelka, ed., *Japanese Tea Culture: Art, History and Practice*, 51–5.

reception of an important guest to a household) had to do with the display of upper-class decorum, and indicated the social rank and quality of both the host and the guest. As I will mention later, the Italian Jesuit and the inspector of the Asian mission, Alessandro Valignano (1539—1606), was particularly concerned about this aspect of tea drinking, and instructed the Jesuits to build their residences with reception rooms and to keep a teaboy in waiting.¹¹

Likewise, the third type (garden party) had to do with social politics. At the great Kitano tea party 北野大茶会 in 1587, hosted by Hideyoshi, it is said that there were eight hundred guests from all levels of society, and this grand outdoor tea party continued for ten days.¹² People were also allowed to come uninvited, as long as they brought their own kettles and cups. In principle, women were excluded from the first two manners of tea drinking, but many women came to the Kitano party and enjoyed the company. Such a grand tea event was a way for powerful personages to demonstrate their charity and power at the same time. It also offered a great pastime to people, and was useful for easing tension between the upper class and the populace.

2. 2. The Space of the Tea Ceremony

As for the content of the second manner of tea ceremony, Denis Hirota provides a succinct summary—it simply consists of tea making and drinking, and there is nothing extraordinary in the practice:

The practices of chanoyu . . . focuses on a small gathering in which the host lays fresh charcoal to boil water, serves a meal, then prepares powdered tea whisked with hot water. The tea is made in two forms: first, thick, in which a large amount of tea is carefully kneaded with hot water, and which the guests partake of in turn from a single tea bowl; then thin, in which a smaller proportion of tea to water is deftly whisked for each individual guest.¹³

The action that takes place inside the teahouse comes down to serving and drinking

11. Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignano’s Mission Principles for Japan*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), 45—6.

12. Yoshiaki Yabe, *Chajin Toyotomi Hideyoshi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2002), 206—15.

13. Hirota, *Wind in the Pines*, 21.

tea. At the same time, however, any participant in a tea ceremony would not miss the profoundly meditative atmosphere of the space. In order to articulate the marked intensity that permeates the course of the tea ceremony, I suggest understanding its principles in terms of two keywords: transformation and indifference.

First, transformation has to do with one's quietly sitting in a teahouse with others and participating in an experience that is "the one chance in one's lifetime" 一期一会 (*ichigo ichie*), and thereby becoming awakened to a new self-consciousness that is in complete harmony with one's environment. Second, indifference has to do with being freed from selfish concerns about social esteem, money, or worldly pleasures. In order to cast off worldly concerns, a teahouse is made to look rustic in the manner of a recluse's hermitage, and the cups and utensils used at the ceremony must be simple, natural, and practical.¹⁴

With regard to the experience of transformation conceived of by the participants in a tea ceremony, Horst Hammitzsch describes his first experience as follows, beginning with the short walk into the cottage with the other guests:

And with every step into the depth of the garden, the everyday world, with its bustling haste, fades from the mind. One steps into a world that is free of everyday pressures, forgets the ways, and ceases to enquire into the wherefores. The deeper the guest penetrates into the garden, this world of solemn tranquility, the freer he becomes of everyday cares. The other guests, too, seem to have become changed people. . . . All of them have forgotten the everyday things that normally rule their lives from early morning until late at night. Casting them off, they have committed themselves unreservedly to this world of silence, of inner freedom.¹⁵

As a gesture to cast off everyday things and enter the world of inner freedom, the guests are asked to enter the teahouse through a three feet by three feet opening called *Nijiriguchi* にじり口 situated about a foot above the ground, so one has to crawl inside on one's knees (there is also a back entrance attached to the teahouse, through which the host goes in and

14. Ironically, the tea ceremony has become a costly pastime with the maintenance of the teahouse, garden, and the collection of cups and utensils. Today, the price of a historical tea bowl with a credited provenance can be astronomical. This, however, is not necessarily a modern phenomenon; in fact, despite its principle of disregarding worldly affairs, the tea ceremony has always been an expensive practice, which ordinary people could hardly afford. This tendency that goes against the ideal of the way of tea was already apparent in the sixteenth century. See João Rodrigues's observation on "The great expense involved in *suki* (tea ceremony)" in Cooper ed., *João Rodrigues's Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, 292-4.

15. Horst Hammitzsch, *Zen in the Art of Tea Ceremony* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 13.

out).¹⁶

According to Kōzu Asao 神津朝夫, Rikyū constructed the first *Nijiriguchi* for his teahouse, Taian. 待庵¹⁷ This seemingly uncomfortable entry had an important function in the sixteenth century. In order to enter a teahouse, a soldier had to give up his dagger, and a nobleman might have to give up his hat, if he was wearing the traditional top hat allowed for high-ranking courtiers. The Portuguese Jesuit João Rodrigues (d. 1633) describes the entry through the *Nijiriguchi* as follows:

*They now approach the closed door of the small house. This is set somewhat above the ground and is just large enough for a person to pass through provided he stoops. They remove their fans and daggers from their sashes, and deposit them in a kind of cupboard placed there outside for this purpose.*¹⁸

Thus, a space of nonviolence was established inside the teahouse, where no arms were ever allowed, and it was also a space where one shared a cup of tea with others as equals.

3. Religious Aspects of the Tea Ceremony

3. 1. Tea and Zen Buddhism

Among the classic axioms that represent the spiritual or religious aspect of the way of tea, probably the most famous one is the aforementioned “The one chance in one’s lifetime,” popularized by the nineteenth-century political figure and tea master Ii Naosuke 井伊直弼 (1815—1860).¹⁹ Among others, there are “Founding an assembly” 一座建立 (*ichi-za konryū*)²⁰ and “Tea and Zen are one and the same flavor” 茶禪一味 (*chazen ichimi*).²¹ “The one chance in one’s lifetime” indicates the existential consciousness that the particular moment of drinking tea in a teahouse is one moment in one’s lifetime that will never be repeated. Kōzu considers that it best represents Rikyū’s personal attitude toward the tea ceremony, whereas “Founding an assembly” emphasizes the communal experience of being in

16. In Rikyū’s days it was called *kuguri* or *kugurikido*. Before the introduction of *Nijiriguchi*, there had been a larger entrance for the aristocrats.

17. Asao Kōzu, *Sen’no Rikyū no Wabi towa Nanika* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2005), 152.

18. João Rodrigues’s *Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, 301.

19. Originally, the phrase “The one chance in one’s lifetime” was noted in “Yamanoue Sōjiki 山上宗二記”(1547) as *ichigo ni ichido no kai*. 一期二一度ノ会ノヤウニ Yamanoue Sōji, “Yamanoue Sōjiki,” *Chadō Koten Zenshū*, vol. 6 (Kyoto: Tankosha, 1956), 93. Also see, Takeo Narukawa, *Sen’no Rikyū Cha no Bigaku* (Tokyo: Tamagawa University Press, 1983), 89—90.

20. “Yamanoue Sōjiki,” *ibid.* 客人のフリ事、在一座ノ建立ニ、條々蜜傳多也

21. Attributed to Sen’no Sōtan. *Chadō Koten Zenshū*, vol. 10 (Kyoto: Tankosha, 1956), 312—6.

communion with others through tea drinking.²² The last one, “Tea and Zen are one and the same flavor” refers to the Buddhist origin of tea drinking.²³ These old sayings indicate how the practice of the tea ceremony derived from Zen Buddhism and developed its own religio-aesthetic and communal principles. While Zen’s goal is each individual practitioner’s experience of enlightenment, the tea ceremony seeks a communal experience of liberation from worldly concerns.

It is possible that the custom of tea drinking was known in China as early as the Six Dynasties period (CE220—589), and tea leaves came to be especially valued as medicine during the Tang period (618—907). The first classic book of “Teaism” 茶經 was written by the master Lu Yu 陸羽 sometime in the late eighth century, where he explained how to plant, grow, and harvest the tea plant, as well as how to prepare it.²⁴ In this early form of tea preparation, tea leaves were “steamed, pounded in a tea-mortar and molded into a cake, pieces of which could then be cut off as needed.”²⁵ The cake-style tea (also called brick tea) was brought from China to Japan before the ninth century. The pulverized tea, which is used in a tea ceremony, came to be popular in China during the Southern Sung period (1127—1279), and the Zen monks favored it because it helped them stay alert and calm during meditation. There is a story told of some Chinese monks during this period that used to gather around the image of the patriarch Bodhi Dharma and drink tea out of a single bowl in commemoration of their great master.²⁶ The Zen tea of Southern Sung was brought to Japan by the master Eisai 榮西 (1141—1215), who authored a treatise on the medical merit of tea,²⁷ and with the spread of Eisai’s Rinzai Zen School, the tea ritual and ideal in Zen style spread rapidly in Japan.²⁸

Early tea masters who played an important role in laying the foundation for the way of tea were Murata Jukō (Shukō) 村田珠光 (1423?—1502) and Takeno Jo’ō 武野紹鷗 (1502—1555). The lives of these early tea masters are shrouded in mystery, and historians still debate today about where and how the way of tea was established.²⁹ With regard to the

22. Kōzu, 221—4.

23. Hirota, 92—105. Also note that the modern philosopher, Shin’ichi Hisamatsu remarks that the way of tea is “Zen incarnated.” Hisamatsu, *Chadō no Tetsugaku*, paperback edition (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987), 29.

24. On the history of tea drinking in China, I referred to the introduction in *Chūgoku Chasho Zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kyukoshoin, 1987), 4—9. Hirota, 28. Ludwig, “The Way of Tea,” 43—5. Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (1906; reprint, Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1967), 17—25.

25. Hammitzsch, *Zen in the Art of Tea Ceremony*, 26.

26. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 24—5.

27. *Kissa Yōjōki* (1211). 喫茶養生記

28. Hirota, 28. Ludwig, 45.

29. Different views are found in: Kuwata, *Chadō no Rekishi*; Herbert Plutschow, *Rediscovering Rikyu* (Folkestone,

purpose of this paper, it is important to note that the tea-historian Kuwata Tadachika 桑田忠親 believes the most important aspect of Murata Jukō’s way of tea was the establishment of “equality among people” in the space of the tea ceremony.³⁰ At the time of Jukō, to entertain guests in a tearoom and to display treasured tea wares belonged to the opulent lifestyle of aristocrats.³¹ For the Zen monks, tea drinking was integrated with their religious life. Blending the two traditions, the early tea masters developed a new form of tea sharing, which did away with the ostentatious, high-class luxury taste from the courtier’s tea, while at the same time they got rid of religious exclusiveness from the monastic way of tea.³² The following passage represents the original aesthetics of simplicity that served for the spiritual progress of practitioners:

*The arrangement of the tea room should be such as to soothe the hearts of hosts and guests, and should in no way distract their thoughts. This is of prime importance. It must penetrate to the very depths of the heart, while having nothing about it of the other.*³³

The rustic simplicity inside the teahouse was meant to form temporary equality among the participants, and it also helped the participants to focus on looking undisturbed into the depth of their hearts.

3. 2. Rikyū’s Contributions

Following in the legacy of Jukō, the final development of Japanese tea ceremony as perfected by Rikyū was “aniconic” and religious at the same time. By “aniconic,” I refer to utter simplicity of space; the decoration inside the teahouse is limited to a few branches of fresh flowers and just one piece of hanging scroll, which is usually a piece of calligraphy or painting suitable to the occasion. Explicit religious icons such as the image of the Buddha

UK: Global Oriental, 2003); Asao Kōzu, *Chanoyu no Rekishi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2009).

30. Kuwata, 42. Kuwata says that the older teahouses had two entrances: the courtier’s and his servants’, and *Nijiriguchi* (n. 16 above) was originally the servants’ entrance. However, during the time of Jukō/Rikyū, the courtier’s entrance disappeared and all the guests went into the teahouse through a *Nijiriguchi*. Ibid. About Jukō, also see Hammitzsch, 40-9. Hirota, 63-80.

31. This manner of tea drinking was established by the fifteenth century by Noh actor Noh-ami under the patronage of Ashikaga Shogun. Hirota, 30. Kuwata, 13—8.

32. In addition to this, Kōzu particularly remarks the significance of casual tea drinking custom that was widely spread among the ordinary people living in major cities in the fifteenth century. Kōzu, *Sen’no Rikyū no Wabi towa Nanika*, 196—8.

33. Hammitzsch attributes this passage to Jukō, although it is not found in authenticated Jukō’s writings (there is only one letter that is certainly identified to be Jukō’s). Hammitzsch, 47.

are avoided.³⁴ Still, the aim of Rikyū's tea ceremony was the spiritual growth in the sense of Buddhist teaching.³⁵ It is believed that Rikyū said the following:

*Chanoyu of the small room is above all a matter of performing practice and attaining realization in accord with the Buddhist path. To delight in the refined splendor of a dwelling or the taste of delicacies belongs to worldly life. There is shelter enough when the roof does not leak, food enough when it staves off hunger. This is the Buddhist teaching and the fundamental meaning of chanoyu.*³⁶

Although the tea ceremony does not explicitly represent Buddhist doctrines or practices, the space is filled with allusions to Zen, representing a fusion of the secular and religious in the drinking of a cup of tea.³⁷

Rikyū avoided the religious icons that had been present in the tearooms of the Buddhist monasteries, yet the space still spoke soundly for the Buddhist ideal: the state of self-forgetfulness as well as the experience of being in complete harmony with nature. The innovation of the tea ceremony in the sixteenth century challenged the practitioners to experience the space in communion with others present with an open and undisturbed heart. According to Hammitzsch's observation, with the establishment of the way of tea,

*From this point on, then, the tea gatherings no longer speak the language of a particular social class, but that of 'everyman' whether he be high or low, rich or poor. All that is needed is that he should open his heart to the Way. A temple of common experience, Ichiza-kenritsu [sic.], is erected, where those of like beliefs, pupils of a single Way in quest of an inner harmony that is far removed from the world, find each other on that Way.*³⁸

To be sure, the phrase "those of like beliefs" in this context would not designate belief in a common religion or dogma, but it refers to the common discovery of universal value, such as the beauty of nature and inner harmony.

34. Kuwata, 52. Also see the list of famous paintings and calligraphies used for tea ceremony in *Yamanoue Sōjiki*, 72—8.

35. On Rikyū and Zen, see also Ludwig, 49, Hirota, 92-105.

36. Hirota, 217.

37. Hirota also considers that there is an aspect of the Pure Land school in Rikyū's thought. See Hirota, 105—16.

38. Hammitzsch, 48.

In terms of social rank, Rikyū was a middle-class layperson from the city of Sakai. In the sixteenth century, however, Sakai was a major international port and a commercial town where the merchant middle class was emerging as a new power and bringing their secular values into the upper-class society that consisted of aristocrats and Buddhist clergy. Most importantly, Rikyū’s tea ceremony produced an egalitarian space,³⁹ where it did not matter whether the participant was an aristocrat or a merchant, clergy or laity, Buddhist or Christian.⁴⁰

3. 3. Silent Dialogue in the Teahouse

With regard to the concept of “Founding an assembly,” it is important to note that the communication that occurs in the space of a tea ceremony is dialogical, but it does not necessarily consist of discursive dialogue.⁴¹ The actual conversation exchanged in the teahouse is formalized and extremely succinct. There are fixed sets of exchange between the host and the guests, and beyond that, the conversation is limited to the exchange of a few words uttered on the beauty of the season, garden, and the cottage. Discussions about money, politics, religion, or any other personal concerns are taboo in the realm of tea.

In the solemn silence of the teahouse, the participants of a tea ceremony may recognize a sense of profound communication and communion with others. In order to elucidate the nature of this unusual mode of communication, it might be meaningful to refer to the concept of dialogue explicated in Martin Buber’s essay “Dialogue (*Zwiesprache*).” According to Buber,

There is genuine dialogue—no matter whether spoken or silent—where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself [sic.] and them.⁴²

39. The ideal, however, was not always worked out in practice, especially as the way of tea became more prevalent and respected in society. As Dale Slusser observes, there was lofty elitism among the practitioners of the tea ceremony against those who did not participate. Slusser, “The Transformation of Tea Practice,” 48.

40. Although his religious or spiritual background was Zen Buddhism, Rikyū may have been attracted to Christian teachings. He knew many Japanese Christians in his own family and among his close friends and disciples.

41. Originally, the “Founding an assembly” concept derived from the Noh theater, in reference to the sense of communion established between the actor and audience. According to Kōzu, Rikyū could have been critical of “Founding an assembly” as he preferred a tea ceremony without conversations. Kōzu, 221—4.

42. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Reutledge Classics, 2002), 22. Emphasis mine.

This quote appropriately represents the phenomenon that takes place in the space of the tea ceremony; namely, one's turning toward others in one's naked being that pulsates in the moment of "the one chance in one's lifetime." The cups of tea prepared in this dialogical space are shared to commemorate the inner transformation of each participant as well as the transformation of the relationship among them, from "I and He/She" to "I and Thou," and finally to "We." Moreover, this community includes not only the participants in the space, but also the entire surroundings: the movement of nature outside, the teahouse, and cups and utensils, together with the historical memories commemorated with their provenances. This wholeness, however, does not demand that each person's individuality be melded into the whole. Rather, a keen practitioner of the tea ceremony would realize that one's individuality stands in communion with others and nature.

Hence, the tea ceremony can be considered a dialogical space, where one may experience a silent dialogue with others. The simplicity of the teahouse, its natural standing and decoration, avoidance of iconic representations, and various other aspects help establish a radically neutral space for contemplation. With regard to the act of cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue, however, the tea ceremony cannot be a space to have a confessional dialogue, since the conversation held in the teahouse excludes arguments. The participants are challenged to cast off all their concerns, including their religious beliefs. If the space could be confessional in some sense, it had to be in the communal and spiritual sense; this is to say that one may confess one's belief in a loving companionship with others and with nature, commemorated in the silent dialogue and sharing of tea.

4. Sixteenth-Century Jesuit Accounts of the Tea Ceremony

4. 1. The Jesuits and Their Adaptation to Japanese Culture

The early Jesuit mission to Japan is particularly important in Asian church history, since it was one of the earliest missions that employed cultural adaptation as mission strategy.⁴³ The Jesuit inspector Valignano contributed the cultural adaptation strategy when he convinced his colleagues that it was absolutely necessary for the Europeans to conform to the Japanese way of living if they wanted to proceed toward their goal peacefully: the evan-

43. On the Jesuit adaptation to Japanese culture, see Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignano's Mission Strategy for Japan*, vols. 1 and 2 (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980—1985). Boxer, "Christian Culture and Missionary Life," in *The Christian Century in Japan*, 188—247.

gelization of the whole country. When their work was terminated by the expulsion decree of 1614, they were still far from converting the entire population, but had made notable progress in view of the cultural adaptation.

With regard to the tea drinking custom in particular, Valignano instructed the Jesuits in Japan to build all their residences in the Japanese style with a reception room so that the guests are cordially welcomed with a cup of tea. It is evident that Valignano was seriously concerned about keeping up with the social decorum and gaining the same respect from the Japanese as the Buddhist priests received. The Jesuit inspector, however, seems to have had little interest in the spiritual aspect of the tea ceremony. In 1581, Valignano gave an instruction about tea drinking formalities in the treatise, *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão*, as follows (the following passage has been paraphrased and annotated from the original by Josef Franz Schütte):

In all the houses there should be a special room near the entrance door for the preparation of the chanoyu, the ceremonial tea, for in accordance with general custom, entertainment with the ocha (tea) could not be omitted even in mission stations. There the tea attendant, the chanoyusha (a dojuku, or one of the house staff), was to be continuously on duty; he had to have a good knowledge of this office, especially in places where many distinguished people called.⁴⁴

The Jesuits in Japan lacked the financial resources to build all of their residences in the style of wealthy Buddhist temples, but at least a few residences in big cities were built finely accordingly to Valignano’s instruction. The outlook of a Jesuit residence with a tearoom can be observed in a late sixteenth-century Japanese painting that depicts the view of international trading ships from a port town.⁴⁵

Needless to say, for the missionaries in sixteenth-century Japan, religious orthodoxy according to the decrees of the Council of Trent was the utmost priority, and so the Jesuit adaptation strategy was to be limited to the cultural sphere. As already noted, the Jesuits’ relationship with the Japanese religions was contentious, and it is no surprise that a strict mission inspector such as Valignano disregarded the religious aspect of the tea ceremony at all. Other Jesuits, however, did appreciate participating in the tea ceremony, where they

44. Valignano’s *Mission Principles for Japan*, vol. 2, 170. Regarding the original text, see Alessandro Valignano, *Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1946), 160–3.

45. *Nanban Byōbu* (Nanban Bunkakan, Osaka). See *Nihon Byōbue Shūsei*, vol. 15 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979), 46–7; fig. 37.

could encounter Buddhist spirituality without being bothered by the iconoclastic imperative against pagan images.

4. 2. Acknowledging the Aesthetic Attraction of the Tea Ceremony: Almeida and Fróis

The Portuguese Jesuit Luis d'Almeida (d. 1583) was one of the early missionaries who commented on the aesthetic attraction of the Japanese tea drinking custom. In a report from 1565, Almeida writes about the local custom of entertaining guests as follows:

*Thus they give parties to drink this herb (of which the best sort costs about nine or ten ducats a pound) and to display these utensils, each one as best as his wealth and rank will allow. These parties are given in special houses, only used on such occasions, which are marvels of cleanliness.*⁴⁶

What Almeida experienced seems to have been something in between the social decorum tea and the solemn tea ceremony. Almeida did not really appreciate the taste of the meal served prior to tea, but he appears to have been genuinely impressed by the orderly service and the simple beauty of the utensils. He continues,

*I do not praise the food, for Japan is but poorly provided in this respect; but as regards the service, order, cleanliness, and utensils, I can confidently affirm that nowhere in the whole wide world would it be possible to find a meal better served and appointed than in Japan.*⁴⁷

Another Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis (1532—1597) writes in his *History of Japan* that a *chashitsu* (tearoom) at the residence of a Christian tea master “Soy Antão”⁴⁸ was

*a clean space that provides people earthly calmness so that the Japanese Christians, as well as the pagans, greatly admire that space. A priest celebrated the Eucharist there and the Japanese Christians gathered there.*⁴⁹

In this passage, it is evident that the Jesuit noticed the aesthetic appeal of the tea ceremony

46. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, 53.

47. *Ibid.*

48. This could be the master Naraya Sōi. Rikyū also used the name Sōi.

49. Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. 2, ed. Jose Wicki (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 1981), 265. Translation mine. Also see, Machiko Wada “Kirishitan Jidai no Misa, part 2,” *Seishin Joshidaigaku Ronso*, 96 (2001): 81—149.

beyond its importance as social decorum. Both Fróis and Almeida remarked on the cleanliness and calmness of the space in reference to the Japanese sense of beauty inherent in the simplicity of the tearoom.

4. 3. *The Tea Enthusiast Rodrigues and His Teaism*

While the Jesuit amazement at the orderliness of Japanese tea custom was real, it appears that neither Fróis nor Almeida really liked the strong taste of pulverized green tea. Among the European Jesuits, the Portuguese João Rodrigues⁵⁰ —also known as “The Interpreter”—was the one who was most engaged in the tea culture of Japan. Rodrigues first came to Japan in the late 1570s at the age of fifteen or sixteen, as a servant boy to Portuguese merchants. After being admitted to the Society of Jesus, he completed all of his theological education without ever going back to Europe.⁵¹ He lived and worked in Japan until 1610, and in those days his skill in the Japanese language, as well as his knowledge of the culture, was probably unsurpassed among the Jesuits.

Rodrigues the Interpreter was also among the foremost tea enthusiasts. Rodrigues’s long description of the six merits of tea drinking in his *História da Igreja do Japão* includes a unique comparison of Europe and East Asia seen from the perspective of the tea drinking custom:

*Both China and Japan are densely populated and the people, especially in China, are greatly crowded together. Yet there is usually no plague in these two kingdoms as in Europe and other places, and pestilence is very rare. Many people maintain that this results from cha, which evacuates all superfluous matter that causes evil humors.*⁵²

Rodrigues also writes that he heard from the Japanese that tea is “good for chastity and continence because it has the quality of restraining and cooling the kidneys.”⁵³

Rodrigues appreciated not only the medical benefit of tea drinking, but also the aesthetics and contemplative atmosphere of the tea ceremony. In *Historia da Igreja do Japão*,

50. A modern Spanish translation of Rodrigues’s account of tea ceremony is available as *Arte del Cha*, ed. J. L. Alvarez-Taladriz (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1954).

51. On his life, see Michael Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter* (New York: Weatherhill, 1964).

52. Cooper, *Joao Rodrigues’s Account of Sixteenth Century Japan*, 277—8.

53. *Ibid.*, 278.

Rodrigues spent four chapters describing the Japanese tea culture in detail and develops his on Teatism. In the first of the four chapters, he explains the general quality of the drink, how to plant tea trees and harvest the leaves. Then, in the second chapter, he states the principle of the tea ceremony as follows:

For in this manner of entertainment and etiquette, no attention is paid to rank either by the host or the guest, for both nobles and people of lesser standing who practice this art are regarded as equals whilst engaged in it. . . . So this gathering for cha and conversation is not intended for lengthy talk among themselves, but rather to contemplate within their soul with all peace and modesty the things they see there and thus through their own efforts to understand the mysteries locked therein.⁵⁴

Here, Rodrigues identifies the characteristics of a tea ceremony, remarks the equality presumed among the attendants, and distinguishes it from other manners of tea drinking that were current in Japan.

Because of his advanced knowledge of Japanese language, he particularly distinguishes what he believed to be the true tea ceremony, “*suki* (or *suky*, *suqi*),” 数奇 from general tea drinking, “*chanoyu*.” 茶の湯 *Suki* is an important concept in the way of tea that refers to the virtue of rejecting superficial beauty and loving the quality hidden inside things.⁵⁵ The etymology of *suki* is obscure, but it probably derived from the verb *suku*, to have affection. In one of the classic treatises on the tea ceremony, *Zen cha roku* 禅茶録, it says that *suki* “means to delight in an austere and pure poverty and is close to being an admonition to subdue desires and cravings.”⁵⁶ By suggesting delight in pure poverty, it is meant that the truth is to be found where one’s mind is indifferent to worldly finery and sophistication. Other important terms that have to do with the aesthetics of the tea ceremony are *wabi* 侘び and *sabi* 寂び; Rodrigues does not say much about these but introduces *wabi zuki* to be a popular version of the *suki* tea ceremony practiced by people who do not have the means to own expensive cups and utensils.⁵⁷

Rodrigues’s third chapter on Japanese tea culture focuses on the *suki* tea ceremony. He recounts his own experience of participating in a tea ceremony as follows:

54. Ibid., 282.

55. On the philosophical aesthetics of *suki*, see Hirota, 106—10.

56. Hirota, 281. Hisamatsu, 170—92.

57. Joao Rodrigues’s *Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, 305.

Once he (the host) has withdrawn, the guests open the gate (of the garden where the tea house is located), enter, and then lock it again from the inside. They sit there in an arbor for a short while, relaxing and gazing at the wood. Then as they walk along the path through the wood up to the cha house, they quietly contemplate everything there—the wood itself, individual trees in their natural state and setting, the paving stones, and the rough stone trough for washing the hands.⁵⁸

Comparing this account with Hammitzsch’s modern experience of the tea ceremony, it is interesting that there is a noticeable connection between the experience of going away from everyday business and the world of quiet contemplation. After thus describing the setting of a teahouse, Rodrigues continues to state each detail of a full-course tea ceremony, including the formal greeting by the host, the ritual of lighting the stove, the serving of the meal and sweets, and finally the preparation and sharing of tea.

Rodrigues rightly understands the origin of the way of tea was Zen Buddhism, and says that the solemn *suki* tea ceremony developed out of imitating the way of the Zen philosophers, “as regards its eremitical seclusion and withdrawal from all dealings in social matters, its resolution and mental alertness in everything . . .”⁵⁹ He then speaks of certain Sakai men who built the tea house which

represented, as far as the limited site allowed, the style of lonely houses found in the countryside, or like the cells of solitaries who dwell in hermitages far removed from people and give themselves over to the contemplation of the things of nature and its First Cause.⁶⁰

It is very likely that when speaking of “certain Sakai men” Rodrigues is referring to Rikyū. Also, his reference to the contemplation of the First Cause seems to indicate his own interpretation (despite being incorrect) of the *suki*, which attempts to see the truth of things beyond their exterior beauty or ugliness.

The tea enthusiast Rodrigues does not hesitate to acknowledge the tea ceremony’s closeness to Zen Buddhism. This is because the Jesuit observed, “[a]lthough they imitate the Zen

58. Ibid., 301. Parenthesis mine.

59. Ibid., 289.

60. Ibid., 291.

sect in this art, they do not practice any superstition, cult, or special ceremony related to religion.”⁶¹ What is especially interesting about Rodrigues’s statement on Zen, included in his chapters on the tea ceremony, is that he seems to have gained at least some knowledge about Zen schools through his own experience of the tea ceremony and interaction with tea masters. He writes about the Zen “philosophers”:

*This (art of suki) is in imitation of the solitary philosophers of the Zen sects who dwell in their retreats in the wilderness. Their vocation is not to philosophize with the help of books and treatises written by illustrious masters and philosophers as do members of the other sects of the Indian gymnosophists. Instead, they give themselves up to contemplating the things of nature, despising and abandoning worldly things. They mortify their passions by certain enigmatic and figurative meditations and considerations that guide them on their way at the beginning. Thus, from what they see in things themselves they attain by their own efforts to a knowledge of the First Cause. Their soul and intellect put aside everything evil and imperfect until they reach the natural perfection and being of the First Cause.*⁶²

It is evident that Rodrigues knew of some specifics of Zen meditational practice such as *kōan* (riddles given for meditation). Notwithstanding his confusion of taking the end of Zen to be the attainment of knowledge of the First Cause, Rodrigues’s attitude towards Zen Buddhism is objective and far from being hostile or contentious. Rather, as far as the statement above indicates, he recognizes Zen as a pagan effort to gain the knowledge of God or the Creator (he seems to have never understood the concept of enlightenment) and refrains from placing judgment upon the Buddhist efforts for advancing in meditation.

4. 4. Christian Tea Master Takayama Ukon

As we have seen, the particular setting of the Japanese tea ceremony provided opportunities for the Jesuits to interact with Zen Buddhism. The interaction was indirect, but not entirely futile, since the missionaries directly experienced some very significant aspects of Japanese religion and aesthetics. Also, it is important to note here that the way of tea helped

61. Ibid., 289.

62. Ibid., 288—9. Parenthesis mine.

Japanese Christians to advance in their prayers and discernment.⁶³ Among the Japanese converts of the period, there were many tea masters and practitioners, and scholars believe that five of the seven direct disciples of Rikyū were Christians.⁶⁴

According to Rodrigues, the Christian lord of Takatsuki, Justo Takayama Ukon,⁶⁵ was one of the true masters of the tea ceremony who mastered the *suki*. Rodrigues says of Ukon,

He was wont to remark, as we several times heard him, that he found suki a great help towards virtue and recollection for those who practiced it and really understood its purpose. Thus he used to say that in order to commend himself to God he would retire to that small house with a statue, and there according to the custom that he had formed he found peace and recollection in order to command himself to God.⁶⁶

Ukon was one of the seven disciples of Rikyū, and Rodrigues notes that he was highly esteemed by both Japanese Christians and non-Christians as a master of the way of tea. Rodrigues’s account also informs us that the teahouse was the place where Ukon retired to as he needed to meditate and “command himself to God.” The principle of indifference to worldly affairs may have helped Ukon to find peace and recollection in being a tea master, warlord, and Christian all at the same time, and helped him to discern the right action in difficult situations. Discernment for the tea masters, however, was not the same as the discernment between “good” and “evil” or a choice of one way over the other. Rather, it had to do with discerning the proper quality and harmony that are hidden in the phenomenal world. It was not the question of choosing one over the other, but of maintaining both in a harmonious relationship. As Rodrigues observed, Ukon found that *suki* was a great help for virtue, and successfully incorporated the way of tea into his spiritual growth as a Christian.

63. For further reflection on the cross-sections of the way of tea and Christianity, see Peter Milward, *Ocha to Misa*, trans. by Sadanori Bekku and Kaoru Moriuchi (Tokyo: PHP Kenkusho, 1995). Nakamaro Abe, *Shinkō no Bigaku* (Yokohama: Shunpusha, 2005), 77—82.

64. Herbert Cieslik “Chado to Kirishitan no Deai,” *Kirishitan Bunka Kenkyūkai Kaihō*, 17/1 (1975), 607. Tei Nishimura discusses each of Rikyū’s seven major disciples and their relation to Christianity. Tei Nishimura, *Kirishitan to Chadō* (Kyoto: Zenkokushobo, 1948).

65. On Takayama Ukon, see, Johannes Laures, *Takayama Ukon no Shōgai* (Tokyo: Enderle, 1948). Nishimura, *Kirishitan to Chadō*, esp. 101.

66. Rodrigues’s *Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, 308.

5. Conclusion

In the late sixteenth century, the tea ceremony provided a space where the European missionaries could peacefully engage in cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue with the Japanese. The mode of the dialogue, however, was entirely different from other concurrent interactions, such as doctrinal disputations or violent attacks and destruction on each other. Rather, the dialogue was carried out in the manner of silent communion with other participants of the ceremony. Thanks to the impartiality of the space of the tea ceremony and the meditative atmosphere secured through the unique code of manners, missionaries had a chance to experience a peaceful moment of communion with the Japanese that transcended the differences in their religious faiths. The majority of the missionaries, however, were indifferent to the way of tea as spiritual practice, but used tea drinking as a tool to establish their status in Japanese society. Other missionaries, Almeida, Fróis, and Rodrigues in particular, commended the space of the tea ceremony for its religio-aesthetic significance. Further, the case of Takayama Ukon indicates that the Japanese Christian tea master utilized his teahouse for spiritual practices. Notwithstanding its origin in Zen, it was the radical inclusiveness and spiritual openness inherent in the tea ceremony that helped the Japanese Christians to advance in contemplation and find peace with the Japanese accommodation of Christianity established in the realm of tea.

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