

The Nature of *Sadō*¹ Culture²

HISAMATSU SHIN'ICHI

SADŌ culture is one of the first things to which scholars and learned men of the West turn their attention when going about a serious study of Japanese culture. This is primarily because it is of a foreign nature and strange for them. Further, it may be because they regard *sadō* culture as a high culture, which though lacking in the West, cannot be passed over lightly or dismissed, and because it seems to them to be somehow profound though not easily understandable. Although *sadō* culture is of a very different nature for them, and is not easy for them to comprehend with sufficient exhaustiveness, nevertheless, they regard it as having deep cultural value. What is this unique Japanese culture of the way of tea? Where are the special characteristics by which this culture differs from Western civilization?

If we want to say in a word what the culture of the tea cult is then I think we can say that it is an all-embracing cultural system created with drinking tea (*matcha*, i.e. powdered green tea) as an essential element. The culture of *sadō* in its synthesizing and unified aspect is comprehensive. *Nōgaku*,³ for instance, is certainly a typical element of Japanese culture, but it does not have an all-embracing cultural form. However *sadō* has a synthetic cultural unity which cannot be found in other fields. It not only includes art, ethics and morality, philosophy, but even religion, in short, all manner of different aspects of culture. It absorbs all of these into one cultural system.

*The footnotes have been added by the translator.

¹ *Sadō* (茶道), literally the way of tea, is usually referred to in the West as *cha no yu* or the tea ceremony. "Se" is an alternative pronunciation of the word "cha."

² *Bunka* (文化), means culture or civilization in either the spiritual or material sense or both taken together as a whole.

³ *Nōgaku* (能楽), usually known in the West as *Nō* drama or *Nob*.

In the realm of art there is, for architecture, the *chasbitsu* or house for the tea-cult, for gardening, the *roji*⁴, for crafts there are the various implements and works of art used in the cult itself. The manner of carrying out the cult not only has an ethical meaning but the beauty of movement and gesture is of great importance. It should be emphasized that even the way of moving the body shows a refined, polished, artistic skill. All of these acts and skills are brought together into one formal arrangement, something not to be seen outside the way of tea.

With regard to moral principles the way of tea has something of truly great depth. It provides many rules and precepts not merely for the way of performing the *temae*⁵ at the place for the cult but also for every day living. They are standards of conduct for the tea-man. But nowadays even though the rules and precepts remain, the type of spirit that gave rise to them is completely forgotten. Therefore such things occur: the tea-man is said to be a person of a crabbed and spiteful nature, and although his manner for the *temae* is splendid, if one enters the *mizuya*⁶ one finds his attitude is not good at all; while learning the tea-cult the inside of his house is in a disordered, sloppy state. Since this is missing the spirit of tea, this kind of *sadō* degenerates into a mere pastime in the *chasbitsu*; the way of tea does not become an active part of everyday life. The way of tea consists of rules covering a subtle, delicate consideration for others beyond what the ordinary person would notice. When we view this we can feel a deep respect for the spirit of the men who laid down these precepts. In the tea cult there are scrupulous moral codes beyond the reach of everyday thinking. The basis of the rules of tea consists of consideration for the guest. They are a formal manifestation of this. This attitude is both of a moral and of a lofty and deeply careful, thorough nature.

Furthermore, there is philosophy in *sadō*. When one reads the "scriptures"

⁴ *Roji* (露地), the specially made garden surrounding the *chasbitsu*.

⁵ *Temae* (点前), the actual ritual of preparing and serving tea performed by the host in the presence of the guests.

⁶ *Mizuya* (水屋), the small nook or corner (not usually visible from where the guests are) for washing, drying, and storing the tea implements. It is regarded as being exactly equal in importance to the place where the guests drink tea because it is the place for preparing the mind as well as preparing the implements.

of tea such as the *Nanbōroku* (南坊錄)⁷ of Sen Rikyū⁸, one finds there a philosophy which is profound indeed. These works, though one can hardly say that they are academically and structurally well ordered, are truly very deep. Even among the philosophical systems of the West it is not easy to find anything quite comparable with them. Among the classics of tea the *Zencha-roku* (禪茶錄; Zen Tea Records)⁹, I think, consists of such a philosophical systematization.

From the standpoint of religion in *sadō* there is the Awakening (*satori*) of the way of tea. The "founder of tea," Rikyū, is not only known by posterity but was even known during his own age as a tea-man of Great Awakening. The Awakening of *sadō* is no shallow and ephemeral upsurge of sentimental feeling, but rather of a religious nature which, rooted in humanity, penetrates to the very heart of man. One can say that this is the basis of the cultural system on which the way of tea rests. The connection between the way of tea and religion is not merely due to there being religious persons among tea-men or the old tea-masters but is rather due to the fact that religion is the very foundation of Japanese *sadō* culture; it is the root from whence it sprang.

From the above, one can see that the way of tea is a rarely to be found comprehensive cultural unity. Even in the West such an all-embracing system is not to be found. It is called Japanese *sadō* culture simply because in this systematized tea culture characteristics of a peculiarly Japanese nature are found. It is not simply that the peculiar feature can be found in this unified and comprehensive system of *sadō* culture, a culture created by the act of drinking tea, but rather that in its characteristics there is a special nature.

At this point let us examine the characteristic of *sadō* culture in detail. If we try to pick out this nature or set of characteristics inductively from the developed synthesis of *sadō* culture I think we can more or less divide it into the following seven heads: 1) Asymmetry (*fukinsei*, 不均齊), 2) Simplicity (*kanso*, 簡素),

⁷ *Nanbōroku*. A book traditionally said to have been recorded by a man named Nanbō Sōkei (南坊宗啓, dates unknown) concerning the essence of *sadō* as he learned them from his teacher Sen Rikyū.

⁸ 千利休. (1522-1591), the founder of *sadō*.

⁹ *Zencha-roku*. A book, first printed in 1828, which emphasizes the inseparable relation of Zen and *Sadō*. Of the author, Jakuan Sōtaku (寂庵宗沢) nothing definite is known.

3) *Kokō*¹⁰ (枯高), 4) Naturalness (*sbizen*, 自然), 5) *Tūgen* (幽玄)¹⁰ 6) Unworldliness (*datsuzoku*, 脱俗) 7) Tranquility (*seijaku*, 静寂). Let us examine these heads one by one.

1) Asymmetry

Asymmetry is the absence of the balance found in symmetry. The easiest way to illustrate this is by taking a tea-bowl used in the tea-cult. Of course there are many tea-bowls which are symmetrical, but, as bowls truly suitable for *sadō*, more of them are of an asymmetrical shape. There are bowls of an irregular shape with the right and left sides of different shape, ones without symmetry, ones with an uneven surface consisting of bumps and indentations with a high foot (*kōdai*, 高台) or base of crooked shape, and ones in which the glaze does not completely cover the whole tea-bowl. Rather than a bowl of a regular and symmetrical shape, this type has something of interest and arouses a feeling of appreciation. A rice-bowl¹¹ is symmetrical but one cannot drink ceremonial tea from it; for drinking tea in *sadō* a bowl of irregular shape is better. One may say that this holds true not only for the tea-bowl but also in the case of the tea-caddie (*chaire*, 茶入), flower-container (*kaki*, 花器), water-vessel (*mizusashi*, 水指), tea-house, etc.; that is, for all of the objects used in the way of tea.

Things of regular shape are not interesting. One can point out that the interest and taste contained in something asymmetrical is a special characteristic of *sadō* culture. This asymmetry expressed in other words is called *suki* (数奇). According to a certain explanation the ideograph *ki* (奇) of *suki* comes from the *ki* of *kiū* (奇数) meaning odd-number as opposed to even number. *Kiū* is something odd which cannot be divided and thus is "asymmetrical." If we refer to *sadō* by the analogy of numbers then it can be thought of as not an even but rather an odd number.

Asymmetry is a destruction of perfection. On this point I cannot completely agree with the understanding of Okakura Tenshin (岡倉天心).¹² Tenshin

¹⁰ *Kokō* (austere sublimity) and *yūgen* (subtle profundity) have no direct English equivalents. They will be explained in detail below by the author.

¹¹ The same word *chawan* (茶碗) means both a common rice-bowl and a tea-bowl used for *sadō*.

¹² Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覚三 (1892-1913), the author of *The Book of Tea*, Charles E. Tuttle Co.

explains asymmetry as a process which reaches perfection, but I think of it as something which destroys perfection. Asymmetry goes beyond perfection and negates it. For instance, if you get a child to draw a circle he cannot do it skillfully. However hard he tries he cannot draw one well. But an adult can easily draw a geometrically perfect circle. However a somewhat warped circle with a feeling of interest is not something easily done. Expressing asymmetry in terms of proper style (*shin* 眞), running style (*gyō*, 行), and grass style (*sō*, 草),¹³ it corresponds to grass style, the style which is made by demolishing the proper style. The grass style holds our interest which cannot be held by the proper style. Among different types of the tea cult we find *sadō* of *wabi*,¹⁴ *suki*, and *sōanfū*.¹⁵ These, I think, can be considered grass style. Thus this condition of being deformed has a very important meaning.

2) Simplicity

This means that which is not tedious or gaudy, that which is uncomplex. It also implies that which is neat and tidy, unsophisticated. Upon looking at the architecture of a tea-house anyone cannot but feel clearly the extreme simplicity of its construction. When Westerners state the essence of *sadō* culture to be simplicity one can say that this is generally pertinent. One can see this in Bruno Taut's¹⁶ view of the Katsura Detached Palace. But the inner meaning of the simplicity found in *sadō* culture is truly very difficult for Westerners to understand. For instance, even Bruno Taut disposes of the character of the construction of Ise Shrine and the tea-house of Katsura Detached Palace equally as examples of simplicity. But the simplicity of Ise Shrine and the tea-house are essentially different in content.

¹³ *Shin*, *gyō*, *sō* are equivalent to *kai*, *gyō*, *sō*. The latter three are technical terms of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, indicating respectively the formal, semi-formal, and informal styles. The former three have the same meaning, but are widely applied to matters outside of calligraphy, to such elements of traditional Japanese culture as the tea-cult, floral art, and architecture.

¹⁴ *Wabi* (侘び), is the most suitable term to characterize the nature of *sadō*, a term including within itself all of the seven characteristics of *sadō* discussed below.

¹⁵ *Sōanfū* (草庵風), literally "grass hut style."

¹⁶ Bruno Taut (1880-1938), a German architect. His books include *Grundlinien der Architektur Japans*, Tōkyō, 1936, and *Houses and Peoples of Japan*. Tōkyō, 1937.

If we ask where this difference lies, I think we can say that it is in the fact that the very root of *sadō* culture is *mu* (無).¹⁷ The simplicity of *sadō* is simplicity as an expression of *mu*. It is a manifestation of *mu*. The hanging scroll, that is, the painting in the tea-house, for instance, the picture of persimmons by the famous Mokkei (牧溪)¹⁸ can be taken as an example of this. Such a thing is not to be comprehended as simplicity in an ordinary sense.

On the other hand, among folk-crafts there are objects which have the fascination of the beauty of simplicity. This simplicity is much talked about these days but the simplicity of folk-crafts and that contained in *sadō* culture are completely different. The simplicity of the way of tea is not a raw, unrefined type, but rather something which is simple and elegantly natural which we can say is of the nature of *sabi* (寂び),¹⁹ a neatness and cleanness, (*seiso* 清楚) a lightness of touch (*karumi* 軽み). For example, in a tea-house there is somehow a quality of lightness. There is a rusticity. For instance, the pillars of a tea-house are never what one could call pretty, they are rough and unfinished. This also falls within the realm of simplicity. There is also a certain artlessness, single-mindedness and even a frightening aspect.

3) *Kokō*

Kokō (枯高)²⁰ is a condition where all trace of sensuousness has been removed. It has no sensuality or rawness, unripeness. A certain ripeness, aged quality falls under this category. It means something passed down through the ages and of long experience. This is a very important characteristic of *sadō* culture. It can in other words be expressed by the term *sabi*; the word *shibui* (渋い) is also fitting. In something having *sabi* (in the sense of antique patina) there is no element

¹⁷ The Buddhist concept of Nothingness, which is another term for *nirvāṇa*. It may be said to correspond more or less with, though strictly different from, the Nothing found in the Writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, St. John of the Cross, etc.; not a nihilistic Nothing. *Vide* Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness" *Philosophical Studies of Japan*, Vol. II 1960, Tōkyō, and Abe Masao "God, Emptiness, and the True Self" *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, Vol. II, No. 2, 1969.

¹⁸ Mokkei, in Chinese Mu ch'i, flourished at the end of the Sung (960-1297) Period. This work is traditionally attributed to him.

¹⁹ *Sabi* (寂び) will be explained by the author in section 3) *Kokō*.

²⁰ This is somewhat similar to the widely used term *shibui*, and means literally withered (枯) and lofty (高).

of the unripe, the raw. Strength is hidden, there is a sense of age, mellowness. The implements for the tea-cult must be objects which have passed through the ages, otherwise they cannot have *sabi*.

Furthermore there is a noble, graceful aspect in *sabi*. I think that, as works of calligraphy, the pieces by Daitō Kokushi²¹ are most appropriate for use in the tea-cult. In his calligraphic works there is *sabi* and, furthermore, nobility and a pithy, vigorous style. *Sabi* has vigour and the quality of manliness. For the *temae* in the tea-room when such characteristics appear it really becomes a proper *temae*.

4) Naturalness

This is a condition of *musbin* (無心),²² *munen* (無念),²³ the will or intention does not show. Without artifice or design, straight-forward without intent or purpose expresses this quality. A thing which shows its artificial intention, i.e. its artificiality, is an ugly thing. A tea-bowl made by an expert artisan is asymmetrical, but, more important, its asymmetry does not cause the slightest feeling of artificiality. It is honest, straight-forward, and natural.

These days there are many objects that give one a disgusting feeling of added artificiality. Things that naturally have *sabi* are good, but things which have been given *sabi* artificially, that is, by design or intention are definitely not proper. It is even written in the *Genryū sawa* (源流茶話),²⁴ "The style and quality of a tea-cult which has the nature of *sabi* is proper but that to which *sabi* has been artificially added is bad." For artifice to be noticeable is not proper. In the motions involved in carrying out the *temae* there must be a naturalness. These must be performed in a spirit of *musbin*. There is a poem cited in the *Nanbōroku*, "If you think about no-thinking you are still thinking; do not think even about no-thinking."²⁵

5) *Yūgen*

One can say that *yūgen* is profound and refined gracefulness (*okuyukashisa*

²¹ Daitō Kokushi, (1281-1337) the famous Zen Master of the Rinzai school in Japan who founded Daitoku-ji.

^{22, 23} No mind and no thought in the Buddhist sense. *Vide* foot-note 17.

²⁴ *Genryū sawa*. A book on *sadō* by Yabunouchi Chikushin (藪内竹心 1678-1745).

²⁵ An old verse, the author of which is unknown.

奥味しき). It has a placid, composed nature embracing the infinite and a charm of suggestiveness or aftertaste which cannot be sufficiently expressed. Even in the greetings and words exchanged during the tea-cult, if their way of talking is suitable and fitting for the way of tea there is naturally the flavour of *yūgen*. If there is not an atmosphere of refined gracefulness in everything then the cult has no value. There is a depth in the suggestiveness, the lingering feeling of aftertaste. Whenever you look there are each time different moods or artistic effects; this means that there is bottomless depth.

Beside profundity *yūgen* has at the same time a darkness. Too much brightness is not regarded well in the way of tea, but, although one talks about darkness, this is not the darkness of gloom or melancholy, nor is it that of the demonic. It is rather that of self-composed gracefulness. This darkness is very important; it is of a special type. Even in the movements for performing the tea-cult there must be this darkness in which is included a certain shadow element. This can be also thought of as a serious gravity. And yet this *yūgen* is not in contradiction to simplicity.

6) Unworldliness

Upon leaving the *roji* and entering the tea-room one forgets the everyday world. One casts off the spirit of the vulgar, does away with all worldly thoughts and, leaving the mundane behind, enters a world of purity. Shaking off the dust of the everyday world is the spiritual attitude that one takes upon entering the *roji*. The tea-garden must be constructed in such a way as to cause people to receive this feeling. That one washes one's hands, rinses one's mouth at the *tsukubai* (a wash-basin made of stone in the garden) must mean that one purifies one's heart and mind. This unworldliness is not merely an escape from the vulgar everyday world. Having purified one's heart one must once more re-enter the vulgar world and work.

In unworldliness there is something which is not bound by laws and rules. When Sen Rikyū said, "I awakened to the one rule of the heart (*kokoro no hitotsu gane* 心の一つ尺)" it means that through extreme practice and training all of the rules and laws, become naturally a part of one's very being and one reaches the level of the Law of No-Law. Thus one becomes a person who is unconstrained, unconventional (*shadatsu* 洒脱). One not only becomes mentally detached oneself, but makes others so. At the tea-room talk of such vulgar

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mundane things as money-making is strictly forbidden. Topics must be free from the dust of the world; even in the way of talking the same manner is fitting and suitable.

7) Tranquility

Tranquility refers to a settled, quiet, unturbulent quality, also an inward-looking spirit. In *sadō* it goes without saying that in speech and manner of movement everything must be calm and self-possessed. The manner of talking must be such as to induce composure. Both tea-bowls and hanging scrolls must not be loud or gaudy. A self-composed quietness is very important for performing the *temae*. The principle, "Motion existing in a state of rest," which implies that movement arouses a feeling of quietness that is itself moving, is important. Even in daily life self-possession and composure are required; in *sadō* culture tranquility is essential.

Above, we have spoken of the seven characteristics of *sadō* culture but these seven qualities are not combined together deriving from various separate sources, they all spring from one original source. They are not by origin separate entities, but are rather the attributes of one single entity. *Sadō* culture is one unified whole. Unless these seven characteristics are present we cannot speak of *sadō* culture. It may be safely said that even one characteristic cannot be missing. By its very essential nature the way of tea has oneness with these seven qualities united together. When this oneness manifests itself it inherently possesses these seven. This one is *mu*. This *mu* is indeed the creative source which has made Japanese *sadō* culture. *Mu* is the creative subject which has created *sadō* culture by drinking tea as an essential moment. In the *Nanbōroku* too it is written, "The essence of *wabi* is a manifestation of the eternal purity of the Buddha-world." Since this *mu* was alive within tea-men it showed itself upon all occasions. In this we find the creation of *sadō* culture.

For instance Korean pottery has long been selected by Japanese tea-men and a great many pieces have become national treasures of Japan. This is because within the old tea-men *mu* was alive and they could judge and select articles in keeping with the spirit of *mu*. What is called *konomi* (好み) means a liking or a selecting of something among things already given. This is a creative act. Also there is the type of *konomi* which is not a liking of something among articles

already given, but rather having others make something in accordance with one's taste or fancy. Among tea-men there are various kinds of *konomi*, but they are all the taste of a person who has *mu* living within him. If *mu* is not alive within the person in question then his preference becomes a case of being a mere copy or worse, a plagiarism. To be able to have *konomi* in its true sense one must have the creative spirit of the way of tea.

This applies likewise to the form or etiquette of the way of tea. When *mu* is active in one's heart then form is not mere form, but rather that in which one can realize the highest freedom. On the contrary, without *mu* being alive, form or etiquette becomes mere outward form devoid of meaning. It becomes mere parrot mimicking and an example of vulgar bad taste. In such a case the way of tea becomes only an affair of the tea-room, and daily life must become separate from it. The way of tea is not that kind of thing. It must be a part of everyday living.

The creative spirit of the way of tea is *mu*. *Mu* is not a subject of appreciation, it is a subject of creation. It creates all things. When *mu* comes to life in the heart of a man then he becomes a tea-man. Becoming such a tea-man is the true essence of the way of tea. This is a great human task of weighty importance. Now that one is to learn the way of tea one's *mu* must be alive, and, in accordance with *mu* one must, so to speak, create one's environment. One must realize the way of subjectivity (*shutai-do* 主体道).²⁶ Through *sado* one must practice the human way by self-discipline, spiritual exercise. If one considers *sado* to be merely a question of taste or pleasure, it is better to give it up.

In present day *sado* this most important *mu* is completely lacking. This is truly a deplorable fact. For us there is nothing more important than to restore the original nature of the way of tea. We who are connected with Kyōto University and who are interested in the way of tea have formed the *Shinbukai* (心茶會, literally Heart Tea Group, i.e. a group to practice a Zen approach to tea and through tea), at the house of the head of the Ura-senke School of Tea, and, in accordance with our special methods, practise *sesshin* (禪心, a concentrated Zen discipline) every week with the single purpose of attaining the heart or mind of

²⁶ *Shutai-dō* (主体道), a term peculiar to the author, may be taken as being identical to the "True man" in Lin-chi's sense. See Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "Zen: Its meaning for Modern Civilization," *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, Vol. I, No. 1. p. 27-32.

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sadō. Our *Shinobukai* endeavours to attain this spiritual state by the dual methods of *ji* (事) and *ri* (理),²⁷ that is, in the present case, *temae* and *zazen* (Zen sitting meditation). The "father of *sadō*," the Buddhist layman Rikyū, gave great emphasis to this spiritual approach. Stating in the *Nambōroku*, "The most important thing for *cha no yu* in a small room is to practise and attain the Buddhist Dharma," Rikyū practised Zen profoundly. There is nothing here of sectarian Zen, but rather the practising of *mu*. This is the most important thing in *sadō*.

Translated by Patrick Macgill James
in Collaboration with Abe Masao

²⁷ A combined terminology of the Kegon (Hua-yen) school of Buddhism. *ji* means the actual, particular, and concrete, while *ri* indicates a principle, the universal, and absolute. See D. T. Suzuki, *The Essence of Buddhism*, London 1947, p. 51 ff.