

Can Tea Save Non-warriors and Women? The Japanese Tea Ceremony as an Empowering Public Sphere

ETSUKO KATO

Introduction

This article elucidates how the Japanese tea ceremony, or *sadō/chadō*, has provided its practitioners in Japan with a unique type of “public sphere” throughout its 400-year history, especially after World War II. As an art of making tea by a host and drinking it by guest(s) in a highly elaborated style, the tea ceremony presupposes a gathering of people. Yet, unlike the public sphere in 17th and 18th century Europe which, according to Habermas (1962), was a forum for citizens’ free, critical discussions, first on art and literature, and later on politics, and thus a cradle of democracy, the public sphere the tea ceremony creates has not led to new political ideas or movements. Rather, it became de-politicized in the course of time.

Still, the tea ceremony’s public sphere has its own, unique empowering effects on the practitioners *because* of its apolitical character. Diachronic comparison between social groups that practice(d) the tea ceremony today and in the Edo period (1603–1867), namely, women and non-warriors, indicates that the art has been especially welcomed by “politically second-from-top” people. In the past and the present these social groups have created a public sphere which promotes interaction not only between members of their own ranks, but also with those who are politically more powerful than themselves. In other words, even if it does not lead to political changes, a forum for aesthetic and intellectual communication can lead to empowerment of political subordinates in its own way.

To illustrate this, I will first overview the practice and the history of the Japanese tea ceremony. Next I will summarize Habermas’ theses on the political nature of public sphere and Ikegami’s (2005) critique of Habermas from the viewpoint of Japanese art. According to Ikegami, Japanese *za* art (“sitting-in-a-group” art), of which the tea ceremony is a part, creates apolitical public spheres. After reviewing Ikegami’s argument by probing how

politically subordinate groups practiced the tea ceremony in feudal and early modern times to empower themselves, I will depict, based on my own anthropological fieldwork, how contemporary female tea-ceremony practitioners maintain their own public sphere for the same purpose. Here I will elucidate both similarities and differences between these women and the practitioners in previous eras, in terms of the practitioners' social positions, motivation for practice, and how they create a public sphere out of the art.

The Practice and the History of the Tea Ceremony

The Japanese tea ceremony is a "highly structured method of preparing powdered green tea in the company of guests" (*Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* 1993). Established in the mid-16th century, it today represents one of the so-called traditional arts in Japan. One cannot ever exhaust description of how the ceremony is practiced: In a specially structured room with a sunken hearth, a host boils water, puts green tea powder into a teacup, pours hot water into the cup, whisks, and offers the cup to the guests, using specially designed utensils and doing so in a highly formalized manner. Then the guests, also in a highly formalized manner, sip the tea and pass the cup around.

In contemporary Japan the tea ceremony is regarded as high culture and a "classy" hobby. Each school has its specific set of body movements for making tea, and it takes years or decades for pupils to learn them all. These specific manners (*temae*) are learned from teachers who are licensed by certain schools. Pupils, too, need a license in order to learn the movements. Teacher and students have regular lessons (*keiko*) at the teacher's house or in public institutions like community centers. Those who have learned basic movements sometimes attend formal tea ceremony gatherings (*chakai*) hosted by other practitioners; those at a more advanced level host their own *chakai*. Practitioners at further advanced levels can host or attend a more exclusive, more formal, more time-consuming gathering called *chaji*, though the opportunities are rare today.

Besides being trained in the bodily movements, the practitioners are expected to have knowledgeable of ceramics, flowers, calligraphy, history, Zen Buddhism and other related areas in order to appreciate and have a formal dialogue with other practitioners on utensils, room decorations, tea, sweets and so forth. Pupils obtain such knowledge from teachers or by self-education.

Elsewhere I have pointed out the difficulties in explaining the *raison d'être* of the tea ceremony (Kato 2004:26). One may be tempted to define it as a religious ceremony. The mainstream discourses argue that this cultural

activity was established by wealthy merchants from the late 15th to mid 16th centuries, emphasizing the founders' piety as Zen Buddhists. They are claimed to have been enthusiastic Zen Buddhists, who introduced Zen thinking and temple decorum into the new ceremonial art they created. I, however, question whether they had any necessity to create such a ceremony. Rather I argue that they invented this pseudo-aristocratic art for their own empowerment, as will be discussed later. The merchants' invention was eagerly learned by warriors, the ruling class of the time, and spread rapidly among them. Throughout the following three centuries the tea ceremony continued to be practiced by both merchants and warriors, while being spread among artisans and wealthy peasants too, most of whom were men.

It was not until the late 19th century, when Japan was remodeled as a Western-style modern nation-state, that the ceremony became popular among women. By the early 20th century the number of women practitioners is supposed to have surpassed that of men. After World War II, this cultural activity was dominated by women, although the heads of each school are hereditarily men even today. I will come back to all these and other historical details later.

In the next two sections I would like to explore the tea ceremony from the viewpoint of "public sphere".

"Public Sphere" as Political and Apolitical Site(s)

The academic importance of the concept of "public sphere" is emphasized and most thoroughly discussed by Jürgen Habermas (1962). According to Habermas, the emergence of coffee houses in Great Britain, salons in France, and *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies) or *Sprachgesellschaften* (language societies) in Germany in the 17th and 18th centuries provided the bourgeois, an economically upwardly mobile social group at that time, with "centers of criticism – literary at first, then also political" (Habermas [1962]1989:32).

According to Habermas, these "centers" had three institutional criteria in common. First the disregard of the status of members:

The coffee house not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers... [T]he "wealthy shop keeper" visited the coffee house several times a day, this held true for the poor one as well. (Habermas [1962]1989:33, citing Traveleyan 1944:324 and *National Review* 1857:301)

In such gatherings, which nurtured the idea of "the public", not only "power and prestige of public office were held in suspense; economic dependencies

also in principle had no influence” (Habermas [1962] 1989:36). This institutionalized, temporary equality between members of different social and economic status is especially important for the current discussion.

The second criterion of the “centers” is the problematization of areas that hitherto had not been questioned, such as the interpretation of works of art, which had been monopolized by state and church authorities. The third criterion is the idea of the public as an open, inclusive category (Habermas [1962] 1989:36). With these characteristics, the “centers” opened a new communication sphere, which Habermas calls “public sphere”. Free from the existing political and religious authorities, it thereby encouraged bourgeois critical thinking and nurtured democracy.

Eiko Ikegami (2005) critiques the above concepts in at least four points. First, she argues that Habermas’ analysis is “a case study of this hegemonic process in which one category of the liberal bourgeois public sphere gained normative authority”. Meanwhile there can be “multiple publics”, that is, different social groups and communication networks maintained by each of them (Ikegami 2005:59–60). Second, a public sphere does not necessarily lead people to have rational and critical discussion, but can let them remain in aesthetic, apolitical communication (Ikegami 2005:73). Third, public spheres can be created physically outside the social organizations and not necessarily in coffee houses or guild buildings in the middle of the town, (Ikegami 2005:73). And, fourth, human relationships in the public sphere need not be durable, but can be casual and momentary (Ikegami 2005:61).

Za Art in Feudal Japan as an Apolitical and Aesthetic Public Sphere

Behind Ikegami’s critique of Habermas is her advocacy of feudal Japanese artistic activities as sites of a public sphere. What she especially has in mind is *za no bungei* (*za* art and literature), a type of art which is “performed collectively within a group of seated (*za*) participants” (Ikegami 2005:76). *Za* art is supposed to have been established during the Warring States Period (1467–1568), a time of unceasing wars between landlord warriors and of political turmoil. This politically unstable period forced individuals (especially warriors and merchants, I argue) to create their own safety net, that is, a human network embracing different social strata; and this political movement was combined with aesthetic activities (Ikegami 2005:109). Typified by *renga* (linked poetry), or linked verse composition by a group of poets sitting together with each poet contributing stanzas in turn (Ikegami 2005:77), *za* art presupposed a gathering of people as a site of spontaneous and col-

laborative creation of beauty. In the tea ceremony, too, the aesthetics of in-a-lifetime encounter (*ichigo-ichie*) between those gathered, and the spontaneous interaction and atmosphere born there were highly valued.

Ikegami accentuates the characteristics of *za* sites as partly overlapping with, but different from, those of European bourgeois circles described by Habermas. First, *za* sites, like bourgeois circles, allow people of different social positions to meet in horizontal relationship. Unlike their European counterparts, however, *za* art values an “aesthetic enclave”, that is, retreat from existing organizations, both in philosophy and in space. The tea ceremony, for instance, is preferably preformed in a small hut in woods outside the town, or at least in the replica of such a hut and woods re-created in the town. In this sense it is different from 16th-century German *Meistergesang*, which is also a collective creation of art but was a “central manifestation of solidarity” of pre-existing organizations, guilds (Ikegami 2005:72–73).

Second, Ikegami emphasizes *za* sites as purely aesthetic and apolitical spaces. Unlike Arabic oral poetry, in which poetic exchanges imply “manifestos, challenges, and accumulating points of honor for individuals and communities” or “political rhetoric of dispute mediations, ...on the surface, Japanese medieval arts and poetry were intensely aesthetic; there were few politically aggressive poems whose expressions directly touched upon the social and political dynamics of the time” (Ikegami 2005:72, 74).

One should not, however, interpret Ikegami’s second point to mean that Japanese *za* art is essentially apolitical. On the contrary, it was born and spread as a political tool par excellence. In the case of the tea ceremony, it was established by wealthy merchants in the era of warrior rule. The merchants had economic power, but were subordinate to warriors politically and to aristocrats culturally. One can argue that the merchants needed to create their own pseudo-aristocratic culture in order to defy warriors, who, with their military power, could force merchants to obey (for more details see Kato 2004, Chapter 2).

The reason many warriors rushed into this new art created by merchants is also worth analyzing. Nobunaga Oda, the warrior who ended the Warring States Period and became a national ruler, declared that no warrior could practice the tea ceremony without his permission; he also gave tea utensils, instead of land, to his vassals as rewards for their service. The next national ruler-warrior, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, dedicated tea he made to the Emperor in his own ritualistic way; he also planned a gigantic tea ceremony party, to which the rank and file was invited. Both rulers, who were not from prominent warrior families (like Minamoto, which was originally an aristocratic family), had to use this new, pseudo-aristocratic art of the tea ceremony to demonstrate their cultural sophistication and political power. And so did

many other warriors (Kato 2004:46–47; Ikegami 2005:163–171, although my view is not identical to Ikegami’s). Moreover, in the tea-room, warriors and merchants should have exchanged confidential political messages within or across the social groups. In all these respects, the tea ceremony is no less political than Arabic oral poetry.

It is, therefore, more accurate to argue that the tea ceremony is not apolitical by nature, but its use became depoliticized in the course of time. And the depoliticization presumably occurred in the Edo period, the era that followed Nobunaga and Hideyoshi’s rule.

The Tea Ceremony in the Edo Period: From a Political to an Apolitical Public Sphere

The Edo period (1603–1867), the era of more than 250 years’ peaceful rule by a single Shogun (the chief warrior) dynasty, the Tokugawa, witnessed several significant changes in the world of art. For the public sphere of the tea ceremony, two seemingly contradictory changes proceeded in parallel: the establishment of a social rank system *and* intermingling of different ranks in this art.

It is true that social ranks were nothing new to this era. In the preceding era, there was already hierarchy between different social groups, with warriors as an obvious ruling class. There were, however, no strict boundaries between social groups; a peasant could be a warrior one day while a warrior could quit the job to be a merchant. On the other hand, the government-sanctioned rank system in the Edo period prohibited such mobility, while declaring the strict vertical order among four ranks: warriors, peasants, artisans and merchants, from top to bottom (above the four ranks existed the Emperor and aristocrats, though they were politically powerless).

At the same time, warless years “aristocratized” warriors making them favourably disposed towards artistic pursuits. Also, an increasing number of peasants, artisans and merchants became wealthy enough to participate in the same activities as warriors. Ikegami sees this phenomenon as a blurring of the rank system. “Although samurai [warriors] and commoners might socialize with one another in their pursuit of beauty, sharing the cognitive universe of such artistic genres as *jōruri* [doll performance that originated from commoners] also represented boundary-crossing in terms of the *mibun* [rank] status distinctions” (Ikegami 2005:158).

I am more skeptical than Ikegami about actual “socializing” between warriors and their subordinates, even in the world of art. Even if they did gather in the same places, say theaters or art teachers’ houses, they may not literally have sat side by side. Still, it can be safely assumed that members of

non-warrior ranks literally sat side by side and communicated as *chōnin* (townspeople) or commoners. Moreover, these non-warriors would have enjoyed at least imaginary association between themselves and warriors in the world of art. The *iemoto* system that emerged in the 18th century must surely have increased this sense of “imagined communities” among practitioners of different ranks.

The *iemoto* system is a system that enables certain families to monopolize for generations the rights to license people to learn or teach art. It is seen not only in the tea ceremony but also in other kinds of so-called traditional art including *ikebana* (flower arrangement), dance and the playing of musical instruments. In the tea ceremony, as in other kinds of art, the system creates a pseudo-family out of the teacher and pupils. This is suggested by the word *dōmon* (the same gate), which refers to pupils who “went through the same teacher’s gate” for training. The same applies to the artist name, or *chamei* (tea name) in the tea ceremony, which pupils at an advanced level obtain. *Chamei* consists of two Chinese letters: the first letter from the name of the *iemoto* (the head of one’s school, usually a male descendant of a historic tea master) and the second letter from one’s own name. Through *chamei*, the *iemoto* and pupils are associated as if they were parent and children.

Even today collective confirmation of the pseudo-family policy can be observed, for instance in local gatherings of teachers of certain schools. At such a gathering of the Urasenke School, for example, participants chant in unison: “For the *iemoto* is a parent, *dōmon* are brothers and sisters, and we are all one body, let us not forget the spirit of putting hands together in prayer to each other” (Kato 2004:132). As manifested in this credo, the *iemoto* system suspends the worldly identity of pupils, enabling them to treat each other simply as practitioners of the same art. In this aspect the site of the tea ceremony is Habermas’ public sphere.

One can assume that in the Edo period the public sphere of the tea ceremony was more appreciated by commoners than by warriors. For those who had wealth and leisure but had no other choice than to stay in the same subordinate ranks as their parents, the world of art would have been the only site for them to be released from constraints. Also, the fact of being involved in the same activity as warriors, learning from the same teacher as warriors, or sometimes being ranked higher than warriors in terms of artistic skills, would have given the people of subordinate ranks pride and joy.

The Tea Ceremony in Early Modern Times: From Men's Public Sphere to a Site of Women's Domestic Training

Before discussing the contemporary tea ceremony which is practiced predominantly by women, it may be useful to briefly overview the changes this art witnessed during early modern times. I focus especially on the feminization of the tea ceremony. "Early modern times" here refers to the period from 1868 to 1945, that is, from Japan's rebirth as a modern state to the end of World War II.

The 1868 restoration marked drastic changes in Japanese history; it ended the feudal rule by warriors, transforming the country into a modern, Western-style nation-state. Due to the ban on the rank system that accompanied the restoration, the *iemoto* lost their powerful patrons, the warriors. Also, the government-led Westernization policy devalued Japanese "traditional" art in general. To overcome this and that hardship, some teachers sought a new market among women.

This means that before the restoration, the tea ceremony was presumably dominated by men. The scarcity of historical records on female tea ceremony practitioners before 1868 suggests that women were peripheral in this art. In the early modern period, however, following the efforts of some *iemotos*, the tea ceremony assumed a new aspect as a "bridal training for young women": the idea that the art teaches women appropriate manners and the art of hospitality that every good wife should know. At some girls' high schools the tea ceremony became a part of the curriculum. Also, young women from relatively wealthy families began to take private lessons. The wars Japan waged with China (1894) and Russia (1904) and World War I that occurred within relatively short intervals of each other also promoted the idea at the beginning of the 20th century that teaching the tea ceremony could be a suitable occupation for war widows. Due to these and other factors, the number of women tea ceremony practitioners is thought to have surpassed that of men in the early 20th century.

One should not, however, see this change as an indication of women replacing men in the public sphere of the tea ceremony. Women were socially encouraged to learn the tea ceremony not because they were expected to intermingle with strangers in the public sphere, but to make use of the skills in the domestic sphere, home. A photograph in a 1937 etiquette textbook used at a girls' high school symbolizes this argument; here is a woman in kimono sitting on the *tatami* (Japanese straw-mat) floor, handing a pair of Western-style gloves to a departing man (presumably her husband) dressed in Western clothes and standing at the doorway (Hisada 1937: 48). The picture indicates that outside is Westernized public space, which is for men, while inside is Japanese, and domestic space, which is for women.

The Tea Ceremony in Modern Times: A Public Sphere for Women

After World War II, the tea ceremony underwent another change; it was further feminized and provided women with a public sphere. Behind these phenomena were drastic changes in Japanese society itself, and of women's and men's life patterns.

First, as a result of further feminization of the tea ceremony since the early modern period, practitioners of the art today are predominantly women. The Statistic Bureau survey of 1996, which records 2,626,000 self-reported tea ceremony practitioners, shows that approximately 90 percent of them are women. My own observation during fieldwork from 1998 to 1999 suggests an even greater dominance of women in the art; out of nearly 100 pupils I encountered, only a few were male (while high-ranking teachers and the *iemoto* were all male, due to the patriarchal hereditary system). Among these women practitioners the most visible age groups were those in the late 40s and older, especially in their 50s and 60s. According to my observation and interviews, most of them were housewives, who were high school or two-year women's college graduates. Some had part-time jobs.

The women practitioners' life histories had many common features. They had learned the tea ceremony in their late teens or early 20s; some did clerical work with companies for several years; they married in their early 20s; they quit the tea ceremony on marriage or at the birth of the first child; they had two or three children; they were preoccupied with caring for their family, often including their old parents (-in-law), for two decades or more; they came back to the tea ceremony because their children were grown up, their husbands were retired, or their parents (-in-law) had passed away. To summarize their remarks: "I wanted to do something because now I have more time, and I chose the tea ceremony because I have done it before."

The general life pattern depicted here well coincides with the life pattern of women under the "postwar family system" as described by Ochiai (1997). According to Ochiai, as a result of government-directed rapid industrialization after the war, the majority of women and men in Japan began to live relatively unitary lifestyles as a complementary pair of urban paid workers ("salary man" in Japanese English) and their wives, and formed nuclear families with two or three children. This "postwar family system" promoted the normalization of the housewife role among women to an unprecedented degree, creating a social norm that "those who are not housewives are not women" (Ochiai 1997:47-48).

If so, what does the tea ceremony mean for these women, especially when they re-encounter this art? They seem to come back to this old and

familiar activity rather casually, but why do they continue the activity for decades? What keeps them attracted to the art?

One answer can be found by comparing these postwar women and commoners in the Edo period. Nishiyama (1959) points out that:

Only in this period [after World War II] were women given freedom to act on their own will. Yet, of course, Japan was not completely renewed. Housewives were surrounded by double and triple difficulties in realizing the theoretical or legal freedom given to them. Their situation is extremely close to that of common men in the Edo period, who established themselves, were ready to get freedom, but could not get it and compensated their lack of freedom in the world of *yūgei* [amusement and art]. (Nishiyama 1959:146–147)

Nishiyama's argument is acceptable in view of the contradictory situations that faced women after 1945, especially in the time of great economic growth (most visibly from 1955 to 1974, but more or less till the early 1990s). On the one hand, women obtained the vote in 1945, and the new Japanese constitution, effective from 1947, advocated gender equality. Yet on the other hand, society, driven by economic growth, did not encourage women to pursue their own studies or career. "It is not that women went out to society after the war; women went into home after the war" (Ochiai 1997: 19) to support male workers, who devoted themselves to the rapid industrial development. Economically speaking, the normalization of the housewife role meant the normalization of women's subordination to men. And in capitalist society, economic subordination means political subordination. Here is the parallel between women after World War II and non-warriors in the Edo period (as well as merchants in the Warring States period); they are all economically affluent, but politically subordinate.

Nishiyama, then, argues similar to Ikegami in the analysis of the aesthetic public sphere:

Whether it is a housewife or a master, in this world of traditional art, a practitioner can intermingle with famous people, wealthy people, intellectuals and others who are of supposedly *kōkyū-jinshu* [high-class rank]. (Nishiyama 1956: 149)

I do not find this discussion entirely persuasive because, according to my observation, not all housewives-practitioners have chances to meet such "high-ranking people". This is especially so if the woman is interested only in regular training (*keiko*) in a familiar circle but not in formal tea ceremony gatherings (*chakai* or *chaji*) outside, as was the case with many of my participants. So, what kind of public sphere do these women constitute, and how?

I argue that women create a public sphere out of the tea ceremony in three stages. In the first stage, they create *shachū*, a unit of a teacher and

pupils. It is important to note that *shachū* is not merely a unit for regular training, but also a gathering of “close” people. In the case of taking lessons at a teacher’s house, one is usually introduced to certain *shachū* through one’s family members, friends, or colleagues at work. In the case of taking lessons at public institutions, people of the same neighborhood tend to get together. In both cases, certain *shachū* tend to attract people of similar economic levels and social positions. Wives of doctors, lawyers and company executives form one *shachū* while regular office workers’ wives make another, and so forth. On top of that, members of each *shachū* share similar life experiences, basically as women under the “postwar family system”. Here the site of training is at the same time a gathering of congenial people, where members understand and acknowledge each others’ experiences, achievements and worries as wives, mothers and daughters (-in-law).

Considering all these factors, *shachū* is a “semi-private public sphere”. In a sense it is “public” because it enables women to step out of home. But it is not yet “public” because it does not promote interaction between people of different economic and social positions.

In the second stage, *shachū* members attend or host formal tea ceremony gatherings (usually *chakai*, big gatherings for anonymous guests) together. The gatherings usually take place in temples or shrines, or houses of traditional architecture owned by local governments. The gatherings can be entirely arranged by the teacher her/himself, or a part of bigger events such as annual events at a school that the *shachū* belongs to. In any case practitioners, as hosts or guests, intermingle with practitioners from outside their own *shachū*. Plate 1, for instance, shows tea ceremony practitioners from different *shachū* gathering at one *chakai*, admiring tea utensils together after the ceremony. The relationship can be either momentary or durable. Here the site of the tea ceremony seems more open to the “public”, allowing interaction between people of a variety of economic and social positions.

In the third stage, which often overlaps with the second stage, practitioners as *shachū* or as individuals intermingle with a variety of people including non-tea ceremony practitioners in any tea ceremony-related setting. They can serve tea for passers-by at municipal festivals, join reading circles organized by historians, visit historic temples, shrines, museums or galleries, or go shopping for tea utensils or kimono. On these occasions the practitioners interact with priests, clergy, local political leaders, shop managers, artisans, curators, scholars, the *iemoto*, passers-by, and so forth.

In one *chakai* which took place in a historic temple, for instance, a woman member of the host *shachū* said modestly but proudly to the guests: “The chief of our local branch is excused right now, to greet the mayor and the head priest of this temple.” Plate 2 shows a formal tea dedication cere-

mony [*kencha-shiki*] performed by the *iemoto* at a shrine. While the *iemoto* is making tea for legendary god(s), hundreds of lay practitioners are watching. A mass of women wearing kimono at a historic site is itself a spectacle, which every passer-by reacts to with a look of surprise and awe.



PLATE 1: Women admiring tea utensils

Another example is the so called *soe gama* (literally “an accompanying tea kettle”), that is, making and serving tea free to anonymous visitors at certain events, most typically exhibitions of ceramics. A teacher I knew was once asked to perform *soe-gama* in a department store. On the sixth floor was an art salon, where ceramics were exhibited for sale. The teacher and her *shachū* members made tea for the visitors in a small indoor teahouse just beside the exhibition. The women would have interacted not only with visitors, but also with artisans and the floor manager. Also, they would have been

gazed at by a number of shoppers. To all these non-tea ceremony practitioners, the kimono-clad women making tea in a specific manner are not (just) housewives but “guardians of traditional culture”. Thus women without special political power are respected by people in society, including those in respectable positions.

In short, as individuals or as *shachū* or as a bigger unit of “tea ceremony practitioners”, women sustain and expand their own sphere in society. They receive acknowledgement from society, intermingling with people whom they would not have a chance to meet without the tea ceremony. This temporary horizontal relationship between people of different political standing and social positions indicates that the tea ceremony provides its practitioners with a “public sphere” par excellence even today.



PLATE 2: The *iemoto* performing in *kencha-shiki* at Hikawa Shrine

Conclusion: An Empowering Public Sphere

In this article I have illustrated similarities between two core social groups that practiced the tea ceremony in two different historical periods, the Edo and the post-World War II period, in terms of their social positions and motivation to practice the art. It was found that both non-warriors in the Edo period and housewives from postwar times until today were “classes” that

were economically affluent but politically “second-from-top”. The tea ceremony provides these groups with a sphere in which existing social order is suspended. It is a sphere where they intermingle with relationships of various degrees. In the case of contemporary housewives, the very basis of this relationship is social acknowledgement of them as “guardians of tradition”.

Can we call this situation or process “empowerment”? My answer is, “Yes. This is a possible form of empowerment”, even if this empowerment does not give people more political or economic power. Rather, acquisition of power here means acquisition of knowledge or skills, and of social acknowledgement. First, knowledge or skills of the tea ceremony change one’s way of interaction with the surrounding world, as does literacy. With this kind of knowledge or skills, people do not necessarily become politically prominent or economically rich, but less easily controlled by others, or less at the mercy of situations: in short, they acquire more agency (Kato 2004:5). Some of my participants made this point clear, by saying that they were practicing the tea ceremony “to have my own castle apart from my husband’s”, “not to be involved too much in my child’s education”, “to get away from caring for my mother(-in-law)”, in addition to expressing their joy in the art itself.

One can explain this empowerment by referring to Bourdieu’s discussions on economic, symbolic and cultural capital. Economic capital means material wealth, including money. Symbolic capital is “the capital of honour and prestige” (Bourdieu 1980:118), an example of which is art in capitalist society (Bourdieu 1993:75). And cultural capital means a form of knowledge that equips agents with empathy towards, appreciation for, or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts; it is the code by which alone a work of art, for example, has meaning (Bourdieu 1979:2). Education is a kind of this capital. Based on the criteria above, the practice of the tea ceremony comprises both cultural and symbolic capital: cultural capital because the tea ceremony entails knowledge, skills and technical qualifications, like education; symbolic capital because it entails the capital of honor and prestige as “high” culture. However, since the postwar economic growth, the practice does not usually give women economic independence, whether single, married or widowed, even if some teach and receive tuition.

The second aspect of “empowerment” is that, by acquiring certain knowledge or skills, the tea ceremony practitioners are considered by society as guardians of a cultural heritage unfamiliar to most people nowadays. Therefore society welcomes them, gives them space in certain spheres, and respects them. If such a process is not empowerment, what is it?

Certainly, one can point to the limitation of this kind of empowerment by saying that it does not change society. I can not know how commoners in

the Edo period would have responded to this argument, but I can assume from my own observation that contemporary women tea ceremony practitioners would not mind the limitation, because they are not inclined to make social changes. Although not uncritical of patriarchy, the women already have achievement as wives, mothers and daughters(-in-law) who have successfully supported their family members. In *shachū*, women acknowledge and admire each other's achievement in this domestic area. What they need next is not the deconstruction of society, but acknowledgement from society.

The fact that the tea ceremony does not lead to social changes benefits women in another way too. Because it does not give them political or economic power, the women's family members, especially husbands, do not oppose their participation in the practice. The men do not want the women to threaten their university degree, their position as breadwinner, or political savvy; in short, they do not want the women to compete with them. And women themselves are not inclined to do so. One may well imagine that non-warriors in the Edo period did not have too different a stance towards warriors than contemporary housewives towards their husbands.

To summarize, a public sphere created by the tea ceremony, or aesthetic public spheres in general, is a means of empowerment for its practitioners when they do not necessarily want to change the social system they live in.

References

- For a more comprehensive bibliography on the tea ceremony, please refer to Kato (2004).
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1979] 1984.
- , *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1980] 1990.
- , *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature*. Randal Johnson (ed.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, [1962] 1989.
- Hisada, Waki, *Kokusui-reihō* [Manners for Genuine Nationalists]. Sasebo: Sasebo Girls' Sewing School, 1937.
- Ikegami, Eiko, *Bonds of Civility. Aesthetic Network and the Political Origin of Japanese Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Japan. An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Tokyo: Kōdan-sha, 1993.
- Kato, Etsuko, *The Tea Ceremony and Women's Empowerment in Modern Japan. Bodies Re-presenting the Past*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.
- National Review* 4, no.8 (April 1857):301.
- Nishiyama, Matsunosuke, *Iemoto no kenkyū* [A Study on the Iemoto]. Tokyo: Kōsō-shobō, 1959.

Ochiai, Emiko, *Shinpan: 21-seiki kazoku e* [New Edition: Towards the Twenty-first Century Family]. Tokyo: Yūhikaku-sensho, 1997.

Travelyan, G.M., *English Social History. A Survey of Six Centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944.

Acknowledgement

The original version of this article was presented at AJ Forum hosted by Asia-Japan Research Center of Kokushikan University, Tokyo, on October 20, 2007. I would like to thank Prof. Hiroshi Aoyagi for giving me this opportunity and forum members for their valuable comments, many of which I have incorporated in this article. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Detlef Kantowsky who kindly read my book thoroughly and suggested that I contribute an article to *Internationales Asienforum*.