

【Tea Ceremony and Ii Family Collection】

Tea Ceremony

Japanese tea ceremony, called *sadō* or *chanoyu*, is the procedure of preparing, serving, and drinking powdered green tea. The practice was introduced to Japan from China sometime between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Over many decades, it became intermingled with Japanese aesthetics of austerity and minimalism, and a distinctive Japanese practice was developed. Many of these practices were established in the sixteenth century by Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591), a tea master who is considered the father of modern *sadō*.

Tea ceremony is believed to have been introduced to Japan in 1191 by the monk Myōan Eisai (1141–1215), who was exposed to tea as a form of medicine while studying Tendai Buddhism in China. Eisai would later establish Rinzai (Zen) Buddhism in Japan, and it was soon adopted by the Kamakura shogunate. In 1211, Eisai wrote a treatise on the benefits of drinking tea called “Notes on Curative Tea-Drinking” (*Kissa yōjōki*), which he presented to Minamoto no Sanetomo (1192–1219), the shogun at the time. At this point, drinking tea was an established activity in Japan, but it had not yet become a structured, ritualized practice.

In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), tea was primarily understood as medicine, but it would gradually become the basis for socializing and even entertainment. Beginning in the latter Kamakura period, a new form of competitive tea-drinking emerged among the upper classes, and elaborate tea-drinking parties were held. Guests at these parties competed to determine, for example, which of 10, 20, or even 100 cups contained “genuine tea,” from Japan’s first tea plantation in Togano-o (now Kyoto Prefecture). These competitions invariably included betting, and the hosts spared no expense to impress their guests with expensive tea-making utensils from China. Gradually, the customary appreciation of these utensils became part of the events.

Drinking tea was a social pastime for samurai during these two centuries, but it was not until the final few decades of the sixteenth century that it would become codified through the influence of Sen no Rikyū. In 1570, Sen no Rikyū first met and served tea to Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) who was already in the midst of his campaign to unify Japan’s many warring domains. Rikyū was appointed Nobunaga’s tea advisor. After Nobunaga was assassinated, Rikyū continued in this role for Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), who carried on Nobunaga’s efforts in unifying the country. During these years, Rikyū refined his tea practice according to the values of *wabi-sabi*, the Japanese aesthetic that values austerity and imperfection.

By the time Hikone Castle was built, tea ceremony was a central cultural element

in samurai society that was common at official government events and social exchanges. The thirteenth Ii daimyo, Naosuke (1815–1860), was known to be a master of tea ceremony who designed and made tea utensils himself. Naosuke held numerous tea ceremony gatherings in Edo and Hikone, and the Ii family collection contains over 900 utensils.

Tea Utensils (*Chadogu*)

The utensils in the Ii family collection include: fresh water containers (*mizusashi*), portable braziers (*furo*), tea bowls (*chawan*), bamboo tea whisks (*chasen*), bamboo tea scoops (*chashaku*), and tea containers (*natsume* and *chaire*).