

# Introduction to Japanese tea culture

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The image of a mysterious, ossified cultural practice that the phrase “tea ceremony” conjures up does not do justice to the vibrant and contested tea traditions in either contemporary or historical Japan. Likewise, the term “*chanoyu*” (literally, “hot water for tea”) with its close connections to the powerful tea schools that dominate Japanese tea discourse today, does not adequately represent the great diversity of practices attached to and influenced by tea consumption. The chapters in this book examine Japanese tea culture, the set of cultural practices that revolve around tea consumption in Japan. It is by no means a comprehensive volume, and in fact focuses in large part on one segment of tea culture, the ritualized, performative forms of tea practice that have been popular among elites in Japan since the sixteenth century. The authors attempt to avoid perpetuation of the linear, totalizing conception of tea that has come to dominate modern discussions of Japanese culture, and instead apply critical methods from a range of academic disciplines to situate tea in a broader hermeneutic context.

Why tea? Historically, tea played a central role in political and social life beginning in the sixteenth century, and deserves our attention for its great influence on varied forms of cultural production. Tea remains the non-alcoholic drink of choice for most Japanese despite the twin challenges of commodification and globalization. Historically foreign products such as coffee, cocoa, milk, soda, juice, and flavored and “enhanced” waters have flooded into the domestic marketplace, but tea endures.

The simplest and most common form of contemporary tea culture is the canned beverage available hot or cold from vending machines or “convenience stores” on any street corner. Such vending machines contain far more variety than similar machines in other countries. According to a 1997 study, for example, most vending machines in the United States averaged six available beverages, while in one small area of Hokkaidō, Japan, more than 140 separate drinks were available from vending machines. These included five types of oolong tea, eight types of “Western style” (black) tea, and two types of “traditional” (green) tea.<sup>1</sup> These distinctly modern beverages are usually consumed alone, on the way home from the train station or during a brief break from work. By contrast, the most

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rarefied form of tea culture is the powdered green tea drunk in ritualized contexts by devoted students of the art of *chanoyu*. These practitioners host and attend highly choreographed gatherings at which art objects and tea utensils (ranging from priceless treasures to improvised stand-ins) are displayed and used. This form of tea practice has had a profound impact on social etiquette, notions of hospitality, art production and connoisseurship, architecture and landscape design, and more recently, understandings of “Japaneseness” and the value of tradition. For these reasons, *chanoyu* and its rival tradition, *sencha* (steeped tea), are the primary focus of this volume.

This Introduction will begin by examining the practice of tea culture in Japan today, focusing in particular on beverage consumption, etiquette, ritual, performance, devotion, and narrative. The second section looks at the way in which we read tea culture, literally embodied in the state of academic scholarship on tea in Japan. The third section examines the process of writing about tea culture, and suggests a number of issues that are in need of further attention. The concluding section of the Introduction considers the experience of tea culture, and asks how we can represent the lived experience of tea practice. These varied approaches to thinking about tea culture in Japan set the framework for the chapters that follow.

Before turning to the practice of tea, we should address the mundane but salient question: What is tea? In popular usage around the world, the term tea can refer to any kind of infusion. A Japanese grandmother once confided that her only remaining means of feeling healthy and vital was to drink “carrot tea” (*ninjin cha*), which she made by boiling grated carrots to create a watery, orange-colored concoction. In contemporary Europe and North America, it is a simple matter to purchase and consume similar “herbal infusions,” ranging from old favorites in Western cupboards like peppermint and chamomile, to more recent imports such as rooibos (a South African legume, *Aspalathus linearis*), maté (leaves from the South American *Ilex paraguariensis*), and yoco (bark from the South American plant *Paullinia yoco*).

The drink of concern in this book, however, is not the “all-natural” herbal infusion, but processed and fully caffeinated tea. In its wild form, tea is an evergreen, flowering bush or tree of the order Ericales, family Theaceae, and genus *Camellia*, known as *Camellia sinensis*. A range of varieties are grown today, including *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis* (“China tea”) and *Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica* (“Assam tea”). Cultivators usually keep the plant pruned to a height of not more than 6 feet (2 meters) to encourage a “flush” of growth, the soft, young leaves and buds from which tea is made. In some locales, particularly Japan, they also partially cover the plant just as the buds begin to emerge, to encourage larger and longer growths in increased numbers. The next stage in tea production is the processing of the flush; different methods result in different types of tea. To make green tea, for example, the flush is picked, heated to

prevent fermentation, crushed, and dried. Chinese oolong or jasmine tea, by contrast, is partially fermented. The buds are picked, allowed to rest, crushed, and then partially fermented before being heated to halt the fermentation process. The tea commonly drunk in Europe and North America (“black tea”) is produced by yet a different method. The tea leaves are picked, allowed to wither, crushed, and then left to ferment entirely before being heated and dried.<sup>2</sup>

Like drinkers and distributors of herbal infusions, present-day tea producers and consumers vociferously make health claims for their prized beverage, much as they have for millennia. Tea seems to have various antioxidant and antibacterial properties, the latter enhanced by the fact that the beverage is made using boiled water. Tea has also been identified as a stimulant from the very beginning of its use in China. The primary source of tea’s stimulating effect is now known to be caffeine, which is found in large quantity in tea leaves and buds: 3.5 percent by weight compared to 1.1 to 2.2 percent for coffee beans.<sup>3</sup> Critics have historically leveled a range of condemnations at tea as well, and in the modern era caffeine itself has been the source of some controversy as “the world’s most popular drug.” Tea and coffee are, after all, the two most commonly consumed beverages on the planet; one estimate claims that we drink 700 billion cups of tea and 600 billion cups of coffee per year.<sup>4</sup> Carbonated, caffeinated beverages such as cola are not far behind, making the impact of caffeine on our bodies a public health issue of vital concern.<sup>5</sup>

Tea therefore exists within a larger global market of non-alcoholic, caffeinated beverages that seems to be growing yearly under the control of large, multinational corporations. The survival of so many forms of tea practice in Japan would thus seem to be a somewhat surprising event. Similarly complex beverage cultures have disappeared or been homogenized as the victims of new trends or mass-produced competitors. The practice of crushing cocoa seeds to make a beverage, for example, has largely disappeared from the northern hemisphere. When the Spanish arrived in the Americas, they encountered cocoa for the first time; natives alternately used the beans as currency or crushed them and combined them with water and a variety of spices.<sup>6</sup> The Spanish soon added cinnamon or vanilla to their own mixtures, as well as a dollop of cane sugar. By the eighteenth century, this was one of the most popular beverages in Baroque Europe. In the 1870s, however, the Swiss developed milk chocolate, forever changing the nature of chocolate consumption north of the Equator. Today chocolate is inextricably linked to milk, and it is difficult to find the old form of the beverage outside of South America.<sup>7</sup> Other beverage practices such as drinking a mixture made from the dried, roasted, and ground root of the chicory plant, or the imbibing of salep (also saloop; made from the dried, ground tubers of orchid roots) have similarly faded from widespread, popular practice.

How did tea survive in Japan in its many forms? Although it is impossible to answer this question definitively, the chapters in this volume sift

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through tea culture's textual and material traces to highlight some key trends from four hundred years of heterogeneous practice. The two chapters by Watsky and Slusser, for example, focus on the alchemy of politics, social status, and cultural production that placed tea culture and the rhetoric of tea aesthetics in such a prominent position in the sixteenth century. Chapter 3 by Cort on the ceramics of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Japan points to the great diversity in material culture of that period's urban marketplaces, and the facility of tea practitioners and utensil dealers at producing new cultural trends. My own chapter on the seventeenth-century tea master Sen Kōshin Sōsa illustrates the mediating role tea masters played at the intersection of politics and culture, and also points to the growing prominence of the Sen house of tea masters as the authors of orthodoxy in the tea world. Chapter 5 by Graham on the art of *chanoyu*'s counterpart, *sencha* (steeped tea), illustrates how collecting objects to use for drinking tea could function as a form of personal narrative in which the collection metonymically represents the collector and a set of (in this case Sinocentric) ideals. In Chapter 6 Tanimura's study of the warrior politician and tea practitioner Ii Naosuke likewise reveals that tea practice was for many an arena in which struggles over moral behavior, social status, and idealized cultural values could be waged. Chapter 7 by Cross deals with three cinematic representations of the life of *chanoyu*'s mythologized founder, Sen no Rikyū, and deconstructs the manner in which tea has simultaneously been situated as a global, peace-producing cultural practice and a uniquely Japanese tradition. Holland's chapter concludes the book with an ethnography of the use of written records and memoranda in contemporary tea gatherings, and the playful contrast between public and private narratives they create.

#### Practicing tea

Tea first arrived in Japan as a component of a larger package of imported Chinese culture and technology. Writing, literature, architectural methods, music, dance, political ideology, and visual and material objects traveled to the Japanese archipelago from China – often by way of the Korean peninsula – on the vehicles of trade, diplomacy, and Buddhism. Tea carried associations of the exotic and advanced continental societies, making its consumption an inherently performative act. Members of the Japanese elite could symbolically imbibe the Chinese “empire of things” in a cup of tea.<sup>8</sup> Early drinkers also understood tea to be a medicinal brew, and drank it to increase health and vigor. Buddhist monks in particular relied on tea to keep them awake during the long hours of meditation. Symbolic and practical functions were juxtaposed in tea consumption from the start.

The combination of varied meanings and purposes in Japanese tea culture is by no means unique. In past and present societies around the world, beverage consumption manifests in myriad structures ranging from

highly visible social practices to private forms of succor or devotion. Drinking, like eating, is above all a basic corporeal function. As the authors of an 1892 guide to drinks of the world noted,

From the Cradle to the Grave we need DRINK, and we have not far to look for the reason, when we consider that at least seventy percent of the human body is composed of water, to compensate the perpetual waste of which, a fresh supply is, of course, absolutely necessary.

We drink, then, to subsist and survive, and yet the act of drinking is also a source of enjoyment:

Thirst is the notice given by Nature that liquid aliment is required to repair the waste of the body; and, as in the case of Hunger, she has kindly provided that supplying the deficiency shall be a pleasant sensation, and one calculated to call up a feeling of gratitude for the means of allaying the want.<sup>9</sup>

The individual practice of beverage consumption often manifests in particular and idiosyncratic rituals that vary from person to person: coffee drunk from purpose-built, insulated cups during the morning commute; a glass of purchased or squeezed juice swallowed as much for health as for pleasure; a sports drink consumed for extra energy during a run or hike; and a glass of water, or perhaps whisky, sipped before bed. The act of imbibing liquid can be a particularly private act.

For some time, however, collective beverage consumption has been understood as socially (though not always morally) normative. The practice of drinking feels most “natural”<sup>10</sup> in a group context, and likewise is thought of as promoting sociability. Coffeehouses, for example, spread throughout the Arab world in the sixteenth century, much as the practice of holding social tea gatherings spread among elite urban merchants and warriors in the same period in Japan. Taking a trip to the coffeehouse was an innovative act, a departure from the solitary and familiar domain of the home into the social world of interaction, discussion, and sociability.<sup>11</sup> The pioneering sociologist Georg Simmel referred to such sociability as “the *play-form* of association,” an artificial world of staged interaction that simultaneously produces feelings of emancipation and conventionalism.<sup>12</sup> This concept of the dialectic relationship between “play” and “form” is quite useful for understanding the particular combination of opportunities for staged creativity with ruthless enforcement of individual and group norms produced within Japanese tea culture. The manner in which the gradual institutionalization of tea both restricted tea practice and created new spaces for creative cultural production will be explored further in the chapters in this volume.

How, then, is tea practiced in Japan today? The tapestry of tea culture

is woven of many complex strands that defy easy untangling, but at a general level most Japanese encounter tea on a daily basis as a simple beverage. In specialty tea shops or in the average supermarket, a shopper can expect to find a startling variety of tea products. Steeped green tea (*sencha*) is perhaps most common, and available in many forms ranging from high quality “jeweled dewdrop” (*gyokuro*) tea to the rough, leafy “coarse tea” (*bancha*). “Roasted tea” (*bōjicha*) and “stem tea” (*kukicha*) are popular as well, often drunk cold in the hot summer months. Also common is “whole rice tea” (*genmaicha*), made of an equal mixture of roasted low-grade green tea and toasted whole rice. Chinese-style teas are also quite popular in Japan, particularly the semi-fermented oolong tea. Though harder to find, novelty teas such as “go-stone tea” (*gosekicha*), which consists of green tea molded into small spheres, are still produced and consumed. As mentioned above, many of these teas are available in cans from vending machines or markets, allowing the consumer to participate in the “complex cultural conversation” woven by the interplay of commodities in society.<sup>13</sup>

When served in social situations, tea also manifests as a key element in etiquette. Visits to shops, offices, or residences frequently result in the serving of green or black tea, a trend that goes back to the merchant shops of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Kyoto. In contemporary situations that are more self-consciously constructed as “traditional,” such as when visiting the workshop of a traditional craftsperson or performing artist, powdered green tea (*matcha*) might be served in a tea bowl, usually preceded by a sweet of some kind. The carefully choreographed movements of serving tea, which are themselves seen as physical manifestations of respect, have developed under the influence of *chanoyu*’s attention to walking, posture, and breathing in the context of the tea gathering.<sup>14</sup>

Tea practice continues to thrive in ritualized formats such as *chanoyu* and *sencha*, preserved and disseminated by the large, corporate schools that dominate the tea landscape. At the central headquarters, at regional branches, or in small local classrooms, students acquire specialized training in tea procedures, tea art connoisseurship, manners and decorum, and the school’s version of tea history. Though the tea schools do not to my knowledge release official counts of their students, the guesses of observers range as high as four to five million total practitioners. Urasenke, the largest and most financially successful school, was reported in 1997 to have 300,000 members in the Tankōkai association of its organization, the majority of which are official teachers and instructors.<sup>15</sup> The number today is likely higher, implying a total population of well over one million students in Urasenke alone. Each member student pays a monthly fee, as well as a special license fee that is required each time a new course of techniques is begun. The costs of licenses are set by the schools with prices rising for more advanced licenses. Informants indicate that profit for one’s immediate teacher is built into the price, although the majority of the fee is

sent back to the headquarters of the organization. Moreover, tradition often dictates that a gift of cash up to the fee for the license be given to one's teacher at the time the license is received. Additional fees apply when a student has earned the right to purchase a "tea name" or attends special events and gatherings.

Membership in a tea school opens many doors in Japan. Students become affiliates of an imagined cultural community as well as a real network of teachers, craftspeople, art dealers, academics, and fellow learners that extends to every corner of Japanese society. The discourse and curriculum of the schools additionally serve to construct a temporal matrix within which the majority of official (i.e. school-sanctioned) tea practice occurs. Classes are held on a weekly or monthly basis, creating a phenomenological rhythm of lived tea experiences. Regularly occurring seasonal gatherings mark important aesthetic/symbolic moments in the annual calendar superimposed on the longer narrative of the school's linear development. Furthermore, the constant striving for higher licenses and greater access to the core of the school creates an imaginary temporal narrative of progress that is always approaching, but never reaching, a conclusion of complete mastery, acceptance, and access. Students can and do take part in tea activities outside of the school network, particularly gatherings hosted by or sponsored by tea dealers, who stand to profit from business with as many tea practitioners as possible, regardless of affiliation.<sup>16</sup> Access to these "informal networks" is often introduced or mediated by tea school membership.

*Chanoyu* is very much a performative ritual as well. The small, private gatherings that typify *chanoyu* meetings are intrinsically performative, with the host and guest(s) playing roles and speaking from a learned script in order to create, observe, and participate in a symbolically rich routine.<sup>17</sup> For ambitious tea practitioners, more conspicuous public gatherings that are staged for strangers and outsiders also represent opportunities to engage in mutual performance, but with the additional element of a non-participating audience.<sup>18</sup>

For some individuals who count themselves tea practitioners (and perhaps members of official tea schools), preparing and drinking tea is also understood as a form of personal spiritual devotion. Tea devotees often refer to their practice as "the way of tea" (*chadō* or *sadō*), a term that appropriates the Chinese religio-philosophical notion of the path or "way" (Chinese: *dao*; Japanese *dō* or *michi*) to legitimize an increasingly popular (and increasingly contested) form of cultural production.<sup>19</sup> Like dozens of similar cultural practices that were reinvented as consumable paths in the lively urban marketplaces of Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo, tea was simultaneously popularized and systematized in this period. The association with religion was not, however, merely a seventeenth-century construct. As mentioned above, Buddhist monks drank tea in China, Korea, and Japan as a stimulant, and eventually tea consumption was incorporated into the definition of a healthy Buddhist life.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, many of

the sixteenth-century Japanese pioneers in the development of new designs in tea architecture and material culture were associated with Zen Buddhist temples in the cities of Kyoto and Sakai. Mythologized founding figures such as Murata Shukō, Takeno Jōō, and Sen no Rikyū all were either patrons of Zen or held Zen titles. Rikyū's descendants in particular continued his close affiliation with certain powerful Zen institutions, and in modern hagiographies of Rikyū, tea and Zen have been inextricably linked as a result. For the purposes of this section, the historicity of this correlation is irrelevant; it is enough that some contemporary practitioners believe that tea practice is a form of Zen-like meditation, and seek personal spiritual salvation in the processes and atmosphere of the tea gathering.

A final strand in this cultural tapestry is tea practice as a form of narrative. Tea practitioners constantly reiterate famous tea gatherings of the past. They also strive to re-enact the perceived aesthetic decisions (the “taste” or *suki*) of tea luminaries such as Rikyū. The major tea schools, for example, routinely stage private and public tea gatherings that mark important events in the lineage's history, often using the tea utensils that were selected for the original gathering. These are nostalgic acts that constantly seek to embrace the phantasm of tea's mythic past.<sup>21</sup> At the popular level within tea culture, the act of selecting and arranging tea utensils for a gathering is explicitly acknowledged as a form of constructing private and public narratives, as Holland explores in the final chapter in this volume. Tea practitioners collect and use tea utensils to display wealth and taste, to demonstrate personal connections, and to engage in non-verbal conversations with other tea practitioner *cognoscenti*.

## Reading tea

For many students of Japanese culture and history, tea is accessed first and foremost through scholarship. The vision of tea presented in academic writing in Japan reflects many of the trends seen in the practice of tea as described above, but also represents a more controlled, ideological form of cultural production. Since the seventeenth century, writing about tea has been incorporated into the assemblage of skills of the elite tea master, with the result that struggles between teachers and schools have occurred as much on the written page as they have in the classroom and the marketplace.

Post-war tea historiography has been dominated by scholarship written by a small and elite group of tea practitioners, or sponsored by the most influential tea schools. The three Sen family tea schools – Omotesenke, Urasenke, and Mushanokōji Senke – have been particularly vigorous in their promotion of research on tea history and culture. Urasenke, for example, runs a “research center” in Kyoto (the Chadō Shiryōkan) that holds exhibitions and conferences and includes a library staffed with full-time researchers. Urasenke also has an affiliated publishing house



(Tankōsha) through which it publishes two monthly journals (*Tankō* and *Nagomi*) and dozens of tea-related monographs.

The influence of the tea schools on research, publishing, and access to and dissemination of primary sources has serious ramifications for tea scholarship. Editors in the affiliated publishing houses are themselves members of the sponsor tea school, and it goes without saying that scholarship that is highly critical of the school or the school's vision of tea history is not likely to be accepted. Furthermore, because substantial rivalry exists between tea schools, affiliation with one school limits a researcher's access to the sources of other schools. Studies of important individuals or events in tea history based entirely on the documents and objects in the collection of a single school are common. Many important primary sources have been published during the post-war period, removing them from the confines of restricted access and making them available to all researchers. Even in this area, however, the influence of the tea schools has been unduly great, because the documents are preselected by tea school insiders before being published.

As a result of these trends, post-war Japanese tea scholarship has tended to privilege one individual – the founder of the Sen lineage, Sen no Rikyū – as the progenitor of Japanese tea culture, while largely ignoring the larger social, economic, and political context for his and other tea practitioners' activities. This vision of tea culture has gone mostly uncontested, and today is accepted in the general population as the only authentic version of tea's past. In this sense, the Sen tea schools have enjoyed overwhelming success in shaping the horizon of expectations of readers and practitioners.

In the past two decades, however, academic historians who specialize in research on tea history but are not necessarily affiliated with tea schools have begun to emerge, and they have moved away from a monolithic conception of tea culture. Archeologists have also become increasingly active in the study of tea's material culture, radically changing many long-standing assumptions about the history of tea utensil development. In 1993, the Society for the Study of Tea Culture (Chanoyu Bunka Gakkai) was founded, the first independent academic organization devoted to tea culture. In 1994 the Society began publication of an annual journal of tea research.

These developments have begun to affect publishing by the major tea houses. In 2000, Tankōsha began publication of an eleven-volume series of monographs devoted to every aspect of tea culture.<sup>22</sup> It included numerous essays by non-affiliated scholars, and generally approached themes such as “the art of tea” in a fresh manner. Perhaps most remarkable have been a number of symposia held in recent years that bring together traditional, tea school-sponsored scholars with archeologists and historians who do not share the orthodox vision of tea's development. In 1999, for example, Urasenke sponsored an exhibition and symposium titled “Famous Tea Bowls of Chanoyu: Domestic Tea Bowls [*Chanoyu no meiwan: wamono*”

*chawan*].” On the surface, this event was just another canonical display of the key objects that are said to reverberate with the rustic spirit of Rikyū. The symposium and accompanying catalog, however, revealed a far more contested field. Archeologists who increasingly believe that many of the ceramics associated today with Rikyū were in fact produced after his death spoke alongside some of Urasenke’s most respected and knowledgeable proponents. A historian of ceramics who had previously been ostracized from the clique of school-sponsored scholars (as well as from the key resources they control) was suddenly presented with the opportunity to present her insightful yet unorthodox research. If such occasions for open dialogue continue, tea scholarship seems likely to diversify further in the future, which hopefully will lead to the much needed problematization of the ideological shibboleths found at the intersection of tea practice and scholarship.

A scattered but useful literature on tea has emerged in English over the course of the twentieth century, often following the trends in Japanese tea practice and tea scholarship.<sup>23</sup> In 1906, the “internationally minded Japanese intellectual and globe-trotting Zen priest”<sup>24</sup> Okakura Kakuzo described *chanoyu* as “the true spirit of Eastern democracy,” in his book on “the tea cult,” a cultural practice represented as at once utterly alien and seductively intuitive. A.L. Sadler remedied Okakura’s vague, aphoristic account with a deceptively encyclopedic volume on the treasures, heroes, and history of the “tea ceremony” in Japan.<sup>25</sup> In the post-war years, as Urasenke in particular became progressively more internationalist, increasing numbers of Japanologists studied tea and wrote about its history, usually in the mode established by Japanese practitioners and scholars. Translations of works by Japanese scholars also became increasingly available.<sup>26</sup>

Certain studies broke the mold of Japanese tea scholarship, such as Louise Cort’s ground-breaking 1979 study of the long history of a rural pottery community, which paid significant attention to interactions with tea practitioner consumers.<sup>27</sup> Robert Kramer’s insightful (but unfortunately unpublished) 1985 University of Chicago dissertation went even further in its critical application of post-structuralist theory to the early modern and modern history of tea.<sup>28</sup> More recently, the art historian Christine Guth has insightfully examined the interest among Japan’s first modern industrialists in collecting tea utensils and other genres of “traditional” Japanese art.<sup>29</sup> The historian Mary Elizabeth Berry discusses tea practitioners in her well-written account of social and political turmoil in sixteenth-century Kyoto.<sup>30</sup> Most recent is art historian Patricia Graham’s study of Chinese-style steeped tea (*sencha*) and its associated arts, a project that she develops further in her chapter in this volume.<sup>31</sup>

## Writing tea

In writing about the history and contemporary practice of tea culture in Japan, we participate in a tradition of commentary and critique that extends back to the sixteenth century. Recording our hermeneutic encounters with textual and material remnants of tea's past and fading present is in and of itself a form of tea practice, though the extension of this process outside of the dominion of tea adherents and into the field of academia is a relatively new phenomenon. In writing, though, we participate in the ongoing cultural production of tea. To borrow a paradigm from Bernard Faure, previous writings affect our understanding of tea, and our understanding of tea in turn affects the type of scholarship we produce. This "circular causality" has rarely been acknowledged in tea historiography.<sup>32</sup>

The authors in this volume emerge from a broad range of backgrounds and professions that inform the manner in which each writes about tea culture. We include academic historians and art historians; current and former members of tea schools; museum curators; and an academic anthropologist. Our personal and professional identities inform the manner in which we have encountered and experienced tea, and also influence our practical and methodological responses. It goes without saying that the problems and concerns of one author are not necessarily those of the next, and that the range of approaches and interpretations presented in this book is in no way representative of a new school or movement of tea scholarship.

Working on this volume has raised a number of issues that this author believes deserve further concerted consideration. The historical and contemporary relationship between tea and Zen, for example, is in dire need of critical appraisal. As mentioned above, many of the iconic figures of tea history were closely affiliated with Zen Buddhism, the most prominent being Sen no Rikyū. Emerging from the institutionalized hagiography of Rikyū is an orthodox rhetoric of tea practice that is filled with discursively irrational aphorisms of the sort common to the Chan/Zen tradition. These pronouncements have all too often been given too much importance, particularly the notion that "tea and Zen have the same flavor" (*chazen ichimi*). Christians, Shinto priests, Confucianists, and members of other Buddhist schools have also practiced tea throughout its history, often making major contributions to tea's development. More importantly, the ideological functions of tea practitioners' appropriation of Zen hierarchy, Zen notions of lineage, Zen naming terminology, and the language of Zen enlightenment have been completely ignored in the secondary literature. We need to reconsider the historical relationship between Zen and tea as an alliance between two corporate entities, a bond that held as much for political and economic reasons as for spiritual or aesthetic ones.<sup>33</sup> We need to pay particular attention to the essentialist and nationalist reverberations in modern writings on tea and Zen, and be wary of the simplistic

conflation of the complex religious practice that is Zen Buddhism and the equally convoluted cultural practice that is *chanoyu*.

Another issue that needs further consideration, not only in the study of tea but in the larger field of “traditional” culture, is the historical and contemporary role of the *iemoto* system in shaping practice and discourse. “*Iemoto*” is sometimes translated into English as “family head” or “grand master,” though these phrases do not adequately capture the flavor of the Japanese term, which literally translates as “origin/source of the house.” This *iemoto* system of social and cultural organization, though seen in elemental form before the early modern period, emerged as a dominant force in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In this period, the male heads/grand masters of schools instituted new standards for training, accreditation, membership, practice, and even aesthetic taste. The *iemoto* defined the terms of practice for all members of the school. The claim of belonging to a familial group and the acquisition of skills offered by *iemoto* organizations proved extremely popular, and many existing tea schools saw their memberships rise dramatically. By the end of the eighteenth century, some had expanded throughout the Japanese archipelago, regulating large populations of amateur tea practitioners through a unified curriculum and system of licensing.<sup>34</sup> The *iemoto*-led tea schools proved remarkably adaptable, and managed to survive the ruptures of the Meiji Restoration and World War II. Their impact on the formation of cultural structures historically, and their role in both limiting and preserving myriad cultural practices over time are topics in need of focused research.

Also related is the difficulty of studying culture through documents, visual sources, material objects, and architecture. Most scholars of tea, both inside and outside of Japan, tend to approach their research from a single academic discipline such as history (with its focus on documents) or art history (with its focus on stylistic analysis and connoisseurship). This approach is at odds with the inherent interdisciplinarity of tea practice, which demands close interaction with written records and memoranda (as described by Holland), ceramics and other utensils (as described by Cort), visual and textual materials such as inscribed paintings or calligraphies (mentioned in Graham’s chapter), and the symbolically constructed spaces of tea gardens and tea houses. Although it is near impossible to be fluent in all of these fields of study, ignoring whole categories of historical evidence produces a narrow and uninformed vision of tea practitioners and tea culture.

## Experiencing tea

The relationship of language to experience lies at the heart of the study of culture. It inspires simple but thorny questions such as those posed by Susan Stewart in her influential book, *On Longing*: “How can we describe something? What relationship does description bear to ideology and the

very invention of that ‘something’?”<sup>35</sup> This issue seems particularly problematic in the case of tea practice, which for most people is a non-rational, non-discursive experience. Spoken language is abolished from certain portions of the tea gathering, replaced by focused and choreographed interactions that constitute a shared performance. The movements of preparing, serving, and drinking tea are physically internalized as forms (*kata*) by rote repetition rather than through lecture, dialogue, or interrogation. The hostility to rhetoric in tea culture – borrowed perhaps from Zen – partially explains why tea practitioners’ attempts to compose written histories have tended to reveal more about their absorption of modern paradigms of culture and history than about their subject matter.

In light of the danger of reproducing tea’s ideological structures in scholarship, reflexive ethnography emerges as a particularly appealing approach to studying tea practice. I do not mean to imply that ethnographers translate the experience of tea into words more truthfully or objectively; rather, on the whole, experience has not “fallen in value” for the ethnographer who still appreciates the power of storytelling, both on the part of the informant and the anthropologist.<sup>36</sup> A number of recent (and as yet unpublished) studies have attempted to investigate the contemporary practice and meaning of Japanese tea culture without becoming imbricated in the legitimating strategies of the tea schools.<sup>37</sup> A diverse picture of the “tea life” of Japanese tea practitioners emerges from this still growing literature.<sup>38</sup> Holland, for example, fashions affecting biographical sketches of his informants, and then engages in thick description of their associations inside and outside the tea room. His analysis of non-clite tea gatherings as instances of “ritual performance” in which complex communicative allusions are made through the selection of utensils (*toriawase*) reveals tea society to be diversely stratified and rich in opportunities for creativity. These aspects are all too often overlooked in scholarly accounts of tea culture.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that countless aspects of the historical and contemporary experience of Japanese tea culture are missing from this volume. The central importance of the tea garden or “dew-covered path” (*roji*) as a liminal and transitory margin between everyday and ritual space, for example, is hinted at in Slusser’s chapter, but not addressed directly in any of the other chapters. Likewise, tea practitioners’ many innovations in architectural design – beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing to the present – unfortunately are not attended to in these pages. Perhaps most importantly, the tactile, non-discursive moments of tea practice have not been captured in the chapters contained herein. The sounds, smells, and sights of the tea room, not to mention the close proximity of bodies and art objects, combine to form an unspoken grammar of sensation and awareness. Like historical pasts that can never be fully recovered, these experiences lie suspended between the poles of encounter and representation. The following chapters record our own encounters

with tea practice and its historical traces, selected and arranged (*toriawase*), carefully prepared, and ritually offered up for readers' consumption.

## Notes

- 1 Michael Ashkenazi, "The Canonization of Nature in Japanese Culture," in Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland (eds), *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives* (Curzon, 1997), pp. 207–212.
- 2 For more information on the science and cultivation of tea, see Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer, *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug* (Routledge, 2001), pp. 246–251.
- 3 These figures are somewhat deceiving, however, because the caffeine levels in the final beverage are generally lower for tea than for coffee. Bennett and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, pp. 236 and 327.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- 5 It is clear that caffeine consumed in extremely large quantities can be dangerous, particularly because it can inhibit iron intake. In regular doses of the sort seen in popular beverage consumption, however, adverse effects are not immediately apparent. At present we find no consensus among scientists on whether or not caffeine poses a health risk. See Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, for summaries of recent research.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49.
- 7 William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765–1914* (Routledge, 2000), pp. 10–32.
- 8 This term emerges in Simon Schama's reading of Roland Barthes' 1953 text, "Le monde-objet." Though Schama's subject matter – Dutch still life paintings – seems far removed from early Japanese tea consumption, the manner in which both forms of cultural production point to "the fateful connection between 'the domestic empire of things' and the global empire of commerce" is instructive. Simon Schama, "Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-life Painting and the 'Empire of Things,'" in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (Routledge, 1993), pp. 478–479.
- 9 James Mew and John Ashton, *Drinks of the World* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), pp. 7–8.
- 10 Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (University of Washington Press, 1985), p. 127.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–91. It should be noted that coffeehouses were also sources of controversy among religious and political authorities in the Islamic world. Opposition to coffee consumption was argued on the grounds that drinkers "behaved in a reprehensible way." Of particular concern was the fact that social gatherings organized around coffee consumption often consisted of "clandestine nocturnal gatherings." See *ibid.*, pp. 29–45.
- 12 Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (The University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 127–140.
- 13 This phrase comes from T.H. Breen, "The Meanings of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century," in Brewer and Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, p. 250.
- 14 See Kumakura Isao, *Bunka to shite no manaa* (Iwanami Shoten, 2000).
- 15 Anonymous, "Kessoku 'ichimai iwa' c fushin," *Kyoto Shinbun* (29 September 1997).
- 16 See James-Henry Holland, "Allusion, Performance, and Status: The Social and Aesthetic World of Elite Practitioners of the Japanese Tea Ceremony," (Ph.D.

diss., Cornell University, 1997), particularly the section on informal networks: pp. 133–153.

- 17 Herbert Plutschow suggestively applies Emile Durkheim's theory that ritualistic rules of conduct invoke the sacred to the case of tea culture, arguing that for tea practitioners the sacred is not any identifiable deity but rather "the entire *communitas* assembled in the sacred space" of the tea room. "An Anthropological Perspective on the Japanese Tea Ceremony," *Anthropoetics* 1:5 (Spring/Summer 1999). See also Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 138–144, on the mutual creation of performance. I am grateful to James-Henry Holland for this second reference.
- 18 Public gatherings of this sort are sponsored by tea schools, by tea utensil dealers, by individual practitioners, and by associations of tea and flower arrangement practitioners. As public performances, they serve both as opportunities to display wealth (in the form of tea utensils) and power (in the form of participants and attending audience members) and as chances to display technical mastery of the routines of being a host or guest. See Holland, "Allusion, Performance, and Status," pp. 148–153.
- 19 See Slusser's discussion of the conception of tea practice as a path or "way" in Chapter 2.
- 20 See, for example, *Kissa yōjōki* by the monk Eisai (1141–1215), founder of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism in Japan.
- 21 Marilyn Ivy uses the term "phantasm" to indicate how nostalgia for something absent is neither an exercise in complete imaginary construction nor an attempt to recover something authentic, but "an epistemological object whose presence or absence cannot be definitively located." *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 22.
- 22 *Sadōgaku taikei*. Even this series, however, has Sen Sōshitsu, the head of Urasenke, listed as the supervisory editor.
- 23 I focus in this Introduction on English language research, but there is a lively literature on Japanese tea culture in other European languages. Recent works in German, French, Italian, and Russian, for example, include the following: Norbert R. Adami, "Tee-Zeremonie in Japan oder Form und Inhalt," in *Münchener japanischer Anzeiger: Eine Vierteljahrsschrift* 4 (1993), pp. 8–33; Franziska Ehmcke, *Der japanische Tee-Weg: Bewusstseinsschulung und Gesamtkunstwerk* (Cologne: DuMont, 1991); Nicolas Fieve, Sylvie Guichard-Anguis, Michèle Pirazzoli-Serstevens, et al., *Les arts de la cérémonie du thé* (Dijon: Faton, 1996); Manar Hammad, *L'architecture du thé* (Paris: Groupe de recherches semio-linguistiques, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique, 1987); Horst Siegfried Hennemann, *Chasho: Geist und Geschichte der Theorien japanischer Teekunst* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994); Horst Siegfried Hennemann, *Cha-no-yu: die Tee-Kultur Japans* (Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, Hamburg: Otto Harrassowitz, 1980); Aleksandr Nikolaevich Ignatovich, *Filosofskie, istoricheskie i esteticheskie aspekty sinkretizma* (Moskva: Russkoe fenomenologicheskoe obshchestvo, 1997); Christlieb Jobst, "Befriedigung aus Tee und Blumen: Traditionelle Formen der Selbstverwirklichung," in Gebhard Hielscher (ed.), *Die Frau in Japan* (OAG-Reihe Japan modern, vol. 1, 1984); Dani Karavan, *Tè: la cerimonia del tè* (Glori-Fattoria di Celle, 2000); Brigitte Kita, *Tee und Zen – der gleiche Weg* (Munich: Erd, 1993); Bernadette Raab, *Das Wunder der Teestunde: Teegeniesser erzählen eigene Erlebnisse* (Aufl.-Ottensheim: Lilanitya, 1997); Hans Schwalbe, *Die Teezeremonie* (Munich, 1979). I am grateful to Michael Wachutka and Hideyuki Morimoto for assistance in compiling these references.

- 24 Robert Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions* 33:1 (August, 1993), p. 3.
- 25 A.L. Sadler, *Cha-no-yu: The Japanese Tea Ceremony* (J.L. Thompson & Co., 1934).
- 26 Some admirable studies include Rand Castile, *The Way of Tea* (Weatherhill, 1971); Ryoichi Fujioka, *Tea Ceremony Utensils* (Weatherhill, 1973); Sen'ō Tanaka, *The Tea Ceremony* (Kodansha International Ltd, 1973); T. Hayashiya, M. Nakamura and S. Hayashiya, *Japanese Arts and the Tea Ceremony* (Weatherhill, 1974); Henry Mittwer, *The Art of Chabana: Flowers for the Tea Ceremony* (Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1974); Theodore Ludwig, "The Way of Tea: A Religio-Aesthetic Mode of Life," *History of Religions* 14 (1974); Beatrice M. Bodart, "Tea and Counsel: The Political Role of Sen Rikyū," *Monumenta Nipponica* 32 (1977); H. Paul Varley and George Elison, "The Culture of Tea; From its Origins to Sen no Rikyū," in George Elison and Bardwell L. Smith (eds), *Warlords, Artist and Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1981); Theodore M. Ludwig, "Before Rikyū: Religious and Aesthetic Influences in the Early History of the Tea Ceremony," *Monumenta Nipponica* 36 (1981); Shigemori Chikamatsu, *Stories from a Tearoom Window* (Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1982, trans. Kozaburo Mori); Dorinne Kondo, "The Way of Tea: A Symbolic Analysis," *Man* 20 (1985); Herbert E. Plutschow, *Historical Chanoyu* (The Japan Times Ltd, 1986); Jennifer Anderson, "Japanese Tea Ritual: Religion in Practice," *Man* 22:3 (1987); the essential multi-author volume, Paul Varley and Kumakura Isao (eds), *Tea in Japan: Essays in the History of Chanoyu* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1989); Richard Wilson, "The Tea Ceremony: Art and Etiquette for the Tokugawa Era," in *The Japan of the Shoguns* (The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1989); the Urasenke-centered but very helpful ethnography by Jennifer Anderson, *An Introduction to the Japanese Way of Tea* (State University of New York Press, 1991); Barbara Lynne Rowland Mori, "The Tea Ceremony: A Transformed Japanese Ritual," *Gender and Society* 5 (1991); Barbara Lynne Rowland Mori, *Americans Studying the Traditional Japanese Art of the Tea Ceremony: The Internationalizing of a Traditional Art* (Mellen Research University Press, 1992); Julia Nakano-Holmes, "Furuta Oribe: Iconoclastic Guardian of Chanoyu Tradition," (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); Dennis Hirota, *Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path* (Asian Humanities Press, 1995); Sen Sōshitsu XV, *The Japanese Way of Tea from its Origins in China to Sen Rikyū* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); and of course the many translated and original essays in Urasenke's English-language journal, *Chanoyu Quarterly*, which consists of eighty-eight issues published between 1970 and 1999. A number of anthropologists have also conducted research on tea culture in recent years. See n. 37.
- 27 Louise Cort, *Shigaraki, Potters' Valley* (Kodasha, 1979).
- 28 Robert Kramer, "The Tea Cult in History" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1985).
- 29 Christine M.E. Guth, *Art, Tea, and Industry: Masuda Takashi and the Mitsui Circle* (Princeton University Press, 1993).
- 30 See Chapter 7 of Mary Elizabeth Berry, *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto* (University of California Press, 1994).
- 31 Patricia Graham, *Tea of the Sages: The Art of Sencha* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).
- 32 Bernard Faure, *Chan Insight and Oversight: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 145.
- 33 Greg Levine's attention to Rikyū's patronage of the powerful Zen temple Daitokuji is particularly instructive. See "Jūkōin: Art, Architecture, and Mortu-



- ary Culture at a Japanese Zen Buddhist Temple” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997) and his work-in-progress, tentatively entitled, *Daitokuji: Visual Cultures at a Japanese Zen Buddhist Monastery*.
- 34 See Chapter 4, “The Raku House and the Iemoto System,” in Morgan Pitelka, “Raku Ceramics: Tradition and Cultural Reproduction in Japanese Tea Practice, 1574–1942,” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2001) for more on the history of the *iemoto* system in tea.
- 35 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, NC, 1993), p. ix.
- 36 This interpretation is inspired by Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Schocken Books, 1968), p. 83.
- 37 Authors are of course reflexive to different degrees. Holland, “Allusion, Performance, and Status,” is a particularly notable example of an ethnographer critically examining his position *vis-à-vis* his informants, and taking into account the manner in which his presence impacts their practice. Also interesting is Melissa Marie Kane’s work, “Communicating Tea: An Ethnography of Social Interaction and Relationship Construction in the Japanese Tea Ritual,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1998). She applies speech communication theory and the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin on speech as a social event to the communication that occurs in the tea gathering. As is the case with the scholarship of Barbara Mori (1991; 1992), Kane conducted much of her research among tea practitioners outside of Japan, illuminating the transnational character of Japanese tea culture in the post-war years. The most recent ethnography as of 2002 is Etsuko Kato, “Bodies Representing the Past: Japanese Women and the Tea Ceremony after World War II,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2001). Kato interprets the study of the procedures of preparing, serving, and drinking tea (*temae*) as an act of oppositional empowerment on the part of socially “nondominant” groups, such as commoners in the early modern period, and urban housewives in the post-war period.
- 38 Holland, “Allusion, Performance, and Status,” p. 29.