



*Three Strands of Asia*  
Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Lecture Series

# Lecture Five

**Tea Cultures of China, Japan and Korea**  
**July 17, 2014**

# Tea Cultures of China, Japan and Korea

Muramatsu Kanako  
Representative of Urasenke Seoul Branch

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*The fifth lecture of the Three Strands of Asia was held in July 17, inviting Ms. Muramatsu Kanako, Representative of Urasenke Seoul Branch. Urasenke is one of the most famous schools of Japanese tea ceremony established by the descendant of Sen Rikyu, a Japanese tea master who perfected the tea ceremony and raised it to the level of an art. The lecture by Ms. Muramatsu featured on unique yet inter-related development of tea cultures of China, Japan and Korea.*

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This lecture aims to understand tea cultures of China, Japan and Korea, focusing on the development of Japanese tea ceremony that corresponds to Chinese and Korean tea ceremonies. Tea plant is native to the area that encompasses Southwest China, Northern Thailand and Assam of India. Long before the existence of historical records, people in this area must have consumed tea leaves. Before the invention of tea, they took nutrition by eating soft young leaves.

Tea started to spread out around China's *Jiangnan* area from the 4-5th century. *Yu Lu*, the famous scholar respected as the Sage of Tea, wrote 'The Classic of Tea' in the late 8th century. *Yu Lu*'s writing indicates that tea drinking had evolved from an act of taking nutrition to a culture with spirituality. Tea of this time was solid. People made powder out of well dried leaves, mixed it with hot water and drank it. This particular way of tea drinking has disappeared in China, yet it is similar to the way of drinking grind tea in Japan.

The tea culture was at its height during Song Dynasty. It was the time when Japanese monk *Eisai* introduced grind tea from China to Japan. Around the same period, an envoy from Song to the Korean peninsula composed 'Illustrated Account of Goryeo'. According to this writing, Goryeo court held tea rituals when the envoys came. Goryeo also developed its own tea-things, and etiquettes for tea making and drinking. This suggests that before 'Illustrated Account of Goryeo' was written, the culture of drinking solid and grind tea was introduced from Chinese continent to Korean peninsula.

Tea introduced by *Eisai* took a strong root within Japanese society along the development of Zen Buddhism. During Kamakura period of the 14th century, tea culture was transmitted from

the monks to the commoners. During the late Kamakura period, tea fight was prevalent. People often enjoyed the competition of drinking 10 cups of 4 different types of teas and making a good guess of their different origins. Tea drinking in this time became a play thanks to the ample supply of tea leaves that enabled nation-wide popularization of tea culture.

Tea drinking as a play, and tea as an item of personal preference were further elaborated to become an art during Muromachi period. 'The Way of Tea' that refers to Japan's tea ceremony can be turned into an art only when tea drinking is combined with polished costume, action, background and heart. In medieval Japan, tea party was prevalent, and tea-things and teahouse were refined. Yet the heart that systemizes all those elements of tea drinking was yet to be developed. That heart is *Wabi* aesthetics of subdued, austere beauty expressed in the culture of *Wabi-cha*.

*Murata Juko*, the founding father of *Wabi-cha*, first addressed the problem of heart in tea ceremony. *Wabi-cha* was further developed by *Takeo Joo*, the big merchant of the *Sakai* area, and perfected by *Sen Rikyu*. This particular style of Japanese tea ceremony has couple of unique characteristics. For example, *Sen Rikyu* made ceramics particularly invented for tea ceremony for the first time. The good example of this is *Raku*-style *Chawan*, a tea cup produced by *Chojiro*, a roof tile craftsman from Korea. *Sen Rikyu* thought the clay and glaze used for roof tile was suitable to make a tea ware, and tried to express the beauty and heart of *Wabi-cha* by *Raku*-style *Chawan*.

*Sen Rikyu* on the other hand created *Daian*, a two *tatami*-mat tea house. It is a humble space where one *tatami*-mat is for tea making and the other for tea drinking. Tea ceremony within this small teahouse induces feeling of tension, which in turn invites a person to the special experience in a nondaily world. *Sen Rikyu* also invented a unique entrance called *nijiriguchi*. This 66 centimeter-wide entrance works as a force field that blocks dailyness. The invitees of tea ceremony cross this entrance with cleaned body and mind to arrive at the holy space of the teahouse.

Sharing thick tea is another unique tea culture of Japan. Japanese people prefer to use individual cups even amongst their family. Thus, sharing one bowl of thick tea with others may arouse repulsion at first, yet strengthens human solidarity once people get used to it. This ceremony of sharing influenced tea party meals, and engendered new style of Japanese cuisine called *Kaiseki*. *Sen Rikyu* attempted to express *Wabi* aesthetics by sense of season, design of tableware, and table manners. This allowed the development of simple meal of *Kaiseki* with one soup and three vegetable dishes.

*Wabi-cha* perfected by *Sen Rikyu* has been succeeded for 450 years by the three schools established by the sons of his grandson *Sensotan*. *Mushanokojisenke* School was founded by the second son of *Sensotan*, *Omotesenke* School by the third son and *Urasenke* School by the

last son. In China, tea culture has been succeeded in the form of *Chayi*, or ‘the Art of Tea’. As for Korea, *Darye* or ‘Tea Ritual’ has been transmitted from the ancient Three Kingdoms’ period to Goryeo Dynasty. Tea culture was not popular among the commoners, as Buddhism was suppressed in Joseon Dynasty. Yet the culture has become popular in Korea in recent 40 years. People of China, Japan and Korea nowadays relinquish tea under these unique cultures.

## Q & A

1. Do tea cultures of China and Korea also have close ties with Buddhism as Japanese tea culture does?

Tea drinking is an indispensable part of Buddhist training of one’s mind and body. I have once met a Korean who believes in Zen Buddhism. He drinks *Zen Cha*, a type of tea where the culture of Zen Buddhism and Korean tea are blended, every time before he practices Zen meditation. It is because tea is effective in making one’s mind clear, aiding digestion and getting rid of distracting thoughts. According to him, Korean tea culture has maintained close ties with Buddhism. Although the culture was not popularized during Joseon dynasty, tea ceremony has been continuously practiced in Buddhist temples. As for China, people casually enjoy tea drinking in their lives, but do not practice tea ceremony as part of a religious training because of the influence of Communism.

2. From your lecture, I have noticed that tea culture naturally contains the thoughts for peace and harmony. It is impressive to know that *Sen Rikyu* was against *Toyotomi Hideyoshi*’s invasion of Korean peninsula. It is also notable that in the writing by *Murata Juko*, there is a sentence saying that it is necessary to go beyond the boundaries of Chineseness and Japaneseness. I think that understanding of the philosophical essence of tea culture can promote friendly relationships among China, Japan and Korea. What do you think?

I totally agree with your opinion. In fact, it is what the present master of *Urasenke* School has insisted for a long time. He holds a belief that people in the three countries can build close relationships to one another by the mutual understanding of their tea cultures. *Urasenke* holds ‘East Asian Tea Culture Symposium’ every year, where the experts gather and discuss the role of tea culture in contributing to world peace.

It was the idea of the master of *Urasenke* to build a Japanese tea house in Korea in the late 1980s. It was the time when Japan and Korea were not in amicable relationship. Thus I went through a difficulty in building a bridge between Japanese and Korean culture by introducing Japanese tea ceremony to Korea. That is, I was in-between two different cultures: I was Japanese when I practice Japanese tea ceremony yet had to live a life as a Korean wife and mother at home. Now I have overcome all those hardships since the two cultures are now

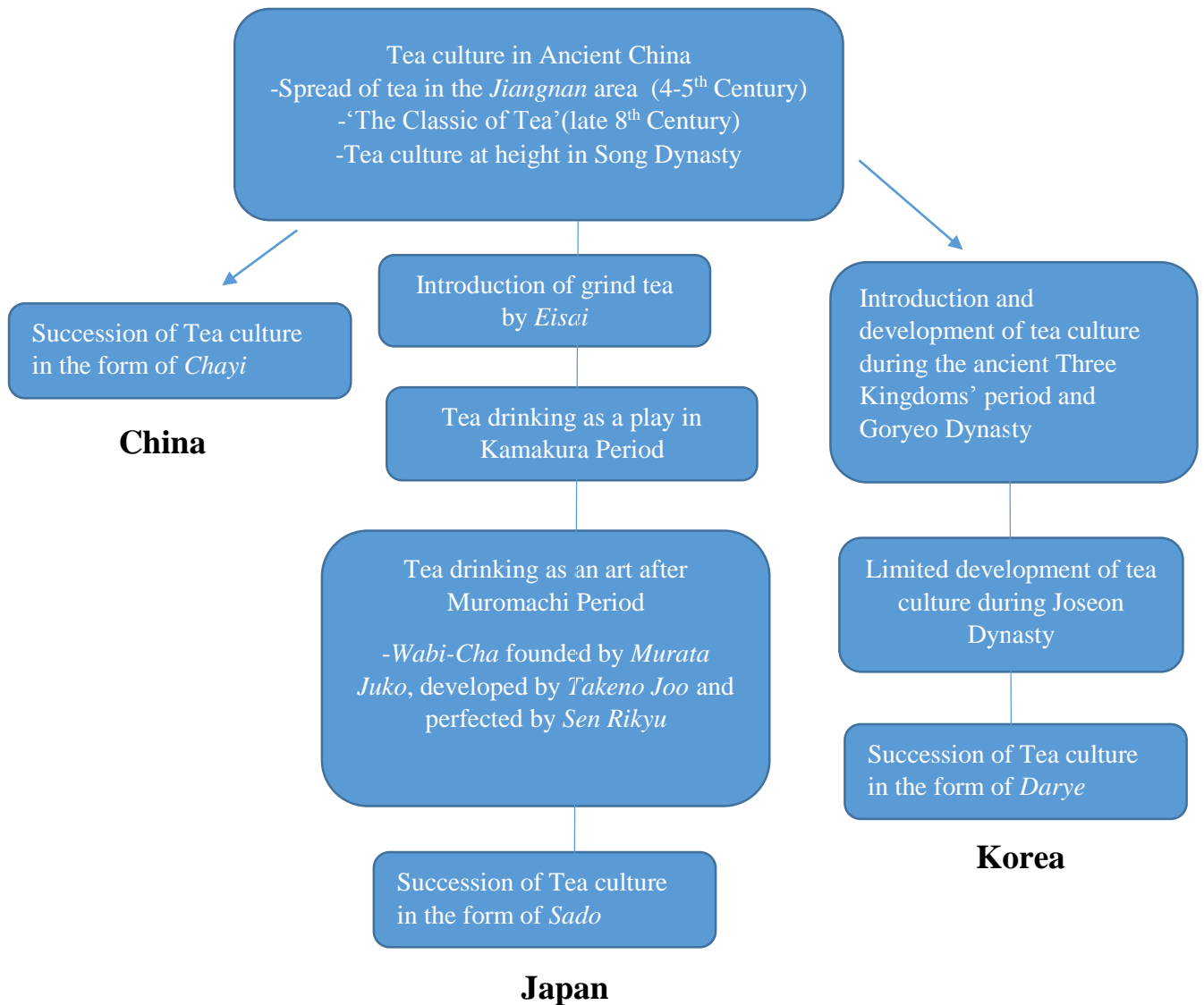
harmoniously blended within my life. This led me to think that Korean people also share the culture of subdued, austere beauty.

3. What kind of things should we put inside the tea cups of the three countries?

Secretary-General: Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) is an international organization which promotes friendly relationships among China, Japan and Korea. In this sense, I think TCS is a tea cup that can contain any ideas about the trilateral cooperation. We are expecting brilliant new ideas of people in the three countries about the trilateral cooperation.

Deputy Secretary-General (Mr. LEE Jong-heon): In the tea cup of Korea, I think we can put 'We' culture that does away with distinction between You and I. The essence of tea culture that emphasizes harmony in this sense is inherent in Korean consciousness.

## Lecture Five at a Glance



Ms. Muramatsu Kanako is a representative of *Urasenke* Seoul Branch who performed Japanese tea ceremony at 2013 TCS Open House. She has introduced and taught *Urasenke* tea ceremony in Korea since 1990. In 1993, she was awarded Japanese Foreign Minister Prize for her contribution to the cultural exchange between Japan and Korea.

### Three Strands of Asia Overview

	Date	Theme	Speaker
Lecture One	2014.2.13	Written Scripts	Professor Emmanuel Pastreich Kyung Hee University
Lecture Two	2014.3.13	Housings	Mr. Kim Kyung Eun Editor of Kyunghayng Shinmun
Special Lecture	2014.4.14	The Making of Northeast Asia	Professor Kent Calder Johns Hopkins University
Lecture Three	2014.5.20	Court Music	Professor Song Hye Jin Sookmyung Womens' University
Lecture Four	2014.6.25	Implication of Confucianism	Professor Shing Jung Geun, Sunkyunkwan University
Lecture Five	2014.7.17	Tea Cultures	Ms. Muramatsu Kanako Chief Representative, Urasenke Seoul Branch
Lecture Six	2014.9.23	Calligraphy	Mr. Ye Xin Board member, Chinese Culture Center at Seoul



Three Strands of Asia is the monthly lecture series by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) started from February, 2014. This lecture series brings together experts of China, Japan and Korea to explain various aspects of the cultures and societies of the three countries from a comparative perspective. This event is aimed at encouraging balanced and thoughtful understanding of the three countries by investigating similarities and differences.

Edited and Translated by: YANG Soo Young