

# Tea Ceremony – *My Way*

1/2

**Markuz Wernli Saitô**

Selfpublished speech prepared for presentation at Soko Gakuen Japanese language school in San Francisco, February 18, 2008  
<http://momentarium.org/research/independent/tea.shtml>.

In 2002 when arriving to Japan I knew that this country has a deep-rooted culture and tradition, which is particularly evident in Kyoto. So I wondered how I could bring something authentic of that culture into my fast-paced life on a daily basis. I wanted to get into a practice that I could maintain a connection to Japan no matter where I lived.



Upon arrival a friend of mine introduced me to Obana-sensei who ran a small tea school in Kyoto. After attending a few classes he agreed to sponsor a cultural activities visa which allowed me to stay in Japan. Without knowing I became a student of the Souchûryû school, a sub-branch of the Urasenke tradition. This meant — as my teacher Obana-sensei put it — that as students we were in a safe environment to make mistakes in order to learn.



Nowadays when I meet another tea practicing person I am actually quiet glad to belong to a small, specialized school within Urasenke. Because then as tea persons we can be at ease and know that there are slight differences in the presentation and handling and nobody can tell when there is a glitch... Anyway we shouldn't stress the differences between Urasenke or Omotesenke too much.

Above all Chanoyu (Japanese tea ceremony) is about leaving status and equality of the outer world behind and unite people in the ritual of tea in a humble way.

Over the following four years I went to tea school almost every week. Of course all the rigorous practice with sitting for hours on my sore knees, and notoriously forgetting the crucial details made me often want to quit all together. But all those years I stayed on and kept coming back to my tea school.

# Tea Ceremony – *My Way*

2/2

**Markuz Wernli Saitō**

Initially I saw Chanoyu as an expression of house culture and a social function where different art disciplines merge like interior design, flower arrangement, kimono, sweets and tea, and a form of ritualized live art we can call performance.

It took me years to realize that with obtaining a certain proficiency in the tea ceremony's rigid protocol everybody can find ones own personal expression

When you watch an experienced

'tea person' preparing Chanoyu you can detect her or his own style which is something wonderful. After you master the technique you have the leverage

— the creative license, so to say — to add your personal touch. In that respect tea ceremony is a life-long past time and is taking on different meanings as seasons go by and as we go through trough life.



When I got a bit more confident and was able to get all the way through the

200-something step protocol I was thinking of ways to bring the tea ceremony out of the secluded tea house into daily life. The thing with

many traditional arts is that they seem rather disconnected from our contemporary urban life. It is hard to imagine that originally the tea ceremony

didn't have that upscale and elitarian feeling to it as it often does these days. Chanoyu was part of

everyday house culture and often prepared in the form of a casual picnic in the park.

So in autumn 2006 I allowed myself to play a bit with tradition and brought the tea ceremony into open public places in Kyoto and Hakodate. On a weekly basis I scheduled and offered weekly tea ceremonies that were free of charge. Not only to create surprising situations and invite fresh encounters but also to expand our collective horizon on what can be done in the public sphere.

