

Semiotic Perspective of the Japanese Tea Ceremony: Founded in Culture, Movements, and Symbolism

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Abstract:

However, a semiotic perspective is founded in the culture, movements, and symbolism of the Japanese Tea Ceremony. This paper will journey into the unique and exciting pieces of the Japanese Tea Ceremony. While also allowing the reader to learn and gain some information about the Japanese Tea Ceremony they might not have been aware of before reading this paper.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to widen my perceptions about the Japanese Tea Ceremony from the lens of a semiotic [47] ideology. Furthermore, the following seven sections discarding the beginning and end of the paper will focus on certain parts of the Tea Ceremony and ways it inquires some form of semiotic values.

The second section in this paper is called “*History of Japan’s Cultural Icon: Tea Culture,*” will give an overview of Japan history during the Edo period and history after World War II, the changing roles of men and women in the practice of the tea ((6, 8)), as this section also focuses on the diachronic [11] perspective change of the “language” in tea culture after WWII and the synchronic [60] perspective of the traditional “language” of tea culture in ancient Japan, which will highlight when the cultural icon [20] of tea changed its representation in the culture and lives of the Japanese.

The third section of this paper, titled “*Postmodernism and Modernism Style of the Teahouse / Tearoom,*” details the physical structure of different outer designs. Tea Ceremonies buildings can look depending on whether it is postmodernism [39] architecture style and modernism [28] style, while also comparing the internal design of the tearoom where the Tea Ceremonies are held. Where the different placement of the ceremonies influences the interactions between the host and guest during the Tea Ceremonies ((2, 10, 11)), as the different semiosphere spacing of the tearooms and tea buildings leaves “room” for the guest and host to main a sense of proxemics [42] between each other.

The fourth section of this paper is headed, “*Different Types of Japanese Tea Ceremonies,*” which gives descriptions and explanations of the Hatsugama ceremony, Rinji ceremony, and Yuuzari-no-chaji ceremony as some diverse types of Japanese Tea Ceremonies that are held in Japan ((10,11)). This section will as express the connotation [6] and denotation [9] of the purpose and style of these Tea Ceremonies and the particular signal [54] or interactions the host and guest have with each other ((1)).

The fifth section in this paper is called “*The Codes within the Host, Guest, and Tea,*” and goes through the code [2] of the Japanese Tea Ceremony, social and hagiarchy codes the host and guest must follow as a sign [51] communication of manners, respect and boundaries between one another ((1,3,8,10)).

The sixth section of this paper, titled “*Body Movements and Gestures during Tea Ceremony,*” will discuss the different elements of non-verbal communication that happen during Tea Ceremony with the host and guest/s. The non-verbal communication elements that will be focused on is gesture [16], gesticulant [17], kinesics [25], proxemics, [42] and oculusics [32] ((4, 5, 10)).

The seventh section of this paper is headed, “*Functions of Communication in Japanese Tea Ceremony,*” which will hit on the concept of Jacobson’s functions of communication with how some of these functions are applied during the engagement of the host and guest ((1,4,5,10)). The functions of focus will

be phatic Function (of communication) [37], poetic Function (of communication) [38], emotive function [13] and conative function (of communication) [3].

The eighth section in this paper is called “*Signs and Symbols the Tea Ceremony represents for Japanese Culture,*” will go into an analysis about how the tea bowl and tea are a conventional sign [8] and a symbol [58] for the people and Japanese culture, as well as how women are the main symbol during the Tea Ceremony, signifier [56] and signified [55] effect of the tea bowl between the host and guest ((3, 7, 9,10)).

The conclusion of this paper concludes the concept of the Japanese Tea Ceremony summarizing the vast ideas and structure from a semiotic perspective throughout this whole paper.

History of Japan’s Cultural Icon: Tea Culture

The Japanese Tea Ceremony has a long and rich history behind it. The Japanese Tea Ceremony or “Chado” in Japanese has been around since the mid-16th century and today represents one of the so-called traditional arts in Japan ((6)). It has been said to be started and spread from wealthy merchants within the late 1400’s up until the 1600’s. Where before being seen as a cultural practice, it was more as a religious practice within Zen Buddhism. Then, over time, the tea ceremony became recognized for its history of being held as a cultural appreciation and engagement towards Japanese people and culture.

The timeframe of Japan’s Japanese Tea Ceremony throughout the Edo period is between (1603-1807. The Japanese Tea Ceremony after World War II was a timeframe within (1945 – present day). Respectively, to gain an understanding of how long the Tea Ceremony has been a part of Japan’s culture and in the Edo’s period I have discuss major events that happen during this timeframe. The tea ceremony was already around before the Meiji Restoration ((8)), the era of the samurai and the event of Roman Catholic missionaries trying to spread Christianity. Now Versus after WWII the Tea Ceremony has been around in the process of the aftermath of the war causing a social upheaval, cultural shift over of militaristic traits, economic growth in the 60’s, Tea ceremonies in schools during the 80’s and even today’s aesthetics of them.

The practice and history of the Tea Ceremony in Edo was a main aspect of “manliness”, militaristic and wealthless around the ideas of power and money values. As the practice was a foundation of life for the sake of art and the fundamentals for the practice of chado in architecture, philosophy, crafts, flower arrangements, food preparation ((8)). This practice was inspired by three men known for their masters of the art of tea. On the other hand, the practice of the tea ceremony after World War II had a different

approach than Edo's. After WWII the practice had been shifted into further feminization of the Tea Ceremony ((6)). As a result of the ending of war and more aspect of feminization being more open not all the way, but in Japanese society made it possible for this newly found practice to emerge. In other words, women influence in Japan's public sphere would allow for this push within the Tea Ceremony.

The association with the cultural icon [[20]] of tea in Japan and the concept towards the Japanese Tea Ceremony has drastically changed from the Edo period and the modern times after WWII. In the Edo period tea ceremonies were only reserved for men to participate among. As by the 1600's, its practice had spread from the monasteries to the court, the military, and wealthy upper-class merchants ((8)). It was seen as masculine trait and women were very limited to the participation of doing a tea ceremony. Women could basically help their husband "prepare" for his real ceremony with the other men, and if they were the wife of that "social status". Now obvious today in Japan women's role around "tea" is very common and heavily involved than before, as the product after World War II. There were new outlooks on the synchronic [[60]] traditions of military influences on the roles of who would be in charge of "tea" and amidst the Tea Ceremony. Thus, soon after Chado had to redefine itself and its place in society... participation by women was encouraged and Chado was cast in light of preserving and teaching cultural practices and values ((8)) in a new diachronic [[11]] approach. As these characteristics see the fit more feminine traits women were seen the most "appropriate" fit for the Japanese Tea Ceremony. Which even today women are still the main roles of the Tea Ceremony and matcha tea itself is seen as a more calming, radiant aesthetics versus an "warrior" military concept in ancient Japan.

Postmodernism and Modernism Style of the Teahouse / Tearoom

The machiai is known to be the waiting area for the guest to wait to start the Tea Ceremony. The tea garden or in Japanese Roji is waiting area and the teahouse with has few adornments. The nijiriguchi is a building that separates the interior of the teahouse from the adjoining preparation area ((10)). All these buildings are a mimic style the traditional Japanese style for ancient Japan. Each of these different buildings creates different and beautiful scenery for the guest /s enjoy as these are in nature around trees, gardens and flowers etc.

Furthermore, the inner parts of the tearooms have a mixture of being postmodernism [[39]] architect style with some older traditional designs and pieces used in the Tea Ceremony. The inner parts of the tearoom are important from room design to the equipment in the Tea Ceremony. Due to the reason where everything will happen in the tearoom from making and eating the little snacks down to making and drinking the matcha tea. The tearooms can range from having a traditional Japanese design to a more modern outlook inside. For example, the nijiriguchi tearoom is sparsely decorated with only a small tokonoma art alcove on whose back wall a single scroll is hung. Where the roji has a basin made of stone and a bamboo dipper as well to wash hands in it ((10)). The more traditional rooms have pillows and floor mats with a floor tray. More postmodernism [[39]] tearooms have glass windows with a painted black or brown wooden table, some small chairs and some fancy looking lamps in the room. Thus, from the moment a guest/s walk into the Tea Ceremony can already be displayed in two places, the tokonoma alcove, and the host's place, organized around the kettle providing boiling water, heated with a carefully prepared charcoal fire ((2)). Now there are a lot of special utensils used in the Tea Ceremony. There are about seventeen different utensils that are for matcha tea. Some of these products are the caddy (Chaire/Natsume), whisk (chasen), tea Bowl (Chawan), tea Scoop (Chashaku), Drawstring Pouch (Shifuku) kettle Lit (Futa) and the green tea (matcha) ((11)).

The architecture styles of the outer design of the tea ceremony buildings, and the inner tearoom influences the semiosphere [[48]] between the engagements and functions of the host and guest. If the building is made from wood the guest/s are supposed to crawl into the door slide to meet the host. Versus if another one is a more postmodernism type the host will open the door and the guest/s will bow and take off their shoes and sometimes will have slippers. Others might have to wait outside under the shelter type ceremony building and wait for the host to allow them to enter and some waiting rooms are connected inside in the next room is the tearoom. Thus, the designs of the buildings and tearooms make a difference in how the host and guest first engage with each other.

The outer architecture designed styles of machiai, tea garden, and nijiriguchi Japanese tea ceremonies are modernism [[28]] buildings. As the outer parts of these three buildings are influenced and reflected based off traditional Japanese styles. The machiai outer design is made out made from complete wood or sometimes is even made from stone with a wooden roof. Inside with a wooden bench to sit and wait in the winter a mini heater to make the guest warm. The tea garden or in Japanese Roji is made from wood all wood expect it also has a shoji wall around the building with a bunch of stones. The nijiriguchi is made from wood with wooden boards and roof on top there is also some lintel as well.

Different Types of Japanese Tea Ceremonies

The denotation [[9]] of the Hatsugama ceremony is the boiling of the first kettle of tea ((11)). The Hatsugama ceremony is known as the first kettle of tea because it is the first tea ceremony of the year in Japan. So, it is held in the month of January making it a winter ceremony and is typically done at sunrise so at 6am or near that timeframe. In a connotation [[6]] perspective this ceremony is an extremely formal and important for the culture and people, as it is between teachers and students as they wear their best kimonos on this special occasion. Which actually has dated back for centuries as a tea ceremony and special ritual too ((11)). Though it focuses on tea, the Hatsugama ceremony has lots of different foods other than tea.

The denotation [[9]] of the Rinji ceremony means emergency or in terms of the tea ceremony “emergency tea”. Now this may sound like an urgent type of tea ceremony, it really is the opposite type meaning. The Rinji ceremony can happen any time of the year with no special time to arrival or to have the tea makes this an informal ceremony as it has flexible “rules” for the host and guest. A connotation [[6]] perspective this ceremony is that Japanese culture considers the Rinji to be a time for friends to randomly have tea together and bond with each other. While also appreciating the Japanese heritage of the Tea Ceremony. That allows them to spend time with each other and enjoy the hospitality friends offer one another similar to a “hang-out”.

The denotation [[9]] of the Yuuzari-no-chaji ceremony is exact translate meaning the early-evening tea ceremony held in the warmer months ((11)). Which is true as the tea ceremony is literally held during the exact time the sun is about to set so the guests can enjoy this beautiful naturalistic scenery while drinking some tea. This tea ceremony is held in the summertime so anywhere between June, July and August, and as said before, it is held in the evening, so between six and seven is the usual time. Now in a connotation [[6]] perspective this ceremony for Japanese culture and people is an informal type of tea ceremony. Where in even though it is seen as informal, Japanese culture believes this experience unifies the people in the tearoom, which makes this a very special ritual ((11)).

During all these different types of tea ceremonies the host and guest produce a particular signal [[54]] / signals and interactions among each other. The host is supposed to give off an aura of being elegant but also professional traditional manner as well towards the guest, wearing traditional attire either a yukata or kimono outfit ((1)). This indicates to the guest regardless of if it is a formal or informal ceremony the host is serious about doing the tea ceremony and having it be in a precise manner. In which gives the guest another signal that this is special ceremony for them to enjoy the tea while participating in a Japanese culture.

The Codes within the Host, Guest and Tea

Since the beginning concept of the Tea Ceremony there has also been as sense of a social code [[2]] between the host and guest. Back in ancient Japan the focus of the social code [[2]] was shifted to the community higher status people in Japan. Specifically, male the religious figures, wealthy merchants and courts as they were the hosting the Tea Ceremonies. While the guest /s were other male figures in this same social status as well. As time went on this would change into a more of a teacher and student set of the social rules and standards between the host and guest. In which Chado was in the direction that retained the ranking and series of relationships of a feudal household in its grand master-teacher-student ((8)). Thus, in later time and present time it would change into those with more background knowledge and certified within the arts of the Tea Ceremony as it would later include women’s participation too and then “common” people in Japan. So, in a way all social classes were able to be part of the Tea Ceremony and the social code [[2]] over time.

Women in Japan had the connection of different hierarchy social codes during the Tea Ceremony. Most of the time this was main because some of these women's husbands were higher up in Japan's hierarchy and made it a little bit easier do the Tea Ceremony. Though it was more of practice for their husband than them. Other times is because Japan was a male dominated hierarchy country and continue to direct all pertinent changes, had dominated the way of tea in general, and chanoyu in particular ((10)). There were also the levels of called "novices" and a "iemoto" level type of relationship hierarchy ((3)) as the novices was inexperienced and the iemoto was the headmaster over them. Previously said before women were so limited during the Tea Ceremony in the past it was hard for them to gain some experience with the Tea Ceremony and majority of the tea masters were older males or men in general. Making women having a lower hierarchy social code over the Tea Ceremony in Japan.

Moreover, because of these social rules, standards and hierarchy set up throughout the history of Japan's Japanese Tea Ceremony it is more common for the host and guest to act in a more formal style with each other. Where the host and guest each are responsible for upholding formal manners and actions towards one other. Where the Japanese Tea Ceremony is a precise and important piece of culture in Japan and the Japanese themselves. This is way there are many different forms and actions that are demonstrated between the host and guest for the immediate start of the Tea Ceremony. Due to those reasons and how Japan is culture is involved in being respectful to those in higher status or even age than them. Though the formal style can be ditched if a more informal Tea Ceremony if it is with a group of close friends and around their age, but respect should still be a factor even though they are friends.

In most cases of a Tea Ceremony the one hosting the ceremony is an elder or older Japanese person, more experienced or this practice has been passed down within their family for generations. Where the guest is usually a stranger, student / pupil or even a tourist / foreigner who wants to engage themselves with the Tea Ceremony to enjoy. Though sometimes a guest/s can also be of higher status or the same status, if it is professional business type Tea Ceremony. Dating back to the ups. The house headship system (iemoto seido) ranks based on hereditary relations to the head of the school, knowledge of tea preparation and tea culture acknowledged in the form of certification, and occupations ((8)).

Body Movements and Gestures during Tea Ceremony

Many people may be surprised to learn and find out that the Japanese Tea Ceremony does not have any talking at all and is silent from the start to the end of the ceremony. It is actually a gesticulant [[17]] ceremony between the host and guest full of many body movements. So, the concept of gesture [[16]] is big within the tea ceremony as there will be many types of gestures between the host and guest during the whole tea ceremony. For instance, it is important for the host to have a good tea bowl and have a smooth and nice tablecloth to slide the tea over to the guest. If not, it could cause the host to have trouble because the cloth for wiping and purifying the bowl will not slide smoothly, and a guest will also be inconvenienced because it will be hard to find a place to drink from ((5)). Even not gesturing to use utensils from the host can make the guest to experience a firstness [[14]] feeling of unwelcomeness. So, gestures are in fact an important factor as it can increase or decrease the connection between the host and guest during the ceremony.

Besides the tea ceremony being a gesticulant [[17]] and involving gesture [[16]] there is another key foundation that goes on with the host and guest. This aspect is the kinesics [[25]] of the host and guest when they are in the ceremony, as this regards posture and facial expressions. The beginning of the tea ceremony is key for the kinesics [[25]] during the role of the host and guest. For example, from the moments of the guest entering a tea ceremony there is the opening a fusuma sliding door, make a bow, walk in a tearoom, take a seat ((4)). Where the host is using body movements to open the door, then the guest and host doing a posture of lowering their body to each other for respect and a formal Japanese greeting. Then the last steps of walking and seating down where facial expressions are dominated where there is smiling happening during this time or frowning depending on how the guest feels the host welcomed them or if the host is lacking a sense of hospitality to the guest or guests.

Furthermore, there is another aspect that happens during the Tea Ceremony, and it is the process of oculusics [[32]]. Oculicsics [[32]] deals with eye movement, eye behavior, gaze, and eye-related nonverbal forms of communication ((12)). Now eye behavior is important for the host as they need to be aware and watch themselves when boiling the water, making the tea and stirring it in a steady and slow manner. In order to avoid spills and other sorts of accidents in front of the guest. The guest/s on the other hand, while all of this is happening it is common for them to kneel facing the host while waiting as well as observing the host prepare the tea ((10)). They do this as a way of showing respect and a sign [[51]] they are paying attention to the host so when it is time to grab the tea, they will not be surprised.

Finally, the last key piece that goes on between the host and guest within the Japanese Tea Ceremony categorized under the concept of body movements is proxemics [[42]]. This happens to involve degree, and effect of the spatial separation individuals naturally maintain depending on relates to environmental or cultural factors. Where keeping an appropriate space between the host and guest/s are crucial to the Japanese Tea Ceremony. There is careful consideration over having good spacing of the guest/s near each other at the tea table is important. Due to the reason if there were a stranger or somebody who is not in good relationships with other participants, it would be difficult to infer the intensions to entertain and be entertained one another among the host and the guests ((5)) because the people are uncomfortable with the close proximity between each other. Also, the spacing directly from the host across the tea is big too as a guest/s or even host did not want to invade the personal space of the other person or not to seem rude being that close. This can be the cultural factor that Japanese value their own personal space.

Jakobson's Functions of Communication in Japanese Tea Ceremony

Jakobson's Functions of communication has some ways within the relationship of the host and guest in the Japanese Tea Ceremony. One of these presents is the conative function (of communication) [[3]] as this focuses with influencing the behaviour of the addressee ((12)). Even though there is no verbal form of communication going between them, there is a non-verbal aspect of the conative function happening with the host and guest. For example, the host bows then withdraws and the guests file out of the tearoom into the waiting lodge in the same order in which they had entered ((10)). By the host bowing it indicates and hints to the guest/s to leave the room until they are ready for the next part of the Tea Ceremony. Which then influences the guest/s to do this behaviour and exact in the manner the host wants them to act upon.

Phatic function (of communication) [[37]] is another occurrence going on connecting the relationship of the host and guest/s together. As the Phatic function can be used to a non-verbal communication form and is used in place to greet someone or say goodbye. Previously mentioned before greeting of saying "hello" is done by bowing to each other. Now to say goodbye after the Tea Ceremony the guest/s will usually turn their tea bowl towards the front of the host to tell them they are finished ((1)). After the guest will hand the bowl carefully and nicely back into the host's hands. Both will stand up and bow to each other once again before they leave as the host shows them out of the tearoom and the building.

In addition, emotive function [[13]] will play a role in the host and guest relationship. This function focuses on addresser's own attitude towards the content of the message is emphasized. A time when this can happen is where the guest/s eat the little sweets before or after the tea, and when drinking the tea. The guest may make an "slurp" sound when eating or drinking as express it was good tasting. Sometimes a guest/s does not make that sound, it implies the tea may not be to their liking and dislike the taste of the tea. In which hints to the host creating a message that either their tea was made good or poorly made for the guest/s taste.

Lastly, the poetic Function (of communication) [[38]] is another part of the relationship among host and guest. This function is responsible for the allocated to the message. This is a key product in the Tea Ceremony is the main message of the host trying to represent respect, purity and tranquility. And if this message is allocated to the guest/s who are attending the Tea Ceremony and they feel this was the message received during the Ceremony. Their relationship can be seen in terms of a poetic function (of communication).

Signs and Symbols the Tea Ceremony represents for Japanese Culture

There is an array of conventional signs [[8]] that are connections the host, guest to the tea and tea bowl as "one". In a way it represents a type of semiosis [[49]] relationship, as without the tea and tea bowl itself it would "taint" the connection and meaning the host and guest/s are supposed to experience together during the Tea Ceremony. This also includes the steps and performance in a syntagmatic [[62]] and signifying order [[50]] way. The host will follow and use the tea bowl and make the tea. In a correct manner that Japanese culture tries to achieve for the guest/s and the Tea Ceremony as a whole.

The tea bowl itself has a symbolic meaning as it has been known to create the signifier/s [[56]] of all the art modes accompanying cha-no-yu strove to heighten the subliminal awareness of this transportive geometry ((9)). Now some people think it is a myth [[29]] that the history of the tea bowl was a product of China and Chinese culture. Instead of Japan and Japanese culture as the Tea Ceremony has been around a long time throughout Japan and is still a huge part of the culture today. Though it is true the tea bowl can date back to earlier 13th century until around the 16th century in China, as the Tea Ceremony started in Japan as the product of the realm of Zen doctrine and aesthetic ((7)) from Zen Buddhists monks. Thus, Zen is a Chinese religion that happened to move in other eastern Asian countries over time. As the Tea Ceremony is the signified [[55]] concept from the tea bowl itself. In the tea bowl and tea serve as presentational symbols [[41]] crucial to Japanese aesthetics and culture.

The history of women with the tea bowl and tea is long regardless of women not being able to publicly do the Tea Ceremony. Formerly discussed before women used to use the tea and tea bowl helping their husbands for other professional Tea Ceremonies throughout way earlier centuries. Thus, after that shift of Japan's society and views of women doing this tradition more openly the way of tea and participation in the tea ceremony provided an outlet for self-fulfillment for women, who are traditionally denied such opportunities in Japan ((10)). Another point is women use the tea bowl and tea to practice as a marriage event throughout Japan. Where it is said to practice being elegant and pure like the Tea Ceremony is represented today.

The tea bowl and tea have a major symbol [[58]] in Japanese culture because it has a huge ritual dedicated around it the Tea Ceremony. Where the whole ceremony is based off tea and the mix of the tea within the tea bowl. It also fits the theme of how tea and making the tea in the bowl is an event of feeling emotions of purity, tranquility, respect and harmony ((10)). Without this aspect of the tea bowl and tea in Japanese culture that ways of the Tea Ceremony would be non-existence and have a totally different theme for the culture as a whole and the Japanese people as well. So, may even express that the tea and tea bowl are discursive symbols within Japanese culture and serve as its own type of language of "tea".

Conclusion

Overall, my purpose of this paper was to widen my perceptions about the Japanese Tea Ceremony from the lens of a semiotic [[47]] ideology. All these sections are important concepts as they are piece together in a structuralist manner like the idea of structuralism [[57]] where Japanese culture and its people are closely in a "relationship". Following the aspect of the Tea Ceremony, tea and the bowl and all the other things that piece this ceremony together. The connection of culture, movements and symbolism has towards the development of the Tea Ceremony can be seen as one. Thus, the Japanese Tea Ceremony can be considered to be a thirdness [[64]] part of Japanese Culture. Due to the reasons, it is linked in many ways to the place and people within Japan and even those outside of Japan.