

Sipping the Ritualistic Tea

Japanese Tea Ceremony and the Art of Being

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Samurais had to leave their swords and egos at the door when crossing the small doors of the teahouses of 15th century in Japan. They, as everyone else who entered the dimly lit room, had to bend to purify their hands, sit humbly and peacefully, breathe and get ready to sip the bitter and bubbly green tea. Six centuries forward, students at Cal State Monterey Bay [CSUMB] had a taste of the ritualistic tea.

The Japanese Tea Ceremony (chanoyu) is a choreographic ritual of preparing and serving Japanese green tea, called matcha, which is imported from China. Students and faculty of Global Languages and Culture put together a ceremony that represents an ancient tradition of harmony and well-being.

Guests purified their hands with water from a fountain at the entrance of the teahouse. But not just hands needed to be clean. Following tradition, the tea master swept utensils and bowls with delicate and precise strokes like performing a dance. Each gesture looked effortless. Before the ceremony began, the teishu (tea ceremony host and teacher) and a team of apprentices, made sure the chashitsu (room where the tea is served) is not only pure, but also relaxing.

The set-up of the teahouse at CSUMB included the sound of running water from a fountain, the tones of ancient songs in the background, a garden at the corner, a scroll with ancient calligraphy on the wall, and the tea master performing the art of brewing tea by the boiling kettle in the middle of the room. This created an environment that invited body and soul to slow down.

The ceremony is not just for drinking tea. "It is a moment to enjoy peace, and trust everyone in the tearoom," Yoshiko Saito-Abbott, Japanese Professor at CSUMB, said.

"Everyone is treated equally and receive the same love."

The event was divided into six different sections of 45 minutes, making possible for many groups of students to attend and learn

about Japanese culture.

The guests sat in the circle, and the host was in the middle, preparing the tea. The first guest is called shokyaku, which is the honor guest, the last guest is called tsume, and the rest are called kyaku. Once the dora or Japanese gong is called five times, the apprentices, donned in their kimonos, served tea to the guests. Before serving tea, they offered tiny sweets to balance out the bitter taste of the tea. Bowls were not mere containers, but handmade ceramic pieces decorated with subtle designs. CSUMB guests received the bowl, bowed to their server, and learned to turn it twice, sip, and turn it back again.

"I miss Japanese tea because the green tea here is totally different," Urarara Emonoto, Sophomore, Global Studies said. "But drinking matcha tea makes me feel peaceful and helps me relax."

On the wall, a scroll with two characters read "knowledge" and "enough," which carries two meanings: To know when one does not need more, or to know to live simply, in a minimalistic way, and the other is "one does not stop learning." Tea Master Keiko Hashimoto explained the meaning and the connection of the tea ceremony with contemplative and meditative practices rooted in Zen Buddhism.

Hashimoto graduated from CSUMB in 2007 with honors. She always dreamed about getting a certificate to perform tea ceremonies. Recently, she received a kettle and utensils from a friend, and her dream became true.

"The tea ceremony calms your mind, betters yourself," Ryan Kirkland, GLC student, one of the apprentices serving tea said. For Kristin Szabo, GLC student, performing as an apprentice was unique because "I love to learn about other cultures, and even more when they are totally different from yours."

Although the atmosphere of the ceremony resembled the original practice, "in Japan attendees sit on the floor, on their knees for more than an hour, and meditate," Andrew Alviar, WLC student, who went to a teahouse in Japan said. "It is nevertheless a peaceful ritual."



SCROLL SYMBOLIZES SIMPLICITY AND THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE



THE TEA CEREMONY IS A CHEERFUL EXPERIENCE



STUDENTS IN KIMONOS PERFORMED AS APPRENTICES OF THE TEAHOUSE



LEARNING TO HOLD THE TEA BOWL, ROTATING IT TWICE, SIPPING IT AND ROTATING AGAIN.



THE SET UP INCLUDED A FOUNTAIN TO PURIFY HANDS