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# The Teahouse Fire

## Audience: Friends Book Club

Tour given by Lynn Brofman  
March 16, 2012

## Subject/Theme: The Teahouse Fire

By Ellis Avery  
Published by Riverhead Books, 2007  
Adaptation, Transformation, Flux, Immutability

## Theme Statement:

The Teahouse Fire takes place at time of great change from the isolationist rule of the Tokugawa shogunate during the Edo Period (1603-1868) to the forced opening of foreign trade and the restoration of Imperial rule by the Emperor at the beginning the Meiji period (1668-1912)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edo\\_period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edo_period)

Faced with troubled times each character struggles to respond to a changing world. Although we see adaptation and transformation we also experience the immutability of the essential core of Japanese culture.

## Objects:

1. Teahouse, 2001.204.1, G225
2. Mizusashi, (Fresh water vessel), 2005.53a-c, G224
3. Takatori Style Teabowl, 2002.141.3, G224
4. Teabowl (Satsuma kilns) 2001.132
5. Tea Caddy 2000.29.1a,b
  - a. Presentation Bag (Shifuku) for Tea Caddy
6. Incense Box 2001.2661a,b
7. Dutchman with Chinese Child 98.105.60
8. Kimono 86.101 G239
9. Kiyomizu Temple and Heian Shrine, Kyoto, 96.146.176
10. Lacquer Box 24.21.7a-c: Cosmetic Box 24.21.1a-c G 221

## Introduction

Introductions, Welcome, Rules, Portable Stools, Elevator  
Begin at the Uji Bridge....

Imagine that you are crossing over this beautiful bridge in to the Japan of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today we're going to explore objects in the museum's collection that relate to the book and talk about the impact of the major upheavals of the time. In the story we see the amazing ability to adapt, transform, cope and sometimes thrive. We'll also see that in the face of major change there is an essence of the culture that seems to be immutable.

Now imagine that you've just run away from home; your only wish is "any life but this one" (p.1, p. 36); you come upon an open gateway, over come by thirst (p31) you're drawn in ...



## Object 1: Teahouse (Chashitsu) 2001.204.1

Artist: Yasuimoku Komuten Company Ltd

Date: 2001 (constructed)

Zenshinan-----Hermitage of the Meditative Heart (sign under the eaves)

Replica of Teahouse constructed in Japan in 1742, commemorate 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sen Rikyu's death

### Questions

What do you hear, smell, taste, see, feel?

If you were a small run away child---where would you hide?

What do you notice...?

### Key Points

***NB: the following key points are scattered among many objects on the actual tour.***

Garden: NOT cluttered with colorful flowers—only a highlight. Pruning of Iris in preparation for Emperor's nephew; stone basin---ritual cleansing.

Hut: Zen—soan—"Grass hut", 4.5 mats, 9' x 9', humble entry

Ceremony:

Everyone equal in the teahouse willingness of host to perform humble act of preparing and serving

5 senses: incense, babbling stream, sound of boiling water...meditative calm;

Sweet served before tea, feel the bowl against the lips...on the palm

Rich poetic experience

One moment, one meeting—every ceremony is unique

Wabi- poverty, liberation from material and emotional concerns.

Tea Master Murata Shuko (Juko) late 15<sup>th</sup> century —brilliance and plainness, elegance and artlessness complimentary

"The moon is not so appealing as when it is obscured by the clouds"

Chilled & withered (hiekareta) ---Japanese pottery tea bowl vs. perfection---rare objects imported from China

Tea Master Sen Rikyu returned tea ceremony to Zen discipline, spiritual salvation, simple essence. Initiated use of Raku ware.

Hideyoshi's displeasure, Seppuku 1591.

Tokonoma- "pole room"--- barber's pole pun p. 456;

Alcove- calligraphy scroll poem may be changed at intermission

Single flower appears after intermission

Prep for Emperor's Nephew p. 49

Tatami mats—props in Docent library

Thatch---see prop photo attached and on Docent ipad under "Teahouse Fire" album

Kimono

First Tea Ceremony in the book: p 45

## Notes

MIA Teahouse: 2001 ten weeks, team of 8 Japanese craftsmen

“The outsider may indeed wonder at this seeming much ado about nothing. What a tempest in a tea-cup! He will say. But when we consider how small after all the cup of human enjoyment is, how soon overflowed with tears, how easily drained to the dregs in our quenchless thirst for infinity, we shall not blame ourselves for making so much of the tea-cup. Mankind has done worse. In the worship of Bacchus, we have sacrificed too freely; and we have even transfigured to gory image of Mars. Why not consecrate ourselves to the queen of the Camelias, and revel in the warm stream of sympathy that flows from her alter? In the liquid amber within the ivory porcelain, the initiated may touch the sweet reticence of Confucius, the piquancy of Lao Tzu, and the ethereal aroma of Sakyamuni himself.”

The Book of Tea Kakuzo Okadura, Dover Publications Inc. N.Y., N.Y. 1964, p2  
*Originally published by Fox, Duffield and company in 1906*

**Props**—all photos have been downloaded to the docent ipads in Teahouse Fire album

1. Garden Nara
2. Camilla-- December
3. House Nara—with glazing
4. Thatch Roof Nara
5. Kaiseki meal Himeji
6. Wagashi -- Spring
7. Wagashi – Summer fireflies















## Object 2: Mizusashi (Fresh water vessel) 2005.53a-c

Suzuki Sansei, b 1936

Gallery Label: Suzuki Sansei specializes in celadon ware. His highly refined, classical, light bluish-green glazes rival their Chinese Southern Sung prototypes and have garnered him many awards. This mizusashi, with its low profile and cool glaze, would be appropriate for a tea gathering conducted in the hot and humid summer months.

### Questions:

How would you describe the design?, the glaze?, the color....

How do you feel when you look at it?

How would it feel to touch it?

### Key Points:

Glaze—color, crackle, line---reminds me of the stream—see photo

Contemporary yet classic

Cool color, used in summer

Good time to explain differences between tea ceremony depending on season---

Refer to book when it was decreed by the Master that it was time to change in to summer Kimonos

Objects 3 & 4 are presented together

**Object 3: Takatori-style Teabowl, 2002.141.3**



Artist Unknown

Culture: Japan

17<sup>th</sup> Century, Edo Period

Gallery Label: Takatori was one of many ceramic production areas in northern Kyushu originally founded by émigré Korean potters. Takatori potters catered to the tastes of renowned tea masters in the distant cities of Sakai and Kyoto. This tea bowl exhibits their trademark technique combining a thick, whitish glaze with a translucent amber one on a single vessel. Interesting patterns and effects occur where the two glazes run together. This bowl is known as a kutsu chawan, or shoe-shaped tea bowl, because of its distinctive shape--a type particularly preferred by the tea master Furuta Oribe (1543-1516).

**Object 4: Teabowl (Satsuma kilns) 2001.132**

Artist Unknown

Culture: Japan

17<sup>th</sup> Century, Edo Period

Gallery Label: Émigré Korean potters first founded the Satsuma kilns of southern Kyushu in the late 16th century. Catering to the tastes of tea masters of the time, they produced a variety of tea wares, most notably teabowls and caddies. This rare example was decorated with thick irregular swathes of black and white clay slip and green glaze. Its somber tones and irregular shape accord well with the "wabi" (imperfect or rustic) aesthetic championed by Japan's most renowned tea master, Sen-no-Rikyu (1521-1591)

**Questions:**

How would these bowls feel in your hand? on your lips? what would you see as you drank tea?

Describe how the two are different

**Key Points:**

How pottery came to Japan, how it developed

Refer to the Tea Master's collection

Yukako understood transition need to change adapt, sell student tea bowls, adaptation to western tastes

**Prop:** Photos of Dragon Kiln (on docent ipad Teahouse Fire album)

Object 5a: Tea Caddy (Cha-ire) 2000.29.1a,b; Object 5b: Presentation Bag (Shifuku) for Tea Caddy,



Caddy:

Artist Unknown

Culture: Japan

16<sup>th</sup> Century Momoyama period

Gallery Label:

From medieval times, Japanese potters in and around Imbe village in the old province of Bizen produced a variety of sturdy utilitarian vessels using the local, iron rich clay. The unglazed, rich reddish brown clay appealed to 16th century tea masters, who prized accidental kiln effects. This small, finely crafted tea caddy exhibits the goma-yu (sesame seed glaze) effect in which small beads of natural ash glaze form in the firing process. The caddy was once owned by Sotatsu Sai (active early 19th century), the 8th grand tea master of the Omote School of tea, whose signature appears on the box.

**Key Points:**

Relate back to tea scoop made from flute p.53

Explain different caddies for thin tea and thick tea

**Object 6: Incense Box 2001.2661a,b**

Artist Unknown

Culture: Japan

15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Muromachi period

Gallery Label: Tea masters collected small boxes made of wood, lacquered wood, ceramic, metal, or bamboo for holding incense used in the tea ceremony.

Particularly prized were small lacquered boxes originally used by noblewomen for cosmetics. This box is decorated with stylized flowers (hanabishi) within geometric tortoise-shell shapes (kiko\_), a pattern adopted from textile designs.

**Key Points:**

Pass around prop with pleasing scent

Discuss technical, time, aesthetic

**Object 7: Dutchman with Chinese Child 98.105.60 G 239**

Artist Unknown

Culture Japan, Kyoto

18<sup>th</sup> Century, Edo period,

Sculpture-Netsuke, Ivory

**Key Points**

Example of how foreigners were viewed

Discuss how Netsuke, Inro worn

### **Object 8: Kimono 86.101 G239**

Artist Unknown

Culture: Japan

20<sup>th</sup> Century about 1900

Meiji period.

Woven silk satin with tie dyed shibori kanoko and hand painted roundels using yuzen method.

### **Yuzen Dye Method**

Seen on NHK World March 2012 on TV show “Nippon Style”

### **Key Points**

**Yuzen:** Chiso Company opened in 1555 CE

Design and dye Kimono fabric

Draw Lines, shield with resist in specific areas, dye then paint by hand

**Shibori:** Describe tie dye process

**Weaving:** notice the rectilinear design woven in the fabric

Relate to sewing of, care of, meaning of in the book. Point out child's kimono (boys) on way out of gallery. (relate to p.41)

### **Props**

Lynn's shibori garment--- Docents are welcome to borrow it.

Photos of Yuzen process, Shibori







**Object 9: Kiyomizu Temple and Heian Shrine, Kyoto, 96.146.176 G253**

Artist: Maeda Seison

c.1916

Gallery Label: Maeda Seison was an extremely versatile artist who is best known for his legendary and historical themes rendered in a highly detailed and colorful manner. He was also adept, however, at ink painting. Inspired by the longstanding tradition of depicting Japan's meisho, or famous places, Seison frequently traveled in order to create his own renditions of notable views. The extremely high vantage point that Seison adopted for these two paintings reflects his innovative approach to composition. The manner in which he dabbed ink onto the surface of the paper, too, suggests that he was unfettered by traditional brush techniques.

*note: Sanjyusangendo Temple, Kyoto, 1885. Ink on paper, hanging scroll. Part of a set of three - 81.2.21 and 96.146.176; all stored in same box*

**Key Points:**

Although these are shrines the paintings demonstrate how a property would have been organized, notice the stream, the position of the buildings, entrance....

**Object 10: Lacquer Box 24.21.7a-c: Cosmetic Box 24.21.1a-c G 221**

Artist Unknown

Culture: Japan

18<sup>th</sup> Century

Gallery label:

These small boxes are decorated with a pattern of bamboo, plum and pine, symbolic of strength and longevity. They also bear the hollyhock crest of the Tokugawa family rulers of Japan during the Edo period (1615-1868).

**Key Points:**

Importance on women's make-up, dress...

How a pillow would have looked – wish we had one in the collection...

**Prop:**

Photo of wooden pillow, photo of cosmetic boxes and pillow in use:





**Thoughts on immutability**

This is how Gion looks today

...and photos my husband took in the Gion Starbucks & in Gion.





### Page references

- p. 105 Big change, end of sumptuary laws  
p. 95 Western Dress of Court  
Yukako's scents "Evening Fragrance Child"  
p. 86-7 Kimono  
p. 53 Tea scoop made from flute  
p. 45 1st Tea Ceremony  
p. 41 Child's Kimono  
p. 31 Water outside the teahouse  
p. 49 Prep for Emperors Nephew  
p. 456 Barber's pole

### Theme notes:

Historical novel, changing times after 300 years of peace and prosperity  
Feudal society—rights of the master  
Jiro—angry, fall of Samurai class, crossing class barriers, he retreats, does not adapt  
Yukako –adaptation, changing role of women  
Pipe Lady—change in circumstance  
Western influence—western watch with netsuke, canals, trains, dress

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<http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/46111/2/teahouse-chashitsu>

Soshitsu Sen, Grand Master XV, Urasenke School of Tea; Chado, The Japanese Way of Tea; published by Weatherhill/Tankosha NewYork, Tokyo, Kyoto. 1979.

Adapted for Western readers from two books in Japanese by the same author both published by Tankosha in 1977.

*I highly recommend this book. It includes photos of every step of the ceremony, utensils, pottery, flowers, food...drawings of floor plans, garden plans... It's available from the Hennepin County Library.*

Oxford Art Online accessed via Hennepin County Library, Japan, XIV: Tea ceremony

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Metropolitan Museum of Art Essay:

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jtea/hd\\_jtea.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jtea/hd_jtea.htm)

MIT Visualizing Cultures—source of photo of cosmetic boxes and pillow in use

[http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/vc01\\_about.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/vc01_about.html)

Book Review: <http://januarymagazine.com/fiction/teahouse.html>



Map



To see all the details that are visible on the screen, use the "Print" link next to the map.

