

THE SEKISHURYU SCHOOL OF TEA

Past and Present

Sado, or the Way of Tea, is a prime symbol among the beautiful cultural traditions of Japan. Its roots have been grounded deeply and permeate the daily life of Japan. With a history of over six-hundred years, Sado has continued down to the present day embracing many of the traditional arts. The spirit of tea is rooted firmly in the spirit of the people and, in fact, constitutes the standard guiding the day to day values of the Japanese people.

Historically, the Sekishuryu School of Tea took its forms from an earlier style called tocha(a Chinese pastime whereby contestants would attempt to outguess others regarding the various qualities of tea that were being passed around). And, with the birth and development of the concept of furyu (elegance) , this tradition has been passed down according to the way of transmission of Tea Master, Sen no Rikyu.

At the source of Japanese aesthetic sense of beauty can we find this unique realm of tea treasuring, as it does, wabi and sado (concepts of quiet elegance and simplicity). This spirit of sado, being inseparable from Japanese taste, has been passed down to the present transcending all ages and conditions of our ever-changing world.

At the same time, the ideals of sado constitute the standards for construction centering around the tea house and inclusive of the surrounding gardens and paths. Further, these ideals encompass the craft arts from the style of tea bowls and natsume (a lacquer container that holds powdered tea) used in the tea ceremony down to the particulars of the vases set in the tokonome (alcove) or the scrolls hanging in the machiai (a kind of ante-room where guests wait before being invited into the room itself) or the tokomoma.

Moreover, the beauty of the temae (serving of the tea itself) and of the kaiseki meals embodied in the tea ceremony has played an instructive role in the aesthetics of the daily life of the Japanese. That is why one cannot talk about Japanese culture without talking



about the tea ceremony.

There are many schools of tea activity in Japan today. Sekishuryu is certainly to be numbered among them, occupying a very unique position; the tea school of the former samurai class. There are quite a few people in Japan even today who feel that it is the spirit of the samurai or warrior that underlies the whole structure of the spirit of the Japanese people.

From the time Katagiri Iwanakami Sekishu, the founder of Sekishuryu, advised the fourth Tokugawa Shogun, Ietsuna, Sekishuryu became established as the tea school for families of the succeeding Shoguns and of the warrior class. The Sekishuryu School combines the spirit of the warrior with the spirit of the tea ceremony itself to form a tradition of highest refinement.

The warrior class as such was dissolved a little over 150 years ago. Yet, the spirit of the warrior lives on today in the tea ceremony. The spirit of tea passed down from tea masters Juko and Rikyu most surely embraces the spirit of the warrior; this becomes revealed through the gestures and movements during the temae, the various positions for holding and folding the fukusa cloth and constitutes the unique creativeness of the tea ceremony of the warrior class.

In the former castle towns all around the country, Sekishuryu remains alive and is still very active today. At one time, the various daimyo (feudal lords) vied with one another incorporating Sekishuryu into their various domains. And, it was in these castle towns that those samurai warrior, having very strong connections to Sekishuryu, lived and where their descendants carry on the tradition today. Since these castle towns are scattered throughout the country it is only natural that Sekishuryu proliferates everywhere.

The present Soshō (Tea Master), Katagiri Sadatomo, succeeds as the 16th tea master and heads the school today. This youthful tea master will certainly play an active role in the unfolding of Sekishuryu as an evergrowing tradition-a tradition that supports the very spirit of the Japanese people.

