

# OCHA NO WA

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CHADO URASENKE  
TANKOKAI WASHINGTON DC ASSOCIATION

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The devastating earthquake and massive tsunami on March 11 rendered catastrophic damage in Japan. We, the Association, express our deepest condolences. In order to help victims and affected people who are in immediate need in the Tohoku region, the Association decided to contribute our Spring Chakai proceeds to the Japanese Red Cross. In addition, the Association plans to hold charity tea events in DC area. Details will be worked out and circulated later. Please come and join us at these events. We strongly believe that Japan will recover from this tremendous hardship and rebuild the nation stronger than ever, with hope for the future.

## A TRIP TO IGA-UENO

Visiting Iga-Ueno, in nearby Mie Prefecture, turned out to be a fascinating day trip from Kyoto. I was visiting Kyoto to see the cherry blossoms, but they decided not to open for another five days until warmer weather arrived. Therefore, I opted to continue my exploration of sites in Japan that are well-known for their pottery. Having been to Shigaraki on a previous trip, I settled on a visit to Ueno. Ueno, now identified as Iga-Ueno to distinguish it from the Ueno district in Tokyo, is probably best known today for being a center of *ninjustu* (ninja arts). However, it is also the home of Iga pottery and Iga *kumihimo* (braiding), the birthplace of Basho Matsuo, and site of Ueno Castle.

The first place that I visited was Ueno Castle, which occupies a central location in Ueno Park. Ueno Castle was originally constructed in the late sixteenth century, but largely destroyed fifty years later. Although most Japanese castles today are reconstructed in concrete, Ueno Castle's five story tower was rebuilt in wood. Ueno Castle is known as *Hakuho* or "White Phoenix." Currently, it is also famous for being the site where Kurasawa Akira filmed *Kagemusha*. After seeing this incredible castle, I couldn't wait to return home and see the movie once more.

Iga-Shigaraki Koto-kan, close to Ueno



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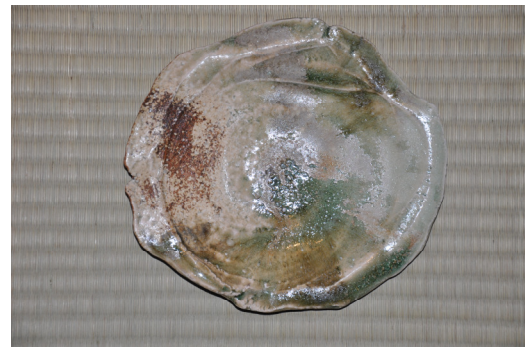
## OCHA NO WA

The name of our newsletter means "The Wa of Tea," where wa can refer to harmony or peace (as 和), story or talk (as 話), or circle or link (as 輪).

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## A TRIP TO IGA-UENO, CONTINUED

station, is an excellent place to see both Iga and Shigaraki pottery. It contains a gallery of mostly Iga ware and a museum of both Shigaraki and Iga pottery on the second floor. Iga pottery was most famous during the Momoyama period, but fell out of favor during the Edo period. Most of the existing pieces of Iga ware from the Momoyama era are flower vases. Iga pottery is similar in nature to its more famous neighbor Shigaraki. Features that distinguish Iga pottery are “bidoro” or drops of shiny vitrified glass (*tombo no me*) and scorch markings (*koge*). Both Iga and Shigaraki pottery have natural ash glazes and are high-fired, but Iga ware is fired at a higher temperature than is Shigaraki, resulting in a pottery that is commonly used in the kitchen.



Scattered throughout Iga-Ueno are many historic sites related to Basho Matsuo's life. Basho, the famous *haikai* (haiku) master, was born in Ueno during the mid-seventeenth century. He spent his early years in Ueno until the death of the local daimyo's son, with whom he allegedly first began writing poetry. As an adult, Basho traveled throughout Japan, usually dressed as a pilgrim. He recorded his travels by incorporating what came to be known as haiku—unrhymed phrases of five, seven, and five *mora* (Japanese “sound units”) meant to capture the essence of nature. I visited Minomushian, the “Bagworm Hermitage.” It is so named because when it was completed, Basho penned a verse that translates as “Come and listen to the sound of bagworms thatched hermitage.” Of Basho's five hermitages, this is the only one still standing.



The final site that I visited was the Iga Kumihimo Center. Originally designed to be used with swords and armor, today kumihimo is used to keep an obi in place. According to my guidebook, Iga produces 90 percent of Japan's

kumihimo. It is possible to try your hand at braiding silk cord at the Center. It was amazing to see all of the articles that were made from kumihimo.

As mentioned earlier, Iga-Ueno is an easy day trip from Kyoto or Osaka. All the tourist sites that I visited but the Kumihimo Center are within walking distance of Ueno Station. Additionally, there is an excellent local bus system that stops at all of the primary tourist sites. So on your next trip to the Kansai region; why not explore the sites of Iga-Ueno.

- Margie Linn

## MITATE WORKSHOP

*Gentle Reader, please be advised that this article is written by a curious but unschooled observer of the tea ceremony. I suspect many aspects of this discipline which surprise me are common knowledge to those who practice tea.*

On December 12, 2010 Miyahara Soyu Sensei led a workshop on “Mitate in the Tea Ceremony”. In this context I would translate *mitate* as “sensitive substitution”. Everyone was invited to bring examples of *mitate* (and sweets to share after the session).

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## MITATE WORKSHOP, CONTINUED

I think of the tea ceremony as a ritual of hospitality, communion, awareness and gratitude. My sense is that different schools arose as various masters perfected their visions on how best to practice this activity which is both simple and complex. Therefore there are rules about how to perform the tea ceremony. *Mitate* seems to be about respectfully playing with the rules regarding utensils.

There aren't that many things you need to make tea and to serve your guests a little something to eat. In the Japanese tea ceremony the items used are usually chosen to reflect the season in which the event is taking place. Part of the art of *mitate* seems to be finding a nontraditional object to use that perfectly performs its function and which also shows characteristics associated with the season. If the item chosen is not only well suited to do its job but is also surprising in how it was never envisioned to be part of a tea ceremony, all the better. For example, Sensei showed us a beautiful frosted straight walled vase she bought in Paris which she uses as a fresh water container during certain summer tea ceremonies. The lead content of the crystal was so high that the vase rang if she just brushed it with her fingernail. I can imagine how a summer tea ceremony would be enhanced by brilliant tones from the vase when the ladle touched the rim while removing water.

Interestingly to me, one of the other participants brought a *mitate* piece which was an exquisite antique American cut glass rounded vase which she also uses as a summer fresh water container. It was intricately faceted and seemed to capture the sparkling essence of pure water.

This was another subject Sensei discussed: when choosing a nontraditional object for *mitate* it should embody the essence of the traditional object it is replacing. Hearing this was a great comfort to me. In American culture objects are generally considered inanimate. Of course this is not universally true, some Americans name their cars and we differentiate between a house and a home. Yet, I am much more comfortable with the respect my Japanese friends give to objects of beauty, usefulness or age than that which I generally see exhibited by Americans. Subjectively evaluating the essence of an object for an appropriate use seems right to me. I don't think we have a word in English for the energy and personality that many objects seem to project. My master dance teacher in Bali summarized it without words every morning when he put an offering of flowers and shells in front of the drum he used in all of his lessons.

There was a discussion about the difficulty in choosing *mitate* objects that will enhance the tea ceremony in a public setting. I suspect that this is a particular challenge for tea ceremony groups that are located outside of Japan and that have the opportunity to introduce both the culture of Japan and the intrinsic message of peace inherent in the ceremony. To incorporate objects from the local culture can signal the universalism of the tea ceremony. Choosing objects up to the job of being ambassadors between two cultures can be a trick. An interesting example of this challenge was described about a relatively recent tea ceremony performed in an old Maryland mansion during which a number of vintage American objects were substituted for traditional utensils to acknowledge the history of the setting. Unfortunately, although the *mitate* were functional, they didn't have the right "feel" and there was a lack of resonance to the gathering.

Sensei talked about how she knows immediately whether there is a *mitate* item in an antique store as soon as she walks in. It is as if the item is calling to her until she finds it. If there is nothing she can use for tea in the store she knows that, too, in the first minute. Sensei described walking along a Parisian street with a friend, catching a glimpse of something appealing in the back of a store from the corner of her eye and feeling compelled to go into

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## MITATE WORKSHOP, CONTINUED

the store. The gorgeous crystal vase she had showed us earlier was the item in the farthest corner of the shop from the street and her friend couldn't figure out how on earth she had spotted it from outside.

In order to describe *mitate* selection in the most logical way Sensei suggested looking at the process as a form of abstraction. Just as early twentieth century modern artists distilled the depictions of their subjects to their most elemental forms, when deciding if an object is appropriate for *mitate* a crucial question is what inherent qualities does the potential *mitate* have that matches the traditional utensil.

Functionality is crucial. One of the most intriguing *mitate* introduced was a ladle rest. It was a tiny Japanese bowl that had been fused to a firing stand in the kiln. At first this object aroused skepticism but a ladle was produced and, low and behold, the ladle rested at just the right angle.

The oldest *mitate* was the broken base of a Japanese Yayoi (200 B.C.-250 A.D.) ritual vessel. Turned upside down it became a flower holder.

Lack of space prohibits describing all the delightful examples of *mitate* that the thirteen participants brought. Several commonalities were noticeable, though. Most of the *mitate* were not made in Japan but were perfectly suited for use as tea bowls, water containers or incense containers. People described the things they brought with great passion and pleasure. Many talked about the delight of discovering the object and the eureka moment of realizing it could be used in a tea ceremony. Participants spoke with relish about the enjoyment they got from using their discoveries. That many *mitate* combined Japanese culture with American, English or French aesthetics clearly produced a satisfying and comforting aspect of internationalism.

Sensei talked about how it really helps to become familiar with the best traditional tea ceremony utensils in order to choose *mitate* well. Museums, dealers and collectors can all educate one's eye. Some Japanese collectors are hesitant to let others view their treasures though. There is a Japanese concept that there is a form of "sight residue" (my words) or "eye prints" (akin to finger prints) that you don't want "staining" the object. "Eye schmutz" is what it sounded like to me if I am allowed to incorporate Yiddish into this English language article.

Kindly tolerate my mentioning my own contributions to the day. Perhaps my learning experience will be educational to not just me but to a reader or two as well. I brought two pieces that I thought were so perfect for the tea ceremony that they wouldn't be considered to have much substitution quality to them. My hope was that since they were Chinese they would qualify as *mitate*. I was wrong.

The first object was a Sung Dynasty (960-1279) glazed porcellenous Qing-pai ware (I don't know the Japanese term) covered cosmetic container. Like many Sung cosmetic containers it has a peony impressed on the cover and ribbed sides. I thought it would make a wonderful in-



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## MITATE WORKSHOP, CONTINUED

cense container. It is about 4 cm. high and 9 ½ cm. in diameter. Alas, it is too big to be an incense container.

The second object was a 19th c. porcelain cricket cage. This is essentially a small covered bowl with perforations in the cover to let air in for the cricket. The bowl is decorated with an immortal riding a *kirin*. Although it is only 5 ½ cm. high and smaller than the lovely soba cups Aiko Ichimura brought to use as incense burners in the incense workshop last year, I thought it could probably be used as an incense burner anyway. Alas, this time I learned that one does not use that type of incense burner in the tea ceremony.

(A few weeks later Aiko sent around an article which reminded me that, of course, the first treasured items for drinking tea came from China. Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591) introduced the *mitate* concept by using Korean, Japanese and Southeast Asia ceramics that performed the functions of the Chinese utensils. I now suspect Sen no Rikyu would have laughed hardily at my assumption that only the Chinese origin of my objects qualified them as *mitate*.)

I was able to forget my public misinterpretations of *mitate* thanks to the vast array of sweets from which to choose after the workshop. Yet the *mitate* theme continued. Spanish and Middle Eastern delights mimicked textures and tastes found in the traditional Japanese sweets which were artistically arranged on beautiful serving trays and plates.

My lessons above epitomize why I am fascinated by the tea ceremony. Over and over again I am humbled by thinking I understand what is transpiring and then I realize that I don't. I am blessed to be part of Urasenke Tankokai Washington, D.C. where I continue to be gently and generously taught about the way of tea.

- Ann Marie Moeller

## 2011 GENERAL MEETING REPORT

On February 13th, 2011, Chado Urasenke Tankokai Washington DC Association held its General Meeting at the McLean Community Center. Besides the pre-mailed proxies to satisfy the necessary quorum, eleven people were in attendance and they approved and accepted the Report on Activities and Financial Reports for the year 2010. The projected activities and the budget for the year 2011 were unanimously approved and accepted as well. The three major activities of this year will be the Spring and Fall Chakai and the Association's 10th Anniversary Celebration to be held sometime before Thanksgiving. Detailed information and invitations will be issued later, and they will be also announced in the quarterly newsletter, *Ocha no Wa*.

As listed on the last page of this issue, the slate of new officers was announced and elected unanimously. The Association Website will be updated by the new officers, and Archives for various records and photos of the Association will be established. Our heart-felt appreciation was expressed at the end of the General Meeting for the beautiful Misonodana that Dr. Sachiko Kuno donated to the Association for its activities.

- Takako Dickinson

## TEA INTRODUCTION AT AAFSW

On February 17, Ms. Yamasaki and I had the pleasure of introducing Tea to the AAFSW (Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide) at one of their member's house in Falls Church.

Following the demonstration, we served sweets and tea to 32 people from a variety of countries. Afterwards, we had an international lunch together.

We hope that all those that attended enjoyed the opportunity to learn about Japanese culture and the relaxing time together.

- Norie Watanuki



## MEMBERSHIP

If you have not already renewed your membership for 2011 or officially joined Chado Urasenke Tankokai Washington DC Association, we invite you to do so. Also, please let us know of any changes in your address, phone number, or e-mail address.

Membership categories are: Individual \$30.00, Family \$50.00, Student \$20.00, and Corporate or Institution \$75.00. Please make your check payable to Urasenke Tankokai Washington DC Association, and send it to:

Chado Urasenke Tankokai Washington D.C. Association  
P.O. Box 138  
McLean, VA 22101

If you have questions or would like further information, including the address to send your membership dues payment, please e-mail me at [membership@tankokaidc.org](mailto:membership@tankokaidc.org).

- Yumi Yamasaki, Membership Secretary

## 2011-12 OFFICERS

President: William T. Breer

Vice President: Masakazu Watanuki

Chief of Administration: Norie Watanuki

Treasurer: Mioko Miller

Event Secretary: Akiko Takagi

Membership Secretary: Yumi Yamasaki

Bilingual Recording Secretary: Takako Dickinson

Supervisors: Margaret Ann Linn, Mary Repass



Honorary Advisor: Masako Soyu Miyahara

## YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dear Members,

Have you ever been urged to write something about the Way of Tea? Did you discover something new while attending a tea affair? Have you experienced a eureka moment about a Zen phrase? We would like to invite you to write for Ocha no Wa about anything to do with the Way of Tea or any related cultural aspects of it. We are sorry that the space is limited only to a page or two including photos. Contact us at [ochanowa@tankokaidc.org](mailto:ochanowa@tankokaidc.org) for more details or questions.

-- Editors