

# The Meaning of Zen Buddhist Concepts Lying behind the Ceremonies of the “Seven rituals” Tea Complex

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## Introduction

The « Seven rituals » or 七事式 *shichiji-shiki* is a tea complex created in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the 7<sup>th</sup> head of Omotesenke tea school and the 8<sup>th</sup> head of Urasenke tea school, Joshinsai<sup>1</sup> and Yūgensai<sup>2</sup> respectively, along with their fellow disciples. The tea complex implies clearly the regulated communication between the host and the guests.

The complex includes the following ceremonies: 花月 *kagetsu* (« flowers and moon »), 且座 *shaza/saza* (« sitting for a while »), 廻り花 *mawari-bana* (« flowers in a circle »), 廻り炭 *mawari-zumi* (« coal in a circle »), 一二三 *ichi-ni-san* (« one-two-three »), 茶カブキ *cha-kabuki* (« Kabuki » tea game ») and 数茶 *kazu-cha* (« tea for many people »).

The origin of the “Seven rituals” tea complex goes back to the middle of the Edo period (1603–1868). By the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Japan, the tradition of tea drinking as a secular event had already been developed, but at the same time, the meaning of tea drinking as a sacred action had not been lost. The important point is that the complex has connection with not only the art of tea, 茶の湯 *cha-no yu*, but also with other noble arts of Japan such as flower arrangement (花道 *kadō*) and the art of scents (香道 *kōdō*).

Despite the fact that the complex was developed in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it took more than ten years to improve it, so the ceremonies of the complex began to be conducted only in the middle of the 18th century. It happened at the time in three tea schools—Omote-senke, Urasenke, based in Kyoto, and Edo-senke, located in Tokyo (Kawakami, 2004. p. 75).

If the conduction in the Omote-senke and Ura-senke schools can be easily explained by the fact that the complex was developed within them, the conduction in Edo-senke school is explained by the fact that Yūgensai had a student, Fuhaku Kawakami, who was helping him during creation of the rituals, and lately Fuhaku Kawakami founded his own school—Edo-senke.

Currently, the complex is conducted only within these three schools and only within Japan, despite the existence of many branches of the Omote-senke and Ura-senke schools outside its borders. Despite the growing interest in Japan towards the “Seven rituals” complex, there are no studies in English and other Western European languages on this topic. In Russian oriental studies, the study of this topic is limited to the book by prof. Elena E. Voytishchik, devoted to game traditions in the spiritual culture of East Asia.

## 1. The functions of the « Seven rituals » tea complex

Nowadays, the « Seven rituals » complex serves as a specific ritualized form of tea drinking, implying

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<sup>1</sup> Personal name is Ten'nen Sōsa (1705–1751).

<sup>2</sup> Personal name is Ittō Sōshitsu (1719–1771).

clearly the regulated communication between the host and the guests.

The key to understanding the importance of these “meetings” lays in the fact that each of the ceremonies can be conducted only once. The little things that change from ceremony to ceremony reflect the concept of briefness of the moment.

Outwardly, the complex of « seven rituals » looks like one of tea drinking involving games, but the meaning of the ceremonies is not limited to the entertainment purpose only but the complex also serves as a certain training in order to achieve skills necessary for successful participation in the tea ceremony. Moreover, these skills not only include tea drinking or tea making, but also include manipulating with a hearth, incense, coal and flowers.

Therefore, it seems logical to conclude that the « seven rituals » complex has only two main functions—entertaining and educational. However, the sources indicate that the rituals contain another, not so obvious function—the sacred one, based on the connection of the complex with Zen Buddhism.

According to our study, we can state that the complex is inextricably linked with Zen Buddhism at three levels: the level typical for the tea ceremony in general; the level typical for the complex as a whole and, finally, the level typical for each ceremony separately.

## 2. The connection to Zen Buddhism on the level typical for the tea ceremony in general

If we talk about the connection to Zen Buddhism typical for the Japanese tea ceremony in general, we mean such general concepts as « Harmony » 和 *wa*, « Respect » 敬 *kei*, « Purity » 清 *sei*, and, finally, « Peace » 寂 *jaku*. It is believed that these concepts were first formulated by Juko Murata<sup>3</sup> in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but they were finally formed only in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

« Harmony » implies the unification of guests and the host at a certain metaphysical level, where the differences between individuals cease to be felt; « Respect » implies that the participant of the tea event should respectfully treat the “host” of the ceremony and the rest of the guests gathered in the tea room. « Purity » is a principle that implies spiritual and body cleansing before participating in the tea ceremony, in order to reject worldly possessions during the tea ceremony, leaving only a pure heart and, finally, « Peace » implies a calm state of mind and spirit necessary for participation in a tea ceremony.

Moreover, the concept called 侘 *wabi* (« artlessness », « simplicity ») is one of the key concepts of the Japanese tea ceremony. This concept might indicate that the art of tea, *cha-no yu*, is a product of Zen Buddhism itself. The essence of *wabi* can be described in more detail as follows:

1. The beauty of simplicity and artlessness.
2. The beauty of asymmetry, which we can observe not only in the Japanese tea ceremony. While symmetry generally is important for Westerners as an indicator of beauty and correctness of forms, asymmetry plays a key role within the *wabi* concept.
3. The beauty of asceticism and sharply defined forms.

The concept of *wabi* concentrates the characteristics of the Zen worldview. The artlessness and simplicity are also manifested in the teahouses, built specifically for tea ceremonies

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<sup>3</sup> Juko (Shuko) Murata (1423–1502) was a chajin (master of the tea ceremony) in the middle of the Muromachi period. Previously he was a student of Ikkyū Sojun, the former head of the Daitokuji Temple in Kyoto, who taught him the basics of the tea ceremony.

(Quoted from: [Okakura, 2014, p.86] ).

The teahouse may be the « abode of emptiness », since it is almost devoid of decoration, but it is still allowed to place something in it for aesthetic purpose. The simplicity and purity of the teahouses' style comes from the asceticism of Zen Buddhist temples. Zen Buddhist temples differ from other Buddhist temples in that point that they serve as simple dwellings for monks. Such temples are not intended for rituals of worship or pilgrimages, they do not amaze with their external beauty, but they serve as premises for classes, where students gather for study and for mastering the secrets of meditation (Ikeda, 2000, p.55) .

### 3. The connection to Zen Buddhism on the level typical for the tea ceremony in general

If we talk about the connection typical for the complex as a whole, we mean the fact that the creators of the complex, Joshinsai and Yūgensai were monks first of all. They studied Zen Buddhism for a long time, so they combined the « Seven rituals » complex with the Buddhist concept of the « Seven internal and external deeds » of a nobleman.

According to Sen Sōshitsu XV<sup>4</sup>, there are two types of « seven deeds » – internal (内ノ七事 *uchi-no shichiji*) and external (外ノ七事 *soto-no shichiji*) (Sen, 1977, pp.10–11) . Hence, the amount of rituals arose–seven.

Tea masters describe the following deeds as « internal »:

1. 大機大用 *daiki-daiyū* (lit. « Great opportunities, great benefits ») . This concept means that as soon as a chance arises, it is necessary to use all the possibilities for its realization, and then this chance will entail other chances.
2. 機弁迅速 *kiben-jinsoku* (lit. « At the decisive moment you need to act quickly and swiftly ») . It means that during the conversation teachers and students should quickly respond to each other's questions, staying calm internally. In Western philosophy there is a concept that is the closest in meaning–the « Socratic Method »<sup>5</sup>.
3. 語句妙靈 *goku-myorei* (lit. “Words and phrases are beyond comprehension”) . Any words and phrases that have been spoken are not just a speech act, but something that always has a sacred meaning.
4. 殺活機鋒 *sakkatsu-kihō* (lit. « In death and in life, use the main argument ») . Teacher and student should not be afraid to come into dispute while discussing any topic. In this case, you can change roles–first attack, then retreat. The main thing is to remain calm and, if necessary, use the main argument at a certain point.
5. 博学広覧 *hakugaku-kōran* (lit. « Extensive knowledge, broad outlook ») . According to Zen teachings, before obtaining the state of satori, one must prepare the heart, and after the obtaining, one must concentrate on the accumulation of knowledge.
6. 鑒覺不昧 *kankaku-fumai* (lit. « Awareness and awakening should not be blurred ») . If the ability to see the truth is excellent, then not a single nuance can remain in the shadows.

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<sup>4</sup> Sen Sōshitsu XV is the 15th-generation Grand Master (iemoto) of Urasenke, which is one of the most widely known schools of Japanese tea, and served in official capacity from 1964 to 2002.

<sup>5</sup> The « Socratic Method » is a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions.

7. 隱顯自在 *onken-jizai* (lit. « Latent and explicit manifests itself freely »). What is clearly visible and that what is hidden from understanding manifests itself freely. An enlightened person who knows the truth can see things even if they are hidden.

Tea masters describe the following deeds as « external » :

1. 挂杖 *shujō* is a Buddhist staff used while walking. In Buddhist terms, you can give a staff to someone, or you can take it back. Metaphorically, this means the following: if a person works hard and tries in every possible way in any business, then give him a staff to help him, and if a person himself does not make any efforts in anything, take the staff away from him.
2. 拂子 *hossu* is a brush made of animal fur. In India, it is used to drive away flies and mosquitoes, while in Japan Zen monks use this object as a symbol of overcoming worldly passions and delusions.
3. 禅板 *zenpai zenpan* is the « zen board » (approx. 50 cm long) . In the old days, Zen monks could not sleep lying down, but dozed or meditated, resting their chin on this board.
4. 几案 *kian* is a low table, which, together with a Zen board, was used by monks during the meditation practices. Along with this, the word « table » (机 *tsukue*) is also used, denoting various utensils—a sutra stand (经机 *keiki*), a tea table (茶几 *chaji*), or a low dining table (卓袱台 *chabudai*) .
5. 如意 *nyoi* is the wand of wish fulfillment (in Chinese « zhui » wand) . It is an attribute of an enlightened monk, which is used during sermons and religious ceremonies.
6. 竹篋 *shippei* is a bamboo stick (60–100 cm long) made of split bamboo, sometimes curved like a bow without a string. Used by a teacher to their students for physical punishment. With a sudden blow with the stick, a follower of the Buddha must, throwing aside all non-essential matters, answer clearly to the teacher's question, having discovered at that moment the full measure of his spiritual state.
7. 木蛇 *mokuda* is the « wooden snake » . It is a female goddess with the face of a human, but with wings and the body of a snake covered with scales. It was used in the same way as the wand of wish fulfillment. What exactly it looks like is unknown.

According to Sōkan Horinouchi <sup>6</sup>, « internal deeds » have a philosophical meaning, while « external deeds » refer to the physical attributes of Zen in the world (Horinouchi 1989, p.3) .

Thus, it is understood that the cultivation of skill in the “seven rituals” ceremonies allows the participant to cultivate his spirit in order to achieve the state of a noble person.

Moreover, talking about the origin of the rituals, Sōkan Horinouchi also noted the fact that the « Zhou Rituals » has a part about seven important deeds that keep the secrets of control over the state. These deeds include: 祭祀 *saishi* « serving in the temple », 朝觀 *asami* « waking up at dawn », 会同 *kaidō* « meetings », 賓客 *hinkyaku* « invitation of guests », 軍旅 *gunryō* « war », 田役 *taeki* « taxes for repairing temples », and 喪荒 *moara* « funeral ». These deeds are also called 七事 *shichiji* (“seven deeds”). Since the number « seven » also has such a meaning as « the basis of everything in the universe », they can be called « secrets of control over the everything » .

There is also one of the basic concepts for understanding Zen — 七事隨身 *shichi-ji zuishin* (lit.

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<sup>6</sup> Sōkan Horinouchi was the 12<sup>th</sup> head of Ura-Senke tea school.

« seven deeds-companions »). The meaning of this concept is that you need to constantly have a place in your heart for these important deeds and carry them out with zeal. The person who succeeds is called 七事者 *shichiji-sha* (lit. « one who does the seven deeds »).

The complex was based on those various concepts.

#### 4. The connection to Zen Buddhism on the level typical for each ceremony separately

Finally, if we talk about the connection to Zen Buddhism on the level typical for each ceremony separately, we mean the fact that in each of them Joshinsai and Yūgensai laid Zen concepts that determine the formal and sacred meaning of the ceremony. The order of the ceremonies was created in strict accordance with specific Zen concepts as well.

Let us describe few examples of this determination.

Ritual	Concept
花月 <i>Kagetsu</i> (« flowers and moon »)	互換機鋒看子細 <i>Gokan kihō kanshisai</i>
且座 <i>Shaza/saza</i> (« sitting for a while »)	是法住法位、世間相常住 <i>Zehō jū hōi sekensō jōjū</i>
廻り花 <i>Mawari-bana</i> (« flowers in a circle »)	色即是空 <i>Shiki-soku-ze-kū</i>
廻り炭 <i>Mawari-zumi</i> (« coal in a circle »)	端的看灣 <i>Tanteki Kanni</i>
一二三 <i>Ichi-ni-san</i> (« one-two-three »)	修證即不無、汚染即不得 <i>Sjūsho-wa sunawachi nakiniarazu sen'yosureba ezu</i>
茶カブキ <i>Cha-kabuki</i> (« Kabuki» tea game »)	千古今截斷舌頭始可知真味 <i>Inishie-ni ima-ni setto-wo shite hajimete shinmi-wo shirubekishi</i>
数茶 <i>Kazu-cha</i> (« tea for many people »)	老倒疎慵無事日、安眠高臥對青山 <i>Rōtō soyō buji-no hi, amin kōga seizan-ni taisu</i>

For example, if we consider the first ritual, *Mawari-bana*, it is based on the concept called *shiki-soku-ze-ku*. It means « Everything visible is empty ». Everyone must regard everything in the world to be in constant flux and will change. This way you will not develop attachments.

During *Mawari-bana* ritual participants arrange flowers into a flower composition. One participant, before placing their flower in the vase, must pull out the flower of one of the participants in order to maintain balance. Thus, the flower arrangement never remains static, but constantly changes, which reflects the meaning of the concept.

The second example is the ritual called *Kazu-cha*. It is based on the concept called *ro:to soyo: buji-no hi, amin ko: ga seizan-ni taisu* coming from « *Empō Dentō-roku* » by Shiban Mangen. It means « On the days when I become old, I will go to sleep in peace to the green mountains, where I will live alone ».

*Kazu-cha* being the last ritual in the complex, at the same time being the less strict. The amount of participants is not clearly the regulated neither their actions. It correlates with the concept in terms meaning that when you become old and tired (the last ritual) you do not have to put all your efforts on achieving goals, but can concentrate on the rest of body and soul.

## Conclusions

Therefore, every detail used during the ceremonies not only harmoniously complements the concept inherent in the ritual, but also has a deep connection with Zen Buddhism. Moreover, it can be assumed that the connection of the « seven ritual » complex to Zen Buddhism is broader than the connection between the Japanese tea ceremony and Zen Buddhism in general.

According to its internal meaning it is legitimate to consider the complex as a part of Zen-Buddhist practices. Moreover, even talking about the formal side of the complex, including its conduction, it might be concluded that the conduction of every ceremony was created in accordance with a certain Buddhist concept. If the conduction did not correspond to the concept chosen for a particular ceremony, then the conduction of the ritual was changed until the correspondence of the inner content and the formal side came to a state of harmony. This fact allows us to speak about the invariability of the Zen meaning of rituals in the historical perspective.

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