Rebecca Corbett, C*ultivating Femininity: Women and Tea Culture in Edo and Meiji Japan*

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Historical studies of the Japanese tea ceremony are characterized by three centrisms: male-centrism, school-centrism, and Sen Family centrism. The majority of historians of tea culture are men; the historians are supposed to not offend schools, which possess valuable resources; and the historians are not to offend Sen Family, the descendants of the alleged founder of tea culture in the sixteenth century, Sen (no) Rikyū. This is what I found when conducting an anthropological research on contemporary women tea practitioners in late 1990s. As I recall, it was strangely difficult to find studies on women tea practitioners in the pre-Meiji period, while those on men were abundant. This was a mystery considering that more than 90 percent of tea practitioners today were women, but due to the lack of studies, I had to adopt a major discourse that women's participation in tea culture in the feudal era was quite limited, in both number and class.

Corbett, having confronted the same difficulty in her more recent studies, noting "how persistent and pervasive the arguments are against the notion that women practiced tea prior to the Meiji period" (3), courageously broke through this three-layered centrism. She scavenges the facts from almost all available resources in the Edo period, from commercial edification guides, *sugoroku* (board games), puppet and *kabuki* plays, to more closed documents, such as a samurai-written guide for women in his household. With rich support, she argues that commoner women and elite women in the Edo period committed to tea culture, even if few had official registration with schools run by the *iemoto* (heads of schools who began to control the license system in this period).

The book consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 puts women and tea in a general context of Edo popular culture. In the age of economic prosperity, many commoners became affluent and education for and by women, including commoners, spread. With high literacy among women, handbooks specifically for women became an established genre, with tea culture as its popular topic. The chapter also introduces women participating in family-based tea gatherings. Chapter 2 focuses on an eighteenth century handbook written by a tea master to women of aristocratic and samurai status, which developed "a distinctively feminine framework for tea practice" and created "a model of genteel femininity" (72). This framework is explored in Chapter 3; in the eighteenth century, young commoner women serving elite households increased and a knowledge of tea was supposed necessary for their successful job hunting and services. Chapter 4 examines popular writings on women's tea practice from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. According to Corbett, the writings emphasized acquisition of graceful body movement as the primary objective of women's tea, while in men's guidebooks any such rationale was absent. Chapter 5 presents a relatively short glance of the Meiji period, when the femininity associated with women's tea was reinvented in a modern and nationalist framework.

Corbett owes her theoretical framework to two classics: Norbert Elias' "civilizing process" and Pierre Bourdieu's "symbolic and cultural capitals." Commoner women's adopting elite women's femininity through tea culture is, according to Corbett, part of a civilizing process, (64, 98) and in learning *temae* (specific body movements required

in tea culture), commoner women's bodies were bearers of symbolic-cultural capital (34–35, 118) that blurred class boundaries.

This book fills a void in the studies of the tea ceremony while also providing an important achievement in women's history. The richness and diversity of material and detailed examination tells that the facts for commoners (and) women are beyond *iemoto*-based official records. Upon its presentation, each source seems so eloquent that one wonders why these resources had been disregarded so far.

Having said all this, I, the author of *The Tea Ceremony and Women's Empowerment in Modern Japan: Bodies Re-presenting the Past*, which is occasionally cited in this book (to my appreciation), find some important parts under-acknowledged. For example, I have described the Edo period women's, including commoner's, tea practice based on historical studies available, noting that the tea ceremony by and for women began to develop as a genre in Chapter 2. Corbett does not mention these pages, while citing other pages that give an impression that I had argued women's tea "emerged out of a vacuum in the early twentieth century" (14; also 120). In her concluding discussions in Chapter 4, Corbett argues that "The body was one site for this civilizing process, and women's bodies in particular could serve as capital-bearing objects that displayed both their individual acquisition of civility and that of their families" (121). One might find a resonance between this sentence and a sentence in Introduction of my book, arguing that the body that performs *temae* is a sign that bears a type of symbolic-cultural capital, which enables women tea ceremony practitioners to equilibrate themselves with their family members' economic and cultural capital. Focusing on bodies in Bourdieu's framework was the essence of my work, which Corbett keeps failing to acknowledge in her discussions of bodies, to my regret.

Another regret is that, readers may have wanted to see this book, a publication in 2018, featuring theorists other than Elias and Bourdieu, both of whom have been (too) much referred to, including in my own work.

Yet, it seems that novelty of this book is not in theory making but in elucidating long-neglected historical facts. As a study intended to "bridge the gap between work in other fields of Japanese cultural and women's history, on the one hand, and studies on Japanese tea culture, which have largely ignored women, on the other" (6), this book should be read by scholars and students in various disciplines who are not necessarily interested in tea, but in literature, art, Japan studies, and certainly, women's studies.

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