

Planning a Transcultural & Transhistorical Toriawase

Lesson Plan: Planning a Transcultural and Transhistorical *Toriawase*

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Creation Date: February 11, 2025

Keywords: Chanoyu, tea, ceramics, tea gathering, *chakai*

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Target Audience:

Undergraduate students, Graduate students

Duration:

2 class sessions; 1 essay assignment

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the social context of a tea gathering
2. Understand the importance of non-verbal communication and using material culture in chanoyu
3. Demonstrate comprehension of these objects through an essay

Potential Courses to Include this Lesson in:

- East Asian Art History courses
- Japanese Culture and/or History courses
- Global Tea courses

Assigned Materials:

- James Henry-Holland, "Tea Records: *Kaiki* and *Oboegaki* in Contemporary Japanese Tea Practice," in *Japanese Tea Culture: Art, History, and Practice*, ed. Morgan Pitelka (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), 184–203.
- Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 355–364.
- Tani Akira, *What is Chanoyu?* (Tokyo: Tankōsha, 2008), especially pp. 103–111 and 153–167).
- Natsu Oyobe, "Toriawase: Creating a One and Only Encounter in Japanese Tea Ceremony," (lecture, Gardiner Museum, Ontario, Canada, February 17, 2022):
<https://youtu.be/caqYfoYPSCA?si=meLmvgbvZjxCOEVM>

Activity/Procedure:

Prior to class:

- Distribute readings for students to review and discuss in-class.
- Assign students to watch and take notes on the YouTube lecture.

In-Class

Day 1/Lecture 1: History and Context. The contents of this lecture will vary depending on the discipline and theme of the class, but the instructor should seek to contextualize *toriiawase* in the larger story of tea history for a tea class; in the chronology of Japanese art history for an art history class; or as an important part of warrior and elite commoner sociability in premodern Japan for a history class.

- **Discussion:**

Develop a worksheet or a handout with discussion questions to guide students to focus on the topic of *toriawase* as a form of communication, allowing community-building, allusion-making, and other forms of non-verbal sociability. This could take up an entire class session or could be completed in breakout groups.

Day 2/Lecture 2: Introduction to tea utensils. The instructor should provide an overview of the most important utensils used in a typical tea gathering, with ample visual references and use of aesthetic keywords from the readings. The lecture might include the following:

Hanging scroll (*kakemono*; to decorate the alcove and signal a theme)

Flower container (*hanaire*; to decorate the alcove and indicate the season)

Incense container (*kōgō*; to decorate the alcove, purify, and create a distinctive scent)

Water container (*mizusashi*; to hold fresh water)

Tea caddy (*chaire*; ceramic container for thick tea powder)

Lacquer tea container (*natsume*; container for thin tea powder)

Tea bowl (*chawan*)

Tea scoop (*chashaku*)

- **Discussion:**

Develop a worksheet or a handout with discussion questions to guide students to focus on keywords from the readings. For example: *karamono* refers to imported Chinese utensils; *kōraimono* refers to imported Korean utensils; *nanbanmono* refers to imported utensils from

Southeast Asia and other regions; *wamono* refers to domestically produced or commissioned utensils; *wabi* refers to an appreciation for more rustic or less luxurious utensils; and *sabi* refers to the beauty of old things, of utensils with the patina of age and use.

Assignment:

Students should write an essay in which they create their own *toriiawase*, and use the selection and arrangement of utensils for a tea gathering as a window through which to write about tea history and culture. The objective of the assignment is to make an argument about the value of *toriiawase* in tea culture. Instructors should stipulate in the prompt which utensils students need to choose on their own, and within what constraints. For a short exercise, the prompt might provide specific objects for most of the utensils and ask the students to pick just one or two on their own. For a longer essay, students should make all the selections themselves.

The essay should contain the following components:

- Brief discussion of the history of *toriiawase* and tea utensils.
- Discussion of each utensil selected by the student. Describe the object. What aesthetic keywords does this object reflect? What meaning does this utensil convey to the participants in the gathering?
- Include analysis of elements such as seasonality, aesthetic variety, and purpose in the gathering.
- If space allows, students might also address the seven qualities that hosts should consider in the selection and arrangement of utensils for a tea gathering (from Tani Akira, *What is Chanoyu?*):
 - Asymmetry: preference for dents and warped shapes; distaste for perfection
 - Simplicity: preference for plainness; avoidance of complexity and precision

- Tall and withered: preference for utensils with the quality of a leafless tree rather than bold, flowery objects
- Naturalness: appreciation of innocence and "non-worldliness"
- Subtlety and profundity (*yūgen*): preference for suggestion rather than overt expression
- Non-vulgarity: avoidance of status, wealth, and "human entanglements"
- Serenity: avoidance of turmoil and hustle; preference for quiet and composed qualities
- NOTE: This is a flexible assignment and can be adapted to the resources that are available. If an instructor has a local museum or university museum with a collection of Japanese art (which needs to include ceramics to be useful for this assignment), you might ask students to make their selection of utensils from that museum's online collection. Or you could use a public, online museum collection of Japanese art. Alternatively, you could allow students to select objects from their own lives, but be wary of the danger of allowing the assignment to become overly autobiographical (thus losing its historical and cultural focus).
- The assignment could also be repurposed as a presentation or a group project.

A sampling of appropriate museum collections:

- Boston Museum of Fine Arts: <https://collections.mfa.org/>
- Metropolitan Museum of Art: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search>
- National Museum of Asian Art: <https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/>