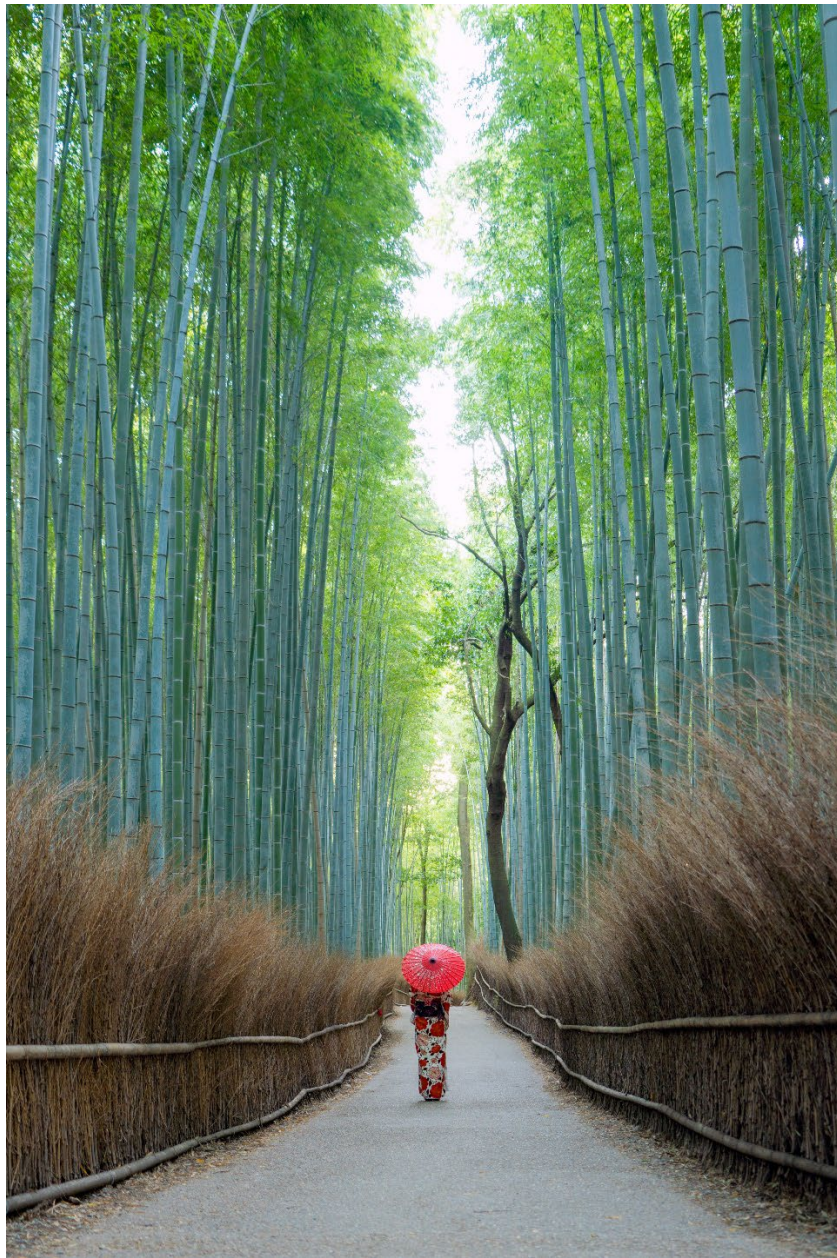


Japanese Tea Ceremony for Business Professionals:
A Path Less Traveled to Self-Development
A Systems Psychodynamic Perspective



By

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Abstract

Although the Japanese tea ceremony is one of the cherished traditions of Japanese culture, its practitioners have been dwindling in number, particularly among working professionals. To examine the relevance of this ancient practice to this population segment, this research study explores the impact of the regular practice of the Japanese tea ceremony on the self-development journey of working professionals. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the interviewees' perspectives on their practice of the Japanese tea ceremony and its impact on them. The findings revealed that the interviewees were initially drawn to the practice because they were frustrated by their inability to meet their core needs and felt estranged from their inner selves in their daily lives. The Japanese tea ceremony practice — through its well-thought-out core principles, rituals, artifacts, and social interactions — catered to the interviewees' sense of belonging and fed their self-esteem, while inspiring them to be their best selves. While their interviewees' learning and experiences took place at the conscious level, it was likely that the unconscious processes — underlying the cultivation of their mental focus and calmness in the tearoom, as well as the integration of their conscious and unconscious processes — facilitated their personal growth and the process of individuation. A promising outcome of this research study was the revelation that the interviewees carried over their transformation into their daily lives, therefore illuminating the potential of the Japanese tea ceremony practice for working professionals beyond the realm of the tearoom.

Keywords: Conscious and unconscious processes, TEF (Transforming Experience Framework), Core needs, Hierarchy of Needs, Self-Determination Theory, Individual Members & Membership Individuals, Ideal self, Individuation, Japanese Tea Ceremony, Psychological safety, Self-development

Word Count: 12,684

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Chapter 1: Introduction

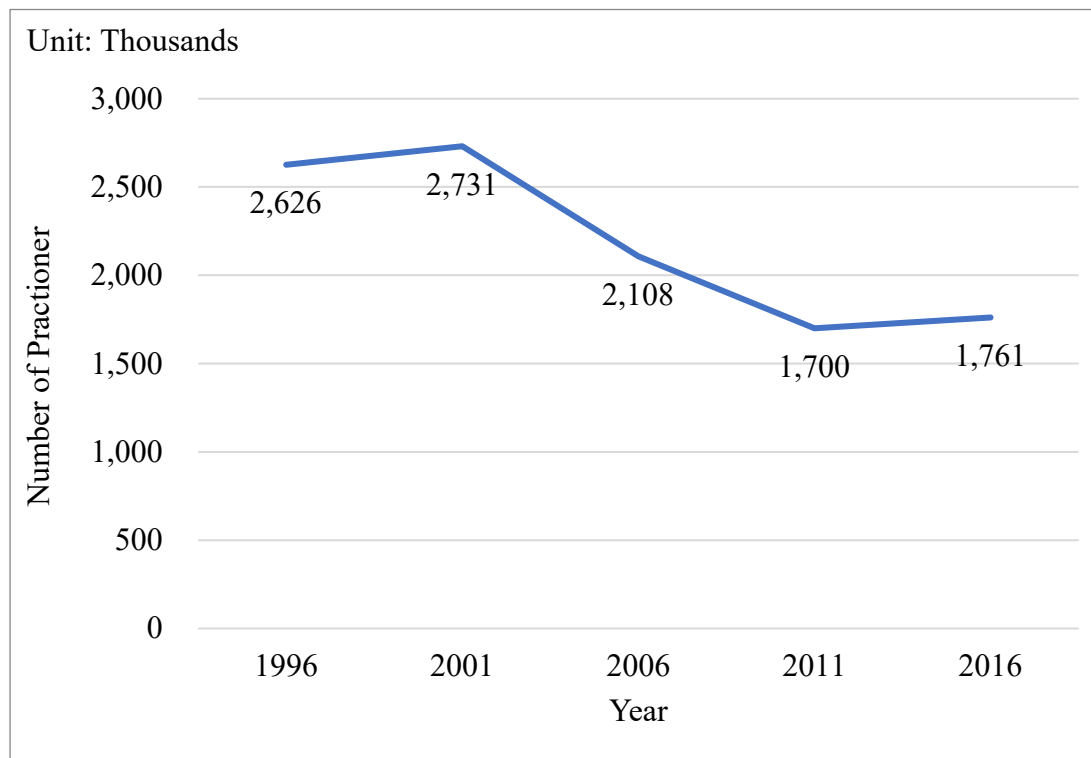
Background

Japanese culture is well-known for its myriad traditions, comprising *jūdō*; *kendō* (a traditional Japanese sword-fighting martial art); *kadō* (Japanese flower arrangement); *shodō* (calligraphy), *kyūdō* (a form of traditional Japanese archery), etc. Among these famous traditions is the Japanese tea ceremony — 茶道 [*sadō or chadō*] in Japanese, also translated as “The Way of Tea” — which has a 400-year history (Ministry of Culture [MoC], 2021). The Japanese tea ceremony, with its meticulously crafted tea-serving rituals, embodies the spirit of hospitality, whereby a host gracefully performs specific sequences to prepare a cup of tea for their guests (Anderson, 1991). Rooted in centuries of tradition, these rituals emphasize harmony (*wa*), respect (*kei*), purity (*sei*), and tranquility (*jaku*) (Anderson, 1991). Therefore, the Japanese tea ceremony practice can offer its participants a profound experience of self-validation that is related to the core values of Japanese culture (Anderson, 1991).

Although participation in the Japanese tea ceremony can take the form of joining special occasions, the focus of this research study is on the hands-on practice of this tradition (MoC, 2021). According to a 2016 survey, approximately 1.76 million people practiced Japanese tea ceremony in Japan (MoC, 2021). Given that Japan’s total population was 127 million in 2016 (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2017), the percentage of practitioners would amount to just 1.39% at the time. More alarmingly, the number of practitioners has been declining — decreasing by approximately 30% compared with two decades ago (MoC, 2021) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Number of Japanese Engaging in the Tea Ceremony as a Hobby ('000), 1996–2016



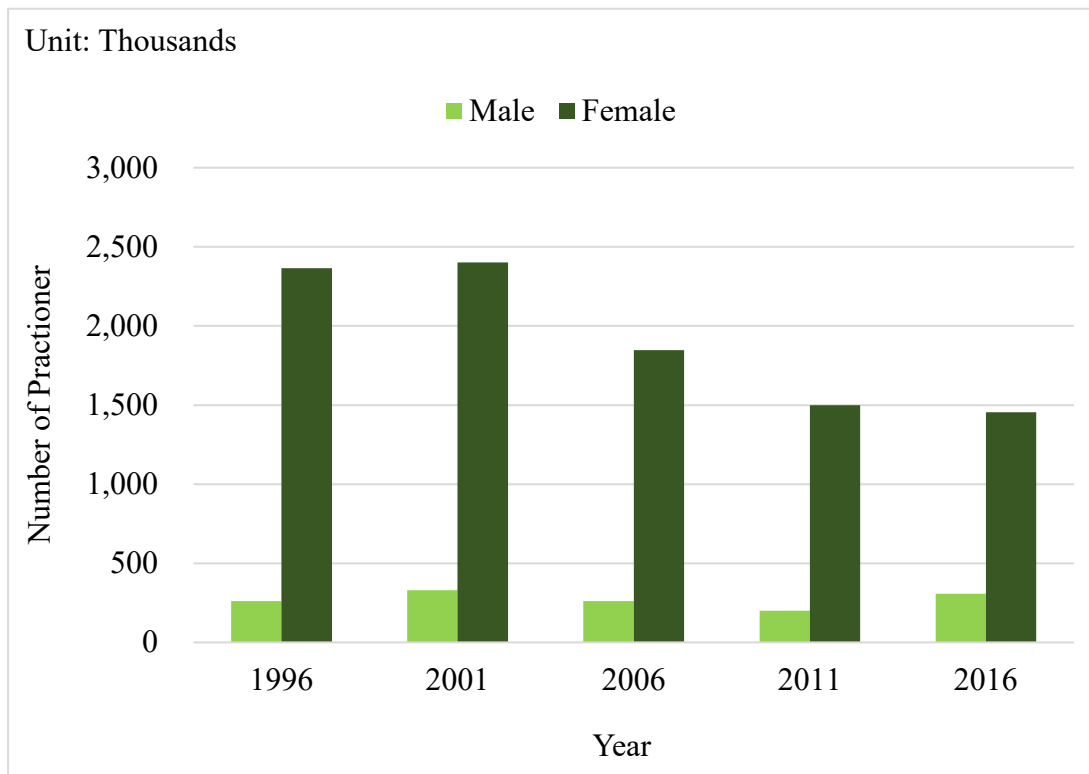
Note. From *Report on the Cultural Study and Research Project on Tea Ceremony in Fiscal Year, 2020*, by the Ministry of Culture, 2021, p.13

(https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/tokeichosa/seikatsubunka_chosa/pdf/93014801_06.pdf).

In sharp contrast to the days when *samurai* (members of the warrior caste) were skilled Japanese tea ceremony practitioners (Miyauchi, 2017), males today accounted for less than one-third of the total number of practitioners (see Figure 2). Instead, practitioners were predominantly female and elderly — aged 65 and above. Moreover, adults aged between 25 and 34 had the lowest participation rate (see Figure 3) (MoC, 2021). This statistic suggests that the Japanese tea ceremony is at risk of extinction, particularly when the old generations pass on, with young adult working professionals — the workforce of the future in Japan — considering this ancient tradition to be irrelevant to modern life.

Figure 2

Number of Japanese Engaging in the Tea Ceremony as a Hobby ('000), 1996–2016, by Gender

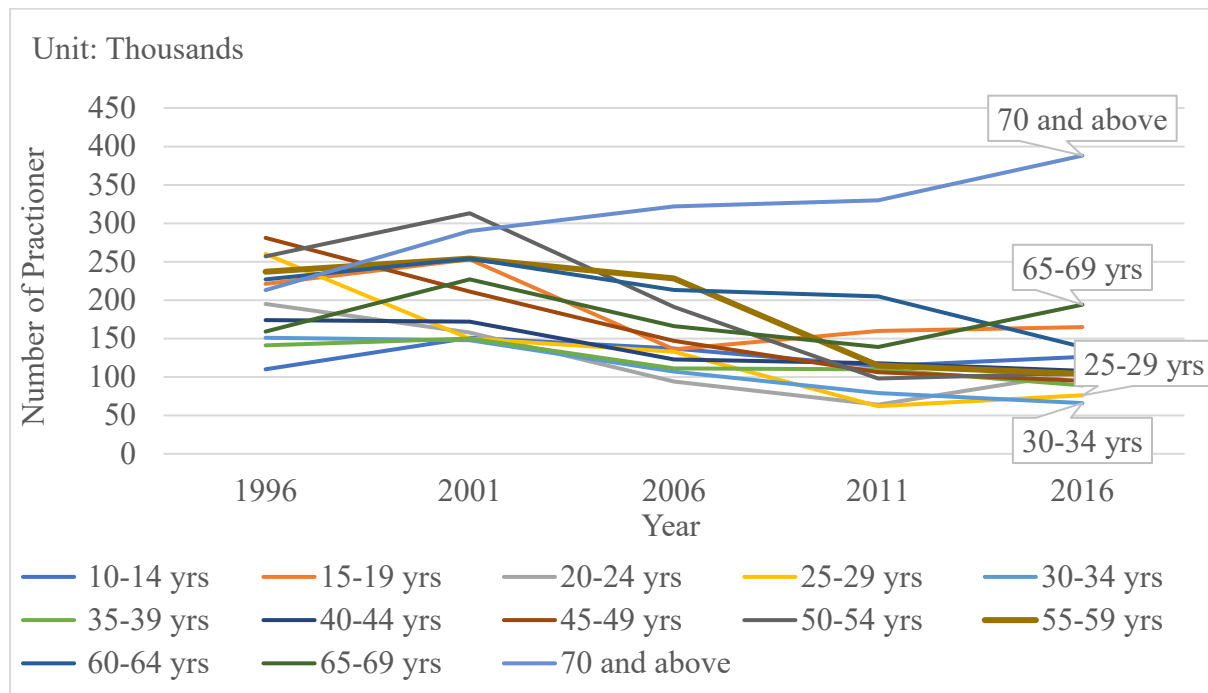


Note. Adapted from the *Report on the Cultural Study and Research Project on Tea Ceremony in Fiscal Year, 2020*, by the Ministry of Culture, 2021, p.13

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Figure 3

Number of Japanese Engaging in the Tea Ceremony as a Hobby ('000), 1996–2016, by Age Group



Note. Adapted from the *Report on the Cultural Study and Research Project on Tea Ceremony in Fiscal Year, 2020*, by the Ministry of Culture, 2021, p.14

(https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/tokeichosa/seikatsubunka_chosa/pdf/93014801_06.pdf).

A possible contributor to the declining interest in the Japanese tea ceremony in contemporary society is the focus of the research to date on the ritualistic elements of the Japanese tea ceremony and the instruction of practitioners, which is primarily in the fields of cultural anthropology and sociology (Miyachi, 2017). The result is a lack of an in-depth understanding of the impact of practicing Japanese tea ceremony at an individual level, particularly from the point of view of working professionals practicing it as a hobby. However, given the fact that the Japanese tea ceremony is at risk of being rendered irrelevant by the march of modernity, it is vital to investigate its impact and explore the role it could play in the modern world. In particular, the potential benefits of the Japanese tea ceremony for the self-development of practitioners, such as working professionals, along with ramifications for organizational dynamics and performance, could be considered.

My Japanese Tea Ceremony Journey

What is my interest in the Japanese tea ceremony? In a nutshell, it “saved” my life. Thanks to my committed practice of the Japanese tea ceremony over the past two years, I have forged a new sense of self and discovered my joy in life.

At the time that I encountered the Japanese tea ceremony, I had just departed from my 15-year career as an investment banker. Until that momentous event, I was at the height of a profession that is highly regarded in most societies. At the time, I took great pride in my ability to pursue such a brilliant and lucrative career. Nonetheless, its demanding nature, long working hours, and high-pressure environment were also imposing a heavy toll on me. In retrospect, I could see the extent to which I had relied on instant gratification to contain the various anxieties I faced. They included the pressures of striving for career advancement, seeking validation, challenging societal expectations as a woman, navigating the conflicts of being a working mother, and adhering to a healthy lifestyle — all while experiencing chronic sleep deprivation due to my endeavor to “have it all.” While I yearned for a job with more balance and personal time, I had come to equate social status and money with happiness; I just couldn’t step off the treadmill.

However, everything came to a stop when my husband was relocated from Japan to Singapore and I ended up leaving my career prematurely when my company would not transfer me. During my darkest hour, as I struggled to find my way, I discovered the Japanese tea ceremony.

Embarking on the journey of the tea ceremony has transformed my life completely, though it has been hard to capture *how* it has wrought this impact (see Figure 4). There are so many dimensions to the Japanese tea ceremony, making it a deeply immersive and multi-layered experience for committed practitioners. On one level, it resembles a “moving meditation” due to the need for intense mental focus, not only for acquiring the knowledge of the tea preparation etiquette as a host but also for executing it with precision and mindfulness. And yet on an entirely different dimension, the Japanese tea ceremony awakens one’s dormant senses to become attuned to a diverse range of emotions and sensations, which can simultaneously evoke a deep sense of connection and immense satisfaction within oneself and in relation to fellow practitioners.

After two years of committed practice, my self-transformation has been remarkable. Once upon a time, I would have thought that my previous career was *the* way for me to exert an impact on the world. In reality, I was consumed by the constant pursuit of busyness, thinking that time was money, which engulfed my entire life. Little did I know that a simple act of preparing a cup of tea with the full focus on caring for the guest(s) I am serving would liberate me from the rigid belief that social status and money were directly linked to my happiness. Today, I have a clear understanding of what truly brings me joy and fulfillment, which I can attribute to my self-development and growth as a result of embarking on the journey of the tea ceremony.

Figure 4

The Researcher Practicing the Japanese Tea Ceremony with Joy



Research Aim

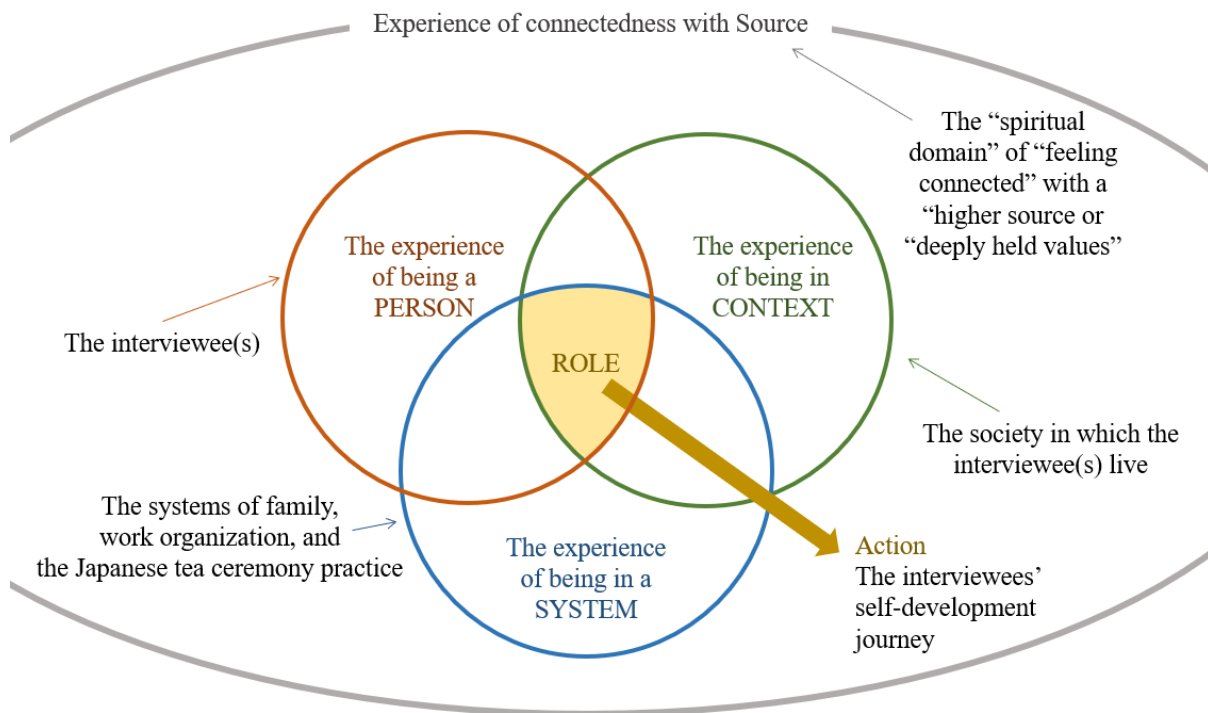
My thesis is an endeavor to take my journey one step further by seeking to “solve the mystery” of *whether, why, and how* the Japanese tea ceremony could exert a transformative impact on working professionals in order to evaluate its relevance for contemporary Japanese society. In order to do so, the aim of this research study was to explore the impact of the regular practice of the Japanese tea ceremony on the self-development journey of Japanese practitioners through a systems psychodynamic lens. Essentially, the self-development journey would trace the inner transformation of the interviewees from their decision to begin practicing the Japanese tea ceremony to their committed practice. Additional foundational theories related to self-development, such as those pertaining to the fulfillment of an individual’s core needs and intrinsic motivation, as well as other relevant frameworks, were also used in the exploration of the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony on the interviewees.

More specifically, the systems psychodynamic lens of The Grubb Institute’s Transforming Experience Framework (TEF)¹ (as cited in Long, 2016, p. 2) was adopted to analyze the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony on the interviewees’ self-development journey. TEF explores how individuals can authentically assume roles and responsibilities within social structures across four different domains. Within the context of this research study, the relevant TEF “domains” would be the interviewee(s); the systems of family, work organization, and the Japanese tea ceremony practice; the contexts of the society in which they live; and the “spiritual domain” of “feeling connected” with a “higher source or “deeply held values” (Long, 2016, p. 4). Through this framework, we can gain a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between the interviewees and the tea ceremony system, along with the ensuing impact on their navigation of the domains, in their respective sociocultural contexts.

¹ Full name: The Transforming Experience into Authentic Action through Role.

Figure 5

Transforming Experience into Authentic Action through Role (TEF)



Note. This figure is adapted from “Transforming Experience into Authentic Action Through Role (TEF),” *Transforming Experience in Organisations: A Framework for Organisational Research and Consultancy*, p. 12, by S. Long, 2016, Karnac Books.

Value of This Research Study

The Japanese tea ceremony is a cherished tradition with a rich history. However, its relevance and utility for working professionals have not been fully examined for its potential to be fully harnessed in modern society. By delving into the committed practitioners’ journey from novice to higher levels of commitment and competencies, this research study sought to capture their internal transformation through their perceptions of their evolving selves over time. Furthermore, the use of the systems psychodynamic lens helped illuminate how the interviewees’ participation in the tea ceremony “system” affected their functioning in their daily lives, thus reflecting their self-development. These findings would thus be invaluable for deepening the understanding of the tea ceremony’s potential in an area hitherto unexplored — its capacity for enabling self-development and personal growth.

Certainly, this exploration of the Japanese tea ceremony, with its focus on the psychological dimension and on an atypical segment of Japanese practitioners — working professionals, will expand the scope of discourse on the subject matter. By highlighting its practical relevance to the working professionals of contemporary Japanese society, the findings of this research study could be extrapolated meaningfully to contemporary societies so that working professionals, teams, and organizations could reap its benefits.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review is broadly divided into three key sections. It begins with a presentation of the Japanese tea ceremony, with a focus on the practice, to provide the necessary background information for the uninitiated, while offering a multi-sensory introduction into the realm of the Japanese tea ceremony. This is followed by a presentation of the basic tenets of the concepts of self-development and the applicable theoretical frameworks. Finally, the applicability of the theoretical frameworks on self-development to the context of Japanese culture will also be examined.

The Japanese Tea Ceremony

The Japanese tea ceremony is characterized by distinctive attributes — the environment, the accouterments, and the rituals — that mark its difference and separateness from the modern world. Therefore, engaging in the Japanese tea ceremony practice has the powerful effect of transporting its practitioners away from the preoccupations of the modern world to an atmosphere of total peace and calm in the tearoom (Anderson, 2006). In this realm, the central priority is the preparation and the partaking of tea with the utmost care, in accordance with the formal principles of hospitality that have been transmitted across generations (MoC, 2021).

Prior to their entry into the tearoom, the practitioners would make further preparations to step across the threshold demarcating their daily life from the tea ceremony practice. Practitioners are advised to remove their watches to surrender their preoccupations with schedules so as to immerse fully in the present (Machuyonn, 2006). They put on the *kimono* — a traditional Japanese robe-like garment, which is considered to be the symbolic uniform of the Japanese tea ceremony, and not typically worn in the outside world (Horinouchi, 2001b), further cementing their departure from the realm world. Another common item practitioners worn by is the *tabi* or white split-toe socks (Hyakkanokai, 2022). The white color, symbolizing cleanliness, is intended to project a sense of purity and contribute to the quiet and tranquil environment of the tearoom (Hyakkanokai, 2022; Inokomochi, 2019; Okamoto, 2015).

Upon entry into the practice space of the tearoom, practitioners will find themselves in a small, intimate space, specially designed for the tea ceremony. Based on the Zen philosophy of seeking enlightenment through the unity of host and guest, what may appear to be overly

cramped spaces for accommodating guests can be transformed into ideal environments for the host and guest to “merge” as one — through the sharing of a harmonious tea experience that unifies their hearts (Sen, 2014).

What is also distinctive about the tearoom is the covering of the entire floor with tatami mats — thick “straw mats measuring approximately six by three feet and bordered with cloth” (Anderson, 1991, p. 296). As tatami mats have become a special and increasingly rare feature in modern homes (including Japanese households) (Miyachi, 2017), their presence further contributes to the reification of the Japanese tea ceremony practice as a dedicated space for one to connect with traditional Japanese customs and aesthetics. The tatami mats are also inextricably interwoven with the rules and etiquette of the ceremony, as they dictate precisely where practitioners sit (Fujimori, 2012) and the distance they move, which involves shuffling around on the mat supported by both hands (MoC, 2021, p. 61). These clearly prescribed locations and movements, involving the use of the tatami mats to mark the distance, are expressly meant to bring participants closer together, thus symbolizing the fusion of their emotions and intentions. For the practitioners, navigating around on these tatami mats with mindful precision means that they must not only be mentally focused on their own movements but also pay attention to others. Therefore, tatami mats are an integral part of helping practitioners cultivate a state of mindfulness and complete immersion in the tea experience.

In fact, every artifact in the tearoom is interwoven into the procedures and sequences of the Japanese tea ceremony to encapsulate its emphasis on the relationship between the host and the guest(s). For instance, the use of a *sensu* — a 15–20 cm folding fan — serves the purpose of creating a symbolic boundary between the host and the guests, which is meant to signify respect and humility. Specifically, the guest greets the host by placing the *sensu* in front of their knees in order to convey a sentiment of “I am entering your space and apologize for any intrusion”. The fan is thus a visual symbol that encapsulates the respectful and humble demarcation of the respective roles of host and guests (“About Tea Ceremony Folding Fans,” 2020; Anderson, 1991). Its subsequent removal then indicates the unifying spirit of the social experience (Ria, 2021).

Within the context of a typical Japanese tea ceremony class, which would last three hours when there are 5–6 students, there is *both* an individual and a group component. Essentially,

the students take turns playing the role of a host in 30-minute timeslots during which they receive individual instruction (Horinouchi, 2001a) (see Figure 6). The remaining practitioners are experiencing group instruction in their role as guests and learning about the corresponding etiquette. The class thus enables practitioners to simultaneously acquire the etiquette of being a host and a guest, while experiencing the effects and learning about the social experience of the Japanese tea ceremony.

Figure 6

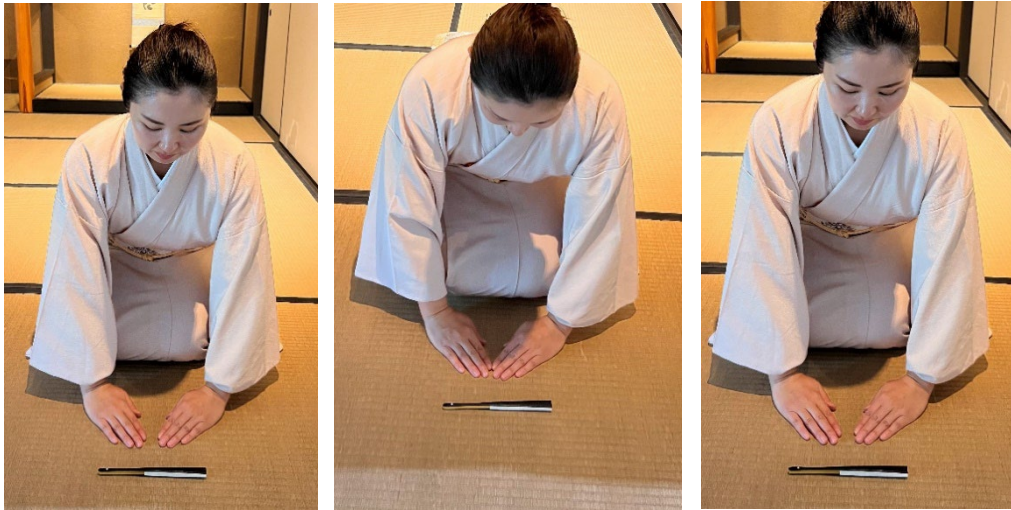
Practitioner Learning Sequences of the Host Under the Guidance of the Teacher



For practitioners playing the role of the host, their time under the spotlight is an all-consuming experience, where they have to learn how to perform specific sequences as meticulously as possible. These detailed sequences include sitting in the *seiza* posture — with knees folded and tucked beneath the body; bowing with variations; moving on tatami mats; bringing out and purifying utensils; preparing the tea; tidying up the utensils; and concluding the ceremony (MoC, 2021; Sen, 2014) (see Figure 7). Moreover, the mastery of these sequences is not just about imitating the physical gestures, but also performing them in accordance with the spirit of the principles of the Japanese tea ceremony, which is centered on showing respect to the guests and gratitude to the host. A case in point is bowing, which is performed by both the guests and the host (Horinouchi, 2001b, p. 22). The graceful performance of the bows, at varying depths and formality, as well as timing and situation, expresses genuine respect and gratitude (Horinouchi, 2001b, p. 22). Mastering bowing is thus a reflection of an accurate understanding of the meaning behind each bow and the sincerity of one's intentions (Sen, 2014). Therefore, practitioners have a heightened awareness of themselves in relation to others.

Figure 7

Researcher Wearing Kimono in Seiza and Bowing Positions on Tatami Mat



The challenge of mastering these sequences is further compounded by the fact that the instruction is delivered verbally, with no textbooks or instructional manuals provided. No note-taking is allowed on the corrections or guidance provided by the teacher during practice, thereby forcing practitioners to “observe, listen, and perform, focusing entirely on the present moment” (Kuuie, 2020, para. 2). This can thus explain why the “mastery” of the sequences — through long-term repetition and dedicated training during lessons (MoC, 2021, p. 10) — is described as “almost hypnotic” (Anderson, 1991, p. 96). Essentially, the body internalizes the movements in a harmonious connection with the ritual, without the self-conscious involvement of the mind.

Ultimately, the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony may seem esoteric with its particularities and the use of artifacts, which seemed divorced from modern reality. Yet this special realm, with its clearly demarcated boundaries to shut out the daily existence, as well as the mindfulness involved in every aspect of the ceremony, particularly with regard to the mastery of the sequences, could make it a “training ground” for developing individual attributes and leadership capabilities to optimize group/organizational performance.

Theoretical Frameworks of Self-Development

As this research study is focused on the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony on self-development, it is important to define this concept. “Self-development” refers to a multifaceted and ever-evolving process that encompasses the continuous pursuit of personal

growth, self-fulfillment, and the endeavor to realize one's highest potential (Maslow, 1954). This concept is informed by two influential theoretical frameworks, which have overlapping dimensions: Maslow's (1954) theory of self-actualization and Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory.

Maslow's (1954) concept of self-actualization refers to the realization of one's true potential, the experience of meaningful relationships, and the possession of a profound sense of purpose and fulfillment (p. 46). In order to attain this stage, individuals must first have fulfilled all their “physiological needs,” the “safety needs,” the “love needs,” and the “esteem needs” (arranged from bottom to top) in Maslow’s (1943) pyramidal hierarchy of needs (pp. 372–382). This foundation would then motivate individuals intrinsically to connect with their “own nature” (Maslow, 1954, p. 46) — harnessing their own potentialities and inner resources — and strive for “character growth, character expression, maturation, and development” (Maslow, 1954, p. 159).

Another classic theory in relation to self-development is Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), individuals' intrinsic need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness plays a crucial role in influencing their overall well-being and development. “Autonomy” refers to the desire to act in harmony with one's own values, interests (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 155–157), and preferences, while “competence” involves seeking opportunities for personal growth and mastery (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 58–61), which overlap with Maslow’s (1943) esteem needs. These two aspects of autonomy and competence provide individuals with intrinsic motivation, which is rooted in personal enjoyment, curiosity, and satisfaction derived from engaging in an activity for its own sake. The final component of the theory is “relatedness,” which highlights the significant role that social connections and meaningful relationships play in fostering self-development (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 88–99); this component which with Maslow’s (1943) sense of belongingness. When individuals feel connected to others, supported, and understood, they are more likely to experience a sense of fulfillment and well-being. One can see how individuals, who possess intrinsic motivation and a strong sense of relatedness with others, will be well-placed to pursue self-development.

By integrating Maslow's (1954) theory of self-actualization as well as Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, we can hone in on the necessary conditions needed for self-

development to take place. These theoretical frameworks will thus provide the focused lenses to supplement TEF for examining the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony on the self-development journey of working professionals who are committed practitioners.

Self-Development in the Japanese Context

The sense of self in Japanese culture differs drastically from that in Western cultures. In Japan, the concept of self is often intertwined with others and the collective, not an independent and individualistic entity (Takata & Matsumoto, 1995). Therefore, taking into consideration the construct of the self and the concept of self-development within the context of Japanese culture would be instructive.

For the Japanese, the Confucian tradition, which emphasizes collectivist values and societal harmony, lies at the core of its culture (Dollinger, 1988). Therefore, the Japanese derived their sense of self from their social existence — i.e., through nurturing meaningful social relationships, maintaining a suitable position in them, and engaging in interdependent and cooperative interactions (Kitayama, 1994). More specifically, the Japanese define themselves in relation to the larger context of family, community, and nation (Chung et al., 2008), which would suggest that the impacts of the systems and contexts would be significant for the individual Japanese from a TEF standpoint.

Moreover, the Japanese' assertion of their individuality is further prescribed by the society's hierarchical structures that have clearly demarcated the boundaries of the roles and responsibilities across various contexts and life phases (Curhan et al., 2014). From a young age, the Japanese learn to navigate these hierarchies, adhering to specific social norms and expectations (LeTendre, 1994). Norms and practices that are heavily emphasized include attentiveness to others and the focus on hospitality, with a desire to avoid inconveniencing others (Kitayama, 1994), thus showing a strong consideration for others in life's undertakings.

Therefore, the sense of self, for the Japanese individuals, which is inextricably interwoven within a web of structured social relationships, can offer tremendous stability, thus enabling Japanese individuals and the entire Japanese society to operate with confidence (Hamaguchi, 1998). At the same time, from a psychodynamic standpoint, one may even suggest these social norms, expectations, and behavioral guidelines serve as a container for providing

Japanese individuals and their society with a sense of control over any primal emotions, such as anxiety (Bion, 1962).

At the same time, the juxtaposition of the Japanese concept of the self with the Western constructs (as represented by Maslow and Deci and Ryan's theories), described in the previous section, would highlight an irreconcilable gap and thus argue that the Western concept of self and self-development may be irrelevant to Japanese individuals. However, Ikukawa (2014) pointed out that the Japan society's strong emphasis on harmony and well-defined norms may not be fully positive for Japanese individuals, thus illuminating a gap between the needs of Japanese individuals and their society. For instance, Japanese individuals are constantly expected to "read between the lines" and be mindful of others, even at the expense of their own well-being (Ikukawa, 2014). Furthermore, the culture's expectation that the individual interest and individual well-being be sacrificed for the collective, so as to avoid inconveniencing others, can result in the neglect of individual well-being and the suppression of their true feelings (Masuda, 2022). As a result, many individuals in Japan struggle to find genuine happiness, with unspoken pressures and expectations leading to internal conflicts and emotional difficulties (Masuda, 2022). This reality thus highlights the fact that the Western concept of self is more likely a universal construct for all human beings. As with everyone else, an element of individuality, which incorporates an individual's distinctive attributes and needs, is still vital for anyone, regardless of their sociocultural background. In the case of Japanese individuals, their self-development may need to be integrated with elements of Japanese culture without being annulled by it.

Rationale for This Research Study

The discussion in this chapter has highlighted the extensive discourse in the literature on the attributes, artifacts, and rituals of the Japanese tea ceremony culture (Anderson, 1991; MoC, 2021; Miyauchi, 2017). At the same time, there are also theoretical frameworks supporting the understanding of self-development, such as Maslow's (1943, 1954) theories on core needs and self-actualization as well as Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. The examination of Japanese culture, with regard to the concept of self, also provided an enhanced understanding of how self-development could differ for the Japanese individuals who are the subject of this research study.

Nonetheless, to date, no research has delved into the psychological impact of the Japanese tea ceremony, particularly in terms of its implications for self-development within the Japanese context. Given the fact that Japanese culture has an attenuated concept of individuality vis-à-vis Western constructs (Hamaguchi, 1998), the implication of the discussion above suggests that the Japanese tea ceremony practice could hold the key to enabling Japanese individuals to address their needs for their individual self (Ikukawa, 2014; Masuda, 2022), which is nonetheless still compatible with their social connection to Japanese culture.

In investigating the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony practice on the journey of self-development of Japanese practitioners, this research study could add an important cultural dimension, which would be important for Japanese individuals and organizations, in terms of preserving ancient traditions in their fast-moving modern society. Moreover, the adoption of the TEF as an overarching framework for this research study would take into consideration the complex and dynamic interactional dynamics among the practitioners, the systems of the Japanese tea ceremony practice and their work/home, and the societal contexts where they lived. The understanding of the practice and its potential for self-development could then be extrapolated beyond the implications for Japanese individuals and its culture.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Approach

The aim of this research study was to explore the impact of Japanese working professionals' regular practice of the rituals of Japanese tea ceremony on their self-development journey. As this research study involved the investigation of this topic through the experiences of practitioners from their perspectives, the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, which is focused on how individuals make sense of their experiences, was adopted. As explained by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), IPA allows for a deep exploration of the interviewees' unique experiences and perspectives within the context of the Japanese tea ceremony. It encompasses three characteristics:

1. **“Phenomenology”**: This philosophical approach is focused on examining the subjective experiences of the world around us. In this research study, we are studying the phenomenon of the impact of the tea ceremony on working professionals' self-development journey through their stories.
2. **“Hermeneutics”**: It refers to the interpretation of messages and sense-making, specifically the interviewees' interpretations of their narratives and the researcher's analysis of the interviewees' perspectives and interpretations through conceptual lenses.
3. **“Idiography”**: This characteristic refers to IPA's focus on the *individual* interviewees' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8).

Selection of Interviewees

I initially employed purposive sampling to ensure the relevance of the findings to my research aim. The primary selection criteria for the selection of the interviewees were as follows: they must be working or retired working professionals of Japanese origins who were committed to the practice of Japanese tea ceremony on a non-professional basis. This is based on the research study's intent to evaluate the relevance of the Japanese tea ceremony to the self-development of working professionals. Therefore, professional Japanese tea ceremony practitioners, who engaged in this practice as their livelihood, were excluded. In addition, the criterion of a shared nationality was introduced to enhance the homogeneity of the sample, while allowing for the impact distinctive impact of Japanese culture on the interviewees' self-

development journey to be considered. Finally, to demonstrate commitment, interviewees needed to have been attending tea ceremony lessons regularly, at least twice a month, over a period of at least one year. It is important to point out that there were no constraints imposed on the Japanese tea ceremony schools, as there are various types (MoC, 2021), since the focus of the research study was on the interviewees' subjective engagement in the experience.

In total, 12 individuals were approached for interviews through a participation invitation letter that was either sent to them via WhatsApp or email, depending on whichever mode of communication was more effective for access to the potential interviewees (see Appendix A). The invitation set out a concise description of the research aim, the request for a one-on-one interview with available days and timings, and the expected duration. Potential interviewees were informed that their participation would be voluntary, their identities anonymized, and their responses treated as confidential. The participation invitation message was composed in English and then translated into Japanese for the Japanese recipients.

Apart from two interviewees — fellow tea practitioners attending the same course as I was, who agreed immediately to participate in the research study, I also targeted another 10 possible leads through my review of publicly available information, such as Japanese tea ceremony classroom websites, personal blogs, and books. Among them, an initial email led me to a professional Japanese tea ceremony teacher. Although she could not participate in the interview herself as a professional practitioner, she introduced me to three of her students. Therefore, these three interviewees were derived from snowball sampling. As for the remaining three individuals, I approached them directly and obtained their consent to participate in the interview, with two of them agreeing to do so after a preliminary 30-minute phone call to address their queries.

In the end, there were eight interviewees participating in the interview, comprising a diverse group of Japanese men and women in their 40s to 50s, residing in Japan, the United States (U.S.), or Singapore. We were able to schedule the interviews at a day and time, which was convenient to both parties, while factoring in my travel to their respective countries, in the case of the interviewees who were residing abroad (that is, Singapore and Japan).

Data Collection and Research Setting

To gather data on the impact of the interviewees' practice of the Japanese tea ceremony on their self-growth journey, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and took place in Singapore, Japan, and the U.S., depending on the interviewees' locations. The variety of research settings included INSEAD's campus classrooms, cafés, and tearooms, as well as the interviewees' homes. All the locations provided a comfortable and relaxing space where the interviewees could sit comfortably and engage in conversation with me. Whether it was a café or any other public setting, the environment allowed for clear communication and ensured privacy without any acquaintances nearby, thus providing emotional safety for the interviewees to openly share their perspectives.

Each of the interviews largely followed the following format. To begin with, I sought to strike a rapport with the interviewees. After expressing my sincere gratitude for their willingness to participate in this interview, I provided a self-introduction and reiterated the purpose of my research study. Permission was obtained from the interviewees to audio-record the interviews, thus enabling me to focus on the interviews, while being able to analyze the content in greater detail later. Finally, I reassured the interviewees that their identities would remain anonymous and the information they provided would be treated as confidential.

Next, the interviewees completed a short questionnaire. The questionnaire served the dual purpose of gathering background data for the research study and being an icebreaker. It comprises demographic questions and inquiries about the interviewees' professions, the Japanese tea ceremony *ryuha* (school) they were attending, and the duration of their engagement in tea ceremony practice. The questions were natural prompts for the interviewees to speak about their Japanese tea ceremony journey and insights in a natural manner.

During the semi-structured interview, I was guided by a set of pre-formulated questions that were centered upon the interviewees' journey of engaging in the Japanese tea ceremony experiences: when they first learned about the Japanese tea ceremony practice; their reasons for pursuing the practice; their journey of learning; the reasons for their continued pursuit; and their perceptions of their personal development (see Appendix B). While I had questions on-hand for the interview, my focus was on ensuring that the interview flowed naturally and

enabling the interviewees to offer their perspectives freely. Therefore, the questions were only utilized as needed to keep the discussion on track.

The interviews were conducted in Japanese. As a Japanese person conducting face-to-face interviews with Japanese interviewees, it was natural for the interview to take place in our native tongue. Doing so also helped reinforce the rapport between the interviewees and me, while enabling both parties to use the terminology of the Japanese tea ceremony easily, without any need for translation or concern over any misunderstanding. My previous training in coaching skills and my learning from INSEAD's Executive Master in Change program also enabled me to build rapport and engage in active listening during the interviews. Ultimately, the interviews proved to be highly engaging for everyone: although I had requested one-hour interviews, seven of them exceeded an hour, with two of them lasting more than three hours.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to analyze the rich and complex data gathered from the interviews, following the procedures outlined in Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014) article for analyzing qualitative data:

1. The first step was to transcribe the interview data. They were generated by using an application called Notta that could recognize Japanese and convert the audio recordings into text. As there were some errors in the wording, I made further corrections to the transcripts by listening to the recordings. Then I divided the transcript of each interviewee by question and organized the responses accordingly. This thus allowed me to compare the interviewees' responses across the same questions.
2. Before beginning a detailed analysis, I revisited the transcripts and noted down my initial impressions and observations in my notebook. I also reviewed my notes comprising my reflections on what I observed, thought, and felt regarding the interviewees' narratives and their characteristics, taken after the interview.
3. Going through each question, I extracted key phrases from the interviewees' actual remarks and the summarized versions of the interviewees' spoken words (that is, the

codes) to hone in on the essence of what was being said as I read each interviewee's answers. I wrote down the codes on post-its. This process was repeated for all seven questions and the resultant 253 post-its were grouped by question number for further organization.

4. I sorted the extracted codes into meaningful groups based on their codes and then formulated summarized words that best represented each newly created group as a whole. Ultimately, 21 groups were formed.
5. By clustering the relevant 21 groups into larger groupings based on the relationships between the codes, I was able to further divide them into six broad categories of "Bonding", "Characteristics of tea", "Reality", "Responses", "Result", and "Wishes." The analysis of these broad categories, in juxtaposition with the post-its, then led to the identification of the final themes.

Chapter 4: Findings

Description of Interviewees

All eight interviewees were middle-aged individuals in their 40s to 50s, with extensive life experiences and longstanding careers (see Table 1). Apart from one interviewee, all of them had pursued the study of the Japanese tea ceremony for over a decade, hence demonstrating that they were highly committed practitioners who considered it to be a lifelong practice. Therefore, we would consider their career development to have run alongside their engagement in the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony. Moreover, five out of the interviewees were living overseas (in Singapore and the U.S.), which also meant that their engagement in the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony was an intentional one for them to maintain their connection with their culture.

Table 1

Characteristics of Interviewees

Pseudonym	Age group	Gender	Residence	Occupation	Family Status	# of years of Japanese tea ceremony practice
Chika	40–44	Female	Japan	Japanese Teacher	Unmarried, no children	10
Hikari	45–49	Female	U.S.	Scientist	Unmarried, no children	2
Jiro	55–59	Male	Japan	Intellectual Property Specialist	Married, with a child	38
Ken	55–59	Male	Singapore	Head of a shipping company (Retired)	Married, with a child	12

Mika	45–49	Female	U.S.	Employee of a non-profit organization	Married, without children	25
Miyabi	50–54	Female	Singapore	Interpreter and Translator	Married, with children	13
Ryoko	55–59	Female	Japan	Writer	Married, with a child	30
Suzu	45–49	Female	U.S.	Office Manager	Married, with children	25

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

The exploration of the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony practice on the interviewees on their self-development journey showed how they were first drawn to the practice because they perceived that there was something missing in their “real-world” systems (family, school, or workplace), which undermined their sense of well-being. Their participation in the tea ceremony practice constituted a “sanctuary” — a demarcated space where they could disconnect from the outside world and reconnect with themselves — due to its particular attributes. Moreover, it was also a “training ground” for them to strengthen every aspect of their being — physical, mental, and emotional. As a result, through their immersion in the tradition, the interviewees began to undergo an internal transformation that impacted their daily lives, as they became self-aware lifelong learners with a deeper meaning of purpose for life.

Theme 1: Something Missing in the “Real World”

Prior to their participation in the Japanese tea ceremony, all the interviewees struggled to fulfill their core needs in the real-world systems, be it their family, workplace, and/or school, and connect with their authentic identities. For the interviewees living abroad, their lack of direct access to Japanese society and the attributes of Japanese culture in their “real world” led to a sense of inner void:

I guess I miss Japan. I've been away from Japan for about 23 years. The unique qualities of Japan make me long for the essence of Japan. (Hikari)

I left Japan when I was about 18 years old and I've been living abroad ever since. Maybe I was looking for a place to feel at home in Japan at first when I started to learn tea. (Miyabi)

Although Hikari and Miyabi had been away from Japan for a long time, they had not “forgotten” their culture or abandoned it. If anything, being away had intensified their desire to connect to their childhood identities. Their perceptions thus confirm the significance of the fourth premise of the clinical paradigm, which highlights the extent to which the experience of early childhood can continue to influence our adult selves (Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2014). Moreover, from a TEF standpoint, these interviewees' yearning for Japanese culture can also be attributed to the interviewees' sense of estrangement from their interactions with the non-Japanese systems and contexts in their daily lives. In the case of Miyabi, her description of her non-Japanese family and Singapore life is akin to an outsider looking in: “My husband is non-Japanese, and my children speak English and German more than Japanese. I rarely have the opportunity to interact with Japanese people in the context of the children's schools or work-related environments.” Similarly, Hikari also appeared to feel ill at ease as a middle-aged female scientist working in an American workplace with sociocultural norms that remained unfamiliar to her:

Being a woman, being Asian, and being a short, small lady, I think I can't afford to be underestimated. I may not overtly show it, but I always have a sense of being in a combat stance. I have to exhibit confident behavior. If I remain passive like in Japan, I'll be taken lightly by others. I feel like I have to put in extra effort, and it becomes exhausting... there aren't many Japanese people in my company.

It would seem that neither Miyabi nor Hikari perceived their real-life systems and contexts to be psychologically safe spaces where they could be themselves. Based on Edmondson's (1999) definition of “psychological safety” as “a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking” (p. 350), we can extrapolate this concept to Miyabi and Hikari's experiences of feeling disconnected with their true selves in their real-world environments. Essentially, for these interviewees, their endeavors to survive in their

real-world environments come at the expense of being able to develop a positive self. This perception is exemplified by Ken in his description of his previous experience as the Head of a shipping company in Singapore:

I had this feeling that my emotions were worn out. Going through tough experiences at work, feeling betrayed, it's like a scab on the heart. While continuing with work, the scab kept getting thicker, and I thought I would become someone who wouldn't care about anything.

The sense of alienation from one's self was not just experienced by the Japanese interviewees living abroad but also by those who lived in Japan. This pattern thus highlighted that the source of the interviewees' distress stemmed more from the realities of modern life, symptomatic of many big cities, rather than any specific country. Ryoko, a female writer and essayist, in her 50s, who lived in Japan, also articulated the dysfunctional impact of modern life on the development of a positive self:

I think most modern people are like this. I lead a very chaotic and disorganized life. On a daily basis, we all are busy. Because of that, I am unable to imbue anything with a sense of soul and show gratitude for anything. Yet not being able to do that is considered normal.

Situating these narratives within TEF, we can see how the interviewees' interactions with their real-world systems and the broader context were not enabling them to "find meaning and identity within a purpose beyond the self" (Long, 2016, p. 7). Based on their perceptions about their former selves, the interviewees were despairing of being unable to develop an "ideal self" based on "a personal vision and aspirations for the desired version of oneself, encompassing both the desired qualities and accomplishments in life and work" (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006, p. 625). Given their surrounding realities and the impact on their being, this aspiration had seemed impossible.

Theme 2: Sanctuary and Training Ground

For the interviewees, who were feeling unfulfilled and battled from their real-life experiences, the Japanese tea ceremony practice was a haven with particular attributes that helped to liberate them completely from their real-world preoccupations. Specifically, it

created a clear boundary of separation and enabled them to heal and recharge from their daily lives in the real world:

When I ran my own business, I would think about work all the time... There was no clear boundary between work and personal life. But when I come to tea ceremony practice, it's like I am not thinking about anything at all. (Ken)

There's a constant whirlwind in my mind, my thoughts are buzzing with work, family, health, and various other things... [Tea ceremony practice] allows me to reboot, to detach myself from all those swirling thoughts. It brings me great joy to be able to separate from them and find solace in this space. (Suzu)

There are various things in the secular world. Especially when you are raising children, you are so busy that you have to do this and that. That is why the time spent in the tearoom is so important to me. Because I empty my head and face, thinking only about the tea. I can purify my mind and also get rid of brain fatigue. (Ryoko)

The interviewees' statements suggest that the tea ceremony practice was their "sacred" space with clearly-demarcated boundaries that enabled them to detach from the real world and empty their minds. Within the context of TEF, the Japanese tea ceremony practice was a positive and nurturing system, unlike the other real-world systems for the interviewees. It was a psychologically safe space, where the interviewees could recharge, quiet their minds, and embark on their journey of self-development. How the particular attributes of the tea ceremony practice — its essence, the relationship, and the sequences — helped ensure the reinforcement of the boundaries separating it from the real world, and hence provided a conducive environment for the interviewees to develop their selves, will be explored in this section.

Essence. What set the Japanese tea ceremony apart from the real world, from a big-picture perspective, according to the interviewees, was that its existence appeared to be superfluous in juxtaposition with the values, priorities, and norms of modern society. According to the interviewees, *every* action they did in the tearoom and *how* they did it would not be considered to be of value in modern society. As Mika, an experienced professional in non-profit organizations, who was living in the U.S., pointed out bluntly, "In terms of

necessity, [tea ceremony] is not needed in our daily lives.” Indeed, the investment of the sheer amount of time and focus into the act of preparing a cup of tea stands in stark contrast to the modern world’s preference for pragmatic efficiency. Similarly, Miyabi noted that she did not sit in the *seiza* posture in her daily life. But in the tearoom, the *seiza* posture is the default position for initiating the practitioners into a state of calm through conscious breathing. Focusing on breathing in the *seiza* posture and on preparing tea was thus a deliberate rejection of the real world in every respect. Ironically, it is precisely this quality — the Japanese tea ceremony’s rejection of real-world values and norms — that drew these interviewees towards the practice: they were seeking umbrage from the real world. Therefore, from a TEF standpoint, the Japanese tea ceremony functioned as an important system for the interviewees to navigate past the stressors in the other systems of their lives within the broader contexts of the societies where they lived.

How the real-world systems were different from the system of the Japanese tea ceremony practice for the interviewees was also evidenced by their descriptions of the moment when they would step into the tearoom. Mika stated that she would experience a deep sense of relief from the cares and expectations of the real world in her anticipation of engaging in the Japanese tea ceremony. Suzu spoke about consciously calming her breath before entering the tearoom, thus establishing a sense of control over her state of being and adjusting her mindset as she was about to cross the threshold. Within the tearoom, Ryoko’s teacher would remind her and her fellow students to “perform each movement with thoroughness,” unlike the modern world’s ways of “rushing and doing things in a haphazard manner.” Instead of the emphasis on efficiency and productivity, other values and considerations would come into play, as Ryoko explained: “Taking time to perform each action gives weight and refinement to the movements. We are taught to consider the position of each tea utensil to pursue beauty...”

Through their immersion in a system that prioritizes slowing down their breathing and movements, the interviewees pointed out how their sensory perceptions of the serenity of the tearoom would be heightened, making them attuned to every detail in the room. Chika, a Japanese teacher living in Japan, remarked, “Engaging all five senses and truly savoring something is something we rarely do in our daily lives.” Hikari cherished the “stillness... [of] the tearoom,” unlike the “everyday life” that was “full of movement,” and delighted in “sensing the faint fragrance of incense and hearing the indescribable sound of boiling water.”

Suzu also remarked about the pleasure she derived from hearing the “shuffling sound of the tatami mat when [she] walk[ed] on it.” Within the system of the Japanese tea ceremony practice, the interviewees not only experienced a quieter and more peaceful physical environment but also became more connected to their inner selves down to the very minutiae. They became attuned to their breath and the beauty in the simplicity of life, and in the process, felt the awakening of the emotion of joy, which had eluded them in the real-world systems. Therefore, it would seem that the Japanese tea ceremony practice provided the interviewees with a psychologically safe space and the emotional foundation to embark on the journey to connect with their authentic selves.

Relationships. Adding to the psychological safety of the Japanese tea ceremony, within the context of Maslow’s (1943) pyramidal hierarchy of needs, was the sense of belonging. It is manifested in the core concept of “hospitality” that lies at the heart of the Japanese tea ceremony practice (host and guests), which also permeates into the actual relationships among the practitioners (teacher-student and student-student).

The Japanese tea ceremony is a deeply social experience: all practitioners take turns playing the primary roles of hosts and guests and taking responsibility for contributing to the overall hospitality of the experience. Miyabi captured the inherently social nature of the Japanese tea ceremony: “Tea ceremony cannot be done alone. It is a place for communication. It is about smoothly and beautifully conducting oneself while engaging in communication, following the prescribed forms.” More specifically, the core relationship between the host and the guest(s) is focused on the care for the latter: a host’s concentration on the tea preparation sequences is centered upon the “simple wish of making delicious tea for the person right in front of them,” as Chika pointed out. Apart from the interactions between the host and their guest(s), Miyabi also highlighted the presence of additional relationships and interactional dynamics in play. Essentially, *all* practitioners have a part to play in “reading the atmosphere and responding accordingly based on a shared purpose of fostering the spirit of hospitality (Horinouchi, 2001a).

The focus on relationships within the construct of the Japanese tea ceremony is mirrored in the camaraderie among the practitioners. According to the interviewees, the positive interactional dynamics among the practitioners within the system of the Japanese tea ceremony practice are grounded upon a shared appreciation and valuation of human

relationships, which stem from their practice. The interactions among the practitioners are similarly characterized by ease, comfort, and connection, rather than the assertion of the separateness of self and individuality:

In the classroom, there are all sorts of people. But when you enter the tearoom, all those titles and occupations are set aside, and it becomes a simple... relationship.
(Ryoko)

They are of different genders, different backgrounds, and completely different ages... but we have something in common, and there is mutual respect, which makes it an indescribably comfortable group... I get along with them from the very first time I meet them... Those who have immersed themselves in the values of tea for a long time all share the same values. (Miyabi)

The interviewees' narratives of their social experience in the tearoom appeared to be focused on bringing joy to their guests within a carefully constructed social situation and the show of mutual respect for one another. They conveyed what Watkins (2020) described as selfless joy centered upon forging strong connections with others or projects deemed important, valuable, and good. This joy, revolving around care and connection (lying at the heart of hospitality), is without the interest of the ego (Robbins, 2021). Therefore, the interviewees' exposure to nurturing other-centered interactions and relationships within the Japanese tea ceremony system seemed to be inspiring them to move toward their ideal self — one to which they could not connect in real-world systems. The practitioners' shared desire to foster the spirit of hospitality of the Japanese tea ceremony experience can be said to create a virtuous cycle within the practice space, whereby a "good person" begot another "good person" (Miller & Kahle, 2018). We can see how the Japanese tea ceremony practice can be a spawning ground for ideal selves — a conducive environment for fostering the intrinsic motivation to strive for self-development. At the same time, it is evident that the interviewees' evolution toward an improved self was accelerated by their experience of a sense of belonging and relatedness.

Yet it is important to note that such a nurturing social environment does not exist in a vacuum. Based on the interviewees' narratives, the teacher's role and the individual occupying it lie at the epicenter of the positive social relationships within the tearoom. Not only are they the knowledge bearers of the traditions and norms of the Japanese tea ceremony

but they are also role models whose application of their knowledge impact each student and, in turn, the interactional dynamics among the practitioners. Therefore, these teachers hold the key to the psychological safety of the environment.

A pivotal aspect of how the interviewees' teachers enabled the interviewees to feel psychologically safe was the former's recognition of the differences among the students and giving individual students the room and support to learn and develop at their own pace without negative judgment:

My teacher is a good person with a good heart. If you don't have a good heart, it's not good for tea... I haven't made any progress at all. But that's fine, both myself and the teacher accepted that. She considers me to be in a special class, and that's okay.

(Ryoko)

I don't do much prep or review, so I have a slower growth curve, but the teacher doesn't put too much pressure on me. That's why I'm able to keep going. If the teacher puts too much pressure on me, it would be stressful. It's just right. (Hikari)

Apart from their willingness to accommodate the interviewees' pace of learning, the interviewees also pointed out how their teachers supported the uniqueness of each student and showed attunement to the individuality of every student:

The teacher doesn't negate the way each individual is. It really made me feel the depth and breadth of their generosity, like what it means to have such broad-mindedness.

(Chika)

The teacher, I always noticed, is constantly observing what interests each person, and there is this professional conscience to support them in their areas of interest. Without a doubt. (Ken)

These comments illuminate the significant role the teachers played in the development of the interviewees through the Japanese tea ceremony, mirroring Winnicott's (1986) concept of a mother's "holding environment": "In an environment that holds the baby well enough, the baby is able to make personal development according to inherited tendencies" (p. 28). In the

same way, the teachers' support of the interviewees is similar to Winnicott's (1953) description of a mother's adaptation of their care for their children to match their needs, thus building up their sense of safety, competence, and autonomy in order to foster personal development. The teachers' interaction is also a perfect demonstration of how relatedness helped in building up the interviewees' competence and, in turn, boosted their motivation to persist with their Japanese tea ceremony practice.

Sequences. Once the basic safety and needs for belonging are met, the next level of needs relates to the esteem needs on Maslow's (1943) pyramidal hierarchy of needs and Deci and Ryan's (1985) component of competence, which is pivotal to the pursuit of self-development. In the case of the interviewees, the challenge of mastering the sequences of the tea ceremony practice was a significant part of their self-development journey. The interviewees' self-esteem and competence were nourished in their endeavor to master the sequences:

If there were no sequence, anyone could do it. Without a form and just doing something freestyle, it doesn't hold much value or create value. I want to perform it properly.
(Miyabi)

For a special gathering, I practiced the same form for a whole year. And when I succeeded, I felt a sense of achievement I had never experienced before. I was happier than when I was promoted at work. (Suzu)

Yet beyond fulfilling their esteem needs and bolstering their sense of competence, the interviewees' delight in executing a repetitive series of sequences to perfection seemed to indicate a psychodynamic driver operating at the unconscious level. It is possible that the structured nature of the sequences offered the interviewees a positive learning experience, which was not marred by any learning anxiety. As Chika explained, the learning, which takes place in the Japanese tea ceremony, feels "easy": "Because there is a sequence built up already, all I need to do is focus on that form. I just need to concentrate on the movements." Her comment highlights how her anxiety regarding learning the sequences was contained by the repetition of the sequences and the teacher's guidance, thus validating Bion's (1962) "container-contained" concept. In fact, as French (1997) pointed out, when well-contained, anxiety, can serve as a source of creative energy and motivation for learning.

But beyond the containment derived from the physical replication of the gestures and the presence of the teacher, the containment more likely stemmed from the holding environment of the Japanese tea ceremony as a tradition that is generations in the making: “I feel a sense of tranquility knowing that I am doing something universal. It makes me realize that people in the past did the same, and it brings a great sense of calmness” (Miyabi). From a TEF standpoint, we can see how the interviewees’ sense of self would be greatly strengthened by the fact that their participation in this Japanese tea ceremony practice connected them to a system (the Japanese tea ceremony practice) and a context that transcended time and space (traditional Japanese culture with a long history).

Theme 3: Lifelong Learning in Journey of Individuation

For all the interviewees, the Japanese tea ceremony practice transformed them at several levels. To begin with, their participation in this practice had given them a whole new appreciation and experience of Japanese culture. According to Suzu, engaging in Japanese tea ceremony practice is like gaining access to “Japanese culture condensed.” They include “calligraphy, flower arrangement, incense appreciation, seasonal cuisine” (Chika) and “*kimonos*, the names of authors written on hanging scrolls, tea bowls, incense” etc. (Hikari). More than just acquiring hands-on skills, the interviewees delighted in the fact that the Japanese tea ceremony practice was a comprehensive art form that had exposed them to “various forms of knowledge, intelligence, aesthetic sense, and communication skills” (Chika).

In addition, the interviewees had also extended their passion for the Japanese tea ceremony to interest in learning about the history of Japanese culture and Chinese culture, as they relate to the tea ceremony:

...Even though I wasn't particularly interested in ancient Chinese history before, thanks to the tea ceremony, I've become somewhat curious and started studying it on my own. As I engage in these activities, I find that my perspective on China, where I used to live, is completely different from what it used to be. (Miyabi)

I had completely closed my eyes to history during my student days. It wasn't until I started practicing the tea ceremony that I found history to be enjoyable. Just recently, I

bought a famous 12-volume history book on Kindle... I realized that this is how I wanted to spend my time. (Ken)

Apart from transforming their interests, the Japanese tea ceremony practice also exerted a positive impact on the interviewees in their real-world systems. One key area of change was their recognition of their ability to assert control over their perceptions and emotions:

If I don't have space in my heart, I can't entertain others through tea... I've realized that I need to be grateful to my husband, who kindly supports me in attending practice. In the end, I've learned that it's about having a calm heart, expressing gratitude, or making tea and expressing gratitude to others. (Mika)

Tea is really like a reflection of oneself. If the heart is not fulfilled, one can no longer prepare a good tea. That's why making tea is also about self-discipline, like a form of self-reflection, a mirror. (Ryoko)

Others like Miyabi experienced a seismic change in what would be considered “deeply held values” within TEF (Long, 2016, p. 4). Miyabi spoke of how she used to indulge in shopping to seek “self-satisfaction,” “sense of relief,” and “validation from others” through their praises. Her past mind was simply focused on “being in a big and famous ‘good’ company, having nice things, and owning a good car., and... making money.” However, thanks to “walking the path of tea ceremony,” she had become someone who no longer “blindly grew older”; rather, she pursued each day by “seeking” profound and important learning. As for Hikari, her participation in the tea ceremony practice has enabled her to see and appreciate her real-world environment with eyes of enlightenment:

... By participating in tea ceremony practices, I gained a sense of spaciousness and became someone who can appreciate the changing seasons. I feel like I haven't really lived while experiencing the goodness of winter, summer, or spring... I am grateful for that.

An interesting observation that can be made about the positive “spillover” effects of the Japanese tea ceremony practice on the interviewees’ real-world systems is that the realm of the Japanese tea ceremony was able to prevent the reciprocal encroachment of the real world

into its system. This outcome certainly illuminates the effectiveness of these attributes of the Japanese tea ceremony in creating a powerful impact on the practitioners and its contribution to the practitioners' development. With its distinctive attributes that established clearly demarcated boundaries from the real world, the system of the Japanese tea ceremony practice offered the interviewees a psychologically safe space for them to undergo individuation and self-realization (Stein, 2020). Away from the stressors and distractions of the real world, the interviewees had the opportunity to seek dialogue and inner harmony with their unconscious and deepen their consciousness (Stein, 2020). In doing so, they were able to embark on the quest to discover what Rusu (2001, 2003) called the true essence and purpose, and pursue the integration of the self for unleashing one's latent potential. Indeed, by juxtaposing the interviewees' perceptions of their current selves with their original reasons for initiating their tea ceremony practice, it is easy to recognize how far along they had come since they embarked on the Japanese tea ceremony practice.

Most significantly, the findings showed that the interviewees' journeys of individuation were achieved through their forays into the Japanese tea ceremony practice — a tradition built upon collectivist principles of clearly prescribed norms, which would seem antithetical to the cultivation of individuality. Yet the quotes of the interviewees below would show how their participation in the Japanese tea ceremony practice impacted them differently:

I hadn't been interested in traditional crafts, folk art, or Japanese painting before... Because of practicing Japanese tea ceremony, ... I've started to develop some interest in them. Recently, I visited an art museum for the first time, and I was amazed by how wonderful it was. (Ryoko)

... Ever since I started practicing tea, I no longer fear growing older. I used to wish to stay young, but now it's different. It's more about seeking depth within myself, a shift in mindset. Instead of clinging to what is no longer there, I feel like it shows me that there is a path to my future, and that gives me hope. (Miyabi)

I think it's about discovering what was already within myself. It's like realizing, "Oh, I didn't know I loved this." It provides an opportunity to discover oneself, like a catalyst that unveils something existing within a person. I believe there will continue to be various new discoveries and it excites me greatly. (Ken)

These narratives and the voices of these interviewees captured the unique impact of the Japanese tea ceremony practice on the interviewees' connection with their inner selves and the corresponding actions they had chosen to take in their interactions with their surrounding systems and contexts. This finding thus illuminates the effectiveness of the Japanese tea ceremony practice in being able to cultivate the individual as individual members (I.M.) and as membership individuals (M.I.) within the group. Derived from Kreeger (2019) to describe the transition process of individuals into members of a group, these concepts depict how I.M. can feel pressured to suspend their distinctive selves in the transition process to becoming M.I., who prioritize group interests above their own.

However, these interviewees did not experience such a struggle thanks to the inherent design of the Japanese tea ceremony — with its distinctive setting, its prescribed norms, and its individual-group format. While the personalized instruction for the student playing the host addresses their I.M.'s interests and aspirations, their immersion in their role as guests within the distinctive environment, for a considerable amount of class time, enables them to process their understanding of the Japanese tea ceremony to embrace M.I.'s values and responsibilities. As a result, the Japanese tea ceremony practice, by its nature, addresses both individual and group priorities simultaneously. In fact, the potential and the benefits of the group within the system of the Japanese tea ceremony were harnessed to support the individual interviewees in undergoing their separate self-development journeys.

The differences in the interviewees' self-development, viewed from the lens of TEF, also enabled one to delve into the depths of the individual practitioners' outward interactions with the systems and contexts while eliciting the distinctive attributes of their emotional experience. And ultimately, despite the commonalities of the interviewees' shared heritage as Japanese and their common passion for the system of the Japanese tea ceremony, an integrated understanding of individual self-development must still factor in the yearnings and desires of individuals, which is perfectly encapsulated within the TEF.

Therefore, for the interviewees, their pursuit of the Japanese tea ceremony is a lifelong journey that has no end, as encapsulated in the word “path (*dō*)” in its name:

Japanese tea ceremony practice, it's not something that can be easily mastered. People have asked me when I will graduate from the practice, but the concept of graduation doesn't even exist... (Mika)

Learning the Japanese tea ceremony is like a journey... For those who have been practicing for a long time, it becomes a way of life, part of their existence. (Jiro)

The interviewees recognized the pursuit of the Japanese tea ceremony as a never-ending one because they knew that the cultivation of their inner self in relation to others, as taught within this tradition, would continue to open ever-new vistas for their growth. And this is perfectly aligned with the theoretical concept of TEF, which considers the continuous development of the personality and identity to be an ongoing journey through various ages and contexts (Long, 2016).

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

Summary Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to explore the impact of the regular practice of the Japanese tea ceremony on the self-development journey of Japanese working professionals through the systems psychodynamic lens, particularly TEF. In putting together the picture of the interviewees' practice of the Japanese tea ceremony through the overarching perspective of TEF, one can see how this tradition played a role in shaping the interviewees' self-development journey toward growth and individuation.

When the interviewees first embarked on their journey, they were experiencing stress and anxiety (person) in their diverse roles in their families/workplace in the modern societies of three different countries (systems and contexts). Amidst the stressors of the competitive and fast-paced society, all the interviewees were struggling to get their core needs met, that is experiencing a sense of belonging and connecting with their “deeply held values” (“connectedness with source”) (Long, 2016, pp. 3–4).

Engaging in the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony ushered the interviewees into a psychologically safe and nurturing “system” that catered to their unmet core needs. It offered a quiet and tranquil environment with attributes that shut out real-world demands and preoccupations, stilling the turbulence of their thoughts and enabling them to heal from the outside world. In addition, the clearly prescribed roles, norms, and sequences of the Japanese tea ceremony practice, coupled with the exemplary guidance of the teacher, helped to create an ideal holding environment for containing the interviewees' emotions of anxiety. The structured learning, which fed esteem needs/competence, and the social experience, which nourished the sense of belonging/relatedness, cultivated the interviewees' intrinsic motivation to strive toward their ideal selves.

Although the interviewees' learning and experiences took place at the conscious level, it is important to point out that the unconscious processes taking place beneath the surface also played a critical role in their transformation journey. Without being fully conscious of it, the interviewees' immersion into the quiet and tranquil space enabled them to enter a meditative state, where previously unnoticed interests or inclinations, unconscious elements, and latent

feelings could surface for them to discover, observe, and explore. Within a psychologically safe space, where they could occupy clearly defined roles within a system that was neither stressful nor anxiety-provoking, the interviewees were able to connect with the source and connect with their “deeply held values” (Long, 2016, p. 4). Essentially, by enabling the quiet of the interviewees’ minds and providing an environment that nurtured their ideal selves, the Japanese tea ceremony practice supported the interviewees in integrating the conscious and unconscious, which is crucial for personal growth and the process of individuation (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

Recommendations

The findings in this research study indicate that the potential of the Japanese tea ceremony could be properly harnessed and redeveloped to enable modern organizations to benefit from this ancient practice at the individual, team, and organizational levels.

1. **Creating a Mindful Organizational Culture to Enhance Employee Well-Being and Workplace Harmony.** The aim of such a program would be to integrate the cornerstones of the Japanese tea ceremony into the organizational values, norms, and practices of the company. The implementation of the two-phase program involves:
 - a. Introducing the basic tenets of the Japanese tea ceremony to employees in a step-by-step fashion, with carefully designed, streamlined modules, and conducting periodic “refresher” sessions; and
 - b. Embedding mindfulness practices into daily operations through (i) scheduling leadership-sanctioned mindfulness tea breaks in specially designed spaces throughout the day; and (ii) implementing team meetings driven by tea ceremony rituals and norms, with the meeting rooms incorporating Japanese tea ceremony-related artifacts for incorporating tea-drinking to put everyone in the proper mindset.

Over time, through the conscientious adoption of the Japanese tea ceremony practice of mindfulness, which would begin to feel like second nature, an organization could

experience the positive impact of increased mindfulness, enhanced well-being, and a harmonious work environment.

2. **Inner Mastery Leadership Development.** Targeted at leaders at different levels, the core focus of such a program would be to develop leaders who can maintain a sense of inner calm and make sound decisions under pressure, through an experiential understanding of tea ceremony principles and their application in a corporate context. The program would comprise two parts:
 - a. **One-on-one sessions** will help leaders to cultivate mindfulness, concentration, and a state of tranquility through the process of learning how to prepare and serve tea within a modified Japanese tea ceremony practice. The sessions will be customized to enable participants to process their real-life challenges through the lens of their Japanese tea ceremony practice.
 - b. **Small-group workshops** will challenge the participants to apply their Japanese tea ceremony learning in a supportive and interactive setting, where they would get to engage in collaborative learning through brainstorming about real-life problems. At the same time, the workshop will also be driven by the interactional dynamics of the Japanese tea ceremony to foster the development of the leaders' best selves.
3. **Competencies in Interpersonal and Group Dynamics.** To enhance teamwork and build strong relationships, an experienced tea ceremony instructor could collaborate with the team leader (who has undergone the inner mastery leadership program described in [2]) to facilitate diverse types of interpersonal interactions by incorporating the Japanese tea ceremony principles of hospitality, respect, gratitude, and tranquility. Therefore, participants could learn the art of creating a welcoming and respectful atmosphere within a group environment, centered upon fostering a sense of "hospitality" toward colleagues, clients, and partners, in any type of groups interactions. The practice of these dynamics could take place within the context of regular team meetings, conflict resolution, brainstorming sessions to inspire innovation, and targeted sessions for developing specific group-related competencies, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

These recommendations can provide organizations with refreshing and novel ways of harnessing the potential of the Japanese tea ceremony practice to promote individual growth, improve team collaboration, and transform the organizational culture for the better. The programs described above, which incorporate the regular practice of the tea ceremony, are thus vital in enabling organizations to tap into the full value of this ancient tradition and unleash its full potential for individuals and organizations of the 21st century.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This research study was subjected to certain limitations. Due to the small sample size inherent to an IPA study, the findings are not generalizable to a larger population. Nonetheless, the in-depth insights identified could be used to investigate the impact of the implementation of a Japanese tea ceremony-related initiative on its leadership development program.

Furthermore, the subjective nature of the IPA approach also meant that there was the possibility of researcher bias, given my passion for the Japanese tea ceremony practice, which might have led me to favor certain interpretations that aligned with my personal beliefs and experiences. Therefore, it was important for me to exercise self-awareness, remain open-minded, and actively bracket my bias during the interviews and the analysis of the data so as to ensure an objective and comprehensive understanding and analysis of the interviewees' perspectives.

Finally, this research study explicitly studied the experiences of Japanese working professionals in order to factor in the effects of Japanese culture on their self-development. However, such a sampling approach missed out on the reality that there are non-Japanese tea ceremony practitioners engaging in the practice all over the world. Therefore, an IPA study could be conducted with an interviewee pool from other cultural origins and nationalities to elicit other insights.

Final Reflections

Exploring the impact of the Japanese tea ceremony on self-development through the systems psychodynamic lens in this thesis has been particularly meaningful, not only from an academic perspective but also at a personal level. This is because my 11-year-old daughter, Sara, has also taken up this practice with me. She is proud to have mastered the basic sequences and appears to delight in serving and sharing her tea with others. Her motivation for practicing this tradition seems straightforward: “Because it's fun.”

However, if I were to delve beneath the surface of her words, there would be far more than meets the eye. As Sara has been living abroad since the age of seven, it is possible that engaging in the tea ceremony allows her to connect with her cultural roots, which constitute a part of her neglected identity. Moreover, it could also be a way for her to spend quality time with me and build our connection through a shared activity, given my passion for the Japanese tea ceremony. Sara’s use of this activity as a way of connecting with me is affirmed in her question— “How was I today?” — as well as her clinging to me for a long hug after every practice session. Perhaps, as with the interviewees, Sara is seeking to fulfill her core needs within the holding environment of the Japanese tea ceremony practice. Based on the findings of the positive impact of the Japanese tea ceremony on the self-development of the interviewees, I look forward to the person she will become, as she continues to pursue the journey of the tea ceremony.

Figure 8

The Researcher and Her Daughter



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Appendix A: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear [[Potential Interviewee]],

My name is Emiko Adachi. I am a graduate student attending INSEAD's Executive Master in Change program. I am kindly requesting your participation in the research study that I am conducting on the impact of the committed practice of the Japanese tea ceremony on the practitioner. Would you be able to participate in a one-hour face-to-face interview at your convenience at your preferred location?

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. The interview is strictly confidential, and the information you share with me will be used for analysis only. Your interview responses will be kept anonymous and will not be personally identifiable.

If you are able to participate in this interview, please let me know at your earliest convenience. And I will be happy to follow up with you.

Thank you very much in advance for your kind consideration.

Kind regards,

Emiko ADACHI

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Appendix B: Questionnaire and Interview Questions

Questionnaire (prior to the start of the interview)

- Demographic questions: age, marital status, children, nationality, and country of residence
- What is your profession?
- At which *ryuha* (school) are you learning the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony?
- How long have you been learning the tea ceremony?

Interview Questionnaire

1. When was the first time you learned about tea ceremonies?
2. What made you decide to learn the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony?
3. How would you describe your first experience of doing the Japanese tea ceremony?
What was its impact on you?
4. Describe the most memorable experience of a Japanese tea ceremony. Why was it so memorable?
5. How would you describe your experience of the Japanese tea ceremony learning journey? What was it like in the beginning for you? What is it like for you now?
6. Why have you continued to pursue your tea ceremony?
7. How would you describe the person you were before you started your practice of the Japanese tea ceremony and the person you are today?