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<i>Sen Sōshitsu XV</i>	Autobiographical Essay 11 — Hydroplane Training	5
<i>Michael Cooper</i>	The Early Europeans and Chanoyu	7
<i>Nakamura Toshinori</i>	INTERVIEW — Reconstructing the	29
Interviewed by <i>Okamoto Kōhei</i>	Tai'an Tearoom	
with photographs by <i>Fujimori Takeshi</i>		
	<i>Temae</i> — Tea Procedure: <i>Ro Nagaita</i>	57
	<i>Sō Kazari, Usucha</i>	
	Book Reviews	71
	Chart of Japanese Historical Periods	80

The names of Japanese and Chinese persons are written surname first, in accordance with the customary practice in these countries.

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Reconstructing the Taian Tearoom

Nakamura Toshinori

Interviewed by Okamoto Kōhei

with photographs by Fujimori Takeshi*

Introduction

Of the many tearooms built by Sen Rikyū (1522–91), only one remains today, the “Taian” (lit., “Waiting Hut”) preserved at Myōkian in the Yamazaki area of Kyoto.[†] Originally built elsewhere, it seems to have been brought to its present location after Rikyū’s death [some twenty years after its construction]. In the nearly four hundred years since then, the structure has been repaired a number of times. Although its basic, extremely small, two-mat design has not changed, specialists believe many minor alterations have been made. Recently, a reconstruction of the original Taian as built by Rikyū was completed at Daitokuji temple’s Zuihōin by architect Nakamura Toshinori, who based the reconstruction on detailed studies. Rikyū’s design incorporated a surprising number of innovations, from the size of its tokonoma to the presence of the *tsubo-no-uchi* — the walled-in space immediately outside the *nijiriguchi* entrance.

千利休
待庵 妙喜庵

瑞峰院

坪の内
躋口

The original tearoom, as well as Rikyū himself, have long since passed into the realm of legend — a fact which makes it no easy task to determine exactly what the prototype of the Taian was like in all its details. Anyone who sees the Taian today admires its dignity and atmosphere endowed by the passage of four hundred years. Captured in photographs, the darkened hue of the woodwork and the soft texture of the worn-down earthen walls seem to embody the aesthetic epitome of wabi. The purpose of the reconstruction was to try to obtain a clearer idea, even partially, of Rikyū’s original, while at the same time giving due tribute to the qualities imbued by the passage of time.

* Excluding the photos on pp. 30, 32, and 33.

+ For more on this tearoom, see the color plates, “Rikyū’s tearoom: the Taian at Myōkian,” and Hayakawa Masao, “The Microcosmic Space Created by Sen Rikyū,” featured in *Chanoyu Quarterly* no. 80, pp. 7–37.

Introduction abstracted and translated from Okamoto Kōhei, “Kaze no Michi 6: Rikyū no Gekijō Kūkan ‘Taian,’” appearing in *Kobijutsu Rokushō* no. 8 (February, 1992). Interview translated and adapted from “Fukugen ‘Taian’ no Zōkei,” appearing in the same *Kobijutsu Rokushō* issue.



Drawing of grounds of Hōshakuji temple in Yamazaki, Kyoto. Ca. 1606. This drawing provides one of the few pieces of concrete evidence that Rikyū had a building at Yamazaki. Hōshakuji served as Toyotomi Hideyoshi's headquarters during the 1582 Battle of Yamazaki. *Bottom left detail:* Just below center at the far left on the drawing, a structure marked "Rikyū" is pictured on the property of "[Yamazaki] Sōkan's Residence." *Bottom right detail:* Right of center toward the bottom of the drawing, "Myōkian" is seen by the pine tree labeled "Sodesuri Matsu" (Sleeve-brushing Pine). Photos courtesy of Tankōsha Publishing Co., Kyoto.

Interview

The Presence of the *Tsubo-no-uchi*

What were the particular difficulties encountered during the reconstruction project?

We were trying to reconstruct the tearoom "Taian" exactly as Rikyū designed it more than four hundred years ago. We believe that the well-known "Taian," which has been designated a National Treasure and currently stands at Myōkian temple in the Yamazaki district in southern Kyoto, is not the original. Its structure incorporates elements that did not exist when Rikyū is said to have constructed the tearoom between 1582 and 1583. We believe that the original tearoom was built in the castle at Yamazaki which Toyotomi Hideyoshi was in the process of constructing at that time. When Hideyoshi decided to move to Osaka Castle, and Yamazaki Castle was abandoned, the already completed original Taian was left unmaintained without having been used even once. The tearoom was rebuilt [dismantled and reconstructed] at Myōkian, a temple with which both Hideyoshi and Rikyū had close ties, and it is that tearoom that stands there today.

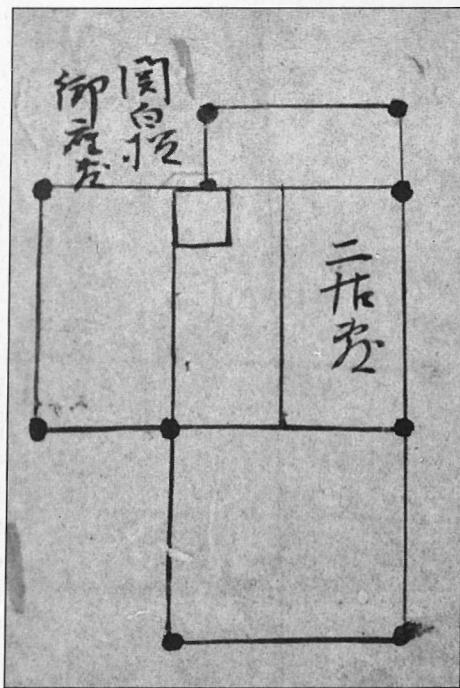
What we set out to do, therefore, was to reconstruct the Taian that Rikyū originally built. That was what we intended, but it was extremely difficult to return to the prevailing circumstances and techniques of Rikyū's time and accurately apply them in the reproduction. The technique for blackening the walls, for instance, was very hard to execute. Another challenge was the rounding of the wall corners — it was an arduous task to achieve smooth contours without using the rounding trowels available today.

Did you rely on some particular document or source as the basis for the reconstruction?

Rikyū's disciple Yamanoue Sōji left an account called the *Yamanoue Sōji Ki* which contains a floorplan drawing entitled "Two-mat room (*zashiki*) for Regeant Hideyoshi," believed to be the prototype of the Taian. It was based on this record that we designed the reconstruction, and that we set the width of the tokonoma at 5 *shaku* (1 *shaku* = 30.3 cm). Also, if we study tearooms that were built around that time, we note that they all had a *tsubo-no-uchi* [area of enclosed space outside the entrance]. We believe that this feature was then a standard addition to

豊臣秀吉

山上宗二記



Floorplan drawing of “two-mat room for Regeant Hideyoshi” in the *Yamanoue Sōji Ki* copy owned by Omotesenke Fushin’an. Photo courtesy of Fushin’an, Kyoto.

tearooms. The current Taian at Myōkian, however, has no *tsubo-no-uchi* at all, and only has extended eaves (*dobisashi*) over the *nijiriguchi*. This was presumably one of the alterations made in the rebuilding at Myōkian. The walls surrounding the outside of the *nijiriguchi* in our reconstruction constitute what is called a “frontal” (*omote*) *tsubo-no-uchi*. We conceived that Rikyū’s original Taian had a *tsubo-no-uchi* like this.

Are there other examples of tsubo-no-uchi at extant tearooms?

No original examples exist, but during the early Edo period, when many architectural structures were being restored, tearooms that included an *uchi tsubo* [“inner” enclosed space, with stone wash basin (*tsukubai*)] — like the Teigyokuken at Daitokuji temple’s Shinjuan, designed by Kanamori Sōwa — did appear. This seems to have been an attempt to restore the kind of “side” (*waki*) *tsubo-no-uchi* which were attached to tearooms in Rikyū’s time.

[interview continued on p. 48]

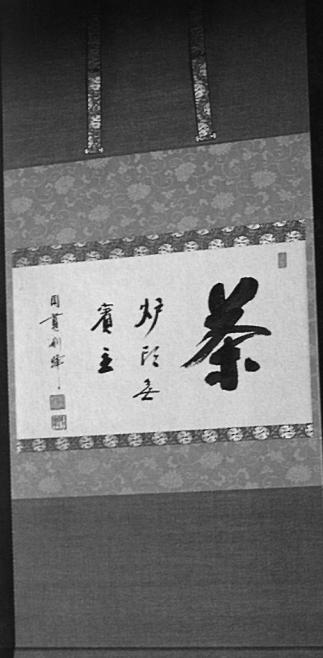


The *uchi tsubo* of the Teigyokuken tearoom at the subtemple Shinjuan of Daitokuji temple in Kyoto. Photo by Tabata Minao.















What was the significance of the tsubo-no-uchi?

The *tsubo-no-uchi* appears to have been an interim space signifying the separation of the outside, mundane world from the cloistered, uplifted world of the tearoom. Furthermore, the part called the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi* played the role of a passageway. This was before the advent of the *nijiriguchi*, when it was customary to enter the tearoom by passing through the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi* — the 'entry point' from the walkway — and, from there, stepping up to the veranda. The veranda was used both in entering the tearoom and during the *nakadachi*, the intermission between the first and second halves of a tea gathering.

The area leading to the veranda was the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi*, and the space which actually faced the veranda was the "frontal" *tsubo-no-uchi*. Since the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi* was covered by a roof and was surrounded by walls, it was a completely enclosed space. By contrast, the area which actually faced the veranda was a kind of surplus space. It was built in a very plain fashion, without any eye-catching features, in order that the guests would continue to focus their attention only on the tea, and to facilitate their mental concentration. It contained no plants or rocks, not even sand or pebbles. Unlike a planted or stone landscape garden, it was simply a plain, unadorned space. It was empty or void space, like the unpainted areas in an ink painting. Beyond the walls, the green of the pines, however, was visible.

The *tsubo-no-uchi* was an in-between space separating the worlds inside and outside the tearoom. Later, when the *roji* or "tea garden" became established, the *roji* came to play this role. The *tsubo-no-uchi*, specifically the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi*, gradually evolved into the *roji*. First the veranda, with its facing *tsubo-no-uchi* area, was eliminated, and, to enter the tearoom, a low doorway (*kugiri*) permitting direct access from the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi* was created. Consequently, it also became the practice to move the guests to the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi* for the intermission. In this way, the role of the "side" *tsubo-no-uchi* gradually grew more important, playing the role of an entrance garden.

The Blackened Walls

Why are the walls of Taian blackened?

A just-completed rough plastered earthen wall (*arakabe*) has a rather unsettling quality. No matter how much care one might take in choosing the color of the clay, it takes four or five years for the color to mel-

low. In the case of the Taian, there was no time to wait for the years and wear to do their work; it was going to be used right away. Many different materials had been employed in creating the tearoom, and the walls had to have a tone that would harmonize with all of them. I believe it was for this reason that they were tinted black.

By what means were the walls originally blackened?

The *Chafu* manual on tea [anonymous; late Edo period] includes a 茶譜 section about wall finishing, as follows:

The plaster of the walls extends into the tokonoma. Over the basic structure of the wall, spread a layer made of plaster mixed with straw cut to about 5- or 6-sun (1 sun = 3.03 cm) lengths and softened by kneading. In order to achieve a rustic (*sabi*) effect, [the walls] are blackened with soot.

The idea was to achieve a smudged, darkened effect, but it turned out to be very difficult to make it look even. Ultimately, we applied powdered sumi ink using a brush to the walls before the clay dried.

What techniques were used to darken the wooden parts of the building?

We do not know for sure what was originally used to stain the wood. For the reconstruction of Taian, we used persimmon juice. But it might be that they used perilla oil.

Isn't there an account of a tea gathering which was supposedly held in the black-walled Taian using red Raku teabowls?

Actually, there are no records at all of tea gatherings at Taian. Not only that, around the time that the Taian was completed, Raku teabowls were still unknown. There are, however, accounts of Rikyū's later tea gatherings held at Hideyoshi's Jurakudai mansion in Kyoto. These indicate that Rikyū used different utensils for a four-and-a-half mat room and a two-mat room. For the former, he used a black Raku teabowl and a bamboo container for the flower arrangement. In the case of a two-mat room, he used a red Raku teabowl and a ceramic vase. It was not that Rikyū never used a bamboo vase in a two-mat room; it was simply that he used earthenware more frequently. The four-and-a-half mat room was considered the classic size room, with its hallowed Buddhist tradition; the two-mat tearoom was a very new innovation.

As the old saying — “Black is for oldness, red is for newness” — goes, he preferred a red teabowl for the two-mat room. Perhaps this was because the classic four-and-a-half mat room was associated with a certain spiritual rigor, while the shrunken proportions of the two-mat room suggested a playful approach. We might hypothesize that there were red-colored teabowls resembling red Raku, even though red Raku itself did not exist at the time.

We often see photographs of the Taian with a black Raku teabowl and bamboo flower container. Actually, however, I believe that their combination does not necessarily produce the kind of atmosphere that Rikyū basically sought to create, in spite of the fact that they each individually embody his ideals.

The windows at Taian must also have been laid out with a particular aim.

Yes. Light enters the room from the windows behind where the guests are seated, pouring into the room from over their heads.

In Rikyū's day, the sitting style was also different, wasn't it?

Yes. People did not sit on their calves (*seiza*) as they do now, but sat cross-legged (*anza*), as is often seen in the statuary from the time. Both the host and the guests sat cross-legged; only when drinking tea, apparently, was it customary to raise one knee erect. This way of sitting closely resembles the way of sitting common in Korea. The posture with one knee raised expresses an attitude of respect. The most respectful way of sitting, though, was to lower the buttocks with the legs splayed to each side. Sitting this way, the legs don't become numb, no matter how long one is seated. In today's cross-legged position even, sometimes they become numb, but if the weight of the body does not rest on the legs, as it does in *seiza*, it is more comfortable.

The Minimal, Two-mat Size

Please discuss Taian's minimal, two-mat size.

In the course of the evolution of wabi style tea, all the extraneous activities and accoutrements once associated with drinking tea were eliminated. This is described as the “trimming down” of chanoyu to its utmost essentials; and, indeed, chanoyu became very lean, leading to its perfection as an art. Once just a minor part of banquet parties which

stretched late into the night, the preparation of tea became the focus and the center of the host's attention, and all other elements were done away with. Finally, it was prescribed that chanoyu "should not last more than four hours."

Along with this, the function of the *shoin* [study room where guests were conventionally entertained] as a "sitting room" (*zashiki*) assumed independence, and there arose a separate space intended exclusively for chanoyu. The advent of this exclusive space is represented by Takeno Jōō's (1502–55) four-and-a-half mat room.

In the new kind of room format, the built-in desk (*tsuke-shoin*) and staggered shelves (*chigaidana*) which were standard fixtures of the *shoin* were eliminated, and only the *tokonoma* was retained. Ultimately, even the extra seating space was eliminated, leaving only two mats: one for the guest(s), the other for the host preparing the tea. A one-mat tearoom would obviously be impractical, so the two-mat room became the limit of tea's downscaling. And in fact, no one-mat rooms exist.

As for the Taian, however, I think that it was not made a two-mat room as the result of the "paring away" of non-essentials. Rather, it was influenced by the 'one-span square' (*ikken shihō*) idea brought from the Korean peninsula. The Taian's two-mat design is not a shrinking of the four-and-a-half mat space; its inspiration derived from a completely different source.

武野紹鷗

一軒四方

This seems to be a major issue. Until now, the prevailing notion has been that the traditional four-and-a-half mat space had been shrunken down to two mats. Your opinion, however, seems to be that Taian's two-mat construction resulted from the influence of spatial ideas seen in Korean folk architecture.

The Taian tearoom is the one-span square size that is the basic spatial unit for rooms in Korean folk houses. Perhaps this size became the standard in Korea because it made the most efficient use of the heating flues contained in the floors. Korea's "one span" was somewhat wider than that of Japan, extending from about two meters to 2.5 meters, but all the rooms were basically demarcated in units of one-span square.

The basic principle of this architecture, like the priest's quarters at Yakushiji temple in Nara, is subdivision perpendicularly along the ridgepole. The space covered by the roof, in other words, was subdivided in lengths of one span. I believe that the Taian was conceived on the basis of this one-span square unit. It is worth comparing with the spaces one finds in Korea. I did not arrive at this conclusion because of the small size of the room or the lowness of the ceiling, or the fact that it is encircled by walls, but because of a sense one gets when observing the Taian as a whole.



A thatched farm house of the kind often seen in the Korean countryside. Photo taken near the village of Hahoe, toward the upper reaches of the Nakdonggang River in South Korea.

What you're referring to, then, is the notion of standard modular spaces associated with certain regions and time periods.

Yes, but although the modular spaces adopted in each age and each region were important, so were individual parts, and neither can be fully understood separate from the other. The whole must be understood not by considering these two factors apart, but as a totality. The details, too, should not be examined each in isolation, but as part of the whole. The artistic origin of the *sōan hashitsu* ("grass-thatched hut" style tearoom), in fact, lies in the integral involvement of the parts. The Taian represents the perfected form of the *sōan hashitsu*, both conceptually and in terms of form. What I am suggesting is that when we consider all these elements together, we have to question whether they can all be attributed to indigenous roots, or whether they also might reflect the influence of Korean folk architecture.



Ceiling in the former country house of a Korean aristocrat. Typical of traditional Korean residential architecture, there are no ceiling boards and the wooden roof beams are visible. In Japan, this kind of ceiling, termed *funazoko-gata* (ship's-bottom style), is sometimes seen in rustic tearooms.

Which of Taian's details suggest influence originating from the Korean peninsula?

室床
太鼓襖 One is the *murodoko* alcove with its earthen wall covering the posts in the corners in rounded contours, but even more obvious are the *taiko-busuma* ("drum fusuma"; frameless, translucent paper-covered doors). This design is not indigenous to Japan. For Japanese panel doors, which are usually set in pairs (*hikichigai*), it was most efficient and rational to use fusuma with frames which facilitate their movement against each other. There was no such thing as unframed fusuma before *taiko-busuma*.

Although there is no definitive evidence, I think that the *taiko-busuma* appeared first in Rikyū's tearooms, beginning around the time the Taian was built. Other elements which suggest Korean influence are the *nijiriguchi*, and the grooved sillboard (*hasami shikii*) and grooved lintel (*hasami kamoi*).

What, then, is the derivation of the name "Taian"?

対月庵
山崎宗鑑 One theory is that it meant "awaiting Hideyoshi," but since Myōkian was modeled after the Taigetsuan, or "Facing-the-Moon" hermitage, of the renga poet Yamazaki Sōkan (15th–16th c.) [see photos and caption on p. 30], and since the building next to the Taian was called the Meigetsudō, or "Clear Moon" hall, it is often said that "Taian" should be interpreted as "hut to wait for the moon." However, the Meigetsudō was not located there when the Taian was constructed.

明月堂 There is also another theory. By the time construction of the Taian at Yamazaki Castle was completed, Hideyoshi had led his troops out to battle in Ise and Mino; later, instead of returning to Yamazaki, he proceeded directly to Osaka, and began construction on Osaka Castle. Rikyū, meanwhile, remained at Yamazaki, with the tearoom ready, so it is possible that the name referred to his "awaiting the return" of Hideyoshi.

待松 The first character of the name Taian, "tai," also read "matsu," suggests the *matsu* that means "pine." The "matsu" meaning "pine" was Hideyoshi's one-character name. It is possible that Rikyū purposefully chose this subtle play on words. Also, not far from the Taian was the Sugi-no-an, or "Cedar Hut." He may have named it "Pine Hut" for the sake of contrast. If, indeed, the name was an intentional suggestion of "hut of pine," there is all the more reason to think Rikyū was influenced by Korea.

Speaking of pine, pine wood was used in the reconstruction of Taian. Is it correct to think that pine was used in the construction of tearooms after the time of Taian?

As written in the *Yamanoue Sōji Ki*, it is thought to have been around this time that red pine came to be used in tearooms. Pine has a tendency to warp and ooze sap, so it is not often used in Japanese architecture. In Korea, however, where pine timber is cheap and plentiful, it was actually the chief wood used for ordinary dwellings. That is one reason why I believe Rikyū was influenced by Korea.

What may have been the reason for the white paper used on the lower portion of the wall behind the sunken hearth (ro), and the adoption of taiko-busuma, which are obviously covered with a similar paper?

I believe Rikyū used fusuma without frames in order to relieve the heavy, ponderous feeling. But this way of thinking up reasons for each and every thing is a very Japanese penchant. It may be wiser to embrace the simple conclusion that he adopted the kind of fusuma used in Korean folk houses. In the construction of Korean *taiko-busuma* panels, we believe the paper played the practical role of a cushion around the edges that helped to prevent drafts.

The elimination of unnecessary points and lines, for example by concealing the posts in the alcove, seems to promote a feeling of spaciousness, doesn't it?

Yes, the elimination of the fusuma frames, too, may have been a means of making the space seem larger. But the sliding panels would have functioned more effectively if they had had frames. There had to have been some reason that the frames were done away with, but we don't objectively know whether the purpose was to eliminate as many lines from the space as possible, or whether it owed to the influence of Korean partition fixtures.

If it owed to the influence of Korean architecture, there must have been something about it, in any case, that satisfied Rikyū's aesthetic.

Yes, of course. The important issue is not the specific resemblances or differences we find with Korean architecture. Rather, we should ask whether some kind of architecture having the spatial quality found in the Taian, with its *taiko-busuma*, small entrance, and minimal interior space with low ceiling, existed in Japan before that time. There had to

be a prototype and model of the *sōan chashitsu*'s distinctive style. It is for this reason that I believe we should keep in mind the fact that the Taian may have been built incorporating influences from the Korean peninsula, which would have been natural, of course, since there was considerable contact between Japan and Korea at that time.

Translated by Lynne E. Riggs