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Bernamea Feature

CHADO: THE CHARMING JAPANESE WAY TO BUILD TIES

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KUALA LUMPUR: There are many ways of fostering closer relations but perhaps none is as aesthetic and symbolic as the Japanese Chado or tea ceremony where every little details ranging from the utensils right to the flower arrangement are used to express the host's appreciation to his guests.

At a glimpse, the Chado appears to be a rigid and strict code of etiquette in the Japanese culture of a simple practice of drinking tea together.

In a recent lecture and demonstration of the Chado by a tea master, the Hereditary Successor to the Grand Tea Master of the Urasenke Tradition of Tea, Prof Sen Soshi, everyone was enlightened about the centuries-old culture.

According to history, matcha (green powdered tea) used in the ceremony was first brought to Japan from China by Zen monks and was used as a beverage and medicine. The practice of drinking then spread not only among Zen priests but also to the upper class.

But it wasn't until the end of the 16th century when another tea ceremony, which was based more on the lives of the Japanese while embracing the spirit of Zen Buddhism, was established by a tea master called Sen Rikyu (1522-1591).

Under Rikyu, Chado's basic principles are based on four characters -- "Wa" which means harmony between the people; "Kei" means respect paid to all things and comes from sincere feelings of gratitude; "Sei" means purity, both in worldly and spiritual cleanliness and "Jaku" refers to tranquility which comes from the realisation of the first three principles.

Rikyu's teachings were handed down by his descendants and disciples and three different schools were set up, in which one of them is the Urasenke School.

Soshi said during the Chado, the host expresses his deep feeling of happiness to his guests who has come to enjoy a session of tea drinking with him.

"The guests who are watching the host are very happy and grateful that the host goes through all this preparation to make tea for them," said Soshi through an interpreter.

"Therefore, both hosts and guests strive to understand the best portion of each other and their good qualities," Soshi added.

Chado begins with the host preparing the matcha before his guests and beside him are the essential utensils for tea preparations in the tea room.

The principal utensils are cha-wan (tea bowl), cha-ire (tea container), cha-sen (bamboo tea whisk) and cha-saku (bamboo tea scoop).

The host lifts the tea scoop and container and puts the matcha (three scoopfuls per guest) into the bowl. Then takes a ladleful of hot water out of the kettle, putting about one-third of it into the bowl and returning the remainder to the kettle.

He then whips up the mixture with the whisk until it resembles a very thick green pea soup in consistency as well as colour.

The host then puts the bowl in its proper place by the hearth and the main guest moves along on his knees to pick up the bowl.

The guest bows to the other guests and puts the bowl on the palm of his left hand, supporting one side of the bowl with the right hand.

After taking one sip, he praises its taste, then takes two or more

sips. He wipes the spot of the bowl from which he has drunk with the kaishi paper and passes the bowl to the second guest who does the same thing as the principal guest.

This process will go on till the last guest is served. When he finishes, he hands the bowl to the principal guest, who will return the bowl to the host.

To Soshi, Chado is not just a custom and he would like to believe that it should be the way for Japanese to receive guests.

Soshi said through the expression of the Gasho (expression of gratitude by clasping hands) expressed when tea is served, it would bring out the best of each other.

He also expressed his surprise at the amount of interest shown by Malaysians for Japanese cultures.

"I was so surprised, so much that my heart would probably burst because I had the opportunity to serve tea to the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Negeri Sembilan Regent, Tunku Naquiyuddin, recently," he said.

He also said that he is glad that tea, in some way, is able to fill the gap between the two countries which enjoy great relations economically.

"If I am able to contribute something towards better understanding through tea, then I am happy," said Soshi. -- BERNAMA

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