

V. Charye Tea etiquette 茶禮

Charye refers to the etiquette for drinking tea, that is, the rituals performed while drinking tea. When enjoying tea with acquaintances in a cozy tea room, or when serving tea to guests visiting from an ordinary household, or drinking tea in a city teahouse, the etiquette that matches the atmosphere is necessary, and all that must be done at such times is called a eetiquette.

In particular, in Korea, a custom of performing ancestral rites known as charye has been handed down since ancient times, and that is the tea ceremony performed during ancestral rites or wedding ceremonies.

First, let's talk about charye as a form of rite that was introduced to our country, and then look at its implications for our modern life. In our country, ancestral rites are especially referred to as charye. This means that regardless of whether it was an anniversary ancestral rite or a holiday, tea was always offered as an offering, incense was burned, and rites were performed with tea.

Of course, it does not mean that wine was not used in the ritual, but tea was considered more important than wine. Regarding this point, in the *Yongjaechonghwa* (慵齋叢話) by Sung Hyun (成俔 1439-1504), there is a record that says, “Various fruits, injeolmi rice cakes, tea, soup, and alcohol are used in ancestral rites. (祭奠諸果餈餅茶湯與酒)” This is undoubtedly true, considering the fact that in some regions of Gyeongsang-do and Jeolla-do, where tea still thrives, traditional families always serve ancestral rites with tea.

Nowadays, this has been misunderstood, so during a memorial service, alcohol is offered three times, called Choheon (初獻), Aheon (亞獻), and Jongheon (終獻), and the ancestral rite procedure of putting down a soup bowl and offering sungnyung (scorched rice in water) is called Heoncha. As a result, tea has been turned into alcohol or plain water.

Also, in ancient times, at ancestral rites, it was necessary to have dasik (茶食 tea cakes), so almost every house prepared a tea cake mould and served songhwa dasik (松花茶食, pine pollen kneaded with honey and shaped on the tea cake mould), or even imjadasik (sesame tea cakes) were served on the offerings table.

Regarding this tea ceremony, Silhak scholar Seongho (星湖) Yi Ik (李漢) during the Joseon Dynasty said, “In my opinion, the dasik is probably a change from the Daeso yongdan (大小龍團) of the Song Dynasty. Tea was originally brewed in boiling water, but it was used for family ceremonies. In other words, the tea powder was first put into a bowl, then hot water was poured in and stirred. The current use of tea during ancestral rites actually came about gradually, but the objects have changed. I believe that the fact that people use chestnut powder to shape fish, birds, flowers, or leaves is a variation of Yongdan,” he said.

The use of tea in family rites refers to the use of matcha (powdered tea, tea leaves ground into powder), which is undoubtedly true considering that it was very popular during the Silla and Goryeo periods.

In particular, on major holidays such as Lunar New Year and Chuseok, unlike usual times, people take a bath and perform ablutions, and place various carefully prepared offerings on the ancestral rites table and perform rites.

After it's over, the adults and children in the household, the whole family eats together and in harmony. At this time, all are expected to eat with etiquette, and adults also teach their children table manners, which is a tradition that has been used since ancient times to teach these rules with tea.

This beautiful custom must be restored as soon as possible. For several years now, some families in the Jinju region are once again performing ancestral rites with tea, and this is an extremely fortunate and welcome event.

Since the ancestral rites at weddings have a more profound meaning, we cannot help but say that our ancestors' ancestors' ancestral rites are a very interesting way of tea ceremony.

The reason why the ancestral rite at the time of marriage is already deeply conceived of as a tea life is because it can be seen that by performing the ceremonial rite before and after the most important wedding in one's life, the deep meaning of the tea ceremony was intended to be brought to life in real life.

In traditional Korean weddings, two charye ceremonies are performed before and after the wedding. At first, when a man and a woman are to marry each other, their fathers and brothers performed tea as a courtesy, and when the marriage is decided, they served tea called 'Bongcha'. By sealing and sending tea, they express a firm covenant.

Next, after the wedding, the bride is expected to go to her in-laws' home and visit the shrine where her in-laws' spirits are kept. At this time, the bride respectfully places tea, chasik, fruit etc. prepared by her parents' family on the altar and then performs a tea offering ceremony.

In this way, when a bride first attends her in-laws' house, the contents of the ancestral rites include respecting and serving her parents-in-law well, and having children as well as ancestral rites to carry on the in-laws' family. It is an event to renew and resolve to persevere and endure any situation, whether bitter or salty, that one may experience in the course of life.

Also, just as tea trees do not live well if they are transplanted, the meaning is implied that one will keep fidelity and live well with one's in-laws like a tea tree that is fresh and green all year round.

In this way, when we think about the fact that marriage, the most important in one's life, took place with charye, it cannot be denied that the housewife's responsibility for determining the happiness or unhappiness of a family is even greater.

Efforts to fulfill this important responsibility will naturally center on tea. It cannot be denied that a housewife's tea life plays an important role in establishing a happy family and healthy society.

Above, we talked about charye, which are traditional Korean customs, but they are necessary for everyone, regardless whether students, members of society, and housewives, and must be performed anytime and anywhere in daily life.

It is said that modern people, who drink tea countless times at home or in teahouses even if not in specially prepared tea rooms, may be said to have an etiquette for drinking tea that suits today's reality, but in reality, it can only be said to be extremely rude.

However, I do not want to advocate the strict formal etiquette of the tea ceremony that is practiced in Japan today, but when it comes to tea life, at least careless behavior in handling tea should be corrected as soon as possible.

I mentioned a little bit about the rules of tea life in the introduction, so I will avoid going into detail now, but the most important thing in ceremonial rites is that it must be natural, and it also includes the tea utensils, the tea room, and the mind of the person performing the tea. All must be clean.

In addition, we must always approach with a respectful attitude and attitude, and the atmosphere must be soft, harmonious, cozy, and quiet. Through the exercise of such frugal and true rites, we can reach the realm of the sacred.

