

CHADO URASENKE TANKOKAI HOUSTON ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER - January, February, March 2016

Winter, such as it is in Houston, is arrived - 立冬/*Rittō* (lit. “winter begins”) was early in the tenth month in the former lunar-solar calendar, and it is placed in November in the modern calendar. The sunken hearth is opened around this time, as we will welcome its warmth. Winter will continue through early February.

We are not likely to have winter scenes in mind while we consider our selections of *dogu* and themes for tea here in Houston. We know, of course, in Kyoto the weather at the end of autumn turns colder; rain becomes sleet. Fallen leaves and withered grasses are everywhere in the fields. We find beauty nonetheless, for instance in the moon's reflection off water thinly crusted with ice. Snow arrives first in the mountains, and thus mountain-fed streams rush faster for a time. Winter progresses and snowfalls become heavier. Paths and fields are blanketed in snow, bitter cold arrives, and there sets in a time of isolation, as travel is difficult. Nonetheless, there remain nice winter images, such as the tall *susuki* standing amidst the snow, and new-fallen snow upon the bare limbs of the trees that makes it look as if they are all somehow in bloom. The green splendor of pines trees is also especially nice amidst the snow-quieted land. It is a good time to have gatherings to appreciate the snowy winter beauty. The time arrives for the preparations for year's-end and new year's celebrations. The appearance of plum blossoms (*ume*) is the herald of the end of winter; as they begin to bloom, even amidst the snow, we know that winter is drawing to a close and that spring must be near.

The description of the progression of winter above is essentially taken from the *Kokin Wakashu* (古今和歌集, “Collected Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times”, ~CE 915). One of its twenty books is devoted to the season of winter, and the poems within are ordered by the appearance of their subjects in the course of the season (as related, in a greatly abridged manner, above). Naturally, the incorporation of these images into poetry greatly predates *chanoyu*, but these long-standing poetic traditions remain a basis to the aesthetics that live on in our considerations of theme in preparing tea.

Houston *chajin* must do without these views, though we can consider one of the directions from 利休七箇條 *Rikyu Shichi ka Jo* (the Seven Lines of Sen no Rikyu):

花は野の花のやうに

[lit., regarding the flowers, they should be like natural flowers]

Typically rendered to English as “Arrange the flowers as they lay in the fields,” this is often discussed in the context of avoiding the mistake of arranging any flower in a situation in which it can not be encountered in nature (such as hanging the flower of a pond-dwelling plant like the bright yellow 河骨 *kobone* (spadardock, *Nuphar advena*), in which Rikyū took great delight, incongruously high on the wall or in the window).

However, it is also instructive in cases such as ours - our *chabana* (and *gomei*) should reflect whatever is blooming where ever we find ourselves.

A poem for winter at the end of the year:

雪ふりて年の暮れぬる時にこそつみにもみぢぬ松も見けれ

yuki furite	at year's end when snow
toshi no kurenuru	blankets all in white
toki ni koso	then at last the pines
tsuini momijinu	who know no autumn glory
matsu mo miekere	stand forth in all their splendor

Anonymous, "From the Empress's Poetry Contest in the *Kampyo* era," *Kokin Wakashu*, Winter, 340.

This poem may be of further historical interest inasmuch as its author would certainly have been aware of and in fact referring to a very old Chinese proverb that is repeated in 論語, *Lunyu* (Analects of Confucius, lit. "Selected Sayings," very approximately 140 BCE): "The Master said, In the cold of the year - only then do we come to know that the pine and cypress do not wither," 60 An. 9:27.

Since it is so mild, another for early spring, by 藤原 家隆, *Fujiwara no Ietaka* (CE 1158-1237):

花をのみ待つらん人に山里の 雪間の草の春を見せばや

hana o nomi	to those who long
matsuran hito ni	only for flowers
yamazata no	show them a spring
yukima no kusa mo	of grass amidst the snow
haru o misebaya	in a mountain village

千利休, *Sen Rikyu*, (CE 1522-91) continued the development of *wabicha* philosophy and would lay the foundation for *chanoyu* as we study it today. He followed the example of 武野 紹鷗, *Takeno Joo*, (CE 1504-55), and selected this poem to illustrate his understanding of *wabi*.

Contact John Seavitt at <jrseavitt@mac.com> if you have any news or ideas to share with other members. I would be happy to include mention of class schedules, dates to reserve for 茶会 (*chakai*/tea gathering) or demonstrations, and reports and 会記, (*kaiki*, tea *dogu* narrative) after such events.