

Comments on Wong ' s Paper

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In this comment, I would like to draw attention to the Japanese words Tōyō 東洋 and Asia アジア. It is my idea that Tōyō and Asia respectively symbolize two different Japanese perceptions of non-Japan Asia, namely, Self and the Other. Tōyō, or the Orient, is used when someone refers to cultural and spiritual heritage of the East. The noun Tōyō connotes that it is an integral part of Japanese national identity. On the other hand, the Japanese word Asia would be chosen when someone needs to separate Modern Japan from other Asian countries that were formerly regarded as backward regions. The Japanese word of Asia tends to represent Asia which is not within the boundary of Japanese identity.

In Aida Yuan Wong's paper, we can find these two aspects of Asia from Japanese perspective. For example, when painter Kishida Ryūsei 岸田劉生 introduced the Chinese image of Hanshan 寒山 and Shide 拾得 to his own Reiko series, he treated the Chinese classics as a cultural heritage of Tōyō which had already been a part of Japanese tradition. However, when Ryūsei painted deformed Korean pottery in his still-life, the context of Orientalism appeared. In this case, exotic Korean ceramics were recognized as something belonging to Asia which was considered to be the Other.

Wong emphasizes the evaluation of imperfection, irregular forms, and grotesque as the common elements between Kishida Ryūsei and Mingei movements. In their quest for imperfection, Ryūsei turned to the past, namely Tōyō, while Mingei movements clung to the outside, namely Asia. Time and space were both important strategies for the artists. When we think of getting out from the values prevailing here and now, we may transcend time and go to the past, or may transcend space to go overseas. In Ryūsei's case, imperfection derived from the past, i.e. Tōyō, whereas Mingei's praise of imperfection depended on different spaces, i.e. Asia.

Their strategies of time and space were by no means contradictory. Ryūsei was not only interested in the tradition of the East. He himself also travelled to Manchuria seeking new materials for his artistic works. It is suggestive that Ryūsei died on his way back from the Chinese Continent in 1926. Time and space were both important for him. Moreover, Mingei movements also rediscovered domestic handicrafts of disappearing good old Japan, while Yanagi Muneyoshi 柳宗悦 frequently crossed the channel and visited the Korean Peninsula.

Through her presentation, Aida Yuan Wong appropriately explored the neglected link between Ryūsei

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and Mingei movements, as well as the close relationship between time and space.