

[Concluding Remarks 2]

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The comments below are a response to hearing the papers presented in the symposium and to reading papers from team research members together with the previously published references as provided by the organizers. It was a privilege and a pleasure to be invited to respond to these: elements of intellectual disquiet which appear in the comments which follow should not be construed as a comment on the quality of the papers which overall was very high.

My first and most indicative difficulty was with the last part of the proposition implied in the title: “an international perspective”. To me this involves a great deal more than the two implied suppositions of the symposium: the “international” was equivalent to either a position adopted by a non-Japanese presenter, or to a positioning of the understanding of Japanese “Arts and Crafts” based on their situation in cultural flows between Japan and chiefly Euramerica in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several of the most fulfilled papers—and speaking Japanologically, most enriching for me—such as those by Wilson, Pitelka, and Román Navarro, were views written as it were from within Japanese discourses but with intellectual histories from without. I could not see what was international about the presentations apart from the personal background of the presenter and the language in which they expressed themselves. But is an international perspective generated by simply shifting an internal discourse by means of the quasi-“insider” position of an “outsider”? It can, if it is raised to a different intellectual plane and put into a comparative frame, or if it is used to generate concepts which can be applied far beyond the particular situations and speaker positions from which they arose.

As interesting and as informative as these papers were, I do not think they provided tools which could be used outside their immediate field of “Japanese” application. What happens if we did not know who had made, say, “Kenzan’s” pots, but they were found according to available dating sometime between 1650 and 1750? What

if we did not even know what the “Japanese”-ness referred to might indicate? We would be engaged in archaeological reconstruction through an understanding of the series in which the pots were placed, and our differing conceptualizations of the aesthetic properties and temporal sequences, that were engaged. We would, in short, be in the intellectual domain dealt with by Kubler’s *The Shape of Time*,¹ and with the notion found elsewhere in his papers that what was there “from before” [the Spanish Conquest of Meso- and South America] remained “afterwards” as only a broken shard, or in his terms the time-wasted relics of a “shipwreck”. Applied to “Japanese arts and crafts” a Kubleresque position would be generative of concepts applicable outside their defining field of origination, and would in my sense be “international”.

The second and perhaps insuperable difficulty is that the symposium created an almost ineluctable connection between “traditional”, “Japan”, and “Arts and crafts”, the last complex compound noun being an equivalent in Japanese to *angewandte* as opposed to *schöne künste*.² The papers were so concerned with the substantive developments of *kōgei*/arts and crafts, that they rarely referred to, and none fully argued out, the problem that these terms are diacritically mapped in pairs, “tradition” with “modern”, “Japan” with the “West” or the “World”, “arts and crafts” with “fine arts” or “art”. It is the contribution of a “craft aesthetic” in Japan through the modifications of its practice from factory to craftsman studio practice, that it dialectically interacted with the panoply of state training and exhibition as well as similar processes of consecration in “fine” art?

This historical process of mutual definition and re-definition, too complex for summary here,³ was considerably inflected via training apprenticeships sometimes

1 George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (Yale University Press, 1962). See also his significant re-examination of the problems in “The Shape of Time Revisited,” Reese, Thomas, F., ed., *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: The Collected Essays of George Kubler* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 43-430. The shipwreck motif is found in his essay, “On the Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of Pre-Columbian Art,” in Totten, Charolotte M., ed., *Anthropology and Art* (New York: The Natural History Press, 1971), as well as in the *Collected Essays* above.

2 On the development of the Japanese equivalents for these terms chiefly derived via from Wager’s report on the 1873 Wiener Weltausstellung, see Kitazawa Noriaki, *Me no shinden* (In the Palace of the Eye) (Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1989).

3 See the paper by Ajioka here, “Modern Japanese Craft and *Mingei Sakka*,” and her *The Mingei Movement in the History of Modern Japanese Art*, Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1996.

articulated by the state tertiary educational institutions, sometimes by craftsmen atelier training schemes which directly or indirectly had state support. The process took place alongside the development of an exhibition structure which later fed into various levels of other-than-aristocratic or rich merchant patronage through specifically modern consumer outlets, such as craft society exhibitions, commercial gallery exhibitions, department store exhibitions—all for mediated rather than factory-door sales. There was in addition the much broader postwar diffusion of tea ceremony ideals through training of middle-class women and certification of some of them as tea masters.

The third difficulty is how in the early twenty-first century it makes any sense to refer to these fields as of “Japan”. Certainly the political state called “Japan” which was hegemonic in the geographically “Japanese” islands from 1868 to say the early 1980s, claimed a continuity which allowed it to integrate as “Japanese” all the pasts of that space, and its differently constituting cultural contingencies. We here blindly enter at our own risk the dangerous terrain of cultural narcissism, and one apparently without recognition of the historically material consequences of the invasion of China in 1937/38 or the intellectual ones of the “Overcoming/Conquest of the Modern” debates of 1942.⁴ As if now any culture could still be of account to itself, by itself, through its own language only. The more we know how cultures mutually define each other, even to the most elevated and refined aspects of cultural practice which include “arts and crafts” and “art”, the more we know that our knowledge of any one of them is doubly articulated, between the different constituents of a culture, even its very language, on the one hand, and the “other cultural” zones it has been in contact with, or whose cultural tools it has adapted. This is most particularly true of cultures which by a given historical period had interacted with other cultures widely and in longitudinal depth like early twenty-first century Japan.

Surely it is time now to understand the historical and even personal psychological

4 The issues surrounding the *Overcoming of the Modern* have been widely debated in Japanese and English it is something of a surprise they were not raised in the Nichibunken Symposium. See, *inter alia*, Hiromatsu Wataru, “*Kindai no chōkoku*” ron: *Shōwa shisōshi e no ichi shikaku*, (Kōdansha, 1989). For the background to this issue in English see Najita, T., Harootunian, H. D., “Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6, *The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

constraints of say a thinker like Kuki Shūzō,⁵ or inter-cultural location of the practices of a potter like Tomimoto Kenkichi,⁶ or the buried cultural strata in the expressionist forces of a painter like Okamoto Tarō,⁷ as not belonging to a “Japan” which was knowable only to itself, or by any series of objects or masterpieces markable as “Japanese”. A “Japan”, or some element of its cultural practices like “arts and crafts”, only now emerges relationally, by the mutually and interactive definitions of the bearers of cultural values and practices with those “other” cultures they have had contact with, even if they have themselves never left Japan.⁸

One might also add in the context of this conference, that it is unlikely “Japan” will be relativized simply by seeing how its aesthetic ideologies or concepts of “arts and crafts” are confirmed, modified, or negated by its binary relations with its neighbors Korea or China. This problem arises whether or not there are bilateral or unilateral flows, perceptions, and misperceptions between them. Such flows tend towards the replacement of one binary with another, or the substituting of another privileged term, “Japan and China” for “Japan and the West” as in appraisals of what Okakura Kakuzō actually found or was positioned to find in a kind of “sketch realism” China.[See He Jing’s paper here⁹] Okakura’s understanding of China as he found it was only conceivable by his interaction with the West, and not just his interaction with late Qing China as he found it. Or, the “authentic Korean values” which can be substituted from a resurgent and resistant Korean nationalist position against the “false Korean aesthetic genealogy” discovered by Yanagi Sōetsu in Korea in the 1920s and 1930s [See Min Joosik’s paper here], one which it is presumed latently served the needs of Japanese colonial domination. Of course over this hangs the

5 See notes to my translation, Kuki Shūzō, *An Essay on Japanese Taste: The Structure of Iki*, [with a foreword by Nakano Hajimu, [Co-edited with notes by John Clark and by Sakuko Matsui] (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997). Another translation of this work has recently appeared as Kuki Shūzō, *The Structure of Detachment: The Aesthetic Vision of Kuki Shūzō* [translation by Hiroshi Nara; essays by J. Thomas Rimer and Jon Mark Mikkelsen] (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004). For an appraisal of Kuki related to some of the issues raised here see my “Sovereign Domains: The Structure of Iki,” *Japan Forum* 10: 2 (1998), pp. 197-209.

6 See Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan Kōgeikan, ed., *Tomimoto Kenkichi ten* (Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan Kōgeikan, 1991).

7 See my essay “Kindai Nihon bijutsu ni okeru hyōsōteki, senkōteki moniumento” (tr. Takayashiki Mabito), *Bijutsu Forum* 5 (2001).

8 For a recent analysis see Joos, Joël, “A Stinking Tradition: Tsuda Sōkichi’s View of China,” *East Asian History* 28 (December 2004), pp. 1-26.

9 For my own views on Okakura and a different approach see, “Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzō) and Aesthetic Nationalism,” *East Asian History* 29 (June 2005).

politically correct but methodologically suspect views of Said—with many of whose political views I incidentally agree, but not his method—where “Orientalism” serves as an excuse for not finding out what the “other” thinks, because it is purportedly unrepresentable to the “self”, or position of cultural hegemony whose interest “Orientalism” serves.¹⁰

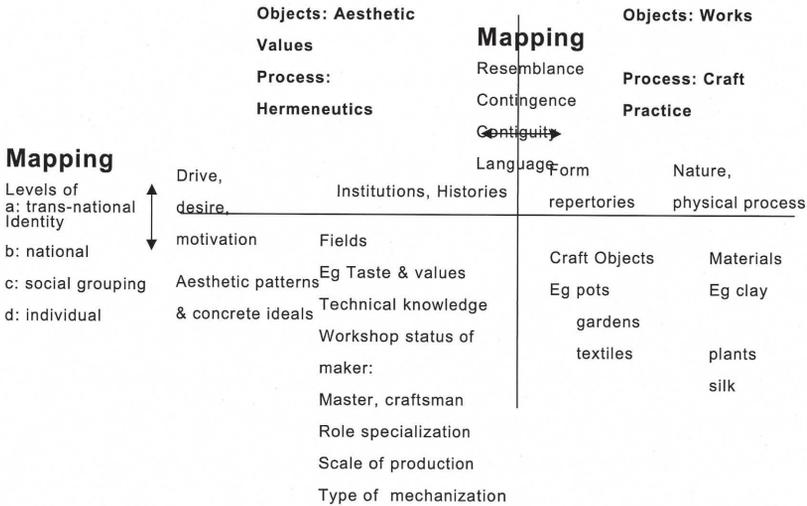
I think some of these difficulties hung over the Nichibunken conference because the level of aesthetic ideals or applied domains of different craft practices were being confused in which various kinds of mapping procedures were applied. Sorting out these confusions, perhaps “category mistakes”, might be a more productive contribution now than simply going over what should be rather well worked ground in the history of Japanese arts and crafts and their interpretation, certainly in the generation of craftsmen and women artists and scholars working since 1945. [Please see the Diagram below whose explication now follows]

I think the basic confusions arise because the same kinds of mapping procedures are being applied to what are actually two different phenomena, however much one presumes them to be causally connected. Works or aesthetic ideals are mapped by resemblance, historical or causal contingency, contiguity in space and time, or their marking by the same linguistic terms. But works or values are also marked by that most dangerous of cultural signifiers “identity” (because so facilely circular) and this itself has many different target dimensions or levels.¹¹ These are the phenomena of taste in objects found between very different cultures—internationalized *Mingei* or “Japanese folk” after Bernard Leach and St. Ives—those found in specific nations or social groups, and those attributable to some inalienable individuality attached to their reception class or maker as the case may be. Does the “Japanese”-ness of a *mingei* pot derive from : “a new transnational craft sensibility”, “Japan”, the aesthetic tastes of a new middle-class patronage group in Japan or the maker “Hamada Shōji”.

10 See Clark, John, “On Two Books by Edward W. Said,” *Bicitra Seni*, Jilid 2, [from Pusat Seni, Universiti Sains Malaysia,], 1995, pp. 20-47, and Clark, John, *Modern Asian Art* (Sydney: Craftsman House/ Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998).

11 In fact these levels are given by the nature of the units whose hegemony is presumed. For a discrimination between these and their consequences for one cultural imaginary see Clark, John, “An Australian Creative Space: Where is Australian-Asian Art Now?,” in Waite Dianne, ed., Green, Charles & Stubbs, Mike, curators, *2006/ Contemporary Commonwealth* (Melbourne: Australian Centre for the Moving Image & National Gallery of Victoria, 2006), pp. 26-33. This paper was written before the Nichibunken seminar.

But if in one direction mapping is apt to be confused by the levels of identity to which it is applied, in another dimension it is fraught because it is applied to two different categories of object, one a notional value, the other a physical work. On the one hand the hermeneutic category deals with intangibles of cultural value and aesthetic taste, and on the other, the domain of all-too-tangible craft works are presented as instinct with form in their own right, as if they were a fact of nature. What might have been a relatively straightforward mapping in two dimensions for one quadrant becomes a mapping of two dimensions for four quadrants. When we look further and ask what might be the actual markers onto which categories such as resemblance or contingency are mapped we find works are marked by the form repertoires of objects, and also by nature in terms of physical processes of various materials such as clay or silk. These stand in some correspondence to values which are marked by the motivations inherent in their aesthetic patterns as well as institutions and their histories which produce, perpetuate, and codify the values which govern production of craft objects.



The Double Articulation of Crafts

The shift between the same kind of mapping horizontally but with two kinds of presumed targets, values/meanings and works I call *the double articulation of crafts*. This seems to be specific to crafts because of an assumed causal relation between hermeneutics and works, one which we do not or should not so easily assume of “art”

works whose historical dynamics are only explained if we separate them.¹² Between the mapping of aesthetic values and craft works a kind of genealogy of resemblance is assumed where what are “Japanese” aesthetic values somehow find correlation in the physical properties produced by the application of craft practices to different kinds of craft materials. I suspect most observers would not think this was a one-to-one correspondence but a correlation between a complex of aesthetic values and a complex of physical properties and form types, or the manipulation of them.¹³ But even if the correlation is an indirect one, it is assumed or derived from analysis of the physical properties. Indeed we can think that the paradigm case for such correlations is to associate hermeneutics with craft practice, and it is only a small further step to think that both processes are two sides of the same approach, where practice produces values, or values produce specific practices to realize them. An “art” object has at least theoretically to take account of far more complex relationships because of authorial intention or abilities, audience intentions in co-production of an aesthetic object, the problems of art discourses restricting as much as empowering discoveries and solutions, the rhetorics of interpretation and their historical genealogies, and many of the other features which condition an “art history”, including above all the instability of a conception of “art”.¹⁴ But our understanding of “craft” works, even if we think the kinds of aesthetic pleasure they give fits into other kinds of hermeneutic interpretations we normally derive from art, would be far better served if where they sit was conceptually more argued out rather than left as some ineffable quality implied in the correlative assumption the above diagram underlines.

If Lévi-Strauss postulated *bricolage* as an intermediary cognitive series of representations between mythological knowledge on the one hand and scientific knowledge on the other,¹⁵ “craft” work may stand as intermediate between a kind

12 See Clark, 1998, diagram page 14.

13 This correlation of a structure of aesthetic values and types of effect in craft objects is what we see in Kuki, op.cit., and the work of Tanikawa Tetsuzō. See Tanikawa’s papers “Nihon no bi” (1965), and “Jōmonteki genkei to Yayoiteki genkei: Nihon no bi no keifu ni tsuite” (1969), published in Tanikawa Tetsuzō, *Jōmonteki genkei to Yayoiteki genkei* (Iwanami Shoten, 1971). See also Tanikawa Tetsuzō and Fukuda Sadayoshi, *Nihonjin ni totte no tōyo to seiō* (Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1981).

14 See the discussion of the residues of this problem for art history in Belting, Hans, *The End of the History of Art*, (tr. Wood, Christopher S.) (University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp.15-23.

15 Levi-Strauss, Claude, *La Pensée Sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), pp. 4-47, English translation as *Primitive Thought* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

of raw taste on the one hand and a sophisticated, that is self-knowing artistic discrimination on the other. Indeed, understanding the position of “craft” works as part of an aesthetic science of the concrete is what each culture or set of humanly conditioned discourses requires. In this sense all of the work on “Japanese” discourses from inside, or from outsider positions writing the inside, is valuable and necessary, but it requires a kind of space which allows any particular work or set of aesthetic values to be seen *in between* the raw and the sophisticated. Only then will they be seen neither as just themselves nor just intrinsically arising from, and only possible inside, the “Japanese” culture where they are found. We might hope to move to a cross-cultural mapping which will engage that specificity, but by multiple comparisons. If we still use the term “Japanese” at the end of that process, we will be all the more empowered to do so.