Dochaku: artistic evolution at the confluence of cultures

Author:
Oiyama, Toshiko

Publication Date:
2011

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/23816

License:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/
Link to license to see what you are allowed to do with this resource.

Downloaded from http://hdl.handle.net/1959.4/51256 in https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au on 2023-09-14
Dochaku: Artistic Evolution at the Confluence of Cultures

Toshiko Oiyama

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Art, College of Fine Arts

University of New South Wales

2011
Abstract

This research project investigates artistic evolution through the process of dochaku. Originally an agricultural principle, the Japanese term dochaku, meaning 'of the land,' signifies a fresh idea from outside being adopted and adapted to suit the local environment, often to the point where it is eventually considered 'indigenous' to the locality. Employing this concept of dochaku as a perspective, the research investigates how Frank Lloyd Wright, Pierre Alechinsky, Issey Miyake and Hiroshi Sugito developed their internationally recognized art practices by, among other means, internalising and individualising elements of traditional Japanese culture found in its architecture, calligraphy, textile and painting, respectively. The primary aims of this research are to uncover the individual negotiations in cultural interaction in these cases, and from these discoveries, to formulate a model of artistic evolution by the dochaku process.

Unlike the commonly accepted models that rely on concepts such as hybridisation, the research examines cultural interaction with a focus on the process rather than the product. By so doing, it has uncovered that the artists exploit and explore the potentiality of foreign aesthetic elements by ceaseless experimentation, re-contextualisation, and eventual 'indigenisation' of the elements into their art, facilitating an evolution of their practice over time. The dochaku perspective has also revealed that the products of cultural interaction can vary widely, ranging from the visibly-mixed to not-visible-mixed. I have proposed to classify them into three states: the State of Maturation, the State of Visible Conjunction, and the State of a New Paradigm. In contrast, hybridisation models recognize only the visibly-mixed as the proof of cultural interaction.

These findings attest to the variety of negotiations possible in cultural interaction, foregrounding the individuality and agency of the artist without typecasting her as a 'creative genius.' Furthermore, by recognising the previously unrecognised products of cultural interactions, the research has revealed the ubiquitous nature of cultural interaction. It is likely that the awareness of dochaku process in artistic evolution can help us widen our horizon and deepen our understanding of cultural formation, leading to richer cultural interactions in the world of visual art.

Declaration relating to disposition of project thesis/dissertation

I hereby grant to the University of New South Wales or its agents the right to archive and to make available my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in the University libraries in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I retain all property rights, such as patent rights. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

I also authorise University Microfilms to use the 350 word abstract of my thesis in Dissertation Abstracts International (this is applicable to doctoral theses only).

Signature

Witness

Date

The University recognizes that there may be exceptional circumstances requiring restrictions on copying or conditions on use. Requests for restriction for a period of up to 2 years must be made in writing. Requests for a longer period of restriction may be considered in exceptional circumstances and require the approval of the Dean of Graduate Research.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date of completion of requirements for Award

THIS SHEET IS TO BE GLUED TO THE INSIDE FRONT COVER OF THE THESIS
ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.'

Signed ..............................

Date ................................. 23.7.2011

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

'I hereby grant the University of New South Wales or its agents the right to archive and to make available my thesis or dissertation in whole or part in the University libraries in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I retain all proprietary rights, such as patent rights. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation. I also authorise University Microfilms to use the 350 word abstract of my thesis in Dissertation Abstract International (this is applicable to doctoral theses only). I have either used no substantial portions of copyright material in my thesis or I have obtained permission to use copyright material; where permission has not been granted I have applied/will apply for a partial restriction of the digital copy of my thesis or dissertation.'

Signed ..............................

Date ................................. 23.7.2011

AUTHENTICITY STATEMENT

'I certify that the Library deposit digital copy is a direct equivalent of the final officially approved version of my thesis. No amendation of content has occurred and if there are any minor variations in formatting, they are the result of the conversion to digital format.'

Signed ..............................

Date ................................. 23.7.2011
Acknowledgements

Had I known the extent of work required for a PhD research, I would have had a second, and probably a third, thought before starting. My appreciation goes to everyone who made it possible for me to complete the project, which amounts to almost all with whom I came in contact while undertaking the project. Specifically, I would like to thank my supervisors Dr David McNeill, Nicole Ellis, Dr Paula Dawson, Mike Esson and Dr Diane Losche, for their inspiration, challenge, and encouragement. Andrew Christofides was kind to provide me with astute critiques of my practical work, while Dr Vaughan Rees and my fellow PhD students were ever ready with moral support. Special thanks goes to Dr Janet Chan for giving me the first glimpse of the world of academic research, and for her insightful comments on my draft.

Ms Hitomi Uchikura and Ms Kazuko Hōjō were the kind and knowledgeable guides to the contemporary art world in Japan, where I was a stranger. Margaret Blackmore and Mitsuhiro Obora came to my rescue with their friendship and technical expertise in producing this thesis. My sister Setsuko Sprague and my mother Nobuko Oiyama had faith in my ability to complete the task, which kept me afloat. Lastly, a huge thanks goes to my husband Derry Habir. I hold him partly responsible for the very existence of this project – he knew before I ever did that I wanted to do a PhD, and knew when and how to give me a supporting hand in navigating its long process.
# Table of Contents

List of illustrations ........................................ iii

Introduction .................................................. 1

1. Cultural interaction in a globalising world .......... 8
   I. Global cultural interactions theorised in the social sciences ............................................. 9
   II. Global cultural interactions represented in visual art ......................................................... 17
   III. Predicament of hybridity ........................................... 26
   IV. Dochaku: a perspective ........................................ 30

2. Frank Lloyd Wright and the spectre of Japan ....... 46
   I. The channels .................................................. 46
   II. The aspects of Japanese aesthetics in Wright buildings: three cases .................................... 53
   III. Wright and the dochaku process in his art ........................................... 59

3. Pierre Alechinsky: In pursuit of his monsters ....... 69
   I. CO-penhagen, BR-ussels, A-msterdam .................. 69
   II. Japanese calligraphy and the art of Alechinsky ........................................... 73
   III. Central Park: A breakthrough ........................................... 80
   IV. Calligraphy and its dochaku process in context ........................................... 82

4. The making of Issey Miyake ................................ 94
   I. The first period, leading to the book East Meets West ........................................... 95
   II. The second period, leading to the exhibition A-UN ........................................... 98
   III. The third period, leading to the exhibition Making Things ........................................... 101
   IV. Miyake and dochaku process in his art ........................................... 104
5. Hiroshi Sugito: Moves and countermoves  115
   I. The world of nihonga  116
   II. The worlds of Hiroshi Sugito  122
   III. The way to dochaku-ka: moves and countermoves  130

6. The nature of dochaku  139
   I. The artist, and her fluid worlds  140
   II. The attractor, and its home culture  142
   III. The process of interaction, and the acts of dochaku-ka  146
   IV. The products of interaction, and their states  156
   V. Dochaku in perspective  162

7. At the confluence of theory and practice  167
   I. The component one: the artist  168
   II. The component two: the attractor  169
   III. The component three: the interaction  170
   IV. The component four: the product  174
   V. Art practice at the confluence of cultures  176

Conclusion  179

Appendix. Works in the exhibition Dochaku: Of the Land  183

Bibliography  191

CD. Works in the exhibition Dochaku: Of the land  Inside back cover
List of Illustrations

1. Cultural interaction in globalising world
   1-1 Recycled tin can toys 45
   1-2 *The Swing (after Fragonard)* 45

2. Frank Lloyd Wright and the spectre of Japan
   2-1 The Hardy House rendering 63
   2-2 *Kameyama, Clearing Weather after the Snow* 63
   2-3 *Yasumi Bridge and Maple Trees at Mama* 63
   2-4 The Winslow House rendering 64
   2-5 The Robie House 64
   2-6 The Great Hall of Higashi Honganji 64
   2-7 The Japanese domestic interior, from *Japanese Homes* 64
   2-8 The Robie House living room 64
   2-9 Fallingwater 65
   2-10 The Gale House 66
   2-11 Fallingwater living area 66
   2-12 Steps leading to the balcony, Fallingwater 66
   2-13 The Guggenheim Museum 66
   2-14 The central well, the Guggenheim Museum 67
   2-15 Ribbon of galleries, the Guggenheim Museum 67
   2-16A Higashi Honganji 68
   2-16B The Robie House 68
   2-16C The Gale House 68
   2-16D Fallingwater 68
   2-17A Head-height frieze, Japanese domestic interior 68
   2-17B The Robie House frieze 68
2-17c The Little House clerestory 68
2-17d The Guggenheim Museum ‘luminous cornice’ 68

3. Pierre Alechinsky: In pursuit of his monsters
   3-1 Cobra exhibition, Amsterdam 1949 89
   3-2 Daruma 89
   3-3 Materials and tools of calligraphy 89
   3-4 Floral Quest 89
   3-5 Poems of Tsurayuki 90
   3-6 Shooting the film, Japanese Calligraphy 90
   3-7 Sumi (Ink) 90
   3-8 Alice Grows up (ink on paper) 90
   3-9 Gazing Landscape 91
   3-10 Alice Grows up (oil on canvas) 91
   3-11 Central Park 91
   3-12 Facture Honoree 92
   3-13 Alechinsky at work 92
   3-14 Au Pays de L’encre 92
   3-15 La Cantatrice 92
   3-16 Le Bleu Horizon 93

4. The making of Issey Miyake
   4-1 Woman’s kimono 110
   4-2 Coat, top and pants in Pewlon 110
   4-3 A Piece of Cloth 110
   4-4 Issey Miyake Spectacle: Bodyworks exhibition 111
   4-5 Cover of Artforum, February 1982 111
   4-6 Issey Miyake: A-UN exhibition 111
   4-7 Oniyoryu 111
   4-8 Pleats Please, Spring-Summer Collection, 1994 112
   4-9 A-POC 112
   4-10 A-POC, Berlin Homage 112
   4-11 Issey Miyake: Making Things exhibition 113
4-12  Inakajima
4-13  Energies exhibition, Amsterdam
4-14  Morimura’s Doll

5. Hiroshi Sugito: Moves and countermoves

5-1  Flood
5-2  Yodo no Suisha (Water Mill)
5-3  Tori 04-1 (Bird 04-1)
5-4  Shorinzu Byobu (Pine Woods Screen)
5-5  Kohakubaizu Byobu (Red and White Plum Blossoms Screen)
5-6A  Fire
5-6B  The Pyramid Tower
5-6C  Shark Man
5-6D  Rainbow Mountain, 2003
5-7  Rescue
5-8  The Big Tree
5-9  The Pink Floor
5-10 Water Man
5-11 Spider Song
5-12 Lobster Man
5-13 Butterfly

7.  At the confluence of theory and practice

7-1  All along the Stream
7-2  Spring in Black
7-3  To Receive (detail)
7-4  Long White Cloud

Appendix. Works in the exhibition Dochaku: Of the Land

Over the Ridge
In the Sand
To Depart
To Engage
To Traverse 184
Spring in Black 185
Long White Cloud 186
Long White Cloud (detail) 186
Cloud, Cloud 187
Cloud, Cloud (detail) 187
On the Beach 188
Into the Valley 189
To Receive 189
From the Other Side 189
Before the Rain 190
After the Frost 190
To Elsewhere 190
Introduction

This research project investigates artistic evolution through the process of ‘dochaku.’ Originally an agricultural principle, the Japanese term dochaku, meaning ‘of the land,’ implies a fresh idea from outside being adopted and adapted to suit the local conditions, so much so that it is eventually considered ‘indigenous’ to the locality. Employing this concept of dochaku as a perspective, the research investigates how some artists develop their art practice by internalising and individualising certain elements of foreign cultures. Specifically, the research centres on four cases of internationally recognized artists whose art evolved, among many other means, through ‘indigenising’ elements of traditional Japanese aesthetics into their ‘base’ Euro-American aesthetics. The primary aims of this research are to uncover the individual negotiations in cultural interaction in these cases, and from these discoveries, to formulate a model of artistic evolution by dochaku process that allows the agency of the individual to manifest while not typecasting her as a romantic creative genius. It is hoped that the findings of this research will reveal new facets in the nature of cultural interaction, and will help artists and theorists alike, facilitating their investigation and understanding of transformative transcultural experiences.

Unlike many researches on cultural interaction in art, which tend to concentrate on the socio-political context of the finished artwork, this research emphasizes experiencing art. The stress of the investigation is on the ‘how’ of the negotiation in cultural interaction.

1 Roland Robertson, "Globalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in Global Modernities, ed. Mike Featherstone, Roland Robertson, and Scott Lash (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995), 28-29. According to Robertson, the Japanese term dochaku became a marketing buzzword in the nineties. In business sense it is related to ‘micro-marketing: the tailoring of goods and services on a global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets’

interaction, that is to say, the process of ‘becoming’ something different through encounters with the other. In this approach, the ‘what’ of the negotiation – the end-product, artwork – will be observed as the trace of the cultural interaction, rather than as the proof of the interaction that is purported to have taken place. In addition to the theoretical investigation, a practical research on a theme of Becoming will take place, directing and grounding the theoretical findings. In this connection I bring, to this investigation, two relatively uncommon perspectives, i.e. that of a practitioner (as opposed to a theorist) in fine arts and design, and of someone whom John Tomlinson calls a cosmopolitan3 (as opposed to either Japanese or Euro-American), who has grown up in Japan but has spent her entire adulthood abroad, spread over six countries. Before going into more details of the project, it will be useful to set the stage, as it were, by reviewing some concepts of global cultural interaction as context.

The sociologist Malcolm Waters speculated in 1995 that just as post-modernism was the concept of the 1980s, globalisation might be considered the concept of the 1990s that would carry us into the new millennium. According to him the word ‘global’ is over 400 years old, its uses as ‘globalisation’ appeared around 1960, and the concept became academically significant in the 1980s.4 Roland Robertson notes that there were two groups of thoughts in the early debate of globalisation; ‘homogenisers’ including Anthony Giddens and Marxists, and heterogenisers such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and James Clifford. The homogenisers would invoke convergent development such as a world system, while the heterogenisers dispute convergence or the idea of development itself.5 Today we see that, although without a definitive definition, the term has become a part of popular parlance, used widely from the fields of music to finance and countless others. For many people the concept of globalisation is associated with Westernisation and modernisation. They see globalisation as a conflict between modern and pre-modern, centre and periphery, West and non-West,

---

Ulf Hannerz, Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places, Comedia (New York: Routledge, 2000), 103. One of the definitions of cosmopolitan by Tomlinson is someone who is ‘able to live – ethically, culturally – in both the global and the local at the same time.’ I choose Tomlinson’s use of the term over Hannerz’s in which a cosmopolitan could be a cultural dilettante uncommitted to any particular culture.

global and local, and some even see it as a war between ‘McWorld’ and ‘Jihad world.’ And the first of the pair is usually privileged. In reality, globalisation is neither that dismal nor that simple.

As Arjun Appadurai and many others point out, globalisation is neither new, nor is it simply a euphemism for Westernisation. There have been many cultural interactions and directions of influences since the beginning of history. What is new with today’s globalisation is its geographical spread and speed, with the tension between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation as its central problem. For example, even though a dominant culture such as today’s Western culture may seem to succeed in homogenizing the world in its image, the process itself incites heterogenisation at the same time. In encountering another culture, a host society interprets the new in its own way. It also selects what it absorbs, instead of accepting the incoming culture wholesale. During and after the encounter, because of the new perspectives gained through the contact, the host society’s idea of itself may change. It may even acquire enough flexibility to see itself and the new culture as examples of yet another norm among many, which encourages further changes.

For these reasons Robertson and Tomlinson favour the term glocalisation – a global outlook adapted to local conditions – over globalisation with its mistaken connotation of homogeneity, as reflecting more accurately the dynamics of interaction between cultures. According to Robertson, the term glocalism was modeled on the concept of dochaku. It implies conscious decisions made by a society to adopt and adapt the new, while, by default, being ready to transform itself as a result of grounding the new firmly as its own. A dochaku process takes place not only in a public world, but also in a private world of an artist-cosmopolitan. Wu Hung argues that the artist faces and absorbs the global macro world, but the experience needs to be localised, i.e. internalised and individualised, in order for her art to emerge as a forceful micro

---

8 Robertson, "Globalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," 41.
9 Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture, 196.
narrative. Even in today’s globalising world with its seeming tendency to homogenisation, or perhaps because of it, the individual responses and honest expression of these personal responses remain the essential elements of contemporaneity in art practice.11

A by-product of, and a reaction to, McDonaldization by economic globalisation might be the current growing awareness of cultural heterogeneity in the world. From Les Magiciens de la Terre of 1989 to Asia Pacific Triennial of 2009, international exhibitions that celebrate differences among cultures abound. When the idea of visible hybridity comes to the fore, however, the much desired outward differences often locks the art into a certain ethnicity and its accompanying stereotypes, thereby locking it out of a serious consideration as an individual utterance by a complex subject who lives and experiences a wide range of philosophical issues.12 To compound the problem, the current idea of globalisation as hybridisation in the world of art is often bound with post-colonial theories as a matter of course. By extrapolating the colonial experience to the planetary, this perspective assumes power struggles and unwilling host societies in most cultural interactions. However, if we look at globalisation being as deep as history, there have been many other types of interaction, including willing interactions among the equals. In this connection, the advantage of dochaku perspective over that of hybridisation theory becomes evident. Without specific historical ties to colonialism, and with its focus on the process rather than the product, the perspective of dochaku facilitates more general, and perhaps more balanced, views on cultural interaction than the currently available models, such as hybridisation.

It may seem strange, at first, to employ a concept that was born in a small island nation off the Eurasian continent in examining global cultural interaction. However, William McNeill points out, ‘… in remote offshore islands, like medieval Japan and Britain, aliens played significant roles as bearers of special skill.’13 Since her official

---

contact with China in the sixth century, even through her self-imposed isolation period
from the 17th to 19th century, Japan has had steady, if limited, contact with the outside
world, and alien cultures have indeed been playing a significant role in her culture.
Robertson reports that Japan is a country ‘where the general issue of the relationship
between the particular and the universal has historically received almost obsessive
attention.’ In relation to Chinese culture, which was imported through official
channels with great enthusiasm till 894, the terms like karayō (kara-Chinese, yō-
mode), its counter-part, wayō (wa-Japanese, yō-mode) and wayō-ka (ka-to change. To
Japanise.) were born. In more recent years, after the fantasy and nightmare of
imperialistic ambitions, many Japanese artists and intellectuals pondered the relevance
of their home culture, aspiring to create and to uphold sekaisei (sekai-global, sei-
characteristics, or universality). Robertson suggests that his field, sociology, ought to
be ‘internationalised and de-ethnocentrised.’ The same can be said of the world of
visual art. What better way to examine globalisation and cultural interaction in art
than through the concept of dochaku, a concept originated in an island culture that has
had many centuries of practice in viewing the relationship between the local and
global?

Coming back to the scope of this research project, clarifying the nature of cultural
interaction, and finding the process of artistic evolution by an individual through that
interaction, then, are the objectives of this research. The perspective of dochaku, and
its process noun dochaku-ka, connote a successful case of a foreign concept becoming
one with the locality. We can surmise that while busily adopting and adapting the
incoming idea, the host locality – the artist, in the case of this research – will be
compelled to examine her ways, will be enriched by the experience and the new idea,
and will be changed somewhat by it all. This premise of change, of fluidity,
acknowledges the adaptation that takes place within both the adopter (the artist) and
the adopted (the foreign aesthetic element). The fluid dochaku concept will shed light
on the negotiations needed in the inter-cultural, rather than multi-cultural, formulation
of personal artistic specificity that is the product of interaction.

14 Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian cited in Robertson, "Globalization: Time-Space and
15 Ibid., 26.
In any research, the selection of cases necessarily determines its direction, and forms its outcome that gives a framework to the cases.16 Of the artists with transcultural practice in which Japanese aesthetics play a significant part, to configure a theory of cultural interaction in general, I chose to study variety. Further, I have defined the ‘base’ culture to be the mainstream of the fields in which the artists practice. With these conditions, the artists selected are: Frank Lloyd Wright, Pierre Alechinsky, Issey Miyake, and Hiroshi Sugito. Wright was an American architect with astonishingly wide interests, including *ukiyo-e* (woodcut print) and traditional Japanese architecture. Alechinsky, a painter, hails from Belgium, with a passion for Japanese calligraphy. Miyake grew up in Japan, and trained in his metier, fashion design, in Europe and the United States. His fascination with *kimono*, the traditional Japanese garment, has re-contextualised the idea of clothing in the world of fashion. Sugito, a contemporary painter, grew up in the United States and went back to Japan at the age of 16, where he subsequently obtained his training in *nihonga* (traditional Japanese mode of painting). In competing in the international arenas like Wright and Alechinsky, for Miyake and Sugito, the dominant Euro-American aesthetics in their respective fields serve as their base aesthetics, rather than the regional Japanese. These four artists provide variety in cultural backgrounds, fields of specialisation, and different areas of interest in the traditional Japanese art, such as architecture, *ukiyo-e*, calligraphy, *kimono*, and *nihonga*. Together, their careers span over one hundred years leading up to present, covering both fine arts and design. Furthermore, the varied elements of Japanese aesthetics explored by them complement each other, and facilitate understanding of Japanese art in general, while encompassing its long history. Other than variety, there is one more reason that is personal yet vital, for the choice of these artists. I like their art. Being a practitioner, the affinity and respect I feel toward the objects of study are essential for sustaining my enthusiasm and curiosity throughout the long process of a research project.

As stated, this research project consists of two parts, the theoretical and the practical. The two parts are discrete, yet complement and interpenetrate each other. While being interdependent however, each half also investigates the areas where the other half

cannot reach due to the inherent characteristics of words and images. The theoretical research is carried out by examining literature, and studying artworks encountered in my travels in Japan, the United States, Holland and France, along with some interviews. The practical research derives from my field of specialisation, drawing. Like the four artists, I am fascinated by Japanese aesthetics as one of many sources of inspiration. And like Miyake and Sugito, I come to Japanese aesthetics as a semi-outsider due to my background. As dochaku-ka of Japanese aesthetics is one way my art practice has been evolving, the practical research provides fresh concepts and questions to explore in the theoretical research. In turn, the theoretical investigation plays an important role for the practical by thematising in reverse, and by giving context to my art practice. The intertwined nature of the two halves of this project deepens my observation, analysis, and conceptualisation, leading to understanding of the transformative nature of dochaku process in cultural interaction. It can be said that the project is ‘of’ artistic evolution through dochaku process, rather than ‘about’ it.17

The structure of this thesis is governed by the chronological order of the four artists’ careers, and the ‘naturalistic’ methodology of the research. Chapter one surveys the current understanding of cultural interaction, and the problems found in its theorisation. The four chapters of case studies that follow reveal the nuanced and individualistic evolution of each artist. Cumulatively presenting the whole picture, the four cases are then discussed and conceptualised together in chapter six, to find what is particular and what is common, and to form a working model of cultural interaction, allowing the theory of dochaku to ‘emerge.’ Chapter seven is an analysis of my practical research that formed, and was formed by, the theoretical research, viewed from the perspective of the newly articulated theory of dochaku. The conclusion summarises and gives context to the findings of this project. A catalogue of my graduation exhibition is included in this thesis as an appendix. Following common practice, modern Japanese names are given in the Western order with given names first, while the names before the Meiji Restoration (1868) remain in the original Japanese order, with family names appearing first, followed by given names.

1. Cultural Interactions in a Globalising World

‘How does one represent other cultures? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one?’\(^1\) asks Said in his seminal work *Orientalism*. Clifford considers these as the most important theoretical questions of Said’s study.\(^2\) ‘Culture’ for Said is simply hegemonic and disciplinary, while Clifford sees it as differentiating and expressive. Denouncing Orientalist procedures for their dichotomising, enclosing and essentialising ways, Said offers a humanist and cosmopolitan view on the world.\(^3\) Seeing Said’s position as leading sometimes to ‘a denial of the other,’ Anthony Milner and C. Andrew Gerstle argue for ‘not closure but sensitivity to cultural differences.’\(^4\) Clearly we need to examine what cultures are and how they behave in today’s globalising world from various points of view.

Of the many uses of the term ‘culture,’ I would like to borrow a set put forward by William Ray. He states that the term ‘culture’ is commonly used to designate two different things. One is ‘the shared traditions, values, and relationships, the *unconscious* cognitive and social reflexes which members of a community share and collectively embody.’ And the other is ‘the *self-conscious* intellectual and artistic efforts of individuals to express, enrich and distinguish themselves.’\(^5\) One can also name these two uses of the term as the anthropological/group sense of culture, and the artistic/individual sense of culture.\(^6\)

\(^3\) Ibid., 258-73.
\(^6\) Diane Losche, in discussion with the author, April 2009.
In this chapter I will discuss the nature of global cultural interaction from these two views of culture, that is, from the perspective of the social sciences and from the world of visual art. I will then point out the problems with one concept, namely ‘hybridity,’ which has been associated with globalisation in both disciplines. Finally I will propose an alternative perspective on cultural interaction, which, borrowing from the Japanese agricultural principle, I have called dochaku.

I. Global cultural interactions theorised in the social sciences

In anthropology, cultures were initially thought to be tied to communities such as villages or states with clear boundaries. Moreover, the village, a manageable unit for study, was treated as a portable synecdoche of its culture, so much so that it was presented as an exhibit – both its dwellings and live inhabitants – in the great world’s fairs of the late 19th century in St. Louis, Paris and Chicago.7 When such cultures came together, their interaction was visualised as either a ladder or mosaic.8 In the ladder concept, cultures climb from primitive to advanced stage step by step, following the one in front, with the European civilisation at the pinnacle. In the mosaic concept each culture is clearly demarked and rigidly located, without affecting its neighbours. These pictures became obsolete in the late 20th century with the new awareness of cultural formation and interaction. In their place we now have a more dynamic image of culture, which is characterised by: 1) its fluid nature, 2) its multi-directional movements, and 3) agency of the actors involved in the interaction.

1) The fluid nature of culture: In discussing the process of global cultural formations, Appadurai suggests that we need to consider three things. First, the forms of cultures are not clearly bounded but fractal with ambiguous edges. Second, the cultures do not locate themselves side by side as unique and discrete entities, but overlap and resemble. Third, the process of interaction between cultures is similar to the dynamics

of chaos theory. Proposed as ‘a general theory of global cultural process,’ this macro picture of cultural formation is relevant to the micro concern that is dochaku process in art. In speaking of dochaku, we are dealing with an unfamiliar concept from outside being adopted and adapted by an artist, giving birth to new forms and meanings – which after all, is one type of cultural formation.

Fractal geometry was invented by a French-American mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot in the 1960s and 1970s. The name he gave to the new geometry derives from ‘fractured’ and ‘fractional,’ indicative of its focus on ‘broken, wrinkled, uneven’ shapes. We find fractals everywhere. The weather patterns, snowflakes, tree branches, river deltas and our lungs are fractals. Unlike the Euclidian shapes such as rectangles and circles that are simple and clearly bounded, fractals are infinitely complex, being made of parts that are made of parts that are made of further parts. In the fractal world the closer we look, the more we find, while in the abstract Euclidian world enlargement of forms does not reveal any additional information.

How does this relate to our idea of culture and dochaku process? Cultures emerge, disappear, merge, split, copy, innovate, thrive and decline... and above all, respond to each and every stimulus from within and without, transforming themselves in unpredictable ways. Given these dynamics, the cultures cannot remain discreet from each other, if ever they were indeed discreet to start with. Furthermore, with each response to stimulus being fed back into the body of culture for further reaction, the shape of culture becomes more and more complex and fractured. This process of transformation of culture is, as Appadurai suggests, similar to the dynamics of chaos theory. In chaos theory, the details matter. Any response to stimuli by a detail affects every other detail, and as a result, transforms the whole. Because of iteration – feeding back the reaction into itself over and over again like compound interest – the result is indeterminate. Thus cultures are dynamic, that is to say, continuously active, systems that interact in the manner of chaos, forming and transforming themselves. Having gone through many interactions, and being exposed to varying stimuli, the shapes and

---

characteristics of cultures can be both quite similar and wildly different from each other in many aspects. Alluding to chaos theory, Appadurai urges us to think of cultural formation in images of ‘flow and uncertainty… rather than older images of order, stability and systematicness.’

The image of flow and uncertainty is echoed in the theory of globalisation as hybridisation by Jan Nederveen Pieterse. The term hybridity is used today, quite casually in many instances, without a clear, agreed upon definition. Hybridity was used in the 17th century for an animal or plant that was a result of crossing two different species. The Victorians regarded different races as different species, and they applied the term to a person of mixed descent. Its connotation was derogatory as in the idea of miscegenation, focusing on the ‘impurity’ of the result as opposed to the ‘purity’ of the originals. Since the development of Mendelian genetics in the 1870s, however, hybridity has come to be seen as something positive as well, indicating an enriched gene pool and robust products resulting from it. From mixing of plants and animals, today the hybrid combination extends to technology, as in cyborgs (cybernetic organisms).

For Pieterse the current hybridity discussion seems superficial, ‘for it is entirely dominated by the episodes of colonialism and nationalism of the last two hundred or so years.’ He believes that cultural hybridisation has been going on since the beginning of history, and cultures have been, and will be ever-mixing, ‘ever-generating new commonalities and new differences.’ He postulates that there are varieties of, and various degrees of hybridity, in which he includes other related terms like syncretism and creolisation. I will discuss these terms later in relation to visual art, where some differentiation is made. Pieterse cites that organisational hybridity has been widely practiced in business management in which local cultures influence the centre as in ‘Think globally, act locally.’ Others on his list include, institutional hybridity such as in governance, interdisciplinarity in science, and everyday hybridity.

---

11 Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, 47.
14 Ibid., 56.
in identities, consumer behaviour, lifestyle, etc.\textsuperscript{15} In all instances, for him, hybridisation as a perspective means that the relationship between cultures is fluid, and ‘it’s the mixing of cultures and not their separateness that is emphasised.’ Moreover, while cultural hybridisation usually refers to the mixing of differences, we can also shift the perspective and see the similarities, he stresses. For example, the Catholic saints are icons of Christianity, but are also holdovers of pre-Christian paganism, showing the trans-cultural affinity between the Christian usage and the syncretic, saint-masks-for-pagan-worship usage. This perspective by Pieterse on hybridity encourages us to view culture as trans-local, rather than essentially territorial, stressing its fluidity.\textsuperscript{16}

For Bhabha, cultures, like identity, are in a continuous state of becoming. When two cultures meet, they go through the process of hybridisation due to the impossibility of exact translation, resulting in slippage and formation of a third entity, hybrid, that is different from the original two cultures. His emphasis is on hybridisation – hybridity’s ongoing process – rather than hybridity itself. In fact cultures are ‘the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities.’\textsuperscript{17} I will discuss Bhabha’s concept of hybridity in more detail in Section II in relation to contemporary visual art, in which his post-colonial theory plays a significant role.

2) Multidirectional movements: Robertson states ‘The conception of contemporary locality and indigeneity is… contingent upon encounters between one civilisational region and another.’\textsuperscript{18} How, then, do they encounter each other? Cultures, once defined as location bound, have been found to be mobile. In fact they have been travelling since the beginning of time through trade, religion, war and migration, says Clifford. Furthermore, one does not necessarily have to move away from one’s locality to experience travel. Citing an ethnographic study of Japanese female factory workers by the anthropologist Christina Turner, he concedes that travel can include

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{17} David Huddart, Homi K. Bhabha, Routledge Critical Thinkers (Abingdon, [U.K.]; New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2006), 7.
the forces that pass through – such as television, radio, tourists, commodities and armies – which make us aware of our locality in context of the global. With advancement of technology, travel has become faster, wider, more frequent, more intense, and a normal state rather than abnormal. As Clifford suggests, we must consider both ‘roots and routes,’ and the ‘import-export’ activities of cultures.  

If we accept the position that cultural interaction is as deep as history, and also consider the fact that Europe was ‘until the late eighteenth century, merely a fringe area of the Afro-Euroasian zone of agrarianate citied life,’ then we can surmise comfortably that cultural ‘import-export’ has been going on in many directions. However, deep historic considerations aside, today, feeling threatened by the sudden acceleration of globalisation, many fear cultural imperialism of the West, especially of the United States. No doubt there are grounds for such fears, but we also need to recognise some factors in motion against that imagined one-way stream. Robertson lists the following. First, the ‘locals’ absorb communication from the ‘centre’ in many varied ways. Second, the producers of ‘global culture’ such as CNN or Hollywood tailor the products to the ‘locals.’ Third, seemingly ‘national’ resources are available for differentiated global interpretation. (King Lear by Shakespeare being staged as Ran in medieval Japan by the film director Akira Kurosawa is an example. Going in the opposite direction from East to West, there is Kurosawa’s Seven Samurai becoming Magnificent Seven in Hollywood.) Fourth, flow of ideas and practices from so-called Third World to the centre has been seriously underestimated. Citing these points, Robertson states that the debate about globalisation being either homogenisation or heterogenisation needs to be transcended. The question is not either of the two, but how both tendencies have become feature of our lives.  

As stated before, to capture the dynamics of global-local accurately, Robertson suggests using the term glocalisation. The main thrust of glocalisation lies in the interpenetration of global and local. In the case of micro marketing, for instance, it means adjusting a product to suit the local need, but at the same time, the local need

19 Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century, 11-36.
itself has been partially created as a new consumer ‘tradition’ in response to the outside world of which the local is a part. In a more abstract sense, he equates the global with universal, the local with particular, and defines *glocalisation* as simultaneous particularisation of the universal, and universalisation of the particular. Rather than seeing the global/universal and local/particular as opposites, he maintains that the two directions create and affect each other. We are involved in the twofold process of trying to preserve particularity and difference on the one hand, and universality and homogeneity on the other. The result of the twofold process is that the universal is given a more concrete and human dimension by particularization, while the particular is universalised to such an extent that the differences are accepted as a norm.\(^22\)

Considering the fact that, in discussing globalisation, we are discussing the globality of the entire world, the interactions other than between centre and periphery are strangely missing from many theories. What of interactions among non-Western cultures? And within the West itself? Are there no centres other than the Euro-American centre? Appadurai neatly sidesteps such questions. For him the current global cultural economy can no longer be understood in terms of centre-periphery models. Citing fundamental disjuncture between economy, culture, and politics, he proposes five ‘landscapes’ to explore global cultural flows. They are: *ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes* and *ideascapes*, with the suffix -scapes alluding to the fluid and irregular shapes of landscape. The movements of the five *scapes* are nonisomorphic, and the relationship between them is ‘not a simple one-way street,’ but deeply disjunctive, fluid and uncertain.\(^23\)

I have so far discussed multi-directional movements of culture in terms of space. It is important to remember that cultural interactions take place across time as well. For instance, in areas where rapid urbanisation is taking place such as in developing countries, the pre-modern, modern and post-modern can co-exist affecting each


other. Or, a newly adopted or created concept may lead us to re-examine, re-interpret or re-formulate events in the past. In the intersection of cultures, their past, present and future can commingle. For instance, Frank Whitford offers such a reading of Japonisme. In depicting the urban ephemeral life, the ukiyo-e prints were presenting the images of bourgeois sensibilities. The Impressionists, therefore, were responding not only to the exotic aesthetics of the prints but also to the modernity they found in the far-away land. In other words, says Pieterse, ‘Japanese popular art was modern before European art was.’ Moreover, among the countless ukiyo-e that crossed the ocean, many that touched the French artists deeply, such as works by Utamaro (1753-1806), had been produced almost a century before the artists encountered them. That particular cultural interaction took place across space (between Japan and France), and over time (between the 18th and 19th century).

3) Agency of the actors: The multi-directional nature of cultural interaction discussed above leads the way to the issue of agency involved in the interaction. ‘The “global-local” theme is more complex than “action-reaction” relationship,’ says Robertson. The receiver of the influence in cultural interaction is seldom completely powerless or without options. She does not simply react, but responds. Agency is apparent when Clifford urges us to think of culture as ‘not organically unified, traditionally continuous, but as negotiated and present process.’ In Appadurai’s dynamics of indigenisation concept, the forces from metropolis undergo unique modification as soon as they come into contact with local culture, while the local culture experiences both homogenising and heterogenising pulls within itself in response to the incoming forces. Robertson makes a similar point in his theory of glocalisation as simultaneous particularisation of the universal, and universalisation of the particular, involving agency by all actors. The Meiji period (1868-1912) in Japan is a good example. When she was coerced into opening her doors in 1854 by the United States, Japan had no illusion about her precarious position in the world, being aware of the devastation of China and India under colonial rules. Soon after restoration of the

26 Pieterse, “Globalization as Hybridization,” 60.
29 Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, 32.
imperial rule and the start of the Meiji era, in response to that global condition, Japan threw herself into rapid modernisation, i.e. Westernisation, as a means of self-defence. Although there were indiscriminate emulations and woeful mistakes in many areas, overall, there was, as Robertson calls, ‘selective incorporation.’ In emulating European societies, Japan made conscious decisions as to which systems and technologies to bring in.

Hannerz offers his version of local response framework as ‘maturation tendency of the periphery.’ When the forces from metropolises arrive, they generally do not experience uncritical acceptance. Being culturally different from metropolis, the local society first sifts which forces to let in. (Not that they are always successful in letting in only those that they approve.) Of the forces that passed the first gate, most will be taken apart to be examined. Some parts will be discarded while the others will be reconfigured or mixed with local elements to suit the local needs and tastes, creating new entities quite different from the metropolis’s originals. As in Robertson’s *glocalism*, the local is anything but a passive partner. To capture the hearts of the local, the global force must adapt itself to the local needs. To describe this on-going centre-periphery cultural relatedness Hannerz proposes the term ‘creolisation’ which originates in linguistics. Although he stresses the direction of influence runs also from periphery to centre in this scheme, he does not elaborate. Barbara Abou-El-Haj points out, however, that for those outside of anthropological and sociological discourse the after-image of former debasement of the periphery by the centre lingers in that term, while Pieterse judges that the term is limited in its applicability to the post-sixteenth-century Americas experience.

---

33 Pieterse, “Globalization as Hybridization,” 54.
The image of cultural interaction glimpsed in social science thus far is typified by its fluidity, movement and agency of the participants. Somewhat different views are found in the world of visual art.

II. Global cultural interactions represented in visual art

To examine contemporary art, there are three theories that are commonly used as analytic tools. Citing Susanne Langer and her book *Philosophy in a New Key*, Clifford Geertz speaks of certain theories ‘bursting upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force… solving many fundamental problems, and seeming to promise to solve all fundamental problems. Everyone snaps them up as the open sesame.’ After the theories become a part of general pool of ideas, however, one begins to sift their applications and finds out what the ideas are really solving. This scenario fits the theoretical constellations of post-modernism, post-colonialism, and globalisation, which appeared one after another in the world of art. Much of art since the 1980s could indeed be interpreted, to an extent, through some combination of these three perspectives. And they have one aspect in common – a penchant for mixed-ness of one kind or other. However, each theory has some preferred terms and differing nuances in relation to the mixed-ness. In this section, I will discuss the three perspectives and an example in which the three are used in creating a powerful work of art.

1) *Post-modernism, and its taste for the plural:* With the loss of grand narratives, we are in the post-modern condition where many narratives proliferate and compete. Charles Jencks, one of the popularisers of the term ‘post-modern,’ explains that post-modernism is not a totalising category, and the movements vary depending on the field. ‘An intense commitment to pluralism’ unites post-modern movements, and their agenda is ‘to cross territories, break down specialisation, hybridise discourse, and attack false boundaries.’ Their strategy is double or multiple coding, which often takes on an ironic stance by saying two different things at the same time. For example, in

---

35 David McNeill, in discussion with the author, August 2007.
architecture, this means a mixture of the exaggerated oppositions – the elitist and popular, the accommodating and subversive, the new and old – leading to ‘controlled schizophrenia,’ with layered and contrasted codes. In literature, ‘post-modern fiction inscribes itself within conventional discourses in order to subvert them,’ as seen in the work of John Barth, Umberto Eco and Salman Rushdie. In anthropology Clifford notes that the taste for the hybrid and the incongruous is now associated with post-modernism.

As in many other fields, in post-modern visual art, the term hybridity – meaning any mixture of elements such as subject matter, concept, media, technique, or style in one work – is loosely defined and generalised. Hybridity is one of the popular traits in contemporary art because it is seen as an antidote to the essentialism in race, culture and gender. Hybridity is not particular to post-modernism, however. In the form of collage, hybridity was often used by Futurists, Cubists, Dadaists and Surrealists. In their modernist aesthetics, though, the alien elements were subsumed in a totalising whole. By comparison, post-modern hybridity is jarring, and juxtaposing visible differences is the favoured method for double or multiple coding. Visible hybridity does not necessarily indicate the artist’s understanding or her willingness to accept the ‘other,’ however. Much of the 1980s’ tendency for casual appropriation of elements from other cultures is a case in point. By definition, appropriation – one sided and aggressive borrowing – does not lead to internalisation or indigenisation of the aesthetics from which the uplifted elements originate. Moreover, post-modern art’s fascination with pastiche does little to encourage artists to seek deep understanding of other cultures. Jonathan Harris cautions that hybridity ‘guarantees nothing’ other than things are multiple, and casual celebration of it can be counterproductive, referring to the case of the black identity created through the experience of slavery.
believes hybridity ‘does not extricate us from a self/other dualism and the implication of loss and redemption in the formation of the third term.’

Instead of hybridity, Fisher champions the notion of ‘syncretism’ as a direction of art in globalisation. She defines syncretism as a dynamic process in which the relationship between parts is constantly changing depending on circumstances. It allows for an element of untranslatability between disparate factors. The concept of syncretism first appeared via anthropology as the fusion of religious forms in which Catholic saints were adopted as masks for non-Christian deity worship. Harris explains, ‘Syncretism implies the recognition that an alliance… does not mean a simple identity… but rather a tactical commingling of different elements whose separate characteristics are not dissolved within their alliance.’ It may be a subversive tactic, explicitly not creating a unified third. As with hybridity, however, it can have a derogatory connotation as a mixture of essentially incompatible elements.

Terminology aside, post-modern art’s commitment to pluralism often manifests itself in the form of juxtaposition of incongruent elements. To highlight the difference between the elements, the artist might choose to exaggerate or employ strategic essentialism. It is ironic that essentialism, a modernist trait and the very thing post-modern art is purported to be opposing, is one of the tactics it employs. Such self-conscious plurality may not be too far from the now-discredited mosaic image of cultural relations that is static and clearly bounded, but that is perhaps a part of the irony that post-modern art so favours.

2) Post-colonialism, and its hybrid identity: Robert Young defines the postcolonial as ‘coming after colonialism and imperialism in their original meaning… but still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global system of hegemonic economic power.’ It is both ‘contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a

---

42 Ibid., 238.
43 Pieterse, “Globalization as Hybridization,” 56.
44 Harris and Tate Gallery Liverpool., Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism, 27.
transnational social justice.’ For post-colonialism the central object of analysis is
conflictual cultural interaction, and it is concerned with both the positive and negative
effect of the mixing of peoples and cultures. Among many of its key issues are the
colonial, imperial and anti-colonial past, postcolonial present, emigration and
immigration, diaspora, contemporary politics of identity, race and ethnicity, class,
gender and sexuality and the role of culture in the operation of imperialism.45 There
are many intersections among post-colonialism, postmodernism, and globalisation
theory, such as diaspora and identity, with their accompanying cultural, political and
economic ramifications.

One of the most influential and controversial theorists on post-colonialism is
Bhabha.46 Stating that Bhabha’s key concepts such as hybridity, mimicry and
ambivalence have become touchstones in colonial and post-colonial debate, Peter
Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams explicate his hybridity as follows. In colonial
domination, the colonising power requires two things. The first is to possess the pure
and ‘natural’ culture and essence that cannot be distorted upon contact with Other.
The second is an identity that can be constructed and asserted through discrimination.
These are needed in order to clearly mark the difference and accompanying hierarchy
between the coloniser and the colonised for exercise of power by one over the other.
Bhabha’s concept of hybridity postulates that this coloniser’s wish cannot be met. The
supposedly unified and pure message from the authority will be, upon contact,
interpreted and inscribed by the colonised in the light of her culture. There is no such
thing as transparent, unmediated communication. The product of the transmission and
its reception is a hybrid, which is not a synthesis of the two cultural positions, but a
monstrous bastard. One of the examples given is the vegetarian Hindus’
understanding of ‘Christian communion as cannibalism, eating flesh of Christ, or
vampirism, drinking his blood.’ The bastard child looks back at the mother culture,
and the authority feels mocked and terrorised by the bastard’s mimicry. Both parties
are implicated in this uncontrollable and menacing process of cultural transformation,
which for Bhabha, amounts to resistance by the colonised.47 Each encounter is a site of

46 Loomba, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, 176.
47 Peter Childs and R. J. Patrick Williams, An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory (London: Prentice
Hall, 1997), 122-37.
hybridisation; and *hybridisation*, the ongoing and ever-changing process, is what Bhabha emphasises, not *hybrid*, the static product. Continuous hybridisation and mimicry unsettle the relationship between the colonial subjects, keeping identities of both the coloniser and colonised in flux and relational. Hybridisation denies stable and unified self, and breaks down the duality of self/other. Both mimicry and hybridity are built-in components of the colonial encounter, placing colonial discourse not wholly in the hands of the coloniser.

Largely based in cultural studies, post-colonialism itself is a ‘*syncretic* formation… a theoretical *creole*, a *hybrid* product… of *heterogeneous* origin,’ drawing its conceptual vocabulary from diverse disciplines. Bhabha’s poststructuralist approach based on semiotics and psychoanalysis has often been accused of not reconciling itself with socio-historical events. Benita Parry calls his approach ‘The World according to The Word.’ His psychoanalytic perspective does not allow agency for the colonised to make a conscious choice to initiate resistance. Undifferentiated by location, gender, class, or indeed as coloniser or colonised, his hybrid subject is generalised and universalised. However, the other side of this coin is that, for many artists of widely varied cultural background, his brand of generalised hybridity is an easy concept to adopt, then to adapt … and to hybridise. We see, then, in some contemporary art and its criticism, the emphasis is placed on hybrid (end product) *not* hybridisation (ongoing process), differences *not* similarities, one-sided *not* mutual transformation of the participants, in opposition to Bhabha’s theory of hybridity. There is a certain poetic symmetry in the fact that his concept of colonial hybridity is widely quoted but often misused, through just the process he postulates in his theory of hybridisation, that is to say, through translation, misinterpretation or slippage due to cultural differences.

---

49 Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 64-69. (My italics.)
50 Childs and Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, 145.
51 Quoted in Loomba, *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, 179.
3) Globalisation theory, and its creolising periphery: In the 1980s the debate about the relationship between the Western art and the rest of the world began to arise. Of the countless exhibitions mounted with that theme, ‘Primitivism’ in Twenty Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern (New York, 1984) and Les Magiciens de la Terre (Paris, 1989) can serve as two interesting cases that are indicative of a perspective of the decade. In hindsight, what was on display in these two exhibitions was not so much as the art of the world as the restricted view of the West on ‘the rest.’ In 1997, with some improved awareness of the rest of the world, Documenta 10 aimed to ‘bring out the continuing critical nature of contemporary art in the age of globalisation.’ Yet it drew a majority of artists from Europe and North America. In Johannesburg Biennale of the same year, its artistic director Okwui Enwezor stated that ‘colonialism created new communities and cultures in a way that prefigured globalisation.’ To understand globalisation he aimed to explore colonial discourse through the articulations of post-colonial theory such as hybridity and diaspora. Niru Ratnam, drawing upon Documenta 11 and its artistic director Enwezor, periodises globalisation as ‘debates about the state of the world at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.’ He further states that there was ‘a relatively straightforward evolutionary development from colonialism, through post-colonialism, to globalisation.’ He limits the arena of globalisation, stating ‘… it is hard to imagine globalisation taking place in a world that had not experienced the retreat of the classic western empires and the succeeding post-colonial condition.’ In other words, for him, globalisation started at the end of 20th century, and its concern is the experience of the colonised and the coloniser. Similarly, Harris defines globalisation as a new name for imperialism.

These definitions of globalisation found in the world of visual art contrast sharply with the variety present in social sciences, which is from the beginning of history (Pieterse, Waters) to the 1960s (Tomlinson), covering the whole world, in the three

---

54 Cited in Ibid., 283.
55 Ibid., 277-95.
56 Harris and Tate Gallery Liverpool., Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism, 23.
arenas of economy, polity and culture.\textsuperscript{57} Robertson cautions ‘… the dominant image of global interdependence has been centred on the global economy… because there has been a rapid crystallisation of a global economy in relatively recent times we are tempted into thinking that that is what defines or determines globalisation in general.’\textsuperscript{58} Pieterse notes that some of the ‘shallow globalisation’ theories that cover only the last 200 years or so make the globalisation just another word for Westernisation and modernisation, because it is contemporaneous with colonialism and nationalism. It has the unfortunate effect of enforcing Eurocentric view in analysis, and blocks out wider concerns of social relations in deep history.\textsuperscript{59} As the misgivings by Robertson and Pieterse suggest, Enwezor’s definition of globalisation echoes the general tendency in contemporary art to make the debate of globalisation solely a critique of global capitalism.

The clear hegemony of the West in global capitalism foregrounds centre-periphery relationship. Of the terms in circulation for global-local interaction, Ratnam chooses ‘creolisation’ to describe localisation of global object in the periphery. He cites the case of toys made of discarded Coca-Cola cans in Sri Lanka, discussed by Sarat Maharaj in his paper. The cans that symbolise global capitalism are literally ‘dissected and reassembled in unexpected ways,’ and are put to new use – in this case, re-sold as ‘local’ toys to tourists from the centre. [fig. 1-1] These creolised global objects were exhibited in Stuttgart and Sydney, blurring the distinction between art and popular culture. Like Hannerz, Ratnam considers creolisation as a sign that, in global cultural interaction, the idea of passive absorption of global culture by the local is overly simplistic.\textsuperscript{60} Creolisation framework attests to the agency of the local, and to the fluid and plural nature of culture.

Hybridisation, syncretisation or creolisation, whichever term is used, the mixed-ness and plurality have become the recognised condition of globality today. Artists, like any other people, live contemporary life and respond to their environment. And for

\textsuperscript{58} Robertson, “Social Theory, Cultural Relativity and the Problem of Globality,” 87-88. (Robertson’s italics.)
\textsuperscript{59} Pieterse, “Globalization as Hybridization,” 47.
\textsuperscript{60} Ratnam, “Art and Globalisation,” 303.
some artists, the current issues become the subject matter of their practice. Yinka Shonibare is an exemplary case of an artist who grounds his art firmly at the intersection of the personal, social and aesthetics. He examines his worlds through the juncture of post-modernism, post-colonialism and globalisation, using complex hybridity as a means of his investigation.

4) The art of Yinka Shonibare, and the three perspectives: A self-proclaimed ‘citizen of the world’ and ‘post-colonial hybrid,’ Yinka Shonibare was born in London of Nigerian parents in 1962. He grew up in Lagos, and attended London’s Goldsmiths College at the time of feminist debates, admiring, for example, Jenny Holzer and Cindy Sherman and other emerging artists of their generation. Shonibare’s art is a lively mixture of sculpture, installation, photography, painting, cinema, art history and popular art. Particularly noteworthy among his oeuvre is the installations with mannequins dressed in Dutch ‘waxprint’ textile. Dutch waxprint textile alone can tell wondrous tales of colonialism, globalisation and post-modernism. The fabric was based on batik techniques and patterns from the Dutch colony, the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia), first produced in Haarlem, Holland, and then in Manchester, England. After its resounding failure in Indonesia, at the end of 19th century Dutch waxprint was marketed successfully in West Africa, so much so that, with later inclusion of local patterns, it eventually became a symbol of Africa-ness for peoples of Africa. A totally contingent product of the circumstances, the fabric has nothing inherently African about it other than the fact that it grew into its symbolic status due to its popularity. Dutch waxprint has also effectively become Shonibare’s trademark.

Shonibare explains his art. ‘Yes, okay, I am here to protest, but I am going to do it like a gentleman. It is going to look very nice.’ [fig. 1-2] He wants to dress his sculptures,

---

so he uses mannequins, and clothes them lovingly in Rococo or Victorian high fashion made with wildly colourful and boldly patterned waxprint textile. He wants to protest, so he cuts off their aristocratic heads. He wants to bring down the icons, subverting high art from within, so Fragonard’s lady swings, and Enlightenment thinkers think, all clothed in ‘African’ textile, which is not African at all. The sculptures indeed look very nice... they are perfectly crafted, sensuous, provocative, and ensnaring. With their seductive beauty and intriguing theatrical set-ups in many-layered codes, Shonibare’s sculptural installations have made their way into metropolitan museums and galleries in the West as he had wanted, and now, says Shonibare, ‘It is too late.’ It is there protesting, whether the art world likes it or not.

It is easy enough to deconstruct his tableaux according to the theories and cultural types he problematises. For instance, his use of Dutch waxprint – with its Indonesian origin, colonial history and international marketing – is a critique of globalisation. His cosmopolitan biography can be interpreted along the same line as the issue of migration of people and culture. Post-modernity is well embodied in his ironic stance of using ‘fake’ African fabric to symbolise Africa. He is using pastiche and stereotypes on purpose, and is playing the game of I-know-that-you-know-that-I-know-that-you-know. As for post-colonialism, in the period European high fashion costume meticulously crafted in Dutch waxprint, we are to read Shonibare’s protest that the riches of Europe were based on the colonisation and slavery, and the European identity houses, underneath, the identity of the brutally oppressed.

What makes his art compelling, though, is something beyond all of these things. His headless mannequins play out the theatre of seduction and humour, jumbling cultures, concepts, and forms, in multiple codes, and in style. Their sometimes vociferous, sometimes subtle hybridity is no simple mixture or mimicry, but a kind that Ella Shohat calls ‘creative transcendence.’ Leela Gandhi speaks of the mood in Britain that wants to go beyond ‘the pervasive post-colonial exhaustion with the mantric iteration of the embattled past,’ and to deal with wider and perhaps more urgent issues.

---

65 Guldemond and Mackert, ”To Entertain and Provoke: Western Influences in the Work of Yinka Shonibare,” 36-41.
66 Quoted in Loomba, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, 178.
of class, gender, and sexuality. Shonibare does go beyond. And while going at these more urgent issues, moreover, he laughs with the viewer, at the absurd situations, at his interpretation of them, and at himself. As a result, Shonibare’s art appeals to many senses, emotions, and mind simultaneously, working at the level of affect, i.e., ‘a synaesthetic relation established between work and viewer, which is in excess of visuality’ as Deleuze defines how art works.

As can be seen in Shonibare’s art, the shared penchant for hybridity by the three theories of the day – post-modernism, post-colonialism and globalisation – has made hybridisation the connecting concept that draws ‘equivalences across different historical experiences.’ Hybridity has become a convenient sign of cultural interaction of many kinds. It encourages the view that cultural interaction is hybridisation. This equation raises two questions. First, is hybridisation the only way cultures mingle? Effective though Shonibare’s hybridity is, there could be many other ways the cultural interactions occur, and many other ways the results of interactions manifest. The popularity of hybridity could be hindering us from recognising other forms of cultural interactions and their visual manifestations. The second question is the term hybridity itself. The popularity and ease of use must not blind us to the fact that the concept of hybridity has its share of problems, and its current de facto symbolic status as the product of all cultural interactions needs to be questioned in order for us to better understand the process and product(s) of cultural interaction.

III. Predicament of hybridity

Bhabha once remarked ‘No critical term… has developed such instant street credibility as postmodernism in the late 1970s and the 1980s.’ Coming soon after, post-colonialism and one of its key concepts, hybridity, also gained similarly rapid credibility, and Bhabha played no small part in it. By now the concept of hybridity has

---

70 Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 39.
entered the common-sense arena, and that status creates wide variety of use and misuse, denotation and connotation, transformation and misunderstanding of the term, both in academia and society in general. Post-colonialism, or at least one of its most notable enthusiasts, Salman Rushdie, celebrates hybridity. He commends hybridity by saying, ‘… hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world.’ On the face of it, the meaning of hybridisation – a bit of this and a bit of that – seems straightforward: mixing two elements to create a third. Yet on closer observation of hybridisation, one faces considerable conceptual pitfalls and complications such as: 1) power imbalance, 2) homogenising tendency, and 3) residual biologism.

1) Power imbalance, and resulting selective use of the term: The term hybridisation has the problem of implying ‘simple mixing,’ and parity in mixing. Yet in reality the power relations and disparity in resources determine the mixing structure and resulting product. Politically, as Clifford observes, what matters is ‘who deploys nationality or transnationality, authenticity or hybridity, against whom, with what relative power and ability to sustain a hegemony.’ This inscribed imbalance is not apparent in the concept of hybridisation. Citing Shohat, Pieterse urges theorising, not merely celebrating, hybridity so as not to sanctify the fait accompli of colonial violence. Bhabha’s hopeful view on the power of the hybrid notwithstanding, historically, the ability to cause ambivalence and terror in the mind of coloniser did not give much agency to the hybrid colonised. This inscribed imbalance of power manifests itself in the selective application of the term to the less privileged of the pair. Hybridisation, like its cousin creolisation, is a value-loaded word. ‘Despite postcolonial attempts to foreground the mutual transculturation of coloniser and colonised,’ says Gandhi, ‘celebrations of hybridity generally refer to the destabilising of colonised culture.’

Whoever has heard the art of Monet or Picasso being described as hybrid?

---

74 Ibid., 147.
75 Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 10.
77 Pieterse, “Globalization as Hybridization,” 55.
2) **Homogenising tendency**: Clifford states that hybridity theories have dismantled many types of purisms, and succeeded in bringing the contact zones into view. At the same time, however, they have shown a tendency to homogenise different hybridities, ignoring historical situations and power relations.79 Pieterse reminds us that in identities, there is a continuum of hybridities, which is often ignored. The assimilationist end of hybridity, as in the case of V.S. Naipaul, looks up to the centre, mimicking its hegemony, while the destabilising end of hybridity, as in the case of Rushdie, subverts the centre.80 In Bhabha’s case, as mentioned before, he does not particularise his hybridity by gender, class, location or as coloniser/colonised. There is a vast difference in colonial experience among that of India, China and Australia, for instance, which he chooses to generalise. Shohat points out that Bhabha does not discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity such as ‘forced assimilation, internalised self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry and creative transcendence.’81 Furthermore, in its popularity, Bhabha’s concept of hybrid identity is extrapolated from colonial to planetary, whether or not colonial experience is applicable to the person or culture in question.

In contemporary art, some critics observe, mindless celebration of hybridity is turning it into a wrong kind of multiculturalism. Replacing unity, hybridity has become a requirement or norm for some people. Hybridity concepts seem to demand non-white artists to create visually hybridised art that reveal all their roots (ethnicity) and routes (travels), demonstrating the juxtaposed pieces as traces of power struggles and contact relations.82 The same is not expected of white artists,83 as if Euro-American cultures were homogeneous. Fisher laments that the colonial thought equates what is visible with the ‘truth,’ expecting the superficial characteristics to reflect the inner truth. But superficial typology, a product of essentialism, never amounts to a meaningful, individual utterance in art.84 Having gained popularity and entered the arena of

79 Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 183.
81 Cited in Loomba, *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, 178.
82 Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 182.
common sense, the concept of hybridity is in danger of becoming another type of homogenising essentialism.85

3) The residual biologism: In hybrid metaphor, there is a problem of the residual biologism that lingers. Tomlinson explains that the word hybridity carries two distinct positions. One is ‘original purity’ and the other, ‘hybrid all the way down.’ The ‘original purity’ idea derives from the word’s origin in biology, in which two discrete species were crossed, producing pseudo-species. In celebrating cultural hybridity today, are we saying that two ‘pure’ and discrete cultures came together to produce a third, as in biology? That is to essentialise culture, which is against the now commonly accepted idea of culture as fluid, dynamic and ever changing. If one takes non-essentialising position, then culture is ‘hybrid all the way down.’ Still, when Rushdie describes a hybrid or himself as a mongrel, he invokes, no doubt inadvertently, the idea of pure origin.86 Another throwback to biological mixing is the perceived static state of hybrid. Hybrid in botany or zoology is seen, by a layman, as a finished and stable product of genetic crossing, clearly known and knowable, remaining so until some outside agent will cross it again with something else. Yet, in Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, the colonial identities are ‘unstable, agonised, and in constant flux.’87 Every colonial encounter plays and replays mutual misinterpretation, creating new hybrid identities. For the colonial subjects there is no unified, whole, true self or identity. Similarly, Stuart Hall conceptualises identity as a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’88 This sense of fluidity is missing in the biological hybrid metaphor. I believe that such a residual biological image of two pure elements creating automatically a mixed and stable third, has little commonality with the dynamics of cultural formation. The essence of cultural interaction is the often-difficult negotiations that take place within us and between societies in order to create new meanings. And the new meanings will continue to change depending on circumstances. The concept of cultural hybridity, says Tomlinson, ‘could benefit from jettisoning all this quasi-biological baggage.’

86 Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture, 143-44.
87 Loomba, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, 178.
88 Ibid., 181.
‘Some term is clearly needed,’ continues Tomlinson, ‘to capture the general phenomenon of cultural mixing that is unquestionably increasing with the advance of globalisation.’ He allows that the notion of hybrid culture can be useful for something like hip-hop youth culture, but cautions that hybridisation is ‘an aspect, not a general description of the global cultural condition.’ Naming is a critical issue. By naming and categorising, we tend to simplify and fix what is complex and dynamical in our lived experience. For Paul Gilroy ‘…creolization, metissage, mestizaje, and hybridity… these terms are rather unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity.’ Similarly, Friedman comments that ‘[hybridisation] would tell us nothing about the processes involved.’ He stresses that it is necessary to examine how, not what of cultural production. Given the fact that inner truths do not necessarily manifest themselves outwardly, we cannot rely on visible hybrid product as the indicator of cultural interaction. I propose a different perspective, a perspective of process rather than product, as a way to better understand the nature of cultural interaction. The process nouns currently in use such as hybridisation, creolisation and syncretisation do not serve when it comes to examining the process itself, because they specify the results in advance, i.e., as hybrid, creole, etc. We need to examine the process of the phenomenon before declaring one of its products as the general description of the phenomenon. The popular and commonsense status of the term hybrid has been blinding us to the fact that there might be other forms of cultural interaction.

VI. Dochaku: a perspective

Dochaku-ka – process noun of dochaku – conveys ‘the idea of making something indigenous.’ There is no specific noun for the product of this process. The product depends on the circumstances. It can take the form of hybrid, creole, or something other. Poet or prose? The process nouns of which we currently speak are not adequate for the examination of the process itself, because they specify the results in advance, i.e., as hybrid, creole, etc. We need to examine the process of the phenomenon before declaring one of its products as the general description of the phenomenon. The popular and commonsense status of the term hybrid has been blinding us to the fact that there might be other forms of cultural interaction.

89 Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture, 144-48. (Tomlinson’s italics.)
92 Quoted in Pieterse, Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange, 98.
93 Friedman, “Global System, Globalization and the Parameters of Modernity,” 81.
entirely different. Liberated in this way from any pre-determined image of end product, with the concept of dochaku, we can examine the process of cultural interaction, and observe the product as a trace or by-product of the process. In this section I will explain 1) dochaku-ka as a process of cultural evolution, discuss 2) the place of an individual in dochaku process, then clarify 3) the nature of dochaku concept, and finally address 4) the role of dochaku concept in the analysis of cultural interaction.

1) Dochaku-ka as a process of cultural evolution: Cultures being ‘negotiated, present process,’96 their interaction is akin to a dialogue. Robertson’s glocalism borrowed its concept from the term ‘dochaku’ as it was used in micro marketing. As one way to explain dochaku-ka and describe its negotiated dialogical process, I would now like to reverse the direction and borrow from glocalism the idea of particularisation of the universal and universalisation of the particular.

In applying the concept of simultaneous particularisation and universalisation to art production in particular, we can take the ‘universal’ to be, that which moves viewers of various cultures, and the ‘particular’ to be an artist or her artistic orientation. The interpenetrating relationship between particularisation and universalisation is a fluid dialogue in which every utterance affects every other utterance, reshaping the whole as the process continues. When we are drawn to a work of art, or a certain culture and its aesthetics, I believe we are responding to something universal in them. We as artists or art viewers might decide to learn from it, and internalise it, in order to develop the result of the encounter between the two cultures (or self and other) into our own unique art, or our own unique sensibility. This step is particularization of the universal. Particularisation alone does not make art, however. Art is not a self-enclosed inward statement in isolation. It presupposes audiences, which means that some kind of communication is sought. To communicate, art has to contain something universal, something that appeals to viewers of various backgrounds and orientations. Therefore universalisation of particular starts at some early stage of art production, along with particularisation. In so doing, the artist develops her specificity to the depth that it becomes communicable to the viewer. Eagleton articulates this hard-to-

96 Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, 273.
articulate process as, ‘Art recreates individual things in the form of their universal essences, and in doing so makes them inimitably themselves.’ As he implies, particularisation and universalisation are not consecutive, but concurrent and continuous two-way flow, complex like a good conversation. To make the matter even more complicated, in art production, individualising specific cultures through particularisation and universalisation presents a paradox like that of identity politics.

The paradox of identity politics... is that one needs an identity in order to feel free to get rid of it. The only thing worse than having an identity is not having one... Like all radical politics, identity politics are self-abolishing: one is free when one no longer needs to bother oneself too much about who one is.

As in identity politics, if blatant cultural characteristics assert themselves at the expense of the artist’s specificity, the resulting work becomes representation of a type. A type is a caricature that locks itself out of being considered as an utterance by a complex individual that is the artist. To get rid of stereotypical representation, the artist needs to ingest and internalise the aesthetics of given cultures in order to be free of them. Then and only then we can say that dochaku-ka of the incoming culture, which includes re-working of the receiving culture, has taken place in the locality, that is, within the artist herself.

Once the work of art leaves the artist and goes out into the wide wild world, a new round of dochaku process starts all over again with new sets of artist and art-viewers, in continuous interpenetrating movement between particularisation and universalisation. The work also joins the common pool of concepts and objects of the given culture, providing background and context for the subsequent cultural formation. Thus the cumulative effect of continuous dochaku-ka has potential to form an outward spiral movement of forces, generating further cultural interactions and fertilisation. Two examples from different locations and times will help to visualise this process.

98 Ibid., 66.
The first example is Zen Buddhism and its on-going evolution. Buddhism originated in the 5th century BC in India. China responded to its universal appeal and embraced it as its own. In the 6th century the Indian monk Bodhidharma arrived in China and saw how Buddhism had degenerated into devotionalism. He exhorted direct insight through one’s own experience, establishing a sect of Buddhism called Ch’an. With the influence of native Taoism, Ch’an evolved in the next 200 years into a uniquely Chinese religion, reflecting and constituting her culture. It prospered as the strongest religious force in the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) periods. From China Ch’an travelled to Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

Japan received Buddhism through China in the 6th century. By the time it reached Japan, it had already changed its emphasis from the original Indian metaphysics to a more pragmatic worldview, as a result of its contact with the Chinese native Taoism among others. In Japan, Buddhism’s universal appeal was eagerly received, but was modified again, this time with her indigenous religion of Shintoism. In the 12th century the Japanese monk Eisai travelled to China and brought back one lineage of Ch’an called Rinzai. In 1215 Dōgen brought back another lineage, and established the Soto school. These schools are called the Zen sect of Buddhism. Zen is the Japanese rendition of Ch’an, which in turn is based on Sanskrit dhyana, meaning ‘a meditational way of life in which the present moment is lived with full attention and clear awareness.’ Acting in corroboration with other cultural elements of the time, Zen fostered many aspects of what we consider today as traditional Japanese aesthetics, found in such diverse forms as architecture, landscape design, calligraphy, painting, haiku poetry, theatre, martial arts, flower arrangement and tea ceremony.

In the mid-20th century Zen Buddhism was introduced to the West, through the efforts of Daisetz Suzuki (1870-1966) and others. Instead of burdening Westerners with the discipline and methodology honed over hundreds of years in Japan, Suzuki emphasised human capacity for enlightenment through experience, experimentation and self-reliance. He attracted many of the most creative thinkers and artists of the time, including Erich Fromm, C. G. Jung, Arnold Toynbee, Thomas Merton and John

100 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, Zen and Japanese Buddhism, eighth ed. (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1973), 3-44.
Cage. Works by Ad Reinhardt, Agnes Martin, Mark Rothko, Robert Ryman, and many others of the period show affinities with Buddhist or Taoist views. In the 1960s Zen practice centres emerged in the United States. By the end of the 1970s the Asian masters had successfully transmitted Buddhist teachings to their American heirs. At the Zen centres the focus was on formal posture and silent meditation, which led some practitioners initially to devalue the teaching of Suzuki as lacking in methodology. Yet it was the liberal nature of his teaching that appealed to the intellectual life in the West, and made the subsequent establishment of formal training possible.\textsuperscript{102} Today there are Zen centres in various parts of the world, no doubt undergoing various indigenisations.

In China and Japan, successful \textit{dochaku-ka} of Buddhism took place. The societies indigenised the incoming concept, and by their very act of indigenisation – taking the new as their own into themselves – both societies partly re-created themselves. At the same time, by particularising the universal Buddhism, they created something new that could be offered to the world as universal once again.

The second example of \textit{dochaku} process is Japanese art and its influence on European art from the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} to the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, especially on Impressionism and Post-impressionism. The wave of influence came in two phases. The first can be called \textit{japonaiserie}, and it denotes an attitude of uncritical enthusiasm for things Japanese. During this phase many artists painted unfamiliar objects from Japan such as fans and kimono in the familiar style of the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century Europe for the pleasure of evoking the exotic. This enthusiasm might have gone the way of \textit{chinoiserie} of decades earlier, which had passed without leaving fundamental changes in the European arts, but the discovery of the \textit{ukiyo-e} (wood-cut prints) changed the scenario. It affected the artists and art audiences of the time deeply, changing the course of painting in Europe. This phase is named \textit{japonisme}. There is no simple or distinct cutting point between the two, however, and the two attitudes and tastes existed side-by-side for some time.\textsuperscript{103}

In terms of \textit{dochaku-ka}, it can be said that while \textit{japonaiserie} did not indigenise itself, \textit{japonisme} certainly did.


\textsuperscript{103} Whitford, \textit{Japanese Prints and Western Painters}, 104.
The art scene of the mid-19th century France was a particularly fertile ground for fundamental changes, with many painters restlessly searching for alternatives for the age-old salon system and its dogmatic canon. Seeking a way out of their academism, the artists found new directions, not incremental minor innovations, in their exposure to the alien Japanese aesthetics. What makes their response interesting is that while the majority seemed to have appreciated the general aesthetics of *ukiyo-e*, each artist took a few aspects of it selectively to incorporate them into their art for regeneration. For instance Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec grasped the graphic abstraction of *ukiyo-e* with its simple forms and flat colours along with the flowing lines. Degas found inspiration in the subject matter, the unstudied poses and unusual perspective. The landscapists adopted and adapted the way the Japanese artists had depicted the changing seasons and the fugitive effects of rain and wind.

The art of Claude Monet is a particularly apt example of *dochaku-ka* of Japanese aesthetics. David Bromfield convincingly argues the critical role Japanese art played in the formation of Impressionism, chronicling the relationship between Japanese art and Monet’s work from 1860 to 1900. Discovery of Japanese art by Parisian artists, critics and collectors was a progressive one. Like his peers though, Monet believed from the start that *ukiyo-e* was an example of a new realism that would lead the way out of the aesthetic impasse of the time, and started collecting *ukiyo-e* around 1865. In 1867 there was an international exhibition in which Japanese art made its first official appearance. Then in 1873 a large number of new acquisitions by the millionaire Henri Cernuschi went on public display. By 1883 Paris had been well exposed to Japanese art including *ukiyo-e* and watercolour paintings through exhibitions, demonstrations and visits by Japanese artists, so much so that there was a large ‘retrospective’ exhibition of Japanese art in that year. As many artists of the time, Monet started with appropriation of the exotic motifs in the 1860s, but as his understanding of Japanese art grew, the influence became more and more fundamental and pivotal for the evolution of his art. In the 1870s his observation of the critical role brush strokes played in Japanese art led him to acquire the ‘freedom of autonomous mark making’ in his painting. By the mid 1880s Monet was exploring ‘the deliberate simplification and contrasts of form and of colour, which Duret identified as Japanese.’

---

104 Ibid., 248.
following the example of *The Views of Mt Fuji* by Hokusai, Monet explored his subjects through multiple images. Through the progressive discovery and indigenisation of Japanese art, Monet orchestrated the evolution of his unique art. ‘Monet took far more than a few formal compositional tricks from the Western experience of Japanese art, he took a coherent new attitude to painting and its subject.’ Bromfield concludes by exhorting critical investigation of cultural exchanges in arts to right the West’s ‘tremendous difficulty in acknowledging the strength of non-European cultural concerns in Western art practice and culture.’

The influence of Japanese art on the Impressionists and Post-impressionists continued for about 60 years. During that time the artists took in some universal appeal of the Japanese art, successfully particularised and developed them into their own art, then presented the resulting art to the world in turn, as their contribution with new universal appeal.

2) The place of an individual in dochaku process: The ‘culture’ discussed in the first example, Zen, is of the anthropological/group sense of culture, while the second example deals with the other ‘culture,’ that of artistic/individual sense of culture. For Robertson ‘small-scale’ individuals are a vital part of the globalisation discourse along with other elemental points of reference such as national societies, the world system of societies, and human kind. This research project is built upon the experiences of individual artists, so the micro picture of individuals is as important as the macro picture of groups. The idea of an individual engaged in the process of cultural interaction brings the term ‘cosmopolitan’ to mind. However, from the late 18th century aristocrats on Grand Tour to today’s culture-vultures and international academics, the term could conjure up a caricature of an ‘affluent, educated (white?), western, middle-class, information-rich’ traveller. A more apt and profound sentiment of cosmopolitan, which I am using in this research, is as Said describes.

---


107 Robertson, "Social Theory, Cultural Relativity and the Problem of Globality," 79.

The more one is able to leave one’s cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.  

As for Hannerz, he pronounces, ‘…there are cosmopolitans, and there are locals.’ He points out that not all who travel are cosmopolitans. There are tourists who travel seeking, what Paul Theroux calls, ‘home plus.’ India is home plus servants, and Africa is home plus elephants. For most exiles and labour migrants needing to know another culture is ‘not a fringe benefit but a necessary cost.’ Some expatriates, like colonialists, are hardly the models of cosmopolitan, detesting ‘going native.’ Hannerz’s cosmopolitan has ‘a willingness to engage with the Other... an intellectual and aesthetic openness… an ability to make one’s way into other culture,’ and as a cultural aficionado, views cultures as artworks. He may pick and choose various elements from other cultures, or may surrender totally to an alien culture. In either case his commitment is conditional, and ‘All the time he knows where the exit is.’ The part these cosmopolitans play is an important one. Hannerz believes that they bring coherence to world culture, which, without cosmopolitans, could remain simply a sum of all locals. As such, Hannerz’s cosmopolitans are rather special people. He cites, for instance, the expatriate painters and writers in Paris between the world wars, with their vocational zeal for cultural newness, while today’s cosmopolitans tend to be organisational men or intellectuals.

Tomlinson believes that in this globalised world we need to cultivate cosmopolitan cultural disposition, if we can think of ‘cosmopolitan’ in non-elitist, non-ethnocentric, non-patriarchal, and non-globalist terms. In opposition to Hannerz’s somewhat elitist and globalist stance that tends to denigrate local experience and practice, Tomlinson describes his cosmopolitan as an ordinary person, but who, in her everyday life, routinely experiences the wider world as touching her local lifeworld and vice versa. He defines his cosmopolitanism as ‘ethical glocalism,’ borrowing the term glocal from Robertson. The original concept of ‘dochaku’ on which glocal is based is:

109 Said, Orientalism, 259.
important for Tomlinson. The principle of dochaku – ‘adapting one’s (farming) techniques to suit local conditions’ – is the principle on which his cosmopolitanism is based. In adapting the incoming idea to the local and personal needs, his cosmopolitan ‘concretises [it] in terms relevant to this lifeworld.’ He stipulates that there are two sensibilities required of a cosmopolitan. First, she needs to have an active sense of belonging to the wider world, feeling common risks, possibilities and mutual responsibilities. The other sensibility needed is a grasp of pluralism and openness to cultural differences. This awareness is reflexive, that is to say, she questions her own cultural assumptions and myths, not falling into the trap of taking them as normative or universal. These two sensibilities are not antithetical, but are mutually tempering, promoting on-going dialogue within herself and with cultural others. For Tomlinson, as well as for Robertson, the local and global (the particular and the universal, in Robertson’s case) are not polarities but mutually ‘interpenetrating’ principles.

As can be expected, there are many other views on cosmopolitanism. For Bhabha, cosmopolitanism is ‘always to come,’ a project that we must strive for without finite and bounded definition, like the concept of democracy. On the opposite end of the picture of cosmopolitanism is Friedman’s scathing take on the global art curators, art and literary critics and cultural anthropologists who cling to their ill-deserved monopoly in pronouncing what otherness is. I believe we need to have a level-headed and practical attitude to cosmopolitanism. Today cosmopolitanism is ordinary. Or, occasions to try that perspective are ordinary. As Eagleton points out, ‘it is not a choice between being a citizen of the world and a member of one’s local parish… we are both of these for different purposes on different occasions.’ Giddens describes the cosmopolitan approach as an ‘intelligent relationship between equals.’ As such, the cultural interaction between cosmopolitan and local, or between cosmopolitans, is dialogical, not monological, respecting the autonomy of the other.

---

112 Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture, 194-204.
113 Huddart, Homi K. Bhabha, 143.
114 Friedman, "Global System, Globalization and the Parameters of Modernity," 79.
116 Quoted in Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture, 195.
117 Ibid., 203.
is not a matter of mileage, but is ‘a perspective, a state of mind, or – to take a more
process-oriented view – a mode of managing meaning,’ as Hannerz positions it.
One way to analyse how we manage meaning is through the concept of mindscape.

In today’s world of global capitalism, it comes as no surprise that much of the
pragmatic perspectives on cultural interaction are found in the field of business
management. The theory of mindscape types, originated by the Japanese multi-
disciplinary scholar Magoroh Maruyama in 1974, is such an example. Mindscape
types are not personality types but epistemological types, the way we ‘know’ things.
He developed his theory as a result of his quest for the way to contextual reasoning in
the interdisciplinary projects he had been involved in, which required interaction
among science, politics, aesthetics and business management. Maruyama believes that
although people see and make sense of the world in many different ways, there are
four recognizable ways of knowing, which he names H, I, S and G types.

Briefly put, H-type believes in homogeneity, the universal way, and classifies things
in a hierarchical order. I-type believes in heterogeneity, the individualistic way,
isolationist stance, and random relationship of things. S-type believes in
heterogeneity, mutualist stance, interactive and contextual relationships. G-type
believes in heterogeneity, mutualising, interactive and contextualizing mode of
operation. He cites Japanese garden and floral art as S or G-type, for their use of
idiosyncrasies of each element maximally. The same can be said of any successful
sports teams. The haiku poetry is a G-type art, because it invites multiple
interpretations by its deliberate incompleteness. The works by Picasso and Stravinsky
show many of the G-type characteristics. Both S and G types are ‘polycocular,’ being
able to know things from different perspectives. They believe in possibilities of
genuine creativity through interaction of ideas among many persons, or many ideas
within one person. The difference between S and G types, as I understand it, is while
S-type simply accepts the otherness (contextual, co-operative), G-type actively seeks
and utilises (contextualizing, co-generative) the otherness. The way for a successful
interdisciplinary or cross-cultural activity is firstly to realize these epistemological

---

118 Hannerz, Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places, 102.
types exist, and to understand the types other than your own, then to utilize various mindscape types to their utmost potential.\textsuperscript{119}

This mindscape principle is applicable, I believe, in inter-cultural experience within one person, such as a cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitanism is self-reflexive, and expansive in its management of meanings. As a G-type, a cosmopolitan revels in the exposure to the new, and manages to re-contextualise both the new and the old, generating her own specificity in the process. She pushes ‘on and on’ in her analysis, not resting snugly within the boundary of common sense.\textsuperscript{120} Thus, the way of managing meaning in cosmopolitanism, and the G-type mindscape’s way of heterogeneous knowing and creating meaning, will serve as pointers as to what to look for in our analysis of artist, her work, and her worlds. Corresponding to the ‘agency of actors’ discussed in section I, the cosmopolitanism and mindscape concepts emphasise the agency and responsibility of artist, highlighting the importance of artist’s orientation toward her worlds.

3) The nature of dochaku concept: As seen, I propose that the concept of dochaku to be used in both macro and micro, anthropologist’s and artist’s sense of cultures. It deals with the process of cultural interaction rather than the product. Unlike such terms as hybridisation or syncretisation, there are three convenient characteristics in the concept of dochaku that make somewhat more objective observations possible. Comparing dochaku with hybrid and glocal will help clarify the nature of dochaku concept.

Firstly, dochaku suspends value judgement. Being a concept that examines the process rather than the product, dochaku assigns no pre-determined value to the act or the end product. As a result, the term allows usage equally for either of the two constituents of mixing, irrespective of their power relationship. In contrast, as discussed previously in the ‘predicament of hybridity’ section, the term hybrid is often selectively applied to the lesser of the pair in mixing rather than equally to either. For instance, while Monet’s art is unlikely to be labelled as a hybrid between European and Japanese art,

\textsuperscript{119} Magoroh Maruyama, Context and Complexity: Cultivating Contextual Understanding (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 1-34.
\textsuperscript{120} Hannerz, Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places, 109.
certain Japanese art that has been influenced by European art might well be called as such. Clearly, hybrid is a value-loaded term, therefore, it is apt to be applied only to the less privileged of the constituents in mixing. Or, conversely, because it is applied only to the less privileged, it carries a clear message of hierarchy. By contrast, in dochaku, all that matters is the process itself. So if we take the example of pasta and Marco Polo, Italy does not have to feel belittled by acknowledging that, most likely, ‘her’ national cuisine pasta originates from the noodles brought back from China by Polo. From the dochaku perspective, what counts is how Italy has made pasta her own with her creative innovations, not that it has foreign roots.

Secondly, dochaku is non-actor-specific. Dochaku can be applied to successful indigenisation of any scale among any actors, regardless of their scale relationship. By contrast, glocal – ‘a global outlook adapted to local conditions’121 – necessarily specifies the two actors and their scale – the vast globe, and the tiny local, thereby excluding other types of relationship. For example, from Kublai Khan’s point of view, at the time of Polo’s travel in the 13th century, China was a producer of global products while Venice was a small city-state in periphery. Travelling from the centre to periphery, the case of pasta can be explained as glocalisation, or as dochaku-ka. As for the cultural interaction among the city-states of the Italian Peninsula, that is to say, within the periphery, it cannot be called glocalisation. It can, however, be interpreted from the perspective of dochaku, since dochaku relationship includes the relationship among the locals as well as between the global and the local.

Thirdly, dochaku is non-direction-specific. It neither specifies the originating location of the idea, nor specifies from where to where the adopted idea moves. Whereas in glocalisation, if we take CNN as an example, ‘a global outlook’ is adjusted by the global to fit the local, and is moved from the centre to the periphery. The open-endedness of dochaku encompasses movements over time as well as over space. Cultures from one era, for example, can go through dochaku process in another, as in the case of the Arabic and ancient Greek knowledge being assimilated to form 14th century Italian Renaissance.

Thus by focusing on the process, and by carrying little political baggage, the concept of _dochaku_ allows us to clear the table as it were, to allow us to observe and describe objectively what we could not see before. It also widens the horizon of enquiry by including cultural interactions other than between the global and local, and across time as well as space.

**4) The role of dochaku concept in analysis of cultural interaction:** Said expresses his misgivings about the viability of speaking of ‘culture’ in _Orientalism_. Clifford counters, ‘There is no need to discard theoretically all conceptions of “cultural” differences, especially once this is seen as not simply received from tradition, language or environment but also as made in new political-cultural conditions of global relationality.’ Collectively constituted difference is not necessarily static or dichotomous as Said fears. Unlike the Orientalists of the past, today in cultural interaction with the other, we can strive to appreciate underlying cultural similarities while exploring the critical differences, and be open to change for mutual benefits. Certainly, more often than not, there is unsurmountable imbalance in power and resources in the interaction, but it is still a negotiated process. And to examine the process of negotiation in cultural interaction, the perspective of _dochaku_ could give us objective views, due to its nature as discussed above.

What this amounts to is that the concept of _dochaku_ and the perspective the term creates in us, may allow us to escape from ethnocentrism a little. Prevalent and formidable though it is, Euro-centrism is but one example of countless ethnocentrisms and other centrisms we practice. As Terry Eagleton chides, we should not be ‘ethnocentric about ethnocentricity.’ In any cultural interaction, ‘One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes.’ Given that fact, the relatively ‘neutral’ term _dochaku_ and the accompanying process oriented perspective will give us a slight leg-up towards balanced views, compared to the power-infected terms such as hybridisation, creolisation and syncretisation that

---

122 Clifford, _The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art_, 274. (Clifford's italics.)
123 Eagleton, _The Idea of Culture_, 57.
124 Clifford, _Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century_, 182.
come with heavy historical and political baggage. With less of that baggage, perhaps we can hope to see what we could not see before.

What, then, compels individuals or societies to import new ideas from the ‘others,’ and go through the not-always-painless process of dochaku? For an individual artist, learning from traditions or others, and then surpassing them – whatever the name she gives to that process – is a necessary act in search of her unique voice. As for societies, in examining the Meiji period in which the new Japanese government went about learning from Europe with an astonishing zeal and speed, D. Eleanor Westney cites the obvious advantage for the ‘latecomer’ of needing to spend less time in acquiring the knowledge. She also points out, however, that given the differences in the cultural environment and context, it is inevitable for the ‘latecomer’ to go through much self-reflection and accompanying adjustments in learning from the ‘firstcomer.’ In other words, successful emulation necessitates innovation.  

Robertson reports that nation-states have learned from other societies in various importation and hybridisation projects, especially since the late nineteenth century. He thus gives Meiji Restoration as a particular example of a general phenomenon of that period.  

By the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century Western social science had become a ‘cultural resource’ in a number of global regions – most notably in East Asia, where there was a long-standing cultural tendency to juxtapose superficially contradictory sets of ideas in syncretic form.  

[Japan’s] paradigmatic status is inherent in its very long and successful history of selective incorporation and syncretisation of ideas from other cultures in such a way as to particularize the universal and, so to say, return the product of that process to the world as a uniquely Japanese contribution to the universal.  

In general terms the above passages explain nicely indeed, one of the many processes through which cultures evolve. Considering the historical trans-cultural interactions

127 ———, “Social Theory, Cultural Relativity and the Problem of Globality,” 83.
128 Ibid., 76.
discussed so far, however, it is amusing to note that, enlightened as he is, Robertson lets slip a mild symptom of Eurocentri-itis (West as an inventor, East as an innovator). When the process of particularisation of the universal and universalisation of the particular through *dochaku* process that takes place anywhere in the world, is regarded as an ordinary manner of cultural evolution, then we will be able to say that the world we live in is truly globalising.

Turning from mainly macro to micro, from the anthropologists’ to artists’ sense of culture, in the following four chapters, I will discuss how each of the four artists selected for this research project has gone about making certain elements of Japanese aesthetics his own in the evolution of his art practice.
I - 1
Toys made of re-cycled tin cans, sold to tourists.

I - 2
The Swing (after Fragonard)
by Yinka Shonibare
2001
Mannequin, Dutch waxprint cotton, swing, artificial foliage
330 x 350 x 220 cm
2. Frank Lloyd Wright and the Spectre of Japan

In his introductory essay in *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, the historian Vincent Scully convincingly argues that one of Frank Lloyd Wright’s exceptional abilities was the way he continuously condensed multiple sources into a new unity. Scully lists no less than 23 examples of the perceived sources ranging from Amerindian pyramid to Le Corbusier.\(^1\) Although Scully mentions Japanese influence only in passing in his list, Japanese aesthetics is one exceptional case that Wright (1867-1959) himself freely acknowledged as a significant influence. There again, though, he insisted that his indebtedness was philosophical, not formal.\(^2\) I do not find his protests convincing and, in this chapter, I will examine the access he had to Japanese culture, and how he made use of it in his remarkably creative artistic career that spanned well over six decades.

1. The ‘channels’

Among the many critics and historians who allude to Japan as an influence on Wright’s art, Kevin Nute is outstanding in the thoroughness of investigation in his book *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: the Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright*. He meticulously addresses the question of how and when Wright came in contact with certain elements of Japanese aesthetics, and what influence these contacts – ‘channels’ in his words – might have had on Wright’s art. In this section, I borrow largely from Nute the basic historical information on the ‘channels,’ to set the scene for my discussion and analysis in the two later sections. The ‘channels’ I find relevant for this research are: 1) *ukiyo-e*

---


woodcut prints, 2) traditional Japanese architecture, 3) Lao-tzu’s spatial concept, and 4) the Boston Orientalists.

**Ukiyo-e:** Deserving the title ‘Wright’s other passion,’ Japanese woodcut print *ukiyo-e* was of critical importance for Frank Lloyd Wright. He was first introduced to *ukiyo-e* in the 1880s, Nute speculates, by his first employer Joseph Silsbee who collected *objets d’art* like so many aesthetically-aware others of the period. By the time he sailed to Japan for the first time in 1905 Wright’s love of woodcut prints had become an obsession. And by his second trip in 1913 he had become an acknowledged authority in the field, and was entrusted to buy prints on behalf of the collectors Spaulding brothers, spending $125,000. Throughout his architect career Wright acted as a respected collector and dealer of Japanese prints, at times using his considerable collection as collateral to tide over his frequent financial troubles. Wright admitted the significance of *ukiyo-e* in his life and architecture by saying, ‘If Japanese prints were to be deducted from my education, I don’t know what direction the whole might have taken.’

There are four ways Wright applied the lessons from his *ukiyo-e* ‘education’ in his practice. The first and most obvious is the graphic style and technique he employed in his architectural renderings in his early career with the help from his assistant Marion Mahony. In the Thomas Hardy House drawing of the Wasmuth portfolio [fig. 2-1], for example, one can see the clear adaptation of Hiroshige’s *Kameyama, Clearing Weather after the Snow* [fig. 2-2] in its extreme low angle perspective and pure lines. Its narrow format recalls a Japanese hanging scroll. In Wright’s drawings, as in *ukiyo-e*, the insignificant are eliminated, the forms are simplified to the point of abstraction, and without shadings, the lines are used to their utmost lyrical potential. Wright aimed to seize upon the essentials in his drawings – just like the *ukiyo-e* masters had done.

---

7 Meech-Pekarik, “Frank Lloyd Wright's Other Passion,” 137-38.
In visual art, arrangement of forms in space creates composition, and that is the second lesson Wright found in *ukiyo-e*. After the ‘elimination of the insignificant,’ and simplification of the forms, the *ukiyo-e* artists arranged them in space in, for Wright, the most refreshing and unique ways. Wright was sometimes seen drawing lines on poor-quality *ukiyo-e* prints in order to learn their simple underlying geometric structures. Henry-Russel Hitchcock corroborates that Wright ‘… derived his unusual sense of visual composition from the woodblock print… sharing something common with… Toulouse-Lautrec.’

The third application is less stylistic, and is more crucial for Wright’s later mature practice; it concerns his concept of space. As seen in Hiroshige’s *Yasumi Bridge and Maple Trees at Mama* [fig. 2-3], framing the scene with tree trunks and foliage was an often-used convention in *ukiyo-e*. This ‘inner-framing’ device was borrowed by Wright and Mahony with startling effects in the drawings of the William Winslow House [fig. 2-4] and Unity Temple among many others. The inner-framing acts to deny the frame of the picture itself, bringing the viewer into the depicted scene in the picture. The sense of continuous and shared space between the viewer and the picture defies the two-dimensional space, which Nute believes, led Wright to eventual negation of the three-dimensional frame, that is to say, the Western convention of a room and house as a ‘box.’

The fourth and most general, but nonetheless profound, role of the prints for Wright was as confirmation. He considered *ukiyo-e* a supreme ‘organic’ art form, a parallel to the ‘organic’ architecture he strived for throughout his career. His book *The Japanese Print: an Interpretation* is not only an exposition on prints but also on his aesthetic beliefs in general. In *ukiyo-e* he saw confirmation and realisation of his conviction that art and architecture must be an internally purposive whole, and have honest

---

9 Meech-Pekarik, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Other Passion," 144.
11 Ibid., 109.
12 Ibid.
relationship between form, purpose and material. They also must be democratic, that is, ‘of the people.’

Traditional Japanese architecture: When asked about the similarities found between a traditional Japanese house and his Prairie Houses, Wright often denied any formal influence by citing the fact that he had built his Prairie Houses long before he first set foot in Japan in 1905. Nute argues, however, that Wright had plenty of opportunities to become familiar with Japanese domestic architecture long before his trip, through a highly regarded book *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* by Edward Morse published in 1886. The book was reviewed by Frederick Gookin, a fellow Japanese print collector and close friend of Wright’s. Subsequent to the success of the book, Wright, therefore, ‘…would have had access to an almost scientifically observed analysis of the Japanese dwelling, which in several respects may have been of even greater value than direct experience of the real thing,’ contends Nute. Moreover, Wright did have access to actual Japanese architecture in the form of the Ho-o-den and other structures at 1893 *World’s Colombian Exposition* in Chicago. According to Mahony, the Japanese pavilion Ho-o-den was widely publicised and enthusiastically received by Chicago architects, no doubt including Wright. It remained on site till 1946 as a gift to the city. At any rate, during his numerous trips and long sojourns in Japan starting in 1905, Wright visited many temples and shrines in Kyoto, Nara, Nikko and others. Observing the remarkable similarities in the plans, Nute states that the Taiyu-in-byo in Nikko inspired Unity Temple, which Wright designed a few months after his first trip to Japan.

Another channel that was open to Wright on Japanese architectural forms was through the content of his beloved prints. The most popular subject of *ukiyo-e* being the daily lives of common people, their surroundings depicted encompass from the comprehensive views of the temples and houses to structural details of buildings, all

---

13 Ibid., 108.
14 Ibid., 36.
suitably simplified and abstracted… in just the way Wright liked. The especially noteworthy item found in Wright’s possession is *Hokusai Manga* with its superb abstract representation, which might have encouraged Wright to view the actual buildings in a simplifying manner when he eventually encountered them in real life.\(^\text{17}\)

‘Yes, it all looks, it does – just like the prints!’\(^\text{18}\) exclaims Wright in his autobiography, revealing that, in his case, life imitated art.

**Lao-tzu’s spatial concept through Okakura and Rikyū:** ‘The reality of a room was to be found in the space enclosed by the roof and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves.’ With these words found in *The Book of Tea* (1906) by Kakuzo Okakura, Wright realized in the 1920s, according to his claim, that ‘his’ unique concept of space had been articulated 2500 years before him by the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu.\(^\text{19}\) Actually, Nute points out, it is likely that Wright had been well aware of Lao-tzu’s spatial concept long before the 1920s, through Okakura’s 1903 book *The Ideals of the East*, or Lao-tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* translated by Paul Carus and published in 1896.\(^\text{20}\) Donald Hoppen, a former Taliesin apprentice and architect corroborates Nute’s point by recalling that the discovery of Eastern thoughts such as Lao-tzu’s philosophy made Wright eager to take his first trip to Japan in 1905.\(^\text{21}\) Be that as it may, it seems certain that Wright’s concept of space derives from Lao-tzu’s concept of the house as a useful ‘void’, transmitted by either Carus or Okakura. However, Nute cites, the noted Japanese architect Arata Isozaki (b.1931) believes that Wright interpreted this ‘void’ as a positive entity ‘space’ that could flow, instead of ‘non-being’, which is the traditional way of interpretation. This particular way of (mis)interpretation, to which Wright was perfectly entitled as an artist, proved to be instrumental in creating ‘his’ space,\(^\text{22}\) to which many architects the world over profess indebtedness today.\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 114.

\(^{18}\) Wright, *An Autobiography*, 230. (Wright's italics.)

\(^{19}\) ———, *The Natural House*, 222-23.

\(^{20}\) Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright*, 123.


In *The Book of Tea* Okakura explains the aesthetic of Teaism as Taoism, realized by the 16th century tea master Senno Rikyū in his design of tearooms, called *sukiya* style. *Sukiya* aesthetic is found in Wright’s mature domestic work such as Taliesin, his home and headquarter, in terms of the rustic simplicity, use of unadorned natural materials, and asymmetric composition. Deriving from Zen Buddhism as much as Taoism, the aesthetic of *sukiya* is the aesthetic of incompleteness. With its avocation of simplicity and restrain, *sukiya* philosophy encourages the visitor to the room to complete his surroundings in his imagination, which in turn, produces the zennist sense of never-ending process of ‘becoming’, or *Tao*. Okakura describes the concept *Tao* as the constant change that epitomises life, naming it the ‘‘Great Transition.’

These two concepts, void and *Tao*, provided Wright with the philosophical rationale for the transitional space between the interlocking forms in his building composition, which he called ‘‘great in-between.’ The transitional space, the ‘‘great in-between,’’ was to become one of the most important characteristics of his mature work, eliminating walls and doors to let the space flow.

There is one critical event, the landscape architects Charles and Berdeana Aguar contend, that has been mostly ignored by Wright scholars in the past, and that is his visit to the 1904 *Louisiana Purchase Exposition* in St. Louis. The Japanese exhibit ‘‘Imperial Japanese Garden’ consisted of six pavilions in an extensive landscaped garden of its own. Walking through and studying them, Wright could have obtained a ‘very comprehensive, if encapsulated, view of Japanese culture, architecture and landscape cultivation and articulation.’ They believe that Wright began to comprehend Lao-tzu’s concept of space through this experience. With this physical experience under his belt, Wright could grasp the significance of each temple, shrine and domestic building he visited in Japan the following year. Prior to his visit to the St. Louis exposition, following Western tradition, Wright treated the landscape as an afterthought. There is a shift in Wright’s design approach after 1905, which demonstrates that the landscape became the first step, not the last. To grasp the entire environment as continuous and unified, rather than dichotomised into the building and the garden, is a critical step toward applying the concept of interaction between the

---

inside and outside, which is fundamental in Japanese architecture. Aguar’s point helps
to throw light to just how Wright began to comprehend and individualise Lao-tzu’s
spatial concept in his work.

**Boston Orientalists:** It seems a roundabout way to get inspired about Japan, but
Wright did find great stimulation in associating with some East-coast Orientalists
and/or digesting their scholarly works. The circle started, Nute explains, with Morse,
an American scientist turned Japan scholar who published the popular book, *Japanese
Homes and Their Surroundings*. Morse recommended his Salem neighbour Ernest
Fenollosa for the position of Professor of Philosophy and Political Economy at the
Tokyo Imperial University in 1877. Like Morse, Fenollosa became one of the leading
authorities on Japanese culture, and together with his former student Okakura, played
a major role in preserving Japanese traditional art and introducing it to the West.26
Okakura later became an advisor to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and published
several highly regarded books aimed at English speaking readers, of which *The Book
of Tea* is best known. It is most likely that Wright was introduced to Fenollosa by his
first employer Silsbee who happened to be Fenollosa’s cousin.27 Another member of
the circle was the painter and art teacher Arthur Dow, who was the assistant and later
successor to Fenollosa at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts as the curator of the
Japanese department. Dow’s influential book *Composition* (1899) was based on his
and Fenollosa’s understanding of Japanese aesthetics, and seeing it as a particular
example of the universal ideal of art. With its unique ‘line-ideas’ illustrations,
*Composition* was to become an invaluable source book for Wright for his open-
cornered forms and interlocking spaces.28

Ukiyo-e, traditional Japanese architecture, Lao-tzu’s spatial concept, and Boston
Orientalists were the means by which Wright gained knowledge of certain Japanese
aesthetics. They also give context to his art, which I will discuss next by following
closely three buildings out of countless seminal structures Wright designed.

---

26 For their role in re-conceptualising traditional Japanese mode of painting, see chapter five.
27 Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the
28 Ibid., 92.
II. The aspects of Japanese aesthetics in Wright buildings: three cases

Wright’s long career is remarkable for its dramatic ebb and flow in his productivity and fortune. Epitomising his philosophy and creativity, the Frederick C. Robie House, the Edgar Kaufmann House known as ‘Fallingwater,’ and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum mark three of several highpoints of his career, and are apt specimens for examining how he created.29

The Robie House (designed in 1906): By the time he left the office of his mentor Louis Sullivan in 1893, Wright was utterly discontent with the state of architecture in the United States. He felt that what he saw around him reflected neither the advancing technology of the time nor the open environment of America. With the article titled ‘A home in a Prairie town’ in The Ladies Home Journal in 1901, he launched a new type of American home that was to be known as the Prairie House. Starting as a synthesis of his theories, philosophy, and eclectic attempts made in his previous buildings,30 the Prairie House developed into the first truly ‘American’ architecture.31 The Robie House [fig. 2-5] is considered one of the best examples of Wright’s mature Prairie Houses.

‘Many of the Prairie Houses used the devices of Japanese architecture to achieve their poetic effects,’ remarks Peter Blake. The simple geometric forms, horizontal orientation of the building, open plan interior with minimum of walls and doors, low ceilings, absence of the attic and cellar that were common features of the American homes at the time, and respect of the material used are some of the strong characteristics shared by both.32 Of the many innovations Wright incorporated in his Prairie Houses, the most important is the new concept of space,33 which probably has

29 I chose not to use the Imperial Hotel Tokyo as one of the specimens, because for that project Wright needed to weigh the degree of ‘Japanese-ness’ in his design due to its nature of commission and its location. In this research I am examining the process of indigenisation of a foreign element when it is considered on equal footing with other creative elements, not as one of the conscious design criteria.
33 Twombly, Frank Lloyd Wright, His Life and His Architecture, 81-87.
originated in Lao-tzu as discussed in the previous section. Having grasped the meaning of a room to be the space that is created, not the walls that create the space, Wright went about his task of the ‘destruction of box’ enthusiastically.\(^{34}\) ‘Box’ is the term he used for the enclosed and single-purpose rooms that constituted the typical Victorian homes of the time, which he felt were utterly inappropriate for the 20th century America. Like Sullivan, Wright was seeking for ‘organic’ architecture with the space that is continuous. And Nute believes that Wright found the inspiration for it in the Ho-o-den, the Japanese pavilion at the *Colombian Exposition* in Chicago.

According to Nute, the central hall of the Ho-o-den consisted of four main areas: a sitting area, reception area, study, and food preparation area. They were nominally separated by *fusuma*, sliding screens that could be opened or removed totally, depending on the purpose of the occasion. The plan of the early Prairie House replicates this cruciform of the Ho-o-den, with its one large sitting/living area, and two smaller dining and study areas on either side, without walls between them. The *tokonoma*, the alcove for artworks for pleasure and contemplation, is replaced by the freestanding hearth that acts as the centre of the house. This open plan with continuous space remained as one of the primary features of the Prairie House.\(^{35}\)

The Robie House has many other features of which the origins can be traced to Japanese architecture. The extended eaves of double roofs echo the Higashi Hongan-ji temple [fig. 2-6] he had seen in Japan the year before.\(^{36}\) The head-height frieze seen in the illustration of *Japanese Homes* by Morse [fig. 2-7] became a dominant feature of the Robie House interior. [fig. 2-8] The non-weight bearing removable screen walls of the Japanese house that facilitate the integration of the inside and the outside, is replicated by the long stretch of French windows that span the front of the house. The casement window unit system for designing the house, often used by Wright during the Prairie House period,\(^{37}\) might have been triggered by the modular system of *tatami*. 

\(^{34}\) Brooks, "Wright and the Destruction of the Box," 175-88.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 145.
floor mats. Although the building is open to the outside, the necessary privacy is kept by strategic plantings as in Japanese gardens. Aguar observes that Wright ‘artfully followed the Zen principle of hide-and-reveal’ in his design of the approach to the house, and continued the same principle throughout inside and outside.

For Wright this particular productive and innovative period ended in 1910 when he moved to Europe leaving his family and practice behind. It can be said that the ‘radical creations’ of his Prairie Houses are more than what many architects could hope to achieve in their entire career. Yet this was only ‘Step One’ in perhaps the most prolific and creative architectural career the United States has seen.

**Fallingwater (designed in 1935):** ‘Amazingly to us, the house did not look toward the falls, it sat above them,’ says the owner’s son. Called ‘the most poetic statement Wright ever made,’ Fallingwater, the weekend retreat for the Kaufmanns built on their 2000 acres of woodland, is a symphony in contrast. [fig. 2-9] The building is anchored in the living rock, yet seems to take off into space with its dramatically cantilevered and crossed balconies. The structure steps back from the water’s edge following the incline of the hill and merges into its surroundings like a tree, yet it is undoubtedly a clear testimony to man’s art and technology. Unique as it is in its perfection, however, Fallingwater does have some sources or influences and precedents. Nute cites Hiroshige’s *Agematsu* that shows a shrine overhanging a waterfall as a possible inspiration. A structure projecting into a lake, or built over a pond is a familiar enough sight in Japanese architecture. Although Fallingwater’s strong geometric composition and simple forms without ornament can be said to echo the International Style, there is a precedent in Wright’s own work – his mature Prairie House.
Many formal aspects of Japanese architecture and aesthetics can be observed in Fallingwater, and some came via the Prairie House. Take the case of cantilevers, for instance. The double overhanging roofs of a Japanese temple metamorphosed into fantastically cantilevered double roofs in the Robie House (1905). They then became cantilevered double porches of the Mrs. Thomas Gale House in 1909. [fig. 2-10] Twenty-six years later, these elements were given a new context by Wright, and the basic crossed-balcony form of Fallingwater was born.\(^45\) Essentially an open plan, most of the floor area in Fallingwater is taken up by a living/dining zone with continuous space. [fig. 2-11] The integration of the outside and inside is accomplished by the window wall, recalling a Japanese house with open shōji screen. The grid pattern of shōji appears as the three-story glass wall of the chimney tower. As in the Prairie House, the hearth, instead of tokonoma, constitutes the centre of Fallingwater. The hearth in Fallingwater has one startling feature – a living boulder protruding through the floor. This use of nature in the middle of a man-made structure is often found in Japanese architecture in the form of a gnarled tree – albeit a cut tree – that is used as a column for tokonoma, which was illustrated in Morse’s Japanese Homes. [fig. 2-7] Sympathy with material and its dramatic application by strong contrast is demonstrated in the balconies’ smooth concrete surface with rounded edges against the rugged stone pillar of the central chimney mass. [fig. 2-12] One Japanese feature that did not materialise, for better or worse, is the colour of the balconies. Hoppen reports that Wright wanted to make them matte gold emulating the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, but Kaufmann demurred.\(^46\)

The difference between Fallingwater and Japanese architecture, and Wright’s uniqueness, lie in the dynamism of the building. With its horizontal orientation of the building structure, and the modular units of tatami mat interior with the grid formation of shōji and fusuma screens, traditional Japanese architecture displays serene rectilinear tension. By contrast, although made of similarly simple forms arranged in horizontal and vertical position, Fallingwater is ‘a house made up of concrete terraces exploding from a central core.’\(^47\) Nevertheless, it harmonises with its environment

\(^{45}\) Twombly, Frank Lloyd Wright, His Life and His Architecture, 277.

\(^{46}\) Hoppen, The Seven Ages of Frank Lloyd Wright: A New Appraisal, 102.

perfectly, and demonstrates the ideal relationship between humankind and nature.\textsuperscript{48} Clearly, the lessons in the Prairie House were well learned, and they took a dramatic Wrightian turn in Fallingwater.

**The Guggenheim Museum (designed in 1943):** Completed in 1959, the year of Wright’s death, the Guggenheim Museum is the most plastic of his creation, and comes closest to his goal of organic architecture.\textsuperscript{49} The main structure, a clay-coloured gigantic nautilus, coils up and out like an upside-down Babylonian ziggurat. [fig. 2-13] The interior is a continuous ribbon of gallery around a central well [fig. 2-14], suffused with natural light from the skylight above and spiral ‘luminous cornice’\textsuperscript{50} under the ramp. The floor of the ramp turns up to form a U shape channel, becoming the parapet of the gallery around the central well inside, and outer wall on the other side. [fig. 2-15] It is a ‘natural’ building where the inside finds an honest expression outside, and the form and function are one, Wright claimed, as in all his buildings.\textsuperscript{51}

As for the aspects of Japanese aesthetics in the building, some can be observed but most have been fully interpreted and individualised by Wright. The unit system, whose source might have been tatami mats, is now an eight-foot square grid filled with circles, revealed in the floor of the rump. The horizontal interior frieze seen in the Robie House has evolved through the form of clerestory to cornice, serving the function of bridging outside and inside. The principle of using the most suitable material to its best advantage cannot be applied better than his use of poured concrete. The form of the building is simple and dramatic, without ornamentation. As in Japanese architecture, there is a deep sense of space inside.

The sense of space found in the Guggenheim building is quite different from that of Japanese architecture, however. As discussed, from the beginning Wright interpreted Lao-tzu’s space to be something tangible and positive, a substance that could flow;

\textsuperscript{48} Twombly, *Frank Lloyd Wright, His Life and His Architecture*, 278.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 316.
\textsuperscript{50} Hoppen, *The Seven Ages of Frank Lloyd Wright: A New Appraisal*, 122-42. Wright hated the cornice that can ‘trap space,’ and developed a luminous cornice for Johnson Building (1936) in which the ceiling seems to float above a cornice of glass tubing.
\textsuperscript{51} Twombly, *Frank Lloyd Wright, His Life and His Architecture*, 316.
while Okakura, following the Chinese and Japanese tradition, explained it as a void or non-being. Blake clarifies:

If one thinks of space as a sort of invisible but ever-present vapour that fills the entire architectural volume, then Wright’s notion of space-in-motion becomes more clearly understandable: the contained space is allowed to move about, from room to room, from indoors to outdoors, rather than remain stagnant, boxed up in a series of interior cubicles.

Wright’s destruction of box’ was started in the Prairie Houses, and space became continuous. ‘His’ space first gained drama in the 1904 Larkin Building. The basic elements of the Larkin Building and the Guggenheim of 40 years later are essentially the same: a central well, galleries open to the well, and a great skylight. While the space in the Larkin Building is boxy and simply vertical, that of the Guggenheim is subtle and masterfully manipulated in many directions. A viewer experiences different shapes and movements of space from every point of the interior. It could be a Wrightian interpretation of the ‘Zen principle of hide-and-reveal,’ orchestrating how space is felt by the visitor differently at any given moment as she moves about in the building. Starting with the concept of Lao-tzu, he has created his very own space. In the Guggenheim he hoped to realise a fluid environment that was like a ‘still wave, never breaking, never offering resistance or finality to vision.’ It could well be that the great waves of Hokusai had crossed Wright’s mind during the creation of the Guggenheim Museum.

52  Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright, 124-27.
54  Ibid., 54-55.
55  Ibid., 120-21.
56  Aguar and Aguar, Wrightscapes: Frank Lloyd Wright's Landscape Designs, 127.
57  Isozaki cited in Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright, 125.
Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) being essentially a 19th century romantic with the self-image of a creative genius, it is not hard to understand why he steadfastly refused to acknowledge outside influences. Yet, the outside sources were the crucial components of his formidable creativity, and as Scully’s long list attests, Japanese aesthetics is one out of many such sources. In dealing with elements of Japanese aesthetics Wright applied four different approaches, each going deeper than the preceding one. I consider them as various phases of dochaku process. Along with various dochaku phases of Japanese elements, we must keep in mind that elements from other cultures with their varying dochaku phases could also be present in any one of Wright’s works. The four phases are: 1) seeing the new as a confirmation, 2) adopting and exploiting the new, 3) adapting and exploring the new, and 4) shifting a paradigm.

1) Seeing the new as a confirmation of his own beliefs: Accepting a new concept does not necessarily imply changing a direction. Wright’s discovery of Japanese culture was ‘timely,’ endorsing the direction he was taking. An eager apprentice, he inherited from his mentor Sullivan the transcendentalist ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, which predisposed him favourably towards nature, democracy and oriental concepts. There was also the Arts and Crafts Movement in which he was active, that encouraged an ‘honest’ relationship between the form, purpose and material. The Aesthetic Movement prepared him to be comfortable to interpret a culture from a purely aesthetic viewpoint. Therefore Japanese culture fell on a fertile ground in him, confirming and nourishing what he already had. Wright saw and accepted the new through the old, and used the new to further develop the old. One such confirmation he gained from Japanese aesthetics is sympathy with nature. Since his rural childhood Wright had a lifelong attachment to nature. Its beauty was familiar to him through Wisconsin’s

59 Scully, "Introduction," xv.
60 Aguar and Aguar, Wrightscapes: Frank Lloyd Wright's Landscape Designs, 5.
61 Ibid., 13.
rolling hills and fantastic rock formations.\(^{63}\) With this predilection, it is easy to see how the Japanese concept of man as a part of nature, not a maker of ‘culture’ that is against nature, resonated in him. The Prairie House was his acknowledgement and appreciation of the open Mid-West landscape in which he thrived. Wright’s interpretation of man as a part of nature manifests in his art in the form of a taste for dramatic natural settings for his buildings, which then merge into nature, as seen in *ukiyo-e*. It is also seen in the visual and physical flow between the inside and outside of his buildings, and his preference for native materials that he uses to their utmost advantage.

2) Adopting and exploiting the new: This is a phase in which Wright adopted certain elements of Japanese aesthetics and exploited them fully, giving new meanings in new context, although the element itself remained essentially the same. It is a quick way to bring in a breath of fresh air. His use of many graphic techniques of *ukiyo-e* is a good example. The flat forms, reliance on line, simple and dramatic composition, and unusual perspectives are some of the techniques he adopted and exploited. His was not a casual appropriation for the sake of exoticism, however. The rendering style and the consummate skills of Mahony reveal the essence of a building clearly, and display the structure to its best advantage in each drawing. In terms of the three buildings highlighted in this chapter, the horizontal orientation of the Robie House, the *shōji* grid pattern of Fallingwater, and the obvious ziggurat shape of the Guggenheim are three elements among many that are in the phase of adoption and exploitation in Wright’s *dochaku* process.

The outward appearance is not the only indication of such adoption and exploitation. Although there are no exterior resemblances in architectural details between the Robie House and the Ho-o-den, and between Unity Temple and the Taiyu-in-byo, the plans are, as Nute points out, remarkably similar. Wright could have adopted the Japanese design, if not for the formal reasons, at least for the concept that their plans constituted logical and honest expressions of the multiple activities performed in the respective spaces.

3) **Adapting and exploring the new:** Having understood the essence of the original source, in this phase, Wright interpreted the source freely, adapting and exploring what he could make of it to serve his formal, practical and philosophical purposes. Here, although the essence may remain, the form and even function can change substantially. As noted in the Robie House, the double roofs of the Higashi Hongan-ji were most likely the inspiration for the hovering roofs of his Prairie Houses. The roofs with deep eaves were astutely executed as cantilevers, taking advantage of the newly developed long steel beams. Later, the cantilevered double roofs so unleashed became double porches in the Gale House (1909), and then found a dramatic expression as crossed balconies that were cantilevered to the limit in Fallingwater (1935). [fig. 2-16]

The journey of the horizontal division of the interior wall at head-height illustrated in Morse’s *Japanese Homes* is another fascinating example. It was adapted as the interior frieze in the Robie House (1905), bringing the ceiling down visually to an intimate level. In time it became clerestories bridging the inside and outside as in the Francis Little House (1913), and then it eventually transformed itself into a coiled cornice of light in the Guggenheim Museum (1943). [fig. 2-17]

4) **Shifting paradigm, and subsequent unique development:** In this completed phase of *dochaku* process, the new was exploited and explored fully to its utmost potential, and became fundamental to Wright’s art, replacing the previous paradigm on which his creative activities had been based. It became a part of Wright’s consciousness, serving to widen and deepen his art, preparing the ground for further stimulation from other sources. In other words, a greater cycle was ready to start anew. It can be said that the most important and supremely successful case of *dochaku-ka* of Japanese aesthetics in Wright’s art is his concept of space. Lao-tzu’s description of the reality of a room to be the space, not the physical structure itself, the physical embodiment of this concept in Rikyū’s *sukiya* style of tearoom design, and Wright’s interpretation of them, had a profound effect on his creative career. This philosophical concept served as the unifying framework for him in making active use of other Japanese spatial concepts. For example, Nute believes that there was a direct link between the inner-framing technique of *ukiyo-e* and Wright’s ‘destruction of box.’ The inner-framing makes the viewer’s space and the pictured space continuous, while ‘destruction of
box’ aimed to let the space flow. The space thus liberated from the interior ‘boxes’ can now interact with the exterior as in traditional Japanese architecture. Another example is Wright’s use of modular additive space. It came into existence through the open plan of the Prairie House, which was engendered by the Ho-o-den, and Wright’s own grid system, which probably owes much to the tatami unit system. These concepts, reinforced by the idea that space is positive and tangible, enabled Wright to create his unique flowing and continuous environment that is his oeuvre.

How then, did Wright create? Hoppen recalls Wright’s brand of seemingly limitless artistry. Wright transposed with the greatest of ease between the horizontal and vertical, the two-dimensional and three-dimensional, the old and new, realigning them into new context. While discovering the new continuously, he also had direct access to every one of his previous discoveries, often to be called upon many years later. Moreover, his discoveries did not stay static. He ceaselessly transformed them. And as seen in the Robie House, Fallingwater and the Guggenheim examples, various elements from varying dochaku phases of his discoveries were freely mixed and combined in one work. Moreover, he had no hesitation in finding connections in most unlikely mix of sources, of which there were numerous. In short, Wright could access his sources across time, place and culture. His genius lies in his foresight in recognising practical uses in unrelated sources, in transforming them to meet his stringent philosophical, aesthetic and functional requirements, and in managing somehow to synthesize them all in his inimitable way into a new, elegant unity.

A comment by one of his clients sums up nicely the uniqueness of Frank Lloyd Wright’s art. ‘There are only two things wrong with a Frank Lloyd Wright house. People will hardly let you get it built, and will hardly let you live in it when it is done.’

64 Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright, 109.
2-1 (far left)
The Hardy House
rendering

2-2
Kaneyama, Clearing
Weather after the Snow
by Ando Hiroshige from
Fifty-three Stations of the
Tokaido
1833-34

2-3
Yasumi Bridge and Maple
Trees at Mama
by Ando Hiroshige from
One Hundred Views of Edo
1856

2-4
The Winslow House
rendering
2-5 (above)
The Robie House
Chicago
designed in 1906

2-6
The Great Hall of Higashi
Honganji temple in Nagoya
18th century

The photograph was taken by Wright in 1905.

2-7
The Japanese domestic
interior from Morse's
Japanese Homes (1886)

The illustration shows the
head-height frieze, tatami
floor mats, a column of
gnarled tree, a sliding shoji
screen that facilitates
inside-outside flow of
space, and garden.

2-8
The Robie House
living room
Fallingwater
Pennsylvania
designed in 1935
2-10
The Gale House
Illinois
1909

2-11
Living area of Fallingwater
The tip of the boulder that penetrates through the floor is seen at bottom right.

2-12
Steps leading to the balcony, Fallingwater

2-13
The Guggenheim Museum
New York
designed in 1943
2-14
The central well of the Guggenheim Museum

2-15
Ramp around the central well, constituting a ribbon of galleries.

Note the cornice under the ramp.
2-16
A. Double roofs of Higashi Honganji
B. Cantilevered double roofs of the Robie House
C. Double porches of the Gale House
D. Cantilevered balconies of Fallingwater

See also figures 2-6, 2-5, 2-10 and 2-9.

2-17
A. The head-height frieze of Japanese domestic interior
B. The Robie House frieze, becoming a major design feature.
C. The Little House living room, with the frieze turned into clerestory.
D. The Guggenheim Museum galleries, with the clerestory turned into a ‘luminous cornice,’ seen directly above paintings.

See also figures 2-7 and 2-8.
3. Pierre Alechinsky: in Pursuit of His Monsters

In 1949 the Belgian artist Pierre Alechinsky met Christian Dotremont at an exhibition of the avant-garde group Cobra of which Dotremont was a founder. Immediately Alechinsky threw himself into the movement, spending the following two years till the dissolution of the group in 1951, immersed in the activities of Cobra. In 1955 Alechinsky spent two months in Japan, shooting a documentary film on Japanese calligraphy. In 1965 New York, led by his artist friend Walasse Ting, Alechinsky made his first acrylic painting. These are the turning points in the artistic career of Alechinsky (b. 1927), the youngest member of Cobra, who was formed by, as well as formed, the Cobra spirit. It is interesting to note that even after the dissolution of the group, he has continued to nurture its spirit while going on to acquire international recognition for his art. It is said that his art is ‘above all endless calligraphy which takes place between dream and imagination.’¹ This chapter discusses Cobra in context, then the role Japanese calligraphy played in Alechinsky’s art, and finally, how he made it his own in the development of his unique art.

I. CO-penhagen, BR-ussels, A-msterdam

Cobra was formed in 1948 Paris by the Danish painter-philosopher Asger Jorn (1914-73), the Belgian poet Christian Dotremont (1922-79) and the Dutch painter Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005). The catchy name of the movement, created by Dotremont, derives from the initial letters of their respective capital cities. According to Alechinsky, the rallying cry of the movement was spontaneity.² Having come through the horror of the Second World War, the members rejected the hegemony of reason as

had been defined by the West, and sought a brighter future through expression of creativity untouched by the Western civilization. [fig. 3-1] They found inspiration in the prehistoric paintings, art of children, the mentally handicapped, the primitive, and the East. Cobra believed that we all possessed collective and primeval creativity, and the way to reach that creativity was through spontaneity. To that end they advocated being led by the physical process of creation and by the materials they used, instead of working to pre-conceived ideas. Inter-specialisation, experimentation, internationalism and artistic collaboration were also pursued with passion. With this platform, Cobra welcomed participation by artists from many nations and many disciplines. As Willemijn Stokvis states ‘Painters wrote poetry, poets painted and drew, they established contacts with film-makers, fashioned sculptures, took photographs… worked together on murals, canvas and paper.’ The main group activities were publication of the review and exhibitions, to which Alechinsky dedicated himself while assisting Dotremont. ‘Cobra? My school,’ says Alechinsky.

Even after the dissolution of the group many artists continued to work in the same Cobra spirit, collaborating from time to time. In 1965, 14 years after dissolution of the group, Dotremont wrote ‘The late Cobra is doing very nicely, thank you, and you?’ Although there was no set style of Cobra, and the artists were highly individual, what was later called ‘Cobra language’ evolved during and after the existence of Cobra as a group. In the early days it was awkward child-like drawings, then in the ‘50s came wild colours in turbulent pasty paint, and eventually settled with archetypal mythical form of monsters, with which Alechinsky had as much to do as Jorn. Alechinsky declared in 1977 that Cobra’s ideals remained unchallenged for him.

---

‘One of the principal origins of Cobra is to be found in Surrealism. Cobra moved away from it,’ declares Alechinsky.\(^\text{10}\) However, Cobra did benefit from Surrealism in many ways. The way to Cobra’s questioning stance toward authority was paved by Surrealists, for instance. Ironically, feeling Surrealism itself had already become a burdensome tradition for them with its theorising and set aesthetics, Cobra artists rebelled against it. Another legacy of Surrealism was the experimental approach to creation. However, instead of Surrealists’ psychic automatism, Cobra artists practiced spontaneity through which they hoped to reach something beyond themselves.

Furthermore, while for Surrealists the idea of collaboration remained the parlour game *exquisite corpse*, Cobra developed and carried out collaborative approach in earnest, creating memorable and inspired works. The biggest difference between Surrealism and Cobra lies in their orientation. Stokvis clarifies that while Surrealists followed Freud into each individual’s subconscious, sexual desires and dreams, Cobra artists looked out into the world, seeking Jung’s archetypes beyond themselves.\(^\text{11}\) This was perhaps due to their early ideals based on Marxism, wanting to create a new society where art and life are one, and everyone had the right and opportunity to express oneself creatively. However, after discovering the reality in the Soviet Union where only Socialist Realism was permitted in art, Cobra members dissociated themselves from Communism.\(^\text{12}\)

Surrealists set the mood for free exploration unbound by the rational Western culture, expanding the horizon to include foreign cultures. Joan Miro and Andre Masson became aware of Japanese *zenga* (ink paintings by Zen monks) in the 1920s. [fig. 3-2] Miro’s empty composition and Masson’s brush strokes, both dating from that period, show the influence of their interest. Although the movement did not specifically take up Zen, Helen Westgeest reports that several specialists in Surrealism believe that the Surrealists were instrumental in the rise of interest in Japanese culture in the 1950s.\(^\text{13}\)

---


Alechinsky jokingly comments that Miro led him to the discovery of the calligrapher Gakiu Osawa’s work that he so admired during his stay in Japan.\textsuperscript{14}

The interest in Japanese calligraphy also came from the field of concrete poetry, which started with Mallarmé in 1897 and continued on to Apollinaire’s 1914 \textit{Calligrammes}. The poets seeking the unity between poetry and image saw Japanese poetry visualized in calligraphic form as an exemplary case. The Belgian poet Henri Michaux became interested in Chinese calligraphy in the 1920s. Influenced by \textit{zenga}, Michaux developed his haunting and disturbing inkblot paintings in the 1950s. Westgeest believes that Michaux and Masson steered the general interest in writing to a specific focus on oriental calligraphy and painting. Michaux’s 1932 book \textit{Un Babare en Asie}, which recounts his journey in the Far East, triggered the desire in Alechinsky to go to Japan.\textsuperscript{15}

Alechinsky’s interest in writing goes back to his early childhood. Born left-handed, he was forcefully taught to write with his right hand at school, which focused his attention on script.\textsuperscript{16} Dotremont and Jorn also were deeply interested in words as pictures, and both started studying Chinese calligraphy in 1942.\textsuperscript{17} For Jorn painting and writing were one and the same activity. ‘There is writing, graphics, in each picture, just as in every piece of writing a picture is to be found,’ he wrote in 1944. He and Dotremont did many word-pictures together over the years of their long association. This interest in writing was one of the main characteristics of the Cobra movement.

In the 1950s the Cobra artists were not alone in their interest in Japanese calligraphy. The \textit{Art Informel} painters Jean Degottex, Hans Hartung and Pierre Soulages were exploring expressive brush strokes. From Europe Georges Mathieu, Michel Tapie, Soulages and Sam Francis started for Japan. In the United States Mark Tobey led the way in finding Japanese calligraphy as inspiration. He had a one-month stay in a Zen monastery studying ink painting in 1934, which, along with his previous encounter

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 102-13.
\textsuperscript{16} Alechinsky, "Bordering on Something Central,” 21.
\textsuperscript{17} Westgeest, \textit{Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West}, 136.
with calligraphy through his Chinese friend, inspired his *white writing* of the late 1930s and *sumi* paintings of the 1950s. Adolph Gottlieb and Robert Motherwell were other artists who acknowledged the influence of calligraphy on their art. Among the Abstract Expressionists, Franz Kline’s work seems closest to Japanese calligraphy, but both he and Hartung vehemently deny its influence on their art.\(^{18}\)

**II. Japanese calligraphy and the art of Alechinsky**

When he landed in Japan in 1955, Alechinsky was no newcomer to ink, brush and paper – the medium of calligraphy. The year before, the Chinese artist Walasse Ting (1929-2010) had settled in Paris where Alechinsky also lived at the time. Ting showed him how Chinese artists painted with ink and brush, the paper laid flat on the floor, using the whole body. The concentration and spontaneity with which Ting painted found resonance in Alechinsky, since reaching the creativity through spontaneity uncensored by reason was one of Cobra’s aspirations.\(^{19}\) In this section, before going any further, a brief introduction to the art of Japanese calligraphy is in order. I will then discuss Alechinsky’s early encounter, and subsequent working process, with calligraphy up to 1965.

*Japanese calligraphy*: In China and Japan, ink painting and calligraphy share the same medium, tools and general principles. In pre-modern Japan, good painters were often good calligraphers as well. Painting and calligraphy routinely appeared together in one work as in *zenga* by Zen monks, practiced widely not as a hobby but as one of the disciplines toward enlightenment.

Calligraphy is an art of *line*.\(^{20}\) The line reveals the mental state and body movement of the calligrapher. The lines are rich in variety and contrast – in the degree of ink saturation from almost dry to richly wet, in tones from grey to shades of black, in

---


\(^{19}\) With due respect to Chinese painters and Japanese calligraphers, I would like to take artistic liberty to treat Chinese ink painting and Japanese calligraphy as a single technique in this chapter.

weight from willowy to robust, in all possible shapes and lengths, and in dynamism from lyrical to forceful, mirroring the speed and mode of execution.

Calligraphy is an art of space. As the brush leaves marks, the marks define and activate the previously neutral white of the paper. The residual space (area untouched by brush marks) is eloquent like the pause in music. The white is as critical as the black of the marks for the work to come alive. The marks, residual space and edges of paper are in dynamic tension, defining and energising each other.

Calligraphy is an art of time. The movement of brush is widely varied, from lightening speed to almost immobile, but never tentative. A calligrapher encapsulates the rhythm of her movement in the marks she makes. The viewer can re-live the moment by mentally following the process stroke by stroke, thereby experiencing the time as if the lines are animated and are coming to life by themselves.

The materials of calligraphy are simple; a calligrapher employs ink, brush and paper. [fig. 3-3] Ink, called sumi in Japanese, is made by rubbing an inkstick in inkstone with drops of water. Inkstick is made of lampblack from a variety of woods. The brush is made of animal hairs with bamboo holder. Paper is made of plant fibre such as hemp and mulberry. They come in a variety of weight, texture, size and finish, including dyed or patterned, although most paper used in calligraphy is white. The method of calligraphy is different from easel painting. The paper is laid on the floor, and a calligrapher hovers above it, and writes with concentration in one rhythmic flow of motion. She does not stop for evaluation, judgement or revision. Japanese calligraphy is deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism, and the ideal mental state at the moment of writing is said to be mushin, mind of no-mind. To that end, concentrating on here-and-now, and becoming one with materials are encouraged. This attitude resembles the ‘spontaneity’ of Cobra in that a trained calligrapher responds well to the inflection of the process without conscious thought.

---

24 Imai, “Jisshuno Tebiki.”
In Japan the art of calligraphy has been enriched by the existence of two distinct letter systems. One system is called kanji, Chinese characters, the ideograms imported from China in the 6th century. The other is kana, the syllabary created from kanji in Japan around the 9th century. The origin of kanji, Chinese characters, can be traced back to the oracular writing on tortoise shell dated in the fourteenth century BC. Over the centuries the shells and bones were replaced by stones, bronze vessels, wooden slats, silk and finally paper. As the support and tool for writing changed, different script styles emerged. The five standard styles in use today in differing degrees, both in China and Japan, were developed by the third century by various preceding dynasties in power. Tensho (‘seal writing’), the earliest style of the five dating second century BC, retains the shape in which the letters were chiselled on stone in those days. Sōsho (‘grass writing’ – cursive style), the last style to evolve, has a flowing rhythmic quality, reflecting the medium of paper and brush that made the swift and personal style of writing possible. [fig. 3-4]

The Japanese kana was invented and developed by the court ladies of Heian period (794-1192), the time of Lady Murasaki and her Tale of Genji. They first used Chinese characters in cursive sōsho style phonetically, instead of as idiograms. Then they arrived at syllabaries by dramatically simplifying and deforming sōsho letters, to better reflect their delicate sensitivity in literature and their Japanese environment. ‘Whereas Chinese ideograms are built around forceful strokes in which the ink digs into the paper, kana are signs that slide… the lines slide, break and link together, held by a running, continuous movement.’25 Compared to kanji, kana tends to be intimate in scale since it was mainly used for letters, albums and hand-held scrolls in the early days. Unlike kanji, which is normally done on white paper, there are many classic kana calligraphy masterpieces on exquisitely coloured or painted paper. [fig. 3-5] Kana is used on its own or in combination with kanji, giving the calligrapher wide options in artistic expression. Sharing the same medium (sumi ink on paper) and tool (brush), calligraphy in these two letter systems merges beautifully with painting as seen in zenga. [fig. 3-2]

Calligraphic art grew and spread with development of other cultural forms such as Zen Buddhism and literature. After the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Japan underwent soul-searching and re-evaluation of its traditional arts including calligraphy. In the 1930s the calligrapher Tenrai Hidai introduced an abstract quality into the word- and syntax-based world of calligraphy for the first time in its history. After the shock of the Second World War, Hidai’s students took up the cause in earnest, and the avant-garde calligraphy movement was born. One of the most out-spoken proponents of the new calligraphy was Shiryu Morita (1912-98), with whom Allechinsky would come in contact.

**Alechinsky’s early encounters with calligraphy:** In 1952 Alechinsky came across a bilingual journal called *Bokubi (The Beauty of Ink)*. It was published by a calligraphy group in Japan, led by Morita. The group aimed to revitalize tradition-bound calligraphy, and make it relevant to the changing modern world. Morita, Hidai’s student, was actively seeking the way to connect with the West where gestural mark-making of Abstract Expressionism was becoming popular. Alechinsky started corresponding with Morita, which eventually lead to his two-month trip to Japan in 1955 to make a documentary film on calligraphy by Morita and his peers. At the time Morita was seeking to inject *sekai-sei* (global characteristics) in calligraphy by going abstract, uniting the art of Japan and the West. He spoke of the ideal art as a rainbow that had one end in Japan and the other in the West. This aspiration, no doubt, appealed to Alechinsky who wrote the article *Au-delà de l’écriture (Beyond Writing)* just before his trip to Japan, about the kinship with Japanese calligraphy as a basis for the universal, or international goal of art.26

There was a short period of mutual exchange between the art worlds of the West and Japan in the 1950s and ‘60s. In the abstract art movement of the West the ‘freedom of brush-mark and the feeling for space’ were becoming more and more vital for the artists, and they found traditional art from Japan such as calligraphy very modern.27 The Japanese avant-garde calligraphers, for their part, were searching new impetus from abstract art, and reached out to the West to know and to be known. During this

---

27 Ibid., 109.
period of mutual interest, the work most frequently shown and well-received in the
exhibition circuit in Europe and the United States was a certain type of modern
calligraphy with large abstract depiction of kanji, Chinese character, in forceful
brushstrokes bursting with action and energy. In time this came to be known as
‘Japanese calligraphy’ in the West, even though there were many other types of work
actively pursued in Japan at that time, such as lyrical and intimate work based on the
fluid and continuous lines of kana.²⁸

In 1955 Alechinsky undertook a two-month trip to Japan, which eventually changed
the direction of his artistic explorations. He spent most of his time in Japan filming in
Kyoto. ‘I approached calligraphy by way of the outside, by way of the film camera,’
he states.²⁹ [fig. 3-6] The calligraphers featured in the film were Chikka Morita, Tōkō
Shinoda, Sogen Eguchi, Nakano Etsunan, Shiryu Morita and Sohaku Ogata. The
commentary was written by Dotremont, and the film was premiered in 1957 in
Brussels after two years of postproduction. Antonio Saura reviewed the film with
these comments on the calligraphers: Shinoda (… the most beautiful feminine
calligraphy… pendular movements, profound lyricism), Chikka Morita (… fluid, the
characters slide easily, simple and refined), Ogata and Etsunan (… traditional but with
an original expressiveness), Ogata and Shiryu Morita (… the most extreme
calligraphers with brutal marks).³⁰ It is clear that Alechinsky was introduced to a wide
variety of calligraphic approaches by Morita, instilling in him the awareness of the
heterogeneity in the art of calligraphy.

Alechinsky’s contact with calligraphy did not end with the completion of the film.
Shinoda had an exhibition in Paris in 1957, and the film was shown there. Alechinsky
wrote an article Tōkō Shinoda and Japanese Calligraphy in 1959 for Les Beau-Arts,
Brussels. A comprehensive exhibition of the work in ink by the Zen monk Sengai
Gibon (1750-1837) toured the major cities of Europe from 1961 to 64. Without a
doubt the exhibition left a lasting impression on Alechinsky – he later created an ink
and lithography work titled Variations on Sengai’s Universe after ‘his master.’ In

²⁸ Kyuyo Ishikawa, Sho Towa Dōin Geijutsuka (What Kind of Art Is Sho?) (Tokyo: Chūkō Shinsho,
2002), 175.
²⁹ Westgeest, Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West, 114.
1965 New York, he did collaborative work with the calligrapher Nankoku Hidai, Tenrai Hidai’s son, whom he had met ten years earlier in Japan. Furthermore, his friend Ting was ever present for ‘four-handed paintings’ or ‘Alechings’ – as Alechinsky calls the collaborative work with Ting –, reminding him of the Chinese way. ‘Chinese painter always open lines. Breaths. If lines not open, image die,’ Ting admonished Alechinsky in 1970.31

**Working with calligraphy:** ‘I thought I might learn something imitating the movements,’ said Alechinsky shortly after his return from Japan,32 and produced drawings in ink. *Sumi (Ink)* of 1956 shows his imitating attempt. [fig. 3-7] He is wary of falling into Orientalism, however, as the title of a 1956 painting *Disoriented Orientalist* suggests.33 One work of 1957 is titled *Grass Writing* – literal translation of *sōsho*, the cursive style of calligraphy. Then, being a true Cobra, he does not simply copy but experiments. His 1958 drawings show peculiar broken lines, just like the ones he admired in Osawa’s work in Japan. Evidently Alechinsky crumpled the paper before laying it on the floor. He kept up his ink drawings and exhibitions of them (with little commercial success), and became better at it in time.

In the late ‘50s strange creatures in expressive lines began to appear in Alechinsky’s drawings. He was looking for a new kind of figuration,34 while absorbing influences by Jorn and Japanese calligraphy.35 Imbued with northern tradition, Jorn was known for his turbulent canvases in which mythological creatures nestled. In Alechinsky’s 1960 ink drawing *Alice Grows up* there is a wonderful sense of freedom with a wide variety of lines, tones... and his monsters. [fig. 3-8] ‘A mark, a line turns into a monster with mouth open, a tongue becomes a fragment of calligraphy… As I paint I release monsters, my monsters… They come from my own doubts, my own gropings, my own most diffuse and profound difficulties.’36 An essence of his Flemish predecessors such as Ensor, Bosch and Breughel can be observed in the way

---

33 Lambert, *Cobra*, 235.
36 Alechinsky quoted in Abadie, "Chronology," 265.
Alechinsky creates the grimacing crowd with humour and irony.\textsuperscript{37} Delineated in the eloquent and serpentine lines that are reminiscent of \textit{kana} calligraphy of Heian period, his mischievous monsters chase and argue with each other and with their creator. His 1970 painting \textit{Trained Trainer} is a self-portrait as an artist who is trained by the monsters he trains.\textsuperscript{38}

While his ink drawing was developing in leaps and bounds, in 1962, Alechinsky discovers an old Italian engraving technique that allows the use of brush in making plates. The freedom acquired in working with ink can now be transposed to his printmaking.\textsuperscript{39} In contrast, his paintings in oils remain dense and pasty, exhibiting a \textit{horror vacui} as before his trip. For some, it is a good thing. Michel Ragon comments ‘Very fortunately he is no longer influenced… by Japanese calligraphy. On the contrary, he paints in paste.’\textsuperscript{40} [fig. 3-9] With the 1958 painting \textit{The Great Transparent Ones}, however, breathing space and movement begin to appear. Willem Sandberg, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, sees ‘great mastery’ in this painting.\textsuperscript{41} There are surprising space and dynamic lines in his 1961 oils \textit{Alice Grows up}, with the monsters from his previous year’s drawing of the same title swarming the picture plane. [fig. 3-10] Alechinsky says ‘Now I try to paint as I draw.’\textsuperscript{42} In the same year Francine-Claire Legrand writes:

> Paradoxically, Alechinsky has become a painter more fully since he was initiated into the resources of black and white. The gesture has become broader and bolder, aided by a more fluid pictorial matter.\textsuperscript{43}

 Nonetheless, in subsequent years he returns to dense canvases in oils. The sense of freedom one now associates with Alechinsky’s oeuvre has to wait till yet another introduction of a new medium by Ting.

\textsuperscript{38} Lambert, \textit{Cobra}, 238.
\textsuperscript{39} Abadie, “Chronology,” 266.
\textsuperscript{40} Quoted in Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{41} Quoted in Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{42} Quoted in Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
III. Central Park: a breakthrough

The entry for 1965 in Alechinsky’s *Souvenotes* published in 1971 reads:

Long stay in the United States where he [Alechinsky] works in Walasse Ting’s studio and paints his first acrylics. Subsequently, he learns the technique of remounting, preferring paper to canvas. From 1965 onwards he does fewer and fewer oil paintings.  

The first acrylics, made with help from Ting, are taken back to France. Alechinsky makes strips of ink drawings on Japanese paper, pins them all up on the wall for observation, puts the ink drawings around the acrylic painting... and composes his first painting with ‘marginal remarks,’ *Central Park*. [fig. 3-11]

*Central Park*, a breakthrough for Alechinsky, is significant in two ways. The first is its medium. With *Central Park* he realized that he had been using the wrong medium – oil on canvas – for the past twenty years, and subsequently switched to acrylics on paper for the next twenty years. Speaking of oil painting, he now loathes, says Alechinsky, ‘hard pig-bristle brushes... the heavy paste not letting itself be directed... the immaculate canvas waiting white and sly on the easel, an instrument which resembles Guillotin’s invention... waiting for days, for weeks, before it dries...’ etc, etc. In comparison, the water-based, quick drying acrylic paint allows swift ‘rearrangements, alliterations, comings and goings.’ Joyously he recounts his new work method:

The tool: that same Japanese brush which I use equally for drawing, painting and engraving... With it, with them (water, colour, bowl, brush, paper), I pass from drawing to painting through successive layers of semi-transparent, semi-opaque agents and ideas.  

45 Abadie, “Chronology,” 270.
What is significant is that acrylics enable him to capture the freshness of the ink drawing in his painting. All he learned in emulating calligraphy floods his paintings, especially notable among them is the role the sinuous lines play.

The second significance of Central Park is the birth of ‘marginal comments’ or marginalia, the army of small ink drawings around the colourful acrylic painting in the centre. Alechinsky says that his marginalia is the frontiers of the vulnerable rectangle picture, acting as clarification, protection or reference to the centre. As for its origin, he cites variously from time to time, as black and white comics, animated cartoons, medieval woodcuts, predellas, or Picasso’s Dreams and Lies of Franco. It is also possible that Alechinsky recalled seeing some of the 11th and 12th century kana calligraphy masterpieces with painted borders. Be that as it may, juxtaposition of the two types of art remounted on canvas as one work speaks of two parallel worlds with different order and temporality. The world of Alechinsky’s imagination becomes ‘curioser and curioser.’

Some of the marginalia are done on old documents he resurrected such as stocks, ledgers and certificates. He calls drawing on them, ‘treating.’ He has been treating papers since 1961, and as an independent form of art, ‘treated papers’ matures in the 1970s. In this mode of work, the interaction between the past (old document) and present (his drawing), writing and picture, the worldly (now valueless stocks) and the world of his imagination, is truly beguiling.

In Central Park, his drawing and painting, which have been developing side by side, merge for the first time. His art, including printmaking, has been unified, and his ‘Stradivarius’ – his Japanese paintbrush – does them all. It has been ten years since his trip to ‘the land of the calligraphers.’ Armed with a brush, ink, acrylics and paper, and the unique way of narrating multiple tales in the form of marginalia

---

47 Alechinsky, "Bordering on Something Central," 28.
50 Ibid., 220.
painting, he goes on ‘not so much to articulate that which he knows and can render, but in order to discover that which he doesn’t yet know and must investigate.’

**IV. Calligraphy and its dochaku process in context**

‘It was not until the sixties that the influence of the Japanese trip was clearly discernible in his work,’ writes Westgeest. True enough, but the period 1955-60 was not simply a period of gestation. Alechinsky’s inquiry with ink continued on, and he was also producing watercolor and gouache works beside oils. It was a period of experimentation, and he was rapidly coming into his own. By the mid-60s many elements of calligraphy have gone through *dochaku* process within him, and were ready for consolidation and further development.

*Adopting and adapting calligraphy:* Describing how he was introduced to ink painting by Ting in 1954, Alechinsky wrote in 1971:

> [Ting] crouches before his paper. I follow the movements of the brush, the speed. Very important, the variations in the speed of a line. Acceleration, breaking. Immobilization. The light fixed blob, the heavy fixed blob. The whites, all the greys, the black. Slowness and lightning speed. Ting hesitates, then out of the blue comes the solution, the fall of the cat onto its feet.

By the time he wrote the above passage he had had the trip to Japan, his film *Calligraphie Japonaise*, and his breakthrough painting *Central Park* under his belt. Naturally his degree of knowledge and perception of ink technique would have been much greater in 1971 than when he was first introduced to it in 1954. His description above reveals not what he saw then, but what he has come to understand and has internalised since, and it demonstrates how well he managed *dochaku-ka* of the medium. Examining the elements of Japanese calligraphy – line, space, time, materials and methods – in Alechinsky’s art illuminates his journey.

---


Line: Alechinsky had the appropriate idea when he thought of copying. It is a time-honoured method of learning calligraphy. What is interesting is that he tried to copy the movement of the calligrapher, not the product. As he sensed, it is the rhythm of the body movement that gives the dynamism apparent in calligraphy. His description of Ting’s performance attests to his acute observation and understanding. Naturally, though, it is easier said than done. His early attempts display what Westgeest calls ‘typically Western lines… only slight variations in width and character.’ Being a believer in experimentation (typically Cobra) and discipline (characteristics shared with Dotremont, if not with other Cobra members), Alechinsky perseveres.

In 1958 he finds ‘cutting-out paper,’ the large onionskin paper used by tailors, which eventually becomes his favourite support for painting. On this paper, using his whole body movement, he creates Au Pays de L’encre. The year 1960 brings a reward for his perseverance in Alice. 1965 Central Park is dramatic with its contrast between the bold sinuous lines in the centre and the busy active lines in the marginalia. From then on the lines become more and more uniquely his. The kana lines of old are sensitive and intimate, but Alechinsky’s lines perform magic both in intimate and grand scales, in colour and black. He has also grasped variousness of black in calligraphy, and uses it to great advantage in combination with acrylics. With or without the marginalia, the lines weave the fantastic world where his mischievous monsters emerge and hide, chase and be chased… and Alechinsky claims no responsibility for them – they create themselves at the tip of his brush. ‘One does not choose a content, one is subjected to it,’ muses Alechinsky.

Space: In calligraphy every stroke (black) creates active space (white). The space between the marks and the edge of the paper must be dynamic, not static. In his oil paintings after the trip to Japan, Alechinsky showed little interest in space at first. However, his drawings from 1956 to 1960 display his growing awareness of movement, and the space created by movement. Soon his composition in both

---

55 Alechinsky, “Bordering on Something Central,” 19.
57 Ibid., 220.
58 Quoted by Jacques Putman in Abadie, “Chronology,” 265.
painting and drawing begins to loosen, and his *horror vacui* is on its way out. In *Central Park* the spatial relationship between the image and the edge of the paper is addressed in an unexpected way. Instead of leaving the residual white in tension with the image as in calligraphy, he fills it with *marginalia*, calling attention to the edge forcefully. The sense of space had been important for him after all, developing submerged for a while and it erupted, fully formed, in *Central Park*.

The importance of the other type of space in calligraphy – the white space defined by black marks around it, called negative space in the West – has also been well internalised by Alchinsky. The open images in his ‘treated paper’ works, showing the 18th century document beneath his 20th century ink drawings, let the two layers of marks across centuries interact. The impression one gets from his best ‘treated paper’ work is that of the classic *kana* calligraphy on the exquisitely decorated paper from the 12th century, or the early 17th century picture scrolls with poems in infinitely nuanced black calligraphy over silver painted images.

*Time:* As mentioned before, calligraphy encapsulates the time and movement of its creator, for the viewer to re-live them later. Alechinsky’s paintings also let the viewer experience time. In his *marginalia* paintings there are two worlds, the centre and the margin, side-by-side, implying different temporalities. In the ‘treated paper’ work, the two time zones are vertically stacked one on top of the other. The interaction between these different worlds transports the viewer into the world of Alechinsky’s imagination. This element of time in his art might have evolved on its own, but I would like to think that his interest in calligraphy made him aware of the potential the sense of time could play in his art. At any rate, he succeeded in exploiting that potential fully. Alechinsky’s art is unique in its profound feel of continuum and the time irrevocably passing.59 [fig. 3-16]

*Materials and methods:* About his materials Alechinsky states simply, ‘I have chosen to use the same equipment [as calligraphy] and have acquired a passionate love of paper.’60 And he pursues them with zeal of a convert, acquiring brushes and paper

---

60 Alechinsky, “Bordering on Something Central,” 22.
from China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan. He does not stop with conventional paper, however. Working on unconventional papers like tailors’ cutting-out paper, old documents and maps, mixing different papers, remounting them on canvas, not to mention his dexterity with brushes, attest to his successful dochaku-ka of the ‘equipment,’ and going beyond, in developing his unique art.

As well as the materials, Alechinsky digested the methods of calligraphy. A calligrapher aspires to be spontaneous, in the state of mushin, mind of no-mind. Alechinsky observed similar spontaneity in the painter Ting’s demonstration. For Alechinsky spontaneity is like the motion of a top. ‘The top spins. Amidst the cigarette stubs, brushes and tubes, before a canvas stretched and waiting, I become a top… I can, I must wind the cord,’ he notes in 1977.\(^{61}\) With a nod of acknowledgement to calligraphy, Alechinsky pursues his own brand of spontaneity. But like a calligrapher, Alechinsky lays the support at his feet, preferring the floor to ‘guillotine-like’ easel.\(^{62}\) He enjoys the freedom of movement as well as the sense of dominance over the support this position gives him.\(^{63}\) A calligrapher would have cited ‘one-ness with the material’ rather than dominance over it, but there lies the difference of cultural backgrounds. He is also aware of the difference in the way of working between a painter and a calligrapher. ‘A painter traces a form here or there on his canvas, then stands back to judge the effect before continuing. The calligrapher does not pause.’\(^{64}\) Realizing these differences, he selects what to adopt, adapts what he has adopted, and with what he has adapted he gets down to the business of investigating ‘that which he doesn’t yet know.’

**Conditions for dochaku-ka:** What then made his adopting and adapting, or dochaku-ka, of calligraphy possible? Alechinsky admiringly writes of Dotremont in 1971 ‘He was determined not to be an Orientalist. So many painters pastiche the ideogram; “it smells of butter,” as the Japanese say. A few successes; Kline, for instance.’\(^{65}\) This comment concerns the fact that twenty years had passed from the time Dotremont first

---


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 223.

\(^{64}\) Alechinsky, “Bordering on Something Central,” 22.

took an interest in Chinese calligraphy before he finally arrived at his logogrammes in 1962. Alechinsky also resisted becoming an Orientalist. Nor did he simply graft the elements of calligraphy into his art. He digested and internalised them in stages through his development as an artist, as Dotremont had done. There are three notable conditions that facilitated Alechinsky’s artistic evolution through dochaku-ka of calligraphy.

The first condition is certain commonalities shared by Alechinsky and the art of calligraphy. Alechinsky’s pilgrimage to Japan was made not in search of an artistic quick-fix but in search of a ‘basis for the international goal of art.’ Roger van Gindertael analyses the outcome of the trip as ‘… having overcome all temptations, [Alechinsky] wished to retain a common lesson from his comparative studies, the lesson of the artist’s need to flee from intellect.’ It is spontaneity, the rallying cry of Cobra, which Alechinsky found in calligraphy as the common ground. For Alechinsky the term ‘spontaneity’ is utterly different from ‘a surrender to mere impulse.’ It must be coupled with discipline. And for him, ‘discipline’ means to ‘strive after a perfection that cannot exist.’ Similarly, the calligrapher Mari Imai speaks of a lifelong discipline in pursuit of that elusive state of mushin, mind of no-mind, in her calligraphy. Yet mushin might not be too far from what Alechinsky also seeks when he states wistfully ‘To receive the image without calling it… To let things come… To connect.’ Although the philosophy of art and the exact meanings of the shared terms like spontaneity and discipline might be different for Japanese calligraphers and Alechinsky, having such profound affinities and equivalent concepts made it possible for them to enrich each other’s art.

The second condition is his encounter with the right type of calligraphy. Having been exposed to the variety of calligraphic approaches through filmmaking, Alechinsky was aware that the energetic splashing of ink was but one of the many approaches practiced by modern Japanese calligraphers. I believe that his model was the graceful

---

66 Lambert, Cobra, 235.
67 Quoted in Abadie, "Chronology," 263.
68 Alechinsky, "Bordering on Something Central," 20.
69 Imai, "Jisshuno Tebiki."
and eloquent kana rather than the heroic and forceful kanji calligraphy. On his departure from Japan he was given a scroll of calligraphy by Shinoda, and his deep admiration for her work is evident in his later writing.\textsuperscript{71} Shinoda specialises in a lyrical abstraction that echoes kana, not kanji. There is also ‘his master’ Sengai, whose zenga work consists of whimsical painting and fluid kana/kanji combination calligraphy. [fig. 3-2] ‘I am Sengai. No doubt about it,’ wrote Alechinsky when he was trying to emulate the master’s unselfconscious approach to painting in 1971.\textsuperscript{72} Alechinsky was never completely an abstract painter. The heroic brush marks of kanji would not have taken him far.

Furthermore, as stated before, Alechinsky’s contact with calligraphy stretched over many years, in pace with his own evolution. I believe that the more he developed, the more he was able to understand calligraphy and discern just what he could learn from it to nurture his art. The ‘booster shots’ of calligraphic inspiration in the form of Shinoda, Hidai, Sengai and Ting, were there for him when he needed them and when he was capable of learning from them.

The third condition is having Cobra as a framework. An accomplished clarinet player, Alechinsky once compared the improvisation of a calligrapher to that of a jazz musician who was supported by the rhythm section as a framework.\textsuperscript{73} A calligrapher has the words and their legibility as a framework whether she decides to stay within it or to go over it into the abstract art. By the same token, for Alechinsky there is ever his ‘Cobra-ness’ to gauge himself with. The Cobra spirit of spontaneity, experimentation, inter-specialisation, collaboration and internationalism are deeply ingrained in him, making him receptive to new perspectives such as calligraphy. At the same time, there is Cobra’s anti-aestheticism. In 1955 Jorn told Alechinsky ‘If you add anything to a painting, be sure that it’s never on aesthetic grounds. Solely for reasons of expression.’\textsuperscript{74} Adopting and adapting of calligraphy by Alechinsky were motivated by his true needs in his exploration. No starry-eyed seeker, he sustained his critical approach, avoiding both surface Orientalism and being seduced and trapped by

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 58-65.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 201.
the depth of calligraphy. Furthermore, important though calligraphy is to his art, Alechinsky’s interests span far wider than calligraphy, with a result that his development avoided uni-directional explorations.75 The Cobra spirit, which he was instrumental in forming even after the dissolution of the group, has in turn provided him with a fertile and critical framework.

With multiple viewpoints and ever-questioning attitude, Alechinsky ensures continuous regeneration of his art.76 As he admits, he is a Cobra through and through – Cobra unified him,77 and he upholds its ideals. Unified, he has confidence to go out ‘to investigate, rather than to conclude.’78 Through dochaku-ka of calligraphy, Alechinsky gave himself one more tool with which to investigate, in pursuit of his own voice. That is to say, in pursuit of the ‘cobric’79 monsters that pursue him.80

75  Daix, "Pierre Alechinsky in His Era," 247.
76  Ibid.
79  Lambert, Cobra, 235.
3-1
Cobra exhibition
Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam
1949

3-2
Daruma
by Sengai Gibon
Early 19th century
Ink on paper
51.6 x 69.4 cm

3-3
Materials and tools of calligraphy
From left: paper on felt base with paperweight, brushes, water container, inkstick, inkstone, seal, inkpad, and seal.

3-4
Floral Quest
by Yuichi Inoue
1988
Ink on paper
The work is of one kanji character signifying 'flower', executed in Inoue's heroic style.
3-5
Poems of Tsurayuki
From the Anthology of the Thirty-six Poets
Early 12th century
Ink on painted paper

3-6
Shooting the film,
Japanese Calligraphy
Kyoto
1955
Alechinsky is second from left.

3-7
Sumi (Ink)
1956
Ink on paper
22.9 x 24.7 cm

3-8
Alice Grows up
1960
Ink on paper
20.4 x 31.4 cm
3-9
Gazing Landscape
1957
Oil on canvas
38 x 56 cm

3-10
Alice Grows up
1961
Oil on canvas
205 x 245 cm

3-11
Central Park
1965
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, with marginalia in ink on Japanese vellum
162 x 193 cm
3-12  
Facteur Honoree  
1974  
Ink and watercolour on document dating from 1791  
16.7 x 19.6 cm

3-13  
Alechinsky at work on crumpled ‘cutting-out paper’  
1960

3-14  
Au Pays de L’encre  
1959  
Ink on paper mounted on canvas  
153 x 240 cm

3-15  
La Contatrice  
1966  
Acrylic on linen  
100 x 154 cm
Le Bleu Horizon
1994
Ink and acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
170 x 201 cm
4. The Making of Issey Miyake

In his essay in the book *Issey Miyake: East Meets West*, the noted Japanese architect Arata Isozaki states that Issey Miyake’s creation has always stemmed from the fundamental question he asks himself ‘What are clothes?’¹ This comment, made in 1978, has remained relevant to this day. The part of Miyake’s career presented in this chapter, from the time he established his studio in 1970 to his last major exhibition as the designer for his label in 2000, can be divided into three periods.² This chapter discusses how Miyake addressed his fundamental question in different ways throughout these periods as he evolved as an artist.

The first period, from 1970 to 1978, can be summed up by the concept he calls ‘a piece of cloth.’ In response to the question ‘What are clothes?’ Miyake went back to the essence of clothing, and explored what it was to cover a body with a piece of cloth. The overview of the period was published as his first book *East Meets West* in 1978. The second period, from 1979 to 1988, was devoted to exploration of body, clothes and the relationship between the two. The relationship was examined and exploited through the innovative use of wide variety of materials and surprising forms, culminating in the 1988 exhibition *Issey Miyake: A-UN* in Paris. The third period, from 1989 to 2000, is marked by the re-emergence of simplicity in his design. Miyake seemed to have re-examined his concept of ‘a piece of cloth,’ this time with a deeper search and more profound understanding. The brands he established during this period, *Pleats Please* and *A-POC* are notable for their inventiveness and beauty of forms.

2 Kazuko Sato divides Miyake’s career into five periods. For the purpose of investigating patterns of cultural interaction, I propose to drop the period of apprenticeship before 1970, and combine 1989-1993 and 1994-2000, as these last two periods are united in their spirit of inventiveness. See Kazuko Sato, "Clothes Beyond the Reach of Time," in *Issey Miyake: Making Things*, ed. Hervé Chandès (Zurich, London: Scalo, Thames & Hudson, 1999), 18.
Miyake handed over the role of designer for his label to Naoki Takizawa in 2000 to concentrate on further research and development of A-POC. Eschewing the fashionability of the moment, Miyake’s search remains constant – ‘a state of clothing that reflects its time and lifestyle.’

I. The first period, leading to the book *East Meets West* (1970-78)

Issey Miyake (b. 1938) maintains that he is a designer who makes clothes, not a fashion designer. Indicative of the unusually porous boundary he draws around his metier, the description reveals his determination to continue assessing the meaning of clothes and the nature of his creation.

Miyake studied graphic design at Tama Art University in Tokyo. From the beginning his interest was wide, and to this day, he values highly the exposure to other disciplines of art at the university such as sculpture and architecture. The formal education in fashion design was gained at Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne in 1965, and the subsequent work at the fashion houses Guy Laroche and Givenchy in Paris, and at Geoffrey Beene in New York. In 1970 he returned to Japan and opened Miyake Design Studio in Tokyo. His experience in Europe and the United States, especially of 1968 student movements, confirmed his desire to create ready-to-wear apparel for the people rather than *hautecouture* for the privileged few. Since his first Paris show in 1973, Miyake has used his twice-yearly Paris Collection as the main vehicle to present his creation, generating critical dialogue with the international fashion world.

The apprenticeship in the West gave Miyake not only the skills and knowledge in fashion but also valuable perspectives. He could look at both his Japanese background and the world beyond it critically. For many Japanese designers who took on the world of French fashion system in the ’70s and ‘80s, the sense of being outsiders of

---

that system worked as an asset. Along with Miyake, the designers such as Kenzo Takada (b. 1939), Rei Kawakubo (b. 1941) and Yohji Yamamoto (b. 1943) used the ‘outsider’ sense, firstly to step out or to stay out of the Western conventions, then to bring in a new sense of beauty in fashion that was, at times, disturbingly different. They chose to tap the traditional Japanese aesthetics, but without falling into a romantic nostalgia or exoticism. Each designer took different aspects of the tradition, re-evaluated and re-formed them according to his or her artistic beliefs and needs. For Miyake, the useful and vital aspects of the Japanese aesthetics were textiles and the concept of ma, which, in his application of the term, signifies the space between the skin and clothes. He found both elements in kimono, the traditional Japanese clothes.

Unlike Western tailoring in which fabric is cut and constructed to follow the contour of a three-dimensional body, kimono is made with minimum cutting and mostly straight sewing, remaining a two-dimensional and simple geometric shape until it is worn. [fig. 4-1] When worn, kimono is draped and tacked onto the body, creating varying folds and spaces that are integral parts of the design. The general form of kimono remains constant, absorbing the differences in gender, age or body shape of the wearer. The fabric for kimono comes in bolt with standard width and length, from which one kimono is made without any waste of material. The form being almost constant, what is vital in the world of kimono is textile. Accordingly, the art and craft of fabric making has been highly developed over the centuries, and Japan remains one of the leaders of textile industry in the world today. ‘My goal has been to create clothes that reveal the beauty of body in movement, with the fabrics that were developed in Japanese daily lives,’ wrote Miyake in 1974. He explored traditional Japanese textiles widely, adapting them innovatively for mass-production to meet the aesthetic and functional requirements in his contemporary design.

---

9 For female 38x1350 cm, and for male 40x1350 cm.
10 Fukai, Fashionno Seiki: Kyoshinsuru 20eikino Fashionto Arto (Century of Fashion: Reverberation between Fashion and Art), 224.
11 Senoo, Kappa Ga Nozota Shigotoshi 12nin (Kappa Interviews 12 Masters), 152.
The concept of *ma* – literally ‘between’ – encapsulates the vitality and energy of ‘nothingness,’ embodied in such temporal and spatial phenomena as the void in architecture, residual (or ‘negative’) space in calligraphy and painting, pause in music, and the charged stillness just before a movement in *noh* play. It is that which defines and energises the tangible. In Miyake’s creation, *ma* signifies the space as well as the relationship between the skin and garment. To Miyake, the prevailing Western idea of clothing seems restricting. Clothes are there to package a body, encasing it into a tightly constructed form with the purpose of creating an object that is desirable. Having the question ‘What are clothes?’ at the base of his creative activities, Miyake chooses instead, to search for garments that allow freedom of movement for both body and spirit.\(^\text{12}\) What is vital for movement is space. ‘I learned about space between the body and the fabric from the traditional *kimono*… not the style, but the space,’ says Miyake.\(^\text{13}\) Furthermore, as in the case of *kimono*, he believes that the creation of a garment is completed when it is worn.\(^\text{14}\) Centrality of *ma* for Miyake is evidenced in his active participation in the 1978 exhibition *Ma: Espace-Temps du Japon*, curated by his architect friend Isozaki, at the Musée de Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

In the early ‘70s, as now, his curiosity knew no bounds. His search for beauty and functionality took him not only all over Japan but also to the rest of Asia, Africa, the United States and Europe. The Indian Tantric symbols and Indonesian batik found a home in his avant-garde fashion. Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix appeared on the jersey he designed. Miyake’s creation from this period was often ample and billowing, swathed across the body, with a cheerful disregard to symmetry that was so dear to Western aesthetics. [fig. 4-2] Along with the concept of *ma*, asymmetry is one of the notable characteristics of traditional Japanese aesthetics.

Reduction or simplification, rather than construction, is Miyake’s methodology, however.\(^\text{15}\) In his search he realised that a very simple form of clothing, a rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around a body, existed in many early societies including


\(^{14}\) Kitayama, “Issey Miyake,” 42.

\(^{15}\) Mark Holborn, "Image of a Second Skin," *Artforum International*, November 1988, 118.
Japanese and Greek. And he found it beautiful. In 1976 he created a coat, a square with sleeves, which he named *A Piece of Cloth*. [fig. 4-3] The concept of ‘a piece of cloth’ explores the essence of clothing, that is to say, the relationship between the body and the cloth that covers it. The concept was developed further and presented in an exhibition of the same title in 1977.

Miyake is unique among fashion designers in his use of exhibitions and publication of books as means of research and development. The exhibitions give Miyake and the viewers the opportunities to examine closely the concepts behind the clothes as well as the formal elements such as colour, texture, shape and movement, which in ordinary circumstances can be overshadowed by the immediate purpose of wearing. ‘No other designer interprets his work as deliberately and thoughtfully as Miyake.’ The 1978 book *East Meets West* was an overview and critical evaluation by Miyake of his own work from 1970 to 1977. In the 1988 *Artforum* article, Mark Holborn wrote that the book had signalled the emerging force of Japanese fashion, which was to become so dominant in the 80’s in the international arena. The book ‘overturned the constriction of Japanese society, and at the same time, undermined the Euro-centric perspective in the West.’

II. The second period, leading to the exhibition A-UN (1979-88)

Miyake’s second period is notable for its bold experimentation. The theme of the period is the intimate relationship between the body and clothes, which came into focus in 1976 as the concept ‘a piece of cloth.’ While continuing to present his creation in Paris Collection, Miyake participated in or mounted numerous museum exhibitions. The most notables among them are *Issey Miyake Spectacle: Bodyworks* held in Tokyo, Los Angeles, San Francisco and London between 1983 and 1985; and *Issey Miyake: A-UN* held in Paris in 1988. It should be noted, however, that along with these experimental and spectacular works, Miyake was also developing a

---

18 Holborn, "Image of a Second Skin," 118.
practical approach to design, which he called ‘clothes for real life.’ He established the functional, elegant and relatively inexpensive brand Plantation in 1981.

‘If I did not become a designer, I would have chosen to be a dancer,’ remarked Miyake. The exhibition Issey Miyake Spectacle: Bodyworks underscores Miyake’s fascination with the beauty of body in movement. [fig. 4-4] Indicative of this is his working method. ‘I do not work from sketches. I create by wrapping a piece of fabric around myself. It’s a process of manual labour. My clothes are born out of the movement of my hands and body.’ Formerly known for the voluminous garments in soft fabric draped over body, in the ‘80s, Miyake started juxtaposing a wide variety of materials in different relationships to the body. For him plastic, bamboo and paper were equally suitable for clothing as cotton, silk and polyester. In his 1980 collection, for instance, there was an unusual red bodice made of fibreglass. Equally striking was a 1982 armour-like bodice made of rattan and bamboo, teamed with a pleated polyester jacket and skirt. The outfit drew wide attention, including from Artforum magazine, which used it for the 1982 February issue’s cover and editorial. [fig. 4-5] Are these shells an extension of the body, a second skin? Or is the body a second cloth, perhaps? With these garments and many other radically new forms and materials in the exhibition, Miyake demonstrated the depth of his exploration of the body and its indivisible relationship to clothes. In conjunction with the exhibition Miyake produced the book Bodyworks. The garments in the book are modelled by his friends and clients – by the notable and not-so notable, the old and young, artists and non-artists, from the East and West. In Miyake’s eyes, they all epitomise some ideals in human body, and are taking pleasure in the body/clothes relationship found in his garments.

---

19 Mark Holborn and Issey Miyake, Issey Miyake (Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1995), 50.
In the 1988 exhibition *Issey Miyake: A-UN* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, Miyake wished to convey the mutual understanding and communication between the body and fabrics, the maker of clothes and those who wear them, the past and present, as well as East and West. A Buddhist term in origin, *a-un* signifies instant and complete communication between two people without words. The content of the exhibition was a comprehensive and critical review of his work from 1978 to 1988, with emphasis on the fabric innovation. [fig. 4-6]

For many Japanese designers who are playing prominent roles in the international fashion scene, textile acts as the source of inspiration, and Miyake is no exception. ‘Western clothes are cut and shaped with the body as the starting point; Japanese clothes start with the fabric,’ states Miyake. Makiko Minagawa, his textile director, has been with Miyake Design Studio since 1971, and is credited with MDS’s textile innovation. Unlike many of the designers in the West, who simply select from what has been put forward by the textile industry each season, Miyake and other major Japanese designers create their own fabrics – from selecting fibre, dyeing process, weaving technique and other steps all the way to completion. Minagawa has travelled extensively throughout Japan, and other parts of the world, visiting textile mills and establishing close working relationships with them. Without the support of these factories, and also without the advanced technology available in Japanese textile industry, Miyake Design Studio’s innovations in textile, and consequently in their design and creation, would have been impossible.

‘There are no boundaries as to what can be fabric. Anything can become clothes,’ enthuses Miyake. The *A-UN* exhibition, then, showcased Miyake’s clothes that exploited the potential of textiles to the maximum. The fabrics were not only astonishingly original, but were also ‘… folded, twisted, bleached, quilted, knitted, crumpled, recycled or pressed together in two or three layers…’ However, Miyake

---

25 Sato, "Clothes Beyond the Reach of Time," 45.
27 Kanai, "Fuku (Clothing) Which Brings Fuku (Happiness)," 71.
does not stray from the fact that clothes are meant to be worn over the body. The exhibition centred on how the innovative textile and creative forms lead to each other, culminating in garments that give joy to the wearer. Among many innovations presented was the pleat, which was to play a major role in his work in the ‘90s.

The exhibition was accompanied by a book of photographs of Miyake’s work taken by Irvin Penn. The encounter with Penn was a significant event for Miyake during the second period. Having seen two of his garments photographed by Penn in Vogue magazine, Miyake proposed collaboration that was to last from 1987 to 1999, and was extremely fruitful for both of them. Penn found mystery and beauty in Miyake’s clothes, while Miyake, through Penn’s photographs, was able to understand his own creation more acutely.

III. The third period, leading to the exhibition Making Things (1989-2000)

‘After the visual extravaganza displayed in the A-UN exhibition Miyake wanted to develop a new functionalism,’ observes Holborn. In the third period Miyake’s predilection for simplicity and purity of form became more evident than in the preceding periods. His research in textile continued with a sharper focus. This period saw realisation of two highly inventive lines – Pleats Please and A-POC –, and staging of a comprehensive exhibition of his ideals in clothes making.

Pleats Please, one of Miyake’s signature brands, draws upon the global tradition while re-defining the pleasure of contemporary clothing. Folding a piece of cloth to create pleats is one of the basic techniques in clothing design, and is found in many cultures including ancient Egypt and Greece. Pleats first appeared in Miyake’s work when he adapted oniyōryū, a traditional Japanese fabric with richly textured pleats, for mass-production and contemporary use in 1971. [fig. 4-7] His further experimentation produced 1981 urethane coated jersey with deep shimmering pleats.

29 Kanai, "Fuku (Clothing) Which Brings Fuku (Happiness),” 72.
31 Ibid., 8.
In his 1989 collection heat-treated polyester with permanent pleats appeared, which proved to be a direction with endless possibilities for development.

Regarding the development of this particular brand, Miyake tells of a shift in perspective in his work. In the early developmental stage his attention was on how to cut, sew and construct clothes. Later it changed to how the clothes were worn by the contemporary women. The issue, then, was how to create clothes that were beautiful to look at, pleasant to touch, comfortable to move in, flexible for mix and match, adaptable for many occasions, wrinkle-free and easy to care for, and above all, give pleasure to the wearer in her busy daily life. In 1993 a collection of just such clothes was launched as *Pleats Please*, which enjoyed a critical and commercial success, and is still highly sought after today in many major cities of the world. [fig. 4-8]

‘The blouses emerge like big muffins from the oven,’ remarked Miyake about his pleated creation in 1989. His innovation lies in reversing the standard procedure. In the conventional process the patterns are cut from pre-pleated fabric, then sewn. *Pleats Please* garments are first cut and sewn from flat fabric, then are put through pleating machines. The original forms are basic and with simple construction – ‘almost no design,’ says Miyake – in two and a half to three times the final pleated size. The finished form is simple, and lies flat. When worn, a *Pleats Please* garment leaps into life, clinging to the skin here, floating away from the body there, changing its form and colour according to the body shape and movement of the wearer. *Ma* – the sculpted space between the body and cloth – indeed plays the major role in orchestrating the beauty and comfort of *Pleats Please*. Using advanced textile technology Miyake created fabric that looked labour-intensive as well as innovative. Mass-produced for wide availability, yet each garment being one-of-a-kind in form

33 Miyake, "Interview with Issey Miyake," 106.
34 Fukai, *Fashion no Seiki: Kyoshinsuru 20seikono Fashion to Arto* (Century of Fashion: Reverberation between Fashion and Art), 221.
when worn, *Pleats Please* embodies Miyake’s ideal of clothes for the people, with its beauty, practicality and individuality.

In 1999 Miyake brought out an unusual brand he calls *A-POC*, short for ‘a piece of cloth,’ his concept of 1976. *A-POC* is a bolt of cloth in a tube form, from which with an ordinary pair of scissors, the wearer can simply cut out a dress of desired lengths, a shirt, a hood, a bag, socks, etc., even a water bottle holder. [fig. 4-9] The flat and simple shapes for these items are woven into the cloth in clear outlines, almost like the paper patterns of old. *A-POC* is produced by computer-programmed industrial knitting machines, and once cut, most pieces do not require any sewing. ‘In all modesty I make only half the journey: those who wear my clothes make the other half,’ says Miyake of all his garments. ³⁹ [fig. 4-10] *A-POC* epitomises this philosophy in more ways than one. Miyake often talks of his desire to contribute to environmental protection and conservation of resources. ⁴⁰ Using the entire bolt economically, *A-POC* recalls the way one *kimono* is created from a bolt of fabric without waste. Since its launch in 1999, Miyake has continued to develop this dramatically different approach to clothing, and *A-POC* now comes in a wide variety of style, colour, and fibre mix.

Ever a believer in communication, Miyake staged a major exhibition *Issey Miyake: Making Things* at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 1998. [fig. 4-11] The exhibition travelled to New York the following year, and to Tokyo in 2000. Tadanori Yokoo, a graphic designer/artist, notes that in this exhibition Miyake has returned to his natural state. ⁴¹ For Miyake, as in the traditional Japanese culture, there never has been differentiation between art and craft, or fine art and applied art. Without division or hierarchy, they are all intimately connected to daily life. In the exhibition Miyake invited viewers to share the pleasure and excitement of making clothes. He presented not only his finished garments but also the work in progress, and the production process of *Pleats Please* and *A-POC*. The exhibition demonstrated what was possible at the leading edge of fashion and textile industry, with the unexpected and welcome combination of mass-production and individual human touch. Through the exhibition

---

and accompanying book titled *Making Things*, Miyake called for a dialogue, which for him was vital for continuing research and creation.\(^{42}\) The dialogue he has been having, and continues to seek, is that of between the maker and wearer, material and design, and above all, between a body and a piece of cloth.

**IV. Miyake and dochaku process in his art**

All through Miyake’s career, Washida states in 2000, there is one constant, and that is the concept of ‘a piece of cloth.’\(^{43}\) I would argue that the concept was an answer to a more fundamental constant, the question Miyake posed to himself from the very beginning, ‘What are clothes?’\(^{44}\) The poet Mutsuo Takahashi points out that Miyake answers that fundamental question with yet more questions, and the clothes he creates are provisional answers that are questions at the same time.\(^{45}\) The method he used to create his ‘provisional answers’ varied from one period to another. One way to evaluate the evolution of his art is through the different ways he responded to the stimuli around him in order to make his art uniquely his own. That is to say, the process of *dochaku* – indiginisation – of the sources of inspiration into his work. As discussed, the major elements of Japanese aesthetics that drove Miyake were textiles and the concept of *ma*.

*The first period – making differentiation through synthesis:* For all his iconoclastic attitude, Miyake maintains that he respects traditions. He values the long fashion tradition of the West highly, and does not believe in simply trying to better it. His own, the Japanese tradition, is loaded with history and accompanying constrictions. The challenge for him at the beginning, then, was to ‘create something different, not traditionally Japanese, not purely Western, but something which has the best of both: a new genre of clothing,’ recalls Miyake.\(^{46}\)

\(^{42}\) Miyake, "Interview with Issey Miyake," 105.
\(^{43}\) Washida, "Miyake Issey," 92.
\(^{44}\) Isozaki, "What Are Clothes?... A Fundamental Question," 55.
\(^{46}\) Holborn and Miyake, *Issey Miyake*, 44.
As his book *East Meets West* indicates, Miyake’s wish during the first period was to link the East and West, while scouring for inspiration far and wide, in both space and time. Between the cultures he found similarities as well as differences. For instance, while reviving *sashiko*, an ancient Japanese quilting technique used for work wear, he recognised similar textile treatment in Morocco, India and Afghanistan. The textile of ancient Egypt and Greece, as well as Japanese fabric *oniyōryū*, and the early 20th century Italian designer Fortuny, inspired Miyake’s early pleats that eventually evolved into his brand *Pleats Please*. The gentle drapes by Vionnet, a French designer of the early 20th century who invented the bias cut, inspired Miyake in his quest for design that allows freedom of movement for body and spirit. Along with Vionnet, Miyake regards Poiret and Balenciaga as great designers, and all had found inspiration in *kimono* at some point. Although Miyake states that he learned the space, not style, from *kimono*, in his early design the style of *kimono* is visible. [fig. 4-12] Re-contextualised, aspects of *kimono* can be observed in some of his creations as the simple geometric forms that remain two-dimensional till worn, layering techniques and being gender-free. The concept of *ma* seems to have been interpreted literally as ‘space’, and the resulting garments were, more often than not, one-size-fits-all loose design.

Of course, other than *kimono*, inspirations were everywhere. He found them in nature, culture, and even in the bowl of noodle soup he had just had for lunch. ‘Miyake wanted to create completely novel clothes that would assimilate the traditions and cultures of the entire world,’ comments Buxbaum. In answering the fundamental question ‘What are clothes?’ Miyake synthesised in order to ‘offer people something other than what they already see.’ In 1976 his search for the fundamental found a focus. ‘I am always returning to one piece of cloth – a rectangle – because it is the elementary form of clothing,’ says Miyake. The coat *A Piece of Cloth* was neither

---

48 Kanai, "Fuku (Clothing) Which Brings Fuku (Happiness)," 72.
Eastern nor Western, but had roots in both worlds. A product of creative synthesis, the design was different and new. And so was the concept.

**The second period – attaining specificity by further questioning:** The coat, and the concept named ‘a piece of cloth,’ came into existence as an answer to the fundamental question ‘What are clothes?’ As was Miyake’s way, the concept was both an answer and a question at the same time. What did he mean by ‘a piece of cloth’? Taken as a question the concept indicated the next step, a two-pronged exploration of the body and cloth that covers it. Unlike the previous period, however, there was no longer a simple dualism such as the East and West, or the contemporary and traditional. The body and cloth are not of opposing camps, nor are they the opposite ends of one pole. They are the components of that which he values most – the indivisible relationship between the body and his creation. In the second period Miyake’s original fascination with fabrics and ma, which had kimono as the point of departure, was transformed into more personal and specific questions as the body, cloth and relationship between the two.

Having a clear focus, the method Miyake used during the second period is syncretisation. To delve deeply into the meaning of the concept ‘a piece of cloth,’ Miyake strategically and nominally separated and contrasted the two components in order to explore them thoroughly, and to illuminate the relationship between the two clearly. In *Bodyworks* his concern was the body that wore the cloth. He examined it as an entity that was infinitely beautiful in movement, an entity that could be freed and extended by the cloth it wore. In *A-UN* the potentiality of textile was explored, that is, the cloth as the device that could free both the body and spirit of the wearer.

Interestingly, Miyake also used syncretisation in addressing his two different artistic needs. The fashion system in France – currently the best developed and the most prestigious in the world – has served Miyake’s purpose well, enabling him and countless other designers to accrue symbolic capital. Through the French fashion system he gained international recognition, and through it he continues to influence

---

the contemporary fashion scene. He considers Paris Collection as his ‘annual check-up.’ Although he thrives on the challenge and pace of Paris Collection that relentlessly strives for newness each season, Miyake also yearned for an opportunity to go deeper into his design concepts, taking time and effort to fully develop his ideas. To that end, in 1985, he launched a brand called Permanente. The name, Miyake explains, implies not necessarily being permanent, but being continuous. Classic and timeless in style, Permanente is a vehicle through which he can carry out his search for beauty outside of the frenetic seasonal fashion cycle. As discussed, a similar strategy was taken in creating his line Plantation in order to pursue the practical everyday clothes, in parallel with the fantastic and experimental garments.

As before, the inspirations from nature and culture from all over the world continued to be important in his creative work, but his interpretation and usage of these stimuli were firmly grounded. The question ‘What are clothes?’ acted as a window on the world, ensuring that his response to these stimuli was channelled to answer that concrete question. And by tirelessly posing the fundamental question, and by answering in his unique ways, he gained specificity in his art. Through critical questioning and experimentation, dochaku-ka of many sources of inspiration was taking place in him, preparing an ever-richer soil for further blossoming.

**The third period – creating new definitions:** Miyake’s findings from the second period were, again, put through his fundamental question ‘What are clothes?’ Having gone through much iteration, the question registered at a deeper level in Miyake, demanding more and more profound answers of him. In 1987 he spoke of his passion for ‘design’ – in the widest sense of the word – rather than for ‘fashion design,’ since his early student days. In addressing his fundamental question during the third period, Miyake deployed what had become a part of him through dochaku process previously, and kept on incorporating yet more fields of interest into his perpetual question/answer cycle. The result is the re-definition of clothing and his metier.

---

54 Miyake, ”Interview with Issey Miyake,” 112.
55 Senoo, *Kappa Ga Nozoita Shigotoshi 12nin (Kappa Interviews 12 Masters)*, 151.
56 Ibid., 153.
Wim Beeren notes that Miyake realised *Pleats Please* and *A-POC* by moving freely between art, design and industry. ‘His work provides us with the means to breach the fixed pattern.’

Although Miyake is adamant that his work is not art, his work has been receiving attention from the art world since the early days as seen in the 1982 and 1988 *Artforum* articles on him. Furthermore, along with Kiefer, Polke, Holzer and Sherman, Miyake was one of the 16 artists featured in the 1990 *Energies* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. [fig. 4-13] Speaking of Miyake’s work from the exhibition, Nicholas Serota, the director of Tate Gallery, states ‘In a world that craves novelty Miyake offers not newness but originality… not pastiche but invention. It is these qualities which give his work such a radiant freshness, lifting it from the particular moment that we associate with fashion to the timeless plane which is occupied by the most enduring art.’

As he adopted a new discipline such as computer technology, Miyake adapted it through the framework of ‘a piece of cloth,’ never clouding his fundamental issue of creating clothes that give pleasure to the people. From the fibre to finished garment, *A-POC* is produced in one process without going through the age-old separate steps of fabric making, cutting, and sewing. By inviting the wearer to simply cut out clothes with desired skirt and sleeve lengths herself, *A-POC* defies not only the conventional idea of designer clothes but also the system of clothes creation itself. ‘I do not want to oppose existing systems, but change them by incorporating them into my work,’ stated Miyake in 1983. Wanting to oppose the system or not, 16 years later, he introduced a fundamental change in clothing system through *A-POC*.

Along with the innovations such as *Pleats Please* and *A-POC*, the third period is notable for its collaborative works. If collaborative art is relatively new in the West, it has a well-established place in the history of Japanese art. Honami Köetsu, a calligrapher, and Tawaraya Sōtatsu, a painter, collaborated to create exquisite picture scrolls in the early 17th century. *Ukiyo-e*, the traditional Japanese woodcut prints, was

---


60 Tsurumoto and Miyake Design Studio, *Issey Miyake Bodyworks*, 103.
possible only with close collaboration between the painter, printer, and publisher. Miyake’s interest in many fields has been reciprocated by the attention his work attracts from the professionals of these fields. He has worked with architects, philosophers, sociologists, poets, graphic designers, photographers, dancers, choreographers, actors and visual artists of all kinds. His 1998 exhibition *Making Things* was opened by the artist Cai Guo-Qiang, setting fire to *Pleats Please* garments. It was a part of the *Pleats Please* Guest Artist Series that included collaboration with Tim Hawkinson, Nobuyoshi Araki and Yasumasa Morimura. [fig. 4-14]

‘I am stimulated by working with people who put everything they’ve got into responding to an idea or challenge,’ says Miyake. There is much in common between cross-cultural interaction and artistic collaboration. Miyake excels in both, finding pleasure in the differences that can teach him something new, which eventually might become his soil, seed or detonator for new creation. Bénaîm says of Miyake as having gifts of curiosity and sense of wonder. In the interaction with others, and among the curious and wondrous things around him, he finds inspiration. And through his endless questioning and answering, these stimuli are digested and adapted to become a part of him – which is the process of *dochaku*. *Dochaku-ka* of countless stimuli is one of the ways Miyake’s creation accomplishes the feat of being ‘imbued with the history of the past yet looks dynamically towards the future.’

‘The very idea of the East and West has disappeared today,’ said Miyake in 1998, twenty years after the publication of *East Meets West*. Through *dochaku-ka* of the sources of inspiration and his critical questioning, Miyake makes the distinction between the East and West, art and craft, art and design, design and industry, tradition and technology, quite irrelevant for his creation. Passionately committed as he is to answering a universal question ‘What are clothes?’, Issey Miyake transcends any specific cultures or conventionally defined fields. He is original.

62 Ibid., 5.
64 Miyake, “Interview with Issey Miyake,” 116.
4-1 (far left)
Woman’s kimono
Early 19th century

4-2
Coat, top and pants in Pewlon
1977

4-3
A Piece of Cloth
Coat in cotton and linen knit, symbolising Miyake’s concept of clothing.
1976
4-4
Issey Miyake Spectacle: Bodyworks exhibition
San Francisco
1983

4-5
Cover of Artforum, February 1982
The bodice in rattan, pleated skirt in laminated polyester.

4-6
Issey Miyake: A-UN exhibition
Musée des Arts Décoratifs
Paris
1988

4-7
Oni-yoru
In cotton crepe with a thick rippled texture
1974
4-8
Pleats Please
Spring-Summer Collection
1994

4-9
A-POC
1999
The clothes are simply cut out of a tubal knit, requiring no sewing.

4-10
A-POC, Berlin Homage
Autumn-Winter
Collection
2001
4-11
Issey Miyake: Making Things exhibition
Fondation Cartier
Paris
1998

4-12
Inakajima
Coat in ‘folklore’ textured stripe fabric in wool, showing affinity with kimono.
1976

4-13
Miyake’s creation in Energies exhibition
Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam
1990
Morimura’s Doll
by Yasumasa Morimura
1988
Plastic, Pleats Please dress
170 x 50 x 30 cm

Fondation Cartier
Paris
1998
5. Hiroshi Sugito: Moves and Countermoves

Hiroshi Sugito is a mid-career painter whose art is in the throes of evolution. Unlike the previous three cases in which the totality of the artists’ careers could be examined from the vantage point of hindsight, his is forming and re-forming as we observe its growth. Although it might be difficult to draw clear conclusions from his case study, I believe it is vital to include a contemporary and on-going example to deepen our understanding of dochaku process in its early stage. To that end, this chapter investigates the nature of nihonga – the unique mode of painting born of Japan’s encounter with the West in the late 19th century, and how Sugito has internalised and made nihonga his own in his evolution as an artist practicing in the contemporary international art world.

Asked if he aligned himself with ‘any painterly tradition, Japanese or otherwise,’ Sugito responded with ‘I am just a painter.’ Well he might. Sugito belongs to the type of artists, fast increasing in number today, whom the critic Midori Matsui calls ‘migrant’ artists. Having grown up in consumer societies, they share certain experiences across national and cultural borders. More often than not they have lived, or are living, in countries other than their own. Independent and resourceful by nature or necessity, some mine the cultural heritage of their country of origin for technical or ideological prototypes while not following its conventions.

From the age of three Sugito (b. 1970) lived in New York with his family for 13 years due to his father’s work. Accompanied by his mother, he was a frequent visitor to the Museum of Modern Art, revelling in the works by Monet, Cezanne and Matisse.

---

1 Hiroshi Sugito, ”In Conversation,” in Japan: Rising, ed. Michael Rush (Jupiter, Florida: Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, 2003), 48.
among others. When he came back to Japan in 1986, he recalls, ‘Japan was a foreign
country. Everything felt different and fresh.’ He faced a strenuous re-adjustment
process then, not the least of which was learning to express himself in Japanese.³
During these early days back in Japan, one thing he enjoyed, and was good at
expressing himself in, was drawing. Sugito graduated from Aichi University of Fine
Arts and Music in 1993. Following his first solo exhibition in Tokyo in 1996, Sugito’s
work has been seen regularly in Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, Milan and
elsewhere. [fig. 5-1] Being a ‘migrant’ artist, one of the fields Sugito has been mining
in his evolution is nihonga.

I. The world of nihonga

Prodded by the United States of America, Japan opened its doors reluctantly in 1854
after more than 200 years of self-imposed isolation. In 1868 the Tokugawa shogunate
was replaced by the imperial rule. This momentous event for Japan, called the Meiji
Restoration, signalled the beginning of its modern period.⁴ It did not take the Meiji
government long to realise its dismal position in the international arena rife with
imperialistic intentions. To retain its sovereignty, and wishing to be counted as an
equal among the powerful, the government launched a massive modernization
program. To Meiji bureaucrats modernization meant Westernisation, resulting in hasty
and in some cases, indiscriminate, importation of Western science and technology as
well as political, social and cultural systems – and art was no exception. This section
discusses how one branch of art, nihonga, came into existence, its materials and
techniques, and its fundamental characteristics.

In the sphere of art, ‘modernization’ took the form of the neglect and destruction of
traditional Japanese artefacts, and the installation of the art of 19th century Europe as
the official art. Predictably, in time, there grew opposition, and it was spearheaded by
the American scholar Earnest Fenollosa, then a guest professor at the Tokyo Imperial

---
³ Sugito, "In Conversation," 47.
University, and his confidant, the art historian Tenshin Okakura. In 1889 their efforts bore fruit, and Tokyo School of Fine Arts opened. The school aimed to teach, among other things, painting that merged the best elements of various schools of traditional Japanese art with the art from Europe. This discipline came to be called *nihonga* (literally, Japanese painting) to differentiate it from the new painting using solely the European medium, format and modes of representation, which was called *yōga* (literally, Western painting). [fig. 5-2] Although Okakura did not wish to divide the art of painting this way, the terms and polarization became entrenched when the government-sponsored salon established two separate categories of painting, *yōga* and *nihonga* in 1907. The differentiation still continues today in educational institutions, art organizations and the art market in Japan.

Before the Meiji era, the field of painting consisted of various established schools differing in modes of representation, media and patronage. The Kano school was known for its powerful lines and grand scale, the favourite of feudal lords. Rinpa (Rin school), known for its decorative motifs and bold forms, grew with the rise of rich merchant class. The Tosa school inherited the courtly refinement and Japanese (in contrast to the imported Chinese) aesthetics of the 12th century *Tale of Genji* picture scrolls. The Nanga school, based on the Chinese ink painting tradition, was upheld by literatis. The Shijo school was known for its realism based on direct observations. And of course there were independent artists making base paintings for the *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints.

Although the Tokugawa regime had an isolation policy, the door was not completely closed for the duration of its power that ended with the Meiji Restoration. The Dutch merchants who, unlike the Portuguese and Spanish arrivals, had not shown troublesome evangelistic tendencies, were allowed to trade at the port of Nagasaki, located far from the capital Edo (now Tokyo). There, European science and technologies seeped through along with the more materialistic bounties, and the books

---

and manuals from Holland were studied by avid Japanese scholars and artists who were hungry for stimulation and knowledge from outside. Shijo school artists were influenced by the Dutch copperplate prints they saw. Some ukiyo-e artists attempted to incorporate one point perspective, while others tried chiaroscuro. Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) poured over the illustrations found in Dutch encyclopaedia, which eventually metamorphosed as *Hokusai Manga*, inspiring many artists, both in Japan and abroad, in the 19th and 20th century.⁶

As these examples show, influence and adaptation of European art had been going on before Meiji era. The difference between the late 19th century encounter and that of the previous years was that when the gate was officially opened, the flood was massive and immediate, requiring dramatic adjustments and soul-searching among the inhabitants. For the painters there were two options. One was to succumb to the fascination of the new and start from scratch, studying in Paris, if possible – which was the way of *yōga*. The other way was to re-butress the classical Japanese painting by unifying various schools that were, by then, running out of vitality for innovation, while selectively adapting the new modes from Europe – which was *nihonga*. For both *yōga* and *nihonga* artists, though, some of the new were not that strange. The Japanese artists were mainly looking toward European Impressionists and Post-Impressionists for inspiration, and those European artists themselves had but recently adopted and adapted what the Japanese recognized as their own aesthetics richly present in *ukiyo-e*. Some familiarity of the new notwithstanding, the soul-searching required was considerable. It was around 1910 when truly innovative and personal expressions that avoid both the confines of traditional schools and undigested Western influences began to appear in *nihonga*.⁷

For some scholars the term *nihonga* refers to Japanese paintings dating from the Meiji era onwards, executed in certain traditional manner in terms of media, format or modes of representation.⁸ For others, like the artist Misao Yokoyama (1920-1973),

---

nihonga signifies all painterly marks produced in Japanese culture over the centuries, be it the modest drawing found on pre-historic pottery or the gorgeous folding screens from 17th century. Certainly not limiting their horizon to the time of inception of the term nihonga itself, today, many nihonga artists continue to search for inspiration in Japan’s long history and traditions as well as those from abroad. In this research I choose to take the wider definition of nihonga, as painting in Japan done in some classical manner.

One way to define nihonga can be by its materials and techniques. Preferring the narrower definition of nihonga, the conservationist Masako Koyano states, ‘Nihonga is a type of painting rendered with iwaenogu (mineral pigments) and gofun (shell white), mixed in a nikawa (animal glue) medium. The primary materials for supports are silk and paper, but wooden boards and linen are occasionally used.’ Finely crushed, the pigments are classified into over a dozen grades according to the size of particles. As for the techniques of nihonga, she goes on to cite the wide variety of techniques used by the artists from many schools and eras in the history of Japanese painting, going back to the 12th century. The practice of nihonga widened after the end of the Second World War in 1945. While synthetic pigments for nihonga was developed, the artists experimented with unorthodox materials and techniques as well. Hidetaka Ono (b.1922) shook nihonga in the 1950-60s by using burlap, cement and synthetic adhesive to create his abstract works. The prominent contemporary nihonga artist Matazo Kayama (1927-2004) routinely used various dying techniques and airbrush as well as more traditional materials and techniques in his work. The art historian Nagahiro Kinoshita states that today’s [1995] nihonga has become ‘almost indistinguishable from yōga in its subjects and/or techniques.’[fig. 5-3] In terms of techniques, however, the use of iwaenogu and nikawa does require considerable training. They do not come ready for use in tubes like oil or acrylic

---

paints, and artists spend years learning how to prepare them to their own liking through experimentation. The support, fine rice paper, also requires preparation by lining and stretching. Some contemporary artists with a background of nihonga ruminate that this particular need to prepare one’s own materials helps them to sharpen sensitivity towards the materiality of their art, and to develop love of working with their hands patiently over time.\textsuperscript{14}

Taking a wider view like Yokoyama, Reiko Tamamushi, the curator at the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, equates the term nihonga with Japanese visual art. Japan imported many aspects of Chinese culture through the ages, such as the writing system, literature and ink painting. The adopted arts all underwent what is called wayōka – Japanisation – soon after their arrivals. As the fundamental characteristics of nihonga (meaning, in this case, the Japanese paintings of old and new, executed in some classical manner), Tamamushi proposes: 1) unity with nature, 2) decorative mode of representation, and 3) invoking audience participation by close relationship with literature.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{1) Unity with nature:} Japan’s relatively mild climate with clear distinction between the four seasons, and spreading of Buddhism, compelled the inhabitants to meditate on the transience of this world… and that became one of the standard themes for literature and visual art as seen in \textit{The Tale of Genji}. The majestic and lofty landscape depicted in the Chinese ink painting became more gentle and closer to human scale in Japanese painting, reflecting the geography of the small island nation.\textsuperscript{16} Imported in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the art of ink painting developed its subtle and nuanced Japanised form by the 16th century as seen in \textit{The Pine Woods} folding screen by Hasegawa Tōhaku (1539-1610). [fig. 5-4] The desire to reflect the environment did not stop with the natural environment. Genre painting became popular in the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century, and as seen in \textit{ukiyo-e} prints later, the artists never tired of depicting their surroundings and small daily happenings. Here again, the daily routine depicted was often closely

\textsuperscript{14} Hitomi Uchikura, interview by the author, January 2009.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
related to the seasonal changes, such as cherry blossom viewing in spring, bathing in summer and moon viewing in autumn. This disposition to depict the immediate environment continues in the contemporary nihonga, widening its subject matter to include what is ‘real’ to the artist in a given epoch. For example, Yokoyama’s Blast Furnace of 1956 shocked some viewers with its industrial subject matter, scale (228x1092cm) and forceful mode of representation, but came to be widely acclaimed in the end. In that sense ‘unity with nature’ has indeed been upheld to this day, reflecting even the ‘nature’ of the contemporary urban environment.

2) Decorative mode of representation: In depicting the nature, the nihonga artists do not endeavour to replicate the mere outer appearances. For them, capturing the essence of things is more critical and ‘real.’ To that end they often choose to represent one most important aspect of the object, interpret it, and imbue it with deeply felt personal response to it, and then make the whole visible. The form, more often than not, becomes simple and symbolic in this process. The ubiquitous wave pattern used for water is a good example. [fig. 5-5] Originated by Ogata Kōrin (1658-1716) in the early 18th century, the pattern has come to represent the essence of water, conveying even the inner response to water by the artist and viewer alike. Thus in its origin and depth of content, the apparent ‘decorative’ mode of representation in nihonga is entirely different from the ‘decorative’ in the sense of the word used in the West, which is surface ornamentation without much content.

3) Invoking audience participation through close relationship with literature: The relationship between literature and painting in the history of Japanese arts is far more than that of text and illustration. As in haiku poetry in which a reader completes the poem by her imagination, in nihonga, the viewer is expected to participate in conversation with the painter. Tamamushi points out the painter of pre-modern period had many formats to choose from, depending on the nature of communication he (or his patron) sought. For instance, for story telling, there was a long picture scroll that the viewer held in her hands, furling out with the left hand while rolling in with the right as she read/saw at her own speed, from right to left. The hanging scroll was ideal for representing one dramatic moment in time. The folding screen was an opportunity

---

to present a narrative at a glance. In all cases, knowledge by the viewer of the literature referred to was assumed, and the painter highlighted or withheld parts of the narrative to titillate and to solicit conversation with the viewer. The conversation would be different each time depending on the understanding and interpretation of the literature and the painting by the viewer. This third characteristics of nihonga, Tamamushi laments, is in decline in our time due to the almost uniform format used today, which is the framed tableau shown in exhibition halls. She also notes that although today’s painters might still wish to initiate that conversation with the viewer, the current tendency to strive for ‘almost suffocating’ perfection in finish impedes that communication, allowing no space for the viewer. Nevertheless, for J. Thomas Rimer and others, ‘the inherited sense of elegance and craft’ remains the very essence of nihonga.

II. **The worlds of Hiroshi Sugito**

The worlds of Hiroshi Sugito are singularly permeable. His paintings oscillate between the figurative and the abstract. A part can be a whole, an animal can be a building, interior can be exterior, and far can be near. Through his determinedly private exploration of the worlds he encounters, he creates and presents to the viewer his fluid and plural realities. The plurality extends to his painting mode as well. From the beginning of his career, his nihonga traits have been tempered with the traits of Euro-American Modernism in varying degrees. In 2001 the critic Jerry Saltz said of Sugito’s work, ‘Cy Twombly meets Color Field.’ Some writings on his art comment on its Minimalist aspects. Most critics do not fail to mention the part nihonga plays in it. It is no surprise that the Modernist tendencies are integral parts of Sugito’s work. After all, he spent his formative years in New York, the mecca of Euro-American Modernism, and nihonga, his specialisation at the university, has been digesting some aspects of it since the late 19th century. At the same time, however, there is an inherent

---

affinity between the tenets of Minimalism and traditional Japanese aesthetics in which less is often more.22

For the young Sugito in Japan, -isms of the day were of little concern. The reason why he chose nihonga for his major, says Sugito, was because of its characteristic use of empty space. Moreover, in nihonga, he further comments, ‘drawing is used to give expression to human faces. It does not use the same shadowing technique as that of Western painting. To indicate light, gold leaf is applied. I found that metaphorical method very interesting.’23 To discuss the dochaku process of nihonga in the continuing evolution of Sugito’s art, I would like to borrow, with modifications, the three fundamental characteristics of nihonga postulated by Tamamushi as a framework.

1) ‘Unity with nature’ – or, engaging with his worlds: In nihonga the scope of ‘nature’ has evolved in pace with times, involving not only the natural world but also the daily worlds that artists lives in. As Japan crawled out of the ruins of the Second World War and started forging its ‘economic miracle,’ the eyes of artists turned outward seeking relevance for their art in the changing world. In the 1950s and early ‘60s there erupted a talk of sekaisei – global characteristics – in Japanese art scene. They sought the universal that was understood and accepted by all, both inside and outside of Japan. The desire and search were present not only in yōga (Western painting), but also in the traditional disciplines like nihonga and calligraphy. Sekaisei can take many forms. Some avant-garde calligraphers, such as Morita, sought exchange with the Abstract Expressionists as discussed in the previous chapter on Alechinsky. Others, like the nihonga artist Yokoyama, believed that the way to sekaisei, that is to say, to be international, was to find a truly Japanese way of painting that was relevant to the contemporary world, without falling into revivalism of tired traditions or mere copying of what is happening in the West.24 To engage with and reflect one’s own time and surroundings, in other words.

23 Sugito, "In Conversation," 47.
And that is what Sugito does. Says Sugito, ‘To go to a country you desire, you organise your affairs, buy a ticket, and settle in on an airplane. In travelling to the realm of your dreams, you do likewise. You settle your affairs, obtain what you need, then withdraw into yourself.’ In his inner world Sugito recreates the outer world, and tries to reach some kind of balance between the conflicting observations, ideas and emotions. The process of striving for balance is narrated in the form of paintings and sculptures, or rather, his search for balance is done through the act of creating paintings and sculptures. In that sense, ‘unity with nature,’ the traditional nihonga characteristics, lives on in Sugito’s art as ‘engaging with his worlds,’ as much as it did in Yokoyama’s work a generation ago. Having grown up in Japan and the United States, Sugito’s physical outer world happens to be geographically wider than that of some people, spilling over national and cultural boundaries. Judging from the enigmatic realm he creates on canvas, his inner world is even wider. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to venture into other’s inner world if invited. In 2004 he and Yoshitomo Nara had a joint residency in Vienna, from which an exhibition and a book of their collaborative works emerged. Wide and various as they are, these worlds are Sugito’s lived worlds nonetheless, and his art is firmly grounded in them.

2) ‘Decorative’ – or, symbolic modes of representation: As stated in the previous section, the ‘decorative’ in nihonga connotes the aspects quite different from the conventional idea of ornamentation. The simplified forms and patterns found in nihonga are crystallisation of both the artist’s interpretation of, and deeply felt response to, the visible world. Sugito’s paintings fit that description. And more. Matsui describes the direction of Sugito’s art as, ‘painting that simultaneously enacts perceptual stimulation and symbolic evocation.’ Sugito presents his response to the worlds in his symbolic modes of representation with three distinctive traits, which are: metaphor and metamorphosis, ‘empty’ space that is full and ambiguous, and painting as drawing, drawing as painting.

Metaphor and metamorphosis: Sugito cites metaphorical method of *nihonga*, such as using gold leaf to indicate light, as one of the reasons why he was attracted to *nihonga*. Gold can also symbolise clouds, mist, air or ground. Taking the form of mist, it is often used as a transitional device, signalling the change of time and space. Speaking of his own painting practice, Sugito alludes to the metaphor of agriculture. In his worlds, as in agriculture, things grow. And as they grow, they undergo endless metamorphosis. For example, the triangular tiled roof of *Fire* (1997) evolves to *Code* (1997), to *The Pyramid Tower* (1998), to *Shark Man* (1998), to *Moving Mountain* (1999), to *Rainbow* (2001), and to *Rainbow Mountain* (2003). [fig. 5-6] *Buckle* (1999), which originates from the buckle of *Elephant* of the same year, reappears as a time-space tunnel that is reminiscent of a science fiction film in *To the Woods* (2002). As Matsui observes, Sugito’s art is continuous recycling of basic elements that transform themselves into something else. Nothing is wasted in his finite but expanding universe. Carefully tended, a part might become a whole. Things appear only to disappear, and to reappear. And each metamorphosis brings new symbolic meanings to the object. This perpetual metamorphosis as a mode of exploration creates a sense of fluidity and connectedness, which seems to be the way Sugito perceives his inner and outer worlds.

‘Empty’ space that is full and ambiguous: Vast. The first thing you see in Sugito’s early canvases is space. The space is pulsating, filled with shimmering light. Seduced, you approach closer, and then realize that you are witnessing a scene of disaster. It’s a flood, it’s a burning tower, it’s a raid. [fig. 5-1] The specks you tried to rub out of your eyes are gunboats and fighter planes. His canvases of the 1990s are filled with air that metamorphoses into sea, sky, land and building structures. [fig. 5-7] The expectant, elemental feel of space in Sugito’s paintings recalls the space created by the old masters in *nihonga* such as Tawaraya Sōtatsu (16-17th century). In Sōtatsu’s *Ivy Walk* folding screen, for instance, the air transforms into a path and then into the sky. The ‘negative’ space, the area not covered by objects, is charged with energy, like a magnetic field. In Sugito’s case, the air in *Fire* [fig. 5-6A] is filled with...

---

27 Sugito, "In Conversation," 47.
29 Ibid.
30 Myers, "Hiroshi Sugito," 316.
Lilliputian panic, while *The Big Tree* [fig. 5-8] is bracing itself for an attack by the gnat-sized fighters soon to dot the sky. In *The Pink Floor* [fig. 5-9] the mysterious vastness of the room is palpable, with the miniscule chairs hugging the floor. According to Sugito, he spends 80% of his time and energy on creating the base colour, painting the surface at least ten times.\(^{31}\) The shimmering amorphous field of colour that is created is anything but empty. The evocative colours and tones of his paintings, and his working method, undoubtedly derive from *nihonga*, in which colours are created by multiple layers of thin veils made of minute mineral particles (*iwaenogu*) that are suspended in transparent animal glue (*nikawa*).

One interesting aspect of Sugito’s space that emerged is his predilection toward symmetry. In *nihonga* convention, as in many other Japanese arts, asymmetry is favoured over symmetry in order to create a sense of tension and fluidity.\(^{32}\) Sugito transcends this formula early. For example, *The Big Tree* is positioned off centre, as expected, creating asymmetrically divided sky. And so is the tree in *The Secret Tower*. However, this tree is balanced by the attacking airplanes, creating a visually symmetrical sky. Taking one step further, the space in *The Pink Floor* is serenely symmetrical. It is as if Sugito senses the need for a stable symmetrical composition as a foil to the mutable worlds he creates. The conventional (by *nihonga* standards) asymmetrical empty space of Sugito’s early works started evolving into the deep, quietly breathing symmetrical space that is uniquely his own.

The carefully delineated empty space of his early works soon becomes more ambiguous and fluid. ‘Everything starts to connect better if there was no shadow, like the rainbow,’ states Sugito.\(^{33}\) In 2001 his shadowless forms merge their inside and outside, germinating the hybrid creatures as *Hanger Man* and *Water Man*. [fig. 5-10] In these works the space is felt as layers of amorphous zones instead of vast panorama, inviting the viewer into the painting, and leaving her there, suspended. The space created invokes the constantly shifting mysterious space of mist and air in

---

\(^{31}\) Sugito, "In Conversation," 47.

\(^{32}\) Hideki Nakamura, *Tōzai Ato Yūgōni Mukete (the Fusion of Eastern and Western Art)* (Tokyo: Gendaikikakushitsu, 1996), 274.

\(^{33}\) Bernhart Schwenk and Doris Krystof, "If You Are Lucky, You Are Hit by the Rainbow," in *Yoshitomo Nara, Hiroshi Sugito: Over the Rainbow*, ed. Bernhart Schwenk and Doris Krystof (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 70.
traditional ink painting as seen in Tōhaku’s *Pinewoods* screen. Then in *Pink Elephant* and *Spider Song* [fig. 5-11], the air and space expand to occupy the whole canvas, coalesce to form curtains, and then precipitate in the centre as jewel-like dots and seemingly casual smears, recalling Twombly’s work. Sugito often populates his soft sherbet-coloured space with tiny bright forms. Somewhat arbitrary by Western aesthetics, this ‘decorative’ use of colour, called ‘unhierarchical’\(^\text{34}\) by Matsui, is also a feature commonly found in *nihonga*.

*Painting as drawing, drawing as painting:* ‘It was… through drawing that I felt I could adapt to my life in Japan,’ recalls Sugito of his early days back home. His love of drawing led him to choose *nihonga* as his major at the university.\(^\text{35}\) Sugito’s carefully drawn ships and chairs, miniscule in scale in relation to the size of canvas, find precedents in *The Tale of Genji* screen by Sōtatsu. In *Genji*, while the scene is constructed with bold, almost abstract forms, the facial expressions on the tiny figures are meticulously drawn in. Similar care for details is evident in Sugito’s *Shark Man* [fig. 5-6C] in delineating its numerous tiny windows. This seemingly disproportionate attention to details expressed in drawing, in juxtaposition with the broadly painted main forms, is typical of *nihonga*.\(^\text{36}\)

In 1999 the strange hybrid animals like *Elephant* and *Lobster Man* [fig. 5-12] emerge. *Lobster Man*, made up with faux-hesitant lines, wobbly checker patterns and other simple shapes, coalesce from and dissolve into the hazy background. The use of geometric forms and expressive lines is a familiar convention for *nihonga* artists in their pursuit of the essential in simplifying objects and modes of representation. The grid pattern, which might recall the 20th century Minimalism, has been in use in *nihonga* since the 16th century as the background in gold or silver foil, popular in folding screens. The ubiquitous Japanese architectural elements such as *shôji*, the sliding lattice door, and *tatami*, the unit system floor covering, also provide inspiration for geometric patterns. Sugito’s geometric patterns are never mechanical, however. The warmth and vulnerability are evident as in Agnes Martin’s work. Not relegated to

\(^{34}\) Matsui, “Toward a Definition of Tokyo Pop,” 28.

\(^{35}\) Sugito, “In Conversation,” 47.

describing small details only, in this phase, the lines and patterns of Sugito’s drawing begin to take a vital role in creating his magical world.

Drawing, many artists observe today, is more intimate and closer to the creator than painting. Being closer, says Chris Ofili, drawing is often ahead of painting in terms of allowing the artist a more precise statement.\(^{37}\) Judging from the direction he has taken, Sugito agrees. Moreover, around the year 2000, as drawing increasingly came to the fore, Sugito’s expressions grew simplified and spontaneous, leaving de-skilled forms as traces of his exploration. During that process, or due to that process, the decorative modes of *nihonga* has matured and taken a personal turn, leading Sugito’s art to its specificity that is evocative and symbolic. Lyrical as in Milton Avery’s landscape painting,\(^ {38} \) Sugito’s colours and marks are autonomous, standing for themselves rather than simply delineating outer appearances of objects. By 2004 as seen in *Spider Song*, [fig. 5-11] drawing has become painting, where colours, forms and lines are synonymous. This non-distinction between drawing and painting is also a characteristic of traditional ink painting. As in the art of calligraphy, the simple combination of ink, water and brush on paper offer infinite potential in creating spontaneous and expressive forms, marks, lines and tones, making the idea of differentiating drawing and painting quite irrelevant and artificial. Sugito’s ambiguous worlds too are well served by his idiosyncratic fusion of drawing and painting.

Through his narrative with perpetual metamorphosis, creation of ambiguous space, and fusing drawing with painting, Sugito crystallises his response to his inner and outer worlds. These traits are perhaps inherently his own, but Sugito has cultivated his symbolic mode of exploration through his knowledge of *nihonga* and its ‘decorative’ mode of representation.

3) ‘Invoking audience participation’—or, a passion for wordless conversation: In the pre-modern Japanese visual art the conversation solicited by a painting was on the classic literature. Living in the late 20th and early 21st century, what Sugito narrates is of his worlds. Withdrawing into his inner world, he sets out to investigate his

---


relationship with the outer world, sorting contradictory thoughts and emotions in search of balance. In his wordless search for balance, he creates bodies of work based on definite narratives. For example, he participated in the 1999 exhibition *Noontime Meditation* at Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts with five closely related works; *Buoy Man, Rain Man, Code, Moving Mountain* and *The Mistake*. The composite creature *Buoy Man* sees through his square windows a scene that is *Rain Man*. *Buoy Man*’s triangle head is actually *Code*, while *The Mistake* is a battle scene between *Buoy Man* and *Moving Mountain*. Of course this narrative is not communicable without an explicit explanation by the artist, but the storyline itself is hardly the essence of this body of work, as the curator Reiko Kokatsu observes in her catalogue essay for the exhibition. Sugito’s passion for narrative and conversation is aided by the variety in scale and format, visible working process, and haptic materiality in his works.

In the exhibition *Noontime Meditation*, Sugito’s paintings pulsate in widely different scales from larger than life-size (*Moving Mountain*, 178 x 220 cm) to intimate (*Rain Man*, 23 x 28 cm), creating dynamic interaction among them. The distance represented in these paintings is also varied. *Code*, with its detail drawing, appears physically closest to the viewer. *Moving Mountain* and *Rain Man* are located on a stage in the middle distance, while *The Mistake* takes place far away. With a mixture of close-ups and long shots, the cumulative visual effect is similar to that of classic picture scrolls of the 12th century, or of today’s cinema, in which Sugito confesses strong interest. This variation in scale and distance makes viewing experience rhythmical, inviting the viewer into the enigmatic world created by Sugito’s body of work.

The feel of invitation by Sugito for wordless conversation varies from one period to the next. As if to trigger Tamamushi’s misgivings that *nihonga*’s ‘suffocating’ perfection in finish might impede communication with the viewer, his early canvases are highly crafted. But the tendency quickly evaporates, and we soon see the wobbly

---

40 Sugito, "In Conversation," 47.
42 Schwenk and Krystof, "If You Are Lucky, You Are Hit by the Rainbow," 70.
Lobster Man. [fig. 5-12] His later paintings leave his working processes visible, as if to invite the viewer to complete the journey of exploration in her own way.

Along with the non-closure of his painting mode, the sense of materiality of his work gives openings to the viewer. The playfulness observed in the fairy-tale-like early tableaux transforms itself later into the robust playfulness in hands-on experimentation in many physical forms and materials. From his love of found objects, using them as supports and assemblage materials, Sugito continues to produce odd-shaped paintings and sculptures that exude materiality, looking far from highly crafted. In this, he exercises his Modernist sensitivity, exulting in innovative use of debris and the banal, turning them into his intriguing art. [fig. 5-13] Finding pleasure in materials and handwork might also originate from his nihonga background. The glitter used in these paintings is strangely reminiscent of the sparkles of iwaenogu, the gritty mineral pigment of nihonga. In terms of variety in format, and accompanying different modes of invitation for the viewer to interact with the artwork, if not with the artist, Sugito’s work follows the characteristics of nihonga cited by Tamamushi. Only, his work does that in a contemporary and oddly personal way in wordless conversation.

III. The way to dochaku: moves and countermoves

As a mid-career artist Sugito has a wide-open field to explore, and many directions into which he can develop. I have discussed so far how nihonga has been, and still is, one of the major forces in his art practice. As his evolution continues, so does the dochaku process – adopting and adapting – of nihonga. The process thus far has not been a simple linear progression.

As mentioned before, nihonga requires long and disciplined training. Sugito’s study at the university opened a new world, no doubt, giving him a way that could help him to assimilate himself into the society he was trying to re-enter after a long absence. At the same time, though, the particular perception of the world held by nihonga as a discipline could have been overly restrictive for him. Sugito spent five

---
years in a mountain growing vegetables before coming back to painting in 1996.\footnote{Matsui, “A World within and Beyond the Frame: Hiroshi Sugito's Stereoscopic Figuration,” 112.}

Mitsuhiro Obora, a nihonga artist and a former schoolmate of Sugito’s, recalls that even at the university Sugito did not throw himself entirely into the nihonga conventions, preferring to mix ideas and motifs from his earlier experiences abroad. It is no wonder then, that his early paintings in the ‘90s, which relied on his recent training in nihonga, also contained elements of Modernism. However, Obora believes that Sugito has cultivated himself as an artist through the framework of nihonga. In his early works the conventions of nihonga such as asymmetry, wide negative space, carefully delineated forms, luminous soft colours and high degree of finish played an important role. These obvious characteristics of nihonga were, however, eventually subsumed and replaced by more profound traits of Japanese aesthetics as Sugito evolved. One such trait, particularly noticeable for Obora, is mu – nothingness and emptiness – as Sugito came to understand it in his own way over the years long after graduation from the university.\footnote{Mitsuhiro Obora, interview by the author, May 2009.} Concerning mu, the noted 18th century artist Ikeno Taiga states that the most difficult part of a painting is where there is no paint.\footnote{Nobuo Tsuji, Nihonbijutsu No Mikata (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 2001), 56.}

A similar maturation process is observed by Kazuko Hōjō, a gallery director in Tokyo. In his early works, she comments, Sugito carried out his exploration using recognisable objects like trees, ships and chairs. Some motifs, such as curtains and stage setting, were in fact ready-mades popularised by the artist Toshio Arimoto (1946-1985) previously. In his later works, however, Sugito’s motifs and expressions have become more personal and abstract, as seen in the wobbly triangles and star bursts. As for the stage setting, it melted away, for a time, into amorphous layers of space that is quintessentially his.\footnote{Kazuko Hōjō, interview by the author, February 2009.} As Obora astutely observes, after shedding the formulaic representation of nihonga, and as he grew as an artist, Sugito began to show his newly acquired insight into the more profound traits of Japanese aesthetics in general, and nihonga aesthetics in particular. I believe that growing as an artist can lead to understanding of certain concepts that the artist knew in theory but could not quite grasp previously. Perhaps for Sugito, discarding the surface conventions and

\footnote{44 Matsui, “A World within and Beyond the Frame: Hiroshi Sugito’s Stereoscopic Figuration,” 112.}
\footnote{45 Mitsuhiro Obora, interview by the author, May 2009.}
\footnote{46 Nobuo Tsuji, Nihonbijutsu No Mikata (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 2001), 56.}
\footnote{47 Kazuko Hōjō, interview by the author, February 2009.}
allowing an incubation period were the two necessary steps in understanding and making *nihonga* his own.

I believe there are two factors in Sugito’s practice that are conducive to his continuous evolution and *dochaku-ka* of foreign aesthetic elements. The first factor originates from the very plurality of his background. Judging from the way he has progressed so far, it is clear that Sugito has benefited from having multiple frameworks to work with. Obora believes that Sugito’s experiences abroad protected him from being entrapped by the dogma of *nihonga*, making it possible for him to shed its surface conventions relatively early.\(^{48}\) I believe that the same can be said of Modernism, in which Sugito professes a strong interest.\(^{49}\) Having access to *nihonga* and Modernism, and through his position of an outsider in both, Sugito manages to use one to temper the other in his search for his own voice. For example, simplification of objects, which led *nihonga* to its decorative modes of representation, has led Sugito to Modernism’s de-skilled mode of painting/drawing as seen in *Water Man*. [fig. 5-10] In *nihonga*, deformation or exaggeration is common, but the concept of de-skilling is unknown.\(^{50}\)

Conversely, partly due to his *nihonga* propensity for inviting audience participation in the narrative, Sugito avoids the ultimate stark dead-end of Minimalism.

The second factor that has been instrumental in development of his art is Sugito’s modus operandi. Says Sugito ‘[The] important thing for me is to keep moving the painting a step further by introducing a new element to an ongoing story.’\(^{51}\) And ‘keep moving’ is certainly what his art does, reflecting his perception of the changing phenomenal world and his fluid responses to it in his inner world. ‘When something appears or put in, something disappears from the same moment. I am just chasing them like an endless game,’ comments Sugito.\(^{52}\) For him, a solution leads to a new problem. ‘I arrive at a moment in which I feel that everything is just right, balanced. But it lasts for about three seconds… If I put red, it makes other colours look ugly… If I paint two paintings with curtains, I must paint other kinds in order to balance the

\(^{48}\) Mitsuhiro Obora, interview by the author, May 2009.

\(^{49}\) Schwenk and Krystof, "If You Are Lucky, You Are Hit by the Rainbow," 69.

\(^{50}\) Mitsuhiro Obora, interview by the author, May 2009.

\(^{51}\) Sugito, "In Conversation," 48.

\(^{52}\) Bruce Hainley, "Hiroshi Sugito," *Frieze* 1999, 76.
emotional or aesthetic intensity they create. In search of that elusive ‘balance’ Sugito makes one move, knowing that it will inevitably call for a countermove.

For Sugito, though, it is safe to assume that the question of nihonga or Modernism is an irrelevant one, although we may deduce their varying influences on his work. While painting, says a contemporary nihonga artist Natsunosuke Mise, it is unlikely that the artist would even think whether his particular action belongs to nihonga or some other genre of painting. Similarly, Sugito will not stop to ponder where his moves and countermoves come from. He is searching for his unique aesthetic and emotional ‘balance,’ not for an ultimate understanding of a particular modes of expression be it nihonga or Modernism. As he says, he is ‘just a painter,’ not aligning himself with any tradition. Nonetheless, from nihonga and Modernism, and from countless other stimuli he encounters, Sugito adopts and adapts what is useful for his development as an artist, while freeing himself of their restrictions.

The mature state of his space in which everything seems to hover weightlessly, fusion between painting and drawing, and openness to conversation are indications of on-going dochaku-ka of some traits of nihonga in Sugito’s art. The three characteristics of nihonga put forward by Tamamushi – unity with nature, decorative mode of representation, and invoking audience participation through close relationship with literature – are present in his work, but strictly on his terms and in changed forms. And they are still changing. Sugito being a mid-career artist, it will be some time before we can discern a clear pattern in his dochaku process. Sugito describes both his painting method and the way he lives his life as a continuous act of ‘countering pluses with minuses.’ The process that has created his art that is ‘utterly singular, autonomous and significant continues.

5-1
Flood
1996
Acrylic on canvas
152 x 183 cm

5-2
Yodo no Suisha (Water Mill)
by Uda Tekison
1926
Iwaenogu on paper
194 x 180 cm
An example of classic approach to nihonga.

5-3
Tori 04-1 (Bird 04-1)
by Keisaburo Okamura
2004
Pigment on board
295 x 72 cm
An example of a direction in contemporary nihonga.

5-4
Shorinzu Byobu
(Pine Woods Screen)
by Hasegawa Tohaku
1594
Ink on paper
Right half of a pair of six-fold screens, each screen
155 x 345 cm
5-5
Kakubai-itsu Byobu
(Red and White Plum Blossoms Screen)
by Ogata Korin
Early 18th century
Colours on gold and silver foil over paper, each screen 155 x 172 cm

5-6
A. Fire, 1997, acrylic, coloured pencil on cotton, 173 x 203 cm
B. The Pyramid Tower, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 204 x 245 cm
C. Shark Man, 1998, acrylic, pigment and paper on canvas, 172 x 203 cm
D. Rainbow Mountain, 2003, acrylic, pigment on canvas, 216 x 350 cm
5-7
Rescue
1997
Acrylic, pigment on canvas
54.6 x 72 cm

5-8
The Big Tree
1998
Acrylic, pigment, paper on panel
178 x 220 cm

5-9
The Pink Floor
1998
Acrylic, pigment, graphite, coloured pencil on canvas
203 x 244 cm
5-10
Water Man
2001
Acrylic, coloured pencil on canvas
190 x 130.5 cm
5-11
Spider Song
2004
Acrylic, collage on canvas
280 x 403 cm

5-12
Lobster Man
1999
Acrylic, pigment, graphite
on canvas
91 x 72 cm

5-13
Butterfly
2004
Wood, paint, glitter
36.5 x 75 x 10 cm
6. The Nature of Dochaku

We have followed the trajectories of four artists in their artistic evolution that include exemplary encounters with elements of Japanese aesthetics. In this chapter, I would like to compare and conceptualise them. By comparing four cases I want to discover pointers, as it were, to the type of traits that will help us understand artists whose artistic evolution might have included dochaku-ka of elements from foreign cultures. Moreover, I want to conceptualise the nature of dochaku process in cultural interaction, and clarify the potentiality of that process. Unlike the currently accepted hybridisation models, I foresee that, in adopting and adapting foreign aesthetic elements, the dochaku process encompasses the possibility of indigenising them in the artist’s practice. I also anticipate that the model formulated from these cases will, while presenting the general concept of dochaku, allow the agency and individuality of the artist to manifest without typecasting her as a ‘creative genius’ enshrined in older romantic or expressionist aesthetic approaches. Conceptualisation is not generalisation reduced to common denominators. Far from being generalised, the four artists will become more singular through comparing and contextualising of their particular mode of artistic evolution.

As discussed in chapter one, Appadurai postulates that the process of interaction between cultures is similar to the dynamics of chaos theory in which every detail affects the whole through endless iteration. This macro picture of global cultural interaction serves as a backdrop in examining the concept dochaku – the micro cultural formation in the case of this research – from the perspective of its process rather than its products. To investigate the dochaku process, I have identified four components for close examination. They are: the artist, the attractor (an yet-unfamiliar element from another culture that the artist has been drawn to and decided to investigate), the process of interaction, and the product of interaction.
I. The artist, and her fluid worlds

Even as Appadurai proposes the shapes of cultures to be fractal, Clifford identifies cultures to have been mobile since the beginning of time. If the cultures travel, so do the humans in them. And the artist, the first component of the dochaku process, encounters her object of fascination through her own travels and travelling cultures. For example, Japanese architecture travelled to Wright by way of books, prints and world fairs. He in turn travelled to Japan to see more of them, and in situ. Alechinsky encountered calligraphy through journals that had travelled from Japan to Europe, and then he went to Japan to make a documentary film about it. Couture travelled from Europe to Japan, and Miyake went to Europe and the United States for training in its art. Sugito’s formative years were spent in New York where High Modernism thrived. One of the commonalities among our artists, then, is their ability to engage with different cultures as the artists themselves and the cultures move about. All these travels by cultures and artists evoke the word ‘cosmopolitan.’ In his critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism, James Clifford states that Said’s basic values are cosmopolitan, and he offers them as an alternative to ethnocentric Orientalist views. Leaving her cultural home, Said’s cosmopolitan is capable of assessing herself and the world around her with both intimacy and distance,1 while Hannerz’s cosmopolitan has an intellectual and aesthetic openness and an ability to make her way into other cultures.2 Certainly some of these traits of a cosmopolitan could be conditions for an artist who benefits from dochaku-ka of foreign elements in her practice.

So what is Pierre Alechinsky like as an artist? How does he see the world? First and foremost, Alechinsky is a Cobra. His roots are in Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam – the cities where Cobra movement originated. The routes he has taken include Paris, New York, Tokyo and Kyoto in Japan, among many others. The Cobra movement unified him3 and contextualised him. His goal is spontaneity tempered with

---

discipline, being led by the materials and physical process of art making through constant experimentation. Like the rest of his group, he is interested in many forms of art, such as prehistoric, tribal, by children, by mentally handicapped, and art from the East. Influenced by Marxism and Jung, he looks out into the world instead of into his subconscious. He believes in internationalism and interspecialisation. He has had a fascination with handwriting since childhood, and Dotremont and Jorn, his close peers who had strong interest in Chinese calligraphy, further stimulated his fascination. Equally important for him is the northern tradition personified by Jorn, as well as by the fellow Belgians such as Ensor, Bosch and Brughel. His other interest includes music and writing on art matters. He has been playing the clarinet for many years.

What does this tell us? Prompted by the idea of cosmopolitanism, we note that Alechinsky is open to many cultures and perspectives. He is also aware of his own traditions and the world around him. With wide interests, his gaze on the world is relativising. He escapes the trap of single way of knowing, which facilitates fluid views. He interacts with the unfamiliar, and upon close investigation, generates new meanings for himself. A similar orientation is found in the other three artists. Miyake is a consummate traveller, open to stimuli from many cultures. Culture, says Lila Abu-Lughod, is ‘the essential tool for making other.’ She laments that her field, anthropology, explains cultural differences and by doing so helps construct and maintain differences. For Miyake, however, there are ample examples of similarities as well as differences among cultures. He notices pleats in ancient Greece, Egypt and Japan; quilting in Morocco, India, Afghanistan and Japan. He is inspired by the European designers who were inspired by *kimono*. Having seen different ways of doing something similar, his gaze scours the world, observing both past and present, relativising and making connections among them. Openness to cultural differences, and capacity to engage with the other are two factors also found in Wright and Sugito. Wright rejoiced in encountering the 2500-year-old idea of space by Lao-tzu, which he eventually re-contextualised into his 20th century architecture. As for Sugito, it is telling that, on his return to Japan after 13-year stay in New York, he found everything

---

5 Cited in Ibid., 31.
not only ‘different’ but also ‘fresh.’ For Sugito the different is to be appreciated rather than to be shunned automatically.

Possessing some of the characteristics of the cosmopolitan, these artists traverse both geographic space and historical time. The multiple and heterogeneous worlds they encounter are fluid and inter-connected. Their search is carried out with the spiritual detachment and generosity, and with intimacy and distance, as Said suggests.

II. The attractor, and its home culture

The second component of the dochaku process is an attractor, a yet-unfamiliar element from another culture that the artist has been drawn to, and has decided to investigate. Japanese calligraphy is an attractor for Alechinsky, for instance. An attractor is not a given, but an interpretation of a foreign cultural element by the artist. As such, it is shaped by two factors – the artist’s viewpoints and the type of encounter she experiences.

The first factor, the artist’s viewpoint, concerns the position of the artist in relation to the attractor’s home culture. In his book Art and Otherness (1992) Thomas McEvilley problematises this point in his passionate argument over emic and etic points of view, exhorting the importance of differentiating the two. Emic is a point of view of an insider of the culture being observed, while etic is that of an outside observer. If ever he wanted to set up a target to shoot down for its emic-etic confusion, McEvilley could not have done any better than MoMA’s 1984 exhibition Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art. His main objection to William Rubin, the director of the exhibition, was that Rubin stated to be etic by staying away from anthropological explanation of the tribal artefacts, yet he attributed the Modernists’ sentiment and sensitivity to the tribal artefacts and their producers, as if these feelings were found in the artefacts and were expressed from within the cultures by the producers. He repressed utterly their ‘context, meaning, content and intention,’ and spoke for them.

---

7 Marvin Harris quoted in Thomas McEvilley, Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity, 1st ed. (Kingston, NY: Documentext/McPherson, 1992), 41-42. The neologisms emic and etic were coined by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Lee Pike. They derive from ‘phonemic’ and ‘phonetic.’
Being fair, McEvilley declares that objective accounts can be made from either view, so long as the distinction is kept clear. The sin committed by Rubin was his mixing the two, and pretending to do otherwise. McEvilley goes on to say that etic stance can be taken as a scholarly exercise, but ‘in other than academic senses the etic stance is unacceptable.’

Much as I agree with McEvilley on the general drift of his argument, on the sharp dichotomy of etic and emic, and on the total dismissal of etic position, I hesitate to concur. What of the position of a cosmopolitan? Tomlinson’s cosmopolitan has both global and local (glocal) perspectives. She can neither be entirely emic nor etic in relation to a certain local culture, including her own. And to my mind, that is her strength in an inter-cultural encounter. Sugito’s position illustrates this point. Having grown up in the United States, for Sugito, Japan was a foreign country when he came back. Yet he is not a foreigner in Japan. Moreover, studying nihonga in Nihon (Japan) should provide nihonga with its proper context, but Sugito would have looked at it from the point of view of a Euro-American Modernist… who is not Euro-American. Today this type of fluid and ambiguous experience is becoming more and more common. In situations like this, the distinction between the emic and etic, too, is ambiguous. One could lament the loss of certainty, or one could exploit it to create art that reflects the changing worlds in which one lives. The latter approach gives Sugito his specificity.

Alechinsky’s experience with Japanese calligraphy also illustrates the complex relationship between the emic and etic views. Throughout his stay in Japan he was exposed to the ‘context, meaning, content and intention’ of the artists and their works. He would have needed an emic stance, seeing it from within, at first, to fully benefit from the encounter. Then, once back home, taking that exit Hannerz found mildly lamentable in a cosmopolitan, Alechinsky saw the attractor from outside, that is, from his art world. He switched to the etic view in order to evaluate what he had experienced, to produce a film for the European audience, to exploit and explore calligraphy to make it his own. To be sure, his brand of etic gaze on Japanese

---

8 Ibid., 27-56.
9 Sugito, “In Conversation,” 47.
10 McEvilley, Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity, 47.
calligraphy is not that of a parochial European, but of a Cobra with yen for intercultural fertilization. His initial *emic* stance towards calligraphy and its home culture, however, was crucial to avoid seeing only his own projections and fabrication as an Orientalist would have done.

The second factor that determines the interpretation of the attractor is the type of encounters the artist experiences. For the artist and the attractor, I propose, there are two possible types of encounter. I name one *homogeneous encounter* and the other, *heterogeneous encounter*. The artist’s orientation and her perception of the attractor determine which type of encounter, either homogenous or heterogeneous, is to take place.

_A homogeneous encounter_ is when the artist meets the attractor that appears to be Euclidian, that is to say, simple and clearly bounded in shape, and homogeneous in content. In such an encounter, in the artist’s mind, the attractor is sharply defined and stable, therefore there is little possibility for it to change through interaction, or little need for further examination. In other words, what you get is what you see… and what you bring to the occasion. This type of encounter often prompts quotation or appropriation in the artist’s work. The artist benefits from the encounter certainly, but not from mutual interaction with the attractor. Picasso’s encounter with African masks is an example. The encounter was one-sided, and his interest was in their simple and concrete forms, excluding their context. Without their original context, the masks’ meanings were what Picasso chose to project on them.

In contrast, the _heterogeneous encounter_ involves an attractor that is perceived to be complex and heterogeneous in content, and ambiguous in shape. This type of encounter invites closer examination and interaction. In the heterogeneous encounter, it is likely that the more you investigate, the more there is to find, and the more you will want to know. Alechinsky’s encounter with calligraphy is a case in point. Having fallen in love with Japanese calligraphy, which he saw in the journal *Bokubi*, he went to Japan, met and interacted face to face with many local calligraphers with clearly different approaches to calligraphy, and observed them working in their natural settings ‘by way of film camera.’ During his two-month sojourn he was exposed to a
A wide variety of environment and context of calligraphy, making it possible for him to start cultivating a heterogeneous and complex view of this art. Then he went back home and produced a film, and after many other encounters, eventually attained personal specificity in his art that incorporated aspects of calligraphy in a unique way.

Encounters with art forms that have long traditions, such as calligraphy, pose their unique problems and opportunities. Sugito’s encounter with *nihonga* could have gone either homogeneous or heterogeneous. *Nihonga* was conceived as a conscious synthesis of many traditional, age-old schools in art of Japan, and some aspects of the 19th century European Modernism. Today, more than a century after its conception, *nihonga* signifies different things to different people. For some its original material (mainly *iwaenogu*, the mineral pigment), subject matter (flowers and birds), mode of representation (figurative rather than abstract), and art world (limited to Japan) are sacrosanct, and remain as they were in the early 20th century when *nihonga* matured. For others *nihonga* tradition is a living thing that moves with time, and the spirit of conscious self-renewal is what they inherit from the time of *nihonga*’s inception.11 The former view will produce bounded and homogeneous encounters, while the latter is conducive to open and heterogeneous encounters. Judging from the way Sugito’s early works exhibited dynamic mixture of conventional *nihonga* elements and personal expressions, it is safe to assume that, for him, the encounter with *nihonga* was thoroughly heterogeneous.

One of the definitions of Orientalism by Said is a style of thought that ‘accepts as its starting point a basic dichotomy between East and West and makes essentialist statement about the Orient, its people, customs, mind, destiny and so on.’12 He upbraids the Orientalist procedures for ‘enclosing’ and ‘characterising’ the Orient.13 The same can be our concern about the way the attractor and its home culture are defined. Any enclosing or characterising – either *emic* or *etic* – on the part of the artist will prevent her from perceiving an attractor at its complex and heterogeneous best.

12 Quoted in Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 259.
13 Quoted in Ibid., 273.
Clifford states that the new may always appear monolithic to the old. By the same token, the strange may seem clearly bounded and homogenous at first. If the artist is capable of avoiding that trap, and the attractor appears as many-sided and finely nuanced to her, a heterogeneous encounter and subsequent dochaku process of the attractor may take place. It is the complex, fluid and heterogeneous understanding of an attractor that gives the artist a wide space to manoeuvre and many directions to investigate in their interaction.

III. The process of interaction: the acts of dochaku-ka

While the chaos dynamics, which is unconscious, seems to work well as an image of global cultural formation, there is little room for an artist’s particularity to come into the picture in this scheme. I would like to superimpose, therefore, the intentionality of the artist to the third component of dochaku, the process of interaction. As the heterogeneity of the attractor is being recognised by the artist moment by moment, how does she choose to interact with it? Contrary to my expectation, I have not found set stages or linear progression in the four artists’ interaction with their attractors. For instance, while Alechinsky explored the mystery of calligraphy quite separately from his practice of oil painting at first, Miyake enthusiastically threw himself into synthesizing what he called East and West at the beginning. What I did find instead, in common among the four artists, are two acts in the process of their interaction with the attractors. They are thinking differently and evolving continuously.

The first act, thinking differently, manifests as the four artists’ refusal to accept things as given. Instead of simply borrowing or appropriating the attractor as it has been defined by others, they interpret it in their own way and transform it. Delueze, lamenting how we rarely think, exhorts us to reject what he calls ‘common sense’ – the conventions, received wisdom, or what has already been thought – and think ‘differently.’ For him thinking is a ‘matter of experimentation and problematisation, of becoming something different.’ The four artists’ act of thinking differently starts

---

14 Ibid., 272-73.
with: 1) knowing the attractor and oneself differently, develops by 2) questioning differently, and then concludes with 3) contextualising the findings differently.

I) Knowing the attractor and oneself ‘differently’ over time: Now most anything, if closely observed, is complex. But the shape of the attractor, as discussed previously in section II, depends on the degree of engagement by the artist. The four artists in this study orchestrated multiple heterogeneous encounters with their attractors. After the initial fascination with the newly found (already complex) attractors, they exploited them by getting to know them fully through active re-discoveries over an extended period of time.

Take the case of Wright, for example. His encounters with Japanese aesthetics in general and architecture in particular were varied, numerous, and took place over many years. Starting with the 1890s, he saw many building structures as drawings in his beloved ukiyo-e prints, in Hokusai Manga, in the book by Morse, real buildings at the World’s Colombian Exposition in Chicago (1893) and at Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (1904). In his numerous trips and extended stays in Japan spanning from 1905 to 1919, he observed many traditional buildings in their natural settings. He saw, heard, touched, walked about, sat in, smelled and breathed his objects of fascination using many senses, which made recollection of them readily retrievable. By experiencing Japanese architecture in a multiplicity of ways over time, his perception and understanding of it kept on evolving, getting more fluid and heterogeneous, even as its dochaku-ka proceeded in his art.

Alechinsky, too, provides an interesting example of sustained and active re-discovery of the attractor. Some of his encounters with calligraphy were: the journal Bokubi (1952), demonstration by Ting (1954), meeting Morita and his associates, shooting a documentary film in Japan (1955), Shinoda exhibition (1957), Sengai exhibition (the 1960s), collaboration with Hidai (1965), and numerous collaborations with Ting (the 1960s and ‘70s). It is through his varied exposures to calligraphy that Alechinsky found the right model, kana. Since 1954 he had been using calligraphic materials and

---

16 Maurice Bloch cited in Hanerz, Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places, 40.
techniques in his art constantly, acquiring skills with time. Skills are not the only thing one acquires over time. One’s artistic sense and understanding also change ‘through rational interchange and critical discussion with oneself and other people.’

While Alechinsky built his knowledge of Japanese calligraphy from the ground up, Sugito went the opposite direction, divesting conventions of *nihonga* he already knew. The conventions he had acquired during his university study, such as asymmetry and high degree of finish, peeled away as he grew to understand the essence of *nihonga* better. In their place came in something more profound and personally acquired, as seen in his grasp of *mu* – nothingness – in his later canvases. Or one might consider this as a case of necessary gestation for the real essence of *nihonga* to become relevant in Sugito’s life and art practice. At any rate, we need to keep in mind that some cultural interactions will go through incubation beneath the surface, not manifesting themselves immediately upon encounter.

The benefit of knowing the attractor ‘differently’ is self-reflexive. As seen in the case of the cosmopolitan, once the artist is exposed to the other and gains different perspectives, her own culture is likely to be subjected to a relativising gaze. At the same time as she gets to know the attractor and its home culture, her understanding of her own culture deepens. Through this process, both the artist’s self and her art practice will come to be perceived as heterogeneous, fluid and mutable, which aids the interaction with the incoming attractor. As seen in the three episodes above, the process of active knowing and recognition of fluidity is an on-going process. It starts the moment an alien element becomes an attractor for the artist, and continues throughout the process of *dochaku*, directing the nature of interaction. It is very likely that each encounter is a renewal of the previous knowledge of the attractor, promoting deeper understanding over time through knowing ‘differently.’

2) Asking questions ‘differently’: Throughout her investigation, the artist naturally has a topic of enquiry. It often comes in a form of a question. There is one constant in

---

Miyake’s career, and that is his use of questions in his investigation. Miyake wondered what the wearer wanted in her clothes. Exploring clothes from the wearer’s point of view rather than from the designer’s point of view, he created the ever-popular brand Pleats Please. For Miyake, who finds inspiration and triggers for experimentation everywhere, any answer he comes up with is provisional, and it will be turned into a question for the next round of experimentation. Going through many rounds of an-answer-as-next-question, both his questions and answers evolve in their iteration. For example, his most fundamental question ‘What are clothes?’ had different depths in meaning in his first and third period. The question produced, as an answer, an elegantly simple square coat called A Piece of Cloth in 1976. When he doubted the validity of the century-old process of clothes making, that is, dyeing-weaving-design-cutting-sewing as separate and sequential steps, in 1999, his fundamental question produced A-POC – a truly revolutionary concept in clothes making.19

A similar evolution in the nature of enquiry is seen in Wright’s career. He was unhappy with the state of residential architecture in the United States at the end of 19th century. He saw the standard Victorian house of the time as a confining box subdivided into many more boxes. ‘Destruction of box’ became his mission, and the Robie House was an answer. As his comprehension of Lao-tzu’s spatial concept matured, Fallingwater materialised. Wright’s final leap to originality is observed in the flowing positive space of the Guggenheim Museum, which Blake describes as invisible vapour that moves about from room to room, between indoors and outdoors.20

Unlike in applied arts such as design and architecture, the distinction between concept and execution in fine arts can be unclear. Accordingly, the way the artist forms her question can be less specific. Sugito’s enquiry runs along the line of moves and counter-moves, in search of never-to-be-attained ‘balance’ in emotional or aesthetic

19 The brand A-POC is a bolt of cloth in a tubal form, from which a wearer can simply cut out a dress, a shirt, etc., requiring no sewing.
intensity in his work. A painting calls out for certain another, then another, leading to deeply personal and fluid narratives. His motifs appear and reappear, undergoing continuous metamorphosis trying out new formal and symbolic meanings. As in Miyake’s case, for Sugito, a solution is a means to create a new problem for further experimentation.

3) Contextualising the findings ‘differently’: From the time of first contact, the four artists contextualised their experience of cultural interaction ‘differently.’ Miyake is one of a small number of Japanese designers who changed the concept of beautiful in the couture world of Paris Collection in the 1980s. He, along with his peers such as Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto, injected an alien sensitivity that is based on, albeit hugely transformed, Japanese aesthetics. The Japanese aesthetics he brought in had been contextualised to meet the challenge of the new environment, and the resulting interaction was contextualised so aptly that the meaning of beauty itself was re-defined in the world of fashion. Validated by the prestige of French fashion system, Miyake’s creation, in turn, invigorates the system. Miyake exploits and explores his position of otherness in relation to the Euro-American mainstream, and as he states, changes things by incorporating the system into his work.

Wright provides an interesting case of a positive effect of misinterpretation in intercultural communication. Wright fell in love with Lao-tzu’s spatial concept, but by misunderstanding the centrality of ‘nothingness’ in Lao-tzu’s concept, took it for a positive element. So, his profound ‘anxiety of influence’ notwithstanding, Wright’s great invention of positive space that flows has its origin in what Harold Bloom calls ‘poetic misprision,’ a strong misreading and creative interpretation.

The strong misreading comes first; there must be profound act of reading that is a kind of falling in love with a literary work. That reading is likely to be idiosyncratic, and it is almost certain to be ambivalent…

‘Misprision’ his interpretation might be, but its eventual product is profound. His mature space, the fruit of years of dochaku process in him, was to influence generations of architects the world over. ‘Misprision’ or not, through rejecting what had been common, and contextualising what was new to him to suit his own enquiry and its environment, Wright did think ‘differently’ and created something specifically his own.

In his theory of mindscape, Maruyama defines the G-type way of knowing as that of a pathfinder. A pathfinder generates new values and meanings as new contexts arise. For her, creativity is due to interaction among heterogeneous ideas, which is quite different from new combination of old elements. She believes in using idiosyncrasies of each element maximally, views the interaction from different perspectives, and chooses to contextualise in her own way. Like Wright and Miyake, Alechinsky with his sense of continuum, and Sugito with his vast inner world can be described as pathfinders, thinking ‘differently’ in their investigation process.

The second act common among the four artists in their interaction with the attractor is evolving continuously. The two acts of thinking differently and evolving continuously are inter-dependent; development in one act solicits development in the other. An image that helps conceptualise vividly the artists’ continuous evolution is becoming, a concept by Deleuze and Guattardi. They often discuss becoming in terms of becoming-animal or becoming-woman. Claire Colebrook clarifies that becoming is a matter of abandoning a picture of oneself as a bounded and unchanging being, in order to become more than oneself. Becoming-animal, for instance, means to expose oneself to the forces that an animal experiences, and to respond to these forces creatively instead of simply imitating the animal’s reactions. Or, putting it in an artistic endeavour, to learn to compose great music, one must experience ‘the inventive force at the heart of

26 Ibid., xxiii.
Beethoven sonatas’ instead of endlessly repeating Beethoven sonatas. We enrich our life by constant ‘varying’ through maximising encounters we experience, and limit our life by limiting our becomings.\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Becoming}, then, is an integral part of artistic evolution. The four artists thrive and evolve in the fluid state of \textit{becoming}, instead of being complacent in the stable state of \textit{being}. They evolve continuously through their unusual capacity in: 1) making connections, and also through their taste for 2) ceaseless cycles of experimentation.

\textbf{1) Connect, connect, connect:} One characteristics notable in the artists’ evolution process is the interactive nature of their investigations. The four artists cast their nets wide for inspiration, connect seemingly unrelated elements, and with what they connect, they run endless experimentation, letting the elements interact and transform themselves. The procedure recalls \textit{rhizome}, another concept postulated by Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizome, like ‘hybrid’ discussed in chapter one, is a term borrowed from biology. Bamboo, potatoes and tulips are some examples of rhizomes. Deleuze and Guattari position the rhizome to oppose the conventional and dominant tree-like way of organising thoughts, which they denounce as hierarchical, linear and centralised. It stops people from thinking ‘differently.’ As an ‘image of thought,’\textsuperscript{29} the rhizome is characterised by making connections and experimentation for proliferation. It has no centre, is always an open system, and has multiple exits and entrances.\textsuperscript{30}

We can find no better example of rhizome than in Wright’s career. As can be seen from the number of ‘sources’ – 23 cited by Scully – Wright was ever vigilant for inspiration and making connections.\textsuperscript{31} While overseeing the Imperial Hotel project in Japan, he went to China and visited a textile factory. His ‘textile block’ was said to have been inspired by the warp and weft of weaving he had observed.\textsuperscript{32} Textile block is a construction system Wright invented using concrete blocks that are threaded by horizontal and vertical rods like warp and weft of textile. The moulds used for making

blocks stamped patterns on the surface. This new system combined fabrication, ornamentation and load-bearing functions, unlike any construction methods before. The buildings he constructed in the 1920s using this system evoke the image of ancient Mesoamerican architecture.\textsuperscript{33} Wright’s exceptional ability to synthesise multiple sources is an interactive method of working with many concepts within one person, as in the case of Maruyama’s G-type.\textsuperscript{34} The G-type recognises ‘the relations among seemingly unrelated aspects of human activities’ and looks at ‘a complex situation contextually to generate fresh insights and new interpretations.’\textsuperscript{35}

Wright’s rhizome-like way of creation alerts us to look for a similar orientation in other cases. And we certainly find it. Alechinsky, a good Cobra that he is, has thrived in collaborative work – interaction with others – with artists from different specialisations and countries. He exposes himself to the forces that come from outside of himself, and interacts creatively in his own way. Miyake is exceptional among designers in his passion for interdisciplinary work. He treasures his colleagues, enthuses about his Guest Artist Series, and throws himself into a wide range of projects with other professionals from different fields. For him the benefit of collaboration is also self-reflexive. Working with Penn, seeing own creation through the eye of another artist, Miyake renewed comprehension of his own work.

The interactive nature is also evident in the range of medium used by the four artists. They engage variously in film production, writing and publication, exhibition design and production, furniture design, building, drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and more. Mixing media deploys multiple senses, contexts and perspectives, leading to deeper understanding. For instance, the experience of producing a film was vital for Alechinsky’s evolution as a painter. Seeing calligraphers in action revealed calligraphy’s two vital elements, time and movement. One of his methods of exploration, copying the calligrapher’s movement rather than the finished product, which probably would not have occurred to him without the experience of filming, opened the way to\ Dochaku-ka\ of calligraphy in his art practice.

\textsuperscript{34} Maruyama, \textit{Context and Complexity: Cultivating Contextual Understanding}, 6.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., xi.
As seen, being rhizomes, the artists are fascinated by many things at once. The attractor in question in this research, an element of Japanese aesthetics, is but one of many attractors they encounter. And that is to their advantage, leading them to multi-directional explorations. Through constant comparing and contrasting, each attractor will be understood deeper. Furthermore it prevents the artists from falling, unthinkingly, into the only-too-easy homogenising dualism of mine–others, the West–Rest, or the contemporary–traditional.

2) Experiment, experiment, experiment: The spirit of rhizome is a spirit of experimentation. Instead of ruminating over their new finds, the four artists plunge in and use them even as they learn the nature of the new finds. One of Alechinsky’s Cobra characteristics, the love of experimentation, was instrumental in his digestion of Japanese calligraphy. It induced him to investigate calligraphy through body movements, for instance, as discussed above. It egged him on to try an endless number of tools and materials, including the crumpled ‘cutting-out paper’ (the onion-skin paper used by tailors), and old documents as ‘treated papers.’ It incited him to collaborative work of many kinds, including with calligraphers. It finally led him to the marginalia painting, which brought his unique world of continuum into existence.

As for Wright, his laboratory for experimentation was his two headquarters, Taliesin and Taliesin West, which were subjected to continuous building and re-building. The result of each experiment was fed back into larger questions, to be used sooner or later, and so the iteration continued with indeterminate outcome. One interesting example of the ‘later’ use is the relationship between his Larkin Building (1904) and the Guggenheim Museum (designed in 1943) as discussed in chapter two. The basic concept of the former reappeared in the latter, transformed, after nearly 40 years of submerged evolution. In the Guggenheim he combined the wholly matured and uniquely his sense of space (which originated from that of Lao-tzu) with his new

motif, a Babylonian ziggurat (which he had not modified much other than turning it upside-down) in the perfect and original unity. It is evident that in Wright’s mind all experimentation, all stimuli from different cultures and from different times, were filed away systematically for easy and random, not sequential, access for further experimentation.

Thus the artist engages in ceaseless connecting and experimenting, the iteration of which is similar to the dynamics of chaos. Any experimentation calls for various judgements by the experimenter in all its stages, and judgement facilitates changing horizons.39 The changing horizons change the artist’s way of ‘knowing’ the attractor and her art practice. In this way, while the interpretation of the incoming attractor and the self-knowledge of the receiving artist evolve, both her question and answer evolve. By working with the attractor at various levels of interpretation, the artist savours its various transformations and proceeds with its indigenisation within her.

There is a paradox in all these artistic endeavours and their results, and that is, without being able to foresee the final outcome, the artist keeps pressing doggedly till she gets ‘there.’ None of the four artists had set out to accomplish precisely what they accomplished in their investigation. They were attracted by certain elements of Japanese aesthetics, but they found out their nature and how to use them only through actually using them in their artistic practice. From the beginning, though, they conducted fluid enquiries, ‘moving purposefully towards an unspecified end’40 through thinking ‘differently’ as well as evolving continuously. These two acts are, like the case of global/local, interpenetrating. They nourish and direct each other. For instance, by knowing ‘differently,’ the experimentation will be directed differently, and the result of the experimentation will renew the knowledge and the artist herself, which in turn will require new thinking and experimentation. The methodology of the artist’s exploration, then, is emergent. The question she asks herself is also emergent, evolving in the course of her artistic engagement. At some point of her exploration,

she will leave behind the conscious separation of the elements, the dualism of what is originally hers and what is of a foreign culture, and will direct her attention to a more critical question. For example, at the beginning Miyake was trying to synthesise the East and West. Later he was concentrating on his far more important question ‘What are clothes?’ and its provisional answer, the concept of ‘a piece of cloth.’ Thus the artist conducts the investigation while allowing the question and answer to interpenetrate and evolve together, without second-guessing as to the exact form of the final product.

**IV. The outcome: the products of interaction and their states**

The goal of the artist’s creative endeavour in trans-cultural fertilisation is to generate creative products that are her artistic specificity. Naturally the products come in wide range of permutations, but I have observed that they can be grouped into three ‘states,’ based on their relationship to the original elements of cultural interaction. I name them as the State of Maturation, the State of Visible Conjunction, and the State of a New Paradigm. Schematically, the actors in this drama of inter-cultural transaction are: the receiving element A, the attractor B, and C that stands for a completely new product that is neither A nor B, although it is generated by the interaction of the two. It is important to note that, as discussed so far in relation to the image or shape of cultures and their products, the outcomes and their states are neither clearly bounded nor discrete from each other, and cannot be placed in a hierarchical order.

**The State of Maturation:** The products in this state are fully developed forms of either the receiving element ‘A’ or incoming attractor ‘B.’ The symbol ‘+’ denotes development and subsequent maturation as a result of the exploration through interaction between A and B. When I speak of ‘mature,’ I do not mean to imply the final state. Cézanne believed that ‘no single work was so perfected as not to lead to further works in an attempt to do better.’\(^{41}\) Similarly, no single work is so great and final that it cannot mutate or thrive further in another context. For most practitioners, I believe, art is always work-in-progress. That being said, in the State of Maturation there are two possible outcomes, which are A+ and B+.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 51.
[A+]: The attractor ‘B’ acts as a catalyst, or an accelerant/encourager for the artist to keep on exploring her receiving element ‘A’ to the full, although this effect might not be acknowledged by the artist. In Wright’s case, he goes out of his way to tell the world that his passion for using materials at their maximum potential, and respect for nature, were in him, and that they did not come from the Orient. Perhaps. The principles of simplicity and respect for materials are also found in the Arts and Crafts Movement of the time, of which Wright was an enthusiastic member. However, I believe that these concepts were at least confirmed, and subsequently matured, by the contact with certain Japanese aesthetics. The confirmation and maturation are evidenced in his unique use of materials, both traditional and cutting-edge, as well as application of the inside/outside flow principle, and harmony between the buildings and grounds in most of Wright’s work.

As well as an encourager, the attractor ‘B’ could work as a repellent, by showing the artist the direction into which she really does not want to go. The nihonga convention of high degree of finish, for instance, could have compelled Sugito to follow his intuition for de-skilled mode of representation in which he now excels.

[B+]: This time round, the receiving element ‘A’ acts as a catalyst or an accelerant/encourager for the maturation of the incoming attractor ‘B.’ Miyake’s 1976 creation A Piece of Cloth is a good example. The ‘B’ elements for him are fabrics and the concept of space ma, encapsulated in the kimono aesthetics. The simple, flat construction of the traditional Japanese garment kimono was pushed to the limit and beyond by Miyake, and appeared transformed as a coat named A Piece of Cloth, literally a square piece of cloth with sleeves. The concept of kimono was matured by Miyake and became ‘B+’ through the interactions with his artistry ‘A’, which, as a catalyst, gave a fresh perspective to his gaze, and facilitated more profound understanding of ‘B’ for further transformation. This permutation, the maturation of

44 Ibid., 311.
the attractor ‘B,’ seldom happens, I believe, due to the sheer difficulty of mastering the alien element in question.\textsuperscript{45}

\textit{The State of Visible Conjunction:} The products in this state display some visible aspects of both the receiving element ‘A’ and the incoming attractor ‘B’ in differing measures as a result of their interaction. Often considered as, uncritically, the only manifestation of cultural interaction, this state can be brought about by synthesis, syncretisation, creolisation or hybridisation. As in the case of defining globalisation, the terms chosen for the process and the product of cultural interaction seem to depend on the speciality and disposition of the writer. I choose to group them together as one state on the basis of traceable visual aspects of the two original elements. By transcending the controversy in naming, I aim to widen the horizon of investigation. Schematically, this state is represented as ‘AB.’

[AB]: The receiving element ‘A’ and the incoming attractor ‘B’ are merged together, and the result clearly shows that it is originated from two discrete elements. Currently the two most popular terms in circulation in visual art that belong to this state are hybridisation and syncretisation.

In a hybrid work, either the unity of, or incongruity between, the two originally unrelated elements is the strategy for creating visual interest. The former strategy is found in the collage work by Modernists, while the latter is often observed in post-modern work with multiple coding. During his first period ending with publication of \textit{East Meets West} (1978), Miyake employed hybridisation as his strategy, combining wide variety of textiles and forms of ethnic clothing from all over the world. In Wright’s case, his Robbie House manifests hybridity with Japanese architecture, evidenced in its simple geometric forms, horizontal orientation, open plan and respect for materials. Hybridisation is evident in Sugito’s early works, showing both \textit{nihonga} and Modernism vocabularies. For example, Saltz relates Sugito’s vast shimmering skis and seas to Colour Field,\textsuperscript{46} but they can be equally interpreted to originate from \textit{nihonga} tradition. The tiny fighters and boats recall \textit{nihonga} vocabulary in which

\textsuperscript{45} The art of Bernard Leach and Joseph Conrad are two examples of the exceptional cases.

detail descriptions appear along with broad and abstract treatment of large forms. His frequent use of grid patterns and other geometric shapes also indicate Sugito’s ease with synthesising Modernism and *nihonga* conventions.

By comparison, in syncretism, the relationship between ‘A’ and ‘B’ is ambiguous and unstable. The effect depends on the viewer’s perspective as well as circumstances. In a product of syncretisation, the elements ‘A’ and ‘B’ are present side by side or one on top of the other, as discrete elements. In some cases syncretism might call for strategic essentialism of each element, emphasising the difference between them to increase tension and ambiguity.

One can also practice syncretism as a working method as observed in Alechinsky’s art practice between 1956 and 1965. During this period he pursued calligraphic mark making in ink and gouache, while experimenting with the newfound sense of space in oils in which the calligraphic marks did not play much part. Syncretism, therefore, manifested in his bodies of work rather than in one particular work. Miyake also employed syncretism as a working method in his second period, 1979-1988. His exhibition *Bodyworks* (1983-85) explored body-clothes relationship, while the exhibition *A-UN* (1988) concentrated on textile and form. By examining his two main concerns – the body and cloth – separately, he explored each deeper, and at the same time, could examine the relationship between the two.

**The State of a New Paradigm:** In this third state, both ‘A’ and ‘B’ have gone through profound transformation by repeated interaction, and iteration of the interaction. The State of a New Paradigm is a state that requires deep engagement with the attractor by the artist. However, she is not beholden to it or to its heritage. Neither is she tied to her own cultural tradition, nor to her past practice. The mindset for this state is akin to the one required for creation of *raku* ware, a particular ceramics tradition originated in the 16th century Japan by the tea master Senno Rikyū, in which aesthetics of the rustic, the accidental, and the new are valued.

In the spirit of raku, one must embrace the element of surprise. There can be no fear of losing what was once planned and there must be an urge to grow along with the
discovery of the unknown. In the spirit of rakuness, make no demands, expect nothing, follow no absolute plan, be secure in change.\textsuperscript{47}

Observing the now well establish state of \textit{raku} in the West, Tim Andrews comments that it is ‘no longer tied by its Japanese apron string. Ironically this liberation affords makers licence to reassess the Japanese legacy.’\textsuperscript{48} Being free of the weight of traditions, the artist is in a position to freely reassess, adapt, and then indigenise the foreign element into her practice, to the extent that the paradigm on which her practice has been based undergoes a fundamental change. Recognising fluidity of all, the artist is willing and capable of living with ambiguity in her art while transforming it, re-contextualising her discoveries into her own world. Accomplishing personal specificity of the artist in this way, the result of interaction does not visibly exhibit either the element ‘A’ or ‘B.’ Schematically, the third state is represented as ‘C.’

[ C ]: With the Guggenheim Museum, Wright created a special kind of space that flows as a positive element. Alechinsky’s artistic specificity manifests itself in the work with his \textit{marginalia}, such as \textit{Central Park}. In his work and that of Sugito, the parallel worlds and the sense of continuum are truly new. From Miyake’s creation, A-POC belongs to the State of a New Paradigm.

Stemming from the basic elements ‘A’ and ‘B,’ the three states – the State of Maturation, the State of Visible Conjunction and the State of a New Paradigm – form a continuum, without clear cut-off lines between them. I am proposing these states not as classificatory tools but as descriptive tools. The relationship between the three states is fluid, just as the practice of the artist is fluid. The recent career of Sugito is a good example. In crystallising his artistic specificity, Sugito distils \textit{nihonga} to its essence through his experimentation, and uses his skills and knowledge of it as catalysts for his ongoing evolution. Thus his art has been travelling from the State of Visible Conjunction (the early \textit{nihonga}-Modernism hybrid, AB) toward the State of Maturation (recently developing personal specificity, A+).

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
It is also entirely possible for an artist to go the opposite direction, i.e., from the State of Maturation (A+ or B+) to the State of Visible Conjunction (AB), or move on to the State of a New Paradigm (C) from the other two states. Furthermore, the three states do not necessarily all appear in the artist’s oeuvre, and the order they appear is particular to the artist. Except for one. Being the most profound transformation in the artist and her art practice, the State of a New Paradigm (C) requires some preceding states. The State of a New Paradigm is not, however, necessarily the matured state of the two other states. All three states can be fully resolved in themselves as seen in Wright’s Robie House (the State of Visible Conjunction, AB) and Miyake’s *A Piece of Cloth* (the State of Maturation, B+), which are most certainly not aspiring to evolve into the State of a New Paradigm.

Tomlinson cautions that hybridisation is but one aspect of global cultural condition, not a *general* description of it.49 A similar remark can be made about the current tendency in the world of visual art concerning cultural interaction. Of the three states I have proposed, the State of Visible Conjunction (AB), such as hybridity, is commonly recognised as the product of cultural interaction but not the other two – the State of Maturation (A+, B+) and the State of a New Paradigm (C). In the art world, as Fisher laments about the colonial thought, there is a tendency to equate what is visible with the ‘truth,’ expecting the superficial characteristics to reflect the inner truth.50 Thus, as discussed in detail in chapter one, through collapsing post-modernism, post-colonialism and globalisation theory into one, in the world of visual art, hybridity has become a convenient sign of all cultural interactions. Appadurai calls such essentialising through representation ‘metonymic freezing,’ a process in which one part comes to stand for the whole erroneously.51 It has an unfortunate effect of encouraging the limited view that cultural interaction *is* hybridisation. It is as if we wear collective blinkers that direct our gaze, disabling us to see beyond, or deeper than, the easily visible surface. Yet, there are numerous cases that belong to those two unrecognised states, as discussed throughout this chapter. One more example, a

---

statement by an artist, will suffice to help summon a vivid mental picture of the State of a New Paradigm.

‘It does NOT have a Japanese look, and yet it is truly the most Japanese thing I have ever made. The microscopic figure of a labourer, a little train crossing the Wheatfield, that is all the life it contains,’ wrote Vincent van Gogh about his 1888 drawings in his letter to Emile Bernard. This passage, the only time Van Gogh specifically mentions Japanese art’s influence on his drawing, epitomises artworks in the State of a New Paradigm (C). In Van Gogh’s late drawings, his marks are rivetingly alive and autonomous, unlike anything seen before, neither in Japanese nor European art. He made ‘graphic fervour a dominant constituent not only of drawing but also of painting. Of this trend, Van Gogh is a master.’

V. Dochaku in perspective

So far I have simply described the concept of dochaku. Examining it through some theories put forward by recognised scholars will clarify its nature, and at the same time, will highlight its role in cultural interaction. ‘Habitus’ and ‘field’ by Pierre Bourdieu, glocalism by Robertson, and the two ‘cultures’ by Ray are such theories.

Bourdieu defines ‘habitus’ as the ‘durable, transposable, structure (and structuring) dispositions of individuals’ that are acquired as the product of social conditions. As a ‘feel for the game’ and disposition, it operates beyond consciousness of the agent. Habitus is learned and, as such, it may be changed by new experiences or education, if it is made ‘conscious and explicit.’ It generates inventions and improvisations, but within limits. In comparison, ‘field’ is like a ‘game board wherein agents are positioned with certain forces available and resources at stake.’ Art or art world is an example of the field where agents operate consciously to accumulate and preserve

---

55 Ibid., 45-46.
their capital, that is, their power and status. The field, therefore, is a field of competitions, which generates change by nature. Each field and each agent comes with their specific, as well as shared, habitus in which they are, as Bourdieu says, ‘at home’. Innovations appear when misfit agents are able to challenge the structure of habitus, ‘sometimes to the point of remaking it.’ With these definitions, it is possible to follow the process of dochaku, and examine especially the role of the attractor in evolution of art practice at the confluence of cultures.

What the attractor does to the art practice is to shake the comfortable habitus and practice of the artist, dislodging some parts of them, bringing them from the unconscious to the conscious in the process. In other words, an attractor is a habitus breaker. Being made conscious, these dislodged parts help the artist to gain a new perspective of her habitus and her art practice. Being made explicit, this new awareness, along with the attractor, can be brought into the field, onto the game board as it were, and be addressed as artistic enquiries. The field, too, has its own ‘unconscious,’ that is, the taken-for-granted assumptions. The attractor can be instrumental in picking out these assumptions for examination. On the ‘game board’ of art field, the attractor works either as an encourager, repellent or new ingredient for a change, in the conscious process of dochaku as discussed so far in this chapter

As for the artist, she has indicated her intentionality by being attracted by her attractor. Now she is required to think, and think ‘differently’ as Deleuze urges, since she is out of her comfortable and convention-filled habitus, and is in the field of transcultural interaction. Exercising her agency, she makes choices, and the choices she makes are, as Mondrian experienced in his creative endeavour, ‘conscious but not calculating’ to facilitate fluid investigation, and fluid contextualisation of that investigation. The investigation is a challenge to the status quo. When the challenge made by the ‘misfit agent’ artist is successful, the result of that challenge affects the structure of the field, thereby re-making its nature. And eventually dochaku-ka of the attractor may in some way affect the culture of the artist, which forms her habitus, and

---

57 Bourdieu, "Habitus ", 316.
58 Ibid., 43-49.
her interpretation of the attractor’s culture. Thus *dochaku-ka* of the attractor transforms the attractor, the artist and her art practice directly; while indirectly it affects her art world, habitus, culture and the attractor’s culture.

We have seen that Robertson’s *glocalism* originates from the concept ‘dochaku’ as it was used in micro marketing in which a global product is adjusted to suit the local needs. The essence of *glocalism* is the interpenetrating relationship between the global and local, summarised as simultaneous particularisation of the universal and universalisation of the particular. The effect of the simultaneous particularisation and universalisation is a kind of dialogue, similar to that of the two interpenetrating acts of *dochaku* as presented in this research, ‘thinking differently’ and ‘evolving continuously.’ Clifford considers culture as negotiated process. Appadurai’s dynamics of indigenisation concept highlights the negotiation required of the local culture, between homogenising and heterogenising pulls, in response to the incoming forces. Hannerz offers a similar idea as the ‘maturation tendency of the periphery.’ In all these concepts, the process gives agency to the receiver of the influence to negotiate, taking part in forming the product of the interaction. The difference between *glocalism* and *dochaku* lies in the type of cultures investigated. While *dochaku* perspective invites examination of the detail process of indigenisation in both micro and macro worlds, *glocalism* deals with the macro world, generalising the process with a broad brush. It can be said that *glocalism* is one particular kind of *dochaku* process, specifically dealing with the issues of the centre and periphery. The *dochaku* perspective has revealed that visible hybridity is not the only permutation of cultural interaction.

---

to light, *dochaku* perspective may aid *glocalism* in widening its field of investigation in cultural globalisation.

As discussed in chapter one, Ray postulates that the term ‘culture’ can designate two different things. One is ‘the shared traditions, values, and relationships, the *unconscious* cognitive and social reflexes which members of a community share and collectively embody.’ And the other is ‘the *self-conscious* intellectual and artistic efforts of individuals to express, enrich and distinguish themselves.’65 The creative endeavours of the four artists investigated in this research produced ‘culture’ of the second kind. These products do not stand still in isolation. From the artist’s point of view, any creative work she produces enters the feedback loop to stimulate and enrich her art practice. Her work, as figure, will be evaluated in the context of her art world, while as ground, it will generate new context for her practice. If the work is influential enough to affect the art world at large, then it can be said that the work has moved from the *self-conscious* ‘culture’ of the second use to the *unconscious* ‘culture’ of the first use. Bringing that transition to light, viewing cultural interactions through the perspective of *dochaku* helps articulate the bridging process between the culture that is ‘the artistic efforts of individuals’ and the culture that is ‘cognitive and social reflexes collectively embodied.’66 In other words, the concept of *dochaku* may show the way to investigate ‘the ways in which cultural texts participate in the construction of wider cultural values and ideologies,’ and maintain, then subvert them.67

There is one example that serves well to illustrate the remaking of habitus, simultaneous particularisation of the universal and universalisation of the particular, and the role of an individual in global cultural formation. It is the flowing sense of space that many of us have in the 21st century. In the West at least, it came into existence partly through Wright’s innovation made more than sixty years ago. Wright responded to something universal in the 2500-year-old idea of space by Lao-tzu, re-contextualised it to function in the 20th century American environment, and

---

66 Diane Losche, in discussion with the author, April 2009.
particularised it to solve specific architectural problems in his own way. At the same
time, the depth of his solution was such that it had universal essences to offer. These
essences deeply affected the sense of space of his day, and are affecting us still today.
Thus the result of that particular incident of dochaku later restructured the habitus of
many artists, societies and cultures.

To summarise, the concept of dochaku examines the process. Dochaku-ka takes place
in an artist who is open to different views and is willing to engage with the other. She
is aware of the fluidity and connectedness of cultures, and recognises the
heterogeneity of her attractor and her art practice. She exploits and explores the
potentiality of various foreign cultural elements through the act of thinking
‘differently’ and evolving continuously. By engaging with the other, she takes herself
out of her habitus, which leads to making conscious choices toward unforeseen
outcome in her art practice. Dochaku is a perspective as well as a process. It examines
the process of cultural interaction as a dialogue. In the process of dochaku, while the
attractor is being transformed and indigenised, the artist and her practice, too, are
transformed. In a macro view, by going through much iteration, dochaku-ka of a
foreign element will eventually transform both the receiving culture and the
interpretation of the attractor’s home culture in some ways. At the same time, the new
element, the result of the dochaku process, may become an attractor in its own right
for some artists, embarking on its own dynamical journey of cultural transformation.
Unlike the hybridisation theory, the concept of dochaku takes into account the agency
of the artist, hence a variety of possible responses, both visible and invisible
permutations of the interaction, evolution over time, and a scope for further spiral
reaction in cultural formation. It is very likely that the awareness of dochaku process,
its three possible states of outcome, and its constitutive nature, can help us observe the
heterogeneity of cultures, and as a result, help us articulate the interdependent nature
of global cultural formation in deep history.
7. At the Confluence of Theory and Practice

This research project, ‘Dochaku: artistic evolution at the confluence of cultures,’ examines how some artists develop their unique personal ‘voice’ through their interaction with foreign aesthetics. As stated in the introduction, the research was carried out in two discrete parts, the theoretical and the practical. Through critical examination of the cases of Wright, Alechinsky, Miyake and Sugito,¹ and also by developing a body of work that culminated in my exhibition entitled Dochaku: Of the Land, I have formulated the theory of dochaku process in art. Throughout the development of the dochaku theory, the practical half of the research acted in symbiotic relationship to the theoretical, directing and grounding the emerging theory. This chapter analyses my practical research, viewed from the perspective of dochaku. That is to say, just as for the four cases examined in the theoretical research, the focus of this chapter is on how of the interaction – the process, rather than on what – the product of the interaction. This process-oriented perspective will reveal the complex nature of cultural interaction in the evolution of my art practice.

My project examines the process of ‘becoming’ something different through encounters with the other by inter-cultural, rather than multi-cultural, negotiations. Accordingly, the theme of my practical work is Becoming. The exhibition Dochaku: Of the Land consists of drawings that explore what becoming is, and what it means to me. As traces of that exploration, the drawings document how my art practice has evolved – and has become something different – during my PhD candidature by, among other means, adopting and adapting some aspects of Japanese aesthetics. In the theoretical research I have proposed four components for the process of dochaku, which are, the artist, the attractor, the interaction, and the product of interaction.

¹ See chapters two, three, four and five, respectively.
These components will be used as a framework in the analysis of my practical research that follows.

I. The component one: the artist

As briefly mentioned in the introduction chapter, I have lived in many countries. I grew up in Japan, went to university in the United States, and then worked as a graphic designer in Holland, the United States, Indonesia, Singapore, and New Zealand. As a U.S. trained designer working outside of Japan, I was amused to notice that some of my clients felt reassured simply because I was Japanese. (‘You are from Japan? They make such beautiful things… you must be good, too.’) After thirty years in industry, I decided to switch from design to fine arts, and moved from New Zealand to Australia to gain formal training. In Australia, from time to time, I have been complimented on not forgetting my ‘cultural roots’ whenever my art took a direction toward Minimalism. Having lived through many cultures, and feeling myself to be quite a cocktail by then, I found such suppositions unsettling, and also intriguing. Realising that I, too, had been guilty of such stereotyping, I wondered how we actually respond to aesthetic elements from foreign cultures. With my PhD research I wanted to find out how I deal with cultures in general, and how my art is becoming something new in particular, through interacting with the other.

With that background, the ‘base’ aesthetics of my art is heterogeneous. In my formal training in design in the ‘70s, the overwhelmingly dominant trend in design was European, which, for better or worse, passed as the ‘international.’ Next, my design practice took place in five countries as mentioned. Then came training in and practising fine arts in the contemporary Australian art world, and its main-stream, the Euro-American modern and post-modern aesthetics joined my ‘base’ aesthetics. For example, in this research, I became fascinated by the artists who dealt with space in certain ways such as Cy Twombly (b. 1928) with his ambiguous space in which the viewer can feel suspended, Per Kirkeby with the exploring lines that transverse his

---

Kirkeby (b. 1938) is a Danish painter, sculptor and poet whose work reflects his training as a geologist.
complex space on paper, and Richard Serra\(^3\) with his domineering, all-encompassing space as black presence. Having said that, one cannot ignore the formative years in one’s own country. So at the fundamental level, I probably had some sort of Japanese aesthetics operating even while training in design in the United States, and have continued to be affected by it long before it became the focus of my PhD research.

**II. The component two: the attractor**

While I was working as a designer, my own interest toward any particular aesthetics was irrelevant. A designer works to a specific brief, with specific target audiences in mind. When I came into fine arts, however, I was free to follow my own inclinations, and Japanese aesthetics appeared titillating against the backdrop of Euro-American Modernism. Looking back, mine was a hunter’s, or an Orientalist’s gaze, up to my Master of Fine Arts degree. I was shopping around for what could be useful for my art practice, and was feeling, at times, that my interpretations were superficial. In the end I designed my PhD research project so that I would be compelled to explore different aspects of Japanese aesthetics in order to know more about it. The selection of Wright, Alechinsky, Miyake and Sugito as cases ensured that there was a wide variety in cultural backgrounds and the areas of interest in the traditional Japanese arts, such as architecture, calligraphy, textiles, and *nihonga*. As expected, early into the project I found that the varied aspects of Japanese culture explored by these four artists complemented each other, making it possible for me to gain deeper insight into Japanese aesthetics.

From the beginning though, two works of Japanese art stood out in my mind as inspirations. They are Tōhaku’s *Pinewoods* folding screen and Kōrin’s *Red and White Plum Blossoms* folding screen.\(^4\) [figs. 5-4, 5-5] The space in *Pinewoods* draws in the viewer, and the absolute silence, cold fog, and the moist sand beneath your feet become tangible. The fog shifts, and you have a glimpse of a distant snow-capped mountain. The space changes as the fog engulfs you again, and you lose orientation. That continuous flow of time and space is complemented by the variety in Tōhaku’s

---

\(^3\) Serra (b. 1939) is an American Minimalist sculptor, known for his bold drawings in black paint stick and large-scale sheet metal assemblages.

\(^4\) About Tōhaku and Kōrin, see chapter five, pp. 120-21.
touch, ranging from the delicate, palest of wash to the rough and vigorous marks made with a brush of bundled straws. Seemingly at the opposite end to the eloquent simplicity of *Pinewoods* in terms of the mode of representation is *Plum Blossoms* screen. On the gold foil, the two ancient plum trees are depicted in realistic mode, while in the centre flows a stylised stream. The radically truncated trees continue in the viewer’s imagination beyond the edge of painting, incorporating the space around the painting into the painting itself. The co-habitation of the two unrelated styles is totally unexpected and breathtakingly effective. This penchant for juxtaposition, found in later works by other artists as well, might explain the passionate and matter-of-course acceptance of the seemingly opposing tastes, that of the gorgeous (*Plum Blossom* screen) and the ascetic (*Pinewoods* screen), in Japanese aesthetics. Today one can observe similar juxtaposition embraced effortlessly in Japan, where the serene ancient temples and wild *anime* exist side by side.

In the theoretical research the focus was necessarily limited to one *attractor*, Japanese aesthetics. But in the practical, the focus on Japanese aesthetics did not preclude other ‘influences.’ If I had limited the scope to one *attractor* in development of my art, it would have been artificial, and the resulting works would have been illustrations of my theory rather than a discrete research. The four artists examined also mustered a wide variety of interests and inspirations, and in my theory of *dochaku*, I have pointed out that trait as a significant factor in their evolution. After the certain elements of Japanese aesthetics as the major *attractor*, then, the secondary *attractor* for me is the Australian outback, with its intensely charged ‘empty’ space in daytime and the dark bottomless-ness at night. I see that intensity and depth embodied in *Big Yam Dreaming* by Emily Kngwarreye (1910-96). With its obvious commitment by the artist, magnificent simplicity, and the haptic physicality of three by eight meter canvas, it is truly *affective*.

**III. The component three: the interaction**

In my theory of *dochaku* process, I have stated that the four artists encountered with their respective attractors in many different ways over a period of time, making their
encounters heterogeneous.5 Due to the way my project was designed, my encounter with Japanese aesthetics has been multiple and heterogeneous as well. Take the concept of ‘space’ for instance. By studying the art of Wright, Alechinsky, Miyake and Sugito, I not only observed their mature and varied treatments of space, but was also introduced to what they themselves had encountered – such as the flatness in ukiyo-e woodcut prints, fluidity in architectural space, power of nothingness in calligraphic marginal space, and ambiguous spatial relationships in ink painting. Similarly, I encounter something different each time I go into the outback. Thus the more I learn, there is more to find out, so the exploration continues with a wider horizon and deeper insight. It is through trying to do something with each discovery, though, that I truly find out what I have discovered. With this awareness I stopped worrying whether I was acting like an Orientalist or not, since I realised that what counted was not the initial interpretation of the attractor, but the subsequent engagement with it.

And the ‘engagement’ is my creative process. Generally, it starts with observation of nature in different environments, including urban and outback, in Australia and Japan. Responding to them as honestly as I can, I draw. When I become comfortable with a certain mode of drawing, I ask myself ‘what if’ questions, such as ‘What if it is night? What if I see it up side down? Change the scale? Change the support?’ Learning from the other is accomplished through a similar process – by engaging in experimentation. The multi-panel format I used throughout the PhD project is an example of such experimentation as interaction. It started with my fascination with the truncated images in the folding screen, which led to my interest in the multi-panel format. Ordinarily, although it might cover the four seasons of the year, the scene depicted in a folding screen is a continuous one, divided into panels due to the physical format. However, inspired by Kōrin’s juxtaposition of two different modes of representation in one painting, I started assembling unrelated drawings as panels. This exercise led to experimentation with panels of various shapes, sizes, numbers, then the relationship between the images on adjacent panels, and naturally, different media and modes of

5 I have named the encounters between the artist and her attractor as being either homogeneous or heterogeneous. A heterogeneous encounter takes place when the attractor is perceived to be complex and heterogeneous in content, and ambiguous in shape. See chapter six, p.144.
expression as well. Along the way in the long string of experiments, other disciplines, such as my training in design, played a part in terms of applying grid formation and unit system. The works by Modernist and Post-Modernist painters such as Francis Bacon (1909-92), Joan Mitchell (1925-92) and Pat Steir (b. 1940), also gave me other perspectives to explore in the multi-panel format, while the concept of becoming by Deleuze and Guattari provided a philosophical framework. As proposed in my theory of dochaku, the exploration expanded in a rhizomatic fashion. Considering the influence Japanese art exercised on the Euro-American Modernism at one time, and the affinity found among the contemporary design, Minimalism, and certain elements of traditional Japanese aesthetics, the interaction among the cultures and disciplines from which I benefit is many-layered and difficult to untangle. Be that as it may, the interaction between my ‘base’ and the attractor has eventually led to evolution of my art practice.

I consider my art practice to be a questioning process. And the quality of my art as traces of that questioning depends on the quality of the question asked. We have seen, in Miyake’s case, how his question ‘What are clothes?’ evolved throughout his career. My question has been ‘What is becoming, and how can I live with it?’ I have realised that, at the beginning, I was not really asking that question, but was simply trying to find a way to illustrate facile answers to that question. Shifting forms in All along the Stream was one such attempt. [fig. 7-1] Then came Spring in Black. [fig. 7-2] In this multiple panel work, the meaning and the sense of becoming are examined through the changing characteristics of each drawing caused by their relationship to the adjacent drawings, and through the dynamics of the assemblage as a whole – in other words, through the interaction among the drawings. As Deleuze observed in Bacon’s triptychs, a multiple panel work creates a sense of instability or contingency, a feeling that the work could disassemble at any moment in front of your very eyes, turning into something quite different. A multiple panel work is a becoming, not a being. With Spring in Black, I started asking my question seriously for the first time, I think. Or, it can be said that the nature and depth of my question evolved as I had come to understand better the topic and objects of my research.

---

6 About the concepts becoming and rhizome by Deleuze and Guattari, see chapter six, pp.151-52.
Also with this piece, I realised I wanted to engage in another kind of interaction, that with the viewer. Measuring three by two and a half meters, *Spring in Black* is large and confronting. After all, I did want to create imposing works that enveloped the viewer, like Serra’s or Kngwarreye’s. As a viewer in front of *Spring in Black*, however, I found myself wanting to step back, rather than to allow myself drawn into it. To lure the viewer to come closer to the drawing instead of stepping back from it, I started reducing the physical dimension of works, making smaller marks, as well as introducing texture by puncturing, peeling, tearing, and cutting the paper. [fig. 7-3] It is impossible to determine precisely from where the dots by puncturing in my art derive, but I can list the tie-dye technique in Japanese textile, Indonesian batik, and Australian Aboriginal paintings as possible sources of inspiration. In terms of purposive mark making using all these techniques, I have learned much from Twombly, with his idiosyncratic use of small marks, smears and blobs that create layer after layer of intermingling spaces on large canvases. With oil sticks and other media, I enjoy the contradicting act of creating some illusionary layers of space in my work first, and then reminding myself that it is only a piece of paper by emphasising its physicality with such techniques as tearing and puncturing. This oscillation between the illusion represented *on* the support and the objecthood *of* the support, or between the metaphysical and physical, causes a mild mental vertigo in me, producing a sense of *becoming*. It is *becoming* itself, or a sense of it, that I am after in my art, not an illustration or description of it.

In this connection, the materiality – the enhanced physicality of the materials in use – plays an important part in my current work. I think, at first, it was a reaction to the mass-produced, impersonal nature of designed objects that I had dealt with for three decades previously. (And, as stated in my *dochaku* theory, this negative ‘reaction’ is also a legitimate part of cultural interaction.) The immediacy, the one-of-a-kind nature of fine arts appealed to me then. It is interesting to note that, as seen in Wright’s case, a similar position is found in the Arts and Craft movement. Respect for material is paramount in traditional Japanese aesthetics as well. More recently, while interviewing some *nihonga* artists, I realised that the type of materiality I was pursuing was important to me because it reveals the time and effort I had poured into a particular work. It conveys, hopefully, not how much I have laboured upon it, but
the degree of engagement I have had with it. To me, what makes a work of art compelling is the artist’s commitment – the depth of her enquiry and the sincerity of her efforts – that can be observed in the work. One of the ways I have chosen to communicate my commitment is through the enhanced physicality of my works. As for the impression of the works, however, I want them to seem effortless and inevitable, and at the same time, to appear to be at the verge of transforming themselves, becoming something different.

As can be seen, the nature of my research was determined by the fact that it was approached from both the theoretical and the practical perspectives. Judging from the way the project has unfolded, it is clear that when I speak of artistic evolution at the confluence of cultures, at some point, I need to consider ‘cultures’ to signify not only the ones based on ethnicity or tradition, but also design vis-à-vis fine arts, theory vis-à-vis practice, and word vis-à-vis picture, i.e. all aspects of my past and present experiences. However, as a practitioner, I need to emphasise that in actual art practice one seldom sets out consciously to mix ‘cultures,’ unless mixing them is the topic of enquiry, which my project is not. My aim in the practical research is to explore becoming, and to leave drawings in which there is a clear ‘alliance of subject and style [where] the how and the why are harmonised’ as traces of that exploration. That being the case, at the time of creation, the question of which cultures are present and how they are to interact does not even arise in my mind.

IV. The component four: the product

Considering the complex nature of the interaction between an attractor and base aesthetics one possesses, merely deconstructing a work into various visible ‘influences’ as is often done in art criticism is a futile exercise as far as understanding how artists learn from the other is concerned. Furthermore, as discussed in this thesis, the influence-spotting approach to analysis of cultural interaction has had the unfortunate consequence of failing to recognize the existence of interaction when the product of interaction does not exhibit outward similarities to the original cultures. To

---

address this problem, the focus of the project has been on the process rather than on the product. Accordingly, this section analyses the product of my practical research viewed from the dochaku perspective.

*Long White Cloud* [fig. 7-4], for example, may ordinarily be described as follows. The work, consisting of 12 separate panels, is in oil stick, gel liner pen and graphite on paper. The narrowness of the panel recalls Japanese hanging scrolls, while the multiple-panel format and the composition with open space near the centre hark back to folding screens. The details and care present in the work are reminiscent of the importance of craft in Japanese art. In the monochromatic representation and the surface treatment such as tearing and puncturing, the viewer may identify the concepts of *wabi* and *sabi*, the aesthetics of tea that value simplicity and imperfection... These are superficial points, however. The more crucial aspect that can be attributed to Japanese aesthetics in *Long White Cloud* is the attitude toward nature, time, and space.

Although I do not attempt to represent nature in my drawings, I often hold images of plant forms and their environment in my mind while drawing. My response to them – mediated through the question ‘What is *becoming*?’ – is what I try to find out through drawing. I aim to make all marks – be it original, inspired or indigenised – to work seamlessly like notes in good music. I want them to relate to each other vertically in each panel at any given moment, like various instruments in an orchestra, and then to flow horizontally from one panel to the next in time and space, to create a new living unity that is visible music. For that purpose I bring in variety and contrast in forms, marks, and textures. Avoiding the facile choice of ink as a medium with which to explore fluidity, I have used oil stick as the main mark-making medium. Although generally seen as a medium for bold and chunky work, the oil stick is, in reality, very versatile, being capable of a wide variety of expressions, ranging from thin translucent veils to thick blobs. Creating different depths in space and time with oil stick and other media, I compose movements. But I also remind the viewer that this really is a two-dimensional work by pushing the physicality of the paper to the front. I want to create a sense of *becoming* by that shift of perception between the illusion of flow and the solidity of the material.
In *Long White Cloud*, I have left traces of my attempt to understand, and then to accept, *becoming*, not *being*, as the nature of all things. I would like to believe that every aspect of the work – the mode of representation, perceived frailty of paper as support, even the way the work is simply pinned on the wall – contributes toward effectiveness of the work as a drawing. The elements of Japanese aesthetics I want to adopt and adapt till they become mine, are its sense of fluidity, of the space that shifts in the viewer’s mind, of time passing, of acceptance of transitoriness of all things. In this regard I have benefitted greatly from studying the concept of *ma*,9 Wright’s (mis)interpretation of Lao-tzu’s space as a positive element that flows,10 and Alechinsky’s representation of parallel movements of time in the centre and *marginalia* in his paintings.11 Nonetheless, at the time of creation, what I wanted to explore in *Long White Cloud* had little to do with the question of cultural interaction as such, and had everything to do with my question ‘What is *becoming*?’

**V. Art practice at the confluence of cultures**

I have proposed that there are three states in which the products of cultural interaction can manifest. Of the three, my current art practice is in the State of Visible Conjunction. I see many things from my past and present in my work. And it pleases me that I can accept that observation without wondering whether any of the elements should be there or not. Perhaps I have finally learned not to essentialise as to what is fine art, what is design, what is Japanese, what is Occidental, what is mine, and what comes from others. More importantly, I have learned not to weigh the relative importance of these amorphous elements in hierarchical order. As for the next stage, of course it would be tremendous if I could reach the State of a New Paradigm in my art, but that is something I cannot prescribe. It is perhaps similar to what Suzuki says about *satori* (enlightenment) in Zen. Once you set it as a conscious goal, you are not likely to get there. Your self-consciousness gets in the way.12 Or, Mondrian’s

---

9 The concept of ‘nothingness’ or ‘in-between’ in temporal and spatial terms, found in Japanese culture. See chapter four, p. 97.
10 About Wright’s spatial concept, see chapter two, p. 50, and chapter six, pp. 150-51.
11 About Alechinsky’s *marginalia*, see chapter three, p. 81.
description of his efforts, ‘conscious but not calculating,’\textsuperscript{13} is perhaps clearer to us non-Zennists. Whichever the way described, it is amusing how this non-calculating effort contrasts so dramatically with how I used to work as a designer. Defining clear objectives, breaking them into attainable goals, setting a timeline, checking milestones, visualising the ultimate positive result, etc. were the only ways I knew then. Through my PhD project I have learned one other way, the non-calculating, emergent or ‘naturalistic’ method of exploration that requires one to be thoroughly flexible and persistent at the same time. I am glad that I have experienced different ways of perceiving and thinking through different ethnic cultures, through design and fine arts, through practice and theory, and also through drawing and writing. During this project, somewhere along the line, I began to feel I was writing with pictures, and drawing with words. In both, there was a keen pleasure of being able to think, and to find connections among things that had seemed unrelated previously. It can be said that my approach has shifted from that of a hunter’s to an agrarian’s, since I aim to nurture new elements I adopt until they become something thoroughly of my own – until they arrive at the state of \textit{dochaku} in my art.


Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) was a Dutch painter who was active in De Stijl movement, and whose art evolved into non-representational Neo-Plasticism.
7-1
All along the Stream
2007
Ink, charcoal, acrylic, graphite on paper
95 x 260 cm

7-2
Spring in Black
2007
Oil stick, graphite, ink, gel liner pen, magnet on paper
300 x 255 cm
See also p.185.

7-3
To Receive
(detail)
2008
Oil stick, ink, gel liner pen, graphite on paper

7-4
Long White Cloud
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
78 x 246 cm
See also p.186.
Conclusion

As we have seen, the various models of cultural interaction currently in use all have inherent problems. In the social sciences we have encountered, among others, such terms as hybridisation and creolisation. As in the case of globalisation, these terms lack clear definition. More importantly, by relying on analytical models with a Eurocentric past, we may well be perpetuating old hegemonic thinking even when our intention is to right it through new comparative studies. Abou-El-Haj asks:

[We] have yet to find a language capable of describing equal exchange in a world of unequal exchanges. Is our vocabulary so impoverished because there is no such thing to be described, or because we have such difficulty envisaging it?

Having borrowed theoretical models mainly from the social sciences, the discipline of visual art inherits such problems in its own examination of cultural interaction. It has tended to employ hybridisation models for most situations whether they are appropriate or not, failing to address differing types of exchange. However, as to the question of the very existence of non-hierarchical, equal exchanges, it may be partly a matter of re-discovering, rather than envisaging totally anew. I believe that by re-examining the world with a new perspective, we will recognise cultural interaction of many different types in the past, and in the present. As an analytic tool with which to begin that re-examination, I have proposed the concept of dochaku. Coming from outside of the Euro-American domain, and not being tied to colonial experiences, the dochaku perspective enables us to recognise, describe, or envisage, various types of exchange in the world, including equal exchanges.

2 Ibid., 143-44.
This research project has set out to clarify the nature of cultural interaction in art by examining the evolution of the four artists. The findings from the four case studies have led to a working model of the dochaku process. The process starts with an artist ‘falling in love’ with an attractor. She comprehends the attractor in multiple ways, as Miyake does. She observes deeply and explores the attractor through continuous experimental interaction, as Wright did. As her understanding of the attractor grows, so does her understanding of her own art practice, as Sugito’s does. Having a passion to grow, she goes forward to investigate rather than to conclude, as Alechinsky does. Culture, says Clifford, is ‘negotiated and present process.’ In search of newness and personal specificity in her art through contact with the other, the artist negotiates… and re-negotiates. The dochaku perspective reveals that process and its products. In concluding, I proffer two insights gained into cultural interaction as a summary of the findings of this research project.

The first insight obtained is the richness and variety of negotiation possible in cultural interaction. By examining cultural interaction with a focus on the individual artist and her process, we have found that artistic evolution through dochaku is a sustained and continuous process. For example, we have seen that Wright’s career of more than six decades is peppered through with his evolving indigenisation of Japanese and other aesthetics. Alechinsky gained more skills, and renewed his knowledge, as he continued his engagement with calligraphy over many years. Miyake’s fundamental question, ‘What are clothes?’ evolved throughout his career, and so did his answers. Further, Sugito provides an interesting example of an incubation period needed for a certain understanding to come to the surface. As individuals, the artists have their own ways of negotiating with the new aesthetics of the attractor, and that of their base culture. The practice of the four artists evolved in different ways, at different speed, and with different types of end-product, defying easy generalisation. By recognising

agency of the artists while not typecasting them as heroic geniuses, we open our eyes to recognise rich varieties in their negotiations in cultural interaction.

The second insight obtained is the ubiquitous nature of cultural interaction. In a seeming paradox, as a result of investigating cultural interaction with a focus on the process rather than the product, the research has identified not one, but three states of product of cultural interaction. They are: the State of Maturation, the State of Visible Conjunction, and the State of a New Paradigm. In comparison, the previous models recognise basically one type of product, bearing such names as hybrid, creole or syncretism depending on the author of the theory. Displaying both their roots (ethnicity) and routes (past interactions), these products belong to the State of Visible Conjunction. The fact that the other two states, the States of Maturation and a New Paradigm, were not noticed is understandable. If one defines cultural interaction solely by the outward appearance of its product as hybridisation models do, then it is inevitable that the models capture only the visible mixed-ness, and miss the invisible. We have seen, however, the appearance of products can range widely from the obviously-mixed to the seemingly-not-mixed. Wright’s Robie House is an example of the former, while the Guggenheim Museum is of the latter.

In this connection, although it might be historically suspect, we may summon again the case of Marco Polo and his souvenir of pasta. Friedman states that ‘the fact that pasta became Italian, and that its Chinese origin became irrelevant is the essential culture-producing process.’ I would argue that remembering origins might give us a somewhat more balanced perspective. As discussed, in the scheme of the concept dochaku, the Italian national cuisine belongs to the State of Maturation, with its Chinese origin ‘B,’ and Italian innovation (+) that led ‘B’ to mature as ‘B+’. This way of viewing the past and present, I foresee, brings out the mixed nature of most cultures. In fact, as we have seen, the dochaku perspective has revealed cases of mixed-ness in art where, previously, cultural interaction was not recognised. There are

---

6 ———, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 36.
instances and products of cultural interaction all around us – if only we knew how to look. With dochaku as a perspective and an analytic tool, we will recognise far more variety and instances of cultural interaction.

However, the concept of dochaku serves little purpose if it were only to uncover mixed-ness of cultures and their aesthetics. Pieterse earnestly hopes that being aware of the mixed origin of most cultures may act as an antidote against the collective amnesia of deep history, and the amnesia’s accompanying cousin, essentialism.8 Clifford commends Said on his ‘refusal to appeal to any authentic… oriental realities against the false stereotypes of Orientalism,’ by saying ‘his main concern is not with what was or even what is but with what is becoming.’9 Similarly, the concept of dochaku must serve a constitutive purpose in the art world. With dochaku perspective, a wider recognition and deeper understanding of cultural interaction become possible, and that in turn, may lead to a new awareness of the various generalisations and centrisms we practice. Once the generalisations and centrisms are made ‘conscious and explicit,’10 we may then be able to investigate and deal with them, for richer cultural interactions in the world of visual art.

Appendix

Works in the Exhibition Dochaku: Of the Land

Over the Ridge
2008
Oil stick, gel liner pen on paper
25.2 x 57.5 cm

In the Sand
2008
Ink, graphite on paper
25 x 57.2 cm
To Depart
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen on paper
25.4 x 57 cm

To Engage
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25.4 x 57 cm

To Traverse
2009
Oil stick, ink, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25.4 x 57 cm
Spring in Black
2007
Oil stick, ink, graphite, gel liner pen, pastel on paper
300 x 255 cm
Long White Cloud
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
78 x 246 cm (detail)
Cloud, Cloud
2010
Charcoal, gel liner pen on paper
78 x 250 cm

Cloud, Cloud (detail)
On the Beach
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite, ink on paper
153.5 x 291 cm
Into the Valley
2008
Oil stick, gel liner pen on paper
25.2 x 67 cm

To Receive
2009
Oil stick, ink, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25.4 x 57 cm

From the Other Side
2008
Oil stick, graphite on paper
25.2 x 58 cm
Before the Rain
2008
Oil stick on paper
25 x 57.8 cm

After the Frost
2008
Oil stick, graphite, ink on paper
25 x 63 cm

To Elsewhere
2008
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25 x 57 cm
Bibliography


---

**Magazines**


Dochaku: Of the Land
Works in the Exhibition

COFA space Gallery
College of Fine Arts, UNSW
10-14 August 2010

Toshiko Oiyama
Spring in Black
2007
Oil stick, ink, graphite, gel liner pen, pastel on paper
300 x 255 cm
On the Beach
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite, ink on paper
153.5 x 291 cm
On the Beach
(details)
Long White Cloud
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
78 x 246 cm
Cloud, Cloud
2010
Charcoal, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
78 x 250 cm
Before the Rain
2008
Oil stick on paper
25 x 57.8 cm
After the Frost
2008
Oil stick, graphite, ink on paper
25 x 63 cm
To Elsewhere
2008
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25 x 57 cm
To Depart
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen on paper
25.4 x 57 cm
To Engage
2009
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25.4 x 57 cm
To Traverse
2009
Oil stick, ink, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25.4 x 57 cm
To Receive
2009
Oil stick, ink, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25.4 x 57 cm
In the Rain
2008
Oil stick, gel liner pen, graphite on paper
25 x 70.4 cm
In the Sand
2008
Ink, graphite on paper
25 x 57.2 cm
From the Other Side
2008
Oil stick, graphite on paper
25.2 x 58 cm
Over the Ridge
2008
Oil stick, gel liner pen on paper
25.2 x 57.5 cm
Exhibition scene 3
Dochaku: Of the Land
Works in the Exhibition

COFA space Gallery
College of Fine Arts, UNSW
10-14 August 2010

Toshiko Oiyama