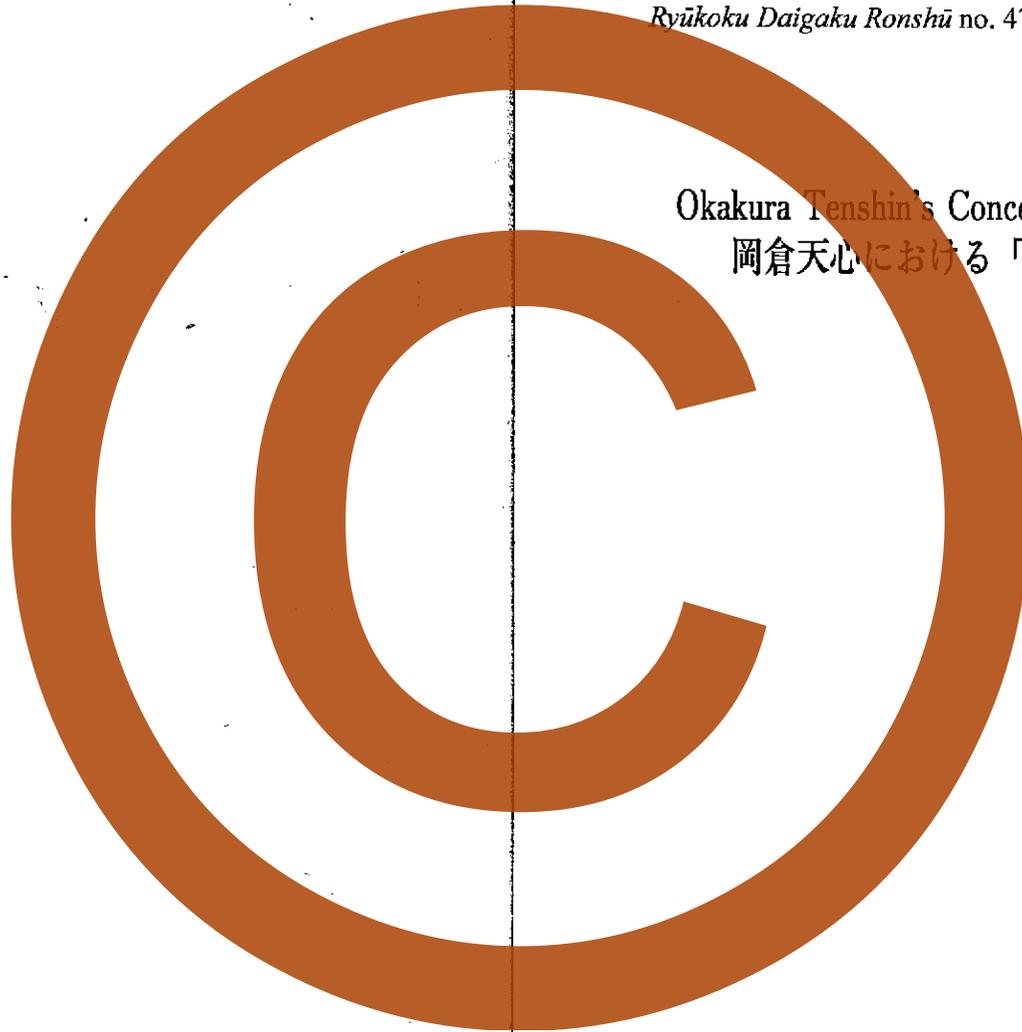


龍谷大学龍谷学会
「龍谷大学論集」第478号 抜刷
平成23年10月 (2011・10) 発行

Ryūkoku Daigaku Ronshū no. 478 (Oct 2011), 10-32.

Okakura Tenshin's Conception of "Being in the World"
岡倉天心における「処世術」 (*In-der-Welt-Sein*)



Dennis Hirota

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"Being in the World" in *The Book of Tea*

My general theme in this article concerns the world experienced in everyday life as the locus of religious existence.⁽¹⁾ *Chanoyu* or the tea ceremony provides an exceptionally focused example of the view in Japanese tradition of the concrete activities of daily life as potentially modes of human existence in touch with reality. This is also an attitude deeply ingrained in Japanese Buddhist traditions, many of which proclaim the nonduality of samsaric existence and nirvana. This includes traditions often assumed to be wholly otherworldly in orientation, such as Pure Land Buddhism.

In addition, an underlying interest here is to explore ways in which recent Western philosophical thought in particular might help illumine Japanese Buddhist tradition. When we bring such considerations to bear on the widely read work *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzō (or Tenshin, 1862-1913), we find ourselves already in the midst of a conversation with Western thought that started more than a century ago.

My title emerges from the often noted fact that the use of the German expression "in-der-Welt-sein," so prominent in Heidegger's exposition of the structure of the being of Dasein in *Being and Time* (1927), in fact predates Heidegger's book. The phrase "Kunst des In-der-Welt-Seins" is used in the German translation of Okakura's *The Book of Tea*. This work was originally composed in English in Boston while Okakura was working at the Museum of Fine Arts. It appears that it was prepared, in part, for oral presentation to small audiences in the home of

Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924), art collector and patron of the arts, and published in Boston in 1906. It was translated into German by Marguerite and Ulrich Steindorff and published in Leipzig in 1919 (according to the dating of the German National Library), although the early editions are undated.⁽²⁾

In order to describe the perceptions that lay behind the emergence and practice of *chanoyu*, Okakura included a chapter in *The Book of Tea* titled "Taoism and Zennism," in which he notes, "Chinese historians have always spoken of Taoism as the "art of being in the world" (44).⁽³⁾ Thus, according to Okakura, the provenance of the expression, "art of being in the world," is traditional, and it probably represents his English translation of the phrase *shosei* (処世, Ch. *chushi*, "living in the world," "getting along in society"), which occurs in such Daoist texts as *Zhuangzi* (see Chapter 9, "Horses' Hoofs"). The entire phrase, "art of being in the world," probably corresponds to the expression *shosei jutsu* (処世術), which is still current in modern Japanese, indicating the acquired skill or knack for the successful conduct of life.

The expression "being in the world" occurs only once in Okakura's book and, in the original English, is not hyphenated. Nevertheless, in its German translation by the Steindorffs, as in Heidegger's usage, it is hyphenated to indicate that it is a single term. Further, in the German version, following the English, the entire phrase "Kunst des In-der-Welt-Seins" appears in quotation marks.

There are strong circumstantial reasons for believing that Heidegger was familiar with the German edition of Okakura's book, *Das Buch vom Tee*, although there is no mention of it in his writings. Okakura was one of a small number of Japanese born in the tumultuous years immediately preceding the Meiji era who wrote influential works on Japan in English (one thinks also of Uchimura Kanzō [1861-1930] and Nitobe Inazō [1862-1933] in particular). From the first decade of the twentieth century, Okakura's works and his striking presence, particularly in Boston, were making a deep impression among intellectuals and cultural figures in the West, including Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens among

American poets alone.⁽⁴⁾ Further, a string of important Japanese philosophers visited and studied with Heidegger from the end of the second decade through the 1930's, including Kuki Shūzō, who had a close personal and intellectual relationship with Okakura, who mentions and quotes Okakura in his own writings, and who is spoken of by Heidegger in his "A Dialogue on Language." It seems natural that Kuki would have discussed Okakura and his works with Heidegger, particularly in relation to the Japanese aesthetic notion of *iki*, which Heidegger recollects in "A Dialogue on Language." There is also the assertion of direct oral testimony by a Japanese philosopher to having given a copy of *The Book of Tea* to Heidegger in 1919.⁽⁵⁾

Nevertheless, my chief concern here is not an attempt to trace a direct line of influence from Okakura to Heidegger or to draw comparisons between the two thinkers.⁽⁶⁾ Rather, I will take a somewhat nonhistorical perspective reflecting back from the present, seeking to point out themes and ideas broached in Okakura's book that Heidegger's thought might help illumine, and in this way to highlight aspects that might otherwise be glossed over, their significance not fully noted. In short, it is easy to read *The Book of Tea* as an impressionistic piece of exoticism and to overlook its insightful reconstruction of a traditional understanding of human existence. Once acknowledging the resonances with Heidegger, it may then become possible to look back further still and indicate ways in which the results of reading Okakura in the light of Heidegger may also aid us in considering the theme of the world of everyday life experience in a figure of Japanese Buddhist tradition like Shinran (1173-1263). Space will not allow such an attempt in this essay, but the possibility suggests an area of research that may open up resources for a contemporary understanding of Pure Land Buddhism.

The Design of The Book of Tea

There are seven chapters in Okakura's presentation of chanoyu:

Chapter 1 The Cup of Humanity

Chapter 2 The Schools of Tea
 Chapter 3 Taoism and Zennism
 Chapter 4 The Tea-room
 Chapter 5 Art Appreciation
 Chapter 6 Flowers
 Chapter 7 Tea-masters

At first glance, the chapter titles appear almost random in both subject matter and arrangement, and in fact, several of the chapters were published or solicited as independent magazine articles before the book publication. It is probably not uncommon for readers going through the book to experience a gradually building suspense as they wait with increasing impatience to learn exactly what transpires in the mysterious activity Okakura speaks of throughout as a "ritual," "holy sacrament," and "ceremony." Chanoyu presents a challenge for any author writing for an audience unfamiliar with life in Japan, for a whole world of endeavor needs to be conveyed. Okakura, in a masterful stroke, employs the metaphor of drama:

The tea-room was an oasis in the dreary waste of existence where weary travellers could meet to drink from the common spring of *art-appreciation*. The ceremony was an improvised drama whose plot was woven about the tea, the *flowers*, and the paintings. ("The Schools of Tea," 33; emphasis added)

And there, in a nutshell, are the core chapters of the book: "The Tea-room," "Art Appreciation," and "Flowers." The preceding three preliminary chapters present Okakura's contextualization of chanoyu, including not only a discussion of aspects of continental Asian and Japanese cultural history, but some global reflections on the history of tea drinking. The latter in particular is a clear indication that Okakura's larger strategy in his book turns not on a cultural exclusivism, but quite the opposite, on an assertion of universality and the need to overcome mutual ignorance. Tea drinking is not uniquely Japanese or even Asian:

Strangely enough humanity has so far met in the tea-cup. It is the only Asiatic ceremonial which commands universal esteem. The white man has scoffed at our religion and our morals, but has accepted the brown beverage without hesitation. The afternoon tea is now an important function in Western society. ("The Cup of Humanity," 11)

Familiar with the social customs of Boston society, Okakura saw tea as an appropriate point of entry for presenting Japanese cultural practices and perceptions as aspects of high civilization and deep humanity rather than merely exotic signs of an incomprehensibly alien people.

Further, the culminating chapter, "Tea-masters," presents the only description of a chanoyu gathering in the book. It is not an abstract template of the typical pattern of a gathering, but an evocation of one, historical meeting—the final chanoyu gathering of Sen no Rikyū, who is widely recognized as having brought chanoyu to its pinnacle as an art in the sixteenth century, and who was ordered to commit seppuku or self-immolation by Hideyoshi, the ruler whom he had served as advisor and aide in matters of tea. In this way, Okakura skillfully conveys the solemnity of formal chanoyu gatherings, whose participants have been instructed to conduct themselves in the attitude that the meeting will occur only once in their lives.

In this essay, I will touch on the topics in the three core chapters of *The Book of Tea*: art appreciation as the transformation of average everydayness into the locus of reality, the tea-room as the space of emptiness, and the temporality or mortality of flowers.

Art Appreciation as Wakefulness: The Individual and Society

Early in his book, Okakura draws on the broad dichotomy of "the individual and society" in his explanation of the thought embodied in chanoyu, and in connection with it, he criticizes people in modern society from two, paradoxically opposite, directions: both for their self-imposed

and dishonest attempts at conformity and for the narrowness of their actual, self-absorbed tastes.

It is much to be regretted that so much of the apparent enthusiasm for art at the present day has no foundation in real feeling. In this democratic age of ours men clamour for what is popularly considered the best, regardless of their feelings. They want the costly, not the refined; the fashionable, not the beautiful. To the masses, contemplation of illustrated periodicals, the worthy product of their own industrialism, would give more digestible food for artistic enjoyment than the early Italians or the Ashikaga masters, whom they pretend to admire. ("Art Appreciation," 85)

As Okakura confesses in his book, "I am not to be a polite Teaist" (9). Disparagement of the "democratic age of ours" may be a reminder that *The Book of Tea* comes from the period of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972), W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) and D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930). It is also, of course, the period of "das Man," the They, concerning which Heidegger says, "We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way they enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way they see and judge" (trans. J. Stambaugh, *Sein und Zeit*, § 27, 126). When in another context Okakura quotes the ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan (屈原 [343?-277? BCE], Jp. Kutsugen), "The Sages move the world" (40)—"move" in the sense, perhaps, of awakening society from forgetfulness or oblivion—the words appear now darkly shadowed.

Okakura's central interest in his dichotomy, however, lies in contrasting two basic, interrelated modes of perception or orientations of human life, what he calls the individualistic and the communal or traditional. In his broad sketch of cultural history, he identifies these with the Daoism of southern China and the Confucianism of the north. In Okakura's view, chanoyu is an embodiment of the former intellectual tradition, which was able to survive and flourish historically in the relatively isolated sanctuary of Japan while eventually disappearing from the continent.

Okakura states that “Confucius with his numerous disciples aimed at retaining ancestral conventions” (40). Further, “The observance of communal traditions involves a constant sacrifice of the individual to the state. Education, in order to keep up the mighty delusion, encourages a species of ignorance” (40-41). By contrast, in this simplified overview,

the Taoist railed at the laws and the moral codes of society, for to them right and wrong were but relative terms. Definition is always limitation—the “fixed” and “unchangeless” are but terms expressive of a stoppage of growth.

As Okakura put it: “the Taoist Absolute was the Relative” (40).

The Wind of Relativity

Although Okakura uses language that pits the pressures of social conformity against the freedom of individuals, “individualism” for him does not mean that human beings are ideally autonomous, isolate entities. “The Relative” also signifies the inherent finitude, situatedness, and inter-relatedness of human existence. Thus he states, concerning the intrinsic limitation of the human capacity for appreciating particular artworks:

[A]rt is of value only to the extent that it speaks to us. It might be a universal language if we ourselves were universal in our sympathies. Our finite nature, the power of tradition and conventionality, as well as our hereditary instincts, restrict the scope of our capacity for artistic enjoyment. (“Art Appreciation,” 83)

Individuality indicates particularity, not a transcendent subjectivity. In the world recognized to be relative, it is precisely the obverse, circumscribed aspect of that which is universal and primal. Thus Okakura continues:

Our very individuality establishes in one sense a limit to our understanding; and our aesthetic personality seeks its own affinities in the creations of the past. It is true that with cultivation our sense of art appreciation broadens.... But, after all, we see only our own image in the universe,—our particular idiosyncrasies dictate the mode of our perceptions. (“Art Appreciation,” 83-84)

Taoist relativity does not absolutize the subject, but rather bespeaks the finitude of our perception and understanding, our “thrownness,” perhaps, or the karmic-createdness of ourselves and our universe. We might note here that Heidegger’s exploration of truth, two decades later, in terms of that which enables the appearance of things and of a deconstruction (Destruction) of the reified subject-object dichotomy, shares structural features in common with Okakura’s discussion of “the mode of our perceptions” here. A further insight in common is the view of human perception as at once made possible and constrained by historical locale and cultural tradition, and also by “mood” (the German translation of *The Book of Tea* renders Okakura’s term as “Stimmung,” later an important term in Heidegger). We will return briefly to the latter below.

Thus, in considering the subject who engages in art appreciation in Okakura, rather than a singular agent acting on the world, perhaps an image like that of beings in the relationship of waves on the sea is more appropriate. Or, to borrow a Daoist image that Okakura repeats in *The Book of Tea*, there is the legendary sage Liezi (said to have lived c. fifth century B. C. E.), who is said to have traveled by riding the wind. Okakura states: “We may ride the wind with Liezi and find it absolutely quiet because we ourselves are the wind.” The absolute quiet of the wind is more abstractly expressed by the metaphor of Vacuum, or perhaps voidness, emptiness, or nothing. Okakura sets out the contrast here with what might be called an ordinary everydayness:

Those of us who know not the secret of properly regulating our own existence on this tumultuous sea of foolish troubles which we call

life are constantly in a state of misery while vainly trying to appear happy and contented. We stagger in the attempt to keep our moral equilibrium, and see forerunners of the tempest in every cloud that floats on the horizon. Yet there is joy and beauty in the roll of billows as they sweep outward toward eternity. Why not enter into their spirit, or, like Liezi, ride upon the hurricane itself? ("Tea-Masters," 113)

Here, we may note further resonances with Heidegger's notion of the nothing, which functions in the human self-awareness of mortality that underpins authentic, wakeful existence.

Taoism, then, is living in realization, amid the tumult of daily life, that we *are* the wind: temporal, relative, finite existence that rides upon emptiness toward inexorable death. It is in this sense that, in Okakura's words, Taoism is

the "art of *being in the world*," for it deals with the present—ourselves. It is in us that God meets with Nature, and yesterday parts from to-morrow. The Present is the moving Infinity, the legitimate sphere of the Relative. ("Taoism and Zennism," 44; emphasis added)

In defining Taoism, Okakura makes the direct equation of human being and temporality ("the present" that is not simply "now," but further embraces the distention of past and future in which "yesterday parts from to-morrow"). Here also, we may note a general proximity to the thinking of Heidegger two decades later, although Heidegger's analysis of time is elaborated in terms of his notion of "running ahead into death" (*Vorlaufen in den Tod*) and of thrownness.

Okakura goes on: "Taoism accepts the mundane as it is and, unlike the Confucians or the Buddhists, tries to find beauty in our world of woe and worry" ("Taoism and Zennism," 44). Since Okakura identifies Zen and Daoism, I assume he means by Buddhists here what in Mahayana tradition is referred to as Hinayana. He sees an Asian tradition of

thought in Daoism and Zen that is cultivated and transmitted in culture aesthetically, resulting in an ethical formation, "a certain capacity for reserve and refinement" (43) in the face of life's vicissitudes. It is this attitude or fundamental orientation of existence that is the "art" of being in the world, and it is attained through maintaining a kind of double vision that perceives "our world of woe" without losing sight of that which both enables and encompasses individual, mundane concerns. Thus, in an Asian adaptation of the hermeneutic circle in which the part is ordinary human existence and the whole is empty, he states:

To keep the proportion of things and give place to others without losing one's own position was the secret of success in the mundane drama. We must know the whole play in order to properly act our parts; the conception of totality must never be lost in that of the individual. ("Taoism and Zennism," 45)

The holistic vision that at the same time allows for the multiplicity and spontaneity of "the mundane drama" dictates against both complete absorption in the perspective of the individual and a reified conception of that which pervades the whole. Thus, concerning the latter, Okakura continues:

This Laotse illustrates by his favourite metaphor of the Vacuum. He claimed that only in vacuum lay the truly *essential*. The reality of a room, for instance, was to be found in the vacant space enclosed by the roof and the walls, not in the roof and walls themselves. The usefulness of a water pitcher dwelt in the emptiness where water might be put, not in the form of the pitcher or the material of which it was made. Vacuum is all potent because all containing. In vacuum alone motion becomes possible. One who could make of himself a vacuum into which others might freely enter would become master of all situations. ("Taoism and Zennism," 45)

The images of room and water pitcher as essentially defined by the empty space within rather than by form or material are derived from *Daodejing*, Chapter 22, but it may be that their significance was communicated to Frank Lloyd Wright and Heidegger through Okakura's exposition here. For Okakura, the emptiness of Daoist and Buddhist insight provided in addition the temporal space for the metaphor of drama, which Okakura adopts broadly for human life apprehended from a Daoist perspective, and more specifically, for the tea ceremony. Thus, the last sentence of the quotation above may be taken to express an ideal of communication and interrelationship in *chanoyu*. For Okakura, *chanoyu* becomes an image for cultivating and embodying the awareness that he sees expressed in Daoist and Zen Buddhist thought, a kind of religious praxis and fulfillment in everyday activities operative in Japanese tradition. We may note here, therefore, that the nothingness that lies at the heart of things for Okakura is not, as in Heidegger, a source of angst, but rather "potent" and fecund, though inconceivable. Thus, "only in vacuum" lies "the truly *essential*": Okakura's notion of "essential" here surely may be said to adumbrate Heidegger's explorations of the "essence of truth" and "the thingness of the thing."

The Mystery of Art Appreciation

As in Heidegger's later treatment of art as an extension of his concern with truth, particularly in "On the Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), so for Okakura the artwork is not merely an object of subjective aesthetic enjoyment that supplements our practical everyday lives, but rather a source of the unfolding of a world. How then does Okakura understand what he calls "the mystery of art appreciation" (78)—mysterious, perhaps, both because its cultivation resists codification and because its core is the enabling emptiness? He begins his chapter on the subject with a long parable, which he calls "the Taoist tale of the Taming of the Harp."⁽⁸⁾ I quote it here in full:

Once in the hoary ages in the Ravine of Lungmen stood a Kiri tree, a veritable king of the forest. It reared its head to talk to the stars; its roots struck deep into the earth, mingling their bronzed coils with those of the silver dragon that slept beneath. And it came to pass that a mighty wizard made of this tree a wondrous harp, whose stubborn spirit should be tamed but by the greatest of musicians. For long the instrument was treasured by the Emperor of China, but all in vain were the efforts of those who in turn tried to draw melody from its strings. In response to their utmost strivings there came from the harp but harsh notes of disdain, ill-according with the songs they fain would sing. The harp refused to recognise a master. (75-76)

At last came Peiwoh [Pinyin: Boya], the prince of harpists. With tender hand he caressed the harp as one might seek to soothe an unruly horse, and softly touched the chords. He sang of nature and the seasons, of high mountains and flowing waters, and all the memories of the tree awoke. Once more the sweet breath of spring played amidst its branches. The young cataracts, as they danced down the ravine, laughed to the budding flowers. Anon were heard the dreamy voices of summer with its myriad insects, the gentle pattering of rain, the wail of the cuckoo. Hark! a tiger roars,—the valley answers again. It is autumn; in the desert night, sharp like a sword gleams the moon upon the frosted grass. Now winter reigns, and through the snow-filled air swirl flocks of swans and rattling hailstones beat upon the boughs with fierce delight. (76-77)

Then Peiwoh changed the key and sang of love. The forest swayed like an ardent swain deep lost in thought. On high, like a haughty maiden, swept a cloud bright and fair; but passing, trailed long shadows on the ground, black like despair. Again the mode was changed; Peiwoh sang of war, of clashing steel and trampling steeds. And in the harp arose the tempest of Lungmen, the dragon rode the lightning, the thundering avalanche crashed through the hills. In ecstasy the Celestial monarch asked Peiwoh wherein lay the secret

of his victory. "Sire," he replied, "others have failed because they sang but of themselves. I left the harp to choose its theme, and knew not truly whether the harp had been Peiwoh or Peiwoh were the harp." ("Art Appreciation," 77)

Boya (伯牙, Jp. Hakuga, said to be of the Spring and Autumn period) is a legendary musician familiar in Chinese and Japanese literary history. His story is recounted in the work *Liezi* (compiled c. third-fourth century C.E., but including earlier materials; the name of both the writing and the reputed author), which, given Okakura's references to the person of Liezi in *The Book of Tea*, is most likely the ultimate source of his account.⁽⁹⁾ What is interesting in Okakura's version is that it appears to be largely his own creation. He has chosen to alter the central theme in the traditional tale, which concerns the bond of friendship between the artist and his one true companion, the only person who is capable of genuinely appreciating his art.⁽¹⁰⁾

According to the *Liezi* story, each image in Boya's mind and expressed in his music is communicated to his friend:

Po Ya was roaming on the North side of Mount T'ai; he was caught in a sudden storm of rain, and took shelter under a cliff. Feeling sad, he took up his lute and strummed it; first he composed an air about the persistent rain, then he improvised the sound of crashing mountains. Whatever melody he played, Chung Tzu-ch'i never missed the direction of his thought. Then Po Ya put away his lute and sighed:

'Good! Good! How well you listen! What you imagine is just what is in my mind.'⁽¹¹⁾

Further, in accord with the key motif of the traditional legend, it is related that so close was the bond between artist and audience of one that when his friend dies, Boya rends the strings of his lute, never to play again. Based on the legend, the expression "grasp the music" (*zhiyin* 知音, Jp. *chiin*) is used to indicate a close companion who exemplifies the

mutual understanding between friends, and particularly in Japan, the idea of "rending the strings" 絕絃 has expressed the importance of companions in enabling progress in the way of the arts.⁽¹²⁾

Although his theme is precisely art appreciation, Okakura transposes the focus in his own version away from the tie between artist and receptive friend, so that the latter does not even appear in his elaborate retelling. Instead, his version centers on the relationship between musician and harp, which stands upon formless emptiness, or emerges out of the harpist's making of himself a vacuum, so that from his playing a whole world of forms arises.

Further, while the portions of the tale that appear to be Okakura's original creation—the notion of the unruly harp made from a venerable old tree of Longmen—might be taken as a narrative of the artist's agency and mastery of the medium, Okakura provides a distinctive interpretation:

This story well illustrates the mystery of art appreciation. The masterpiece is a symphony played upon our finest feelings. True art is Peiwoh, and we the harp of Lungmen. At the magic touch of the beautiful the secret chords of our being are awakened, we vibrate and thrill in response to its call. (78)

It is not that Boya or we exhibit mastery as artistic agents in performance or appreciation. Rather Boya is art itself, or perhaps the artwork or "the beautiful," and we are the lute. Okakura abruptly shifts the reader's stance to one of complete passivity and receptivity with regard to the artwork. It is not the person as the dominant subject who grasps, understands, and values the work; rather, the work enables understanding; through its call it wakens thoughts and perceptions in the person.

The artist lets go his fixation on worldly concerns and "rides the wind" at once of beauty and vacancy, and through the medium of what Okakura terms "moods," the things of the world arise to apprehension in their temporality, in the transience of seasons and emotions. The prob-

lem of art appreciation is correlative. It is one of openness, of release from “stubborn ignorance” and agitation, of “response to its call,” as Okakura puts it, or receptivity to “the moods of the masters.” The “Real Man” of Daoist perception is:

trembling, like ice that is about to melt; unassuming, like a piece of wood not yet carved; vacant, like a valley; formless, like troubled waters. (47)

While “mood” may suggest a projection of something wholly interior and subjective, for Okakura, it holds what might be called ontological significance, close to the source of the things as that which informs through its concerns. Thus he states of Dao, which is the all-containing and the mother of the universe:

The Tao is in the Passage rather than the Path. It is the spirit of Cosmic Change,—the eternal growth which returns upon itself to produce new forms.... Subjectively it is the Mood of the Universe. Its Absolute is the Relative. (37-38)

We see that Okakura breaks down the commonsensical notions of art appreciation or apprehension of the world in terms of a subject-object dichotomy, developing in their place themes of making oneself a vacuum and riding the wind, and of the arising of forms from the unperceivable and void.

I will turn briefly to Okakura’s development of these themes in terms of their embodiment in everyday activities in chanoyu.

The Tea-Room: The Abode of Vacancy

Okakura perceives chanoyu, both temporally and spatially, in terms of the embodying of “riding the wind,” of enabling “impulse” or “mood” to take form in a space emerging from emptiness. This permits him to

interpret a common synonym for the tea room, *sukiya*, as “abode of vacancy” (*suki* here taken to mean “opening” or “aperture” within something that allows passage, implying “empty” or “unoccupied”):

The term, Abode of Vacancy, besides conveying the Taoist theory of the all-containing, involves the conception of a continued need of change in decorative motives. The tea-room is absolutely empty, except for what may be placed there temporarily to satisfy some aesthetic mood. Some special art object is brought in for the occasion, and everything else is selected and arranged to enhance the beauty of the principal theme. (68)

Okakura speaks in concrete terms of the way in which the tea room is without decoration and arranged for each gathering, but I think we can see clearly the larger themes he has in mind. The gathering concerns what is most ordinary and immediate in daily life, but its cosmic underpinnings are brought to awareness and come to inhabit the mode of perception and interaction that take place. Okakura thus speaks of a “self-realization.”

Temporality: The Mortality of Flowers

As we have seen, Okakura unifies his presentation of chanoyu through the use of the metaphor of drama. Because the tissue of this drama is “riding the wind,” its theme most importantly concerns death. Thus, as mentioned before, the only description of a tea gathering in the book, given in the last two paragraphs, is Okakura’s evocation of the final gathering of Sen no Rikyū, who therewith takes his parting from close friends in the face of self-immolation.

Okakura opens this final chapter with the words:

In religion the Future is behind us. In art the present is the eternal. The tea-masters held that real appreciation of art is only possible to

those who make of it a living influence. (109)

If art functions as “call” and as self-aware “mood” that temporarily discloses the world, its living influence is in part the mindfulness of one’s death pervading the present. Concerning this theme, Okakura quotes the *Daodejing* and Kūkai:

Said Laotse: “Heaven and earth are pitiless.” Said Kobodaishi: “Flow, flow, flow, flow, the current of life is ever onward. Die, die, die, die, death comes to all.” (98-99)

For all beings, the medium of existence is temporality.

Paradoxically, perhaps, in *The Book of Tea*, this theme is clearest in Okakura’s meditation on flower arrangement and the inherent element of the death of the flowers. For Heidegger, in consonance with the anthropocentrism of much of western thought, “Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it.”⁽¹³⁾ For Okakura, however, the temporal distention that, as in Heidegger, informs authentic human existence also extends even more effortlessly to flowers, so that for them also “the Future is behind”:

[Flowers] are not cowards, like men. Some flowers glory in death—certainly the Japanese cherry blossoms do, as they freely surrender themselves to the winds.

The cherry blossoms ride upon the wind. This is not mere abstraction in chanoyu. Okakura speaks of the “religious veneration with which [flower-masters] regarded flowers,” of death as “the sacred sword” that “cleaves the bondage of desire” and denial, and of a “Flower Sacrifice.” Since the flowers provide a compelling example of the mode of vision that occurs in chanoyu, I turn here to a concise and effective exposition by Nishitani Keiji that well expresses Okakura’s intuition. Nishitani wrote “*Ikebana*” ten years after returning from study in Europe, where

he studied with Heidegger and also tutored him in Zen classics.⁽¹⁴⁾ The term “ikebana” is of course commonly used for formal Japanese flower arrangement, a traditional art that evolved about the same time as chanoyu, also from Buddhist temple practices adapted to daily life. Rather than the highly formalized creations of the various schools of flower arrangement, however, Nishitani’s essay appears to treat the simpler, less assertive display of flowers for chanoyu, which aspire to a sense of spontaneity. I suspect Nishitani adopted the title “*Ikebana*” because of an inherent paradox in the term: *ike-* has come to mean the formal arranging of flowers, but originally means “living” or “to bring to life.”

Nishitani begins by stating that on his return home he sensed in flower arrangement “something entirely different from the whole ethos of European art.” In contrast to monumental architecture and sculpture, he states:

Such art (flower arrangement) changes with the season and reveals its beauty only for a few days.... It is... temporary and improvised. The essential beauty lies precisely in its being transitory.... It is beauty which embraces time.

In its natural state, a tree or blade of grass in the ground

shows a mode of being which tries to deny time while in the midst of it. It resists the pull within itself working to bring about its own cessation, as if it were trying to get ahead of time.

But, Nishitani goes on to say:

From the perspective of their fundamental nature, all things in the world are rootless blades of grass.... [In flower arrangement,] through having been cut from their roots, [the flowers] are, for the first time, made to thoroughly manifest their fundamental nature—

their rootlessness... The flower made to stand upon death has been cut off from the constructs of time that occur in life, and it is as though it stands in the timeless present.

The essence of the plant being turned into art lies in severing the plant. With this activity, the emptiness (*hū*) which lies hidden in the depths of the plant is unveiled. It can even be said that the plant itself, in being empty, is the appearance of eternity in time... Finitude itself, in being thoroughly finite, becomes a symbol of eternity.

Closing Comments: The Tree of Lungmen and the Fourfold

Much of Okakura's *The Book of Tea* might be seen as a commentary on the following passage of the *Daodejing*, in terms of *chanyu* as an embodiment of its implications for self-aware, everyday life in the world. It is directly quoted in his exposition of Daoism:

There is a thing which is all-containing, which was born before the existence of Heaven and Earth. How silent! How solitary! It stands alone and changes not. It revolves without danger to itself and is the mother of the universe. I do not know its name and so call it the Path [*dao*]. (*Daodejing*, Chapter 25; Okakura's translation in "Taoism and Zennism")

We have already commented on Okakura's interpretation of *dao* as "the mother" of all things of the universe, itself inconceivable, formless, and unnamable.

I will close with two general comments.

First, although I have not explicitly explored echoes and reverberations in Heidegger, I have pointed to broad motifs in Okakura's thinking and expression that resonate with Heidegger. These would include the deconstruction of the subject-object dichotomy in the treatment of art

appreciation, and the concerns with relativity or relationality, "mood," vacancy or emptiness, "the essential," mortality, "mystery," non-resistance, and the artwork as the disclosure of a world.

Moreover, there seem to be elements in Okakura that resonate with Heidegger's thinking at different points in Heidegger's career, and it may be that looking at these can help locate the more significant areas where comparison with Japanese Buddhist thinking is useful. If Heidegger did indeed read *The Book of Tea* before writing *Being and Time*, published twenty years after Okakura's work, I cannot help wondering whether he did not revisit it in the mid-1940's while working on translations of a small number of sections of the *Daodejing*. It appears possible that *The Book of Tea* was a major source of insight regarding Daoist thought for Heidegger from the beginning, and therefore it would have been natural for him to return to it when absorbed in closer study.

According to reports of Heidegger's reading of the *Daodejing*, he had great interest in probing the various meanings of the individual words of the text, and he focused on only eight core chapters treating the concept of "*dao*." Chapter 25, quoted above in Okakura's translation, was central among these, and it appears possible that Heidegger initially noted its significance in reading *The Book of Tea*. Moreover, William J. Richardson indicates similarities between this chapter and Heidegger's later notion of "the fourfold" (*das Geviert*), perhaps the clearest literary source that has been adduced.⁽¹⁵⁾ Okakura does not quote the latter portion of Chapter 25, in which "the four great" (四大)—*dao*, heaven, earth, and king (or human being)—are presented: "Man models himself on earth. Earth models itself on heaven. Heaven models itself on the Way. And the Way models itself on (its own) spontaneity" (自然 *ziran*, Jp. *jinen*).⁽¹⁶⁾ Nevertheless, his image of the "harp of Lungmen," made from a Kiri tree that "reared its head to talk to the stars; its roots struck deep into the earth, mingling their bronzed coils with those of the silver dragon that slept beneath," both illumines and is illumined by Heidegger's notion of the thing as "gathering": "Thinging, the thing stays the united four, earth and sky, divinities and mortals, in the simple onefold of their self-unified

fourfold.”⁽¹⁷⁾ For Okakura, the harp is the locus of human awareness, in which memories and hopes, “the secret chords of our being are awakened... in response to [the] call” of the artwork. Both thinkers share a strong emphasis on the relationality in the emergence of self and things as a paradigm replacing the reified subject-object dichotomy.

Second, Okakura’s narrative of the formless taking articulate form, not through human subjective agency, but through art spontaneously acting upon its medium and its audience, will remind Buddhists of another parable, one from Chinese Pure Land tradition. Tanluan (476-542), in his commentary on Vasubandhu’s *Treatise on the Pure Land*, states:

Great bodhisattvas, having awakened to dharma-body (formless reality), constantly abide in profound samadhi. For this very reason, they are able to display freely in all worlds numerous and diverse bodies, supernal powers, and ways of communicating truth. All of this arises by virtue of the Vow [of the Buddha Immeasurable Life to lead every being to enlightenment]. This may be likened to the harp of the god Asura, which, though untouched, spontaneously sounds forth in music.⁽¹⁸⁾

Okakura interpreted chanoyu through the use of a Japanese Buddhist, particularly Zen, understanding of Daoist materials, but the broad lines of Mahayana Buddhist thinking are present in other forms of Japanese Buddhism. In Shinran in particular, in the thoroughgoing rejection of self-power and calculative thinking, the sense of being acted upon by *jinen* (the spontaneous working of Buddha), the articulation of the attainment of the Buddha’s mind as the entrusting of oneself to the Buddha’s liberative activity—occurring in one instant of time that is time at its ultimate limit—and the emphasis on dwelling in the locus of nonretrogression, all trace a similar orientation of thinking.

Notes

(1) This article was originally given as a public presentation at the Harvard

University Center for the Study of World Religions on February 25, 2011, as part of a workshop jointly convened by that Center and the Ryukoku University Center for Humanities, Science, and Religion.

(2) The Steindorffs published a translation of Okakura’s *The Ideals of the East* shortly after, in 1922.

(3) Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1956). All quotations from *The Book of Tea* are from this edition.

(4) See Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of Old Japan* (New York: Random House, 2003).

(5) For “A Dialogue on Language,” see Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 1-54. Regarding Heidegger and *The Book of Tea* in German translation, see Imamichi Tomonobu, *In Search of Wisdom: One Philosopher’s Journey* (Tokyo: LTCB International Library, 2004), p. 123: “Itō Kichinosuke, one of my teachers at university, studied in Germany in 1918 immediately after the First World War and hired Heidegger as a private tutor. Before moving back to Japan at the end of his studies, Professor Itō handed Heidegger a copy of *Das Buch vom Tee*, the German translation of Okakura Kakuzō’s *The Book of Tea*, as a token of his appreciation. That was in 1919.” Kuku also had a financial arrangement with Heidegger, in part a product of Germany’s World War I defeat and the ensuing economic hardship. It should be noted that Imamichi’s account includes unreliable information (such as the statement that Okakura “published *The Book of Tea*... in London at the end of the nineteenth century”), rendering the details of his narrative uncertain.

(6) There has been a good deal of work recently asserting an Asian influence on Heidegger’s thought. Most of it centers on Daoist ideas and Heidegger’s long interest in Chinese thought, culminating in a collaborative translation of a small selection of chapters from the *Daodejing* in the mid-1940’s.

(7) Regarding Frank Lloyd Wright, see Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave: Wright had greatly admired *The Book of Tea*, ... going so far as to say that he had first encountered his key concept of “architecture from within” in its pages’* (p. 268).

(8) I am greatly indebted to Prof. Tomoo Kida of Ryukoku University for his expert help in seeking to trace the tale as Okakura relates it. As Prof. Kida notes, although Boya is of course well-known in Chinese literature, with individual writings devoted to him, the only version in Chinese of the venerable *kiri* tree (paulownia, given as romanized Japanese in Okakura’s text rather than the Chinese pronunciation which he otherwise provides for

Chinese proper names and terms) and the unruly harp of Longmen appears to be a modern translation of *The Book of Tea*.

- (9) See A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzū*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), "The Question of T'ang," pp. 109-110.
- (10) An interesting, restructured, contemporary version of the tale is perhaps Kazuo Ishiguro's short story "Cellists" in *Nocturnes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
- (11) A. C. Graham, trans., *The Book of Lieh-tzū*, p. 110. Also see Qin Shi 琴史: "Po ya played his lute with his mind on climbing high mountains, and his friend said, 'Good—lofty like Mt. T'ai.'"
- (12) See, for example, Shinkei's *Sasamegoto*, in D. Hirota, *Wind in the Pines* (Fremont: Asian Humanities Press, 1995), p. 141.
- (13) "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 178.
- (14) Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治, "Ikebana," first published in 1953 and included in the collection of essays, *Kaze no Kokoro* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1980), pp. 235-242. English translation: Jeff Shore, trans. "The Japanese Art of Arranged Flowers," *Chanoyu Quarterly* 60 (1987), pp. 9-16.
- (15) *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, (Fordham University Press, 2003), p. 571.
- (16) Toshihiko Izutsu, trans. *Lao-tzū: The Way and Its Virtue*, (Tokyo: Keiō University Press, 2001), p. 73.
- (17) "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 178.
- (18) In *Ōjō ronchū*, T40, 843b.

キーワード Okakura Kakuzō *The Book of Tea* Martin Heidegger