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Introduction

One of the most important and international scholars in modern Japan is Okakura Kakuzō (岡倉覚三, 1862-1913). He contributed the development of arts in Japan and educated some great painters like Yokoyama Taikan (横山大観, 1868-1958), Shimomura Kanzan (下村観山, 1873-1930), or Hishida Shunsō (菱田春草, 1874-1911). Okakura also introduced Japanese and Asian culture to the West through books written in English, i.e. *The Ideals of the East* (東洋の理想, 1903), *The Awakening of Japan* (日本の目覚め, 1904), and *The Book of Tea* (茶の本, 1906).

This article examines Okakura's perception of the relationship between Asia and the West and Japan and the West in his *The Book of Tea*. There Okakura discusses a wide range of topics, such as the arts, cultures, histories, and mankind's different ways of living. *The Book of Tea* is Okakura's masterpiece, and it also became a "classic of modern English literature" (Everett F. Bleiler).⁽¹⁾ In the first chapter Okakura compares the cultures of Asia to that of the West and examines their relationships.

According to Okakura, the East and the West should not stand in opposition, but cooperate in order to deal with their own shortcomings. In other words, escaping from situations such as where the existence of another continent is denied, all countries reach a stage where harmony is maintained through the necessity of mutual respect for the other. Such a

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kind of view is very different from the views found in *The Bushidō, The Soul of Japan* (武士道, 1899) written by Nitobe Inazō (新渡戸稲造, 1862-1933). In *The Bushidō* Nitobe presents western countries as absolutely advanced in contrast with Japan which he sees as absolutely inferior.

There is no doubt that such basic differences between Okakura and Nitobe were influenced by differences in their attitude toward the West. Another factor accounting for these differences of thought was changes in the international situation surrounding Japan. Nitobe's *The Bushidō* was written in an age when Japan was still oppressed by western countries. Following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Japan became a first-class power in Asia. This dramatic change also had a deep impact on the views of the West by Japanese authors.

1. "When the West will understand the East?"

According to Okakura,⁽²⁾ the average Westerner will see in the tea ceremony but merely another instance of the thousand and one oddities which constitute the quaintness and childishness of the East to him. Westerners used to regard Japan as a barbarous country in the Edo period, the period when Japanese people enjoyed peace: Westerners called her civilised once Japan began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefields during the Russo-Japanese war. It was difficult for Okakura to accept such a situation. On the basis of this reasoning, he declared that Japanese would with pleasure remain barbarians, if their claim to civilisation were to be based on the gruesome glory of war, and wait for the time when attention would be paid to Japanese arts and ideals.

After this criticism, the argument moves to the lack of the West's

understanding of the East. After raising doubts, “when the West will understand, or at least try to understand, the East?”, he presents examples of misunderstandings of the East by Westerners.

We are pictured as living on the perfume of the lotus, if not on mice and cockroaches. It is either impotent fanaticism or else abject voluptuousness. Indian spirituality has been derided as ignorance, Chinese sobriety as stupidity, Japanese patriotism as the result of fatalism. It has been said that we are less sensible to pain and wounds on account of the callousness of our nervous organisation!⁽³⁾

But when it comes to a correct understanding of the other Easterners, however, Easterners were in a similar situation “that you had bushy tails somewhere hidden in your garments, and often dined off a fricassee of newborn babes! Nay, we had something worse against you: we used to think you the most impracticable people on the earth, for you were said to preach what you never practised.”⁽⁴⁾

Okakura points out that such misunderstandings of Westerners are rapidly fading among Easterners.⁽⁵⁾ For instance, western languages are used in a lot of harbours for commerce, and young Easterners enter western universities in great numbers to receive the modern education.

Rather driven by practical needs, the insight of Easterners does not penetrate the Western culture deeply, but there is no change in their willing to learn. On the other hand, the Western attitude is unfavourable to the understanding of the East. Because the Christian missionary goes to impart, but does not try to receive anything. Therefore there are few people who

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take the initiative to get to know the East, and knowledge of the East is based on the meagre translations of the Eastern immense literature, if not on the unreliable anecdotes of passing travellers. These attitudes make the Westerners' ignorance to the East. And it happens extremely seldom that "the chivalrous pen of Lafcadio Hearn or that of Sister Nivedita who is the author of *The Web of Indian Life* enlivens the Oriental darkness with the torch of their own sentiments."⁽⁶⁾

There are big problems in taking the series of criticisms by Okakura at face value, because reality was not as simple as pointed out by him,⁽⁷⁾ even if the West was ignorant of the culture of the East at that time. In fact, at exactly the time when Easterners had begun to understand Western culture, Westerners, too had come to hold a strong interest in Eastern culture. Just limiting our comments to Japan, the influence of ukiyoe or Japanese woodblock prints on the artists of the impressionist school is one example. Or, the foreign advisors, who were employed by the Japanese government for their specialised knowledge to assist in the modernisation of Japan such as Edward Morse who is famous for the excavations of the Oomori shell mounds, or Ernest Fenollosa, who is both teacher and colleague of Okakura, had an extremely strong interest in the culture of Japan or the East.

As a general tendency Easterners and Westerners both did not understand the other correctly. Easterner wanted to assimilate the civilisation of the West out of practical necessity, while Westerners relied on their own culture and did not often care about things Eastern. From this point of view we can state that the East actively opened itself to foreign cultures, while the West remained complacent and satisfied with its own culture.

2. Okakura's multi-cultural view

One may argue that Okakura established the hypothesis that in the area of culture the East was superior to the culture of the West. As a matter of fact, however, Okakura comes to attach importance to the intercultural communication and cultural autonomy rather than deciding on the relative qualitative level of different cultures. There is strong evidence advocating this kind of view as follows.

Let us stop the continents from hurling each other, and be sadder if not wiser by the mutual gain of half a hemisphere. We have developed along different lines, but there is no reason why one should not supplement the other. You have gained expansion at the cost of restlessness; we have created a harmony which is weak against aggression.⁽⁸⁾

The ideal situation between cultures that Okakura imaged in his mind is that both the East and the West get away from the habit of denigrating the other's value unfairly, based on subjective self-delusions, and each deepen the understanding of each others culture in order to achieve a mutually complementary relationship, but this cannot be achieved as long as cultures are viewed in hierarchical terms of relative value. If not, we have fallen into the condition called a cultural one-sided supply excess.

What does Okakura mean by "Fain would we remain barbarians", "Let us stop the continents from calling each other names" or "there is no reason why one should not supplement the other"? We suggest the following interpretation: there is no objective standard for measuring the level of one

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culture in comparison with another, the level of national growth is not a representative index of culture, and no culture dominates all others. These views are not strange in our present age when concepts of multi-culturalism exercise a large influence. But if we go back to the situation of Japan from the second half of 19th century with its tendency to accept Western culture, Okakura's arguments differ entirely from mainstream views among his contemporaries, anticipating as he does views that became widespread more than a century later.⁽⁹⁾

3. The international situation surrounding Japan and *The Book of Tea*

Let us now overview the international situation of the era in which Okakura lived. This era could be called the age of Imperialism and Colonialism by the great-powers like some European countries and the United States. In those days even the victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Japanese-Russo War (1904-1905) did not allow Japan to achieve a leading position in the world order, rather being forced to acquiesce in a subordinate position in an order dominated by the West. However this did not prevent Japan from expanding her foreign territories rapidly in the period from 1894 to 1910: Taiwan was annexed in 1895 following the victory in the Sino-Japanese War, the Greater Korea Empire was first turned into a protectorate in 1905 as a prize of the Japanese-Russo War, and formally made into a colony in 1910, and in 1905 Japan took over Russia's lease of the Kwantung Leased Territories after the victorious Manchurian Campaign. Japan's "late-coming imperialism"⁽¹⁰⁾ encouraged Japan to claim her role as leader of Asia, and was also accepted as a member of the five great powers within the Versailles system after World War One.

What should be worth noting in the international situation surrounding Japan in the early 20th century is the rise of the concept of “yellow peril”, based on racial discrimination and not on a threat proven by reality. In fact Japanophobic policies were implemented in the United States, a major destination for many Japanese immigrants over a period of many years. Measures such as the Exclusion of Japanese Students from the San Francisco Public Schools in 1906, the Gentleman’s Agreement in 1908, and the California Alien Land Law in 1913 put restrictions on immigrants from Japan. The introduction of the Immigration Act of 1924 (the “Johnson-Reed Act”) in the United States initiated a gradual deterioration of American relations with Japan.⁽¹¹⁾

These policies were expressions of deeply rooted fears of Westerners towards Japan and Japanese, usually motivated by the idea of a “yellow peril”. But the fact that, Japan a little country in Asia defeated Russia or a European big power made Westerners imagine that the term was more than just demagoguery, rather that formerly weak Japan would one day become a great power and rule civilised countries in the West.⁽¹²⁾

4. *The Book of Tea* and *The Bushidō*

This was the age in which Okakura’s *The Book of Tea* was written. And Nitobe’s famous book *The Bushidō*, originally published in 1899 and revised in 1904, amongst others challenged the concept of the “yellow peril”.⁽¹³⁾ Subsequently we will compare *The Book of Tea* and *The Bushidō*, works representative of studies written by Japanese in English in order to clarify Okakura’s originality.

According to the concept of “the ethnographic triad” by Kuwayama

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Takami (桑山敬己, 1955-),⁽¹⁴⁾ focusing on “the writer”, “the described”, and “the reader”, Nitobe writes as Japanese, presenting himself as a representative of Japan and addressing himself in English to Western readers setting out his philosophy. In the general type of “the ethnographic triad”, “the writer” and “the reader” both belong to the “superior” culture, the “described” culture being considered inferior. (Figure 1) The way Nitobe writes, however, “the writer” and “the described” both belong to the same subordinate group and introduce themselves with the language of the superior. (Figure 2) The intended readers of *The Bushidō* were not the Japanese but Westerners, especially intellectuals with their huge impact on the conceptualisation of the world order of that age. For this reason the Japanese Nitobe, whose mother land was in a subordinate position, had to express himself according to the style of the superior.⁽¹⁵⁾

In fact what Nitobe did is putting next to each other the world of “the

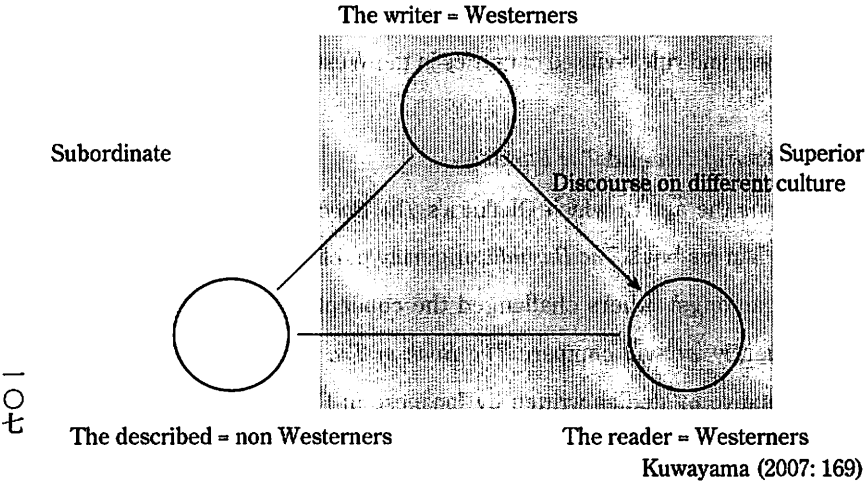


Figure 1 Ethnographic triad: general type

described” and “the reader”. As an example, he compared Japanese famous warring lord Uesugi Kenshin to Roman general Camillus⁽¹⁶⁾ and contrasted the Japanese hara-kiri to Brutus’ dialogue in Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (Act 5, Scene 3) “Thy (Caesar’s) spirit walks abroad and turns our swords into our proper entrails”.⁽¹⁷⁾ For Nitobe it was too difficult to describe Japan without finding appropriate analogies in the West, as he made clear in his explanation why he could not add the chapter of the Filial Piety in Preface of 10th revised edition.

Filial Piety, is considered one of the two wheels of the chariot of Japanese ethics—Loyalty being the other. My inability is due rather to my ignorance of the Western sentiment in regard to this particular virtue than to ignorance of our own attitude towards it, and I cannot draw comparisons satisfying to my own mind.⁽¹⁸⁾

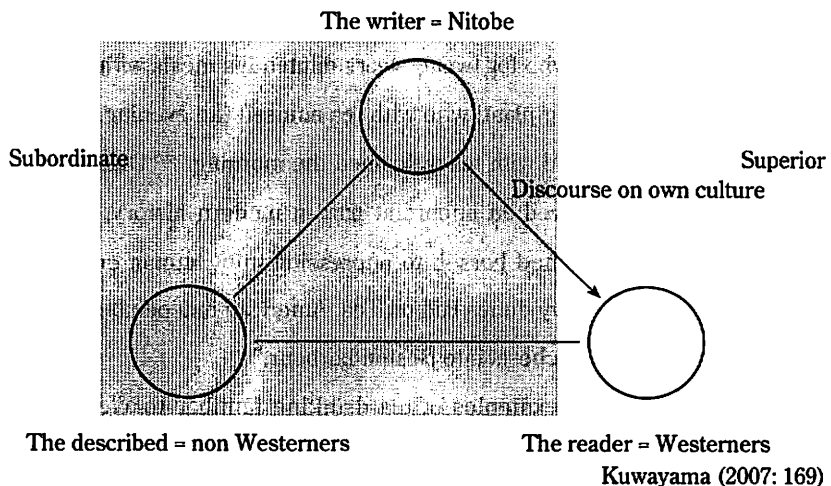


Figure 2 Ethnographic triad: Nitobe type

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In this sense Nitobe engaged in a kind of “translation of the culture”⁽¹⁹⁾ in *The Bushidō*, by placing Japanese phenomena in a Western context.⁽²⁰⁾ Applying the framework of “the ethnographic triad” to *The Book of Tea*, we are justified in calling Okakura's work a “translation of the culture” of sorts. He first referred to aspects of tea drinking in Western culture with which his readers would be familiar, such as the Boston Tea Party, Samuel Johnson's remarks on tea drinking and an article in *the Spectator*. Okakura quotes from an article in *The Spectator* as follows:

I would therefore in a particular manner recommend these my speculations to all well-regulated families that set apart an hour every morning for tea, bread and butter; and would earnestly advise them for their good to order this paper to be punctually served up and to be looked upon as a part of the tea-equipage.⁽²¹⁾

And Samuel Johnson draws his own portrait as “a hardened and shameless tea drinker, who for twenty years diluted his meals with only the infusion of the fascinating plant; who with tea amused the evening, with tea solaced the midnight, and with tea welcomed the morning.”⁽²²⁾ Okakura also pointed out that tea played an important part in modern history, and that “Colonial America resigned herself to oppression until human endurance gave way before the heavy duties laid on Tea. American independence dates from the throwing of tea-chests into Boston harbour.”⁽²³⁾

Okakura uses these examples of tea drinking familiar to Westerners writing in English, supposedly the language of the superior culture. In this sense Okakura's attempt is very characteristic for a “translation of culture”,

an effective way to bring across his argument to Western readers, a point also made by Everett F. Bleiler: *The Book of Tea* has aroused Americans to sympathy with Japanese modes of thought.⁽²⁴⁾ In discussing the purpose or intention of Okakura's effort his description of tea drinking and the international situation of those days may provide important clues. In other words, Okakura intended to point out to Westerners that tea is a beverage essential in the daily lives of Westerners, people who are deemed to be fully accomplished. It would follow that those who have a systematic and profound ceremony of tea like the Japanese are already a cultivated people, so there is no need for people in Japan to obtain the approval of Japanese achievements by Western countries by engaging in barbarous ways such as pursuing the glory of war. Put different, Okakura wanted to his concept to Westerners that Japanese culture is equal, not just compatible with Western civilisation. When Okakura used English, one of the universal languages in the world, he unwittingly based himself on the concept of "the ethnographic triad".⁽²⁵⁾

Conclusion

Comparing the structure of *The Bushidō* and *The Book of Tea*, we may say as follows.

The Bushidō is a book in which Nitobe aimed to describe Japan – being in a subordinate position – as having a civilisation with numerous analogies in Western civilisation, and thus move Japanese closer to the Westerners. Nitobe clearly discerns the hierarchical order between cultures, and according to his view the culture supposed to be in a subordinate position is forced to settle for a framework imposed by the superior culture.

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On the other hand, *The Book of Tea* definitely uses the framework of the Western culture to explain the tea ceremony in terms familiar to Westerners. But Okakura never accepted the relationship between the cultures of the East and the West in terms of a dominant-subordinate relationship, rather stressing equality of each culture and the potential to enrich each other.

A view such as this one by Okakura is adequate for our present age, when antagonisms between the East and the West are covered up, and the gap between North and South, or between South and South in economic strength and power continues to assume serious proportions.

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Note

- (1) Okakura (1964: xiv).
- (2) Okakura (1964: 2-3).
- (3) Okakura (1964: 3).
- (4) Okakura (1964: 3-4).
- (5) Okakura (1964: 4).
- (6) Okakura (1964: 4).
- (7) Suzumura (2002: 7).
- (8) Okakura (1964: 5).
- (9) Suzumura, (2002: 10).
- (10) Yamamoto (2006: 98).
- (11) From the 1870s there were serious conflicts between immigrants from China and white people in the United States and a set of anti-Japan actions should be a kind of subsequent events to anti-Chinese movement. On this point a discussion of Wakatsuki (1972) may be beneficial for us.
- (12) Iikura (2006) reviews the Japanese Response to movement of the Yellow Peril during the Russo-Japanese War.
- (13) Oshiro (1992: 248).
- (14) Kuwayama (2007: 168).
- (15) Kuwayama (2007: 167).
- (16) Nitobe (2004: 24).
- (17) Nitobe (2004: 65).
- (18) Nitobe (2004: x).
- (19) Kuwayama (2007: 171).
- (20) Page (2006: 128).
- (21) Okakura (1964: 7).
- (22) Okakura (1964: 7).
- (23) Okakura (1964: 7).
- (24) Okakura (1964: xviii).
- (25) It goes without saying that Okakura and Bleiler, the editor of Dover edition's *The Book of Tea*, had no knowledge of "the ethnographic triad", but Bleiler's reference seems to support the point that Okakura unwittingly used this framework.

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Abstract

This article examines Okakura Kakuzo's perception of the relationship between Asia and the West and Japan and the West in his *The Book of Tea* (茶の本). Okakura Kakuzo (岡倉覚三, 1862-1913) is one of the most important and international scholars in modern Japan and *The Book of Tea* is not only his masterpiece but also became a classic of modern English literature. In the first chapter of this book Okakura compares the cultures of Asia to that of the West and examines their relationships.

According to Okakura, the East and the West should not stand in opposition, but cooperate in order to deal with their own shortcomings. In other words, escaping from situations such as where the existence of another continent is denied, all countries reach a stage where harmony is maintained through the necessity of mutual respect for the other. Such a kind of view is an almost multicultural one in our present age and it is quite characteristic of Okakura's cross-cultural understanding.

To clear this point we used the concept of "the ethnographic triad" by Kuwayama Takami (桑山敬己, 1955-) and compared *The Book of Tea* and *The Bushidō, The Soul of Japan* (武士道, 1899) written by Nitobe Inazō (新渡戸稲造, 1862-1933). As a result what was cleared is that Nitobe presents western countries as absolutely advanced in contrast with Japan which he sees as absolutely inferior in *The Bushidō*. On the other hand Okakura wanted to his concept to Westerners that Japanese culture is equal, not just compatible with Western civilisation.

And it is also suggested that a view such as this one by Okakura is adequate for our present age, when antagonisms between the East and the West are covered up, and the gap between North and South, or between

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South and South in economic strength and power continues to assume serious proportions.