Japanese Visual Culture and the Possibility of Mural Expression: Kids Guerunica Workshop

日本のビジュアルカルチャーと壁画表現の可能性—キッズゲルニカワークショップ—

●—Toshifumi ABE 阿部寿文

The Tradition of Eizou The Japanese Culture

Japanese visual culture has a tradition, which is different from the West. In fact, it is clear that there is no foreign language that copes with Eizou precisely or with other general ideas of the visual culture in Japan. The word, Eizou, for example, isn’t found in English, at all.

Eizou’s meaning isn’t limited to the movies or to photographs. It, instead, relates to language and the complementary mutuality and techniques concerning a point of view, movement, and time and space. It is the expression of technique being used in the general service of visual cultural in movies, television, comics and animated cartoons. Thus Eizou has a leading role in the visual culture, especially outside the Japanese museum.

That being said, Eizou also can be thought to be at the root to of some fine arts works in the museum, for example in the picture scroll that it is representing The Genji Story by Emaki. In this scroll, time changes as well the point of view, as the story develops. The perspective used to do this is not the Western way of seeing. Rather, the Eizou technique is composed through the development of a sort of parallel universes/perspectives. This technique is based on the assumption that time and space move the matter so that it is kept constant with the picture scroll in relation to the distance of the appreciative person by that person’s becoming part of the point of view. And, barrier paintings, such as room dividers attend to this principle as well.

The many types of Rakutuyuu Rakugaiji Byobu traditional screen paintings in Kyoto are good examples of this. The screen units are connected even if they are upside down and switched from right to left, or even in the painted clouds.

Which direction will an appreciative person move his or her eye in the presence of such art? Ultimately, it doesn’t matter to the artist. What is very important is the interactivity between the conceptual message and the visual message, because the typical Japanese perspective, which expresses the flow of the time, is suitable for expressing a story. This is a foundational aspect, too of contemporary Japanese visual culture.

There are two aspects of this one is the movement of the point of view; the other is the appreciative perceiver’s distance from the work. For example, the ideal distance for viewing a folding screen is 2 to 3 meters, and for a picture scroll, meant to be held in the hand, about 50 centimeters. When these images are seen as printed reproductions we loose the distance aspect and therefore some of the intended meaning, and therefore loose the intentionality of the original Japanese artist.

KATOU Tetsuhiro (1995) explains this way of drawing in The Picture and Stories—Drawing Different Times in the Same Picture. This way of drawing different times in the same picture can show one person many times (in different times) in one picture. This way of drawing isn’t so rare even in the Western world, which he shows by introducing some examples from both the ancient and modern worlds. China and India, he shows, have used this strategy from early on and have influenced the composition of the Japanese Buddhist Mandala pictures and picture scrolls. He suggests that modern Western aesthetics, which deals in pure sight, pure form, minus the narrative aspect, can and should be modified by a return to the aesthetic narrative as represented in these examples.
The focus on eye movement and distance in Japanese culture aren’t limited to the fine arts. For example these concerns are reflected also in Japanese gardens and traditional music. There is the following criticism about TAKEMITSU Toru a typical composer of the Japanese film music: He has the spirit of “garden making” even if his music is spun in accordance with the mode of regular 5 line music in the line-shaped. He composed his music not thinking of the orchestra as huge one instrument but thinking plural sounds scattered in garden. And each part does not insist on its own existence so much as being part of an orchestration of many parts like the parts of a well-framed garden. In this spirit, the picture scroll as concerto is born and that technique produces a result for the sound track production such as the movies The Woman of the Sand, and The Spirit of Love, and War. 2

In a Japanese garden is Eizou is represented, for example, by the Ryōanji Temple’s 15 stones, which can’t be seen all at one time, so if we want to look at all stones, we must move our location and our own eyes. Reinforcing this, a Japanese garden is also typically characterized by its use of the natural scenery around it. The idea of borrowing scenery makes one think about the restriction of the space of the garden that presents itself as a unity shut off from the outside representing a time/space conundrum again. And just garden work arranges trees, a stone, and a pond; the picture delivers a drawn object in the frame, but addressing the same issues.

These ideas also are common in the Chinese garden. But, unlike China, which has vast land, Japanese must build a Japanese garden on a small land. The gardens of the temple of Ryōanji in Kyoto, for example, are located in the small basin, which it had three sides surrounded by a mountains. Likewise, nature is shown in the small space with the rock and the sand in landscape ceremony garden of The Daitokuzai temple. The Entuzi temple borrows Mt. Hiei, which can be seen in the other side of the garden. The Syodenai temple uses the same mountain too. The atmosphere of the same mountain becomes a different thing in each garden by the difference in height above the garden, by the distance from the mountain.

At the Entuzi Temple Gardens, the viewer’s eye moves freely. Also, the viewer standing on the veranda feels rocks, trees, and moss in rectangle garden. If the viewer moves his or her own eyes to over the fence, he can look the Hiei Mountain as borrowed scenery. That scenery becomes a Fusuma Picture composed of pictures framed by vertical trees. The point of view provided by sitting on the veranda increases the connection between nature and humans. The garden itself in its natural setting becomes a picture in the frame of pillar, ceiling and floor. And as the frame changes, so the picture changes, when the viewer moves on the veranda. Furthermore, others who were sitting before the viewer can become silhouettes, forms in the picture like the rocks or the trees. And when they leave it changes so the construction of this garden changes every minute when seen by an understanding and appreciative viewer.

The color of the leaves on the trees also changes, and the spaces change when the leaves grow and when they drop. Where there are no leaves, the spaces borrow changing scenery due to the rain and the snow and a mountain with the four seasons. Sitting observing the garden with this sensibility is an act of Zen, and so is this attitude in watching a movie when this impermanence is considered part of the act of watching. I am reminded, here, of the last, nostalgic scene of Russian movie director Andrey Tarkovsky, in the movie in winter when it begins to snow and the snow dances, and hides a mountain, and shows it again, and the snow of the crystal of the hexagon accumulates on green cedar moss, which we know to be there but becomes covered. 3

The Evolving Moving Viewpoint in the West

Western theoretician, John Berger (1972), had an idea similar to the Eizou idea of the moving point of view. In explaining this, he suggested that paintings in the Western tradition used the convention of perspective unique to European

注2 藤本達一「武蔵野『吃音』の思想と『庭園』の思想を織りに」、「二十世紀の千人 第6巻 メディア社会の編者たち」朝日新聞出版、1995年、p.35

注3 JOHN BURGER "WAYS OF SEEING" Art Series Four 30 programes 16mm colour film,1972
art. That perspective centers everything in the eye of the beholder. It is like a beam from a lighthouse only instead of light traveling outwards, travels in. And the Western tradition of art called that appearance of reality, reality. Perspective makes the eye the center of the visible world. But the human eye can only be in one place at a time. However, it takes its visible world with it. And with the invention of the camera this idea of a moving perspective is reinforced. We can see things that are not there in front of us. Appearances can move. They are no longer trapped in the single eye, traveling to a single center.

In *Ways of Seeing*, Burger (1972) examines four rolls of video in an examination of Japanese visual culture, and concludes that our ways of seeing are a priori but are constructed by social influence. In this context, he mentions description (narration) as being central to the change in the point of view in the West from a single perspective to multiple visions constructed by the influence of the camera, a vision similar to the Japanese conception of Eizou. The appearance of Eizou-type images changed pictures themselves in the 20th century. Was it, for the West, as well, really a manifestation of the idea of the restoration of the time and story the idea had already permeated the culture? Is this true of Japan as well? It may be that the Eizou way of seeing grounds the drawing way of different times in same picture in traditional Japanese culture as well as contemporary Western culture.

In the West this same type of drawing was seen before the invention of perspective, in the renaissance. Then again in the late 19th century, in Chavinu’s mural painting titled *Between Art and Nature*, it appears again with the same person being shown in the same drawing at different times. This idea has appeared in fact since Botticelli’s Spring. But the big acceptance of this idea happened in modern era as expressed in Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze, in which time moves from the left to the right with related to the Ninth Symphony. Picasso’s cubism can be considered as another example of drawing different times in same picture. But there was no express term for it. By using Eizou perspective express different times on the two dimensions plane, the possibility of expression of multiple times can be manifest, with the addition that it represents story telling and narrative communication.

The Japanese appreciative person, in fact, may be able to see the whole from the space where the above two works are come together, as though reading a scroll. The viewer may be able to connect one part and other part like The Rakutyo Rakugaizou Byobu Screen art, or move his own eyes right to left like the picture scroll.

**The Connection to Mural Making**

There is Japanese word “Hiroba.” Its literal meaning is wide space. The Western translation is an open space, a public square, a plaza. So, really, translated into Western terms, the meaning of Hiroba is not so wide a space. Alberti (1452), in fact, said in his book titled *Theories of Architecture*, open space is not so wide a place.

In a public square, people congregate and converse, attend to children, exchange information, and so on. It is the place of public education in that sense. And in those squares, sometimes, murals were an extension of this public education. Whatever the subject of the murals, the focus was on values shared and expressed within the community. But, because such a mural had not so wide distance, from a Japanese Eizou perspective, the appreciative person couldn’t see through the parts to the whole.

Enter the idea of rendering different times and places in one frame. Picasso’s Guernica is a good example. Picasso had asked the Spanish government to sponsor his mural production mural production for the exposition in Paris in January, 1937. The same year, in April, mass murder was important news with the Franco-ordered bombing of the town of Guernica, and Picasso decided on that as his subject, creating with indignation, a huge 7.8m × 3.5m mural entitled Guernica.

One question: why did he paint a mural on the canvas instead of on a wall? I don’t know, but it turns out to have been a very important factor. After the mural was made the wars in Europe
became more violent and Picasso rolled the
Guernica canvas up and shipped it to America
when he went. There it was exhibited in a num-
ber of cities, where it spread two messages: One
was formal that of Cubism. The other was nar-
rative content: the story of the tragedy of the
people of Guernica. In America, it was not the
Demoiselles of Avignon that gained credence for
Cubism; it was Guernica. The rolling and unroll-
ing of the canvas took its toll on the giant
mural, but the message of community inherent
in the mural format from the caves of Altamira,
from ancient Japanese tombs, from the American
civil rights movement, was etched on the
American psyche as a result of its display.

The question of using words and images to-
gether also rises in relation to mural making.
The reinforcement of verbal concepts, visually,
or the presentation of visual concepts, them-
selves, prevents a sort of conceptual reification
that can arise.

In addition, speaking for the value of murals,
there is no guarantee that 50 or 100 years from
now the CD or DVD may still give us images,
but with care, the mural will. A mural, for exam-
ple, can visualize Totemism, which is the philo-
sophy of Minakata Kusunoki. And promoted
existentialism. 5.6

The Kids Guernica Peace Mural Project

At the 1995, Kids Guernica project started. The
purpose of the project is to promote world peace
through children’s art through a focus on locally
specific culture and local understandings. The
messages of peace are rendered on canvas the
same size Picasso’s Guernica, rolled in the same
way and sent around the world.

People are rooted in their own areas and lives
and influence their children with their own cul-
tures, values and ideas. To make murals under-
standable and locally valuable, then, we sought
to imbue them with locally specific values and
well as the global drive to peace. This idea
comes form the community mural movement of
the 1960’s and 70’s (Anderson, 1984). 7

Now, the project consists of more than 90 mu-
rals, from workshops in about 35 countries. The
first mural was executed in Tallahassee, Florida.
I believe that Tom Anderson, who directed that
first mural was the only person who could have
imagined such a result: that is murals represent-
ing on idea of peace in so many ways in so
many countries, catching so many children’s
hearts.

There is a wide variety of people who have par-
ticipated in every country: teachers, painters,
journalists, writers, housewives, and of course,
the children. There are many ways conducting
the workshops specific to each location as befits
our locally specific policy. But each mural is led
by the children who compose and create each
mural with varying degrees of adult input. Also
appearing in each mural are the culture, history,
and/or local conditions of the city and country
of origin. We also encourage collective decision-
making and execution of the murals, especially
in worn-torn areas or with victims of poverty or
other abuse, for the collective psychic safety of
the child, but individual efforts are also re-
spected.

War is sometimes depicted with renditions of
soldiers weapons and so on, if that reflects local
reality, but overwhelmingly the images that sur-
face are historical, public interest, entertainment
and festivals of a given culture, and returning to
the notion Eizou, in narrative fashion depicting
people and events over time. Frequently the
story imbued is like that of a large scroll or
screen, with the formal art qualities carrying the
expressive narrative form. For example, a
German mural was divided into 4 seasons. A
work from Okinawa depicts both World War II
and contemporary traditional dances by children.
Ethiopian and Cambodian murals depict both the
larger village contexts and parts of the village
simultaneously. Specifically, the children of the
Kampuchean refugee camp each drew on small
pieces of paper to prepare the large format
drawings, but there was little or not literal trans-
lation to the large canvas in terms of linear
translation. Then, a mountain, many suns and
scenery were drawn. They are rendering their
feelingful world rather than a literal visual
version of it.

From many stories, depicted visually, in many times and places, overall, the Kids Guernica project, then, itself becomes an example of Eizou. Kids Guernica becomes a work which has one message and which is completed, and displayed before the appreciative person in it’s many part as one scroll, one screen, one story.

The viewer can see those stories fairly easily, but the process of the mural production by the children is difficult to understand. So we have recorded the process by the photograph, film and verbally since we began this project. The mural that was produced by 625 Japanese handicapped children, for example, was divided into 625 parts. The children with cerebral palsy, or other physical difficulties or mental difficulties, all participated, each as they chose and each as they could. Some drew details, others changed the forms, and enjoyed changing the colors. And each had his or her story. Adults did not dissuade children from either making or erasing forms and colors no matter how nice they were or how much we secretly wanted them to be kept, because in this condensed space the colors and forms represented the children’s expression of their world.

In the Taiwanese mural, little children lay down on in the canvas, and their physical outline was drawn. The tiny outlines became a fun festival scene, which was juxtaposed on the other hand to a scene of a soldier in camouflage color who has a weapon. The young children are seen by the appreciative viewer in conjunction with the older soldier-the noncombatants and the combatants become two sides of the coin, so to speak. Engaging in the process of viewing, then as well as engaging in the process of making the mural, are both performance and expression. A process that that picture changes and to go was recorded by video.

Kids Guernica has possibility of the different cultural understandings and the expression built into both its forms and its content. At present, this movement is ongoing, being continued by the Kids Guernica International Committee, which Professor Kaneda Takuya of The Ozuma Women’s College has organized and directs. (http://www.kids-guerunica.org/ja-index.html)

Japanese Visual Culture: Implications, Possibilities and Problems

In 1989, Dr. Brent Wilson visited Japan and collected 6-frame cartoons drawn by Japanese children. As a result, he said that Japanese children have the ability to express the idea, visually, of moving through time. His conclusion was that it was the result of the influence of Japanese visual culture. He evaluated this as the expression of the Japanese children being able to reach a balance between structural and nonstructural things and formal and informal things.

I won’t try to convince you that this evaluation is reasonable or not. But I will corroborate that in Japan, visual culture deeply and widely influences the sub-cultures of Japanese children as a way of visual expression. It may be individual but it is also collective in sensibility. For example, Kitty, Snoopy, types of flower drawings are cultural stereotypes. Even in the Kids Guernica project these stereotypical renderings shoulder an important position and a role. In other words, children work at least to some extent, in a code, which is effectively available through their cultures. Do such images have an educationally effective meaning? Do they contribute to an abundance of expression? Maybe so and maybe not.

Some have extreme misgivings about the cultural stereotypes, for example that overflow from American culture. Efland (2003) quotes the opinion of Chapman in his book, Arts and Cognition, saying Chapman observed that the visual messages that target today’s youth are designed by professionals who excel at what visual imagery does well, namely, direct attention, create desire, tap into emotions, all the while suppressing critical thinking. Artful techniques are used for profit and political power. She also noted that advertisers spend about $3,000 a year per child to win hearts and minds, which approximates what is spent per pupil on classroom instruction in the United States. She
believes that not only are there visual metaphors, but we have become a society that literally is inundated by them. So attention to their impact and influence should become part of contemporary education.

The 625 children who participated in the Japanese mural for the handicapped each drew his or her message of peace in a small frame. At present, children in Japan are not touched by war and are in an economically favorable environment, and most of their images are stereotypically upbeat: flowers, trees, animals, blue sky, the sun, and rainbows, as well as animated characters such as Doraemon, Pokemon, Kitty, too. Such images also appeared in Taiwan too, but are a little different. But in Nepal, there was little broadcasting of television’s animated cartoons, so the images were different: Many images of Buddha, of temples and the eyes on temples are seen in that mural. But because of the social influence of media, Japanese children’s expressions depend more on cartoons or RPG characters. In the end, children grow up to become the shapers of culture, and culture will depend on children’s healthy thinking. But, in Japan, we Japanese educators seem to see the crisis. The current visual culture is accepted by both children and adults as it is. But we must recognize that it is different from reality, and art educators must show that it is different from the reality of actual communication. Life is not a movie, where realities are virtual and relative. Reality is rooted in community and an overarching sense of that community. Eizou, as visual culture has two characters. One spreads our sensitivity and makes a bridge to each other. Another leads to the loss of our ability to make decisions through losing that community connection. But nothing is born of the denial of visual culture.

**Shanghai report**

The Eizou which was born in Japanese culture have some feature. One hand, it is the way of drawing of different times in the same picture. The other hand, it is the way which have inter-activity between words and images. So the Eizou has the ability of expression of story telling which based social and personal context.

In the workshop of the mural expression, we are invited to understanding for several cultural based. The very important thing is that to communicate social or other person will be established with using social media as art. Anderson wrote the book titled “Art for Life” used the point of view as social contextuarian.

He is emphasizing that art will be the tool of social and self cognition. Forether more, art contribute for establishing social activity and social identity. He wrote that:

The point of these units is to explore and understand strategies that make life better through art.

It is important to acknowledge here that social activism is not a new idea in art education. June King McFee, for example, was an early advocate of connecting art instruction to real life.

She wrote that equal rights without economic opportunity and meaningful education could compound social problems. She expressed concern for individuals marginalized by society—a concern many minorities, feminists, and others share today.

McFee stressed that it is each citizen’s responsibility to evaluate the quality of his or her aesthetic contribution to society, subject to the public view.

She rejected the tradition of socially irresponsible individualism in art, described the interdependence of major social forces, and questioned the values perpetuated by the mass media when those values accentuate cultural and economic differences as appropriate topics for art education.

As this reference, Anderson evaluate her view points. In this point, mural workshops were recognized very valuable practice of art education.

Finally, I would like to introduce newer workshop held at Shanghai, China. This workshop attended the students of Xiang Shan Elementary School co-ordinated by professor Chen Cwaiow Education University with Syu school master. This workshop placed as synthesize learning that purposed recognition of history and understanding community.

October 1, the students was introduced about this workshop, and they gathered information of Chinese culture and history. After this activities,
they selected and decided the theme and motive, and draw it. Art teacher enlarged children’s drawing on canvas by charcoal.

October 24, Sunday, I visited at Xiang Shan Elementary School. This day, all students and parents attend the workshop. This work was first one that draw by traditional Indian ink. It completed only 3 hours in morning time. It drew shanghai tower, sky scraper, dragon ship that is symbol of the Han Chinese, 4 heroes and the peace kite fly the sky, happiness birds sing a song. Main red color is the symbol of Chinese happiness.

Final work is just like this picture. I accept vivid impression for the power of expression of the traditional technique of Indian ink. It used chiaroscuro, effect of ooze out of ink. Furthermore, it rest blank space for viewers imagination. It is very nice occasion that co-have culture, tradition, life and sense of self and sense of community. Xiang Shan Elementary School

Grade One: Xu Yue
Zhang Zhijie
Ren Jialiang

Grade Two: Gu Lingjun
Ye Shuying

Grade Three: Han Aiding
Tong Qing
Shen Binyou
Shen Jinjing
Han Xiao

Grade Four: Liu Liyang
Luo Xiaoli
Hao Chunmiao
Dong Wen
Zhang Jingyi
Tang Xiaoyan
Hu Qian
Li Heqing

Grade Five: Liu Ling
Sun Cheng
Lu Yang

Tutor: Yao Fangyuan
Chen Jie
Zhu Jianpu

Xiang Shan Middle School
Wang Shanwen
Zhu Chenyun
Wang Yajun

Zhabei Youth and Children’s Center
Grade One: Zhang Zhiying
Grade Two: Lian Ze’nan
Grade Three: Wu Yanjun
Tutor: Yang Yibin

Xing Long Junior High School
Grade Two: Bao Zhengting
Wang Ying
Grade Three: Ji Tianjiao
Tutor: Lu Zhengxian