

For the “Sakura Science Plan” (Japan Science Technology and Agency)

Lecture in Ise Kogakkan-University (Tuesday, November. 21th, 14:00–16:00, at Momofune)

Secrets of the Craftsmanship and Soul of Japan: Lacquerware and *Maki-e*

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Summary

Why has excellent craftsmanship and traditional culture been transmitted from one generation to the next in Japan? By introducing handcrafts, particularly lacquerware and *maki-e*, I will explore the essence of the spirit of Japanese culture.

Introduction

1) Greetings

Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Masaya Iwasaki, and I am an associate professor at Kogakkan University. I belong to the Faculty of Contemporary Japanese Society, where I teach in the traditional Japanese culture course. It's nice to meet you. Welcome to Japan, Ise City, and Kogakkan University. I am honored to be able to talk to you.

Today, I will introduce Japanese traditional culture to you, especially handcrafts, focusing on lacquerware. And I will show you some pictures, some videos, and some samples. Through them, I would like to think with you about the reasons why this advanced craftsmanship and traditional culture has been transmitted from one generation to the next in Japan. I think that the essence of the spirit of Japanese culture can be seen here. And I think that there are a lot of hints to be found here connecting science technology and traditional culture. I heard that you are studying the latest and advanced science

and technology of modern times. So, I would like to make my lecture an effective story for your future success. Thank you for your listening.

2) My Profile

First of all, please allow me to introduce myself briefly. I was born in 1959 in Tokyo, so I am 58 years old this year. After graduating from the Department of Architecture at Waseda University's Faculty of Science and Engineering, and its graduate school, I worked at Uchii Shozo's architecture design studio for twelve years as one of the staff members. I have been a science track person, a planner and designer of architecture, and I am still qualified as a first-class architect authorized by the Japanese government.

I have worked on planning, designing and supervising for the construction of some museums.

Twenty-six years ago I worked on the planning, designing and supervising for the construction of the imperial residence in the forest in the middle of Tokyo for three years. In addition, I participated in the planning of the Kyoto State Guest House in the Kyoto Gyoen National Garden in the middle of Kyoto for three years. I had the task of defining and presenting to the architect selection competition about what kind of accommodation and facilities would be appropriate to introduce Japanese traditional culture and spirit to state guests from around the world.

Since then, my mission has been to introduce Japanese traditional culture, and to design it to be better for the future. It means I now do planning, designing and supervising for Japanese culture, and I am an architect of culture. Eight-and-a-half years ago, I moved from Kyoto here to Ise in order to teach Japanese traditional culture at this university. I believe that the goddess of Ise Shrine, Amaterasu-Ōmikami, invited me here.

3) A List of Japanese Traditional Culture

When I was invited to Ise by the goddess, she gave me one more gift. It was an opportunity to express all of Japanese traditional culture in a design drawing that would be put in a new textbook for Japan's

junior high-school students (*Atarashii komin*, edited by Ikuhoshia).

This is a list that was praised as very easy to understand. Now, 5.7% of the junior high schools in Japan are using this textbook. The top part says “Faith and the Annual Events in the Four Seasons.”

On the far left of the drawing, I showed Shinto with a picture of Ise Shrine during the time when people pay their first visit to the shrine in the new year. And, at the far right, I placed Buddhism with a picture of the ringing of a bell at Todaiji Temple in Nara on New Year's Eve. I listed annual events that originated with the court, from the left to the right, proceeding from spring to autumn. Next, I put “accomplishments or ways of arts.” There is the way of tea for powdered tea, the way of tea for green tea, the way of flower arrangement, the way of incense, the art of calligraphy, the way of Japanese poetry, and so on. After that, I put the next stage as martial arts. There is mounted archery, Japanese swordsmanship, judo, sumo-wrestling, the Japanese halberd, karate, and so on. I chose the next stage as arts, which include architecture, handcrafts, Japanese-style paintings, sculpture, and so on. Architecture consists of shrines and temples, houses in the style of a tea-ceremony, tea rooms, traditional urban houses, traditional folk houses, and so on. Handcrafts will be introduced in detail later. The bottom stage shows performing arts. These include ancient Japanese court music, noh theatre, kyogen (noh comedy), kabuki, puppet theater, formal dance, and so on. Other various traditional cultures are in the remarks outside the frame.

At this university, I have three fields of lectures, and they appear in the table as “architecture,” “handcrafts,” and “performing arts.” Today, I will tell you about handcrafts. And as an example, I will tell you about lacquerware. I would like you to imagine the whole of Japanese traditional culture and its spirit from the lecture focusing on handcrafts and lacquerware, with reference to this list. So far, this has been an introduction and overview. Well then, I'd like to proceed to the main subject.

I . Traditional Japanese Handcrafts

1) Traditional Japanese Handcrafts

Understanding the handcrafts of a country leads to an understanding of the culture of that country. Because the national spirit of the country appears in its handcrafts. As I mentioned earlier, there are various things in the field of handcrafts. Some of these include dyeing and weaving, pottery and porcelain, lacquerware, gold lacquerware, sword making, metallic ornament work, Japanese sweets, Japanese cuisine, and so on.

2) Precise, Aesthetic, Technique and Heart

What are the characteristics of Japanese handcrafts? Because there are many kinds, it is very difficult for me to explain in depth, so I will mention three of them. First of all, Japanese handcrafts are made with very detailed and precise techniques by skilled craftsmen. In addition, we must pay attention to their functions, not only for ornamental purposes but also for many ritual tools and routine daily practical tools. Japanese handcrafts have simple and excellent beauty. In other words, Japanese handcrafts reflect the unique aesthetic sense of the Japanese people. And these are the attitudes put into the training of each of the craftsmen who are making these works. We call it the traditional training of skill and heart. And, we know that both are indispensable.

II. Lacquerware

1) What is lacquerware ?

I would like to focus today on lacquerware. Lacquerware is a universal handcraft that was widely deployed in East Asia, but it developed in a unique manner in Japan. It is a craft that raises the durability of a container by re-coating the surface of a wooden container with the sap of a lacquer tree. The relationship between the Japanese and lacquerware is very old, and lacquerware of 9,000 years ago was discovered in the remains of Okinoshima in Hokkaido Prefecture. In addition, the lacquer tree wood pieces discovered in the Torihama shell mound in Fukui Prefecture was 12,600 years old. Both

are the oldest examples in the world. The lacquer trees cultivated in East Asia are said to have originated in Japan. In order to prevent changes in the wooden part due to fluctuating humidity, it is necessary to create a multi-layer surface by repeating the tasks of coating and polishing. In addition, a moderately humid environment is needed to apply urushiol, which is the main ingredient of resin in a lacquer-tree. Therefore, lacquerware is a craft suitable for East Asia, where lacquer trees grow, in a region with high humidity, and diligent people.

2) Lacquerware is a craft of East Asia

Eventually, the basic technique of lacquerware was conveyed from Japan to China, and from China it was taught to Japan, Korea, Ryukyu, Vietnam, Thailand, and Siberia, as an advanced craft technique, with other cultural techniques. Various decorations were added to the final surfaces of lacquerware. The level of decorative skill reflected the level of the culture in the country. Lacquerware became an international and basic handcraft, and a basic industry mainly in East Asia, similar to the current automobile industry. The mainstream technique for that decoration was *raden* (mother-of-pearl inlay), which is a technique of fitting shells, gold, silver, ivory, different-colored wood, and other items on the wooden surface to express elegant patterns. In the Shosoin at Todaiji Temple in Nara, ritual utensils for the ceremony to consecrate the large statue of the Buddha of Todaiji in 752 (1,265 years ago), and Emperor Shomu's belongings have been preserved. Among them, there are seven *biwa*, or lutes, of red sandalwood decorated by raden brought from Tang China by Japanese missions there in the 8th century.

(Image-1) Five-stringed Biwa Made of *shitan* (red sandalwood) with *Raden*

(Shosoin) 108.1×30.9cm

<http://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp/en-US/Treasure?id=0000010076>

The biwa is a musical instrument originating from Tenjiku (ancient India). The design on it is of palm

trees and a musician riding on the back of a camel, playing; it's the design of the scenery of Persia. It is said that these biwa were made by craftsmen of Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty. These biwa show how the capital was a mature city with an international and sophisticated culture. In this way, lacquerware and its raden technique spread widely throughout Asia from there. Since then, lacquerware using the raden technique has developed differently in China, Korea, Japan, Ryukyu (the old name for Okinawa Prefecture), and so on.

3) Ryukyu (Okinawa) lacquerware

When I was working in the design studio, I was in charge of the planning, design, and supervision of the construction of the Urasoe City Art Museum in Okinawa Prefecture for two years (1988–1990). When I began the project, I was 28 years old. The museum was designed and constructed to display the masterpieces of Ryukyu lacquerware. At that time, I learned the history and beauty of the Ryukyu lacquerware that used the raden technique. The Ryukyu dynasty sent it as gifts to the emperors of Ming and Qing China, and to the Emperor of Japan and the Tokugawa shogunate. One unique characteristic is the rainbow-coloring from the blue shells that are polished extremely thin within the extremely smooth surface. They were masterpieces which were produced using the top techniques of the Ryukyu dynasty in order to impress other country's government. So, in East Asia, it may be said that the work of the lacquerware with raden was a cultural, political, and strategic weapon of the time.

(Image-2) Box of Black Lacquerware with a Raden Crest of Hollyhock 18th to 19th centuries
(Urasoe Art Museum, Okinawa) 12.6×10.3×11.3cm

<http://museum.city.urasoe.lg.jp/>

III. Maki-e

1) Maki-e

In Japan, after mastering the raden technique, a unique, new technique called maki-e was developed. The word for maki-e is made up of a character meaning “to plant seeds” and another one meaning “picture.” This is a method to draw a pattern on the surface by “sowing” gold or silver powder on the surface of wet lacquer. It began in the Nara (710~794) and Heian periods (794~1192) with sacred books for sutras that were decorated using the maki-e technique to illustrate birds, clouds, *hosoge* (arabesque flower patterns), etc.

(Image-3) Maki-e Lacquered Box for Sutras with Hosoge Flowers and Karyobinga Designs
(Ninnaji Temple Kyoto National Museum) (10th century) 37.0×24.4×8.3cm

<http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/jp/syuzou/meihin/urusi/item05.html>

(Image-4) Cosmetic box: Design of Wheels Half-submerged in Stream in Maki-e Lacquer and
Raden (Tokyo National Museum) (12th century)

30.5×22.0×13.0cm

http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_collection/index.php?controller=dtl&colid=H4282&lang=ja

Various types of techniques have been developed for maki-e. First of all, polished lacquerware (*togidashi maki-e*) was developed. This is a technique of drawing a pattern with lacquer, sowing powder, applying the lacquer, and after it dries, its surface is polished to produce a pattern. Next, flat lacquerware (*hira maki-e*) was developed. This used a technique of drawing a pattern with a lacquer brush and sowing gold powder to fix it there." In addition, a technique called raised lacquerware (*taka maki-e*,) was devised. This is a technique of molding by pasting shell powder and applying maki-e to it. These techniques are used in combination. For example, the rock before the landscape is raised lacquerware, the middle is flat lacquerware (*hira maki-e*), and in the distance is the polished

lacquerware (*togidashi maki-e*), and so on. Other techniques include *nashiji*, *shishiai-togidashi*, *chokin umekomi*, *kirigane*, *noge*. By advancing these techniques at the same time, it became possible to express nuances in taste and design variations.

2) Poetry depicted in gold lacquerware

With these highly advanced decoration techniques, from the end of the Heian period, a new elegant design style for gold lacquerware called *uta-e maki-e* (lacquerware depicting poetry with gold) was developed for aristocracy. It was called reed-landscape-style gold lacquerware (*ashide maki-e*).

For example,

(Image-5) Ink-stone Case with *shio-no-yama* motif (Kyoto National Museum) (Muromachi period, 15th century) <http://bunka.nii.ac.jp/heritages/detail/195796>

25.6×23.7×5.2cm

This is decorated with a picture derived from a famous *waka* poem in the anthology *Collection of Ancient and Modern Poetry (Kokin wakashu)*, as follows.

Shio no yama Sashide no iso ni Sumu chidori Kimi ga miyo wo ba Yachiyo to zo naku

Yomi hito shira zu

The plovers that dwell on Sashide Strand by Mount Shio cry

“May His Majesty’s Reign endure eight thousand ages!” (author unknown)

Those who owned stationary utensils such as an ink-stone case immediately recognized the motifs expressed on these objects, even without the aid of characters. Another sample, I would like to show you is as follows.

(Image-6) Box, Choseiden Motif (Design of the pavilion in a Chinese palace)

(Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya) (13th to 14th centuries) 37.9×23.5×17.9cm

<http://bunka.nii.ac.jp/heritages/detail/155111>

This is a small box for holding cosmetic utensils designed with chinese-style-poetry sung by Yoshishige-no-Yasutane (933–1002) in the *Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Singing* (*Wakan-roeishu*).

Choseiden no uchi wa, hun-ju ni tomi)

Furomon no mae wa, nichigetsu ososhi)

The inside of the Long-Life Palace is rich in spring and autumn

In front of the immortal gate, the sun and the moon move slowly

On the surface of this box palaces, cranes, flowing water, spring flowers and autumn flowers are drawn. On the topside of the lid, there are characters for spring, autumn, wealth, undying, gate, and front. On the sides of the lid, there are characters for the Long Life Palace, sun, moon, and autumn arranged in silver. For those who were well-educated the words and images evoked the Choseiden poem. Choseiden was the name of Hua Qingyu in Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty. And, it has been famous for the phrase, on "The Song of Everlasting Regret" (*Chokonka*) by Bai Juyi (772–846) (*Haku kyo*).

Shichigatsu shichinichi Choseiden, Yahan hito naku Shigo no toki

"It was words when we talked familiarly at the midnight when there was none of us

in the Choseiden palace on the seventh of the seventh month

This poetry of Choseiden celebrated the happiness continuing for a long time of the emperor, and this

poetry of Choseiden has been used as a subject in pictures, handcrafts, and Noh theatre as a lucky sign in Japan. Now, I would like to show you the beginning part and the last part of a Noh theater titled Tsurukame (another name for Choseiden) by my *Utai* 謡 or singing and *Shimai* 仕舞 or dancing it.

(the beginning part)

♪*Sore seiyo no Haru ni nareba shiki no sechie no koto hajime,*
Furomon yori nichigetsu no hikari wo tenshi no eiran ni te,

When it is spring of a new year, it will be the starting of four seasons' ceremonies,
By the lights of the sun and the moon from the Immortal Gate, the Emperor appears in the court

(the end part)

♪*Kimi no yowai mo Choseiden ni kimi no yowai mo Choseiden ni*
Kangyo naru koso medeta kere.

Your Majesty's eternity is eternal, Your Majesty's eternity is eternal,
and we are very happy that my majesty came back to *Choseiden*

(applause)

In this way, uta-e maki-e was a highly elegant and sophisticated craft, which was based on Japanese and Chinese literary works. The sophistication of the Japanese lacquer technique and design reached its maturity of perfection during the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1603), and the Edo Period (1603–1868). It is said that the greatest maki-e masterpiece is *Hatsune no chodo*, “the *Hatsune* marriage trousseau of Chiyohime” (Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya, 17th century) created in the early days of the Edo period (1603–1868).

(Image-7) *Hatsune no chodo*, “the *Hatsune* marriage trousseau of Chiyohime” (Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya, 17th century) <http://bunka.nii.ac.jp/heritages/detail/192763>

This is the furniture and tool arrangement for the wedding trousseau of Chiyohime, who was the eldest daughter of the third Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu. She brought it in when she got married to the Owari Tokugawa family. She married the second generation head of the family, Mitsutomo, in 1639 with a wedding procession from Edo castle to Nagoya castle. It is a luxurious furniture and tool group consisting of dozens of items, including a Buddhist altar shelf, a black-lacquered shelf, a bookshelf, a shellfish play game pail container, a hand box for cosmetics, a mirror stand, a comb box, a writing table, an ink-stone box, etc. All of the surfaces of these tools are drawn with the maki-e technique incorporating the theme of waka poetry in Hatsune's *Tale of Genji* book. “Hatsune” means the first song sung by a bush warbler in the spring, and it was named after the poetry that Lady Akashi sent to a young lady (her daughter) Akashi no himegimi.

Toshi-tsuki wo matsu ni hikarete furu hito ni kyo uguisu no hatsune kika se yo

“I'm longing to hear the song of the first warbler after waiting for her growing for a long time”

It has been called Japan's best wedding arrangement of furniture and tools.

3) Black and gold: Kodaiji maki-e-style

Most of maki-e express a noble and elegant world, but in the Azuchi-Momoyama period, a new style of lacquerware appeared. That is what we call Kodaiji maki-e style lacquerware. Kodaiji is a temple that was established by the top warrior Toyotomi Hideyoshi's regular wife, Kita-no-mandokoro (also known as Nene or Kodai'in) to mourn her husband at the foot of Higashiyama mountain in Kyoto. In the interior of the mausoleum (otamaya) was drawn a powerful maki-e pattern of black and gold. That is the origin of Kodaiji maki-e-style.

The main characteristic of the Kodaiji maki-e style is the beauty of contrast between black and gold. With black lacquer as the background color, autumn flowers such as chrysanthemums, bush clover, or the bellflower were drawn with simple, bold, and powerful vivid golden patterns are beautiful and distinctive. It can be said that it reflects the aesthetic sense of the warriors of civil wars while inheriting the elegant aristocratic culture.

(Image-8) Sake Ewer with Chrysanthemum Sprays and Paulownia Crests (Kodaiji, Kyoto, 16th to 17th centuries) <https://www.kodaiji.com/makie.html>

H12.9×φ18.5×L25.0cm

4) Black lacquerware loved by Sen no-Rikyu

A tea master called Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591), who created the *wabi cha*, or rustling tea style preferred black lacquerware to maki-e. He liked the small black lacquerware container for green tea power without any maki-e decoration at all. He thought it was more suitable for a dark and narrow tea room. The people who loved the beauty of tea after he died applied maki-e on a background of black lacquerware. The Japanese novelist Junichiro Tanizaki (1886–1965) mentioned in his essay *In Praise of Shadows* (*In-ei raisan*; 1933), about the beauty of Japanese black and gold lacquerware as follows.

<http://dcrit.sva.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/In-Praise-of-Shadows-Junichiro-Tanizaki.pdf>

“And I realized then that only in dim half-light is the true beauty of Japanese lacquerware revealed” (omission) “Lacquerware decorated in gold is not something to be seen in a brilliant light, to be taken in at a single glance; it should be left in the dark, a part here and a part there picked up by a faint light. Its florid patterns recede into the darkness, conjuring in their stead an inexpressible aura of depth and mystery, of overtones but partly suggested.”

In this way, the harmonic integration of black and gold, lights in darkness is the basic secret of the beauty of Japanese lacquerware.

5) Maki-e lacquerware was called “Japan”

In the days of the Azuchi-Momoyama period, Portuguese people came to Japan. Christian missionaries ordered the local lacquerware craftworkers to produce the rituals tools they brought from their home country, at ports in India, the Philippines, and Japan. These were items such as folding lecterns for bibles and a tabernacle containing the holy trinities. They also tried to measure the level of culture in each country from the level of production in each lacquerware item. They were surprised at the high level of technique used in *raden* Japanese lacquerware, and especially maki-e techniques. Eventually, merchants ordered Japanese lacquerware crafts such as cabinets and chests for use in ships. As these had a good reputation, these were reordered a lot, and were exported a lot to Europe. Now, these are called “Nanban lacquerware.”

In the world of the Tokugawa shogunate government, trade with Spain and Portugal was forbidden, but many kinds of Japanese lacquerware started to be exported to Europe by Dutch and Chinese merchants. Their customers, European royalty and aristocrats, began to know the luxurious and elegant lacquerware of Japanese maki-e. Eventually, the European court and salon became full of maki-e furniture and dishes of made by artisans in Kyoto. And maki-e began to be called "japan" ware, bearing the name of the country where it was produced. It was the same as porcelain, which came to be called "china." Japanese lacquerware, especially maki-e, earned a good reputation.

One sample I will show you is the “Commode with Pavilions in Landscape.”

(Image-9) Commode with Pavilions in Landscape (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK)
(latter 17th century) http://dramatic-history.com/art/2009/culture/makie/exh-makie_japan08.htm

87.5×144.0×62.0cm

It seems that a craftsman in Paris remade a chest of drawers with the maki-e technique using the craftsman of Kyoto. The owner of this furniture would have wanted to enjoy the maki-e's black and gold in his salon forever, even though the interior fashion changed. Because it was impossible for anyone other than Japanese craftsmen to make maki-e, the parts were taken off and used once again.

6) Maki-e beloved by Queens

Among the European royalty aristocrats who loved Japanese maki-e, there was Empress Maria Theresia (1717–1780) and her daughter, Marie Antoinette (1755–1793). Maria Theresia once said that "I love lacquerware more than diamonds." She made "a room of maki-e" in the Schönbrunn Palace, and collected a lot of maki-e. Her daughter inherited her maki-e collection. The small incense utensils with gold maki-e brought from the Far East reminded her of her mother. She also loved maki-e, and added more to the collection. Now, most of them are in the Palace Museum of Versailles.

(Image-10) Fan-shaped Incense Container (Musee national des arts asiatiques Guimet, France)
(latter 17th century)

<http://cefiro.main.jp/Makie.html> 1.4×6.6×10.4cm

There is also a noble residence called "Barrie house" in Stanford, 160 km north of London, with a special decorative shelf in the library that holds nearly one hundred maki-e items from the middle of Japan's Edo period.

(Image-11) Decorative Shelf for Japanese Maki-e Lacquer in the Library at "Barrie House"
("Barrie house" in Stanford of 160km from London, U.K.) (latter 17th century)

In addition, there are many maki-e collections in the royal palace museums of Denmark and Sweden.

7) Kyo-maki-e “Zohiko” for global executives

I will introduce you to Zohiko, a Kyoto lacquerware shop that was founded in 1661, over 356 years ago. During the Edo period, this shop received special orders from the Imperial court in Kyoto, aristocracy, shrines and temples, the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo (modern-day Tokyo), and feudal lords across Japan. The products were high-class furnishings and tools for various ceremonies including weddings, with sophisticated, elegant designs.

After the Meiji Restoration, new business executives became new patrons in place of those noble customers. They continued to order luxurious maki-e as ceremonial gifts dedicated to the Meiji Emperor and the royal family, gifts to overseas royal families, or items for world expositions. Many splendid maki-e works that the Mitsui family ordered are exhibited at the Mitsui Memorial Museum at Nihonbashi in Tokyo.

(Image-12) Shelf for Headdress Worn by Nobles with Bridge and Willow Design in Maki-e

(Mitsui Memorial Museum) (20th century) 38.0×66.0×(H)29.5cm

<http://www.mitsui-museum.jp/collection/collection.html#page-top>

After the end of the Great East Asia War, many financial conglomerates, called zaibatsu, were dismantled by GHQ. Therefore, Zohiko came to make souvenirs for the officers of GHQ and implements for ordinary people. In the present age, the maki-e of Zohiko is for executives who can understand its beauty and its value. For example, in cooperation with Vacheron Constantin, one of the

world's three largest luxury watchmakers, Zohiko has created a luxury wristwatch in the MÉTIERS D'ART La Symbolique des Laques series maki-e decorations.

(Image-13) Zohiko + Vacheron Constantin

<http://www.gressive.jp/special/impression/20120529-vacheron-constantin/>

This watch took "the three beauties of nature: snow, the moon, and flowers" as the motif on both the clock face and back side. For an expert lacquer craftsman, it took more than nine months to complete. Limited sales of 20 sets each year (for three years from 2010 to 2012) with a set having three models. The price was 24,000,000 yen (excluding tax). There are only 60 sets of these treasures in the world. At its exhibition in Milan, orders for all three years sold out in a day. It may be said that the Japanese maki-e lacquerware continues to attract the attention of executives all over the world.

From now, I would like to show you three special videos. First of all, I will show you the short video of the process of making the basic lacquerware surface on a tea caddy (*natsume*). Next, there is one about the process of making maki-e by an artisan. Finally, there is one showing the process of making maki-e with the motif of "the three beauties of nature: snow, the moon, and flowers" on both sides of a watch.

IV. Movies

1) Kyo Lacquerware

(07:08) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qti46JWRpLw>

The Sharpened Simplicity

The elegant and tense shapes of Kyoto lacquerware,
are created by polishing and sharpening its every corner.

Right angle, at right angles, and an edge,

It does not tolerate even a slight distortion in an elegant curve.

The craftsmen's attention creates the eternal simplicity,
always attractive after years and years

2) Kyo Maki-e (07:52) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbvU-8IPiEc>

Expressing a momentary impression of eternal beauty

At the root of the Japanese pattern, the scenery and the story which moves our hearts are secretly
hidden.

That encounter is a moment that should be called a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Maki-e artisans use the best techniques for each part without doing excessive decoration at all to reach
the feeling of the person whom the impression watches naturally;

to the ultimate is simple, and express it.

It becomes the origin of the eternal beauty.

3) Zohiko + MÉTIERS D'ART La Symbolique des Laques series, (03,41) :

using maki-e lacquerware decorations.

"the three beauties of nature: snow, the moon, and flowers"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmmOPa91xrg>

V. Presentation

Here I will show you some actual maki-e works. These are tea tools which I borrowed from Mr. Sohaku Asanuma, our tea master at Kōgakkan University.

1) Kuro-oh-natume with black, Designed by Sen no Rikyu, Produced by Nakamura Sotetsu IV

- 2) **Oh-natume with Jingu maki-e, Designed by Asanuma Sohaku , Produced by Maehata Shunsai**

- 3) **Water container of Carp-style, with *Seigaiha* maki-e, Designed by Sen Houn-sai, with *Tamenuri*, Produced by Nakamura Soetsu**

- 4) **Dry sweets container, with Auspicious Cloud <aki-e, Designed and Produced by Zohiko**

VI. On the way toward mastering craftsmanship

- 1) **"waza = skill and kokoro = heart" 技と心**

Now, I have finished introducing traditional Japanese handcrafts as one part of the Japanese traditional culture, focusing on lacquerware especially on maki-e. What are your thoughts about it? Finally, I would like to review Japanese traditional culture using two key words: *waza* = skill and *kokoro* =heart. “Waza” means skill and technique. “Kokoro” means mind and spirit. Japanese traditional culture has required advanced technology and a lot of spirit.

2) The way toward becoming a person of virtue

I think that Japanese traditional culture is an integrated one of "technology and spirit".Each person living in Japan has been trained under a strict teacher, not only to acquire skills but also to study the spirit of a craft. This process has required patience, repetition, training, and polishing both technically and spiritually. In order to acquire the eternal truth, we Japanese have to aim to complete not only the technology but also the spirit. The completion of the spirit has included enlightenment in the religious

and literary realms, polite and sophisticated behavior in society, and educational ability for teaching disciples. Through these processes, we Japanese have been aiming at becoming individuals with high virtues. We call these processes a “way,” or *michi*. For example, we have the way of tea, the way of flower arrangement, the way of incense, the way of martial arts, the way of the sword, the way of judo, or the way of aikido (unifying with life energy). Even if there is not the word “way” attached to something, most of Japanese works are "ways" for aiming to be persons of high virtue. Also, we Japanese acknowledge the completion of the person in their work.

3) Integrating various values

We are people who aim to integrate different values. We are people who have been aimed to become virtuous by integrating various values. We are people who have aimed to create a virtuous state that integrates virtuous people. And we hope that the virtuous international society will be built on integrated various virtuous countries.

Epilogue

1) Shikinen-sengu rituals

The treasures created for the rebuilding of Ise Shrine every 20 years (called shikinen sengu) are at the pinnacle of craftsmanship in Japan. These treasures are made by the best craftsman of each era as a representation of the people's gratitude toward Amaterasu.

2) Sakura=Cherry blossom

The soul of Japan has been symbolized by cherry blossoms. The scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) wrote the following poem.

Shikishima no Yamato-gokoro wo Hito towa ba Asahi ni niou Yama-zakura-bana

If I am asked about the meaning of *yamato-gokoro* (the soul of Japan),

I will answer it is the blossoms of *yama-zakura* (mountain cherry trees) shining in the rising sun.

3) Living with the eternal divine virtues

We Japanese have been living with eternal divine virtues, like blossoms of cherry trees, shining in the rising sun. The joy of living with eternal values (Japanese traditional culture) is the happiness of living as a Japanese. That is the secret of our extreme craftsmanship

We wish you all your future work will be wonderfully successful through the integration of skill and heart, science and culture, creation and tradition, and virtue.

Thank you very much.

(Image-15) A commemorative photo of students and the lecturer, me (center) at Momofune-room, in Kogakkan Univ.

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