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An Aesthetics of Everyday Life

– Modernism and a Japanese popular aesthetic ideal, “Iki” –

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Notes

This thesis was originally submitted as a MA thesis on May 1999. This version contains few modifications and additions as of March 25, 2002.

Macrons (due to a technological problem, substituted by circumflex, ô, û) are used to indicate prolongation of vowels.

The updated version of this thesis is available at <<http://purl.org/yuji/papers/papers-e.htm>>.

Japanese names are spelled in the order of surname, given name.

Some historic Japanese authors are called by their first name following the convention. Thus, Futabatei Shimei is called Shimei, but Kuki Shûzô is called Kuki.

0. Introduction

Nineteenth century Japanese popular cultural phenomena, most notably the Japanese woodblock print and painting, *ukiyo-e*, have made significant contributions to modernist artistic movements, in particular the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, impressionism, post-impressionism, and fauvism. In addition, it is worth mentioning the influence of Japanese architecture on Frank Lloyd Wright, who also loved *ukiyo-e*.¹ These influences are primarily the result of applying Western values, specifically, aesthetic values to the interpretation of Japanese culture.

However, this interpretation has had the tendency to be one-way, and there have been relatively few attempts to applying non-Western ideas to Western culture. Is this because it is futile to do so? Or because it is impossible? Rudyard Kipling's well-known line "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet"² is quoted in various contexts. Although the subsequent lines continue that a personal encounter would not be hindered by institutional barriers, one would inevitably feel that the significance of this line is greatly changed. The East and the West did meet and are meeting in this very moment, perhaps far beyond the imagination of Kipling, and yet, one would still doubt if two worlds truly meet if cultures are not equally observed through vernacular concepts from both sides.

¹ Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, and Secret, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, pp. 185-187. For Wright's love towards *ukiyo-e*, see Secret, p. 136.

² Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West*.

The Japanese aesthetic ideal, *iki* may serves as a fine example of the application of a vernacular aesthetic ideal for clarifying the nature of the Japanese contribution to modernism. As we will see, *iki* holds a special place in Japanese aesthetics because it enjoyed wide popularity among the world's largest premodern urban population in the late eighteenth century, or Edo with more than 1.3 million inhabitants. Although its connotation may have changed somewhat, *iki* survived the modernization of Japan, and it is still of wide concern in everyday life.

I will argue that applying a vernacular aesthetic concept to Western/modern works of art is not only beneficial, but also necessary for a fairer understanding of the influences of non-Western ideals on these works, especially when the vernacular aesthetic challenges the notion of “work of art.” I will posit that a viewpoint based on a vernacular aesthetic will broaden the scope of Western aesthetics. We shall see, for instance, how *iki* is observed in Wright's masterpiece, the Robie House.

1. *Iki* in Historical Context

Iki originated among the townspeople of Edo, especially around the pleasure quarters in the late eighteenth century. Middle to lower class Edo townspeople³ praised *iki*⁴ fashion, enjoyed *iki* situations, behaved with *iki* discretion to couples, and wished to be *iki* persons, while the aesthetic sense of richer merchants was characterized as being *tsû* (connoisseur) with an emphasis on intellectual aspects⁵. Many *ukiyo-e* artists pursued the depiction of *iki* figures in *iki* fashion. *Iki* appeared in various genres of Edo literature such as *kibyôshi*, *sharebon*, and *ninjôbon*, often featured as the main theme. A reference to *iki* appeared in a *ninjôbon*⁶, *Tatsuminosono* (1770)⁷ shows that *iki* was held by both men and women. *Iki* also frequently appeared in Edo popular songs such as *kouta*, or *jôruri*, dramatic narrative.

³ *Tsû* and *iki* are closely related, and the distinction between the two is not always clear. Suwa Haruo contrasts *tsû* in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter and *iki* in the Fukagawa pleasure quarter. See Suwa, *Edokko no bigaku*, pp. 69-71. Nishiyama Matsunosuke interprets *iki* as an aesthetic sense, and *tsû* as stylized folkways. See Nishiyama, *Edogaku nyûmon*, pp. 208-211.

⁴ In Japanese, *iki* is a part of speech similar to an adjective, or adjectival verb. When it is attached before a noun, a conjugated form of an auxiliary verb “na” is added after *iki*. Therefore, *iki* conjugates as in “an *ikina* woman” when treated in the conjugated form as an independent word. However, to avoid confusion, I will use *iki* without this modification as in “an *iki* woman.”

⁵ Suwa, *Edokko no bigaku*, pp. 56-59.

⁶ A genre of Edo literature deals with sentimental love story.

Although *iki* was a popular concern of townspeople, it was not a subject of academic concern in the Edo period. The first extensive, systematic study of *iki* is considered to be Kuki Shûzô⁸'s *The Structure of "Iki"* (*Iki no kôzô*) published in 1930. From 1921 to 1929, Kuki studied Western philosophy in France and Germany, and he supported his arguments in *The Structure of "Iki"* using the method of Western philosophy, especially indebted to Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics.

So far, the historical consequences of the impact of Japanese cultural phenomena on modernism may have been covered by scholars, however, the scope of the study of popular premodern and modern Japanese aesthetics was relatively limited until the 1960s. Popular premodern and modern Japanese aesthetics have been problematized to some extent by Japanese critics⁹ but only in the context of classical studies on Edo that rarely uses a comparative approach.¹⁰ After Japan opened to the West¹¹, both Japanese and non-Japanese critics attempted to explain Japanese cultural phenomena, and their approach was to contextualize Japanese aesthetics within Western aesthetics. However, many Japanese critics did not attempt to apply Japanese aesthetic ideals to Western culture, although this is not necessarily true, since they believed Japanese aesthetic ideals unique and incompatible with Western and modern culture.

Kuki's well-known definition of *iki* in *The Structure of "Iki"* consists of three marks, (*Merkmal* in German) "erotic allure"¹² (*bitai*) with pride (*hari*) and resignation (also sophisticated indifference, *akirame*).¹³ Kuki¹⁴ emphatically attributes *iki* to geisha¹⁵ in the Fukagawa¹⁶ pleasure quarter, who

⁷ Nakao, *Sui tsû iki*, p. 166.

⁸ Baron Kuki Shûzô (1888-1941) was a Japanese philosopher born in Tokyo. After studying in France and Germany, he taught at the Kyoto Imperial University. He had direct contacts with several European philosophers while he was in Europe. He attended lectures delivered by Martin Heidegger in 1922, and he also had close conversation with Jean-Paul Sartre in 1928. For the encounter between Kuki and Heidegger, see Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language" in *On the Way to Language*. For the philosophical exchange between Kuki and the then youthful Sartre, which possibly inspired Sartre to pursue phenomenology, see Light, Stephen. *Shûzô Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre*.

⁹ Tada and Yasuda, ed., *Nihon no bigaku* (Japanese Aesthetics), p. 5.

¹⁰ Edo is the former name of Tokyo. It was the capital of Japan between 1603 and 1868. This period is called the Edo Era.

¹¹ The Treaty of Kanagawa, also called the Perry Convention, Japan's first treaty with a Western nation signed in 1854, marked the end of Japan's period of seclusion.

¹² I adopt this translation proposed by Leslie Pincus in preference over "coquetry," which may yield too submissive of a connotation. Pincus also proposes "seductiveness" as a translation of *bitai*. See Pincus, pp. 126-127.

¹³ Kuki, "*Iki*" no kôzô, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 23.

manifests these marks well. Kuki distinguishes spontaneous manifestations and artistic manifestations¹⁷ of *iki*, and he provides ample examples.¹⁸ Although he identifies *iki* in plant and natural phenomena, such as willow or sprinkle, he primarily deals with corporal manifestation as spontaneous manifestations. Kuki maintains that the “erotic allure” of the opposite sex is the first mark of *iki*. He finds *iki* to be dynamically sustaining physical and emotional distance between the opposite sex, but not completely losing it, citing Achilles chasing the turtle in the paradox of Zeno.¹⁹ Then he observes “pride” based on idealism of “the Warriors’ Way” (*Bushidō*) as the second mark.²⁰ On the one hand, one shows “erotic allure” inconspicuously, but on the other, one shows resistance against the opposite sex, not easily yielding. Finally, he states “resignation,” or sophisticated indifference based on Buddhist thoughts as the third mark.²¹ Contrary to the popular stereotypical images of Japanese women²², it should be noted that “erotic allure” in *iki* is not a coy, submissive, fawning attitude as Kuki writes “*iki* must be an attitude which shows a kind of resistance against the opposite sex while being an ‘erotic allure’.”²³ He highlights the quasi-

¹⁴ Kuki’s mother, Hatsuko (or Hatsu), later baroness, was a geisha in the pleasure quarters of Kyoto.

¹⁵ As often misconceived, a *geisha* is a professionally trained entertainer (in traditional dancing and music), and not the same word as *yūjo*, which means prostitute. This distinction was especially pronounced in Yoshiwara, the most prestige licensed pleasure quarter, but sometimes obscured in private, unlicensed brothels.

¹⁶ Fukagawa is a primarily unlicensed pleasure quarter in southeast of Edo. It is often contrasted with licensed, prestige and the prosperous Yoshiwara pleasure quarters.

¹⁷ Kuki claims that “objective manifestations,” that is, concrete examples of *iki* must be preceded by understanding of *iki* as “conscious phenomena,” that is, inner conception (Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kōzō*, *Kuki Shūzo Zenshu*, I: 14.) In Kuki’s version of *iki*, this claim eventually alienates non-Japanese understanding of *iki*.

¹⁸ *The Structure of “Iki”* has four sections other than introduction and conclusion: Connotative Structure of *Iki*, Denotative Structure of *Iki*, Spontaneous (or natural) Manifestations of *Iki*, and Artistic Manifestations of *Iki*. Spontaneous (or natural) manifestations of *iki* includes *iki* appearing on human body (pronunciation of words with prolongation and sudden stop, slightly relaxed posture, dressing in light clothes, woman in *yukata* (an informal unlined cotton kimono for loungewear, sleepwear, or summer wear) just finished bathing, woman with a slender, willowy figure, bare foot), and face (a slender face) and certain facial expressions, light make up, simple hair style, *nuki-emon* (a style of dressing kimono to pull back the collar so that the nape of her neck shows), *hidari-zuma* (an affected style of walking while holding the left hem of kimono), and slight gestures of hands. Artistic manifestation of *iki* includes vertical stripes, certain colors (gray (“rat color”), brown (“tea color”), blue), Japanese teahouse architecture, and some styles of traditional singing.

¹⁹ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kōzō*, *Kuki Shūzō zenshū*, I: 16-18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I: 18-19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I: 19-21.

²² Unlike masculine dandyism, although the emphasis of *iki* is on women, *iki* is also widely practiced by men.

²³ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kōzō*, *Kuki Shūzō zenshū*, I: 18.

feminist aspect of *iki*, the “heroism” primarily manifested by unyielding woman in comparison with masculine dandyism, citing Charles Baudelaire’s *Fleur du Mal*. Although Kuki accepts similarity between *iki* and dandyism, he differentiates *iki* from dandyism by stating that *iki*’s heroism is breathed not only by men, but also “by the women of ‘the world of suffering,’”²⁴

Today, *iki* has become part of the vernacular of the Japanese not limited to *Edokko*, or modern Tokyoite. As Nishiyama puts it, it is “the common property of the Japanese people.”²⁵ Japanese aesthetics have developed many subtle aesthetic ideals such as *aware*²⁶, *wokashi*²⁷, *yojō*²⁸, *yūgen*²⁹, *wabi*³⁰, *sabi*³¹, and so on. However, these ideals are obsolete, existing mostly in literary and artistic jargons. On the contrary, *iki* is an active part of the Japanese vocabulary today. After examining the research conducted by Endo Yukiko and Honma Michiko (1963), Suwa Haruo maintains that “although *iki* has changed from its original meaning to a certain extent, it is not obsolete, and used by some people with positive meaning.”³² *Iki* was inherited by common people across the span from premodernity, to modernity to postmodernity the period of change from Edo to Tokyo.³³ Because it avoids extremes – neither too vulgar nor excessively transcendental – *iki* may be the last survivor among Japanese aesthetic ideals.

2. Reexamining *The Structure of “Iki”*

²⁴ Ibid., I: 79-80. “The world of suffering,” or *kugai* () is a Buddhist term to see the world filled with suffering, derived from a parable to describe the vastness of suffering, *kukai* (), the sea of suffering. In connection with a different word, *kugai* (), which means public association, *kugai* had come to refer to the pleasure quarter in sympathetic view to geisha who were suffered from exploitation.

²⁵ Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*, p. 53.

²⁶ *Aware* means “touching.”

²⁷ *Wokashi* literally means “interesting,” an aesthetic ideal representing sophisticated, intellectual attractiveness of the Heian era (794--1192).

²⁸ *Yojō* is a term to describe implicit emotional aftermath appearing in poetry.

²⁹ *Yūgen* is mysterious profundity, appearing in poetry and Nō theater. It was derived from *aware*, and was developed to *sabi* by the haiku master, Matsuo Bashō.

³⁰ *Wabi* literally means “quiet” and “lonely,” an aesthetic ideal representing austere refinement used in haiku (seventeen-syllable Japanese short poem) and Japanese tea ceremony.

³¹ *Sabi* literally means “rusty” and “lonely,” an aesthetic ideal representing loneliness, and simplicity used in haiku.

³² Suwa, *Edokko no bigaku*, p. 195.

³³ Tada and Yasuda, ed., *Nihon no bigaku* (Japanese Aesthetics), p. 31.

2.1. What Kuki Missed – Criticisms on *The Structure of “Iki”*

Both Tada and Yasuda state that only Kuki has deeply studied the aesthetic sense of the Japanese from the aspect of *iki*. Yasuda also acknowledges that there is no firm scholarly work has followed *The Structure of “Iki.”*³⁴ Thus, much of later literature on *iki* remains heavily indebted to this work. Despite its significance to the study of *iki*, *The Structure of “Iki”* is not free from criticism. It has to be clarified that although Kuki’s contribution to the articulation of *iki* is enormous, it is, by no means, the sole account of *iki*.

The first criticism of *the Structure of “Iki”* is that although Kuki extensively exploits terms of Western philosophy (particularly from Heidegger’s hermeneutics) and cites Western works of art, he is inconsistently pessimistic towards Western understanding of *iki*. *Iki* is not an absolute, exclusive ideal only available to the Japanese as Kuki’s maintain, but rather relative and flexible. For example, Kuki inadvertently reveals that whether the same pattern, stripes is *iki* or not depends on the context rather than to say *iki* is a fixed value attached to certain objects. As we shall see in the following sections, the usages and meanings of *iki* are fairly diverse³⁵ and unstable, since no one examined it academically before Kuki. The second criticism would note Kuki’s excessive philosophization of *iki* and his slighting the role of townspeople (*chônin*) in *iki*, to be specific, Edo townspeople (*Edokko*). Leslie Pincus notes: “In ‘*Iki*’ *no kôzô*, the link between popular cultural forms and the material transformation of Tokugawa society has effectively disappeared.”³⁶ Although Kuki successfully illustrated important aspects of *iki*, he might have reduced, intellectualized, and philosophized it too far for an aesthetic ideal that relating to the everyday life of urban populations. In connection with the first, a third criticism is that Kuki might have underestimated the “everydayness” (*nichijô-sei*) of *iki*, in his nationalistic passion to “authenticate”³⁷ *iki*. The first and

³⁴ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, p. 9. Also Tada and Yasuda, ed., *Nihon no bigaku* (Japanese Aesthetics), p. 5.

³⁵ As discussed in the following section 2.3.2, the application of different ideograms to the single sound “iki” gives freedom of interpretation, resulting to generate dozens of variations with different nuances.

³⁶ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*, p. 133.

³⁷ Ibid.

second criticisms will be discussed in the following sections, and the third will be discussed in a separate chapter.

2.2. The Aesthetics of Edo Townspeople (*Edokko*)

Iki was primarily the aesthetics of Edo³⁸ townspeople, or *Edokko*. As contrasted by Yasuda,³⁹ unlike other Japanese aesthetic ideals, such as *wabi* or *sabi*, *iki* is a unique aesthetic ideal in that it has never been practiced by warriors, nobles, Buddhist monks, or hermits. Since it requires practical, aesthetic-experiential sophistication rather than theoretical, intellectual sophistication. *iki* belonged and practiced solely by the ordinary townspeople – craftsmen, carpenters, plasterers, steeplejacks, firefighters,⁴⁰ fishermen⁴¹, their wives, and geisha. It is estimated that Edo had a population of more than 1.3 million at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and it was the largest city in the world at the time. Townspeople and warriors were about half million each, and Edo was marked by a significantly larger male population.⁴² *Iki* blossomed into an aesthetic ideal among the townspeople of Edo, which was a fully developed “premodern city.”

Somewhat contradicting Kuki’s philosophized observations, evidences suggest that *iki* was casual and impromptu, and sometimes even superficial and somewhat vulgar. As Takeuchi quotes from a witty novelette (*sharebon*, literally meaning “smart book”), *Daitsu Hôgo* (1779), “*iki* (with ideograms for “approach” (*shukô*)) means impromptu.” Kitagawa Morisada writes in his *Morisada Mankou* (1853), an encyclopedic genre chronicle: “one who follows the fashion is called *iki*.”⁴³ After examining the various elements of *iki*, such as *kioi* (pumped up), *isami* (chivalrous, valiant, courageous, energetic), *inase* (gallant,

³⁸ The Edo Era saw the unprecedented emergence of townspeople class. The Edo era passed without war for 300 years while warriors gradually losing their power. Although warriors preserve many feudal privileges, as economic system developed, merchants emerged as a new power in Japanese society. Some warriors had to adopted a son from rich townspeople or farmer by selling their family prestige counting for dowry.

³⁹ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, p. 20.

⁴⁰ Nakao lists carpenters, plasterers, and steeplejacks as typical artisans, who were well respected. They also served as firefighters. See *Sui tsû iki*, p. 15.

⁴¹ The center of *iki*, the Fukagawa pleasure quarter used to be a fisherman town. See Nakao, *Sui tsû iki*, p. 166.

⁴² Ogi et al., *The Edo-Tokyo Encyclopaedia*, p. 592.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

dashing, dapper, smart, rakish, stylish), Nakao points out the general vulgarity of *iki*, even though it is an aesthetic ideal.⁴⁴

Edokko, or a “pure” Edo townspeople, and *iki* are inseparable, and one cannot stand without each other. The Edo townspeople are proud to be born as a *Edokko*, as *Edokko* are often compared with *Parisien* in their strong pride and affection to their liveliest capital city. What make them different from *Parisien* is Edo people’s pride of the poverty and anti-intellectualism. Interestingly, as noted by Saito Ryûzô, Akahori Matajirô, and Miyatake Gaikotsu⁴⁵, despite *Edokko*’s poverty and lack of education, they boasted of generosity to spend money, and anti-intellectualism that despised and challenged the authority of warriors. Nakao Tatsurô writes “since the professional craftsmen class and subsidiary workers were proud of their skills, they didn’t learn reading and writing, or cultivate themselves.” A popular anonymous *senryû* (a genre of comical, satirical *haiku*) made during the Edo era shows their contempt for the attachment to money:

Only the one who failed to be born *Edokko* saves his money.⁴⁶

Iki was a favorite subject of literature in the Edo period. A popular writer Santô Kyôden⁴⁷ is known for his illustrated satirical fiction (*kibyôshi*, literally meaning “yellow-covered book”). A typical *kibyôshi*, *Edoumare uwakino kabayaki* (Spitchcock of Lech Born in Edo, 1785) is frequently cited as in reference to *iki*. The books of this genre have a striking similarity to some modern comic books in their interplay of graphics and text⁴⁸, and their erotic themes. These books upset the government officials who considered them immoral, and Kyôden was arrested and handcuffed for fifty days. These evidences further assert the casual, popular aspects of *iki*, as well as *iki*’s stance against the authority. It should be noted that one of the earliest modern Japanese writers and creators of modern style of writing, the *genbun-icchitai* (the Write as We Speak Style), Futabatei Shimei writes that he incorporated the Fukagawa locution appearing Edo

⁴⁴ Nakao, *Sui tsû iki*, pp. 176-177.

⁴⁵ Haga, ed., *Transition of Edo*, pp. 228-237.

⁴⁶ Ibid., *Edo*, p. 230.

⁴⁷ Santô Kyôden (1761-1816) is a pseudonym of Iwase Samuru.

⁴⁸ Kyôden was also a professional illustrator, who provides the illustrations for the same book under another pseudonym, Kitao Masanobu. See Miner, *Tôzai hikaku bungaku kenkyû* pp. 266-267.

literature into modern style of writing. Shime admits coarseness of the Fukagawa locution, at the same time, he finds it “poetical.”⁴⁹

We find *iki* in Nishiyama’s summary of definition of *Edokko*, in a work of *sharebon*, considered a masterpiece for this genre, *Tsûgen sô-magaki* (Grand Brothel of Connoisseur Language, 1787) by Kyôden, a sequel to *Edoumare uwakino kabayaki*.

. . . He is not attached to money; he is not stingy. His funds do not cover the night’s lodging. . .

He is quite unlike either warriors or country bumpkins. . . He has *iki* (refinement) and *hari* (strength of character). . .⁵⁰

Kuki’s attribution of pride in “the Warriors’ Way”⁵¹ in *The Structure of “Iki”* is repeatedly questioned and criticized by Tada⁵², Minami⁵³, and Pincus⁵⁴ among many other critics. Minami also notes *sashi*, the right of Fukagawa geisha to refuse unfavorable customers after peeking through a hole. (It is the geisha who peeks through, not the customer.)⁵⁵ As epitomized in the previously summarized definition, townspeople actually despised warriors.⁵⁶ On the other hand, warriors had their own pride and they would never called themselves *Edokko*. “The Warriors’ Way” was intended primarily for men, and not women, who play a greater role in *iki*. More over, *Edokko* is a title only granted to those who are born in Edo, not new residents. Since many of warriors served feudal lords (daimyo), and their residence in Edo was only temporary due to the system of *sankin kôtai*,⁵⁷ the warriors were not born in Edo, and therefore not *Edokko*. These local warriors temporarily serving in Edo were thoroughly derided as *asagi-ura*, referring to their outmoded fashion of pale blue cotton lining, and these warriors were often quoted by *Edokko* as being

⁴⁹ Futabatei, “Yoga genbun-icchitai no yurai” (The Origin of My “Write as We Speak Style”), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1938.

⁵⁰ Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*, p. 42.

⁵¹ Kuki, “*Iki*” no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shuzo Zenshu*, I: 18-22.

⁵² Tada and Yasuda, “*Iki*” no *kôzô o yomu*, p. 71, 107.

⁵³ Minami, “*Iki*” no *kôzô o megutte*,” pp. 91-92.

⁵⁴ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan* pp. 131-132.

⁵⁵ Minami, “*Iki*” no *kôzô o megutte*,” p. 92.

⁵⁶ See also: Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” no *kôzô o yomu*, p. 65.

the typical opposite of *iki*, *yabo*.⁵⁸ Edo townspeople still had to obey the warriors in the decaying feudal society, but *Edokko* resisted and revenged warrior class through sophisticated means of mocking. An early modern Japanese writer, Nagai Kafû sees *ukiyo-e* as a manifestation of *iki* by common people rather than the ruler class: “Does not *ukiyo-e* latently manifest the pride (*iki*) of common people who do not succumb to the persecution of the (Tokugawa) government, and sing a song of triumph?”⁵⁹

2.3. Is Western Understanding of *Iki* Impossible?

Although his subject was a distinctively Japanese phenomenon, Kuki’s arguments authenticating *iki* in *The Structure of “Iki”* are backed by Western ideas, notably Heideggerian hermeneutics. Although the focus of this work is on Japanese aesthetics ideal, Kuki wrote his draft during his stay in Paris. Tada describes this work as a “philosophy in a foreign land to evaluate Japan, especially Edo.”⁶⁰ Pincus also suggests the influence of Kant over Kuki’s approaches in *The Structure of “Iki.”*

Though he hoped to guarantee the “Japaneseness” of *iki*, his rendering of Edo style suggests, in fact, other affinities. Kuki described the aesthetic and moral disposition of *iki* in a manner worthy of Kant’s third *Critique*, replicating nearly all of the significant moments of aesthetic judgment: disinterestedness, purposiveness without purpose, and the free play and autonomy of the aesthetic function.⁶¹

Kuki also bolsters his argument by citing Western thinkers and poets such as Zeno, Roscelin, Biran, Nietzsche, Valéry, and Bergson, and artists such as El Greco, Rodin and Chopin along with Japanese materials.⁶² On the other hand, Kuki limits the readers to almost solely the Japanese⁶³. Citing Western ideas to explain a Japanese idea is not necessarily problematic, but Kuki’s dependency on the Western ideas

⁵⁷ *Sankin kôtai* was the strategy of the shogunate government to put under surveillance and regulate feudal lords by consuming their financial resources through a rotation of periodic services in Edo.

⁵⁸ Nakao, *Sui tsû iki*, pp. 218-220.

⁵⁹ Nagai, “Edo geijutsu ron,” *Nagai Kafû zenshû*, XI: 187-188.

⁶⁰ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, p. 35.

⁶¹ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*, p. 188.

⁶² Kuki also criticizes Western thinkers and artists claiming that he cannot find the perfect representation of *iki* in their ideas and works of art.

⁶³ Kuki was competent in French and German, and he wrote several essays in these languages. If he intended European readers, he was capable of expressing his ideas in these languages.

clearly contradicts his pessimistic conclusion towards the Western understanding of *iki*. Behind Kuki's inconsistency, one can observe a severe ironic dilemma in the modernization and Westernization of Japan, i.e. Kuki and modern Japanese intellectuals' ambivalent attitude toward the West. Pincus summarizes Kuki's inconsistency:

Ironically, the theoretical idiom of "*Iki no Kozo*", designed to demonstrate a Japanese cultural authenticity rooted in an indigenous past, simultaneously bore witness to the interval of a heterogeneous modernity that irrevocably separated contemporary Japan from its premodernity.

2.3.1. Ambivalence to the West - The West as the Other

In order to understand Kuki's inconsistent stance, it may be necessary to note how the West has been perceived by the Japanese. The generalized term "West" (*seiyō*) has particular connotations for the Japanese, which might produce a sense of incongruity to the Westerners. You could imagine, for example, how an "Oriental" would feel a sense of incongruity with the term "Orient," as in the thorough study by Edward Said on how the term "Orient" has been (mis)perceived in the Western context. About the danger of seeing an exotic illusion, Oscar Wilde alarms us in a satirical way. In his "The Decay of Lying," Wilde has Vivian say "The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists ... The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, they are extremely common place, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them."⁶⁴ As a reminder of the context in which the word was used in Kuki's text, I shall continue to use the term "the West."

The West, has been the cultural significant Other to the Japanese, while Westernization/modernization has been threatening the Japanese identity. Not only in most of the formerly colonized countries, but also in Japan, the terms "modern" and "Western" are often used with similar, if not identically. The distinction between these terms has been a source of polemic. When communication to the outside of Japan was limited before 1854, Japanese intellectuals had not been urged to be nationalistic. After the opening of the nation in 1854, the intellectuals considered Westernization not only a benefit brought from an "advanced" society to the Japanese society, but also a cultural threat. It was a practical as much as emotional conflict.

Japanese intellectuals were necessitated to create (or resuscitated, because they needed historic justification) and defend the national identity. However, even the most nationalistic advocate would not insist on refusing all benefits of the Western culture. As Japanese intellectuals recognized the conflict, they also realized their ironical situation that enhancing their national identity cannot bypass using Western ideas. Some Japanese intellectuals tried to reconcile this ambivalence in different ways, but not always with success. Pincus calls Kuki's attempt of philosophizing *iki* an "aesthetic defense" against the "imperatives of modernization."⁶⁵

No one doubts that *iki* was a historically unique ideal developed by the Japanese in the sense that there is no precisely identical ideal in existence elsewhere. Nevertheless, this is not to say that *iki* is inexplicable or that the study of *iki* is futile to Western readers.⁶⁶ When relating Japanese aesthetics to Western aesthetics, one of the fundamental questions of comparative aesthetics emerges. At one extreme, a critic – whether s/he is a Westerner or not – may fall into the discourse of cultural imperialism, forcing "universal values" on a non-Western culture. To Kant, at least, aesthetic judgment must be universal. Although this may be an extreme example, to Frederick Gookin who reviewed Okakura's *The Book of Tea*, nineteenth century Japan was in a "state of half-civilization but little removed from barbarism."⁶⁷ On the other extreme, a critic may lean towards a nationalistic view that rejects the Western understanding of non-Western idea. Heidegger warns in a dialogue with a Japanese,⁶⁸: "Here you are touching on a controversial question which I often discussed with Count Kuki – the question whether it is necessary and rightful for Eastasians to chase after the European conceptual systems."⁶⁹ The uniqueness of Japanese culture has been

⁶⁴ Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *Intentions*.

⁶⁵ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*, p. 194.

⁶⁶ My focus on "Japan-West" relation in this general approach to *iki* is following Kuki's narrative, but this does not necessarily exclude other cultures. For example, *iki* in specifically French culture or *iki* in relation to Chinese culture would require whole sets of different argument.

⁶⁷ Gookin, *The Dial*, January 1905.

⁶⁸ This dialogue is based on the visit of a scholar of German literature Tezuka Tomio, but as any careful reader would notice immediately, it does not "fictively recreate[s] his discussions with Kuki," (*The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, p. 69) as Dale mistakenly perceives.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," p. 3. Baron Kuki was mistakenly referred as a Count throughout in "A Dialogue on Language."

sometimes exaggerated in the discourses titled *nihonron* and *nihonjinron*, literally “discussions of Japan” and “discussions of the Japanese,”⁷⁰ and *The Structure of “Iki”* is counted among them. But again, those who hysterically attack “Japanese uniqueness discourse” need to be aware of the danger of cultural imperialism.

Thus, the question of how to relate Japanese ideas with Western ideas has been a major problem among Japanese intellectuals since they encountered Western ideas at the end of nineteenth century to the present. However, these ideas have not been thoroughly articulated in the Western sense. As Michael Polanyi maintains in his book, *The Tacit Dimension*, certain ideas – or what he calls them “tacit knowledge” – do not take the form of language yet nevertheless play important roles in a society. Unlike Western ideas, East Asian ideas, including Japanese “tacit knowledge,” are often inseparable from their practice. From a Western viewpoint, these ideas are an integration (or mixture) of philosophy, religion, art, moral, and life style. In premodern Japan, intellectuals were receptacles of ideas of East Asian thought, but they had not developed a way to articulate these ideas. Non-intellectuals practiced these ideas, and intellectuals verbalized these ideas, but the native articulation was seen to be somewhat incomplete after the introduction of the system of Western thought. The “Japanese” (Tezuka) replies in answering Heidegger that the Japanese language “lacks the delimiting power to represent objects related in an unequivocal order above and below each other.”⁷¹ Whether this is true or not, Japanese intellectuals needed to arm themselves with Western ideas, as well as to explain native Japanese ideas. With the emergence of national identity, this situation spawned an ambivalent attitude toward the West. In order to be nationalistic, Japanese

⁷⁰ *Nihonjinron*, or “Discussions of the Japanese” and “Japanese uniqueness discourse” are two different discourses by definition. Although Peter Dale (1986) defines as “works of cultural nationalism concerned with the ostensible ‘uniqueness’ of Japan,” (*The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, intro.) this observation is a clearly exaggerated generalization. *Nihonjinron* is merely a general term to include “everything written about the Japanese” as he initially calls it, and the term “cultural nationalism” is not applicable to many of commentary essays attributed to *nihonjinron*. His three characteristics of *nihonjinron* – assumption that Japan is a homogeneous society, that the Japanese are radically different, and that they are consciously nationalistic – may not apply except in extreme cases. The works attempting to describe heterogeneity of the Japanese is also included in *nihonjinron*. Many of the works have strong tendency to be self-reflexive rather than egoistically nationalistic. Dale does not mention, for example, a stinging reflective work from the viewpoint of an imaginary Jewish writer, Isaiah BendaSan, (a pseudonym of Yamamoto Shichihei) *The Japanese and the Jews* (1972) or *Nihonjinron* (1994) and other works by Minami Hiroshi.

⁷¹ Heidegger, “A Dialogue on Language,” p. 2.

intellectuals could not avoid training themselves in Western ways and employing Western discourse. Originally, *iki* belonged to *Edokko*, non-intellectuals townspeople of Edo, and Kuki gave it a status within intellectual discourse. The definition of *iki* had to be given – although it may not be perfect – by an individual at a certain point in order to articulate *iki* academically.

2.3.2. Relativity of *Iki*

Although I sympathize with Kuki in his anxiety of losing one's own culture, I maintain that the study of *iki* will contribute to enriching not only Japanese aesthetics, but also comparative aesthetics. Contrary to Kuki's attempt to seek a "strict meaning"⁷² of *iki*, *iki* is a relative, flexible value but not an absolute, exclusive value.

Iki is an etymologically flexible word. If not futile, it would be very difficult to give precise definition of *iki*, it being a colorful concept. When a Japanese word is written with different ideograms, the same single (phonetically identical) word can carry dozens of different nuances, sometimes quite different meaning. When a Japanese word is written with phonograms, either *hiragana* or *katakana*, the word leaves the possibility of interpretation opened. Takeuchi lists fourteen examples⁷³ of different ideograms appeared in Edo literature and popular songs, each one of them having different nuances, used for this single word, *iki*. Kuki himself lists four different connotations of *iki*.⁷⁴ If *iki* is written with phonograms, as Kuki did for the title of his book, the precise meaning of the word become almost indeterminable.

Manifestations of *iki* oscillate depending on the context. For example, Kuki recognized *iki* in stripes, especially vertical rather than horizontal ones. However, as Kuki admits himself, horizontal stripes can be *iki* when the sensation and emotion is insensible to vertical stripes.⁷⁵

3. Recontextualization of *Iki* as An Aesthetics of Everyday life

⁷² Kuki, "*Iki*" no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 77.

⁷³ Ogi et al., *The Edo-Tokyo Encyclopaedia*, p. 427.

⁷⁴ Kuki, "*Iki*" no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 82-83.

⁷⁵ Kuki, "*Iki*" no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 55.

3.1. *Iki* as an Alternative Aesthetics Based on Everyday Life

Despite his use of Western methodology, Kuki originally presupposes that there is no *iki* in the West (although Kuki does see *iki* in the West as explained later), and his text seems to miss several important points for Western readers. In his attempt to authenticate *iki*, Kuki seemed to deliberately ignore the properties of everyday life,” or everydayness (*nichijō-sei*) in *iki*.

What Kuki seemed to miss is that *iki* is primarily aesthetics of everyday experience rather than artistic experience. As Tada calls *iki* a “profane aesthetics,”⁷⁶ the everydayness of *iki* need more attention to clarify the position in relation to Western aesthetics that are firmly based on art and works of art rather than aesthetic experiences from everyday life. Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of conditions of *iki*, and I do not intend to propose a new structure of *iki*, I will re-examine *iki* with an emphasis on everydayness.

I would like to add two axes reflecting everydayness for the purpose of comparison with Western ideas – namely, simplicity and implicitness. Everydayness is essential to *iki*, and very helpful to understanding *iki*, as Yasuda defines *iki* as “aesthetics of craftsmen’s, aesthetics of common people, or aesthetics in (everyday) life.”⁷⁷ I would like to expound on this idea in the following section.

3.2. Formal *Iki* and Situational *Iki*

In order to approach *iki*, it would be useful to think of *iki* from two different viewpoints – formal and situational. Kuki distinguishes “conscious phenomena” such as a person’s disposition and “objective manifestations”⁷⁸ as appearance, behavior, and fashion⁷⁹ but this terminology poses a certain problem. To Kuki, *iki* is a “meaning experienced in a form of national embodiments,” that is only accessible to the Japanese and he insists that *iki* must be understood first as “conscious phenomena,” then as “objective manifestations.”⁸⁰ Here, Kuki falls into a logical trap. If the reader (a Japanese) already knows what *iki* is,

⁷⁶ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Tada and Yasuda, ed., *Nihon no bigaku* (Japanese Aesthetics), p. 45.

⁷⁸ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 24 n6.

⁷⁹ Appearance, behavior, and fashion are included in one Japanese word, *narifuri*.

⁸⁰ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 14.

no further explanation is necessary. In other words, if an explanation can articulate what *iki* is to a Japanese, then it should also serve non-Japanese readers.

In order to demonstrate the explicability of *iki*, I will use viewpoints slightly different from Kuki's, which are formal and situational. Formal *iki* is *iki* manifested on objects at a formal level. The judgment of formal *iki* is based on concrete appearances. One observes formal *iki* in design, color, or objects. On the other hand, situational *iki* is *iki* perceived from the whole situation, but not from any particular object. Situational *iki* is primarily applied to the whole of action, understanding discretion in love affairs, behavior, ambiance, or lifestyle of person, or it could be applied to natural phenomena (such as a sprinkle or a willow.) A phrase of an Edo popular song goes:

An *iki* crow doesn't caw at dawn, *tyoito-tyoito*, only a *yabo* crow caws frantically.

This phrase blames a crow's cawing at dawn as if to hurry the couple who spent a night together.

Particular contexts or situations contribute to yielding or enhancing *iki*. While Kuki's "conscious phenomena" (which is not present in non-Japanese, according to Kuki) must precede "objective manifestations," situational *iki* does not necessarily precede formal *iki*. Formal *iki* and situational *iki* are closely connected and not mutually exclusive. However, it is situational *iki* that characterize *iki* as an intriguing aesthetic ideal. One might even call *iki* as a "situation aesthetics."

In modern Japanese, *iki* is more often used in its situational sense rather than its formal sense. There seems to be no consensus on *iki* colors in modern Japanese, for example, but *iki* tends to refer to the quality of scheme, combination, and actual use of color rather than the color itself. Examples of manifestations of *iki* brought up by Kuki are sometimes too analytical, and rigid, such as limiting *iki* color only to gray, brown, and blue⁸¹. There is a danger of reducing *iki* to merely certain preferences of colors, designs, or patterns. Situational *iki* allows a wider, more flexible interpretation and it is relative and context dependent, subject to change.

⁸¹ Kuki, "*Iki*" no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 60.

3.3. Simplicity of *Iki*

Although simplicity is a shared characteristic of Japanese aesthetic ideals, such as *wabi*⁸² or *sabi*⁸³, it is one of the distinct properties of *iki*, especially in comparison with non-Japanese aesthetic ideals. The simplicity of *iki* includes geometrical simplicity at a visual level, and at a more abstract level, structural simplicity. The former corresponds with formal *iki* while the latter with situational *iki*.

When Kuki elaborates on artistic manifestations of *iki* in *The Structure of "Iki,"* two things should be noted. First, contrary to Kuki's conclusion, these manifestations are not phenomena unique to Japan, but on the contrary, fairly circulative. One should note that the fact that the notion of *iki* is not found universally does not hinder *iki* from being understood outside of Japan. *Iki* does not necessarily universally exist, but it can provide an alternative aesthetic viewpoint.

One can observe *iki* in geometrical simplicity at the level of concrete visual representations. According to Kuki, certain simple geometrical patterns can yield a sense of *iki*. Kuki deals in highly visually abstracted patterns, such as that which might be associated with the simplicity observed in some modern art movements. To Kuki, "nothing but parallel lines can express"⁸⁴ the dichotomy of the "self and the opposite sex."⁸⁵ Kuki clearly declares that a "complex pattern is not *iki*."⁸⁶ To Kuki, even a swastika (*manji*)⁸⁷ appears to be "complex" when it is compared with stripes. He also claims that a radiant pattern⁸⁸ is not *iki* because the visual expression of *iki* must be indifferent and purposeless by avoiding concentration.⁸⁹ Kuki

⁸² See p. 5n, *wabi*.

⁸³ See p. 5n, *sabi*.

⁸⁴ Kuki, "*Iki*" *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 53.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I: 17.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I: 57.

⁸⁷ In Japan, an ancient symbol, swastika is often used in the context of the Buddhist tradition. Although Pincus suggests Kuki's political motive behind authenticating *iki*, one can see Kuki's attitude to strictly separate aesthetic judgment from politics here. It is not likely that he was not aware, that what he saw as not *iki* is the national symbol of Nazi Germany (although) which became an ally of Japan six years after the publication of "*Iki*" *no kôzô*. See also the next note.

⁸⁸ This inevitably includes the Flag of Rising Sun (*Nisshôki*) used in the former Japanese Navy. Although this is not explicitly mentioned in *The Structure of "Iki,"* Kuki's preparatory notes specifically dismiss *Nisshôki* as not *iki*. ("Iki ni tsuite," (Concerning *Iki*) *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, special volume: 19.)

⁸⁹ Kuki, "*Iki*" *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 57.

states: “pictorial patterns are not *iki* when they are contrasted with geometrical patterns.” He limits the application of *iki* to concrete visual art, but not abstract visual art. Kuki lists the following formal conditions to fit manifestations of *iki* in a work of concrete visual art: when it is drawing primarily based on outline rather than painting, the colors are not rich, and its composition is not complicated.⁹⁰ For example, Kuki points out that painting must be “compositionally simple” to qualify as *iki*, although painting is not exactly the artistic form best suited to convey the sense of *iki*. He also lists simple hairstyle⁹¹ and natural make up⁹² as spontaneous manifestations of *iki*, but fails to observe that simplicity is a common required condition for *iki*. The question of simplicity here overlaps with the concerns toward simplicity of some modern artists. The reason why some modern Western artists are regarded as “revolutionary” is partly because their geometrical simplicity contrasts with preceding concrete art movements. Ironically, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s motto, “less is more” inadvertently reveals the inherited phobia of simplicity, or incessant decorative impulse in Western art, which can be read as: “more is better.” (Hence, “less is better.”) This is not to say simplicity was not an aesthetic issue in the West, however, simplicity did not gain wide popularity until the advent of modernism, and artists, poets, and philosophers such as William Morris, Walt Whitman, and Henry David Thoreau started to praise simplicity. It is modernism that brought simplicity into everyday life. On the other hand, Japanese have plenty of words to describe positive simplicity such as *assari*, *sappari*, *sukkiri*, *soboku*, etc, and the word *kirei*, which describes “cleanliness without dusts or dirt” also signifies “beautiful.”

It is quite possible that Kuki consciously avoided referring to his contemporary Western artists producing abstract, geometrical painting with an intention to highlight his presupposed “uniqueness” of *iki*. It is interesting that even though Kuki does not mention many of his contemporary modern abstract artists⁹³ but concrete artists such as Jean Antoine Watteau, Constantin Guy, and Edgar Degas.⁹⁴ Kuki reaches

⁹⁰ Ibid., I: 52.

⁹¹ Ibid., I: 46-47.

⁹² Ibid., I: 46.

⁹³ Kuki mentions Pablo Picasso in a table in preparatory notes to *The Structure of “Iki,”* “Iki ni tsuite,” *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*. Special volume: 6, but Kuki’s position to Picasso is not clear in this table.

⁹⁴ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 105.

strikingly clear parallels of abstract modern artists in terms of pursuit of simplicity. Although the use of primary colors may not exactly conform the choices of *iki* colors (gray, brown, and blue), it would not be hard to imagine that the stern geometrical simplicity of abstract art, especially Mondrian's compositions, carry certain elements of *iki*, if not all of them.

As much as concrete representation, one sees *iki* in abstract simplicity, which corresponds to situational *iki*. One extremely simplified – not only visually, but structurally – form of art would be “a choice,” as Marcel Duchamp demonstrated “ready-mades.” As seen in his *Fountain*, a urinal, or any mass-produced artifact “becomes” works of art, when it is chosen, signed, and placed in a museum.

Alan Watts equates carefully-chosen rocks in a Japanese garden with *objet trouvé*.

So this rock that you would find in a Japanese garden is the uncarved block, or what we call in the West *objet trouvé* where the artist instead of making something, selects it. He finds a glorious thing and shares his finding with other people, and that finding is a work of art.⁹⁵

Duchamp's stance would be much more appropriately called “anti-art” rather than “non-art” since to him art is visible and what he did was to obscure it, deconstruct it. On the other hand, *iki* is an aesthetics of non-art, because art⁹⁶ in the Western sense did not exist in premodern Japan when *iki* was practiced, since the boundary between “art” and “everyday” was non-existent from the beginning. The criterion “Japanese art” is essentially a Western product.

To decide “something is not art” may be easier than to decide “something is art,” because artistic phenomena are less than non-artistic phenomena, the rest, non-art that is everyday life. In the West, a part of everyday life includes art, but the whole of everyday life is not art. Art is an attempt to differentiate a part of everyday life in order to make it more than everyday life. In the Western context, everydayness is the norm that should be destroyed in order to be creative. A work of art must be framed, distinguished,

⁹⁵ Watts, *Uncarved block, unbleached silk*, p. 7.

⁹⁶ The word art is distinguished between *geijutsu* (art in general) and *bijutsu* (fine art) in Japanese. The origin of the term *geijutsu* dates back to a fifth century Chinese historiography, *Gokanjo* (432), but *geijutsu* was strictly used as translation of art in English and the equivalents in other European languages, such as German *Kunst*, or French *art*.

authenticated, spotlighted, and highlighted to be a legitimate “work of art,” to be different from everyday life. As an accomplice of artists, the museum is an institution to support this project called art.

Duchamp’s “ready-mades” problematized the traditional Western concept of the work of art and blurred the boundary between “art” and “non-art,” or “everydayness.” By presenting a urinal as a work of art, Duchamp demonstrated that a museum is an instrument to create the field of art, that art is a product of concept, and that art does not reside in the physical work. It seems quite appropriate to apply the term *iki* to *L.H.O.O.Q.*, another “work” by Duchamp in its modern, extended sense. By adding a moustache to the Mona Lisa, he breaks the stalemate between “art” and “non-art.” He gave the Mona Lisa a new meaning in a new context in the simplest and most sophisticated manner. In *iki*, the aesthetics of everyday life, or practical aesthetics do not require “art”, but choices made in everyday life in the simplest form were valuable as any works of art. In *iki*, “to be simple,” or the orientation toward simplicity in everyday life forms an aesthetic experience that in itself yields pleasure. An oxymoron “sophisticated artlessness” seems to describe this aspect of *iki* well.

3.4. Implicitness of *Iki* – Museum as a Counter Example

Iki avoids explicitness, eloquence, and verboseness. Implicitness is another axis to be added to the understanding of *iki*. The concept of beauty allows narcissism, which may involve the self-asserting statement “I am beautiful.” A narcissist statement does not disqualify someone from being beautiful. In the case of *iki*, however, the statement “I am *iki*” is impossible because *iki* must not be self-asserting and explicit, but rather, inconspicuous and implicit. One might characterize the inconspicuous, implicitness of *iki* as “an aesthetics of the back.” Face-to-face is not considered to be *iki*, and is avoided in manifestations of *iki*. Nishiyama lists an *ukiyo-e* by Hishikawa Moronobu⁹⁷, *Mikaeri bijin* (The beauty who looks back) as a manifestation of *iki*.⁹⁸ Known to philatelists because it was used as a design for a Japanese stamp, this masterpiece captures the moment when a young woman looks back, showing her profile. When one compares the figures in *ukiyo-e* with Western classical portraits – for instance the *Mona Lisa*, who stares

⁹⁷ Hishikawa Moronobu (-1694) was a leading painter at the early stage of *ukiyo-e* development.

⁹⁸ Ogi et al., *The Edo-Tokyo Encyclopaedia*, pp. 16-18.

back directly at the viewer – one immediately notices the difference. It is almost impossible to find an *ukiyo-e* image resembling to the well-known propagandistic poster, *I Want You* (1917) by American painter James Montgomery Flagg, featuring a stern Uncle Sam pointing a finger directly at the viewer. This was not simply because *ukiyo-e* was not propagandistic, but because a figure staring back was not *iki*. One is given the impression that one is not looking face-to-face in any *ukiyo-e* not only in a physical sense, but also in an emotional sense. It is worth mentioning that the decorative knot of the belt (*obi*) of a kimono is designed to be placed on the back in a woman's kimono, but rarely at the front.⁹⁹ The emphasis of the beauty of the nape in *nukiemon* also confirms that showing one's back is important in the corporal manifestations of *iki*.

As a kind of corporal manifestations of *iki*, it is possible to determine the aesthetically best relative position of two people in terms of *iki*, especially a man and a woman in reality, or in paintings or films. The best *iki* relative position would be back-to-back. Tada suggests that back-to-back is the source of Kuki's idea of the suspended tension of “dualism”¹⁰⁰ between a man and woman, in contrast with the occasion the face-to-face embrace resolve the tension in the West. Yasuda points out that Kuki might have seen a *boudeuse*, a type of double sofa in the figure of the letter S that appeared in nineteenth-century Paris, and which has two seats facing opposite directions, in which Tada sees *iki*.¹⁰¹

The absence of museums in Japan is an interesting case for exemplifying the implicitness of *iki* practiced in everyday life. The fact that there was no institutional art museum founded in traditional Japanese culture suggests a difference between the attitudes of Japanese and Western aesthetics. The first modern Western art museum in Japan, the Ohara Museum of Art was not built until 1930, coinciding with the publication year of *The Structure of “Iki.”* It is hard to find examples of even temporary art exhibits in premodern Japanese culture.

⁹⁹ Judo cloth is a notable exception for several (obvious) practical reasons, for example, not to damage the back when one is thrown on the back.

¹⁰⁰ Kuki, “*Iki*” no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 17.

¹⁰¹ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” no *kôzô o yomu*, pp. 58-59.

Ukiyo-e, for instance, was certainly not considered “art.” Nute states that *ukiyo-e* was “primarily a form of popular entertainment, and certainly not *bijutsu* or fine art.”¹⁰² As it is well known, *ukiyo-e* was typically used as wrapping paper in Japan, and its “artistic value” was effectively “discovered” in the West. *Ukiyo-e* was appreciated rather personally, but few of the Japanese at that time would imagine “exhibiting” *ukiyo-e* in a public place. Therefore, the first substantial exhibition of *ukiyo-e* was held in the US, not in Japan, and even then, it was initiated by an American, Ernest Fenollosa.”¹⁰³

Nute continues:

Indeed, when the World Columbian Exposition opened in May 1893, the first extensive exhibition of *ukiyo-e* prints in the United States – Fenollosa’s “Hokusai and His School” exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts – had only just ended; and the first public exhibition of common *ukiyo-e* in Japan was not held until some five years later, and again this was partly organized by Fenollosa.¹⁰⁴

One might even call an art museum a *yabo* (the opposite of *iki*) place since its primary objective is to explicitly exhibit artifacts. Verbosity of labels and explanations of works backed by intellectual backgrounds does not comply with *iki*. Okakura writes: “To a Japanese, accustomed to simplicity of ornamentation and frequent change of decorative method, a Western interior permanently filled with a vast array of pictures, statuary, and bric-à-brac gives the impression of mere vulgar display of riches.”¹⁰⁵

A museum collects artifacts and attracts the focus of the visitors’ attention, but *iki* avoids focus and despise intellectual analysis. The curators must be able to answer the visitors’ questions and everything must be clarified with thorough examination and articulation in this particular cultural field – namely, the museum – that dissociates itself from everydayness. This fissure between art and everyday life within a museum make the place *yabo*. The aesthetic experiences gained from the encounter with artifacts are confined in a museum. The artifacts shown in a museum are “pure art,” which are detached from the context of everyday life. In this sense, both the tea ceremony and a *tokonoma* are qualified as being *iki* in a

¹⁰² Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, p. 21.

¹⁰³ Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) was an American Orientalist and educator.

¹⁰⁴ Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, pp. 21-22.

larger sense because they are not verbosely explanatory, and art and everyday life are not estranged, but remain inseparable.

3.5. *Iki* as “Non-art”

Iki is “non-art,” or artlessness, and *iki* is different from either artistic or anti-artistic attitude. One will not find an entry for *iki* in *A dictionary of Japanese art terms* despite its importance as an aesthetic ideal, not because it is an extremely rare term but because *iki* is characterized by its non-artness. An anti-artistic movement is just another term for denoting another artistic movement, such as Dadaism or surrealism. This happens in the same way that iconoclasm based on iconophobia leads to a mere replacement of the old idolatry with the new one. After eighty years since its first exhibition, the shock brought by Duchamp’s *Fountain* is considerably weakened, and it is canonized as a work of art. Following “common course of thinking,”¹⁰⁶ in *The Structure of “Iki,”* Kuki decides not to question the difference between spontaneous manifestations and artistic manifestations of *iki*. Here, he seemed to miss a crucial point, not realizing that the Western idea of “art” must be examined when he deals with a Japanese aesthetics. Kuki calls patterns in design, architecture, and music as subjective, or free art, and in painting, sculpture, and poem as objective, or mimetic art.¹⁰⁷ Kuki mainly finds *iki* in free art rather than mimic art. He maintains that this is because free art is less restricted by concrete manifestations of *iki* but has a full possibility in abstract manifestations of *iki*. One will notice that all three examples of free art (in his classification) – design, architecture, and music – do not fit the typical definition of art in its strictest sense. This is not surprising, as Japanese aesthetics, especially *iki*, focuses on aesthetic experience rather than works of art.

If one examines the problem closely, one will immediately face the difficulty of using the term “Japanese art.” The usage of this word is very loose, but some Japanese aesthetic ideals, especially *iki*, actually conflict with the very idea of “art.” The differences in value systems require careful examination when comparing “Japanese art” and Western art. For example, the essential activities often referred to as “Japanese art” such as calligraphy, flower-arrangement, tea ceremony, gardening, and bonsai cannot be

¹⁰⁵ Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁶ Kuki, “*Iki*” no kôzô, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 41.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, I: 51.

immediately placed in the context of Western art history. The term “Japanese art” is elusive because art is tightly integrated with everyday life – to be precise, they were not separated in premodern Japanese culture. The term “Japanese art” can only be possible when one accepts this different approach to the word “art.”

3.5.1. Tea Ceremony

One may be tempted to equate the Japanese tea ceremony with an art exhibition, but, in fact, they show essentially different characteristics. The tea master must show not only his or her skills in handling tea wares in the proper manner, and in choosing proper tea and sweets, but also in exhibiting a scroll, flower-arrangement, and tea cups all in harmonious coordination according to the season and circumstances. Teacups made by notable craftsmen can indeed be considered “works of art,” and the visitors are expected to make witty comments about the teacups. At first sight, this whole situation may show a resemblance to a visitor commenting on a work of art in a museum. However, unlike works of art, these teacups actually serve their instrumental purpose, as receptacles for drinking tea. No separate pieces of this experience are considered to be independent works of art to be appreciated, but rather, what matters here is the whole aesthetic experience embedded in one day of the incessant current of one’s life. It is the whole environment and the moments in which the experience takes place, from the architecture of the teahouse and the garden to the design of the teacup, or the entire “situation” of tea ceremony that naturally fits into the context of everyday life. Ekuan Kenji explains the significance of drinking tea:

The ritual drinking of tea gathered all elements of daily communication into the tea hut. Drinking tea and partaking of food are daily activities. But, into these, the tea ceremony introduced a revolution in beauty and appreciation. A fresh aesthetic renewed the texture of existence. The everyday activities of drinking tea and eating were organized into a code of manners, long with an etiquette for the use of space and utensils drawing each participant into an almost spiritual dialogue.¹⁰⁸

3.5.2. Japanese Alcove (*Tokonoma*)

Another good example of the inseparable state of everyday life and art is seen in the alcove in a Japanese house called *tokonoma*. Whether a house follows traditionally Japanese or Western style, most

¹⁰⁸ Ekuan, *The aesthetics of the Japanese lunchbox*, pp. 28-30.

Japanese homes have at least one Japanese-style room.¹⁰⁹ Inside the Japanese style room (*washitsu*), there is a designated alcove in which is placed a vase of flower arrangement or an ornament (*okimono*) such as curiously-shaped natural stones, and a scroll of East Asian painting or calligraphy on its wall. Only a few objects are displayed on any one occasion, and these must maintain the metaphorical connections among themselves taking into account the context of the season. Here, the entire harmony has a priority over the values of artifacts. A modern Japanese writer, Tanizaki Jun'ichirô, describes the importance of context in Japanese alcoves in his *Praise of Shadows*: “Even the greatest masterpiece will lose its worth as a scroll if it fails to blend with the alcove, while a work of no particular distinction may blend beautifully with the room and set off to unexpected advantage both itself and its surroundings.”¹¹⁰ When one compares *tokonoma* and art exhibition, it is clear that *tokonoma* places the utmost emphasis on the context rather than objects.

3.5.3. Repetition and Ritual

Everyday life necessarily includes ritual aspects. It is our tendency to rationalize the situation, but we cannot concentrate all our efforts into investigating what is happening around us. We do not have the time to extricate ourselves from a situation and simply analyze it. Therefore, we cease our investigation, and must proceed without further rationalization. We habitually do many things without any persuasive reasons.

Let us assume that art is the creation of new value: rituals, thus cannot be art because it could be valuable but it does not create any new value (unless creating new rituals, such as the “Golden Dawn” and other modern ceremonious magic groups). In a Western context, the word “repetition” or its derivative “repetitious” almost immediately connotes a negative meaning. Ritual is, by definition, a repetition, and often a target of elimination in the course of modernization. However, the meaning of ritual depends on the attitude of participants. A wedding in a modern society, for example, is a widely accepted ritual because it

¹⁰⁹ This is partly due to the presence of *butsudan*, a family Buddhist altar, based on the complex of Buddhist and ancestral worship. Succession of this altar from the parents to the heir is mandatory, and placing *butsudan* in a Western style room is out of place. *Butsudan* is often placed next to *tokonoma*, enhancing the spiritual centrality of *tokonoma* in a Japanese home.

¹¹⁰ For a reference to Japanese alcove, see Tanizaki Jun'ichirô, *Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (Stony Creek Connecticut: Leete's Island Books, Inc., 1977), First published in 1933.

is generally a once-in-a-lifetime event, or not so many times from the viewpoint of the couple, but it could be boring for some visitors who find it repetitious.

In Japanese aesthetics, however, repetition is not a problem for giving meaning to ritual. Kuki takes “woman just finished bathing”¹¹¹ (*Yuagari-sugata*) as an example of a spontaneous manifestation of *iki*. He maintains “Having the reminiscent image of nude in the immediate past, in a woman dressing casually in a simple *yukata* (a traditional Japanese cloth worn after bathing), the erotic allure and its formal cause complete an expression of *iki*.”¹¹² This is not an artistic event or situation, but it is an almost “insignificant” event in everyday life.

Other examples of spontaneous manifestations of *iki* include the locution of casual conversation, a certain posture, dressing in a gauzy cloth, a slim body, a slender face, light makeup, simple hairstyle, going barefoot etc¹¹³, suggesting how innocuous everyday phenomena emit *iki*. On the other hand, works of art can be *iki*, but their “artfulness” makes them rather difficult to be *iki*. Paying attention to the above-mentioned everyday phenomena has been satisfying the aesthetic desire of the Japanese. The stereotypical remark on the Japanese is that they “lack creativity,” but this is not necessarily taken as an insult. An aesthetics of everyday life places emphasis on aesthetic consumption (that is, appreciation) rather than aesthetic creation. A “lived” ritual is different from the neurotic behavior of compulsory repetition, in which one cannot stop acting despite his own recognition of the meaninglessness of the action. The Japanese are not bored with repeating rituals, because they find value in repeating. Since each action is repetitious, repetition within an action is avoided. As Okakura Kakuzô observes in *the Book of Tea*,

In the tea-room the fear of repetition is a constant presence. The various objects for the decoration of a room should be so selected that no colour or design shall be repeated. If you have a living flower, a painting of flower is not allowable. If you are using a round kettle, the

¹¹¹ It should be noted that *Edokko* loved bathing (like the modern Japanese), especially in the bathtub filled with very hot water. Since many of *Edokko* could not afford to have bathtub at home, they frequently used public baths, *yuya*. Townspeople walking after bathing was a common scene. See Nakao, *Sui tsû iki*, p.174.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, I: 43.

¹¹³ These examples are commonly used compound words in Japanese, rather than being the composite of an adjective and a noun.

water pitcher should be angular. A cup with a black glaze should not be associated with a tea-caddy of black lacquer.¹¹⁴

A Japanese prostitute, a Greek philosopher, and a French painter do not necessarily share the same everyday life, but we can extract the common attributes of everyday life in all of them. The common attributes associated with everyday life could be described as “commonplace,” “stagnate,” “complacent,” “ritualistic,” and so on. These attributes do not necessarily play an active role in Western aesthetics. If art is about the unyielding attempt to create new values, and everyday life is about immersing complacency of self-satisfaction, art and everyday life seem to show a polarity in the West. Everyday life plays a crucial role in Japanese aesthetics as “the properties of everyday life,” most notably in *iki* where aesthetic experiences override the significance of individual works of art.

A Russian Formalist critic, Victor Shklovsky maintains that “defamiliarization” is crucial to art.

. . . art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feels things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*¹¹⁵

To a certain extent, this Formalist attempt at defining art is applicable to the elaboration on how *iki* works. When the “object is not important,” the focus shifts to experience from work. When one read Shklovsky’s “artfulness” as “aesthetic quality,” this principle can be applied to describe how *iki* works relative to the norm of everyday life. The difference between the Formalist approach and *iki* is that while the Formalists ultimately depart life and intend art – whether it is an object or not – *iki* encompasses art into everyday life.

¹¹⁴ Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, pp. 40-41.

¹¹⁵ Shklovsky, “Art as technique,” p. 12.

3.5.4. *Iki* as Shaking of Everydayness

It is not possible to give a full account of everydayness because the characteristic of everydayness lies in its very “uncharacteristicness.” *Iki* could be thought of as “the shaking of everydayness.” Everydayness is not necessarily complacency or stagnation, but rather, lively homeostasis when it is stimulated by *iki*. Tada notes that the “flows of commodities, persons, information” of the Edo pleasure quarters or fish market where manifestations of *iki* are abundant, are the “opposite of the sense of stagnation.”¹¹⁶ Manifestations of *iki* do not seriously undermine everydayness as some Western art does under the name of creativity, nor are they buried in everydayness. Rather, they reside on the boundary of the everyday and the non-everyday. They resist everydayness, but they do not aggressively destroy everydayness. Since the homeostasis of everydayness is sufficiently stable, when certain manifestations of *iki* occasionally shake the everydayness, increased sensitivity brings aesthetic pleasure with even subtle, slight changes emerging on the surface of everydayness.

What Kuki lists as spontaneous manifestations of *iki* – primarily modeled after rakish Fukagawa geisha – in a slightly relaxed posture, dressing in light clothes, or in *yukata* just finished bathing, woman with a slender, willowy figure with a slender face, in bare foot, with light make up, in simple hair style, revealed nape or foot, and making slight gestures of hands. Or *iki* natural phenomena such as a sprinkle or branches or willow – these are all common scenes encountered in everyday life, but sensitiveness can catch and appreciate the subtlety.

The principle of defamiliarization is also applicable here as much as to Formalist art to the extent that “something different” from the norm is appreciated in *iki*. However, manifestations of *iki* do not accumulate to bring irreversible change. They fall back to the current of everydayness. Thus, one is able to gain pleasure repeatedly with sensibility towards subtle changes, whereas some Western art continuously seeks for newer, stronger stimuli, possibly spoiling sensibility toward subtle nuances and change that could be appreciable otherwise.

4. Examples of *iki* in modernity and the West

¹¹⁶ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, p. 21.

4.1. No *iki* in the West?

Kuki claims that “The fact that there is no equivalent word of *iki* in the West, a conscious phenomena called *iki* has no place as a certain meaning in the ethnic being of the Western culture”¹¹⁷ In this claim, he almost disregards that any culture is subjected to change, and a foreign word could be integrated in a culture. However, Minami Hiroshi and Tada Michitarô among other critics note that the understanding and application of *iki* can be extended to modern and non-Japanese cultural phenomena beyond its original space and time, Edo¹¹⁸. As we shall see later, Kuki himself applies *iki* to Western cultural phenomena in his own poetry. Kuki also writes in a note to a brief essay in French, “Théâtre Japonais”: “Il y a quelques années j’ai été très heureux de voir la technique de *hanamichi* appliqué dans un des music-halls parisien, aux Champs-Élysées.”¹¹⁹ There is no more description of what he found, but I see here that Kuki wished *iki* to find intercultural application rather than remain incomprehensible to the West.

4.2. *Iki* in Modernity and the West

Some modern cultural phenomena, as well as Western cultural phenomena seem to manifest *iki*, reflecting Kuki’s observations of *iki*. Kuki inadvertently reveals his own attempts to apply *iki* to modern and/or Western cultural phenomena. Minami points out Kuki’s association with several French women during his stay in Paris from Kuki’s poetry.¹²⁰ This period, from 1925 to 1927 curiously coincides with Kuki’s drafting of *The Structure of “Iki.”* Minami notes that Kuki finds manifestations of *iki* in Paris from his multiple uses of the word *iki* in his own series of poetry in reference to French women.¹²¹ The names of dozens of French women haunt his poetry, “Pari Shinkei (Paris, a landscape in my mind).” After Minami and Pincus, I cite here one of Kuki’s poems as irrefutable evidence of his discovery of *iki* in the West.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., I: 80.

¹¹⁸ Edo is the name of the place as well as a historic period.

¹¹⁹ “Several years ago, I was very happy to see the technique of *hanamichi* is applied in a music hall at Champs-Élysées.” *Hanamichi* is Japanese flower arrangement. Kuki, “Théâtre Japonais,” *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 255 (94). This book contains the parts written in two opposite writing directions, right from left for Japanese and left from right for European languages (German and French), and the number in the parenthesis is the pagination for European languages.

¹²⁰ Kuki, “Pari Shinkei,” *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 109.

¹²¹ Minami, “‘*iki*’ no *kôzô* o megutte,” p. 76.

These lines are taken from a poem titled “Fish Restaurant” in the form of a dialogue between a man from “a distant Eastern archipelago,” and a *parisienne*, who are about to go to their favorite fish restaurant for dinner. The *parisienne* says:

Dressed in black silk
My figure will simmer
 against silvery walls,
A chaste white rose at my breast
A strand of pearls at my throat
Around my wrist, a platinum watch
And on my finger, a white diamond ring.
A hat, the color of sea lettuce,
 Set low at a rakish (*iki*) slant.
Allow me a touch of red on my lips,
And tell me once more I’m your princess of the sea.¹²²

Minami notes in Kuki’s poem “The son of the doorkeeper,” “an example of *iki* not only in forms or voice, but also behavior”¹²³ on a French boy, François playing harmonica for the lovers.

In the room next to ours,
You were playing harmonica
The barcarolle sings:
“The beautiful night, the night of love,”
From *the Tales of Hoffmann*
Who told you to do us
Such *iki* service?¹²⁴

Here, *iki* is used to describe a smart discretion based on sympathetic discernment in the matters of love, frequently expressed as a set phrase, “*iki* discretion” (*ikina hakarai*) in Japanese.

In another poem, a jealous Susanne blames a man who was carried away by a Russian diva.

¹²² Translated by Pincus (Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*, p. 45.), with my modification. Kuki, “*Iki*” no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 119-120.

¹²³ Minami, “‘*Iki*’ no *kôzô* o megutte,” pp. 77-78.

¹²⁴ Kuki, “Pari Shinkei,” *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 122.

Isn't it right?
Yes, I know that.
You were gazing on
The chanteuse who sang
The flirtatious chanson
In her seductive, *iki* voice
With your enraptured eyes.¹²⁵

In this poem, “erotic allure” would be the closest meaning of *iki*.

Tada sees the possible application of *iki* transcending national characteristics in his dialogue with Yasuda.

Tada: Of course, the whole of *iki* is a characteristic of an ethnic group (the Japanese), and it is absolutely impossible to transplant it to Europe. However, it is possible to appropriate *iki* by taking in certain factors of it (even to those who are not familiar with *iki*). In this sense, *iki* can have universality and communicability. This is my reading of *The Structure of “Iki.”* If this is the case, even if *iki* is extinct, something new will be yielded.¹²⁶

Kuki does state that *iki* is “a lifestyle unique to the Japanese,”¹²⁷ but he does not explicitly deny the Western understanding of *iki*. Rather, his extensive use of Western philosophical devices suggests that the understanding and application of *iki* is not limited to the Japanese. If we take Kuki for an exclusive nationalist who refuses communication with the world outside Japan, it would be difficult to explain Kuki’s seeming inconsistency by explaining a Japanese aesthetic ideal with Western philosophical approaches. What Kuki drove at was a cultural concern rather than a nationalistic or political one. Kuki writes in his brief essay “C’est le paysan” in French: “je parlerai de mon pays, je risquerais même d’être un paysan. Il ne sera question ni de politique, ni de commerce, ni de l’armée et la marine. Laissons de côté ces choses superficielles.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Kuki, “Pari Shinkei,” *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 161.

¹²⁶ Tada and Yasuda. “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, p. 207.

¹²⁷ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 3.

¹²⁸ “I will talk of my country at the risk of being called a bumpkin. It is not a question of politics, or commerce, or army or navy. We should leave these superficial matters aside.” (My translation) Kuki, “C’est le paysan” in *Kuki Shûzô zenshû* I: 255 (94).

4.2.1 Fashion and Hairstyle

It would not be inappropriate to seek spontaneous manifestations of *iki* in modern fashion and hairstyle. In fact, certain modern cultural phenomena suit very well what Kuki described in his book. For example, deep navy blue or indigo blue¹²⁹ jeans can be *iki*, if they are straight¹³⁰ and remain as simple as possible without any variations in decorative patterns¹³¹. A T-shirt is an equivalent of *yukata*, a simple kimono that is considered *iki*, in its use as casual wear, its material (cotton), and its simplicity. As for hairstyle, Kuki notes, “simple hairstyle manifests *iki*.”¹³² For example, a masculine woman is not always necessarily *iki*, but a slender girl with short hair wearing a T-shirt and pants can be seen to manifest *iki*. In connection with concrete images in films, it is not wide of the mark to say that a boyish girl figure, such as Jean Seberg in Jean-Luc Godard’s film, *A bout de souffle* (1959) and Faye Wang in *Chungking Express* (1994) by Wong Kar-wai, carry *iki*. They seem to conform to the standards of *iki* – slender, natural makeup, simple hairstyle, and moreover, in the provocative, but implicit “allure” and “pride” of their boyish outfit. Minami, following Nishimura Shinji¹³³, points out the swapping of masculinity and femininity at the level of both emotion and fashion around the pleasure quarters.¹³⁴ Fukagawa female geisha¹³⁵ had typically male names, such as Yonehachi. They also dressed in men’s kimono, *haori*, and they talked and behaved like men¹³⁶. In addition, we may safely consider the ponytail as *iki* from its simplicity and casualness, and that it parallels to *nukiemon*.¹³⁷ As Kuki explains: “One finds *iki* in revealed nape,” and it is not explicitly erotic, but “subtly implies the passage to skin.”¹³⁸

¹²⁹ Kuki, “*Iki*” no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 62.

¹³⁰ Ibid., I: 58.

¹³¹ Ibid., I: 59.

¹³² Ibid., I: 46-47.

¹³³ Nishimura, *Edo Fukagawa jôcho no kenkyû*, 1926.

¹³⁴ Minami, “‘*Iki*’ no *kôzô* o megutte,” pp. 88-90.

¹³⁵ Geisha, professional performers were predominantly woman, but there were also male geisha.

¹³⁶ Nakao notes *kyan*, tomboyishness in relation with *iki*. See *Sui tsû iki*, pp. 175-176.

¹³⁷ See p. 4, note on *nuki-emon*.

¹³⁸ Ibid., I: 47.

4.2.2 *Iki* in Behavior

Iki does not only appear as physical manifestations but also behavioral manifestations as situational *iki*. We find *iki* in dramatic moments of “resolution of triangular relation” in literature and film. One who gives up his or her own love often manifests *iki*, because there is conspicuous eroticism in the resignation of his or her pride. One finds *iki* when Cyrano expresses love for his rival in Edmond Rostand’s novel, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, or when Rick gives up his love for the sake of the one whom he loved in *Casablanca* (1942).

This role is often played by supporting characters as well as heroes and heroines. Hans Sachs who withdraws himself in Richard Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is *iki*. A Fukagawa geisha Yonehachi, who suppresses agonizing jealousy, is considered a typically *iki* figure in a *ninjôbon* (realistic romantic novel, a genre of Edo literature), *Shunshoku umegoyomi* (The Colors of Spring, Plum Calendar) by Tamenaga Shunsui.¹³⁹

4.3. Modern Artistic Manifestations of *Iki*

4.3.2. Architecture - *Iki* in the Robie House

It is not unreasonable to find manifestations of *iki* in one of Wright’s masterpiece, the Frederic C. Robie House (1908-10) in Chicago. In fact, many elements of the Robie House successfully match Kuki’s models of *iki*. Although it is not my purpose to prove the influence of *iki* on Wright in terms of art history, the Robie House will serve as an example of a possible application of *iki* on Western cultural phenomena.

Kuki¹⁴⁰ and Takeuchi¹⁴¹ make note of the *iki* on *ukiyo-e*, which had a considerable impact on modern Western art. In relation to Wright, Nute extensively discussed the relationship between *ukiyo-e* and Wright’s architecture.¹⁴² Nute counts among Wright’s views of *ukiyo-e* as a “democratic expression of ordinary

¹³⁹ Suwa, *Edokko no bigaku*, pp. 60-65. Yonehachi is considered to be typically *iki* in her fashion as much as her behavior.

¹⁴⁰ Kuki, “*Iki*” no *kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 43-44.

¹⁴¹ Ogi et al., *The Edo-Tokyo Encyclopaedia*, p. 427.

¹⁴² Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, Chapter 6, “The woodblock print and the geometric abstraction of natural, man-made and social forms.” pp. 99-119.

life.”¹⁴³ It is probable that Wright was inspired by the abstract elements known to us as *iki* from *ukiyo-e*, as we shall see later. It is not a coincidence that Kuki’s father, Baron Kuki Ryûichi,¹⁴⁴ in alliance with Okakura Kakuzô¹⁴⁵ in support of the Japanese fine-art exhibit at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, introduced Japanese architecture to Wright for the very first time and immensely inspired him.¹⁴⁶

Kuki cites traditional teahouse architecture as a manifestation of *iki*. As Kevin Nute relates at length, teahouse, or *sukiya* architecture had a “special importance” to Frank Lloyd Wright, according to Wright’s own words.¹⁴⁷ Nakao Tatsurô suggests a folk etymological link between the aesthetic ideal closely connected to *iki*, *sui*, and the assignment of ideograms *suki* in *sukiya*.¹⁴⁸

William Jordy notes the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement on Wright, and that “the Arts and Crafts movement had been influenced by an enthusiasm for Japanese art, an enthusiasm shared by Wright.”¹⁴⁹ Jordy also says that Wright built “a small shingle house for himself in Oak Park, its interior revealing influences from both the Arts and Crafts movement and from Japanese design” in 1889.¹⁵⁰ Jordy passionately continues to point out the formal similarities, *nageshi*, the grooved horizontal members just overhead of traditional Japanese house. Jordy maintains Wright “could plausibly (if exaggeratedly) assert that it was not Japanese architecture that claimed his attention, but the Japanese prints that he collected” because Wright is the only one who used the Japanese-inspired elements “as abstractly and creatively.” Although it may be not easy to determine which influences are greater, whether *ukiyo-e* or actual Japanese architecture, it is certain that what influenced Wright are not only formal imitation, but also abstract aesthetic qualities in premodern Japanese design. It is not my purpose to evaluate the degree of the

¹⁴³ Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁴ Kuki Ryûichi was the Vice-Minister of Education, the Japanese Ambassador Plenipotentiary to the United States, and the Director of the Tokyo National Museum. Ryûichi was a personal acquaintance of Wright.

¹⁴⁵ Okakura Kakuzô (also known as Okakura Tenshin, 1862-1913) was a notable art historian and critic. He was a Curator of Fine Arts at the Imperial Museum, an adviser on Chinese and Japanese art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. For his intimate relationship with Kuki, see Tada and Yasuda, “*Iki*” *no kôzô o yomu*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴⁶ Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, p. 31 n 59. See also Secrest, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, p. 185.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-141.

¹⁴⁸ Nakao, *Sui tsû iki*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁹ Jordy, *Progressive and academic ideals at the turn of the twentieth century*, p. 182.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

influence of Japanese design on Wright, but to confirm the circulativity of the Japanese aesthetic quality that impressed Wright; namely, *iki*.

The Robie House clearly stands out among other houses in the area in many ways. The first thing that one notices about the appearance of the Robie House is its extensive use of straight lines. Although heavily influenced by Chinese architecture, premodern Japanese architecture is distinguished from Chinese style in its strict preference of *iki* straight lines over elegant curves, for example, the round roof of a typical fifteenth-century Ming dynasty architecture, the Altar of Heaven, or the frequent uses of arches in the Forbidden City. If you are familiar with Japanese architecture, you will immediately have a sense of déjà-vu when you see the straight lines and stripes appearing in the Robie House. Kuki admits geometrically accurate circular or semicircular windows¹⁵¹ typically used in teahouse architecture, as seen in a work of *ukiyo-e*, “View from Massaki” by Andou Hiroshige. However, he maintains that *iki* architecture “avoids curves” as a rule.¹⁵² The use of straight outlines throughout the Robie House conform to this rule with only one exception, which is a part of the ceiling to pull the attention of visitors and lead them to the second floor.

The Robie House shows distinctive harmonious simplicity. Nute quotes Wright’s fellow Prairie School architect Thomas Tallmadge:

One further aspect of his [Wright’s] art should receive attention – namely, his debt to the Japanese. From them he received inspiration and encouragement to reduce the requirement for a house – as, for instance the number of rooms – to the simplest terms, and to eliminate as far as possible such appurtenances as furniture, picture, and so forth. From the Japanese, too, he learned to make doors and windows an integral part of the design, not floating on its surfaces.¹⁵³

This harmonious simplicity appears as various parts of the Robie House. The bricks used in the Robie House are Roman bricks that are narrower and longer than standard bricks. He also “had the masons

¹⁵¹ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 66.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, I: 66.

¹⁵³ Thomas E. Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America* (1928 ed.), p. 229.

conceal all the vertical joints while all horizontal joints were deeply underscored.”¹⁵⁴ While surrounding Victorian houses using ordinary brick do not show clear stripes and resulting heavy “brick pattern,” the arrays of the bricks consisting of walls the Robie House show clear stripes, important manifestations of *iki* noted by Kuki. As Donald Hoffmann, William Jordy, and Joseph Connors remarked, this brickwork is an important quality of the Robie House as “Wright picked the Robie House along with Cheney House and the Imperial Hotel as examples of his best brickwork.”¹⁵⁵ If the stripes were too narrow, they might be elegant but not *iki*, but they have “adequate width and simplicity” so that the “dualism is clearly perceived.”¹⁵⁶ Horizontal stripes of walls may not sound *iki* at first, as *iki* prefers vertical stripes seen in the lightness¹⁵⁷ of a sprinkle or a willow to horizontal stripes. However, the “hovering” roof planes, as Wright puts it, a characteristic of the Prairie House, does not convey a “heaviness of strata”¹⁵⁸ in the Robie House. Moreover, horizontal stripes are *iki* among towers and vertical structure of Victorian houses as Kuki says “horizontal stripes can be sensed as *iki* with fresh taste especially when our sensation and emotion become dull toward vertical stripes.”¹⁵⁹ Although the roof structure looks quite stable, the simple structure that lacks gables and whose flat eaves extend horizontally creates unusual lightness that cannot be seen on adjacent buildings. The dull orange-red, almost subdued brown color of bricks also contributes to *iki*, since “there would no color but brown (“tea color” in Japanese ideograms) the preferred color for *iki*.¹⁶⁰

The small, inconspicuous entrance reminds us of *sukiya* architecture. Although on a bigger scale, the principle of “crawl” into the space is the same in the Robie House. Inside the house, there are many “grille works” reminding us of parallel wooden bars bringing the sense of *iki* stripes. They appear as a part of a wall, a quasi-*ranma*¹⁶¹, a part of a handrail of a staircase, and grille covers of heating. Indirect lightings

¹⁵⁴ Connors, *The Robie House of Frank Lloyd Wright*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ See Frank Lloyd Wright, “In the Cause of Architecture, V: The Meaning of Materials – The Kiln,” *Architectural Record* 63 (June 1928): pp. 555-561.

¹⁵⁶ Kuki, “*Iki*” *no kôzô*, *Kuki Shûzô zenshû*, I: 56.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I: 54.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I: 54.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I: 55.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, I: 61.

¹⁶¹ A wooden panel used as a decorative transom.

called “moon light” inspired by the *shoji*¹⁶² or *andon*¹⁶³ but replace synthetic resin to paper, create dim light required for an *iki* architecture.¹⁶⁴ As a part of interior design, Wright designed the furniture for the Robie House. *Iki* is also observable in the furniture. One would immediately recognize the striking similarity between the design of chairs and Japanese architectural design, especially the long back of the chair consisting vertical wood bars.¹⁶⁵ The table has lighting on corners that also follow the design of *andon*. The color of contrast between the white wall (whose original color is yellow) and dark brown woods certainly reflects “simple dualism,” the element of *iki* that is repeatedly stressed by Kuki.

One might wonder if an equivalent of *tokonoma* can be found in the Prairie House. Kuki notes that contrasting *tokonoma* with the other parts of a room creates *iki*.¹⁶⁶ A hearth in the playing room clearly mimics the horizontal shelves of two different heights, a common design of *tokonoma*. Wright did not merely mimic the form of Japanese architectural design, but he also understood the significance of *tokonoma* in a home. According to Nute, Grant Manson first suggested that Wright might have translated “the *tokonoma*, ... the focus of domestic contemplation and ceremony, into its Western counterpart, the fireplace.”¹⁶⁷ Nute points out that: “Perhaps ... we have the inspiration for Wright’s apparent translation of the *tokonoma* alcove of the Japanese domestic interior into the ‘integral’ fireplace of the Prairie House.”¹⁶⁸ Kôyama Hisao also stresses that “the central hearth in a design move of literal transposal: for the sacred recess, the **tokonoma**, Wright substituted the fireplace.”¹⁶⁹ (Bold in the original.)

Regarding these observations, we may conclude that the Robie House manifests *iki* well in many aspects. As Jordy repeatedly stresses, like all the Prairie House, the Robie House is “natural” and

¹⁶² A Japanese sliding door consisting of straight, simple wood frame and paper.

¹⁶³ A paper lantern with wood frame.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., I: 67.

¹⁶⁵ Currently, the reconstructed set of table and chairs exist at the Smart Museum in Chicago.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., I: 65.

¹⁶⁷ “Frank Lloyd Wright and the Fair of ’93,” *Art Quarterly* 16, no. 2. (summer 1953). Also see Ching-Yu Chang, “Japanese Spatial Conception – 7,” *Japan Architect*, no. 330 (October 1984): p. 64.

¹⁶⁸ Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁹ Kôyama, in Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, Forewords.

“organic.”¹⁷⁰ When one recognizes the aesthetic quality captured by Wright from Japanese “artless” art in the Robie House, the quality contributes to “the first modern American house” according to Wright, the quality shared by Edo townspeople, the quality is not *wabi* or *sabi*, but *iki*.

5. Conclusion

Kuki articulated for the first time the popular Japanese aesthetic ideal, *iki*, but excessively philosophized in his own struggle over his ambivalent feeling toward the West and modernity. In order to reconcile them to form the Japanese identity in the interwar period, Kuki somewhat slighted the qualities of everyday life, vulgarity, frivolity, and casualness – or the liveliness of everyday life – and he manipulated *iki* to be backed up by “the Way of Warriors” in his nationalistic attempt. Three criticisms have revealed his limitation. First, I have noted the inconsistency (as much as his own dilemma) between his methodological dependence on the West and his doubts over the Western understanding of *iki*. Second, I have discussed the issue of manipulating the origin of *iki* and displacing the crucial role of Edo townspeople, *Edokko*, as bearers of *iki* to the warriors class, whose authoritative nature was quite foreign to and incompatible with the casualness of *iki*. Third, I have pointed out Kuki’s slight of the “everydayness” (*nichijō-sei*) of *iki*. Kuki effectively used Western philosophical devices to articulate *iki*, but he overemphasized the uniqueness of *iki* attributed to the “Japanese race” as if to say its value is incommunicable to non-Japanese. However, the two axes, simplicity and implicitness can be used to identify *iki* in the Western context as “non-art.” When one seeks the source of *iki* in the inseparability of life and art, *iki* is no longer inaccessible to the non-Japanese. Furthermore, examples of manifestations of *iki*, such as in Kuki’s own poems and other cultural phenomena clearly show the possibility of applying *iki* in modern and/or Western culture. In the “Western/modern” context, the Robie House by Wright manifests *iki* without necessarily depending on the possibility of a direct connection to *iki* via Japanese architecture or *ukiyo-e*.

Iki does not accept two extreme views – that it is an ideal only comprehensible to the Japanese, or that it is reducible to just another universal ideal, rather that it is a “circulative” aesthetic ideal. It would be futile to overemphasize the uniqueness or universality of Japanese aesthetics. *Iki* is certainly unique in some

¹⁷⁰ Jordy, *Progressive and academic ideals at the turn of the twentieth century*, p. 196.

way, but it is by no means incommunicable. The productive argument should be whether studying Japanese aesthetics contributes to Western aesthetics. Aesthetics of everyday does not aestheticize the parts of everyday, but rather renders the whole of everyday life aesthetic. *Iki* provides an alternative viewpoint beyond the scope of “exotic” Japan that can be summed up as “the shaking of everydayness.”

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