Seeing the Invisible: Applying Discourse Analysis to the Introduction of Senno Kuden

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Abstract
Senno Kuden (16th century) historically presents the most influential definition of ikebana, which includes both ontological and epistemological concerns in representation. Although the former contributed to the development of the common definition of ikebana as a symbolic representation of nature or the universe, the latter has been largely ignored. This study points out that the latter has not only significant meanings in understanding Senno's teaching on ikebana, but also a strong connection with the traditional Japanese aesthetics that values contemplative awareness of the transiency of beings.

Keywords: Ikebana, Japanese Aesthetics, Senno Kuden, Ikenobo, Yugen, Aware

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Introduction

Senno Kuden (16th century), oral instructions by Ikenobo Senno has several versions and they were written by Senno and other Ikenobo masters for their disciples individually (Murai & Akai, 1973; Murai, 1973). The contents were treated as secret for centuries. In the history of ikebana *Senno Kuden* is regarded as "the first example of a manual containing theoretic principles" (Kobayashi & Flavin, 2017). Inoue (2016) notes that the introduction, in particular, is the most systematic definition of the philosophy of ikebana among the existing medieval ikebana texts.

Senno Kuden historically presents the most influential definition of ikebana, which actually includes both ontological and epistemological concerns in representation. In defining ikebana *Senno Kuden* mentioned two key terms, *onozukara naru sugata* (essence) and *yoroshiki omokage* (good image). However, it is almost always the case in the discussion of *Senno Kuden* that the focus is on *onozukara naru sugata*, and *yoroshiki omokage* has not been received much attention.

For instance, Inoue (2016) summarised *Senno Kuden* by saying that it declared that their school (Ikenobo) did not just appreciate beautiful flowers but also expressed the essence of nature as a whole. In his discussion *yoroshiki omokage* is not included. A similar attitude is apparent on the official site of the Ikenobo school (https://www.ikenobo.jp).

> Ikenobo, unlike previous schools of flowers arrangement, doesn't just appreciate beautiful flowers, but also recognises the poetic features of grasses and trees, sometimes using dead branches to express the features of nature on the table.

Here again the interpretation of *yoroshiki omokage* is omitted. "The poetic features of grasses and trees" is apparently not the translation of *yoroshiki omokage* but that of *souboku no fukyo* in *Senno Kuden.* As we will see later, while those terms have similar meanings, there are small but importance differences between them.

It is probably because the phrase, *onozukara naru sugata* is clear and easy to understand, and also because it contributed historically to the development of the common definition of ikebana as a symbolic representation of nature or the universe. Inoue (2016) pointed out that in many *kadosho* (texts on ikebana) from the end of the Muromachi period (1336 - 1573) to the first half of the Edo period (1603 - 1867), the discussion of the foundation of ikebana was influenced by *Senno Kuden*. Generally they agree that the fundamental essence of ikebana is not just appreciating the beauty of flowers but expressing the essence of nature. Inoue as well as most ikebana masters in history accurately understood that ikebana expresses nature itself, the essence (*onozukara naru sugata*) of nature as a whole (*noyama mizube* - literally means field, mountain, & waterfront), which is different from nature as we can perceive it. In other words, ikebana is not a small-scale representation of nature but a symbolic expression of something we cannot objectively perceive in nature.

However, this study reexamines the concept of *yoroshiki omokage* in order to fully understand the philosophy of ikebana presented by Senno. This study further suggests that it might be this forgotten aspect of ikebana that shares common features with various Japanese art theories, or "the aesthetic Way" (Izutsu & Izutsu, 1981).

Methodology

This study applies discourse analysis to *Senno Kuden*. Discourse analysis explores "patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used" (Paltridge, 2012). Noting that the complete meaning of a word is always contextual, Paltridge quotes claims by Cameron and Kulick (2003:29):

> Words in isolation are not the issue. It is in discourse - the use of language in specific contexts - that words acquire meaning. (…) We cannot understand the significance of any word unless we attend closely to its relationship to other words and to the discourse (indeed, the competing discourses) in which words are always embedded. (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p. 29)

This study looks into the historical contexts of *Senno Kuden*, and analyses its key terms from how they are embedded in their discourses.

Analysis

The 1542 version *Senno Kuden* consists of four parts: an introduction, a section about *tatehana*, a section about flowers for special occasions and contraindications, and an epilogue. This study focuses on the first two sentences of the 14 sentences in the introduction.

1. 瓶に花を挿す事いにしへよりあるとはきき侍れど、
2. それは美しき花をのみ賞して、
3. 草木の風興をもわきまへず、
4. 只さし生けたる計りなり
5. この一流は
6. 野山水辺をのずからなる姿を居上にあらはし、
7. 花葉を飾り、よろしき面かげを本とし、
8. 先祖さし初めしより一道世に広まりて、都鄙のもて遊びとなれる也

(1) I hear that arranging flowers has been practiced since ancient times,
(2) but those in this practice only appreciate beautiful flowers,
(3) without appreciating the poetic potential of grasses and trees,
(4) and they are simply making arrangements.
(5) In this school (Ikenobo),
(6) expressing the essence (*onozukara naru sugata*) of nature as a whole (*noyama mizube*) on a table,
(7) arranging flowers and leaves, based on their good images (*yoroshiki omokage*),
(8) our ancestors started to make arrangements, and it became a popular past time in towns and in the country.

Murai (1973) states that *Senno Kuden* was one of many ikebana texts produced in the early 16th century, when the *rikka* style was developing from the *tatebana* style, and ikebana was accepted by a growing number of people. Under such social conditions, it is assumed that the social function of the text was to establish the identity of Ikenobo school. The first sentence (1 to 4) of the introduction seems to criticise the general practice of flower arranging as not appreciating the poetry of grasses and branches. The second sentence (5 - 8) is the antithesis

of the first sentence at the syntax level. While this sentence, in particular sections (6) and (7), is highly valued as a concise statement of ikebana philosophy, its interpretation has been rather ambiguous. Considering that first sentence (1- 4) and the second sentence (5 - 8) are in contrast, it is reasonable to assume that the phrase, "the poetic potential of grasses and trees" in (3) is paraphrased in (6) and (7). Content is repeated but it is conveyed with different expressions.

In the second sentence, the grammatical relationship is not very clear among the three phrases, (6) expressing the essence of nature as a whole on a table, (first half of 7) arranging flowers and leaves, and (second half of 7) based on good images (*yoroshiki omokage*). As a result, a couple of interpretations are possible. However, it is most probable to take a pause after (6) and join the first half of (7) and the second half of (7). The sentence structure would be as follow:

(6) expressing the essence (*onozukara naru sugata*) of nature as a whole (*noyama mizube*) on a table,
(7) arranging flowers and leaves, based on their good images (*yoroshiki omokage*)

→ (8) our ancestors started to arrange, …

Grammatically speaking, those two phrases, (6) and (7) are in parallel modifying (8) and should be treated equally within the sentence. As mentioned, however, the focus has been on (6), and (7) has been almost ignored. Assuming that within the second sentence (5 - 8), the relationship between (6) and (7) is close to parallelism, repeating a structure but filling it with new elements, the meanings of the following each key words (nouns) in each phrase are to be interpreted in a correlated manner.

(6) *noyama mizube* (field, mountain & waterfront) / *onozukara naru sugata* (their essence or original images)
(7) *hana ha* (flowers & leaves) / *yoroshiki omokage* (their good images)

In (7), first we need to note that the original meaning of *omokage* is the image of something we can see only vaguely. It is often used to describe our inner image of the person who has gone forever. It may be possible to interpret this phrase from a perspective roughly based on phenomenology[1]. While it is hard to clearly represent what we perceive through our senses, it is possible to represent what we can perceive vaguely as an essence and share that perception with others. Probably *Senno* was aware that what we perceive (*omokage*) is actually only a

[1] The philosophy of intuition takes two forms: the *Wesenschau* of Husserl, which converts lived experience into ideal essences before a pure spectator, and Bergsonian intuition, which seeks to coincide with its object by experiencing it from within. Against the first, Merleau-Ponty argues that the world's givenness is more primordial than the ideal essence; the essence is a variant of the real, not its condition of possibility. Essences are not ultimately detachable from the sensible but are its "invisible" or its latent structure of differentiation. Against a return to the immediacy of coincidence or a nostalgia for the pre-reflective, Merleau-Ponty holds that there is no self-identical presence to rejoin; the "immediate" essentially involves distance and non-coincidence. Consequently, truth must be redefined as "a privative non-coinciding, a coinciding from afar, a divergence, and something like a 'good error'" (V&I: 166/124–25).

Toadvine, Ted, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty", The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/merleau-ponty/>.

small part of the essence of the material, its totality or a more complete form of *omokage*, which he called "*yoroshiki*"(good) "*omokage*" (vague image).

It then becomes clear that Senno actually uses the same logic in (6) and (7). *Onozukara naru sugata* consists of modifier, *onozukaranaru* (its original) and noun, *sugata* (form, appearance). With that modifier *sugata* gains metaphysical connotation, and this section is often interpreted as the essence. Similarly, it is possible to interpret that *omokage* gains metaphysical connotation with the modifier, *yoroshiki*. While *omokage* can be metaphysical, *yoroshiki* is a criteria of *omokage*, so it can be interpreted as a higher (or purer) level of metaphysics.

Focusing on the relationship of the two nouns in each phrase, it is now clear that the first item represents observable objects whose entirety is not perceivable, while the second item represents their essence.

(6) *noyama mizube* (field, mountain & waterfront - observable phenomena) / *onozukara naru sugata* (their essence)
(7) *hana ha* (flowers & leaves - observable phenomena) / *yoroshiki omokage* (their good images - essence)

Therefore, Senno's teaching could be interpreted that ikebana is a product that represents the essence of nature, toward the entirety of the universe, and that ikebana originates from the perception of the entirety of the materials as a base. While the former is seemingly more concerned with ontology, the latter seems to be more concerned with epistemology. Although the latter point has been largely neglected, it could represent an important attitude to nature in ikebana.

Discussion

In interpreting the philosophy of ikebana presented in *Senno Kuden*, it is necessary to refer to "peculiarity" that is "deeply and fundamentally involved in the various aspects of that Japanese art-theory, called *gei-doh*, namely the aesthetic Way" (Izutsu & Izutsu, 1981: 28). In their discussion about *Zeami* (1363 - 1443) and *Yugen,* an important key term in the field of Japanese aesthetics, Izutsu and Izutsu (1981) pay special attention to artists' gaze focused upon the phenomenal world.

> Standing on the basis of the metaphysical and epistemological awareness that all possible things and events that are articulated out into existence in this empirical reality through our five senses indicate neither their sole mode of being nor their sole existential significance, these poets and artists gaze intently at the invisible beyond the visible. They exert themselves to go beyond their sensuous limitations. What seems to justify them in establishing *yugen* as a value word is mainly their transcendental aspiration to attain the unattainable, to expand their sensuous ability and even enlarge the domain of their cognition. (Izutsu & Izutsu, 1981, p. 28)

As Izutsu and Izutsu (1981) state, the inner characterisation of *yugen* is applicable to most typically Japanese aesthetic key terms, such as *aware, wabi, sabi* etc. It is also applicable in analysing Senno's aesthetics. As our analysis showed, while *hana ha* (flowers and leaves) were observable phenomena in (7), *yoroshiki omokage* (their good images) acquired a metaphysical connotation, and they can be interpreted as pure essence. However, according

to Izutsu and Izutsu (1981), the relationship between the visible (flowers and leaves) and the invisible (their pure essence) needs to be posited as far more dynamic.

Izutsu and Izutsu (1981) further emphasise that in the idea of *yugen,* the aesthetic factor is a feeling of aesthetic harmony arising from contemplative awareness. It is based on the awareness of "insubstantiality and elimination of the human existential field" (Izutsu & Izutsu, 1981:28). Although our analysis focused on the first two sentences of *Senno Kuden*, its introduction contains multiple sections related to the concept of the impermanence of worldly things often referring to in Buddhism[2]. It is reasonable to assume Senno's philosophy of ikebana is similar to the concept of aesthetic harmony as described by Itsuzu and Itsuzu as "fermented in and induced from contemplative awareness"(Izutsu & Izutsu, 1981: 28).

Although Izutsu and Izutsu (1981)'s argument of *yugen* can be suggestive of "the typical inner configuration of Japanese aesthetics" (1981: 27) in general, it is notable that the configuration could be interpreted in terms of various philosophical approaches including Zen Buddhism and Confucius philosophy. For instance, Shimbo (2021) looked into the Senno's theory applying Kakubutsu Kyuri, a Confucius philosophy explaining the origin of all beings from both ontological and epistemological perspectives. It assumes a pure metaphysical principle, *Ri* at the point of transformation from the metaphysical to the physical. If the origin of ikebana in Senno's theory is interpreted as metaphysical elements rather than perceivable natural materials, it is reasonable to assume that Senno recognises "*yoroshi*"(goodness/aptness/appropriateness) as a pure metaphysical principle to transform a metaphysical essence, "*omokage*" (vague image) to ikebana. Referring to Kakubutsu Kyuri, which assumes a pure metaphysical principle at the point of transformation, at the point where metaphysical essence, "*omokage*" is transformed to ikebana, pure metaphysical principle, "*yoroshi*" (goodness) functions as the foundation.

Kakubutsu Kyuri:
Mihatsu (Pre-being, Metaphysical)↗*Ri* (pure metaphysical principle)↘ *Kihatsu* (Post being, Physical)
Senno:
Omokage (vague image) ↗ *Yoroshi* (goodness) ↘ Ikebana

Referring Kakubutsu Kyuri, *yoroshi* (goodness) can be interpreted as *Ri*, foundation of transferring pre-being, *omokage* to post being, ikebana.

Although such philosophical discussions may help clarify the concepts and nature of the certain cultural phenomena, any judgements about them should be made carefully. It is not appropriate to interpret *Senno Kuden* solely from Confucius views. Similarly, while some aspects of Japanese culture such as poetry and gardens may be interpreted from Zen Buddhism, it may not be the sole or the most important foundation of Japanese culture.

Conclusion

[2] For instance, Senno states as follow in the 14th sentence of *Senno Kuden*'s introduction. Those who practice this would not only relax seeing grasses and trees, become aware of passing time and be moved for a while but also may obtain an opportunity for enlightenment in facing the transient nature of beings.
抑是をもてあそぶ人、草木を見て心をのべ、春秋のあわれをおもひ、いったんの興をもよおすのみならず、飛花落葉の風の前にかかるさとりの種をうる事もや侍らん。

Discourse analysis revealed that in *Senno Kuden* a key term, *yoroshiki omokage* has a significant meaning that has not been recognised adequately. It further suggests that *yoroshiki omokage* as well as *onozukaranaru sugata* is used in the metaphysical sense. While *onozukaranaru sugata* defines ikebana as symbolic representation of the universe, a phrase including *yoroshiki omokage* can serve to explain the origin of ikebana. Furthermore, it is the latter key term that has a strong association with the typical inner configuration of Japanese aesthetics. Senno's teaching implies that ikebana is to be made from recognising the pure essence of flowers and leaves based on a contemplative awareness of the transiency of beings.

Future studies could look into the theoretical development of Senno's teachings which have been often misinterpreted, and its connection to some of the theories that led important ikebana movements such as Free Style Ikebana Movement in 1920's (Shimbo, 2021).

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