

Uniqueness and Cultural Reconstruction.

–Methodological Model for art creation and learning.–

ROMERO GONZALEZ, Antonio Pablo*, SUMI, Atsushi

Abstract

This article, conceptually, is based on the learning process involved in the own culture appropriation through the art concepts attached to uniqueness and reconstruction. According to this, the Modern Asian art could be considered a methodological model for cultural reconstruction, transferable on the one hand to the Spanish sense of uniqueness, on the other hand we could think over its big potential for art education. Although a sort of cultural deconstruction was carried out by the Spanish painter Goya at the beginning of the XIX century, we will pay attention to the East Asia art as a conceptual frame. The process spinning around the own culture from conceptual and globalized standards, was firstly experienced in Japan, and hence spread towards South Korea, Taiwan and China.

The idea for this article is inspired partially by an initiative called *Recyclaspain*, but also by the comparative art education research between the UAM University in Madrid and the University of Toyama in Japan. *Recyclaspain*, originally, intended to create and upload pictures of artworks whose subject was related to the revision of the icons of what we usually meant by “Spanish” or constituent a sort of Spanish imagery in a national sense of uniqueness. Initially, it began as a proposal on Facebook, where a number of artists worked out with this purpose. Nevertheless, soon after it was more than evident the benefit of making real objects in clay, through the earthenware, is a very ancestral material and technique used in Spain from the Neolithic Age. It follows that the term clay evolved into another: *reci-clay-Spain*. Finally, we will point out some reflections about the use of this methodology for art education in Japan and Spain, given that in both countries does exist an important national cultural heritage that makes sense the use of both concepts: cultural reconstruction and uniqueness.

keywords: uniqueness, culture, assimilation, hybridation, identity, icon, reconstruction, learning.

1. Problem and purpose of the research

This article could be a proposal for artistic action, using a methodology inspired in the process of cultural change operated in East Asia since the middle of the XX century, where amazing cultural transformations have merged as a result, including art and art education.

Although we do not normally think about it, we all know that some things that were originally from West, once imported to Japan, then, would be re-exported to West as new culture. When we speak of the local and the global, we are aware of the relativity of these concepts if we analyze the cultural exchanges and their typical round trips between East and West. Additionally of those well documented exchanges, there have been similarities and relationships that have been completely unnoticed, such as the similarity between the Spanish visual poet Felipe Bosso and the Japanese visual poet Niikuni Seichi, and specially the

relationship between the Spanish painter Miró and the Japanese poet Shuzo Taquiguchi.

Turning to art education, and related to the impact of Japanese visual culture, Nobuo Tsuji (2005: 125), in his book, *History of Japanese Art* (Nihon Bijutsu no Rekishi), wrote, “Japanese comics have been known globally as ‘manga’, and in Japan, they have been taken up as exhibition themes of museums, being frequently critiqued.” The words, “manga” and “anime” - a Japanese abbreviated word for ‘animation’, are accepted internationally. Isao Takahata (1999) called “choju-giga” (caricatures of frolicking animals and birds) ‘12th-century animation’, and explains that they were drawn in the similar manner as today’s ‘anime’. He says that the culture of painting and drawing that had been originally imported from China became Japanese painting, and that already was the origin of today’s ‘anime’. In the art education guideline for junior high schools set by the Course of Study that defined the standard of Japanese education in 1998 includes as its contents, ‘video image, manga, media art and illustration, and its 2008 revised version

* Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

also included, though their positioning was shifted, in the ‘points of consideration’.

Thus, if we do consider the continuous changes operating in art and art education in East Asia and specifically in Japan, this methodology point out every manifestation of the national culture.

The challenge of this art methodology is to rework the icons that are part of the repertoire of the collective memory, sometimes present in a hidden corner of our homes as a souvenir. In this way, recalling the idea of global souvenir (low culture), does operates the Snake Kitty (pictures 3, 4, 5), after the Hello Kitty character created by the Japanese multinational Sanrio. This character, originally local and a consequence of the Japanese commercial visual culture, has become a sort of consumerism’s global Goodness. In this proposal, *Kitty* is hybridized with the Minoan *Snake Goddess* (pictures 3 and 4), also available as a cultural souvenir (high culture). The Minoan is a strong subtract in the Mediterranean culture which is the ground, in addition to the Atlantic and Celtic culture, of the Spanish identity.

This is a call for the combination of memory (heritage) and present (globalization), an invitation to work with those images that somehow constitutes a collective idea of what Spanishness [or any else nationality] is; admitting if such a concept does effectively exists.

2. Assimilation, transformation and cultural appropriation in East Asia

Historically, the East Asian cultures have been changing and progressing along the centuries in different cycles; but currently we associate transformation in Asia with the opening of Asian countries to the international trade. There are precedents, like the *rangaku* culture in Japan or the influence of the Italian painter Castiglioni in the *Kangxi* emperor court in China. But if we do regard to the cultural transformation operated in East Asia as a sort of westernization, the process does appear during the semi colonial rule operated after the *Opium’s War* between China and Britain, and during the rising of the Meiji era in Japan (after the *Black Ships* arrival). This happens to occur

during the second half of the XIX century, and under the pressure of the western powers in the East Asia region. Clark (1998) links the assimilation process with that he calls transfer models, which basically rely on the political situation and the socio-economic structure of countries of East Asia over the last 150 years. In relation to these transfer models, there are basically three contexts in which the assimilation is carried out: non colonial, semi colonial, and colonial rule. In addition I point out that there is another interesting context that I call imperialist. In this sense, remarkable is the case of Japan, which has gone through each of these models, including the imperialist, which would make Japan a model and reference in the countries where assimilation is not so thoroughly documented.

Although assimilation in China and Japan was firstly focused on technology (under the Neo-Confucianism concepts of essence *t’i* for eastern thinking and function *yung* for western devices), soon after was addressed to philosophy and art. Therefore, we would like to point out the figure of Ernest Fenollosa, an American citizen from Spanish origins, which helped found the *Tokyo School of fine Arts* and the *Imperial Museum of Tokyo*. Fenollosa helped as well to create the art concepts of *Nihonga* and *Yoga*, closely related to local and uniqueness (local) versus academic and standardized (global).

The first attempts to hybridize the Western philosophical tradition and the Eastern was carried out by Nishida Kitaro whose philosophy, according to Oshima (2006) could be summarized in two points: the vindication of an Eastern thought based on the logic of the place (locus centrism) and the dialectic of nothingness, against a Western thought based on the reason (logo centrism). After Nakagawa (2006), this is the reason which explains the importance given in the eastern culture to the empty space concept 無 (mu in Japanese language).

Following with the transformations operated in the local culture in East Asia, these were catalyzed under the effects of assimilation (Romero 2008), and produced the interesting paradox that the “same” turns into the “other”: assimilation generates difference; therefore we do consider sameness and difference as connected concepts. On the other hand, there are a

number of eastern distinctive elements based on a cultural heritage shared by East Asian countries, e.g. the Chinese Writing; genres and traditional art techniques such as Calligraphy, Landscape Painting, and linear formats (Scroll Painting). Not to mention the philosophical conceptions of Buddhism and Taoism, as well as its aesthetic implications.

This process, with these stages, could perfectly suits to other cultures. In Spain we could find that the difference in relation to other European countries rely precisely on the hybridization of many cultural layers after different civilizations (as did Japan, Spain has been through non colonial, semi colonial, colonial and imperial stages),

One of the meanings of difference is the variety between things of the same kind. Another meaning, taken from the field of logic, would be the property of those things that possessing a nature or common Constitution [such as art], they differ or differentiate themselves in some characteristics, whether essential or accidental.

Aristoteles (2014), in the *Organon*, considers the difference as one of the *predicable* or universal concepts. The scholastic tradition, ranked the universal concepts in gender, kind, difference, property & casualty, creating the framework for medieval philosophical-theological development of the logic, e.g. how we think, how we know and how we know reality, something like the germ of positivism and rationalism precedent, articulated through the dialectic and rhetoric.

There is a Western philosophical tradition that, according to Deleuze (2011), presents a false idea of difference, replacing the affirmation of difference as such by its negation, to subsume it into a superior identity. A game in which the difference is canceled to find a conceptual superstructure that is strongly related to Western thought and philosophy. In opposition, Nietzsche (2000) celebrates the multiple, the manifold, the random, the difference in itself.

To overtake this ambitious task we will manage the concepts of deconstruction, appropriation and reconstruction, which are strongly linked to Postmodernism in the global artistic panorama, but have specific features in East Asia (Romero 2008).

These specific features can be draw out from the art works which are used to express a new gaze over the own or unique and over the global. The picture, taken by Shinoyama in 1966, of the Japanese novelist Mishima performing as St. Sebastian, truly opens the period of Asian art that is considered to be marked by reprocessing the Western's culture in order to produce a cultural hybridization (Romero 2008).

This picture means the beginning of a long series of artists in East Asia which have entered into the wave of globalized postmodern appropriationism trend.

Appropriation, originally, might perfectly reflect the Western preoccupation about the author, including intellectual property, in opposition to the Eastern mentality, where there was not such a strong concern about these issues of authorship. In this sense, Wu Hung (2007) quotes Leng Lin, who notices in Chinese artists a manifestation of will to share a global community in Chinese appropriations, since a group of painters and photographers provide images, often satirical, of the intimate relationship between Chinese art and the process of general globalization lived in the middle nineties of the XX century.

Chinese artists blends their own images with foreign symbols as placing themselves in a fictitious postmodern environment, producing hybrid images involving cultural identity with an exaggerated sense of cosmopolitanism.

In opposition, in the current Korean reconstructive panorama (Romero 2008), sensitivity is more directed toward a lost nature's environment and to a religiosity that ranges from Buddhism to Christianity.

The concepts of deconstruction and reconstruction are partially related to a sort of "Back to the Future", where present and future are involved in a reinvented and eclectic past. This new reading of history flows into a sort of Magic Realism close to a nostalgic aesthetic, which is one of the essential key points (Romero 2008) to understand the Miyazaki's films.

The adaptation of these concepts to the methodology that we do propose is related to the creativity concepts of fantasy, flexibility, problem solving, recombination (hybridization), and originality. Although the cultural identity issue is crucial in the work of

many artists, this methodology integrates it consciously on the creative process.

3. Hybridation, dialogism and reconstruction

Inspired by Socrates, the dialogic rhetoric of Bakhtin (1984) is a way to compare our own ideas in relation to others, in relation to cultural differences. This makes particularly suitable to this research the notion of hybridization suggested by Bakhtin as a form of cultural negotiation, negotiation based on a dialogue that transcends the discursive uniqueness. The interest in the dialogic method is, according to Bakhtin, the fact that we only truly understand our own culture from the point of view of other cultures. The notion of Bakhtin about hybridization is a form of cultural negotiation, the perception of a culture from the perspective of other, comparing which is the best in each of them, but not from a confrontation. In addition, the idea is to negotiate the other's point of view with yours's.

After Zappen (2000), there is a difference between the American concept of Multiculturalism, which emphasizes the rights and dignity of individuals, considered as "minorities themselves", with the Russian concept of Transculturalism, which basically assume that each of us is incomplete without the other. Upon this, not a human (and not a culture) is a complete entity, so all of us are called to restore, through our perceptions and cultural concerns, the whole totality that nature (and local/global culture) does not give us.

In this methodology, both concepts of difference and assimilation are part of a process of continuous dialogic exchange. Both are discussed in the so called "third space" by Bhabha (2000), who describes cultural hybridity, as the debate between the "self" and the "other", which does not imply in no way the end of the cultural difference, rather the opposite.

The desire of the difference is a key point when approaching local art in different cultures, mainly thanks to the guarantee of commercial success. In this sense, Zohar (2000) says that to establish the uniqueness of another culture can be problematic, since in

the case of Japan (and other countries), the problem lies in the establishment of essentialist reading modes for the reading of "Japanese", and then one must be prevented on the (Western/Other) desire of the Japanese as a unique cultural space. The result of this desire produces exhibitions of Japanese (or other cultures) which aim to show the meanings and objects representing according, to the Western/Exotic imagination, "difference" and uniqueness of the culture in question.

This could be perfectly applied to the foreign gaze over the Spanish sense of uniqueness and identity, built on the stereotypes carried out during the dictatorship of Franco. The dictatorship succeed creating a friendly, naïve and backward image of Spain for the tourism industry that could be condensed in a very simplistic discourse, based on the essence of the Spanish fake uniqueness. As a result two interesting sentences were extended widely by the Tourism minister: "Spain is different" (because of the catholic essentialism and traditions) and "Everything under the sun" (because in Spain there are no worries: fiesta, flamenco and siesta). This fiction has been so deeply installed that nowadays, in despite the Spanish scientific and technological achievements, still remain in the collective consciousness. These stereotypes, originally created for the foreigners, where assumed like authentic by many Spanish who ignored the fiction built on their own culture.

Coming back to the processes carried out by Asian artists, they think about their own culture throughout the review, transformation and hybridization of a number of national icons and art genres and procedures such as calligraphy, scroll painting, sumi painting, suibokuga, pottery, etc. This ability to revisit the tradition, remaking and removing the land of their roots, has been performed by Japanese, Korean and Chinese artists.

As it was point out before, the rework of Spanish symbols and icons is not new for the Spanish art's history. Francisco de Goya was the first modern artist who anticipated the concept of deconstruction and appropriation of his own culture as it may be found in his series of "Caprices" and "Follies". One hundred

and twenty years later, in the XX century, the famous Spanish artist Dali and the film director Buñuel made the film “Un perro andaluz” (An Andalusian Dog, 1929), where they deconstruct some features of the Spanish culture, which are specially related to the surrealism movement.

4. The artworks: Estrangement, uniqueness and globalization

The estrangement is an important concept to get the necessary distance if we want to carry out the reconstruction process.

Related to the concept of estrangement, Huizinga (in Parkes, 2000, p.339) invites to evoke the memory of a nation, imagining and enjoying it in a vision. After, it will be perceived the beauty of his art, the vigor of their lifestyle, their history, their landscapes, the wisdom of his thought; the scent of their vineyards ...Perhaps Huizinga would agree that this is mainly essentialism thinking. Nevertheless, this kind of evocation could help us to feel estrangement with our own culture if we do apply what we do feel when evoking another countries and cultures.

Brown (2000) points out the experience of the Japanese artist Akio Takamori, and the importance of the cultural intersections living in another country, which is noticeable in Takamori art works, which reflect nostalgia and memories, the idea of the artist related to the quality of being Japanese abroad. Takamori has been managing the issue of identity. Since he lives in the USA, he always says to be conscious of being Asian (figure) in a society that is mostly Caucasian (background). Conversely, when he is in Japan, looks like a figure against the same background walking with the crowd. So curious about figure and background, he will search a visual language on ceramics to express these feelings. Therefore, Takamori noticed estrangement in USA but also self-estrangement in Japan. When you see something or someone against a different background, it is perceived differently. In others words, figure and background are closely related to difference and sameness. These are not always perceptible, not matter how much we attempt to create and establish connections

between local symbols, traditions and globalization.

In the artworks that we do present in this research we manage a number of concepts: but mainly self-estrangement, assimilation and reconstruction. Another reference related to postmodernism and estrangement, are visual strategies such as “visual metaphors” and “impossible objects”, which easily can be noticed in the artworks of the Spanish artist Madoz and the French artist Carelman, respectively.

With regard to the reconstruction concept, we would list some considerations:

1. Remarkably, Spain is living a special time and many things are changing, socially and economically, in addition local nationalisms arising. Besides, the big crisis that begun in 2008, has opened a time for questioning, time for reflection.
2. There is a big potential for the Spanish’s sense of uniqueness, with a number of traditional icons and symbols to rework. Nevertheless, in Spain this sense is associated to a former undeveloped stage of the country, and subsequently is a difficult matter.
3. The third is related to politics and religion, specifically to a sort of catholic conservative reconstruction wave. This point means a politic position and a potential religious conflict whose direct precedent is the Spanish Civil War in the XX century.
4. Usually in Spain, the term uniqueness is associated with local and popular culture, subsequently low culture. In contrast, the global art trends are associated to high culture. Contradictorily, for current art trends, influenced by postmodernism, the concepts low, high, local or global have a flexible and ambiguous consideration.

The mentioned conflict in Spain is partly related to the social cohesion. We will connect the social cohesion to the particular way of considering the membership of each individual to a social group or another. Tada (2007) has appreciated different degrees of affiliation to tradition and modernity.

There is a wide range of combinations between these, and a multitude of cultural variations, which not always satisfies the Spanish social crisis.

All the illustrations, excepting the picture 2 (Zhou Wendu after Duchamp), have been made in order to reconstruct the Spanish symbols using the technique of earthenware. All of them are based on icons of the Spanish popular culture, but equally all of them are hybridized with the global culture, embodied in the picture 3 by *Hello Kitty* (low) and by the French artist Duchamp (high) in the picture 6.

As can be expected, it is really difficult and complex to deal with this idea, since identity is built on a huge variety of concepts and ideas, many of them even contradictories. We do find out stimulating and challenging this difficulty, as a puzzle to solve in the fictionist (and creative) of building identities.

In relation to this challenge, the “Botijo (earthenware pitcher) Fakir” (picture 1), embodies the complicate endeavor to solve. The nails that are all around the surface represents the sharpness and roughness of facing the Spanish identity, fragmented but enriched by different cultures and languages which shares a relatively small country. The fakir bed of nails is like the ground where underlies the complex Spanish identity. In addition, the art work “Earthenware pitcher Duchamp” (picture 6) is directly inspired by the Chinese artist Zhou Wendu, “(No title”, picture 2), who destroys (deconstruction) an urinary of Duchamp (Fontaine) to create a sort of a new Ming dynasty Vase (reconstruction).

On the other hand the Japanese artist Murakami works closely remaking the Japanese visual culture, which inspires the Spanish Kitty project (pictures 3, 4, 5), which subsequently combine global with local.

This way of making art probably supposes for many Spaniards a fiction (even a delirium), but in despite of its fictional character, it happen to be extremely recognizable by everyone.

5. Conclusion and possibilities in education. A Japanese and Spanish point of view

Following the aforementioned, and in order to work through the cultural heritage in Spain, we do believe that earthenware, one of the most important crafts in Spain, is a privileged way for this approach

for cultural recycling, rediscovering objects and icons of the cultural heritage, balancing reflection and irony. Also, we should incorporate concepts such as justice, truth and mercy, so important for our recent history. Under these circumstances, reconstruction is a necessary concept to reduce the effect of the conflicts that are still dividing the Spanish society.

For the purpose of expanding the possibilities in education, flexible responses to receive the movement of the world’s visual cultures and the national’s own culture in a natural way are necessary. Needless to say, all kinds of visual information are flowing around children through the media. In the past, we had an opportunity to analyze children’s artworks from Spain, Korea, Taiwan and Japan (Youth Culture from Teenager’s Drawings, 2012), where we were able to confirm the fact that the characters, icons and phenomena of various sub-cultures provided through the media moved beyond national boundaries and were influencing the artistic expression of children. In the classroom’s practices without strict regulations by teachers, children’s expressions were highly free and flexible.

The issue seems to be with the teachers who are in the position of accepting such global visual cultures. The cultural exchanges in art discussed in this article have been conducted quite naturally throughout the long history of humankind. Of course there were a number of people who attempted to actively interact with the Spanish artists as Joan Miró through poetry, such as did Shuzo Takiguchi (Shuzo Takiguchi, Joan Miró, Heibonsha,1978).

However, in the same way as Ukiyo-e during the end of the Edo Period, which was firstly appreciated by the Westerners as *Japonism* and which then made the Japanese realize its value (Tsuji, 2005), the current sub-cultures such as animations and comics were also firstly acclaimed overseas and then received attention, which elevated the value of these works to the position in which they were picked up by the art education in Japan. Japanese people may have a tendency for not easily realizing the value of the culture of their own country. The same can be said of the teachers in European countries such as those in Spain, which has

such a wonderful art history.

We should not forget that understanding the value of our own culture generates flexible cultural exchanges, which will lead to the creation of further new expressions. Children have an ability to accept cultural differences flexibly. For art education, this is a crucial point.

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In this paper Romero, A is writing basically, Sumi, A has been retouched to Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 by the position of art education in Japan.

(2016年 5月20日受付)

(2016年 7月11日受理)



Picture 1. Botijo Fakir, Romero. Earthenware



Picture 2. No title, Zhou Wendu. Porcelaine



Picture 3. Snake Kitties, Romero. Porcelaine



Picture 4. Snake Kitty (middle), Romero. Raku. Left Minoan Snake Goddess. Right Kitty Goddess, Romero. Photo collage



Picture 5. Kitty earthenware pitcher, Romero. Earthenware



Picture 6. Duchamp earthenware pitchers, Romero. Earthenware