

GARDENS AND THE WRAPPING OF SPACE IN JAPAN: SOME BENEFITS OF A BALINESE INSIGHT

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Introduction

FROM the summer of 1986 to the spring of 1987, Andrew Duff-Cooper and I were both guests, if in slightly different capacities, of Professor Suzuki Takao at the Centre for the Study of Language and Culture, Keio University, Tokyo. This was during the early period of Andrew's stay in Japan when he was vigorously absorbing Japanese ideas, which he interpreted very much in a Balinese context and which he was always keen to deliberate. I was some two hours away by train, engaged in fieldwork on speech levels and politeness, a topic that later widened to encompass a broader range of phenomena I came to dub 'wrapping'. During my periodic visits to Tokyo, and one memorable visit Andrew made to the seaside town where I was living, we had ample opportunity to exchange views on our respective interests. More formally, each of us was asked to make a presentation to seminars run by Professor Suzuki. Andrew's contribution, which appeared later in an occasional publication of his subsequent Japanese university, Seitoku, not only drew on our conversations, but raised questions and ideas I still find stimulating in my own research.

Andrew's paper, '*Oku* in Aspects of Japanese Ideology' (Duff-Cooper 1991), is concerned with the notion of *oku* in Japanese thought, a notion which may be roughly translated as 'depth' but whose further interpretation occupies a large part of the paper, and which Andrew eventually concluded constitutes a 'polythetic class' (ibid.: 18), 'not likely to prove useful in the structural analysis of social

facts' (ibid.: 20). He contrasted *oku* with the notion of 'centre', 'which can be defined supra-culturally in quasi-formal monothetic terms; and which can be employed...in the comparative analysis of forms of life such as the Balinese and the Japanese which have almost no historical or linguistic connections with one another' (ibid.: 18).

It was the Balinese/Japanese comparison that was immediately most interesting to me, for reasons I will shortly elaborate, and I did not at the time find myself entirely in agreement with Andrew's interpretation of *oku* and its lack of analytical usefulness. On a recent re-reading of the paper, however, and further down the line of my own thinking, I began to see new value in considering the two notions together. I have since carried out some research on Japanese gardens, a subject that takes up a substantial section of Andrew's consideration of *oku*, and his paper once again gave me pause for thought. The present essay forms a kind of synthesis of these ideas, and adds (I hope) another layer to the supracultural theories of wrapping.

The Significance or Otherwise of the Wrapped

One of the important benefits of a consideration of 'wrapping' is that one builds up a resistance to what I perceive as a Western tendency to unwrap, to get at the 'essence' of everything, often throwing away the wrapping in the process. In the Japanese case, the paradigm for the idea was the wrapping of gifts, often multi-layered, exquisitely beautiful, and itself much more significant than the actual object inside, though the total monetary value should be clear. Parallel ideas can be applied to the wrapping of the body, to the wrapping of space, to language as a form of wrapping, and to the way social arrangements may be seen as people wrapping people (Hendry 1988, 1989, 1990, 1993). Interpretations of a social system may also be described as a form of wrapping (Hendry 1993: 6-7; cf. Ben-Ari *et al.* (eds.) 1990).

In moving the focus away from 'unwrapping' in order to concentrate on the wrapping itself, one is able to learn a great deal that may otherwise be overlooked. A question remains, however, about the relative value that should be given to the 'wrapped', and, indeed, about whether it is always necessary to pay attention to that which is being enclosed, if anything. Objects chosen as gifts in Japan are highly stylized, and their value well known, but they may often be replaced by cash, if suitably wrapped. Clothes must be worn by someone, but in formal situations the person inside behaves in a stylized manner so determined by the occasion and the garment they are wearing that they could be (and sometimes are) replaced by a substitute or even a machine. The uniformed figures who appear, bowing, on the screen when a card is inserted into a Japanese cash machine are just one electronic example. They represent the employee who previously would

stand in the entrance to the bank, and still does stand in the entrance to high-quality restaurants and department stores, to call out words of welcome to the customers as they arrive. The words these welcomers use are an example of linguistic wrapping, and small voices utter the same phrases as the figure in the cash machine bows. It is all part of the social wrapping that presents a company or enterprise to the world outside, and, at least in Japan, wrapping is regarded as an extremely important part of a package.

Companies have products to sell, of course, though their quality, provenance or reputation may again be more important than the nature of the goods themselves, but in a consideration of the wrapping of space, things are even less straightforward. Religious buildings in Japan provide a good example. Worship is very often carried out at the entrance to the building or even at the gate, leading one Western architect to observe that Japanese shrine buildings 'are in effect not meant to be spaces to enter, but rather remote places to approach and arrive at' (Bognar 1985: 44). Shinto buildings enshrine a sacred object, usually wrapped up very securely and further enclosed behind a series of doors, but sometimes it is a mirror that would simply reflect the gaze back out again.

Roland Barthes' intriguing if not highly informed account of things Japanese includes a chapter entitled 'Center-City, Empty Center' (1983: 30–32), the idea of which has been reiterated by the better-informed Bognar (1985: 67). At shrines, one may buy a variety of amulets and talismans, for general protection and other more specific purposes. Many of these consist in little more than a couple of layers of folded paper, or a little cloth bag, perhaps wrapped only around a piece of card to give them shape (see also Maki 1979: 59). They may be further enclosed in other packets or cloth, and some are thought to lose their power if they become unwrapped (McVeigh 1991: 151–6).

In the Japanese view there is a certain power attached to the condition of being enclosed. Ascetics who shut themselves away are said to gain spiritual power, and a native concept of *utsubo*, which describes the condition, has also been translated as 'empty', although this is qualified as 'the empty in which, invisibly and supernaturally, a divine principle resides or can reside' (Ouweland 1964: 123). As is often the case, there is a Buddhist parallel to apparently indigenous Japanese ideas, for example those teachings that encourage the emptying of heart and mind, 'the freeing from illusions and passions' that is a necessary preliminary to receiving the benefits of Buddhism (see, for example, Grapard 1982: 208–9).

Without going any deeper into Buddhist ideas, it does suddenly seem reasonable to propose a system of thought that grants wrapping a greater degree of importance than the wrapped, although before committing ourselves it seems a good idea to look further into the notion of emptiness. I now turn to the Balinese insight Duff-Cooper was able to bring to the subject.

A Balinese Perspective

Early in his time in Japan, Duff-Cooper noticed that his representation of the 'Structure of the Balinese Form of Life' as a cone (Duff-Cooper 1990, 1991) was rather similar to descriptions he came across of Japanese society before the Pacific War. Maruyama Masao's discussion of a 'concentric ideology' was the first example, but he then discovered that the German architect Bruno Taut had in 1936 used the same image of a cone, 'a system resembling Mount Fuji in form' to describe the social system in existence prior to Japan's entrance into the modern period. Another Japanese commentator, Ishida Takeshi, later used the image of a 'cone topped by the Emperor' to describe the social structure created after contact with the West, a structure he described further as a 'set of concentric cones' (Duff-Cooper 1991: 2). In making a comparison between the Japanese and Balinese cases, Duff-Cooper asserts that 'the notion of a centre is crucial to both' (*ibid.*), and he goes on to consider whether this notion continues to be important in post-war Japan, and if so, how. By summarizing several examples, which he had previously adduced (Duff-Cooper 1988), he illustrates his contentions that 'physical and/or ideational closeness to a centre is correlated with pre-eminence' (1991: 4-6), and that although they constitute a 'polythetic class...among which there is no common empirical feature...they may be defined artificially by reference to a common feature...in this case...centres being a point of reference', a definition which is now apparently amenable to cross-cultural comparison (*ibid.*: 6). He then turns to consider 'empty centres' or, more accurately perhaps, centres that are simply a space or 'a void', and addresses in particular questions posed by a Japanese architect whose 'Center Building' is built around a space, or a plaza, which the architect suggests may be a 'negative centre'. Here, the Balinese material is particularly enlightening, for the 'supreme centre of Balinese ideology [is] Ida Sang Hyang Sunya, the Void' (*ibid.*: 7). Although Duff-Cooper did not live long enough to make this comparison, and I do not have the ability to do it here, it would seem likely that Japanese and Balinese notions of emptiness could also be compared usefully at a more transcendent level.

Duff-Cooper argued that 'centres may be devoid of content' without being regarded as negatives: 'this is still a point of reference which organises the surrounding buildings and space' (*ibid.*). 'In Japanese ideology', he concludes, 'centres are not absolute, as they are not in Balinese ideology...they may have content, which is highly various—hence their polythetic character...or they may be devoid of it' (*ibid.*: 8).

Duff-Cooper's application of his Balinese material to these Japanese questions provides me with a partial answer to my question about the relative value of the wrapped. Notions of wrapping, particularly where this is multi-layered, are quite comparable with 'concentric cones', and their contents or otherwise reasonably described as the centre. Thus, whether the wrapped is in itself important or not, it could reasonably be described as having value, at least in the sense that it offers a point of reference around which the wrapping is organized. This principle would

seem to apply whether the wrapping be paper, cloth or buildings, whether it be words or the human beings who utter them.

A problem arises, however, with Duff-Cooper's contention that 'physical and/or ideational closeness to a centre is correlated with pre-eminence'. This may be the case among Balinese in Lombok, where the Void is a supreme being, and it may work in the case of the Japanese social structure, topped by the emperor or a company president, and even in some of its physical manifestations like castles and palaces, but Japan's variety of examples of centres would seem not always to comply with this principle. The inner wrapping of a gift certainly could not always be described as the most pre-eminent, except in order of application, and the outer layers of a formal kimono are usually much more gorgeous than the inner ones. Is there something wrong with Duff-Cooper's contention in the Japanese case, then, or is it inappropriate to apply the notion of centre to these examples of wrapping?

A Glance at Gardens

It is at this point that a consideration of gardens in relation to Duff-Cooper's main theme, *oku*, becomes useful. During my consideration of the notion of wrapping in various different Japanese arenas, there were two examples that proved perplexing. Each gave ample opportunity for the application of the wrapping principle, as I came to describe the phenomenon, but each also posed problems. One of these was Japanese gardens, the other the tea ceremony, a highly ritualized practice that in its more complex forms includes the use of a garden. I have considered briefly elsewhere (Hendry 1993: 150–54) the case of the tea ceremony, but I am still working on the intriguing subject of Japanese gardens.

There is, of course, an important area of overlap between gardens and the tea ceremony, that is, the association with Zen Buddhism. Dorinne Kondo, in her symbolic analysis of the tea ceremony, describes this association as presenting 'a unique challenge to the anthropologist, for...Zen is said to elude logical discursive analysis. Zen favours experience and intuition over intellection' and 'the Zen arts...emphasise the primacy of transcendence through a-logical, non-verbal means' (Kondo 1985: 287). She goes on to analyse the ceremony and its study, among other things, as a journey from the mundane to the ritual world, a 'path to Enlightenment' which, according to Zen doctrine, leads to a state of 'emptiness' (ibid.: 291–2).

The garden plays an important role in this journey, for a physical move from the outer to the inner garden accompanies the symbolic journey 'from the mundane to the ritual' (ibid.: 294), and this is partially accompanied through the perception of *oku* (ibid.: 304 n.22). As Duff-Cooper points out in his paper (1991: 14), in Japanese gardens as in Shinto shrines, the path usually 'propels a person from one

vantage point to another...layering the space...fostering an impression of depth and mystery'. The architect Maki Fumihiko (1979: 59), whose writings about *oku* influenced Duff-Cooper, uses a metaphor of 'unfolding' to describe an approach to *oku*, a metaphor also chosen by Kondo (1985: 293) in her description of the tea ceremony. Maki (1979: 59) also describes *oku* as 'nothing but the concept of convergence to zero'.

In considering gardens as an example of 'the wrapping of space', I had been influenced by the use of such metaphors as 'folding' and 'layering'. I had also followed Maki, who liberally draws on the notion of wrapping (or *tsutsumi*), in both the English and Japanese versions of his discussion of *oku* (1978, 1979). The perplexing part was the lack of anything that could be described as the 'wrapped'. The creators of Japanese gardens employ all manner of deception in creating the perception of 'depth and mystery', but at the same time completely conceal any rationale or logic for engaging in the exercise. The garden is a three-dimensional art-form in a Japanese view. It 'represents' the natural landscape (Condor 1964: 1) or the Buddhist cosmos (Hayakawa 1973: 10), but is it simply 'leading to a state of emptiness' as Zen philosophy would have us believe?

Gardens are certainly associated with religion in Japan. Indeed, it has recently become compulsory to take part in a half-hour religious rite before being allowed to visit one of the most famous—the Moss Garden at the Saihōji Temple in Kyoto—as an indication of this association. The earliest forms of garden in Japan are said to have been sacred spaces cleared and purified for the purpose of summoning deities, points of contact and communication with the spiritual world (Bring and Wayembergh 1981: 145; Hayakawa 1973: 27). They were literally spaces, though bounded or 'wrapped' with a straw-rope or bamboo fence, and very often covered in small pebbles, or moss, as depicted still in some Shinto shrines.¹

The representation in gardens of such natural features of the landscape as mountains and water also has religious connotations, since these were thought to be abodes of the gods. Some of the features still characteristic of Japanese gardens actually originated in China, but they reflect Japanese views. In tracing the possible development of the notion of *oku*, Maki (1979: 54–5) argues that it may have derived its directional attribute from the way villages from the earliest times nestle against a mountain, regarded as a special, sacred space, whose often forbidden depths provide the site of a shrine (*miya*) known as the *okumiya*. Another theory he cites (*ibid.*: 56) traces the word from *oki*, meaning 'offshore', which relates the notion to an idea that gods originated from over the sea, which in the case of those of Chinese legend would be accurate.

1. A particularly fine example of this 'landing place' for the gods is to be found at the Kamowake-Ikazuchi Shrine, at Kamigamo in Kyoto. Not only does the shrine have a roped-off patch of moss, and a roped-off area of finely ground stones, but it also has several sacred trees and stones, which are enclosed on carefully bounded areas, marked again with a band of straw rope. The shrine was originally constructed in the seventh century AD for worship of the nearby Mt. Kōya.

In either case, the word is imbued with a sacredness, which it may or may not imply in modern usage, although Maki argues not only for the way *oku* gives 'a sense of depth to relatively narrow spaces' (ibid.: 52), and 'an impression of distance in a given space', but also that it is an esoteric concept that 'implies something abstract and profound', 'for expressing psychological depth: a kind of spiritual *oku*' (ibid.: 53). In this way, whether as 'zero' or 'emptiness', 'depth' or 'distance', *oku* would seem to imply pre-eminence of a certain kind, at least in that an approach in the direction of *oku* does seem to suggest a move from the mundane to the sacred, spiritual or ritual, as Kondo postulated.

The Value of Illusion in Structural Analysis

It remains, then, to relate the notion of *oku* to the notion of centre. Maki (1979: 58) opposes the two notions in an effort to contrast the organization of space in Japan with that found in 'the Western world'. His focus is on 'city spaces', and he asserts that while ancient European cities were built around a central area containing the church and city offices (ibid.), city space in Japan is organized in 'spatial creases' from which he gets 'the impression of penetrating the layers of an onion' (ibid.: 51). This impression he goes on to analyse in detail as concerned with *oku*.

Maki argues, furthermore, that the Western idea reflects an emphasis on 'verticality implying a link between earth and heaven', leading to what he describes as a 'tower' culture. This he contrasts with the Japanese emphasis on a horizontality which 'seeks its symbolism in an invisible depth' (ibid.: 58). The drama of a Gothic cathedral is to be found standing in front of it, or inside it, he argues, 'overwhelmed by the sense of a perpendicular scale'. A shrine, on the other hand, 'is the object to be seen, not a space to be entered' (ibid.): 'in many cases the *oku* has no climax in itself...One rather seeks drama and ritual in the process of approaching it' (ibid.: 59).

While drawing on much of Maki's material, Duff-Cooper (1991: 20) argues against his opposition between *oku* and 'centre', which he sees, probably quite rightly, as yet another attempt to highlight Japan's uniqueness. Instead, Duff-Cooper points out areas of similarity, and points of contact and comparison between the two notions. Despite the theory about *oku* being an 'invisible, unattainable zone', some examples, such as inner shrines, are clearly attainable (ibid.: 14). Others, like some centres, are devoid of content, so that both are context-dependent (polythetic) notions (ibid.: 18). Moreover, the idea of fostering an illusion of depth is certainly not peculiar to Japan, and some of the means found in European gardens and, one might add, cathedrals are comparable to those employed in Japan (ibid.).

Duff-Cooper argues, however, that some aspects of *oku* are more particularly Japanese, and that this and the polythetic nature of the concept render it unamenable to comparative structural analysis, unlike the notion of centre. He does, however, advocate analysing 'the moves through space organised by *oku*', and 'their concomitants that incorporated *oku*' as 'likely to be revealing' (ibid.: 20). This would seem, at least in my interpretation of the matter, to bring us back to 'wrapping'. As already argued above, wrapping can be seen as organized around a structural point of reference, a 'centre', which we have also seen is in many cases associated with some kind of pre-eminence, even if it is in practice void or empty. A consideration of the notion of *oku* has revealed an emphasis on the 'process of approaching it', the 'moves through space' organized by it, and in this case the wrapping as part and parcel (even literally) of the creation of the 'illusion of depth' and the 'drama of approach', which would appear to be the chief 'abstract and profound' constitutive elements of the concept.

In the case of gardens, there is usually no centre to approach, and the illusion is valued in its own right, so it is possible to argue that it is the notion of depth, or distance, which is associated with pre-eminence. Whether the organizing principle be a centre, or *oku*, it is therefore the wrapping which adds the value, and the wrapping itself which may be seen as the structural principle. It remains to be seen how far this principle is capable of comparative analysis. It is possible that I have also demonstrated the value of illusion for structural analysis. Or perhaps this is just an illusion created by the pre-eminence of void, emptiness and illusion itself. If only Andrew were here to add his comments.

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