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AUTHOR Okazaki, Akio
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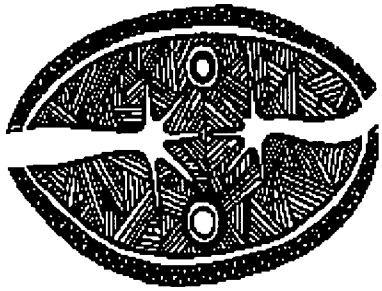
ABSTRACT

A U.S. art educator, Arthur Wesley Dow, synthesized Japanese and U.S. culture in his philosophy of art education. This paper portrays the process of cross-cultural interpretation as a way for an individual to make sense of his or her world in relation to those of others. The paper seeks to explain Dow's legacy in terms of the Oriental cultural tradition of art, noting that it is because his ideas were derived from his views regarding the nature of art rather than from a particular conception of children's artistic development that a multicultural heritage of art education is exemplified in Dow's interest in Oriental art. The paper discusses Dow's contribution to U.S. art education and considers interpretations of his transformation of Oriental art, speculating on spirituality and Hsieh Ho's first canon, ch'i, and notan. Contains 41 references. (BT)



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"Dow's Conception of Teaching Art: 'Harmonious Composition' and 'Notan'"

by

Akio Okazaki
School of Art & Design
University of Tsukuba
Tsukuba, Japan

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Dow's Conception of Teaching Art: 'Harmonious Composition' and 'Notan'

Akio Okazaki, School of Art & Design, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

"Bi-Cultural Education/Cross-Cultural Research" has become one of the central multicultural education conceptions in the field of art education (Tomhave, 1992). Japan and the United States are separated by a vast ocean, though this ocean is also a bridge by which Eastern and Western worlds encounter each other and become integrated into one (Okazaki, 1984, 1985a, 1991, 1995). Japanese art educators, such as Shirahama (Okazaki, 1985b) and Shimoda (Okazaki, 1992, 1994), compared American and Japanese ideas in the earlier decades of the century. An American art educator, Arthur Wesley Dow (1899/1913), similarly synthesized Japanese and American culture in his philosophy of art education. He turned toward the Japanese way of thinking, and found something that American art education lacked. This paper portrays the process of cross-cultural interpretation as a way of making sense of one's world in relation to those of others. While American researchers (deLemos, 1946; Mock-Morgan, 1976; Moffatt, 1977; Hook, 1987) provide their own interpretations of Dow's legacy, the author attempts to explain his legacy in terms of the Oriental cultural tradition of art. It is because his ideas were "derived from his views regarding the nature of art rather than from a particular conception of children's artistic development" (Efland, 1976, pp.68-69), that a multicultural heritage of art education is exemplified in Dow's interest in Oriental art (Smith, 1994).

Dow's Contribution to American Art Education

Researchers concerned with American art education history cannot help but deal with Arthur Wesley Dow's significant contribution to the field, if they want to provide a general perspective on historical development in the field. Many writers, in fact, pointed out Dow's great contribution in the earlier decades of this century in the United States. In assessing Dow's historical role in the development of American art education, there are at least two alternative ways of looking at his enormous influence on art education. Should he be regarded as a pioneer of aesthetic appreciation or as a pioneer of modern design education? Although both ways of interpreting Dow's work are possible (Efland, 1990), it is certain that the first way was more emphasized at the heart of his doctrine. "Dow felt that this appreciation motivated some people to create works of art and most people to desire more beauty in their environment," whereas "he advanced practice in design or composition as a means of developing this appreciation" (Lanier, 1964, pp.31-32).

Hurwitz and Madeja (1977) pointed out Dow's intention in the context of art appreciation. Differentiating Dow's conception of art appreciation from that of the so-called "Picture Study Movement" at the turn of the century, they say: "Dow lent a different tone to the movement. Dow gave teachers a set of principles of composition (developed from his study of Japanese art) that provided a readily grasped vocabulary of form that could be applied to any picture and that could thus serve as the criterion for the success or failure of a work. His basic principles of pictorial structure were line; notan, or value; and a regard for the full spectrum of color" (p.22-24). What they called "basic principles" are actually what Dow termed the three elements. Eisner and Ecker (1966) illustrated that these elements were indispensable for constructing "an art product that displayed harmony and beauty": line which referred to "the contour of drawing objects, value to light and dark, and color to the hues incorporated in the picture" (p.6). For creating harmony in composition the following five principles were to be employed: opposition, transition, subordination, repetition, and symmetry.

Dow is one of the American art educators whose work in the field of art education was influenced by Japanese traditional works of art. He got information on Japanese art through Fenollosa. Munsterberg (1957) describes that Fenollosa came to Tokyo in 1878 as a professor of political philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, and that he stimulated "interest in the ancient art of Japan at a time when Japanese intelligentsia were rejecting the art of their country as unfit for the modern age" (p.174). Marry Fenollosa (1913) indicated the interaction between Dow and Fenollosa in brief preface to her husband's book, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. She mentioned that "the classes which had graduated at the Pratt Institute under the Fenollosa-Dow system, as it is often called, were applying its principles in smaller towns all over the Union" (p.xxi). In fact, there can be found a surprising similarity between Fenollosa and Dow. "Qualities of line, notan, and colour, and the use of these in expressing great ideas," noted Fenollosa (1913), "are made the basis of classification and of appreciation" (pp.xxv-xxvi) of art. This notion corresponds closely to the first chapter titled "Line-Notan-Color" of Dow's book (1913).

Chinese Foundation of Dow's Composition

It is possible to interpret Dow's idea of harmonious composition in both Maritain and Okakura's views of the Oriental art. Chinese "Art," says Maritain (1954/1974), "is a contemplative effort to discover in Things and bring out from Things their own enlarged soul and inner principle of dynamic harmony" (p.13). He also regards the spirit of Things as "a kind of ghost." It comes down from "the spirit of the universe" and gives Things "their typical form of life and movement" (p.13). In this view of Chinese art work, Nature and Things are perceived not as hostile to people but as a pantheistic continuum that people might become an integral part of, through artistic and poetic intuition. Okakura (1903/1970), a Japanese scholar of art, also finds "The Life-movement of Spirit through the Rhythm of Things" in Eastern art. He says that Oriental art can be conceived of as "the great Mood of the Universe, moving hither and thither amidst those harmonic laws of matter which are Rhythm" (p.52). Both describe the first of six canons or principles of old Chinese painting theory, which was first set forth by Hsieh Ho at the end of the fifth century in China in his book entitled the *Ku-hua p'in-lu* (*Koga Hinroku* in Japanese) [Old Records of Classification of Paintings]. Let us examine his first canon called "ch'i-yun sheng-tung" ("ki-in seido" in Japanese), the most important of the six, which is necessary for understanding Dow's idea of harmonious composition.

There are generally three materials available in English dealing with Hsieh Ho's canon of painting. The first one is Chinese scholar, Chan's article (1946/1965). In his description of "ch'i yun sheng tung," Chan renders the four Chinese words as follows: "ch'i" as force, spirit, breath, or soul; "yun" as resonance, rhythm, charm, feeling, or verbalization; "sheng" as life, or the will to live; and "tung" as movement. Although these four words may be, according to Chan, "taken in pairs as ch'i yun or spiritual resonance and sheng tung or life movement" (p.183), the phrase "ch'in-yun sheng-tung" means the nature of things, the principle according to which things posses, strong power, style and charm, the soul and mystery of things, sprit, life force, and so forth. The second material is by Young (1969). He sums up Hsieh Ho's six canons as follows: 1) animate through spirit consonance; 2) follow the "bone method" in the use of the brush; 3) be truthful to the objects in depicting forms; 4) conform to kind in setting forth colors; 5) divide and plan in positioning and arranging; and 6) convey the past by copying and transcribing. Following this description, Young (1969) writes about the first canon: "sheng-tung is usually rendered literally as something like 'life movement,' while chi'i yun has the more mystical ring of 'spirit consonance' " (p.191). Thus "Paintings that have the capacity to move the observer, to come alive with that special rhythmic vitality or resonance, were said to process ch'i-yun" (p.191). The whole "range of intangible aesthetic qualities associated with the spirit and life of a great work of art is evoked in ch'i-yun sheng-tung" (p.191). It implies "a qualitative measure or standard, something desirable but not always present in a given painting" (p.191).

Although Hsieh Ho's first canon can be translated into English by various ways, it is conceived in any case as a qualitative measure that is concerned with spiritual essence and rhythmic vitality. Among the four words of "ch'i-yun sheng-tung," "ch'i" is a more key concept than the others. The meaning of "ch'i" is thirdly explored by Sullivan, a British scholar of Chinese art history. Sullivan (1965) summarizes Hsieh Ho's canon as follows: 1) spirit consonance and life-motion; 2) the bone method in the use of brush; 3) conformity to the object to give likeness; 4) correct color; 5) care in composition; and 6) transmission of tradition by making copies. He interprets "ch'i" as "an energy or spirit" that "gives life to all things" such as human figures, animals, birds, flowers, mountains, water, trees, rocks, and so on, and to which the painters must attune themselves so as to be able to impart this life to their paintings. As a result, "all painters and critics throughout Chinese history have held that this mysterious energy, whether external or internal, or both, is the essential quality" (p.13).

The word "ch'i" expresses the essential quality, mysterious energy, or spirit. It has also been a significant concept in both China and Japan. For Chinese painters to express "the ch'i of a tree," for instance, they "must express the tree-nature, its structure, its peacefulness, and above all, the rhythmic vital force which gives it spirit and form" (Chan, 1946/1965, p.183). The fact that one could find the rhythmic vitality of "ch'i" in such various things as nature, movement, force, creative power, and so on, is the same as with the Japanese traditional-style painter whose canons ,as well as methods of painting, have been borrowed mostly from Chinese painting. One example is Yasunobu Kano (1613-1685). He was president of Edokoro (Academy of Painting) of the Tokugawa Shogunate, succeeded to the main stock of the Kano family, and founded a the Kano school. He wrote a book about the theory of painting entitled, *Gado Yoketsu* (A Key to the Way of Painting) in 1680. The first section of his book suggests that the basic purpose of painting is "the grasp of mysterious energy of ki-in [ch'i-yun]" (Kano, quoted in Sakazaki, 1942, p.8).

Another example is Mitsuoki Tosa (1617-1691). He was the chief of the office of painters in the Imperial Court. He created a new style of painting that added the brushwork technique to the style of the Tosa School. He also produced a book about theory and practice of painting entitled *Honcho Gaho Taiden* (A Comprehensive History of Japanese Painting) in 1690. The first section of the book provides a description of Hsieh Ho's six canons. He said that "ki" (ch'i) was regarded as "a reflection of liveing-creature's mind" (Tosa, quoted in Sakazaki, 1942, pp.31-32). Kano and Tosa both emphasized "ki" (ch'i) as a basic key to painting. Evidently Japanese traditional painters were not only influenced by the Chinese theory of painting, but also

more than a thousand of years later, they had still echoes of Hsieh Ho's basic key to painting.

Together with the "ch'i-yun sheng-tung," Hsieh Ho's second canon is valued more than the remaining four in order to accomplish the transmission of this mysterious and spiritual energy to paper or silk. The first two words of his second canon are "ku-fa" (ko-po in Japanese). Although it can be directly translated as "bone method" in English, its meaning is actually "structural strength of the brushstroke, common to painting and calligraphy" (Sullivan, 1965, p.13). Young (1969) regards the "ku-fa" as "strength and vigor in the handling of the brush" (p.191). The individual brushstroke becomes the measure of the painting. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth of Hsieh Ho's canons are not different from, but close to the Western criteria of painting. These four canons, however, are less valued than the first and second ones.

Maritain (1974) describes the primary intent of Chinese art as follows: "What does the first of the famous six canons of Hsieh Ho prescribe? --To have life-motion manifest the unique spiritual resonance that artist catches in Things, inspired as he is by his communion with the spirit of the cosmos. The second canon is no less significant. If the brush strokes which render bone structure have primacy among all means of execution, to the point of making painting, so to speak, a branch of calligraphy, it is because the very vigor and alertness of these touches (together with the quality of the ink tones) express the movement of life perceived in things and its structural harmony (and they are, at the same time, a token of value of the artist's inspiration)" (pp.13-14). For this reason, Hsieh Ho's first and second canons reveal what Maritain (1974) called "the creative subjectivity of the artist" in which the "more the poetic perception which animates art catches and manifests the inner side of Things, the more it involves at the same time a disclosure and manifestation of the human Self" (p.17). He further says that the creative subjectivity can be found in Greek art: "Man," privileged figure though he may be, "remains an object in Nature and a Thing in the cosmos, subordinate to the perfection and divinity of the universality of Things" (p.19).

Meeson (1981), based on Maritain's assumption above, points out the commonality of Greek and Oriental art with contemporary art. Both Minimal and Conceptual art reflect on "a shift of artistic alignment towards the characteristics of Greek and oriental art, such as Maritain describes, pointing towards change in the artist's relationship with the world around him" (p.30). He also suggests that contemporary art might be understood by returning to the idea of intuition in art. There are at least two intuitional aspects in art. One is art as Things, and the other is the artistic process as imagination, where "the free play of ideas has yet to find a definitive form" (p.30). Thus, we have a spiritual or intuitive approach to regenerating the characteristics of Things and Nature. This approach is essentially different from the representative and symbolic way of art, particularly in the instrumental view of art in both social and religious function.

Instead of the representative and symbolic function of art, Dow took the spiritual approach to art in education even if he could not have used such terms as spirit consonance and spiritual resonance in his time. Dow's term "Composition" means not so much as Hsieh Ho's fifth canon, "divide and plan in positioning and arranging," as his first one, "ch'i-yun sheng-tung," particularly "ch'i " as "inner principles of dynamic harmony" or "mysterious energy." Dow (1913) proposes that principle of composition is a "Way of creating harmony." Dow also suggests, "first cultivate the mind of students and next utilize the power" they have, such as the "power to appreciate," the "power to do something worth while" (p.120). This indicates that he learned the spiritual way of art from Chinese painting through his research on Japanese art. Chang wrote a book about Chinese painters, *Li-tai Ming-hua Chi* (Record of Famous Painters of all Dynasties) in 847. In discussing the six canons of Hsieh Ho, Chang (847/1977) sees the task of Chinese painting as achieving "something more than representation" as indicated by Hsieh Ho's third and fourth canons. He says, moreover, that if a painter focused on "ch'i-yun as an essential element" in working at his art then the representation prescribed in the third and fourth canons would be naturally inherent in his/her work.

Dow's contribution lay not in altering teaching method, but in broadening the concept of art by substituting "composition" for mechanical imitation (Macdonald, 1970). Logan (1955) writes that at the time of Dow's working, the "academic mind did not recognize any value in individual use of design or color; those qualities were only incidental to a work of art. Opposed to this view, Fenollosa believed that beauty, not realism, was the true aim of art, and Dow's philosophy started with composition as the essence of beauty" (p.110). We should not emphasize both the modern design element and the formality of beauty in Dow's idea of composition. The underlying intention in his book, *Composition*, is to reveal the "source of power" and to show "the student how to look within for the greatest help." It also is to teach him "not to depend on externals, not to lean too much on anything or anybody" (Dow, 1913, p.128). We should reinterpret Dow's intention in revealing the source of power as the Chinese term "ch'i." Its power discloses the qualitative wholeness in art through which the "inner world of feeling is given substance and form" (Meeson, 1982, p.21)

Japanese Foundation of Dow's *Notan*

I have pointed out how Dow's philosophical transition from representation to spiritualism was rooted in Hsieh

Ho's first canon of "ch'I," whether he knew the old root of Chinese painting or not. A problem still remains among the proposals including his book, *Composition*. Are there any reasons why Dow emphasized the concept of *notan* (dark-and-light), the second element in his synthetic method of teaching art? He devoted half a page of his book to identifying and defining its conception. It is easy to understand why Dow defined the concept of line as the first element of teaching art. Chinese traditional ink-painting has emphasized lines. Okakura (1903/1970) describes the lack of dark and light in old Chinese paintings at the time of Hsieh Ho. Line takes "the place of nerves and arteries, and the whole is covered with the skin of colour" so that Hsieh Ho "ignores the question of dark and light" (p.52). He also says that all paintings at that time were made by "covering the ground with white line and laying upon this the rock-pigments, which were accentuated and marked off from each other with strong black lines" (p.53).

The concept of *notan* did not come from Chinese traditional painting, but has been borrowed from Japanese art. The first edition of Dow's *Composition* includes illustrations, all of which were from Japanese traditional brush drawing. Three American and British researchers refer to the concept of *notan*. First, Logan (1955) defines its meaning as describing "value, or dark and light" (p.110). Second, Wilson (1974) regards it as "describing the contrast of light and dark" (p.258). Lastly, Macdonald (1970) says much the same thing. "*Notan*, so dominant in Japanese art, is the balance of light and dark areas, a different concept from representation of natural light and shades as understood by nineteenth-century teachers" (p.348). Their interpretations of the Japanese term *notan* are worried about the use of this strange Japanese word for Westerner. I think Macdonald's definition is closer to Dow's intention in adopting the Japanese word *notan*. The original Japanese word *notan* actually consists of two Chinese words: "*no*" and "*tan*." The former means degrees such as depth, darkness, thickness, concentration, strength, or density. The latter has the meanings of light, faint, pale, fleeting, or transitory. Thus, *notan* means the degree or gradation of subtle tone, excluding pure white and black, by which subjective feelings are represented and fused together.

What *notan* expresses is aesthetic awareness of tone sensibility. It is not mechanically or systematically structured but subjectively organized in a state of composing or fusing light and dark on the surface of a drawing. Saunders (1966) provides a closer description to the real meaning of the word *notan* than Macdonald does. In citing Dow's revised 13th edition of *Composition* (1929), Saunders (1966) writes: "By NOTAN, he[Dow] meant the light and dark balance of the object, whether it was a building, a picture, or nature. He distinguished between light and dark here and light and shadow that he considered a single fact of external nature. Notan is not just black and light and white (a two value system) but includes gray in a three-value system or degree of gray in a more than three-value system" (p.9). In the 1913 version of Dow's *Composition*, Dow makes a careful distinction between *notan* as "an element of universal beauty" and light and shadow as "a single fact of external nature" (p.8). He puts forth justifications for his belief: "Notan, a Japanese word meaning 'dark, light,' refers to the quantity of light reflected, or the massing of tones of different values"; and "Notan-beauty means the harmony resulting from the combination of dark and light space--whether colored or not--whether in building, in picture, or in nature" (p.7). It is clear that Dow used the term *notan* in the broadest sense possible. The term *notan* means much more than the term "value" as an element of modern design in the German Bauhaus system of design education. He carefully added two hyphens to translate *notan*: "Dark-and-Light."

Dow (1913) regards painting as visual music. The quality of making the natural scene a good subject for a picture is "the 'visual music' that the Japanese so love in [the] rough ink painting of their masters where there is but a hint of facts" (p.54). He also suggests that to recognize *notan* as an individual element will simplify "the difficulty of tone-composition and open the way for growth in power" (p.54). The idea of visual music was borrowed from Fenollosa. He contributed to the regeneration of fourteenth century Japanese ink-painting style during his stay in Japan (Munsterberg, 1957). His major influence on Dow is the teaching of Chinese and Japanese ink painting style, "sumi-e." It is a typical art form of painting various subjects (figures, flowers-birds, and landscape) using "sumi" (black indian ink) with *notan* by means of special brush strokes. First developed in China during the middle of T'ang Dynasty (618-906) and expanded in the Northern and Southern Schools in the Sung Dynasty (906-1279), "sumi-e" was incorporated into Japanese art during the Kamakura Period (1192-1333). As a result, the Chinese ink-painting style was modified. It became more fashionably sophisticated during the Muromachi Period (1338-1573). Sesshu (1420-1506), a priest-artist, went to Ming China (1368-1644), where he studied the technique of Chinese painting. He finally established his unique style of ink-painting after coming back to Japan. Thus "sumi-e" is not a Japanese style of painting but a modification of a Chinese style. Color was added to "Sumi-e" in the latter half of the sixteenth century in Japan. This became the official painting style of Tokugawa Shogunate, Kano School, in the Edo Period (1603-1867).

Such a story of Chinese and Japanese interactive development in the history of painting explains why Dow placed the three element of line, *notan*, and color in his synthetic method of teaching art. The Meiji Period (1867-1912) of Japan was the time of modernizing Japanese society and culture. Okakura, a Japanese

philosopher of art, contributed to the regeneration of the traditional style of Japanese art, with support from Fenollosa. He refers to the line-notan-color mode of Chinese and Japanese painting: "European [art] work ... has lost greatly ... structural composition and line expression, though it has added to the facility of realistic representation. The idea of line and line-composition has always been the great strength of Chinese and Japanese art, though the Sung and Ashikaga [Muromachi] artists have added the beauty of dark and light [*notan*]--without forgetting that the artistic, and not the scientific, was their goal--and the Toyotomi epoch [the late sixteenth century of Japan] has contributed the notion of composing in colour" (1903/1970, p. 54). Okakura's description confirms an assumption that Dow's line-notan-color context of synthetic art instruction was fully justified not by European art but by Chinese and Japanese art. His notion also includes another important point. The characteristics of dark and light (*Notan*) are artistic, not scientific. The artistic character of *Notan* has come from the interaction of ink, paper, and water through brush strokes. Yashiro (1969) called it "a sense of stained quality," which contributes to various aspects of Japanese art. He concludes that an artist engaging in the work of ink-painting would experience a complete transformation of his/her attitudes towards art from representatism to spiritualism.

In an effort to philosophically generalize the specific term *notan*, Dow (1913) termed it an essential quality. It needs to integrate "dark and light space," to construct "tone-composition," and to build up "harmony." He valued the importance of "Notan-beauty" much more than line and color because half of his book *Composition* is devoted to an explanation of the term *Notan*. Dow says the fundamental fact that synthetically related masses of dark and light convey an impression of beauty, which is entirely independent of the categorical meaning, but dependent on the aesthetic and qualitative response to a hint of facts. He describes it as "a grove of dark trees on a light hillside or a pile of buildings against the morning sky" (p.54). Thus, "we," says Dow, "at once feel the charm and call the effect 'picturesque' " (p.54). When one looks unfocused at the surface of a thing, one could find something like chaos of dark and light. Dow calls it "tone-composition." Whether before or after one recognizes it as something like a patch of damp, a tea mark, or an ink stain, its subtle quality of dark and light reminds him/her of an imaginative object or associative event. Both are enlarged by "the power and mystery" (Dow, 1913, p.53) into an organic whole of association. Dow writes: "As there is no one word in English to express the idea contained in the phrase 'dark-and-light,' I have adopted the Japanese word 'notan' (dark, light). It seems fitting that we should borrow this art-term from a people who have revealed to us so much of this kind of beauty.... . ...The Orientals rarely represent shadows ... . They refer to model by line rather than by shading. They recognize Notan as a visual and distinct element of the art of painting" (p.53).

Dow's finding in the dark-light surface of a thing takes us back to the art form of "sumi-e" in which a cosmic world of dark-and-light goes all over the place after being put on the paper. Complex tones of dark-and-light in ink-painting are more valued than coloring in oil painting. Dow recognized such pervasive quality not through European but through Oriental art, especially Japanese traditional painting prior to the modern Japanese period. He believed that the term *notan* was suitable for representing the essential quality in teaching aesthetic appreciation. The term *notan* becomes one property. Dow (1911) used the term to talk about a structural method of art teaching. Thus, "art," says Dow, "is studied in this way in Japan" and "designers for the great Japanese industries of lacquer, metal, and textile, are trained by the pure Japanese (synthetic) method" (p.232). *Notan* becomes a center of the effort to synthesize "the action of the human mind in harmony building" (Dow, 1911, p.231). A report of 1929 showed that " 'dark-light,' a term closely associated with Dow's theory, was used 528 times in the 36 art books studied; 'notan' was used 157 times" (Stankiewicz, 1990, p.97). The term "value" smelled too much of the traditional scientific scheme in the Western world. It was too mechanical to specify the quality of harmony as visual music.

Conclusion: Mind and Quality

The present paper finds that Dow's idea of harmonious composition has its basic roots in the Chinese theory of painting. Especially, Hsieh Ho's first canon might have caused Dow's philosophical transition from a representative approach to teaching art in terms of Western art tradition to a spiritual one in the context of the Oriental art tradition. In an effort to re-interpret Dow's transformation of Oriental art for Americans, this paper proposes that the Chinese character "ch'i" is a key word to Chinese as well as Japanese traditional art. Another finding of the paper is that the meaning of *notan* is close to something like what is qualitatively felt. Viewing a phenomenon of *notan*, such as an ink-stain, can disclose the quality of harmony as visual music. Saunders (1966) sees the word *notan* to have "only historical meaning" (p.9). *Notan*, however, makes us see an exploratory model for the vividness of quality in the work of art. Dow's extensive work becomes one bridge in the two-way street of Eastern and Western cultures, and is well worth considering in today's efforts in attempting to understand the "other" in art education from diverse cultures (Okazaki, 1997).

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