
Keshiki in Tea Ceramics

Annegret Bergman (Freie Universität Berlin)

E-mail: annegret.bergmann@fu-berlin.de

abstract

This essay deals with *keshiki* or “landscape,” one of the key descriptive terms of Japanese pottery and crucial to the aesthetic evaluation of a tea bowl. It touches upon the history of this means of aesthetic appreciation, and introduces different examples on representative tea bowls in order to show that *keshiki* is much more than a natural phenomenon on wood-fired ceramics as it manifests itself also due to the long and extensive usage of as well as in the intended hand-made bold intervention in the form and appearance of a tea bowl.

Introduction

In the tea ceremony the condensation of space and the ephemerality of time creates a sphere of intense observation. This is why wood-fired pottery perfectly fits in the atmosphere of acutely enhanced observation prevailing in the tearoom. In the course of the development of the tea ceremony, “landscapes” or *keshiki* 景色¹ related to pottery had assumed an aesthetic value that determinates the appreciation of tea ceremony utensils until today. This essay will deal with this phenomenon, its historical development and meaning in connection with tea ceramics, especially with tea bowls (*chawan* 茶碗) and point at the artistic intervention in the appearance of a tea bowl that has until now been neglected in the anyhow scarce subject literature on this topic.

Japanese publications on tea ceramics generally defines *keshiki* as one of the key descriptive terms of Japanese pottery and a crucial criterion to the aesthetic evaluation of a tea bowl. Moreover, most texts on this topic provide also a list of further specified terms of *keshiki* manifestations. Concerning the definition of *keshiki* in pottery the scholar and potter Katō Tōkurō 加藤唐九郎 (1897–1985) states in his “Great Encyclopedia of Pottery” (*Genshoku tōki daijiten* 原色陶器大辞典):

During the firing process accidental and unforeseen changes occur in the shard or in the glaze. In the tea ceremony these unforeseen changes are especially valued and tea practitioners have named them *keshiki* [landscapes] and appreciate them.²

However, he continues that “from the point of view of firing techniques quite a lot of this *keshiki* must be considered a failure,”³ but nevertheless is object of aesthetic appreciation. The standard encyclopedic reference on the tea ceremony, the “Illustrated Tea Ceremony Dictionary” (*Zukai sadō jiten* 図解茶道辞典) explains that “unexpected and unruly changes are most appreciated” and that “a clear and distinct *keshiki* determines the front side of a piece”⁴ emphasizing the aesthetic importance of *keshiki* in tea ceramics, especially tea bowls, whereas western related literature hardly refers to tea ceramics at all.

In the only detailed English publication on “changes” or “transformations caused by fire in the kiln” (*yōhen* 窯変) the authors Kusakabe Masakazu and Marc Lancet point out the natural occurrence of *keshiki* but do not connect the phenomenon to aesthetic principles of the tea ceremony.⁵ However, the ceramics expert and dealer Robert Yellin consents with the importance of *keshiki* in the appreciation and evaluation of Japanese ceramics and defines it as a natural result of the firing process, namely, as

how the glaze flows, stops and pools or the color of the clay, the creating process, or how certain kiln occurrences play out on the surface.⁶

The art historian and philosopher Allen S. Weiss does elaborate on landscapes of Japanese ceramics⁷ but only refers to modern pottery and confines himself to *keshiki* in regard to sake cups (*guinomi* ぐい呑 and *ochoko* お猪口) and hardly mentions traditional tea ceramics, whereas Ian Jones links the emergence of the *wabi* aesthetic in the tea ceremony to the increase of appreciation and usage of wood fired ceramics - first in Japan and then, over time, in the 20th century in Europe and America, but

without touching upon the phenomenon of *keshiki*.⁸ In summary, English literature on *keshiki* in Japanese ceramics focuses more on the highly esteemed natural and more or less random interplay of fire and clay. However, in tea ceramics there is more than that to *keshiki*.

History of the term's usage in connection with the tea ceremony

As Jones has stated, in fact the term *keshiki* as such is closely related to the occurrence of the *wabi* aesthetic. The appreciation of tea bowls leaves a great part of the aesthetic act to the spectator's imagination or imagined scenery. This additionally leads to the poetic imagery, which stems from the linked verse poetry (*renga* 連歌) with its standard poetic diction (*utakotoba* 歌詞). The tea practitioner and founder of *wabicha* 侘び茶, Murata Jukō 村田珠光 (1422/23–1502), was the first to combine this aesthetic connotations in literature with material objects. He applied the vocabulary that had developed as purely verbal imagery within the art of linked verses poetry to the utensils of the tea ceremony, especially to the tea bowls' surfaces.⁹ Murata also promoted the artistic independence from things Chinese (*karamono* 唐物), which, at his times, were the most valued items in the tea ceremony. Until then celadon, porcelain and *tenmoku* 天目 tea bowls from the Southern Song period (1127–1179) had been appreciated as the best in fine ware due to their symmetry and their perfect control of form and glaze surface.¹⁰ This aesthetic had allowed little room for natural interaction of wood and clay. But with Murata Jukō the aesthetic parameter in tea bowls changed towards accidental imperfection of the bowl itself as well as its decors and glazes. He is said to have started to appreciate the serendipitous changes in the glaze of

tea bowls that occurred during the firing process.



Figure 1. *Jukō tenmoku* tea bowl, China, 13th-14th century, h. 6,5 cm; d. 11,5 cm, weight 274 g. Tōkyō Eisei Bunko (Tanaka 1995, p. 34).

The so-called *Jukō tenmoku* 珠光天目 bowl (fig. 1), once in his possession, is a good example for this accidental imperfection in the black glaze, which was preferred until his time. Jukō had named the pattern that appeared in the glaze as *keshiki*. This “inversion of taste”¹¹ from the appreciation of Chinese masterpieces with acknowledged value towards the selection of domestic Japanese pots, imported bowls from Korea and other Asian countries known as *namban* 南蛮 for the tea ceremony, actively challenged the individual imagination in the course of appreciation of *keshiki*.

Since the 15th century imagined landscapes became *the* foremost criteria to decide which side of a bowl would be the front side (*shōmen* 正面) and thus the most esteemed part of it. During the 16th century connoisseurship in tea ceremony also meant to explore and categorize the beauty of *keshiki*.¹² The vocabulary to appreciate those effects was chosen by tea practitioners who enjoyed the irregularities of the jars they found in local markets and which they started to use in the tea ceremony. Tea masters and their followers studied a pot just as they studied a garden or a landscape painting and termed the phenomena they found according to their imagination.¹³ The adoration of accidental changes in the shard and glaze during firing also resulted in

the practice of actively provoking such changes, namely to control and effectuate a whole range of coloration and kiln effects to meet the taste of the times.

***Keshiki*-terms and examples**

Especially Korean tea bowls are highly valued in the tea ceremony due to their wide scale of variant *keshiki*. The powdery white-glazed tea bowl (*kohiki* 粉引)¹⁴ (fig. 2) made in Korea called “Miyoshi” 三好 is one example of intentionally creating a *keshiki* effect called *hima* 火間. This phenomenon occurs in connection with the forming and glazing of a bowl.

When applying the glaze with a ladle a small part is intentionally left unglazed, very often in V-formation (*kusabigata* 楔形). Therefore, *hima* denotes a place where glaze has not been applied and the quality of the clay can be seen.



Figure 2. *Kohiki* (powdery white-glazed) tea bowl, named “Miyoshi,” Korea, Joseon period (1392–1910), h. 8.2 cm, d. 15.4 cm, d. foot 4.8 cm. Mitsui Bunko (Toda 1993, pl. 32).

Another well appreciated *keshiki* is called rain leak (*amamori* 雨漏り). Korean tea bowls like *amamori katade* 雨漏堅手 are especially esteemed for their *keshiki*. *Katade* is the name of a stoneware that is the closest to porcelain among all porcelaneous stoneware in Korea (fig. 3). The almost white shard has changed its color when the tea

seeped through the pinholes of the ash glaze.



Figure 3. *Amamori katade* tea bowl, Joseon period (1392–1910), 16th century, h.7.7 cm, d. 15.8 cm, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2000, p. 74).

The same phenomenon occurs on Hagi ware (*Hagi yaki* 萩焼) (fig. 4) that is especially adored for its *amamori keshiki*. Hagi tea bowls are thrown of rough earth and characterized by its white glaze with its signature of a fine web of cracks and fine pores (*kannyū* 貫入). These cracks emerge throughout the heating and cooling process, because the glaze shrinks faster than the clay. The so-called seven changes of Hagi (*Hagi no nanabake* 萩の七化け) point to the change in color as the tea seeps through the cracks in the glaze, permeating the bowl and changing its color over time. These discolorations, the crackling, blackening of the cracks etc. might completely transform the iconography of a bowl.



Figure 4. Hagi tea bowl, h. 8.8 cm, d. 14.3 cm, Japan, Momoyama period (1573–1615), early 17th century (Kawano 1983, S. 19 Abb. 5).

In this way, the aesthetic value of a tea bowl is increased through its usage so that the “beauty and the use value of a chawan are inextricable”¹⁵ as it

keshiki changes the more the cracks are filled with tea.

But there are also phenomena which are clearly defined as *keshiki*, although they have nothing to do with accidental changes of the glaze during the firing process or changes caused by the usage of a bowl over a long time. In contrast, they consist of bold human intervention of the shape and physiognomy of a tea bowl. The Southern Song-period celadon bowl called “*Bakōhan*” 馬蝗絆 in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 5) is classified as an important cultural property. The cracked pieces of the bowl were not only bonded together but additionally fixed by iron clamps or brackets, thus contributing to the very special *keshiki* of this masterly Kinuta celadon (*Kinuta seiji* 砧青磁).



Figure 5. Tea bowl “*Bakōhan*”, Kinuta celadon, China 13th c., h. 9.6 cm, d. 15.4 cm, f. 4.5 cm, important cultural property. Tokyo National Museum (Tanaka 1995, p. 55).

According to the record *Bakōhan saōki* 馬蝗絆茶甌記 (Record of a tea bowl with a large locust clamp), written in 1727 by the Confucian scholar Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯 (1670–1736), the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1425–1490) had once owned this tea bowl. As it broke, he had sent it to China in order to exchange it for a new bowl demanding that it should be as perfect as the damaged one. As Ming-China did not produce such high quality celadon

anymore, the bowl was sent back repaired with metal clamps. In regard to the appearance of the clamps reminiscent of a large locust the bowl was named accordingly „*Bakōhan*.”

Kintsugi 金継ぎ or “repairing with gold” also belongs to the category of intended *keshiki* caused by human invention. The red Raku tea bowl called „*Seppō*” 雪峰¹⁶ or “Snow Peak” (fig. 6) is said to have been made by Hon’ami Kōetsu (1558–1637).

The cracks in this earthenware bowl were filled with lacquer and gold powder was sprinkled on the lacquer before it dried. This technique of bonding cracks or broken parts of a tea bowl with lacquer is still common today and generally adds aesthetic value to the repaired bowl. Here, the whitish glaze visually enhanced through the artificial application of gold designates the front side the object. Its name in turn stems from the imaginary landscape the beholder recognizes in the interplay of the surface glaze and gold applications. It is said that Hon’ami Kōetsu thought the part of the white glaze visually similar to snow that seems to flow from the mouth towards the lower part of the body, while the repaired part should represent water flowing from melting snow. In this way broken tea utensils gained additional aesthetic value.



Figure 6. Hon’ami Kōetsu (1558–1637), red Raku tea bowl named “*Seppō*,” Japan, early 17th century, h. 9.4 cm, d. 11.6–12.9 cm, d. foot 4.2 cm, important cultural property, Hatakeyama Memorial Museum of Fine Arts (Tanaka 1994, p. 46)

Another bold intervention into the appearance of a bowl shows the tea bowl “*Shumi*” 須弥 (Mount Sumeru) or “*Jūmonji*” 十文字 (Cross) (fig. 7). According to the “Record of the *Jūmonji* Ido tea bowl” (*Jūmonji Ido chawan ki* 十文字井戸茶碗記) of 1727, the influential tea master and successor of Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) as the leading tea master for the top military leader of his times, Furuta Oribe (1544–1615), had cut this Korean tea bowl from the *Ōido* 大井戸 type into four pieces and glue it together again with red lacquer in order to reduce its size, which now measures 14.8 cm in diameter. Still existing bowls of this *Ōido*-type bowls commonly measure about 17 cm in diameter, a size Oribe obviously considered as being far too large for a tea bowl. Besides its *keshiki* resulting from the re-assembling, the bowl is also a masterpiece for other *keshiki* manifestations like *kintsugi*, here a mending in red lacquer, *amamori* and *kairagi* 鯨, the latter being a manifestation of shark skin-like surface of the glaze around the foot.¹⁷



Figure 7. *Ōido* tea bowl, “*Shumi* or *Jūmonji*,” Korea, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 16th century, Ido ware, *Ōido*, h 8.0 cm, d. 14.8 cm, Mitsui Bunko Foundation, Tokyo (Murase 2003, p. 108).

As mentioned above, the appreciation of *keshiki* also means to stimulate a process of

imagination, e.g. to vision a garden, poem or painting. The tea bowl named “*Satemo*” さても incorporates *keshiki* in a special, binary way (fig. 8). It was made by Ueda Sōko 上田宗箇 (1563–1650), the founder of the Ueda Sōko school of tea ceremony, and represents one of the most peculiar *keshiki* in Momoyama-period tea ceramics. It is thrown on a wheel and then its edges had been boldly cut out by a knife or spatula. The color of the piece is also very special, because the front side of this greyish bowl shows a reddish touch. That is why it is sometimes classified as red Raku ware, but in most of the Japanese subject literature it is classified as *oniwa yaki* お庭焼, which means pottery made in the local precincts of a daimyo residence, generally, under the supervision of a renowned potter or tea master. The tea practitioner Ueda Sōko had been a disciple of the above-mentioned Furuta Oribe for 24 years.¹⁸ For his deeds for the Tokugawa side during the siege of Osaka castle in 1615, Ueda Sōko was rewarded with a huge residence in the domain of Hiroshima where he built the Wafūdō 和風堂, a residence and tearoom complex. Here he engaged in producing bamboo vessels for the tea ceremony and also built a kiln in which he fired his own tea utensils.¹⁹



Figure 8. Tea bowl named “*Satemo*,” Japan, Momoyama period, 17th century, h.8.7 cm, d. 12.4 cm, Ueda-ryū, Wafūdō (Hiroshima Kenritsu Bijutsukan 2000, p. 169).

Sōko was also a renowned garden designer and well known for the extensive use of striking

rocks and stones. He had been entrusted with the design of the garden of the detached residence of his lord, the Sensuikan 泉水館, today’s reconstructed landscape garden Shukkeien 縮景園 in Hiroshima. He had also designed the garden of the Tokushima castle in 1600 and the Ninomaru garden on the grounds of the Nagoya castle in 1615. The *Kokawadera teien* 粉河寺庭園 or Kokawa Temple Garden is also said to have been created by Ueda Sōko. This garden is especially renowned for its vertical stone garden and is designated as a national site of scenic beauty of Japan.

The *keshiki* of the “*Satemo*” tea bowl results not only from the kiln effects in the glaze but comes to effect due to a combination of form and color that evoke an image of huge vertically arranged stones. Hence the iconography of the tea bowl transfers the image of Ueda Sōko’s favorite rock garden design to the shape of the tea bowl. This imaginary picture corresponds with the tea master and garden designer Sōko’s preference for rough and edged forms, which he also effectively realized in his rock garden designs. The recapitulation of his practices of choosing his tea utensils sheds some light on the intentions, which might have caused such a design transfer from garden to tea bowl design.

Ueda Sōkei 上田宗冨, the 16th grandmaster of the Ueda Sōko School explains:

Another aspect of Ueda Sōko’s *chanoyu* [...] is on the creative drive of the Momoyama samurai tea practitioners to make their own equipage for *chanoyu*. Ueda [...] Oribe [...] all had the passion to come up with their own unique styles and creations. They all had the spirit of artistic expression through constantly creating new things.²⁰

According to this statement it seems that

Ueda Sōko combined his garden landscape with the tea bowl landscape in the spirit of creating a unique and new artifact. Considering the almost eccentric tea utensils favored by his longtime teacher Furuta Oribe, this bowl by Sōko can be envisaged as a manifestation of the same off-the-beaten-track aesthetic.

Conclusion

In tea ceramics equivocal and potential images are recognized and sought after. Their representation as manifestations of *keshiki* ranges from trace to icon, from abstraction to figuration. The representational value of a tea bowl firstly depends on the potter's work creating the piece within a specific tradition and with individual style and secondly on the kiln effects that are partially planned and partially by chance. Furthermore, the value of a tea bowl is based on the aesthetical changes that were caused by usage or wear and repair. *Keshiki* appeals to a close examination by and the creative imagination of the beholder. It points at both the natural as well as the artificial features of a tea bowl. In conclusion, it seems that *keshiki* in tea ceramics is much more than a natural phenomenon of wood-fired ceramics and manifests itself also due to the long and extensive usage of as well as in the intended hand-made bold intervention in the form and appearance of a tea bowl.

Notes

- 1) Literally *keshiki* does mean landscape or scenery; the Great Japanese Language Dictionary *Kokugo Daijiten* notes the term also in connection with pottery.
- 2) Katō 1977, p. 308.
- 3) Ibid.
- 4) Nagasaka 1978, p. 155.

- 5) They explain that “wood-firing results in surfaces exhibiting of wide-ranging finishes— splashes or waves of color, sandy deposits of ash or melted pools of liquid color—all manifest according to the intricate dynamics of the natural force of fire. Overall the surface decoration is asymmetrical and undulating with array of effects, offering new landscapes [or *keshiki*] at each turn” (Kusakabe/Lancet 2005, p. 18).
- 6) Yellin 2004, p. 195.
- 7) Weiss 2013, pp. 153–171.
- 8) Jones, Ian Nicholas. *Wabicha and the perception of beauty in wood-fired ceramics*. Doctoral Theses, Australian National University, 2016.
- 9) Cort 2001, p. 110.
- 10) Jones 2016, p. 127.
- 11) Cort 2001, p. 128.
- 12) Jones 2016, p. 9.
- 13) Cort 2001, pp. 85,101.
- 14) *Kohiki* typically refers to an iron-rich clay body covered over with white slip and then a translucent glaze. In Japan, the *Kohiki* style started with Korean potters and appealed greatly to the *bushō chajin* or warrior-tea men of the late 1500s.
- 15) Weiss 2013, p. 161.
- 16) It belongs to the so called seven tea bowls of Kōetsu *Kōetsu nanashu* 光悦七種: Amagumo 雨雲, Kaga 加賀, Shigure 時雨, Teppeki 鉄壁, Airake 有明, Kamiya 神谷, Kuichigai 喰違.
- 17) Murase 2003, p. 108; Hiroshima Kenritsu Bijutsukan 2000, p. 121.
- 18) He was one of the chief daimyo in the service of the Toyotomi family who lost the battle of Sekigahara (1603), but served the winning side of the Tokugawa clan, in the siege of Osaka castle (1615). In Hiroshima Ueda was in the service of the daimyo Asano Nagaakira 浅野長晟 (1586–1632).
- 19) „Bushō chajin” 2012, p. 35.
- 20) Ueda Sōkei 16th Grandmaster of the Ueda Soko Tradition of tea, February 26, 2011, NHK Hiroshima, *Rajio shinya bin* 広島ラジオ深夜便.

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