

Kawaii, kehai – spaces in flux, where boundaries are ambiguous. Herein we find a source of images, which cannot be mechanistically simplified, and speak to us intuitively, in an undifferentiated state.

Arata Isozaki, “*Urban Design Methods*”

Marginal Japan

Japan rises out of the margins. New values and hopes appear not from the center but rather from marginal areas. Just as almost all the traditions we see today arose from nameless artisans and derelicts, Japanese creativity has always been inspired by people going astray, not fitting in, or deviating. To understand Japanese aesthetics, peek along the *kiwa* (edges). It is at the edges, where *marebito* (strangers) most often appear.

Japan Concept 1

kiwa

Japan Concept 2

marebito



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① “Cup no Fuchiko” figurines, which were all the rage in 2013. Japan’s playfulness crystallized around *kiwa* (edges = *fuchi*). ② Japanese nail art is said to be among the best in the world. ③ High school girls pursue fashion around the margins of school rules. Loose socks were one such manifestation. ④⑤ Individuality, expressed in *tatami* mat edges and the collar under kimono.



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Provided by: RISA + THE STARLIGHT
The School Style Store

Collars, Finger Tips, Feet and Ankles.

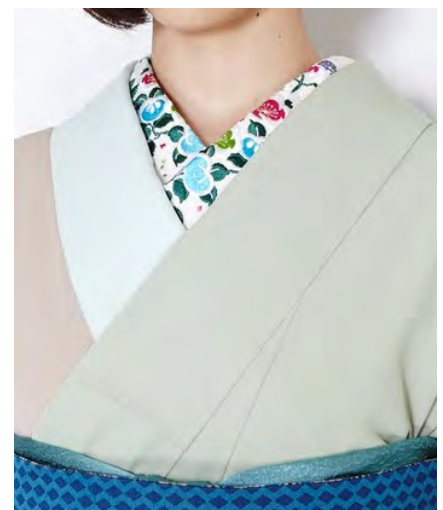
Battles decided, along the edge.

*Take a closer look,
Shepherd’s Purse blooming,
Beneath an ordinary hedge.* Matsuo Basho

④



⑤



Provided by: FURIFU <http://furifu.com/>

“*Kiwa*” connects inside and outside,
and serves as a marker towards
which to advance.

Kiwameru (to attain mastery) is to
“head for the *kiwa*”.

Japanese sense of framing : non-separation of inside and outside

Kiwa is a most important concept in Japan, which means much more than the physical edge of things. *Kiwadatsu*—the verb, “to stand out”—is comprised of *kiwa* and *tatsu* (to stand), and is a foremost quality sought in Japanese design. In the fiery accents of Jomon pottery; the layered combination of ceremonial robes; the hemmings of *tatami* mats, *fusuma* sliding doors, and *byobu* screens; and the collar under kimono—in *kiwa* dwells the *kiwami* (acme) of design.

This sensibility around framing differs from Western framing in that it connects inside and outside without a hard separation. In housing structures it can be found in the shape of hedges, eaves and *engawa* verandas. The spatial boundaries, where the home extends out into the world, have helped shape Japan’s sense of community. Furthermore, as the “slowly paling mountain rim” (*yama-giwa* [=yama-kiwa]) is celebrated in the line, “In spring, it is dawn” of *The Pillow Book*, the Japanese have long found beauty in the *kiwa* of changing times—the critical last moment (*seto-giwa*), the moment before parting (*sari-giwa*), or separation (*wakare-giwa*).

Analogy in Polytheism

Daily life in Japan offers a veritable thesaurus of terms pertaining to *kiwa*. These include words such as *kiwameru* (to master), *kiwadoi* (too close, risky), *kiwami* (acme), *kiwamono* (peculiar/odd things), *kiwakiwa* (borderline), *setogiwa* (the eleventh hour), *magiwa* (just before), *haegiwa* (hairline), *namiuchigiwa* (water’s edge), *madogiwa* (window sill), *sumi* (interior corner), *kado* (exterior corner), *heri* (hem), *fuchi* (rim), *hashi* (tip), *kire* (fragment), *kagiri* (limit), *sumikko* (corner), *bubun* (parts), *ma* (pause/space), and so on. Why such love for edges and boundaries?

Being a land of countless deities, the Japanese chose rhythmic succession of word and image as well as resonance of meaning, over the integrity and perfection of logic. The culture of *za* (guilds), as seen in *renga* linked verses and the *chanoyu* tea ceremony, was made possible through the association of analogous ideas and through creative collaboration. Something takes hold of the subtle workings of the human heart when images deriving from similar events or phenomena are superimposed onto each other—a tremor occurs in the interface, or *kiwa*, between adjacent entities.

Today, we can witness this sense of *kiwa* alive in the delicate adornings of nail art; in LINE stickers, which replace phatic responses for smoother communication; and in the clever wrapping design of rice balls in convenience stores.

kiwa

Marginal Japan



Engawa (veranda)

The *engawa* separates, and also connects, inside and outside. It denotes free entry to all and is a place for interaction with neighbors.



Sandal Straps

Hanao straps that decorate the edges of the feet are an important element in kimono coordination. The photographs show *zori* sandals by Gion Naito.



LINE Stickers

Joy? Irritation? Sarcasm or innocence? The true meaning of these expressions can only be deciphered by the conversational relationship. They add an extra-contextual edge to communication.



False Eyelashes

100-yen stores provide a wide array of false eyelashes. Subtle differences convey the true charm of fashion in the *kiwa*.

Cool Japan ●

Valuing gaps, pauses, empty spaces and silence, the Japanese ambience places relatively more emphasis on the locational dimension than the European ambience.

-Augustin Berque, *Le Sauvage et l'Artifice*. “*Les Japonais devant la nature*”
 (“Japan: Nature, Artifice and Japanese Culture”)

kiwa

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Toji Technology: In the subtle margins of taste

The artists and artisans of the Japan's Middle Ages were nomadic people—a network of *marebito* linking diverse aspects of the culture. These nomads possessed a remarkable ability to refashion time and space. Among them, was the artisan group of sake brewers called, *toji*

Toji are required to display highly refined senses and skills throughout the entire process of brewing sake. They rely on experience and instinct to sense marginal changes in aromas, flavors, and the workings of microorganisms such as yeast fungi in order to add finishing touches to a brand's taste.

Two words that describe the use of instincts to determine a right solution are: “*Ateru*” (to hit, as in “hit a target”) and “*kento*” (see+hit). The biologist and naturalist, Kumagusu Minakata, considered such instinctive guesswork a bonafide method for scientific discovery and referred to it as “*yariate*” (do+hit). Such science of conjecture is alive and well in the skills of Japan's artisans.



Sekai Itto Daiginjo “Kumagusu”
(Wakayama City, Wakayama Prefecture)

Sekai Itto is the sake brewing company, founded by the father of Kumagusu Minakata, and a highly regarded brand of sake. The name was bestowed by Shigenobu Ohkuma. The *daiginjo* sake “Kumagusu” was launched to commemorate the 120th anniversary of Kumagusu's birth.

Japanese Kiwa in Western Uses: Modern Kitchen Knife Design



Hocho-Kobo Tadafusa breadknife
(Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture)

Unlike standard breadknives, only the tip is serrated. The outstanding sharpness of this knife results in a smooth cut, leaving hardly any bread crumbs. Another feature is that the knife can be re-sharpened for continued use. This knife is made in Tsubame-Sanjo, a town renowned for its blacksmiths and manufacturing.

The Japanese often use the term, *kire*, when describing sharpness of skill. *Kire* originally described the sharpness of the tip of a cutting instrument. Blacksmiths' mastery over *kire* and *kiwa* led to the development of Japan's kitchen knife culture. A variety of specialized knives were developed to meet specific needs – for scaling fish, for slicing sashimi, for chopping vegetables – while, alongside the skills of chefs, the art of cutting would evolve to encompass a wide range of techniques, including fine chopping, quarter slicing, half-circle slicing, and many more.

The blades of Japanese kitchen knives are usually single-edged, the benefits of which include the ability to produce beautifully clean cuts. In contrast, western knives are double-edged, which, although inferior in terms of cutting edge, have the advantage of durability. In contemporary times, Japan's artisans have worked on developing domestic western-style knives that combine the beauty and utility of both styles.

The GLOBAL series of Yoshida Metal Industry and Hocho-Kobo Tadafusa are two such examples which have attracted worldwide acclaim in creating the ultimate in kitchen knife designs.



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Japan's deities: strangers from afar

*"I'm a traveler. I go where
the wind takes me, and as fancy takes me.
I'll think as I walk along."*

From the film, *Otoko wa Tsurai yo*
("TORA-SAN, Our Lovable Tramp") series



© SHOCHIKU

marebito

Marginal Japan



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① Ebisu – the god of good fortune – is an odd-looking deity who crossed the sea to arrive in Japan. ② A feature of Japanese gods is that they travel on *mikoshi* portable shrines. ③ The street peddler Tora-san, who occasionally returns home only to embark on a new journey, is a favorite *marebito* character among Japanese. ④ Billiken, surprisingly, comes from the United States. It is now famous as the god of Tsutenkaku Tower. ⑤ Coming out of the sea, Godzilla also displays qualities of the divine.



④

photograph: Shinzo Ota

⑤



marebito

Marginal Japan

The interchanging of host and guest roles is a custom that originates from the concept of *Marebito* – “visiting deities”

Occasional visits by strange guests

Japan is the land of the *marebito*. Literally translated as “rare people”, *marebito* is also spelled using the *kanji* characters which mean, “guest gods” or “guest people” and is a term coined by ethnologist, Shinobu Orikuchi. Orikuchi recognized the unspoken nature of Japan’s deities upon witnessing the Okinawan Shinto maiden ceremony, called *Noro*. The ceremony calls on deities from the utopian world of *Niraikanai*, far over the ocean. The gods never stay for long – they are visitors who, only at times, come from and leave for elsewhere. Unlike the god of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, who rules from the heaven above, the countless deities of polytheistic Japan are visiting gods – occasional guests to the human world.

Gaijin: the key to revitalizing Japan

The welcoming attitude towards *marebito* helped shape unique Japanese customs for hosting guests, and can be found in many areas of everyday life. Banquet seating is a typical example: while a guest will be given the seat of honor, the positional relationship between host and guest is not as strict as it is in the West and changes depending on the situation. Should another important guest arrive, the host or the previous main guest may offer their seat to the new guest by turning their cushion over. Similarly, in a *rakugo* (comic storytelling) performance, entertainers always flip their cushions in respect for the next act. The shifting or switching between host and guest is a key facet of the *marebito* concept. Precious objects are placed on the household shrine, only to be taken down and replaced by another in time.

The respect for “visiting gods” embedded in culture also explains why Japanese people treat *gaijin* (foreigners) and imported goods with such deference. From the ancient Buddhist statues to the hired foreign specialists of the Edo and Meiji era governments, anything that came from overseas was given the *marebito* treatment. Even today, the Japanese vaguely realize that foreigners such as Donald Keene or Hakuho, as well as society’s radical outsiders such as Akihiro Miwa and Matsuko Deluxe, actually hold the key to revitalizing Japan.



Maitreya and Senju Kannon

Buddhism arrived in Japan after being transmitted from India to China and the Korean Peninsula, becoming widespread during the age of Shotoku Taishi. Bodhisattvas and Kannon, too, are guest deities.



The Ministry of Justice’s former main building

The Meiji government entrusted these *marebito* with the task of designing the buildings of its central institutions. This building was designed by the German architects, Hermann Gustav Louis Ende and Wilhelm Böckmann.



Provided by:
Nihon Sumo Kyokai

Foreign Sumo Wrestlers

The retired Kotoōshū from Bulgaria (the current Naruto stablemaster). Foreign wrestlers now account for 40% of wrestlers in the *makuuchi* senior-grade division.



©Hajime Isayama/Kodansha Ltd.

Manga “Attack on Titan” (Hajime Isayama)

This hit manga has been adapted for TV animation and a live-action movie. The Titans of this story may be equated with *marebito*

If one day you visit Japan, you must visit a festival (en'nichi) at least once. The best time to see an en'nichi is at night. The view against the backdrop of countless lanterns and lamps is something to behold.

“Nihon no Kokoro”, Yakumo Koizumi (Lafcadio Hearn)

Dance of the *marebito*: the essence of Japan's performing arts

Orikuchi cites the Niino snow festival in Nagano Prefecture as a prime example of the *marebito* dance. Amidst calls of “ranjo, ranjo”, the masked gods of Saiho, Modoki, and Kyoman appear one after another to provide and celebrate a bountiful harvest.

The mid-winter dance continues from late night until early morning. The gods then go on their way, leaving only a remnant feeling of an auspicious visitation. In contrast to Saiho, who displays a soft, gentle expression, Modoki wears a fierce mask with eyebrows gathered. The name Modoki infers “mimicry”, and Orikuchi recognized its main role to be that of “re-narration” or “re-interpretation”. Zeami – creator of *Noh* drama in its present form – also considered mimicry to be the essence of performing arts and aimed to project the image of Modoki onto the theatre stage.



Niino Snow Festival (Anan, Nagano Prefecture)

Regarded as one of the original ancient performing arts, the festival takes place in the grounds of Izu Shrine from the evening of January 14 through to the next morning. Shinobu Orikuchi introduces it as “a festival that students of Japanese performing arts must see at least once.”



The mechanics of mimicry: hints of a visitation

Oddly familiar, yet unmistakably weird, the telenoid developed by robot developer, Hiroshi Ishiguro (Osaka University) is quite eerie at first glance. Without exception, its strange looks invite suspicion from those who encounter it for the first time. It doesn't take long, however, for it to grow on them. Its neutral design means that onlookers can project onto the figure, any type of person – male or female, child or elder – making it the perfect *marebito*. Robots are measured by their ability to mimic. Festive ceremonies such as those in the Niino Snow Festival and traditional performing arts such as *noh*, *bunraku*, and *kabuki* may hold exactly what Japan needs for future innovation.

Provided by: Telenoid Healthcare Company

Remote control android “Telenoid” (Prof. Hiroshi Ishiguro, Osaka University)

Developed by Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International (ATR) and Osaka University. The android is expected to promote communication among elderly persons in need of care, particularly those showing advanced symptoms of dementia.