

Lecture

# Valuation Dissonance between Traditional and SNS Worlds for Japanese Confectionary *Wagashi*\*

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## Abstract

The Japanese confectionary *wagashi* has been evaluated by traditional Japanese criteria, such as simplicity and serenity, within the traditional tea ceremony. However, the popularization of the social networking service (SNS) (that is, technological change) has led to the introduction of valuation criteria focusing on the efficacy of showcasing one's unique and colorful life (emotions and experiences) through photographs and letters (Suda and Morisaki 2018). Thus, there are two valuation "worlds" (the traditional world and the SNS world that comprise specific events, materials, persons involved, and the valuation criteria) of *wagashi* (Morisaki and Suda 2016; 2017) that share a dissonant relationship. This paper examines whether the two valuation worlds should be in contradiction with each other. Based on a case of a *wagashi* artisan/performer, we can say that there is a possibility to synthesize them. Moreover, the valuation dissonance introduced by the "SNS technology" might serve as a source of "liberal arts" innovation.

## 1. Introduction

Through an example, we demonstrate how technological change has effected a change in the evaluation method for traditional products. In this context, we examine the traditional cultural and economic valuation criteria for a Japanese confectionary, *wagashi*, whose history dates to more than 1000 years. We will pursue this subject as follows. The second section provides an overview of *wagashi's* culture and industry. The third section explains the traditional and dominant criteria used for evaluating *wagashi* in relation to the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. The fourth section shows that the popularization of the social networking service (SNS), a medium for establishing social networks, has introduced a valuation criterion (Morisaki and Suda 2016; 2017, Suda and

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\* This paper is written based on the presentation of the authors in the 3rd Japanese-Croatian International Conference: Technological Changes and Society hosted by Faculty of Economics, Wakayama University in September 9, 2019.

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Morisaki 2018). The fifth section confirms the existence of a *dissonant* (conflicting) relationship between the two valuation worlds (Morisaki 2018)—*traditional valuation* and *disconnected valuation*. In this regard, we examine whether the two worlds should be in contradiction with each other. Based on the case of a *wagashi* artisan/performer, the sixth section stresses that the valuation dissonance introduced by SNS can serve as a source of cultural innovation.

## 2. Overview of the *Wagashi* Culture and Economy

More than 1000 years ago, *wagashi* developed together with the green tea (*matcha*) ceremony held in political and social establishments, temples, and shrines. It has also been integrated into ordinary people's life events (e.g., marriage, funerals, and Buddhist memorial services) and seasonal events. It functioned as a tool to recognize the purposes of events and shared feelings (e.g., celebration and season sense), and thereby strengthened domestic ties. Later, it began to be consumed in homes daily.

However, in recent years, there has been a gradual decline in *wagashi* consumption (Figure 1) owing to the nuclear family trend, a loose focus on in traditional family events, and competition from western confectionery.

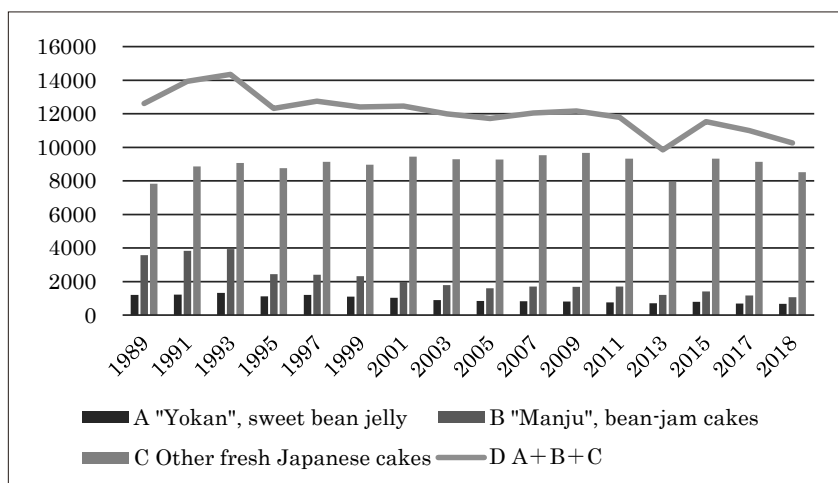


Fig 1. *Wagashi* consumption per household (JPY).

Source: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Family Income and Expenditure Survey.

### 3. Valuation in the Traditional World of *Wagashi*

Traditionally, *wagashi* has been evaluated in the context of the tea ceremony. In the tea ceremony, the host provides *wagashi* to guests. As in the Figure 2, first, a host of a tea ceremony decides the ceremony's theme; subsequently, based on a consultation with the seller, the host orders *wagashi* that matches the theme (purpose). For example, if the theme is to appreciate Chrysanthemum, then the form and color of *wagashi* should be related to the flower. The host and guests evaluate the quality of the shop's *wagashi* (e.g., quality of raw materials and taste) and its fitness to the ceremony's theme. Moreover, such an evaluation contributes to the shop's goodwill (reputation built over a period).

This traditional world maintains a distance between an artisan and end consumers. The host and guests value a *wagashi* shop's goodwill and not a *wagashi* artisan's skill. In other words, the artisan works at the backend or the production site of the shop, and hence the artisan's contribution stays hidden from its customers.

In this world, there are other elements of valuation. The first element comprises the political, social, religious ranks of the host, temples, and shrines. It implies that a shop, which has been selected for delivering *wagashi* in prestigious ceremonies of high-rank individuals, temples, and shrines, has a goodwill and reputation. Second, the product is valued on the bases of Japanese authoritative and authentic aesthetics (value criterion) or "*wabi sabi*," which means simplicity and serenity (Figure 3). The third criterion is design, which has been prescribed by classic culture (e.g., classic literature and poetry). Figure 4 shows an authorized design based on the classic culture. Fourth, *wagashi*'s design should enhance the impact of the tea, the arrangement of the tea cutlery, the tea room, and the whole tea ceremony (Morisaki and Suda 2016). Thus, *wagashi* does not play a leading role but a supporting (but essential) role in the tea ceremony.

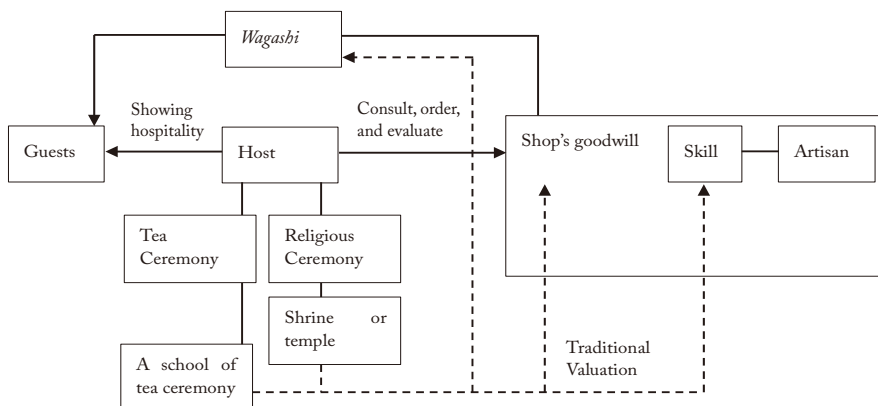


Fig 2. Valuation in the Traditional World

Source: Developed by the authors from Morisaki and Suda (2016) and Morisaki (2018).



**Fig 3. *Wagashi* Expressing Simplicity and Serenity**

The photographs were taken by an author, Morisaki, at Shioyoshiken, Kyoto, September 27, 2017.



**Fig 4. An Authorized Design**

The photograph was taken by an author, Morisaki, at Kameya Yoshinaga, Kyoto, March 12, 2016.

Thus, the valuation of *wagashi* has a robust relationship with the tea ceremony; the entire Japanese classic culture; and the social, political, and religious authorities and their hierarchy. We refer to such valuation system in the traditional world as “traditional valuation.”

#### **4. Valuation in the diffusing digitalized world of *wagashi***

It must be noted that the number of participants in tea ceremonies declined from 2.8 million in 1986 to 1.7 million in 2011. While the scale of participants in the traditional world has shrunk gradually, there has been an increase in the demand of *wagashi* by foreign tourists and for dairy and conspicuous consumption, which can be attributed to the popularity of SNS. In conformity to the theme of this conference “Technological Change and Society,” we focus on the rapidly expanding digitalized relationships established through SNS platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The valuation method in this developing world is different from the traditional one (Morisaki and Suda 2016; 2017, Suda and Morisaki 2018).

Customers in the SNS world value on the basis of the following three points. First, the product must be photogenic. They focus on the feminine values (cute, lovely, exotic, instagrammable, and “*karawai*”) rather than on the authoritative values (simplicity and serenity). Second, they value

a colorful and concise explanation of the product rather than a lengthy explanation, which is related to the traditional and refined culture. The third factor is governed by their emotions and daily experiences. Let us give an example. A customer shows her cats (Figure 5) to an artisan in a department store's booth. In the presence of the customer, the artisan forms *wagashi* replicas of her cats (Figure 6). The artisan's crafting as a service constitutes her experience, which can be described as extraordinary. The customer's satisfaction leads to the artisan's satisfaction. Here, the scenario leads to a shared experience of satisfaction between the artisan and the customer. These shared experiences motivate *wagashi* customers to post photos of such customized *wagashi* on their Facebook and Instagram pages.



**Fig 5. Customer's Cats**



**Fig 6. Forming Wagashi**



**Fig 7. Shared Emotion**

The photographs were taken by an author, Morisaki, at Shinjuku Takashimaya, Tokyo, February 25, 2018.

SNS has opened new opportunities for artisans. In the traditional world, artisans remain hidden behind names of shops where they work. Customers (the host and guests in Figure 2) share a connection with a shop based on its goodwill; however, their affiliation does not extend to an artisan as an individual or his/her skill. Conversely, in the SNS world, artisans can showcase their product by their name and contact customers directly. They can interact with customers using their desired platform, such as at the *wagashi* sales booths of department stores (Figure 8), in their galleries (Figure 9), or in collaboration with designers of other industries with whom they connect via the SNS platforms or at the booths and galleries.



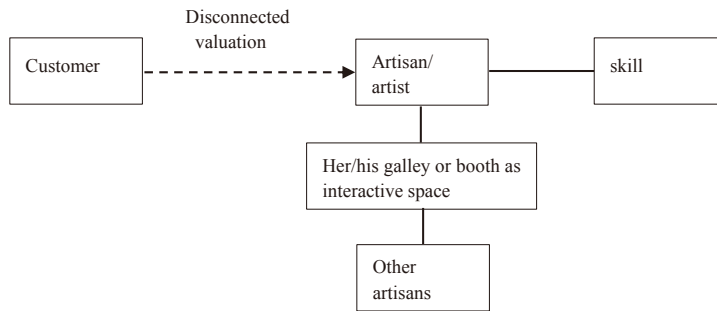
**Fig 8. Artisan at Booth**



**Fig 9. Artisan Having Her Gallery**

Figure 8 was taken by an author, Morisaki, at Shinjuku Takashimaya, Tokyo, October 6, 2017. Figure 9 was taken by an author, Morisaki, at "on Sundays" in the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art: Watari-um, Tokyo, March 5, 2016.

In Figure 9, customers who visit the gallery of the artisan evaluate the latter's personality, sensibility, and expertise. Additionally, artisans from other industries visit the gallery and exchange ideas through their interactions (Figure 10).



**Fig 10. Valuation in the SNS World**

Source: Developed by the authors from Morisaki and Suda (2016).

Thus, SNS has disconnected some artisans and their products from the traditional world. In the new world, *wagashi* is valued on the basis of artisans' effectiveness in showcasing a unique and colorful life (emotions and experiences) through photos and letters. We call the valuation as "SNS valuation" or "disconnected valuation," on account of its disconnectedness from tradition.

## 5. Dissonance

The two worlds are related by *dissonance* (Morisaki 2018). From the standpoint of the traditional world, the SNS world of *wagashi* is characterized by self-assertiveness and gaudiness and lacks simplicity and serenity. In other words, it is considered boisterous for a solemn tea ceremony. However, the traditional *wagashi* has failed to meet the specific demands of customers in the SNS world. As seen from the two *wagashi* in Figure 4, they are not photogenic. The root of the dissonance may be attributed to the essential difference between the roles of *wagashi*. While, in the traditional world, as we noted in Section 3, the role of *wagashi* is to complement the tea and the whole tea ceremony, in the SNS world, the *wagashi* plays a major role in livening the regular and special occasions of SNS users.

The dissonance between the two worlds leads to the question of whether there exists a conflict between the traditional and disconnected valuations. In Section 6, we present the challenging activities done by a *wagashi* artisan Mr. Junichi Mitsubori. These activities can be attributed to his fame as an artisan/performer. He has been receiving attention from a *wagashi* industry trade

magazine (Okimura 2016) and a high-quality magazine for adult women consumers (Nakagawa 2017). Through these activities, as we discuss below, he seems to integrate the aforementioned valuations.

## 6. Case Study: Artisan/performer in the SNS World

Mr. Mitsubori forms extremely elaborate *wagashi* in the presence of the customers. The opportunity to view the entire *wagashi* production process and participate in the main service provide delight to the consumers as well as elevate *wagashi* production to an art form (Figure 11). In other words, Mr. Mitsubori elevates the production activity by turning it into a live art performance, that is, dynamic art (Morisaki and Suda 2017). He has grown through the following five aspects and established own identity by creating a distinct valuation world. First, he extremely enhanced the traditional *wagashi*-forming skill, thereby challenging the traditional design criterion. Although every part of his *wagashi* (Figure 12) is created based on traditional design and skill, the design has too many layers.



Fig 11. Mr. Mitsubori's Performance



Fig 12. Mr. Mitsubori's Elaborate *Wagashi*

The photographs were taken by an author, Morisaki, at Salon du Chocolat, Porte de Versailles, Paris, November 3, 2018.

Second, he presents the backroom production techniques to customers in a face-to-face spectacle to amuse them, unlike the traditional world practice. During the performance, he does not withdraw from difficult *wagashi*-forming processes. Owing to these difficulties, Mr. Mitsubori and his audience share a sense of tension during the process and sense of relief upon completion.

Third, he coordinates and regulates his demeanor and dressing style (for example, his silver hair, black mask, and traditional clothes) and maintains a calm and composed attitude to express modernized, traditional values in a consistent way (Figure 13). Fourth, he earned the traditional and authoritative title, similar to the grand master of a tea school. Fifth, he organizes lessons in which customers/students make their own *wagashi* by using special tools. During the lessons, his customers/students execute activities that help them experience “modernized traditional” values.



**Fig 13. Traditional-taste Fashion**

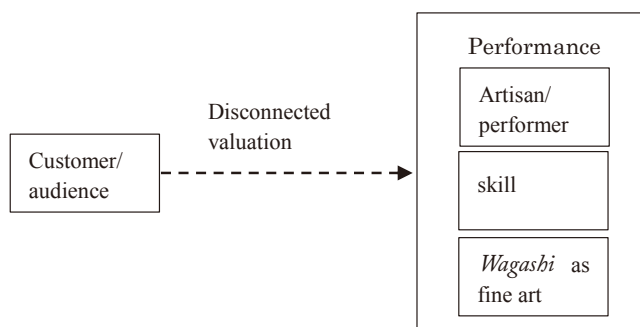
The photograph was taken by an author, Morisaki, at Waterras Common, Tokyo, September 23, 2019.

Such interactions between him and customers motivate them to post photos and letters on the SNS platforms. This can be further attributed to the following two points. First, the unique fashion, behavior, skill, and *wagashi* of Mr. Mitsubori in integrated and consistent manner provide his customers an unique experience. It is not necessary to be well-educated to understand such extremely enhanced traditional value. Second, customers are motivated to share the unique experiences (making, appreciating, and eating) gained during their *wagashi*-making lessons. These experiences depicted through photos, interesting write-ups, and emotional and short messages induce the viewers to push the “like” button.

In his well-constituted valuation world, customers/audiences/students recognize elements (the artisan/performer, his sophisticated skill, and his fine *wagashi* art) as part of a single valuable package (Figure 14).

Mr. Mitsubori’s performance shows a relationship between the traditional and disconnected valuations. He does not withdraw from the traditional value (simplicity and serenity), but highly enhances it using his skill. He elevates a traditional backroom craft to a photogenic performance, thereby evoking customers’ emotions. He converts a skill to a customer experience through his performances and lessons. Thus, we can interpret that he “translates” traditional valuation to a disconnected one in a way that pushes the former one to an extremely enhanced level.





**Fig 14. Disconnected Valuation to Performance: Providing an Experience to Customer/audience**

Source: Compiled by the authors.

## 7. Conclusion

The valuation introduced by SNS (an *engineering* innovation) does not have to be contradictory to the traditional one. In some situations, they can be synthesized or brought to a settlement. The dissonance might serve as a source of translational innovation (or *liberal arts* innovation).

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