
Tea Rooms as "National Heritage"? : Heritage Discourses in 1930's Japan

Mariko Naito*¹

¹Meiji University (Meiji U.) – 1-9-1 Eifuku, Suginami, Tokyo 168-8555 JAPAN, Japan

Abstract (in French and English)

My paper explores the interplay of different languages and different interested individuals or parties that have constructed heritage discourses in modern Japan. More precisely, I focus on tea rooms, architectural spaces designed for the tea ceremony, a practice which became popular in Japan over the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. I will consider how some historical tea rooms exclusively achieved the status of "national heritage" through dialogues between international and domestic architects in the 1930s.

First, I will illustrate how international architects visiting Japan in the 1930s certified the authenticity of the tea rooms as Japanese heritage. I argue that Western languages played an important role in defining what qualifies or does not qualify as national heritage.

I will then illustrate contestations among domestic Japanese architects, intellectuals and practitioners of tea ceremony regarding the legitimacy of the tea rooms. I will demonstrate how domestic Japanese stakeholders transformed authorized heritage discourses in Japanese by revealing the ambiguous and contested meanings used to describe "Japan-ness" in the heritage discourses in 1930's.

I will conclude that heritage discourses produced by interactions between international and domestic languages and among interested individuals in 1930's Japan reveals the complexity and fluidity of the construction of national identity.

Keywords: heritage, Japanese architecture, nation identity, tea ceremony

*Speaker