

# Major and Minor Transnationalism in Yoko Inoue's Art

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## Abstract

This article elucidates major transnationalism and minor transnationalism through an analysis of works by New York-based Japanese artist Yoko Inoue (b. 1964). Inoue engages in social criticism through varied media such as ceramics, installations, and performance art. Her works demonstrate minor-transnationalism observed in the relationships she has built with other transmigrants and minoritized individuals over such issues as xenophobia and racism after 9/11, and Hiroshima/Nagasaki and related contemporary nuclear issues. Inoue also addresses the disparities in collective memory and narratives between Japan and the US as well as socio-economic inequalities between nation-states and the movement of people/goods/money within Trans-Pacific power dynamics, all of which illustrates major transnationalism in the Trans-Pacific.

## Keywords

transnationalism – Hiroshima – transmigrants – 9/11 – Japan – performance art – Sherman E. Lee – General Headquarters (GHQ)

In their book *Minor Transnationalism*, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih define minor transnationalism as the horizontal relationship between transmigrants and/or between minoritized people.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Janet Alison Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen discuss major-transnationalism in the Trans-Pacific, in reference to the economic, political, and military contact zones between the

<sup>1</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih eds., "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationality," in *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–23.

nation-states, as well as the power dynamics between them.<sup>2</sup> This article considers both major- and minor- transnationalism within the context of contact zones in the Trans-Pacific in its analysis of the work of Japanese artist Yoko Inoue who is currently based in New York and also is a faculty member of Bennington College in Vermont. Various approaches could be taken to examine Yoko Inoue's work and commentary, for example, in relation to food and art, or high and low art, however, here I focus on negotiations with "major transnationalism" and "minor transnationalism" in the Trans-Pacific sphere explored in Inoue's art. This project is based on my extensive interviews and exchanges with her between 2006 and 2019, as well as research about the related topics, in particular, the ceramics industry in Nagoya, Japan in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 Early Minor Transnational Encouragements

When Inoue attended graduate studies in the fine arts in New York in the 1990s, she often found herself perplexed by the dictates of the largely white male faculty. She sensed that the faculty viewed her as an "international student" and "Japanese"<sup>4</sup> and expected to find that identity expressed in her work. Inoue felt uneasy about the prevailing stronghold of not only the gendered and racialized gaze but also "East versus West" frameworks that occurred during critiques and evaluations. At times, she felt as if her work did not receive fair recognition and even considered quitting graduate school altogether.

It was her Caribbean-born classmates who encouraged her to continue, one of whom was Nari Ward, a Jamaican immigrant who would go on to international fame as a sculptor. Ward uses objects he finds around his Harlem neighbourhood, such as discarded shoelaces, carts, and scrap iron, to create

2 Janet Alison Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen eds., *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014).

3 This is a revised and expanded version of an excerpt from my chapter, "Hodoku' 'Tsunagu' ga Umidasu Mainā-Toransunashonalizumu: Inoue Yoko Inoue to Jean Shin no Sakuhin to Katari kara" (Minor-Transnationalism generated by "unraveling" and "connecting": The Works and Narratives of Yoko Inoue and Jean Shin), in *Kan-Taiheiyō-chūki ni okeru Idō to Jinshu* (Migration and Race in the Trans-Pacific), edited by Tanabe, Akio, Yasuko Takezawa and Ryuichi Narita (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2020), 361–403.

4 I first interviewed Yoko Inoue on 9 March 2006, but the interviews used in this article took place on the following dates at the following places: 22 September 2017, at Inoue's studio in Brooklyn, New York; 8 May 2018, at the Tokyo Office of Kyoto University, Skype interview on 6 July 2018, in addition to numerous email exchanges. All references to the artist, her biography and practice, as well as statements, are from these communications, unless otherwise indicated.

works that call attention to racial discrimination, poverty, and consumer culture.

Nari Ward was the one who told me I did not have to exhibit in traditional galleries, that I could just create my own spaces to show my work. If you wait for opportunity to knock you might wait forever, so if you want to show people your work, just do it wherever you want, that kind of thing. He himself was always reclaiming spaces like that: "Why not do it in that empty lot? (...) Everyone is going to tell you complicated things about minimalism or injecting theory into your work, but do not let that kind of Western colonialism lead you astray."

"Being an immigrant, you really do have to be resilient, I guess," Inoue continued. Inoue's conversations with Ward and her other Caribbean-born classmates provided her with the encouragement she needed which led to develop her own artistic style.

## 2 Post 9/11: Encounters with Transmigrants

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Inoue was engaged in the creation of a new performance art piece as an artist-in-residence with the non-profit organization, Art in General, in New York City. Through her daily observation of the crowds thronging Canal Street, she noticed that these vendors, exhibiting their humorous and talented performances despite the tragedy, attracted the most attention from people passing by.

I could not do anything more powerful than that (...) The customers were not museumgoers; these were people coming to shop (...) Their desires were different. I asked myself whether the visual arts could satisfy those people's desires, and I decided the answer was no.

As a consequence, Inoue developed a performance art piece in which she took a mould of a *maneki-neko* (a common Japanese figurine in the shape of a cat believed to bring good luck to its owner) and used it to produce copies out of clay, which she then sold.

In the post-9/11 environment in New York, with patriotism substantially elevated, Inoue personally experienced the weakness and precarity of being simultaneously a "non-American" and "person of colour." On Canal Street, nearly all the immigrants covered their shops with American flags and had begun

selling huge quantities of American flag merchandise, while masking the identities of their homelands. It was their way of protecting themselves from the anti-immigrant bashing they feared in the wake of then President George W. Bush's pronouncement that "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."<sup>5</sup>

These "pro-American" merchandise products, including sweaters modelled on Ralph Lauren's American Flag sweater collection, began to fly off the shelves. Yet while the Ralph Lauren fashion company placed emphasis on their products being "100% American made,"<sup>6</sup> the majority of these sweaters Inoue saw on Canal Street were brought to the US by undocumented immigrants who made their livelihoods as intermediaries in the circulation of goods between Peru, Ecuador, and the US.

These vendors constantly kept an eye on one another, scouting out who was setting up shop where, and what each was selling. Sometimes when crowds of people on curator-led tours surrounded her *maneki-neko* stall, Inoue too would be treated as a business rival by the other vendors, who would come out to spy on what was happening at her stall. At the same time, however, there were instances of cooperation and mutual protection, particularly when it came to the police. As Inoue explains:

The presence of a mutual enemy [in the form of the police] brought everyone together. People would call out to each other or signal each other with their cell phones, and everyone would cover for each other. It brought a sense of unity. Things changed enormously in that regard; it is really interesting. Once people have seen you around, they come over to help, say "good morning," stuff like that.

Almost all these vendors were transmigrant people of colour, many of whom came from Latin America, with certain segments from other regions, such as Africa and Asia. , According to Inoue, "like, 9/11 has made things really tough, things like that," which generated a sense of mutual empathy amongst transmigrants including herself.

5 "Transcript of President Bush's Address," *CNN*, 21 September 2001, <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

6 There was a nationalistic element with the phrase "American made using American wool" touted on the Ralph Lauren website. Ralph Lauren patterned this product after the original thirteen-star American flag used during the War of 1812, which incorporated the original lyrics of the national anthem which lent their strength to restoration.

Once we kind of got to know each other, we would stand around and chat over our cups of coffee. I met this Ecuadorian guy who made sweaters, for instance (...) "Where are you from?" "Japan." "I am from Ecuador." "The Ecuadorian soccer team's doing well," I replied. Japan was hosting the World Cup that year, you see. So, I continued, "Ecuador's really giving it their best shot in Japan." We became friendly and ended up exchanging all kinds of information. Eventually he told me he was in charge of all the people selling the sweaters. He would bring them all there in his van. He told me, "There are around twenty villages up in the Andes in Ecuador. I figured out which ones are making a lot of these, and I know all these communities."

Having become close with many of the Peruvian and Ecuadoran immigrants she met, Inoue began a long-term project entitled *Transmigration of the SOLD* (2005–ongoing). New York / Otavalo, Ecuador / Amantani Island, Peru) with



FIGURE 1 Yoko Inoue, *Transmigration of the SOLD*, site-specific installation, Canal Street, New York, NY, 2006–2009.

IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST.

people in the Andes mountains and the “intermediary” transmigrants to New York. Using the American flag knit cap she imported from the Andes, Inoue put on a performance, *Community Alert*, in 2001 at the Rotunda Gallery of the Brooklyn Council of the Arts that involved unravelling the knitted American flag cap she wore to reveal a black headscarf underneath (fig. 1). At the time, metaphors conflating the 9/11 terrorists with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation<sup>7</sup> in Mexico and the Kamikaze special attack units of the Japanese Imperial Army were widespread. Non-white immigrants kept their identities hidden under cover of the Stars and Stripes in order to protect themselves from the gathering storm of xenophobia. The project demonstrated Inoue’s way of challenging the attitudes of mainstream American society that seemed, particularly acute during the 9/11 period, to doubt the loyalty of anyone who was not a white American citizen. Her performance compelled audiences to consider the different ways in which dominant American society and non-white immigrants interpret what is revealed when the American flag is unravelled.

While in the Andes, Inoue learned that the three-colour flag held by the Quechua-speaking Indigenous people of Amantani Island (on the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca in the Altiplano region) during dances symbolizes the red, white, and blue flowers of the potato plant, which they hold to be the source of life. The Indigenous people of the Andes deem potatoes and goats to be more precious than money as sources of sustenance. For her Canal Street performance, Inoue thus also repurposed the yarn unravelled from the American flag hats to make and sell tri-colour bouquets symbolizing the flowers of the potato plant (fig. 2). Ultimately, the processes of globalization have led to Andean peoples knitting American-flag sweaters that are utterly disconnected from their own lives. The repetitious cross-border flow of people and goods led Inoue to begin considering the racial and geographical economic disparities between the global North and South. She subsequently created art using food to interrogate economic disparities and bring historical awareness to modern society’s most pressing issues.

### 3 Hiroshima/Nagasaki: Empathy with a Navaho Chef

In 2017, Inoue presented a provocative performance at SF1140 as part of an event at the Santa Fe Art Institute in New Mexico, which included the

<sup>7</sup> The Zapatista is a guerrilla resistance organization based in Chiapas, Mexico that fight against neoliberalism and the discrimination of Indigenous peoples.





FIGURE 2 Yoko Inoue, Tri-colour knitted potato flowers in “Transmigration of the SOLD,” site-specific installation, Canal Street, New York, NY, 2006–2009. IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST.

involvement of a Navaho pastry chef. The event consisted of each of the invited twenty artists giving 140-second presentations. Inoue’s performance was inspired by an old monotonous film justifying the use of the atomic bomb in *Hiroshima Nagasaki* (date unknown). The film is still being shown, although Inoue had seen it some years before at the Bradbury Science Museum in nearby Los Alamos, where the then Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory (now Los Alamos National Laboratory) housed one of the sites of the Manhattan Project that researched and developed the atomic bomb during World War Two. The film was precisely 140 seconds long. Inoue also recalled that she was deeply shocked to see a model of an enormous cake in the shape of a mushroom cloud on display at the Los Alamos History Museum.

There was this model of a cake that was served at the ceremony [on 5 November 1946] celebrating the successful hydrogen bomb tests on Bikini Atoll. It was totally shocking. They were having a celebration! It was like a wedding cake or something. I was so surprised, I asked, “What on earth is this?”

She was also stunned to see archival photos of upper-class women on their way to a cocktail party wearing large mushroom cloud hats. When she saw the last scene of the film on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and its American-oriented narration (“we ended the war with only two bombs” – as if this was an adequate justification for the use of nuclear weapons), she thought, “Really? In 2017? It made me crazy. And I figured I needed to show it to the audience.” Inoue consulted a local wedding cake shop about “commissioning” a big cake resembling a mushroom cloud from nuclear bomb testings to use in her performance. When she showed to the chef her drawing of the cake in her mind, the chef responded, “Oh wow! I am a Navajo. I am happy to do this!” (fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> The Navajo people had suffered for over a half century from the contamination of their land and the subsequent serious health damage caused by a series of nuclear tests and the large-scale uranium mining in the region. The secret Manhattan Project, which started on 9 October 1941 upon President Roosevelt’s call for the development of an atomic bomb, had acquired an estimated 44,000 pounds of uranium on and near the Navajo reservation between 1943 and 1945.<sup>9</sup> The serious effects of the uranium mining have continued to threaten the lives and resources of the Navajo nation. Inoue decorated the cake stand with napkins that she had hand embroidered with each name of the Native American nations, the names used for each shot of thermonuclear testings that were conducted at Bikini and Enewetak atolls in 1956. These napkins were intended to signal the message that the nuclear issue is not unique to Japan and the Japanese, but of the US and the world historically up to present day.

Inoue’s 140-second long performance consisted of audience members one by one more or less force-feeding cake into her mouth while the aforementioned 140-second video, *Hiroshima, Nagasaki*, played in the background

8 The chef’s anonymity was agreed to by both parties.

9 Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 1–2. See also United States Congress Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, “America’s Nuclear Past: Examining the Effects of Radiation in Indian country: Hearing before the Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, One Hundred Sixteenth Congress, first session, 7 October 2019.





FIGURE 3 Yoko Inoue, photograph of a Navajo Indian chef making a mushroom cloud cake for the performance at SFAI140, Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe, NM, 2017, 140 second performance.

IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST.

(fig. 4). Inoue chose to use a real cake so that the participants would never forget the way it smelled as they fed it to her. Scientists and workers from Los Alamos mingled in the audience with the many white, self-identified liberals from the art world, and Inoue was acutely aware of the crowd's emotional response to her performance.<sup>10</sup>

In dealing with the memory of the atomic bomb, Inoue's work did not address Korean atomic bomb survivors and other victims of Japanese colonialism in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Given that the audience at SFAI140 was composed almost entirely of Americans, Inoue placed her top priority to encourage a reconsideration of nuclear weapons in the US. When I asked her about Japanese colonialism in Asia before World War Two, and the debate in the US regarding the issue of comfort women, she gave her own idiosyncratic view, and expressed interest in someday attempting to produce a work addressing these issues.

10 "SFAI 140 – March 2016 – Yoko Inoue, posted by Sante Fe Art Institute, March 2016, <https://vimeo.com/162389055>.



FIGURE 4 Yoko Inoue, Video still of the performance being fed cake pieces by the audience at SFA1140, Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe, NM, 2017, 140 second performance. IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST.

#### 4 “Upside-Down” Memories of Hiroshima/Nagasaki

Inoue has continued to research and explore the issues related to the post-war US–Japan relationship and differences in historical memories and awareness. In 2017, Inoue presented the installation *Tea Taste Democracy and Upside-Down Objects* at the SPACES gallery in Cleveland. On the wall were Western-style ceramic figurines affixed upside-down such that the viewer was confronted with the words “Made in Occupied Japan” inscribed on their bases (fig. 5). In a recessed display space, set up like a *tokonoma* decorative alcove in a Japanese-style room, the soundtrack from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki film accompanies images of giant mushroom clouds and a photograph of a white vhousewife proudly displaying a mushroom cloud-shaped cake. Inoue’s ceramic replicas of tea bowls, vases, and other everyday items are lined up on tables beside the charred bento boxes she made (fig. 6), copying the well-known actual artefact displayed in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Hanging scrolls are filled with screams written in comic book typefaces. Inoue employed this comic book-style writing because of the important role that



FIGURE 5 Made in Occupied Japan nobilities displayed at Tea Taste Democracy and Upside-Down Objects, *Spaces Gallery, Cleveland, Ohio, 2017*.  
IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: SPACES GALLERY.



FIGURE 6 Tea Taste Democracy and Upside-Down Objects, *Spaces Gallery, Cleveland, Ohio, 2017*.  
IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: SPACES GALLERY.

manga and anime like *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Akira* played in relating the truth of the atomic bomb during the long period after the war when such topics were politically and socially suppressed.<sup>11</sup>

Inoue's work juxtaposes the contrasting "upside-down" memories of Hiroshima/Nagasaki between the US and Japan: the American celebratory narrative of the dropping of the atomic bomb in the video and the charred bento boxes; the proud smile of a woman showing off her cake, and anguished cries represented through anime and manga. Noelle Giuffrida, then a professor of Asian art at Case Western Reserve University, praised Inoue's installation, as "a jarring and thought-provoking group of polarizing images of the romanticizing of the atomic bombs on the American side, and then the devastation that they wrought in Japan."<sup>12</sup>

Inoue first encountered the phrase "Made in Occupied Japan" when one of her students from Bennington College brought her an item discovered in a second-hand shop.<sup>13</sup> General Headquarters (GHQ), part of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) which administered occupied Japan from 1945 to 1952, had mandated this inscription be put on all products meant for overseas exportation produced in the five-year period between the resumption of private import/export trade in 1947 and the Peace Treaty of San Francisco in 1952.<sup>14</sup>

During an art residency in early 2017 at the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA), which boasts one of the finest collections of Asian art in the US on par with the collections in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Seattle Art Museum, she turned her attention to materials in the CMA archive related to the former museum director Sherman E. Lee.<sup>15</sup> Lee (1918–2008) was one of the "Monuments Men," people who went to Japan under US General Douglas MacArthur

11 *Grave of the Fireflies* first appeared in Akiyuki Nosaka's novel in 1967; the film version was produced in 1988. *Akira* first appeared in comics, *Weekly Young Magazine*, in 1982, and its film version was produced in 1988.

12 Noel Giuffrida, "SWAP #59: Yoko Inoue," Spaces Gallery, YouTube, 26 July 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=109&v=P6qXh6EOJBo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=109&v=P6qXh6EOJBo).

13 Present-day Japanese brands such as Tachikichi also had a hand in the production of OJ.

14 Shizuo Takashima, "MIOJ (Made in Occupied Japan)," *All Japan Camera Club*, accessed 4 March 2020, [http://www.ajcc.gr.jp/takashima\\_houkoku\\_2014\\_04.pdf](http://www.ajcc.gr.jp/takashima_houkoku_2014_04.pdf). Japanese collectors living in American even held an exhibition of "OJ" in Roppongi, Tokyo in 2013.

15 Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 134, 142; Kaori Satō, "GHQ no bijutsu gyōsei: CIE bijutsu kinenbutsuka niyoru 'bijutsu no minshūka' to Yashiro Yukio (GHQ's Arts Administration: Yashiro Yukio and the CIE art souvenir division's "democratization of art")," *Kindaigasetu* 12 (2003): 88. The majority of the masterpieces held in the Asian art collection of the Seattle Museum of Art were acquired by Lee, the museum's future director, during the period between 1948 and 1952 after he left his post at GHQ.

to survey the “effect of the ravages of war”<sup>16</sup> on art and artefacts, where he purchased many precious artworks on behalf of the Seattle and Cleveland Museums of Art.

Like the bittersweet taste of green tea in the title of an essay by Sherman E. Lee, the *Tea Taste Democracy* in the title of Inoue's show (a reference to *Tea Taste in Japanese Art*, the title of an exhibition curated by Lee in 1963)<sup>17</sup> represents the mixed emotions of the view of history in the US that still justifies the use of the atomic bomb, coupled with the benefits Japan received from the US after the war.

Through her research, Inoue discovered the following two types of objects brought across the Pacific to the US during the same period —traditional Japanese arts considered “high art,” and mass-market products seen as “low art.” The post-war recovery is usually credited to Japanese “blood and sweat” but she came to realize this was also in large part supported by the US economy.

In addition to issues of economic inequality, Inoue's installation addresses gender inequality and the gendered division of labour. Gender and class inequality are critiqued in juxtaposing fancy tea utensils for the upper-class, which are considered “high art” and usually made by men, with recreations of lunch boxes filled with food by women whose domestic labour often goes uncompensated and unrecognised.

One reason Inoue has taken on such weighty themes as globalization, racial disparity, and the different levels of awareness between Japan and the US regarding the atomic bomb is her desire to use art as a tool for questioning the American status quo:

I wanted to gather propaganda videos and show them as part of my show, maybe five minutes' worth or so, to see how American propaganda represented Japan during World War Two, and after the War as well. The content of that propaganda is essentially the same as what Trump is saying right now, it's virtually identical.

Through this group of works, Inoue continues to ask what “justice” means in the US. Particularly now under the Trump administration, the “justice” gradually won through the civil rights and anti-war movements is in peril, while tensions with North Korea leave the global community anxious about the possibility of the deployment of nuclear weapons. Inoue thinks of her work as “a

16 Satō, “GHQ no bijutsu gyōsei, 80–95.

17 Sherman E. Lee, *Tea Taste in Japanese Art* (New York: Asia Society, 1963), 195–196.



first step”; the questions she posits offer the viewer the opportunity to think, even if they catch their attention only on an unconscious level.

## 5 Major Transnationalism Embedded in the Trans-Pacific Art Objects

Inoue also addresses the disparities in collective memory and narratives between Japan and the US as well as socio-economic inequalities between nation-states and the movement of people/goods/money within Trans-Pacific power dynamics, all of which illustrates major transnationalism in the Trans-Pacific. Inoue’s *Tea Taste Democracy and Upside-Down Objects* poses a key question: What Trans-Pacific Japan–US dynamics are suggested by the existence of both the classic Japanese art objects Inoue encountered at the CMA and the consumer ceramic goods that were “Made in Occupied Japan”? Inspired by the questions Inoue raised, I set out to conduct my own interview and archival research.

While Lee stayed in Japan as a Monuments Man, he and his former supervisor Howard Hollis inspected items housed in art museums and temples, private collections, and art dealer’s shops, and reported on the location, condition, and storage circumstances of artworks and other tangible cultural property. Lee boasted about his role in the “democratization” of Japan’s art museums: “We had some hard proof of the success of our encouragement of the ‘democratization’ of Japanese art museums and of the public availability of registered works of art in private collections.”<sup>18</sup> Hollis later became an art dealer working with Japanese clients in America, and Lee succeeded in bringing an extraordinary number of national-treasure level traditional Japanese art objects into the US.

After the legal recognition of “Important Art Objects” in 1933, the 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties designated “Important Cultural Properties” and “National Treasures” as subcategories within “Important Art Objects.” It is thought that amid the chaos in the aftermath of World War II, however, a great many national treasure-level artworks were lumped in with other “Important Art Objects” and, while not illegally, were also transported overseas from Japan in great numbers. The period of occupation from 1945 to 1952 was the only time since the promulgation of Japan’s National Treasures Preservation

18 Sherman E. Lee, “My Work in Japan: Arts and Monuments, 1946–1948,” in *The Confusion Era: Art and Culture of Japan During the Allied Occupation, 1945–1952* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1997), 101.



Act in 1929 that foreigners were able to remove national treasure-level designated artworks from Japan.<sup>19</sup>

The 1998 special exhibition in Japan, *Oriental Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art*, from the CMA held at the Nara National Museum attests to Lee's extraordinary capability for art acquisition. Then CMA curator, Michael Cunningham, touts Lee's many achievements during his thirty years of leadership, including "record-setting" presentations of research in the field of Asian art, acquisition of art works, and educational programs.<sup>20</sup> Some in Japan, however, express scepticism about the methods Lee employed in acquiring a great many of the finest works of traditional Japanese art and sending them overseas. For example, critic Shimura writes:

During his time in Japan, Sherman Lee exploited the authority of the occupation army to survey the entire country and compile a list of those artworks which were and were not legally certified, making off with the finest of the uncertified works.<sup>21</sup>

Matsushita and others surmised in discussion that: "They went after works that were valuable but had not been certified [as national treasures or important cultural properties]."<sup>22</sup> As Satō adds, "The artworks flowing out of Japan during the occupation were in some sense spoils of war for the Americans."<sup>23</sup>

Certain other circumstances render it impossible to declare that Japan was solely a victim. At the height of the San Francisco peace talks, the de Young Museum in San Francisco held the exhibition *Art treasures from Japan – A Special Loan Exhibition in Commemoration of the Signing of the Peace Treaty in San Francisco, September 1951*, prompting an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response from visitors.

Two facts deserve special attention in respect to major transnationalism: the exhibition was a collaboration between the de Young and the Cultural Properties Protection Commission of Japan, which had been established as a

19 Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture*.

20 Michael R. Cunningham, "Kurivurando bijutsukan no toyō bijutsu (East Asian Art of the Cleveland Art Museum), trans. by Ruriko Tsuchida, in *Kurivurando bijutsukan no toyō bijutsu*, edited by Nara National Museum (Nara: Nara National Museum, 1998), 15–16.

21 Shōko Shimura, "Shāman Rī to nihon bijutsu (Sherman Lee and Japanese Art)," *Akita University of Art Bulletin* 1 (2014): 18.

22 Takaaki Matsushita, Ichitarō Kondō, Tomoaki Kawakita, and Aoyama, Jirō. "Zadankai: Kobijutsu no kaigai ryūshutsu to sono taisaku," (A roundtable discussion: The overseas flow of art treasures / historical art objects and what to do about it.) *Bijutsu hihyō* 8 (1952): 12.

23 Satō, "GHQ no bijutsu gyōsei: (GHQ's Arts Administration), 88.

foreign bureau of the Ministry of Education; and the exhibition's subtitle included the words "in commemoration of the signing of the peace treaty." In the face of GHQ's absolute control and the chaos that reigned in the aftermath of World War Two, the relevant Japanese authorities had no choice but to stand by and watch as a huge number of works that should have been classified as national treasures or important culture properties, flowed overseas. However, from the subtitle of this exhibition we can infer the motives of those in government who sought to use for political purposes these artworks that had found their way into the collections of major American museums via Lee and his cohort.

It should come as no surprise that these artworks, as they crossed the Pacific and fascinated countless Americans in major art museums across the US, played an important role in recuperating the image of Japan, from that which "bombed Pearl Harbor" to a nation with a rich culture and traditions. Cohen writes:

and if America had become the hegemon of East Asia, and extracted art treasures as part of the tribute to which it was entitled, its client states were quick to recognize the value of art as an instrument of diplomacy. First the Japanese, then the Chinese, Koreans, and other Asian peoples sent their art on exhibition to win the respect and support of the American people.<sup>24</sup>

Then how did the ceramics "Made in Occupied Japan," like those found by Inoue's student, make their way to America? To find the answer, I set out for Nagoya, the centre of Japan's ceramics industry, where both the Japan Association for the Promotion of Pottery Industry and the Nagoya Ceramics Hall are located. According to their archival materials,<sup>25</sup> while exports under the occupation counted as low as ¥ 960,000 in 1946, they grew exponentially to ¥ 470 million the following year, and by 1950 had reached ¥ 8.27 billion. In 1950, tableware accounted for ¥ 5.6 billion in exports, over seven times the 2010 tableware exports of 6.4 billion when adjusted for inflation. In 1953, the first year for which data is available, the US was the largest importer of Japanese fine china and porcelain tableware, accounting for almost 40 percent of the gross sales total.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture*, 150–51.

<sup>25</sup> Kondō was kind enough to provide me with an Excel file of his calculations from trade statistics listed on the US Customs homepage.

<sup>26</sup> Conversely, according to the US Department of Commerce's import data, among the countries from which the US imported ceramic tableware, Japan was first in gross imports at 65 percent (the UK was second at 17 percent), and also first in total number of items at

When it comes to dolls, animals, and other porcelain novelties like the ones Inoue uses in her work, the number rises to a full three-quarters. According to Susumu Kondō, former managing director of the Japan Ceramics Export Association, during the time when the American middle- and working- classes dreamed of adorning their cupboards with fine china dinner sets from companies like Wedgwood, they bought Japanese ceramics in great quantities because they were available at extremely inexpensive prices in comparison to their European counterparts. As Kondō explains,

GHQ cared about the quality of dinnerware (...) When the American soldiers arrived after the war, they were delighted to discover that they too could afford to buy bone china. And (...) Japanese ceramics spread as they became [not just a product for the upper classes but] an object of aspiration for the American middle and lower classes as well.<sup>27</sup>

According to Kondō, “the power accumulated [during the Occupation period] provided the impetus that enabled Japan to become, at its height in the 1970s, the largest exporter of ceramics in the entire world.”<sup>28</sup>

The following passage in *Nihon Yushutsu Tōjikishi* (The History of Japanese Ceramics Exports) underscores the historical reality that behind the post-war success of the Japanese ceramics industry lay the economic boom spurred by the Korean War.

The special procurement boom that accompanied the beginning of the upheaval in Korea in 1951 led to a generally healthy economy. Japanese private enterprise was finally getting back on its feet just as the various countries of the world were buying up goods to make up for wartime deprivation, and vigorous business negotiations ensued (...) total gross from exports to countries such as Indonesia, Africa, and especially the United States (...) increased by over 73% compared to the previous year.<sup>29</sup>

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85 percent (second was West Germany at 6 percent), in both cases accounting for an overwhelming market share. *Nihon Yushutsu Tōjikishi Hensan Iinkai* (Editorial Committee of the History of Japanese Ceramics Exports), ed., *Nihon Yushutsu Tōjikishi* (The History of Japanese Ceramics Exports) (Nagoya: Nagoya Tōjiki-kaikan, 1967), 140–41.

27 Personal communication with Susumu Kondō, 22 November 2018.

28 Susumu Kondō, “Asides from the History of the Ceramics Industry 14: The Life and Times of ‘Made in Occupied Japan’ (MIOJ),” *Japan Association for the Promotion of Pottery Industry Newsletter* (June 2011): 4.

29 *Nihon Yushutsu Tōjikishi Hensan Iinkai*, ed., *Nihon Yushutsu Tōjikishi*, 99.

Takafusa Nakamura, a historian of post-war Japanese economy, argues that special procurements resulting from the Korean War in addition to financial aid from the US, and loan agreements with the World Bank and elsewhere played a major role in the revival of the Japanese economy.<sup>30</sup> America's role in the post-war revival of the Japanese economy was not limited to the ceramics industry. Japan, through the US, also enjoyed some share of the economic effects of the struggle over the sovereignty of the Korean peninsula between the US and the Soviet Union.

Inoue's juxtaposition of refined art objects and cheap ceramics in her *Tea Taste Democracy and Upside-Down Objects* makes clear that American and Japanese interests at the time were two sides of the same coin. Ceramics is just one example which demonstrates the fact that the post-World War II Japanese export industry was tied to the US hegemonic intervention in Asia.

## 6 Minor Transnationalism as a Resistance to Hegemony

The above analysis of Inoue's works and commentary has revealed major transnationalism and minor transnationalism as two types of contact zones in the Trans-Pacific sphere. Her art highlights the agency of transmigrants and other minoritized people in their resistance to a nation-state's or sometimes supra-nation states' hegemony. In the intensified xenophobia and racism of post 9/11, in conjunction with the current administration, both documented and undocumented immigrants have been treated with hostility, even though the US relies heavily on the labour of these transmigrants. In response to such a social climate, Inoue and the transmigrants around her came together in solidarity to protect one another and deepen their social interactions, leading to the development of their translocal connection between the villages in the Andes and Canal Street in New York. For the visitors who handled the sweaters from the Andes and the potato flowers subsequently woven from them, Inoue's *Transmigration of the SOLD* offered a "glimpse" of the transmigrants who support the foundations of the US economy, and of the economic and racial inequality engendered by globalization.

For local audiences at SFAI 140, looking at the tribal names picked out in red embroidery on the white napkins unavoidably reminded them that it was not just about Japan, but their own country, and indeed the world in general, both

30 Takafusa Nakamura, *Keizaigaku zenshū 25: Sengo nihonkeizai: Seichō to junkan* (Economics Collection 25: Post-war Japanese Economics—Growth and Cycles) (Tokyo: Chikumashobō, 1968), 151.

past and present. In contrast to the vertical relationship of US hegemony suggested by having Inoue force-fed cake, the performance, enabled by the horizontal ties between the Japanese artist and the Navajo chef, drew audiences into this collective act of thought.

In these times of overt racism and increasing intolerance, Inoue's message and the questions her art raise about American society and the world have greater relevance than ever. Inoue's art bears re-recognising the importance of constantly questioning and thinking of the meanings of "democratization" and "justice" that are both often exploited for political and social purposes. The everyday practices of building ties and friendships among transmigrants and other minoritized people have generated new forms of networks, communities, and cooperation, out of mutual empathy and emotions, beyond reason or logic. It may represent a new attempt to open an alternative form of resistance against racism and xenophobia that shadows the world today.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Yoko Inoue for spending an enormous amount of time for this project. My appreciation also goes to Karin Higa (1966–2013), then curator of the Japanese American National Museum, who introduced me to Inoue in 2006. I wish that I could send this article to Karin, who left us before her time. An earlier version of this article was translated by Daniel Joseph. This study was supported by the KAKENHI of the Japan Society of the Promotion of Science (JSPS) for the project "An Integrated Research into the Processes and Mechanisms of Racialization" led by Yasuko Takezawa.

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