“True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin.”  

Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, the foundational text in the cultural anthropology of Japan, was published in 1946 in the politically charged environment of the Japan-U.S. military conflict and the subsequent engagement of the United States with the postwar rebuilding of Japan. It reveals a powerful dichotomy embedded in its core. This dichotomy, which consequentially embedded itself in the formulation of “Japan’s national culture,” revolves around a powerfully entangled vision of splitting and authenticity. Benedict’s division between shame cultures and guilt cultures is reinforced by a split within the “true” shame culture of Japan involving contradicting qualities: aggressive/non-aggressive, militaristic/aesthetic, insolent/polite, rigid/adaptable, submissive/resentful, loyal/treacherous, brave/timid, conservative/hospitable to new ways. These contradictions are presented as the “warp and woof” of all existing research on Japan. The inner splits signal a camouflage that is woven into a perception of authenticity. “They are true,” Benedict declares.  

“When [a serious observer] writes a book on a nation with a popular cult of aestheticism which gives high honor to actors and to artists and lavishes art upon the cultivation of chrysanthemums, that book does not ordinarily have to be supplemented by another which is devoted to the cult of the sword and the top prestige of the warrior” writes Benedict, negatively embedding *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* within a structural incongruence. The wartime realities that motivated this study of the U.S. enemy are abstracted in the “cult of the sword” and refracted in the cult of aesthetics. The mention of actors delicately introduces a thread of theatricality. The association of art with the “art upon cultivation of chrysanthemums” carries with it a faint vision of decoration and artificiality. The division tacitly retraces a class demarcation between the commoners, artisans and merchants among whom the ornate popular forms of theater and street displays of flower art flourished.

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2 Ryang, p. 6.
on the one hand, and the upper warrior class, those with the privilege to carry a sword, on the other.

The division is overtly but naively gendered as well: the phallic image of the sword symbolizes masculinity in opposition to the aesthetic realm of makeup, artistry, and crafting that represents femininity. The latter is concretely embodied in a masquerade of femininity that emerges in Benedict’s reading of two writing samples by Japanese women relating their experience abroad. Besides the interviews with a second-generation Japanese man who had experienced war-time internment in the United States due to his ethnic origins, the autobiographical works by Japanese women reflecting on their difficulties adapting to the American lifestyle serve as important sources for Benedict. She refers to the by now rather obscure books *My Narrow Isle* (1941) written by Mishima Sumie Seo and *A Daughter of the Samurai* (1925) by Sugimoto Etsuko. In these women’s narratives of cultural transplantation, Benedict appears most impressed, almost poetically so, by the horticultural images of enclosing, forcing, and restraining nature. Benedict concludes based on her reading from *My Narrow Isle* that

Once the Japanese have accepted, to however small a degree, the less codified rules that govern behavior in the United States they find it difficult to imagine their being able to manage the restrictions of their old life in Japan. Sometimes they refer to it as a lost paradise, sometimes as a “harness,” sometimes as a “prison,” sometimes as a “little pot” that holds a dwarfed tree. As long as the roots of the miniature pine were kept to the confines of the flower pot, the result was a work of art that graced a charming garden. But once planted out in open soil, the dwarfed pine can never be put back again.6

Benedict’s reading of *A Daughter of the Samurai* leads her to elaborate on the shame essence of Japanese culture through an analysis of the simulation and reduction of nature. The dwarfed tree from *My Little Isle*’s account fits into the account of staged nature as reproduced in the Japanese garden and thus evokes the lingering chrysanthemum from her title.

This simulated wildness stood to her [the daughter of the samurai] for the simulated freedom of will in which she had been trained. And all Japan was full of it. Every great half-sunken rock in Japanese gardens has been carefully chosen and transported and laid on a hidden platform of

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