

V. Nature Appreciation Tendencies in Japanese Aesthetic Concepts

By comparison with the Western traditions, most Eastern traditions declined the eco-centric tendency by means of their traditional thoughts are deeply rooted in the sense of co-existence with nature. Ordinarily, eastern people instinctively accept that human being is nothing but a part of macrocosm of nature. Among the Eastern traditions, the Japanese culture is considered as an illustrative example of representing it. It can be seen their daily life style, especially in aesthetic concepts. Hence, the Japanese aesthetic concepts are ordinarily based on the nature or natural phenomenon whether they associate with beauty or ugliness. Thus, the concept of aesthetics in Japan is seen as an integral part of daily life.

The Japanese expressed their preference for varieties of beauty which most conspicuously betrayed their impermanence. For example, *Hanami*, the *flower viewing* or *cherry-blossom viewing*, is an illustrative example of this aesthetic concept. It is one of the most popular events of the spring. The blooming period of their favourite flower cherry blossom is so poignantly brief and the danger that the flowers may scatter even before one has properly seen them is so terribly great. In medieval literatures, the samurai was traditionally compared to the cherry blossoms, and his ideal was to drop dramatically, at the height of his strength and beauty, rather than to become an old soldier gradually

fading away. The visible presence of perishability in the cracked tea bowl carefully mended in gold has been appreciated not because it makes the object an indisputable antique, but because without the possibility of aging with time and usage there could be no real beauty. *Momijigari*, viewing autumn maple leaves, is another illustrative example of appreciating the concept of *mujō*. It is a popular event of the autumn. In Japan, autumn itself and its seasonal feature of tinted leaves are recognized as a symbol of *impermanence*. Even though the yellowish or reddish leaves are beautiful for seeing, these are withered leaves and ready to fall down. Here, it represents the impermanent nature of all things. (see **Illustration- 34a,34b,35a,35b**)

The Japanese aesthetic is a set of ancient ideals that include *wabi* (transient and stark beauty), *sabi* (the beauty of natural patina and aging), and *yūgen* (profound grace and subtlety). These ideals, and others, underpin much of Japanese cultural and aesthetic norms on what is considered tasteful or beautiful. Japanese aesthetics now encompass a variety of ideals; some of these are traditional while others are modern and sometimes influenced by other cultures.

Perhaps, however, the influence of Buddhist philosophy was nowhere more marked than in the Japanese aesthetics. Especially, the Buddhist epistemological concept of *impermanence* has been rooted in Japanese culture as the most famous aesthetic term of *mujō* and *wabi*. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable

fact that the native Shintō is the foundation stone of their culture and it played an important role of the Japanese aesthetics too. Here, we can assert that the most significant Japanese aesthetic concept which represent the syncretic tendency of Japanese philosophy is *wabi*. It is a most famous aesthetic concept of the Japanese Tea Ceremony (*Cha-no-yu*), a practice of Zen. *Wabi* is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. While it is a famous aesthetic concept of Zen Buddhism, the sense of *wabi* originated in the indigenous philosophy of Shintō in which the sense of modest and humble is appreciated as an essential quality for representing the simple, artless, or unsophisticated beauty of nature. Thus, *Wabi* is one of the most illustrative examples to show the syncretic tendency of Japanese ways of thinking.

The aesthetic concept of *mono no aware*(物の哀れ) is a foundation stone of developing the concept of *wabi* in Japanese culture. It is literally translated in English as "the pathos of things", and also translated as "empathy toward things", or sensitivity to ephemera". So, it is a Japanese term for the awareness of impermanence (無常 *mujō*), or transience of things derived from Buddhist philosophy, and both a transient gentle sadness (or wistfulness) at their passing as well as a longer, deeper gentle sadness about this state being the reality of life.

The phrase is derived from the Japanese word *mono* (物), which means "thing", and *aware* (哀れ), which was a Heian period expression of measured surprise (similar to "ah" or "oh"), translating roughly as "pathos",

"poignancy", "deep feeling", "sensitivity", or "awareness". Thus, *mono no aware* has frequently been translated as "the 'ahhness' of things", life, and love. Awareness of the transience of all things heightens appreciation of their beauty, and evokes a gentle sadness at their passing.

The deep feeling or awareness of nature or social affairs which decline the tendency of 'gentle sadness' or 'loneliness' were syncretized with the Buddhist concept of *mujō* (impermanence) and then became to be the most prominent aesthetic concept of *Wabi-Sabi* in Japanese culture. Characteristics of the *Wabi-Sabi* aesthetic include asymmetry, roughness, simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, intimacy, and appreciation of the ingenuous integrity of natural objects and processes. In other words, the common denominator of Japanese aesthetics concepts is deep awareness on the 'imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete' nature of things in the world. A sound reason of it is the nature appreciation spirit of Japanese people and Eastern traditions.

Moreover, most Japanese aesthetic concepts are related with these three notions of 'imperfectness, impermanence, and incompleteness' in some extent. This tendency can be found in several phases of the development of Japanese aesthetics.

In the late Heian and early part of the Kamakura Period, the two important aesthetic concepts, *sabi* and *yūgen*, were propounded by Fujiwara Shunzei and his son Teika. *Sabi*, or the ideal of loneliness or desolation,

remains one of the most enduring ideals in the course of Japanese cultural development, playing a significant role in various arts such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement and brushed ink painting, as well as later forms of poetry such as the *haikai* of Bashō. *Sabi*, in sharp contrast to *miyabi*, is subdued, monochromatic in hue, and melancholic in tone. We see the opposition of these two ideals in this poem by Teika:

Miwataseb	As I gaze out
Hana momomijimo	both cherry blossoms and
Nakarikeri	maple leaves are absent
Ura no tomaya no	instead grass-thatched huts
Aki no yugure.	in the autumn gloaming

Instead of the gorgeous and conventional images of vernal and autumnal beauty, we are presented with an alternate image of isolated, unadorned, and barely discernible beauty. *Sabi* implicitly acknowledges the darkness of life, even as it reconstructs the misery into a thing of quiet beauty. While Shunzei also favored the ideal of *aware*, similar in content if not in tone or affect, the austerity of *sabi* became the hallmark of his work and this period in Japan. In the hands of later poets, such as Matsuo Bashō, *sabi* or loneliness became conflated with *sabi*, a giving way to the beauty of the ordinary, the sere, the solitary.

Another ideal developed by Shunzei's son Teika in his early formulations was the notion of *yōen* or ethereal charm. This, like many other concepts, had its origin in Chinese poetics and signified a dreamy, feminine,

winsome beauty of a sort associated with the delicacy of a fragrant blossom or the romance and magic of a spring evening. In its emphasis on transcendent possibility and the resonance of *yojō* or overtones, *yōen* is not unrelated to *yūgen*, perhaps the most profound and ineffable of all Japanese aesthetic ideals. *Yūgen*, the style of mysterious beauty or alternately mystery and depth, was originally a Buddhist term meaning 'obscure, dim, or deep', but was elevated by Shunzei into an aesthetic ideal suggesting great subtlety, complexity and reverberation. *Yūgen* portends an otherworldly atmosphere that hints at but never elucidates fully the possibility of transcendent vision.

The cultural shifts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries foreshadowed the aesthetic ideals of the Edo period, with their emphasis on quotidian life amidst the newly urbanized lower social strata as embodied in the townsmen or *chōnin* class. Sen no Rikyū, the acknowledged master of *Cha no Yu* (*sadō* or *chadō*), the tea ceremony, according to his student Nambo Sokei, preferred above all other ideals *wabi* or the beauty of impoverishment. He remarks, 'There should be a dearth of tea implements in the room', and advises that these few objects should be arrayed simply.

Among the many revealing anecdotes related about him is the story of his deliberately mutilating a vase to use in tea ceremony as a reminder to us of the beauty inherent in the imperfect and the shabby.

Bashō, the *haiku* master, embraced the ideals of earlier ages, especially the notion of *sabi*, but sought to mitigate *sabi* first through the humanizing notion of *wabi* and then through the ideal of *karumi* (lightness). *Sabi*, with its unrelieved austerity and detachment, was in some ways as alien to the common people as the earlier *miyabi* had been, and hence Bashō sought to include the commonplace, the humble and the destitute, as well as the simple, the playful and the light-hearted, in his work in order to suggest a more encompassing aesthetic for his age. While *wabi* helped to convey a more humanistic and egalitarian ideal, in that by elevating the disfigured and the discarded we attest indirectly to the resilience and beauty of imperfect humanity, the notion of *karumi* or lightness proved to be central to his poetry in relieving the weight and darkness implied by *sabi*. Both *wabi* and *karumi* are evident in a verse such as this excerpted from a *haikai* sequence:

Te no hirani,	In the palm of my hand,
Shiramihawasuru,	both the lice crawl forth,
Hana no kage.	in the shade of cherry blossoms.

The humble image of lice, juxtaposed with the traditionally exalted cherry blossoms, is framed by the human observer's eye and hand to produce a poem of considerable whimsy and poignancy.

From mentioned above, it is obvious that the aesthetic ideals of Japanese culture are commonly associated with the ideas of co-existence between 'nature' and 'human being'. Hence, they never lack of intention

about the environments such as 'natural' as well as 'social'. Therefore, wherever or whenever they are, they always intend to bring the things and events occurring their surrounding as it were even though whether it is small of big, scenic or unscenic, beautiful or ugly.

This tendency is considered as one of the reasons why the Japanese aesthetics is interested among the scholars of environmentalism as an important role in environmental conservation and sustainable development of the nature.

Conclusion

In the last part of the twentieth century, environmental aesthetics emerged as a significant area of philosophical research and some basic points of view concerning the nature of the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments developed distinctively.

Generally, these points of view can be classified as belonging in two positions, alternatively labeled cognitive or conceptual and noncognitive or nonconceptual. The distinction marks a crucial division between those positions that take knowledge and information to be essential to aesthetic appreciation of environments and those that take some other feature, such as engagement, emotion arousal, or imagination, to be paramount.

The former is mainly concerned with the thought that knowledge and information about the nature of the object of appreciation is central to its aesthetic appreciation. The latter claims the aesthetics of engagement, draws on phenomenology as well as on analytic aesthetics. On the one hand, cognitive or conceptual position maintains that just as serious, appropriate aesthetic appreciation of art requires knowledge of art history and art criticism, such aesthetic appreciation of nature requires knowledge of natural history—the knowledge provided by the natural sciences and especially sciences such as geology, biology, and ecology. On the other hand, noncognitive or nonconceptual position stresses the contextual

dimensions of nature and our multisensory experiences of it. Viewing the environment as a seamless unity of places, organisms, and perceptions, it challenges the importance of traditional dichotomies, such as that between subject and object. It beckons appreciators to immerse themselves in the natural environment and to reduce to as small a degree as possible the distance between themselves and the natural world.

Nevertheless, both positions accept the role of 'emotional respond' to the aesthetic object whether 'natural' or 'artificial'. The crucial point in both positions is evoking or persuading the spectator's emotional respond and its modification to be awareness of human responsibilities toward environments such as natural environment in its wild nature and artificial natural landscape in its creative arts.

In the previous chapters, some prominent cultural figures of Japanese culture are described and discussed such as '*Nihon Teien*', '*Cha no Yu*', '*Haiku*', and '*Bonsai*'. Some significant aesthetic concepts are coaxed from these traditional arts such as '*Wabi-Sabi*' and '*Mono no Aware*' are most prominent. However, it can be noticeably found the conceptual adoption and adaptation of Buddhist philosophical concept, 'impermanence' or '*mujo*' and macrocosm and microcosm, in the process of conceptual development of '*Wabi-Sabi*' and some other aesthetic concepts.

In fact, these aesthetic concepts also reflect the uniqueness of Japanese way of thinking namely,

'syncretism'. This crucial characteristic of Japanese way of thinking seemed to lead them to make syncretism between the religious beliefs of indigenous Shintō and exotic philosophical or religious concepts of Daoism and Buddhism. The aesthetic concepts in Japanese culture are ordinarily interrelated with their 'nature appreciation spirit' as their cultural gene. For that reason, the Japanese people easily to adopt the 'natural objects' or 'natural phenomenon' into their everyday life, but not only as it is, with the deep philosophical contemplation of the law of nature. For that reason, we can make proper judgement of the role of Japanese aesthetic concepts in environmental aesthetics from these two positions such as cognitive and noncognitive approaches.

In addition, the Japanese aesthetic concepts closely related with the sense of 'eco-friendly', and it can lead the people to be aware and practice of 'eco-friendly' life style. In other words, the tendency of appreciating or experiencing aesthetic taste in everyday life is closely connected with 'a culture of recycling' which is most prominent in Japan rather than other countries. Hence, it can lead the people to practice some important moral principles of nowadays' human being towards 'natural environment'. For example, the ethical concept of 'frugality' in environmental ethics necessarily relates to the keeping old things and reuses them or doing 'recycle' called 'a culture of recycling' against 'consumerism'. It also encourages the tendency of 'co-existence' between

nature and culture or human being by the sense of 'eco-aesthetics'.

Sources of Illustrations

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Illustrations



Illustration (1)

Stones used to delineate sacred grounds (Ise Shrine)

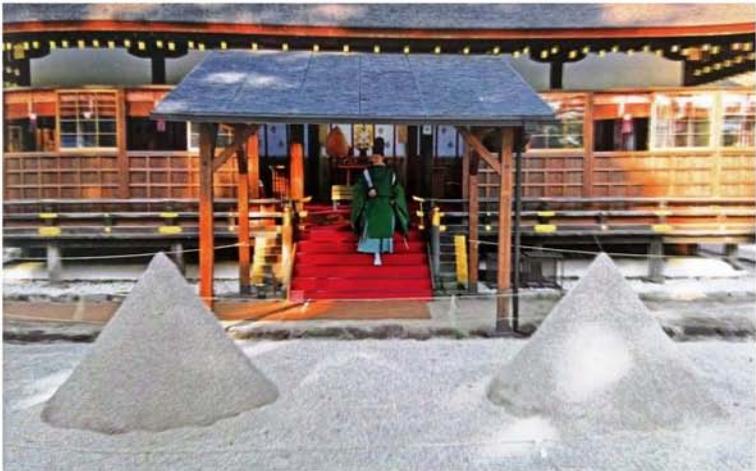


Illustration (2)

Kamigamo Shrine Garden, Kyoto

(The cone symbolizes the mountain peaks on which the Japanese gods descended)



Illustration (3) Pure Land Garden (Motsu-ji)
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Illustration (4) The *karesansui* (dry landscape-zen garden at Ryōan-ji)
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Illustration (8) Tea Garden (*Cha-niwa*) & Tea House & Stepping
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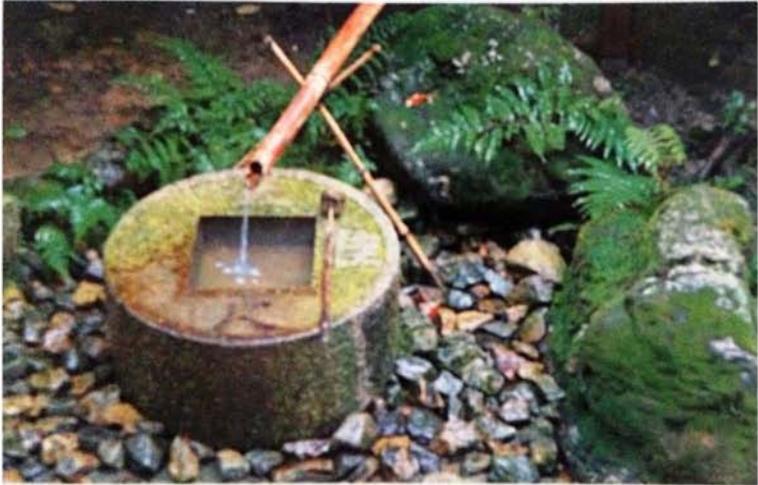


Illustration (9) *tsukubai*, the water basin provided for ritual washing of the hands and mouth (龍安寺), Kyoto



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Illustration (12) Kenroku-en
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Illustration (13) Korakuen
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Illustration (14) Tsubo-niwa
(enclosed garden is visible from most of the rooms)

Kinmata Ryokan, Kyoto



Illustration (15) Tsubo-niwa
Ohashi House, Kurashiki



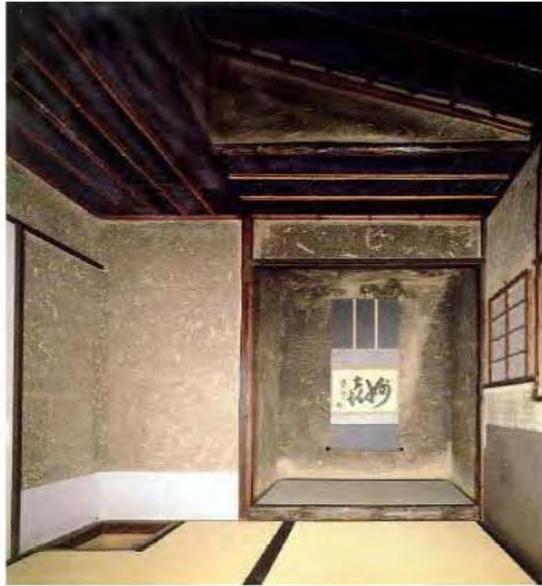
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Illustration (18) Modern Gardens
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Illustration(19) *Tai-an* (待庵), *chashitsu* designed by Sen no Rikyū, representing his concept of *wabi-cha*
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Illustration(20) *Tai-an* (待庵), *chaniwa*
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Illustration(21) Tea house & *Nijiriguchi* (Ihoan Hut)
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Illustration(22) *Haiken* (viewing - of objects)

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Illustration(24) *Tobi-ishi*
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Illustration(25) Chawan (Rakuware Tea bowl)
Sen no Rikyu's Raku tea bowl was the first one ever made especially for the tea ceremony for representing sense of 'wabi-cha'



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Illustration(27) Penjing (盆景) in root-over-rock style
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National Bonsai and Penjing Museum in Washinton, D.C.



Illustration(28) Penjing (盆景)
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Illustration(29) Saikei (栽景)
Saikei featuring Seiju Elm, Display at the North Carolina Arboretum



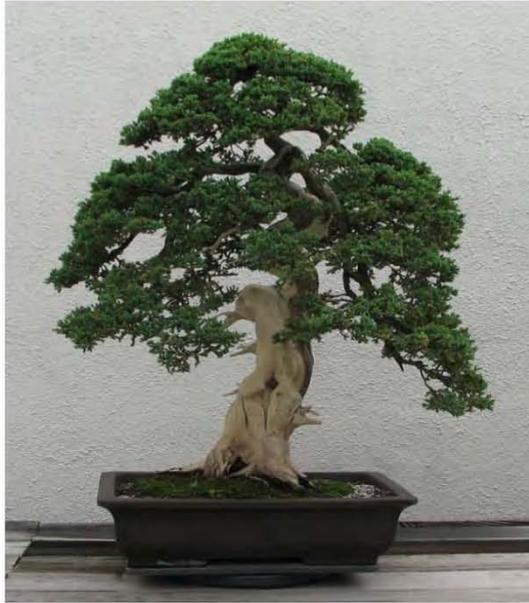
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Multi-species saikei named *Roan Mountain* contains Shimpaku juniper and Zakura azalea, Display at the North Carolina Arboretum



Illustration(31) Bonsai (盆栽) Formal Upright Style Bald Cypress

Display at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum at the United States National Arboretum



Illustration(32) *Bonsai* (盆栽) Informal upright style Juniper
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Illustration(33) *Bonsai* (盆栽)
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Illustration(34b) *Hanami* (花見)
Maruyama Park, Kyoto



Illustration(35a) *Momijigari* (紅葉狩り)
Tofukuji Temple, Kyoto



Illustration(35b) *Momijigari* (紅葉狩り)
Minoh Park, Osaka

