

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 'lonesomeness' 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,

