

AESTHETIC VALUES PERSISTING IN TIME: PAST AND PRESENT CULTURAL APPRECIATION IN JAPANESE CONTEXT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The word aesthetics (*bigaku*) is fairly new in the Japanese language and was used for the first time by Nakae Chômin (1847–1901) in his translation of Eugene Veron's *L'Esthetique* in 1878. The Japanese word beauty, *bi*, was commonly used as late as during the late *Meiji* period (1868–1911). In addition, the first chair of aesthetics was established at the University of Tôkyô in 1897 and Ôtsuka Yasuji (1868–1931) became the first Japanese professor of Aesthetics.¹ At the same time, an aesthetic discourse started in Japan and scientific discussion was carried out using western terms and following the western tradition in accordance with the general cultural and social development (Westernization) of the era.

Even today the aesthetic discourse is carried out using western terms and methods and there are only a few Japanese scholars in aesthetics who have studied Japanese traditional values. One is the modern-era aesthetician Ônishi Yoshinori (1888–1959) who had a psychological aesthetic inquiry in his study called *Yûgen to Aware* (1939). He posited *yûgen* (profundity) as a derivation from the sublime and *aware* (pathos) as a derivation from the beauty.² Another one is Nakagawa Shigeaki (1849–1917) who reflected the traditional Japanese arts and aesthetic principles through *haikai* poetry. He adds “ugliness” to the aesthetic categories and argues that what we call *wabi* (rough or poor) and *sabi* (loneliness or solitude) are “after all feelings that are born from a sorrowful view of life and from a religious outlook”.³

¹ Kaneda 2001: 56.

² Yamamoto 2001: 172–174.

³ Kaneda 2001: 232–233.

A third modern-era scholar, Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941), studied under the guidance of Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), who followed the Neo-Kantian tradition. Kuki, however, disagreed with Rickert's theory and turned later to the modern Japanese philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), and Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960). Kuki's core of study was *iki*, 'taste', 'stylish', a term that describes the spirit of the Edo period town culture.⁴

Okakura Tenshin (1861–1913) was among the first to look Japanese art as "art". Some may argue that he was a "traditionalist", but actually he was an "avant-gardist" in combining traditional technique and Japanese spirit in a realistic manner⁵ during the time when other scholars followed Western tradition in aesthetics and art. On 1889 Okakura became the head of the department of the Japanese style of sculpture and painting that was established at the Tōkyō Imperial Art Academy.⁶

Last, I would like to introduce the present-day scholar Hisamatsu Shinichi (1889–1980), whose unbiased approach in his book called *Zen and the Fine Arts* (1971) is rather descriptive and subjective instead of being strictly logical and rational in accordance with western tradition.

The strong influence of western studies on the development of the modern Japanese aesthetics raises a question: Are we undervaluing some studies on Japanese aesthetics just because they deal with things that are not always possible to explain logically and rationally through Western methods? Moreover, the weakness of modern Japanese aesthetic studies lies in the fact that traditional Japanese aesthetic values are often treated as a past culture and not as a source of the modern ones.

For long, traditional arts in Japan have been an elderly person's activity and amusement.⁷ During the early 1990s, for example, *nō* theatres were almost empty, gathering only a few old men or some incidental foreign students. The young Japanese knew no more about traditional arts than their foreign age mates, and in this sense traditional Japanese culture is rapidly becoming a foreign culture of the past as Kuki Shūzō stated.⁸

It is short-sighted to undervalue the past and think that the modern world has modern forms of culture separated from past ones. Creating the new does not have to mean that one must dismiss the old. The new derives from the past, and understanding this continuum leads to a deeper understanding of the forms of modern cultures. This is not a new idea. Zeami (1363–1443), the creator of the *nō* drama,

4 Tanaka 2001: 319.

5 Yamada 1940: 576.

6 Karatani 2001:43–49.

7 Japan Statistics Bureau 1996–2005.

8 Tanaka 2001: 344.

wrote already in *Fúshikaden (Teachings on Style and the Flower)* that "... while studying the old and admiring the new, the great traditions of elegance must never be slighted."⁹ Also, a German philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), has considered our relation to traditional arts and stated that past art must be criticized from the vantage point of the present. He sees the present being constitutive of the past and reminds us that nothing should be taken over uncritically just because it happens to still be around. Correspondingly, nothing should be dumped either, just because it has waned.¹⁰

I believe that the growing appreciation of the traditional arts and values is the result of hard social values in modern society. The harder the society becomes, the stronger the urge for the soft cultural values grows. With soft values in this context I mean things such as material simplicity,¹¹ peacefulness and silence, or a moment of solitude to withdraw from busy society. Traditional arts, such as *nô*, *chanoyu* or *ikebana* are a present-day luxury – they have become culture for the soul in a society that is growing less humane.

I have two aims in this paper. The first is to show that in the Japanese context aesthetics is an everyday phenomenon and terms expressing specific aesthetic values typical for that culture should not be taken "as such", but rather they should be reflected through the aesthetic experience of that time and moment. Second, I will give some examples why traditional arts and aesthetic values still fascinate present-day Japanese.

In the following section, I will discuss Japanese aesthetics as everyday expression and its religious convergence as well as the importance of aesthetic experience for understanding the metaphoric meanings of the Japanese aesthetics values. After that I will introduce some aesthetic terms and expression in the Japanese tradition in further detail. And, last, I will try to answer the question, what is the fascination of traditional arts and values that have made them flourish in present-day Japan?

⁹ Rimer & Masakazu 1984: 3. Similar thoughts are found in the teachings of poetry or the Tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) as well. See, Tornainen 2000: 86–88.

¹⁰ Adorno 1984: 60.

¹¹ I mean a kind of aesthetic poverty that is seen, for example, in traditional Japanese architecture (sober earth colour) or in minimalist furniture in the houses. Aesthetic poverty in daily life is also seen in the fact that middle class Japanese do not invest much in modern housing conveniences.

2. “AESTHETICS OF THE EVERYDAY” – RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION?

Let me now explain some points of peculiarity concerning Japanese aesthetics, the aesthetics of the everyday, and religious expressions, in order to give a deeper and clearer picture of the Japanese aesthetic phenomena.

There are three general features in Japanese aesthetics. The first is aesthetics as everyday phenomena. The second is special aesthetic terms possessing religious expression and aesthetic values typical for that culture and people, and the third is an aesthetic experience that allows us to step aside from daily routine.

Yuriko Saito stated that the most prominent aspect of Japanese aesthetic affects every area of people’s lives. She continues that the aesthetic experience is not limited to the fine arts but is found in daily practices such as cooking, bathing, and gift wrapping, as well as physical exercises, such as archery and swordsmanship. Saito concludes that aesthetic matters are thoroughly integrated into Japanese life, past and present.¹²

According to Crispin Sartwell (2003: 761–763), the sources of art, both in Western and in non-western tradition, emerge from the religious and spiritual expressions and from rituals which demand objects of beauty and associate such objects with the sacred. An aesthetic dimension may be found in a variety of experiences such as body adornment, gardening, cookery, eating and drinking, or even in watching film or television animation or drama. The Japanese have skilfully combined religious and spiritual expressions in their daily life, such as eating and drinking (home altars and shrines), protection (street shrines), or blessings for health, wealth or success (shrines at companies, shops, or even restaurants, blessing new buildings with Shintô rituals, colouring the eye of the *Daruma* doll, or beautifully ornamented amulets). Religious or spiritual elements are also seen in traditional arts, such as gardening (e.g. setting of stones), *nô* theatre (supernatural stories) or *chanoyu* (Zen), as well as in the “present-day arts” such as in the stories of *anime* and *manga* (supernaturalism and metamorphosis).

The most prominent feature of religious and spiritual expression in Japanese daily life is their love for nature, which is seen in every aspect of Japanese culture and life such as poetry, paintings, traditional arts, textiles, food and drinking (seasonal specialities), enjoying seasonal changes in daily life, architecture, or gardening. Love for nature has its roots in Shintô beliefs and, later, some Buddhist ideas were included. Suzuki Daisetsu summarizes that “the beautiful is at bottom

¹² Saito 1998: 545–546.

religious, for without being religious one cannot detect and enjoy what is genuinely beautiful.”¹³

The Japanese Tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) is a good example of Japanese love for nature and the aesthetics of the everyday with religious nuances. The tea garden (*roji*) with its ever green plants and trees is like a part of wild nature, a forest that was considered in ancient Shintô to be a god himself or at least his shrine.¹⁴ During the Tea ceremony the host shows respect for the beauty in nature by not choosing utensils decorated with the image of flowers or plants of the season. In the Japanese tradition Tea is more than a ceremony; it is a Way of Life in accordance with Zen teachings. In Tea and in Zen every moment is a moment for practice whether it is washing ones hands, eating, or cleaning. In this sense every act in Tea and Zen is aestheticized.

Last, I would like to discuss the aesthetic experience that Yuriko Saito brought up. The aesthetic experience has to be, first of all, valuable and enjoyable, such as the Japanese traditional arts that are a valuable cultural heritage in maintaining and transmitting traditional arts in modern society. They are also enjoyable to modern Japanese since they continuously gather students, participants or viewers for the study groups and theatres. Secondly, aesthetic experience must stand out from the ordinary routine, such as the small and meditative tea huts or the sense of other-worldliness expressed in *nô* plays. Thirdly, aesthetic experience must be meaningful, not a mere sensation. Traditional arts also fulfil this condition since the more you know about them, the more you enjoy them. They are meaningful in strict physical and spiritual practice as well as in the set context of the play or in the course of the Tea gathering. Furthermore, they hide philosophical, artistic, or educational aspects behind the visual form.¹⁵

To conclude, traditional arts in Japan were originally fine arts of the time, but during and after the Edo period art was practised and enjoyed by the ordinary people; not by specialists. In this sense the Japanese traditional arts and aesthetic values may be said to represent the essential spirit of Japanese art today in combining elements from the high and popular cultures. This enables a variety of aesthetic expressions from noble elegance to ascetic minimalism, and finally, to the “chic” and “new-direction-seeking” city culture of modern and present-day Japan.

¹³ Suzuki 1988: 363.

¹⁴ Harada 1956: 13.

¹⁵ Iseminger 2003: 111–112. Following Richard Shusterman’s definition on aesthetic experience.

3. AESTHETIC TERMS AND VALUES IN JAPANESE TRADITION

Like many other terms, the meaning of aesthetic value is complex and it varies both historically and culturally. In Western tradition, aesthetic value relates to actualization and enjoyment of an aesthetic experience. Michael Mitias lists aesthetic values as follows: the comic, the elegant, the holy, the sorrowful, the cheerful, the serene, etc. Thus, he continues, it is difficult to enumerate all possible aesthetic values since they can be actualized in aesthetic perception under certain conditions.¹⁶

The peculiarity of Japanese aesthetic tradition is the possibility of aestheticizing every aspect of life, including objects and phenomena.¹⁷ In Japanese culture and tradition, aesthetic value and taste derives from the aesthetic experience and especially from particular words¹⁸ expressing the specific culture of that people. One way of grouping these concepts of expressing aesthetic value is as follows: *yojô* (emotional aftertaste in poetry),¹⁹ *wabi* (poor, rough), *sabi* (solitude, sorrow), *yûgen* (mystery, depth), *aware* (pathos), *sui* (stylishness),²⁰ *shibumi* (sober, elegant simplicity), *okashi* (ludicrous, odd, funny, ugly, fantastic etc.), *miyabi*²¹ (elegant, graceful), *hie* (chill), *kare* (withered), *yase* (lean), among others.

According to Robert Stecker, we do not value works for their own sake but because they enable us to realize certain ends such as pleasurable experiences (he gives money as an example).²² Stecker's notion helps us to understand Japanese aesthetic categories, such as "rough", "ugliness", "poverty", "chill", "lean", or "withered" that do not necessarily possess aesthetic value in the western tradition. These non-western aesthetic categories do not as such express beauty or value of the object itself but rather a feeling conveying a certain aesthetic value, under certain conditions or through pleasurable experiences, which makes an object admirable.

Sometimes the Japanese aesthetic terms expressing certain aesthetic values are used metaphorically in order to express some feeling about the thing appreciated. In this context the word "appreciate" connotes both comprehending and

¹⁶ Mitias 1988: 84.

¹⁷ Saito 1998: 547.

¹⁸ Yoshioka 2001: 341.

¹⁹ Saito 1998: 547.

²⁰ Konishi 1984: 63. *Sui* and *iki* are differing readings for the same character, the former being a term used in the Kyôto-Ôsaka area and the latter in Edo. See also Tanaka 2001: 318.

²¹ Marra 1991: 35-53.

²² Kieran 2001: 216. Intrinsic value vs. inherent value.

caring about the thing appreciated. If aesthetic terms are used as a metaphor they are like an open stimulus to the imagination with no strictly linguistic controls.²³

This statement is best illustrated with the following passage from the *Yamanoue Sôjiki* (The Diary of Yamanoue Sôji, 1588) where it says that “the renga master Shinkei has said that renga poetry at the highest level should possess the qualities of “chill, lean and withered.” The Tea master Jôh agreed with this and added that chanoyu, too, should become like this at its highest state”.²⁴ In this passage the words “chill, lean and withered” are used in metaphoric meaning in order to refer to the certain state of mind or feeling in poetry or in chanoyu that is most highly appreciated. Concerning chanoyu, this special feeling emerges from the rough and humble appearance of the tea hut or the utensils used.

4. FASCINATION OF THE TRADITIONAL ARTS

As shown above, the indigenous Japanese aesthetic terms are closely related to the Japanese traditional arts and express their essence, spirit and value through aesthetic experience in that place and moment. Next, I will discuss what fascinates in traditional arts making them flourish in present-day Japan.

What we call today “traditional arts” of Japan include forms of art that were high arts at their time as well as today. With this I mean forms of art such as *chanoyu*, *nô* theatre, reading or composing poetry, or calligraphy. Present-day “traditional arts” also include forms of art that were at their times made and enjoyed by the ordinary citizens. This was typical for the Edo period (1600–1867) merchant culture. The middle-class became little by little more powerful and wealthier and wanted new lighter forms of entertainment than preferred earlier by the shogun and aristocrats. From this origin, *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatres were born, as well as the whole idea of the “*Floating World*” (*Ukiyo*) culture that forms a basis for the present-day popular arts in Japan. In other words, traditional arts in Japan are not only high culture (arts) but also include originally popular arts. Common for all these forms of art today is that learning them demands devotion both physically and spiritually and requires patience, time and in some cases, money, as well.

I have come to six possible reasons for the fascination of traditional arts and aesthetic values in the Japanese context. They are luxury, fantasy world and fictive reality, spiritual “*furusato*”, traditional values, prestige and transformation, and aesthetic experience. Let me now study these in further detail in order to explain their validity in this matter.

²³ Cohen 2003: 374–375.

²⁴ *Yamanoue Sôjiki*, p. 97.

Luxury

Luxury has always fascinated the Japanese. For example, old works of lacquer ware are minutely decorated with gold and mother-of-pearl, or painting full of bright colours. Today luxury is seen, e.g., in golden screens used behind the marriage couple or the speaker of the wedding, and even at conferences. Furthermore, it is well known that Japanese tourists want exclusive style and high quality from the hotels they stay in abroad.

To return to the theme of the paper, traditional arts are a modern luxury. They are surrounded with elegant and refined atmosphere and aesthetic feeling. For example, *nô* costumes are rich in colour and design and the aesthetic feeling arising from *nô* is luxurious, elegant and mysterious. Or, the Tea ceremony is an extreme example of exclusive luxury. In a formal, *shoin* style of Tea, the tea room is a large room with beautiful decorations or paintings on the *fusuma* sliding doors or minute ornamentation on nail covers and transoms. All utensils used are rare pieces of art. By contrast, the informal *wabi* style of Tea expresses exclusive poverty. Everything looks poor, rough, simple and modest but actually a small *wabi* style of tea house costs more than a large apartment in the Tōkyō metropolitan area. Even the tea utensils, which are put together with a free hand and look clumsy or heavy, may cost hundreds of thousands of yen. Traditional arts offer luxurious aesthetic experiences that combine the past and the modern into a whole. They are luxury for the eye and soul.

Fantasy world and fictive reality

The fascination of traditional arts lies also in their in their capacity to create a sense of fantasy world and fictive reality, which serve as a way to escape the realities of this world. Especially in *nô* is the sense of other worldliness emphasized. Stylized movements give us only a hint of the feelings and meaning, leaving space for the viewer's imagination to complete it. The idea of other worldliness is seen in the Tea ceremony as well, in its spiritual inquiry to pursue the state of absolute freedom of the mind. This is called the *satori* state and exists in the mind free from the material world and its boundaries.

The fantasy world and imagination appeal especially to young Japanese. These are the highly popular genres of *manga* and *anime* that are played out across "stateless" fantasyscapes (*mukokuseki*) of future cities or far-away galaxies.²⁵ The fascination of fictive reality is also seen in the idea of the meta-

²⁵ Napier 2000: 24.

morphosis that occurs frequently in the stories of *manga* and *anime*.²⁶ And, moreover, a kind of “concrete metamorphosis” is seen in the street fashion called *cosplay* when young girls and boys change their appearance to look like their heroine’s in *manga*. The idea of metamorphosis in *manga* and *anime* has its roots in traditional arts such as in the stories of *nô* plays or even in the Tea ceremony. The metamorphosis that occurs during the Tea gathering may be said to be rather spiritual than concrete. For example, the classic of Tea, *Nanpôroku (Record from the South 1690)*, teaches that, as one enters the *roji* path leading to the tea room, one should leave worldly matters behind and enter the tea room empty minded.²⁷ This suggests spiritual rebirth, a new start that refers more to a mental metamorphosis than a physical.

Spiritual “*furusato*”

Whereas *manga* and *anime* are influenced by the idea of global culture and emphasize the feeling of “statelessness”, traditional arts such as *nô* or the Tea ceremony appeal in their expressions of traditional and local values. They serve as a kind of spiritual “hometown” or “native village” (*furusato*) for modern Japanese in the sense of being safe, familiar and even nostalgic.

The fascination of traditional arts lies in their sense of permanence, even though the Japanese arts during the Middle-Ages were strongly influenced by the Zen idea of impermanence or constant change. The same plays of *nô* and *kabuki* are performed seasonally year after year, and the course of the Tea gathering is today similar to what it has been over 400 years. The more familiar the Japanese seem to be with the course of the performance, the more they seem to enjoy it. Concerning the traditional arts in Japan the saying goes the more knowledge, the more pleasure. The attraction of this unchanging form of traditional arts arises from the personal point of view – from a spiritual maturing. Through various ages peoples’ minds or world views change, and through this development one can reflect and find new and ever varying nuances of beauty and fascination in the traditional arts.

²⁶ Napier 2000: 36.

²⁷ Torniaainen 2000: 50, 69, 188.

Traditional values

The fascination of traditional arts lies also in the traditional aesthetic values they represent such as simplicity, solitude, sobriety, aesthetic poverty, pathos, grace, or luxury among others. The speciality of these terms is the ambiguity of their meanings. One word may be used in various meanings depending on the context. Therefore, the Japanese aesthetic terms should not be understood literally as possessing certain aesthetic values but they are rather used as metaphors indicating special or admirable feelings arising from the object or resulting in pleasurable experiences. Recently modern Japanese have become more aware of their cultural roots and history. This is seen, for example, in Japanese fashion and design that has taken advantage of traditional themes and colours, which, moreover, has influenced an increasing interest and awareness of traditional Japanese arts and values among young Japanese. Japan is POP today both inside and outside Japan.

Prestige and transformation

First of all, traditional arts, such as the Tea ceremony, have met the challenge of changing society. The Tea ceremony, besides being an art practised by devoted tea masters and tea practitioners, has also stepped down from the pedestal and become entertainment for ordinary people. Today Tea is also served in so-called *chakais*, informal tea gatherings. Participating in these gatherings does not require knowledge of tea etiquette, wearing the *kimono*, or knowing the course of the tea ceremony. It is enough to sit down, enjoy and have a cup of tea. Usually these gatherings take place in a large conference hall or in large tea rooms of the temples who hire them out for tea practitioners' use. Many people are invited and several sittings may occur during the day. Some criticize that *chakais* are mass gatherings and have lost the original meaning of Tea. I believe, however, that in *chakai* the Tea Master Rikyū's wish to make Tea possible for everyone has come true. The tea ceremony has met the challenge and has been able to change to fulfil the needs of modern people.

Traditional arts have cultural and social function or value, too. They serve as an opportunity to show respect and maintain one's own culture as well as transmit these skills and cultural values to the coming generations. Traditional arts have a social function as well. Practising them provides one way to show one's social position or sophistication. Japanese are still very aware of social classes, and traditional arts as forms of high culture are respected skills, for example, for young

unmarried women in their marriage portfolio.²⁸ For men they are a way to show one's sophistication and sensibility for arts and beauty.

Aesthetic experience

Another reason for the successful co-existence of traditional arts in modern society is in their practice and in the unique aesthetic experience they can offer. Traditional arts in Japan are very practical. Doing them means concrete practice (performer) that also enables participation (viewer) which together creates an aesthetic experience in that space and moment. Moreover, the aesthetic experience causes pleasure and enjoyment as well as enables a moment away from the daily life and routine.

The Japanese Tea ceremony is an ultimate example of practical behaviour. In the Tea ceremony, every movement has its purpose and nothing is wasted. The host is preparing tea and cleaning dishes in a very intimate setting. It is like an interactive play in which the performer and the viewer both know exactly what to do and when: every act and even speech is strictly controlled leaving no space for improvisation or spontaneity.

Another distinctive feature of the Japanese traditional art is an overall aesthetization. The *nô* is described as being the art of walking in addition to its being visually luxurious. The Tea ceremony is art itself from a single movement of the hand to how utensils are held to the aesthetic details of tea rooms and the utensils used.

Art, practice and aesthetics create a tight interaction in Japanese tradition. In the Japanese way of thinking a *form* (*kata*) has three purposes: practical, aesthetic and spiritual. The practical point has been explained above. The basic form creates safe and familiar, never changing, boundaries for performance, such as the stories of *nô* or the course of the Tea gathering. In the aesthetic sense, the beauty, fascination and aesthetic experience arises within the safety and familiar boundaries of the form, which varies but little in accordance with the season and one's life experience. Therefore, the beauty and fascination of traditional arts arises from the form, but the form alone is not enough for a perfect performance: there has to be a balance between form and spirit.²⁹

²⁸ It is not unusual that a family hires a detective to investigate the family background of the potential spouses for their children. Some social groups, mostly minorities, are persistently discriminated against despite legislation and various efforts to eradicate the phenomenon. For further information, see Hendry 1995: 81; 138–140.

²⁹ Tornainen 2000: 90. About the relationship of words (*kotoba*), form (*sugata*) and general appearance (*fūtei*).

From the spiritual point of view, the form releases the performer and the viewer from the boundaries of rational thinking and leads to the absolute freedom of the mind. In Japanese tradition, art is practical and practice is the essence of art (such as in *nô* theatre or the tea ceremony). And, furthermore, at the highest level art and life become indistinguishable. The Japanese saying “*kaminagara no michi*”, “to leave things to the will of the gods”, describes this state of mind and way of life the best. One practises one’s art and lives one’s life such as it is; that is the ultimate reality itself.³⁰

5. CLOSING REMARKS

Variety of the Japanese aesthetic terms and values were flourishing in the Japanese traditional arts and forms of culture before the westernization process reached Japanese scholarly circles. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Western academic tradition was adopted and the Japanese were in a hurry to sew up the lead of the western scientific tradition. The same aesthetic terms and problems were discussed both in the West and in Japan, but there were also few Japanese scholars who made an attempt to explain traditional Japanese aesthetic terms and values through Western scholarly methods. Japanese aesthetics has been successfully persisting in time and is today more timely than ever.

Aesthetics in Japan is an everyday expression and it is seen similarly in cooking and packing as well as in gardening or forms of arts. Sometimes indigenous aesthetic terms may convey religious aspects strengthening philosophical nuances, a kind of Japanese spirit typical for the culture of that people, which is influenced by the Buddhist teachings or the ideas from the Japanese indigenous cult *Shintô*. Most of the traditional Japanese aesthetic terms are ambiguous in meaning, such as *chill*, *lean*, *withered*, or *wabi*, and unfamiliar in the Western tradition. These terms should not be discussed “as such” but reflected through the aesthetic experience or the metaphoric meaning they convey in the past or present. Moreover, in the Japanese tradition “art” and “the everyday” are not mutually exclusive concepts. Every act in art or in every-day life is considered as a means for spiritual training in order to achieve the highest state – the ultimate mastery.

Traditional aesthetic values were highly admired in the past forms of (high) art during the Heian (794–1185) and Muromachi (1336–1573) periods in Japan. The first great change happened along with the shift to the Edo (1600–1867) period when the newly rising city culture flourished and new aesthetic categories, such as “chic”, were founded. During the Meiji (1868–1911) period traditional aesthetic values withdrew to the background while the focus of interest turned to

³⁰ This coincides with the Buddhist teaching of suchness (*tathatâ*). See, Suzuki 1988: 230.

western aesthetic concepts. However, today Japanese traditional aesthetic studies and appreciation are making a revival and now we have a unique opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the traditional aesthetic values in the past and present cultures in the Japanese context.

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