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Aesthetics of Rain¹

AOKI Takao

Preface

Culture exists between human beings and their natural environment. It is necessary to recognize that our perceptions of nature are not limited to scientific means, but are influenced by our arts and culture. We learn to appreciate the natural world only when it becomes a part of our aesthetic culture. This is what Oscar Wilde meant when, referring to the London fog, he wrote that nature imitates art more than art imitates nature². Landscape has tangible structural elements like mountains, fields, and rivers. We can enjoy clear views of such landscapes in the light of the sun, at night beneath a bright moon, or in times that envelope us in twilight. Adding to these, East Asian aesthetics recognizes a meteorological dimension in the natural environment, called *Yūgen*, which has played a special role in the appreciation of works of poetry as well as of environmental beauty.

Meteorological aesthetics which make much of darkness and obscurity can be contrasted with Western aesthetics which focus on brightness and clearness. Of course, there are exceptions in Western tradition, including J.C.Vernet as a painter and Edmund Burke³ as a theorist of aesthetics. Still, we feel that an examination of the aesthetics of rain will allow us a glimpse of a uniquely East Asian environmental aesthetics.

Here we have to discriminate between the aesthetic culture of rain from aesthetics of rain. In the field of culture and the arts, Japanese people have enjoyed rain in such artistic genres as *waka* poetry, short verse poems of 31 syllables, as well as haiku, Noh drama, Chinese-style painting, the tea ceremony, Ukiyo-e prints and others genres. This positive appreciation of rain has been instilled into Japanese culture through literature and the arts. As a result, it can be observed in the everyday life and culture of contemporary Japan. Aesthetic views of rain and other weather conditions like cloud, haze, fog, and snow, several thinkers in medieval Japan formed an aesthetic theory of obscurity, including the concept of *Yūgen*. In modern times Japanese intellectuals like geographer Shigetaka Shiga (1863-1927)⁴ have considered meteorological conditions to

¹This paper was originally prepared for the Panel of *Japanese Aesthetics* in the XVIII International Congress of Aesthetics, August 13, 2010, Beijing. Fumikazu Kishi, Eiko Suzuki, Masahiro Hamashita and Takao Aoki were speakers on this panel.

²Oscar Wilde. "The Decay of Lying." New York: The Notingham Society, 1909, originally published in 1891. On the cultural formation of 'fog', Alain Corbin also addresses the topic in a short essay in his *L'homme dans le paysage* (2001, Japanese translation 2002, 144 - 148)

³"It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination." In this quotation from "Of the difference between CLEARNESS and OBSCURITY with regard to the passions" in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) by Edmund Burke, we could find the "aesthetics of obscurity". Between Burke and the Japanese tradition, we could recognize what we call an aesthetics of obscurity, as I have described in previous papers. See my paper: Takao AOKI, "Aesthetics of Negative Weather-An Analysis of the Communication between the Mind-body Existence and the Macro Cosmos with a Focus on Rain in a Broader Sense." *Jianshexinghouxiandaisixiang yu Shengtaimeixue*, ShanDong UP, 2013. pp.137~159

⁴Shigetaka Shiga, *Nihon fūkeiron* (1894) On his thought from aesthetic points of view, see Masahiro

be characteristics of the natural environment of Japan. Others, including literary scholar Yaichi Haga(1867-1927)and human geographer Kojima Usui(1873-1948), have combined such environmental features as frequent rain and water vapor with characteristics of Japanese arts, as well as the national culture and character of the Japanese people⁵.

In this way, Japanese aesthetics allow a unique combination of culture and nature, which is called *fūdo*. More specifically, *fūdo* [風土] refers to nature as it is appreciated through a cultural tradition. Though the term *fūdo* has been used in this sense since at least the year 713, it has more recently been employed or conceptualized again in the modern book *Fūdo* (1935) by phenomenologist Tetsuro Watsuji(1889-1960), and developed in the work of Augustin Berque(born in 1942, Rabat), of which *Fūdo no Nippon* (1992) is representative. More modern use of the term has been influenced by Heidegger and by Herder, who formulated the concept of *klima* about the reciprocal relationship between nature and human being. Instead of going into detail about this genealogy, however, here I would like to discuss the relation of rain culture and Japanese aesthetics. Japanese traditions of art, having been influenced by the natural environment and stimulated by Chinese arts and culture, have instilled meteorological aesthetics⁶ into the depth of culture. We can suggest this fact by showing interpretations about the Chinese character '雨' which means rain⁷. We can also see examples of meteorological aesthetics in Japanese food culture, including in certain traditional sweets.

Hamashita, "Shiga Shigetaka "Nihon fūkeiron" to Nihonteki-Sukou." *Shutaino-Gaku toshiteno Bigaku* (2007, Kouyou Shobou), also see Shinichi Anzai, "Shiga Shigetaka "Nihon fūkeiron" ni okeru Kagaku to Geijutsu." *Geijutsu bunka* vol.11. Tohoku-geijutsu-bunka Gakkai pp.15~24

⁵Yukio Yashiro writes typically about the relation between fine arts and vaporous natural environments in Japan in his book *Nihon Bijutsu no Tokushitsu (Essential Character of the Japanese Fine Arts)*, Iwanami Shoten, 1943. 61-62.)

⁶Yuriko Saitoh, "Aesthetics of Weather." *Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. 156-176

⁷In Japanese the characters for both rain [雨] and for the sky [天] may be pronounced *ama* or *ame*. In Chinese, the same character that Japanese uses to refer to the sky [天], may in addition have the meaning of "heaven." The Chinese meaning influences the nuances of combinations of weather, sky, and heaven, when used in Japanese. If we pronounce 天 as *ame* in Japanese, and keep in mind that weather-related words hold a connection to the sky, we can see that a reference to "heaven" is concealed inside it. *Ame* or *ama* refer as well to the mist or cloud that surrounds mountains. The character 天, pronounced as *ame*, in the original Japanese may refer to the high mountain that is concealed in cloud or mist. This refers to the country or world of heaven. And the inhabitants of such a world are the gods. In this sense, *ame* or *ama* are used in contrast to the surface world of our earth. Finally, *ama* and *ame* refers to the vast space above our heads — we may understand it simply as "sky." As a result, *ame* and *ama* are in contrast to the ground, the surface of the earth. In Chinese, on the other hand, 天 is a distant and abstract principle, referring to the home of the Creator of the universe.

Chapter 1 Linguistic relations of rain and fūdo

Japan is situated in a temperate climate zone. It has four seasons, high humidity, and a lot of rain.⁸

Not only is there abundant rain, but the types of rain, the ways in which it falls, are various. To describe the different types of rain, the

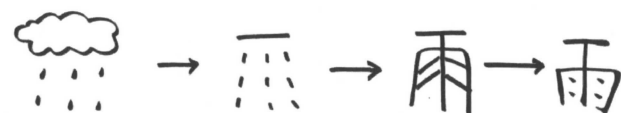
Japanese language employs many different terms and Chinese characters.

Having a large number of terms to describe rain as a natural phenomenon is already a kind of culture.⁹

Let's look at the Chinese characters that are employed in the Japanese language to describe rain.

The diagram above¹⁰ is a kind of schematic representation of rain. The Chinese character for rain [雨] is a kind of ideograph, modeled after such an image. It may be that this character originally carried a wider meteorological meaning, since today it is used as an element in many weather-related terms, including the characters for cloud [雲], mist [霧], haze [霞], fog [霧], snow [雪], sleet [霰], and hail [霰]. Though the character appears in all these combinations, in what follows I will focus on rain in its simplest sense.

Different cultures are rooted in different natural environments and climates, but their development depends on social and historical factors. If we examine the issue from a cultural or linguistic viewpoint, even the number of words that a language has for



Hieroglyphic → Oracle bone script → Xiao zhuan → Modern text rain.

⁸ According to a survey of the years 1976 to 2005 by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of Japan, the average annual precipitation of Japan is 1690 mm—twice as large as the world average of 807 mm. A survey of precipitation in cities for the years 1970 to 2000 by the Japan Meteorological Agency shows that Tokyo's average precipitation (1466 mm) is about double that of London (750 mm). Comparatively speaking, annual rainfall in China is small at 607mm. However, the Gangnam district, where the old capital Lin'an (currently Hangzhou) of the Southern Song Dynasty, is located has a high rainfall comparable to Japan's.

⁹ No need to refer here to the classic Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. From our knowledge of cultural relativism, we know the people of the desert have many minute articulations or nouns about camels, the Inuit have many terms relating to snow; likewise, we East Asian people have many words about rain. Some authors claim that Chinese has more than two hundred words for rain, and Japanese more than four hundred. Please refer to Junko Takahashi, *Ame no Namae* (2001), Shogakukan publisher. Atsushi Kurashima, *Ame no Kotobajitenn* (2001), Koudansha publisher. Hiroyasu Ujiie, *Ame Sennen* (2004), touji-syobou.

¹⁰ According to the *Shuoen Jiezi* or *Origin of Chinese Characters* (ca. 100), rain is a kind of water which comes from a cloud and falls on the land. The order of writing the Chinese character "雨" starts with the horizontal stroke "一" on the top. The "一" is the wide sky or heaven over our head. The second stroke "冂" looks like drooping cloud cluster. The water vapor spreads inside the cloud cluster. As far as we know, every Chinese character related to precipitation begins with the same series of strokes, "雨". Thus all members of this semantic group include the character rain "雨" in a narrow sense.

precipitation can help us understand that society from a cultural rather than a meteorological perspective. Japanese, like Chinese, is among the richest languages in words that refer to rain. Rain is really a part of Japanese culture.

Chapter 2 Names of sweets and food suggesting rain culture in Japan

Japan has a rich culture of rain, which is related to and has been shared with China and Korea for a long time. Japan continues to develop its rain culture independently up to the present day. To illustrate this, I will cite some examples of traditional sweets. In Japan, we have many confectionaries whose names are derived from a long aesthetic tradition cultivated mainly through poetry and literature, as well as from the Chinese tradition of arts. The aesthetic attitude which combines food culture with a traditional appreciation of natural beauty, including weather, is called *fūga* [風雅] or *fūryū* [風流]. Both of these are popular aesthetic ideas which refer to aesthetic practice as well as aesthetic culture. They refer to a wide range of attitudes and practices, including elegant taste and cultivation, and pastimes of the literati such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, playing the lyre or other music, calligraphy, ink painting, poetry, Chinese chess, and some alcoholic beverages. From these cultural practices, some of which have since developed into secular pleasures, Basho founded *fūga* as the primary aesthetic idea of his serious poetic practice. In addition, these cultural practices, called the "Eight Elegant Skills" in China, became popular diversions among the bourgeoisie in Edo. The combination between sweet foods and the aesthetic attitude of *fūga* has been maintained particularly due to the influence of *sadou*, that is, the Way of Tea. Nowadays, as the aesthetics of the way of tea have permeated into our everyday life, traditional sweets called *wagashi* show a unique amalgamation of high culture aesthetics and everyday life.

Example 1 *Momiji manjū*: a sweet bun with the title and image of a crimson maple leaf

To explain the cultural tradition of natural beauty in our daily life, here I would like to point to the example of *momiji manjū*¹¹ — maple-leaf-shaped confectionary, a popular souvenir from Hiroshima. In Japan, cherry blossoms in spring and crimson maple leaves in autumn are representative items of natural beauty.



In the case of *momiji manjū*, we find a combination of an everyday food item (a sweet) and aesthetic tradition (admiring the autumn colors of the maple). This amalgamation is instantiated by its naming. *manjū* is a type of popular sweet—a steamed bun with a bean - jam filling. The common word *manjū* is here overlapped with *momiji*, the name of the crimson maple. This type of aesthetic naming is similar to a title for a work of art. The mechanism of this aesthetics is called *mitate*, a kind of visual-linguistic metaphor as shown in the image. Such a combination is a typical

¹¹ Here I use the image from the internet shop of Okinadou. <http://okinadou.com/dainagon.html>

example of *fūryū*, the Japanese aesthetics of nature practiced by people.

Similarly, we can find many sweets with names related to rain and, needless to say, many which are named after flowers and other beauties of nature. Let us illustrate this by taking up the case of a sweet with the name of a type of rain. Rain is not only a focus of meteorological aesthetics in Japan, but also a symbolic case of the Japanese aesthetic cultural system assimilating natural beauty.

Example 2 *Shigure*: a sweet named for a winter shower

There are many sweets in Japan called by the name of *shigure*, a term which refers to a kind of light rain. Here I would like to look at a sweet called *hatsushigure*¹² which means the first light shower of rain in the season of late autumn or early winter. In this case, the appearance of the sweet doesn't have any visual similarity with the rain of winter drizzle. Though the original name has remained, the appearance of the sweet has changed. The anniversary of Matsuo Basho is also memorialized as *shigure*¹³, because he died in the late autumn of 1694, on October 12 of the old lunar calendar. As this poet made many important haiku using the word *shigure* or *hatsushigure*, it has become a symbol of the religious and moral life achieved through poetic practice. The rain symbolizes life in its last stage because of its suddenness, shortness, sudden passing and irreversibility. In addition to the sweet, there is also a brand of sake called *Hatsushigure*.¹⁴ This name reminds us that the season of the first press of sake often coincides with the first winter drizzle, and, although the tone is different, invokes the beginning of the late season of life as a *Winterreise* by Müller and Schubert would do.

There are also many sweets with names related to different types of spring rain. Let us turn to one of these now, though it is not a sweet but an ordinary food.

Example 3 *Harusame*: spring rain

The popularity of Chinese cellophane noodles has spread widely beyond Far East Asian countries. This type of transparent noodle is made from starchy foods such as the mung bean [綠豆], potatoes, or something similar. In China, such noodles are most commonly called *fěn sī* [粉絲], or “bean thread noodles,” also known as Chinese vermicelli, or glass noodles. In Korea this noodle, called *dangmyeon* [당면; 唐麵], literally “noodle of the Tang dynasty,” is the popular dish *japchae* [잡채]. In Japan, they have the elegant name *harusame* [春雨], which literally means “spring rain,” because they are thought to resemble transparent soft rain, like that which falls in the



¹² I borrowed the image from the online shop *Kagetsu* in Machida City, Tokyo. The title of this sweet is named after Basho's popular Haiku. *Tabibito to wagana yobaren hatsushigure*. The translation is based on that of Reginald Horace Blyth. *The first winter shower / My name shall be / "Traveller"*.

¹³ The date of *shigure* (drizzling rain in the cold season) not only symbolizes Basho's poetic life, but also represents an aesthetic view of a stoic but short life in the world. So the proverb *Ars longa, vita brevis* echoes this perspective.

¹⁴ The brand name *Hatsushigure* is a product of the Ohta Brewery in Nara prefecture.

spring.¹⁵ Naming a food in this way is an example of an inclination to make aesthetic everyday life in Japan.

When we see new things, we use an old or familiar category to classify it. For example, to describe tomatoes, which were introduced relatively recently into China, the Chinese language uses combinations of older terms: “eggplant of barbarous people” [蕃茄], or “Western red persimmon” [西紅柿].

In the case of *harusame* (spring rain), the noodle is referred to metaphorically, rather than as a variation of a different food type. The fact that common food items are named after different types of precipitation shows how deeply the image of rain has penetrated into the Japanese language and culture.

This use of metaphor may be an inventive way to recognize new things aesthetically. This way of viewing a word and a world aesthetically is called *mitate* in Japanese, but we can easily compare it to the case of a work like *Nocturne: Blue and Gold* (1872-77) by James A. McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)¹⁶. The subtitle of this work is *Old Battersea Bridge*. The painter puts the more poetic title of *Nocturne: Blue and Gold* over the subtitle: the name of the bridge. We use such poetic metaphors not only to give a memorable label to a new food or sweet but also to create an aesthetic world by giving a new name or metaphor to familiar things. In Japan, this aesthetic practice of *mitate* became such an institutional habit that at times the metaphor seems almost dead. Nonetheless, it is still alive in our aesthetic tradition¹⁷.

Chapter 3 Views of Scenery illustrating the Aesthetics of Rain in East Asia

3-1: Hiroshige as a Print Maker of Rain

As a print maker of rain, we should mention the name of Suzuki Harunobu, who drew the beauty of umbrellas in the rain. Here, however, I will focus on the work of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). Hiroshige is famous for his series “Fifty-three series of landscapes along the Tōkaidō” (c.1833), for prints of famous sights or *meishō-e*, for a series of views of eight traditional beautiful scenes, and for his one hundred views of the city of Edo (c. 1856-1858). In these works, he depicted many rainy scenes, including *Shōno-no Hakuu* (“Summer white shower at Shōno”, 1833).

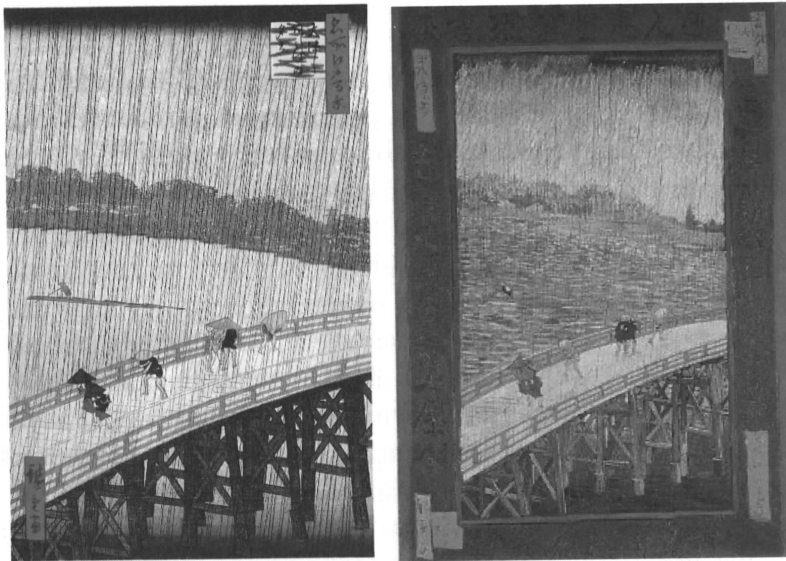


¹⁵ This noodle was imported from China, during the Sung Dynasty in the late eleventh or early twelfth century along with Zen Buddhism, *udon* noodles, *manjū* sweets, and many other things.

¹⁶ Ayako Ono, *Bi no Kōryū: Igirisu no Japonisumu*. (Gihōdō Shuppan, 2008), 106~119

¹⁷ Takao Aoki, “Mitate no Bigaku.” *Nihon-no-Bigaku*, vol 24((Perikan-Sha, 1996),36-62.

Van Gogh copied several Ukiyo-e woodblock prints, including one of Hiroshige's rain scenes: *Japonaiserie: Bridge in the Rain* (after Hiroshige) 1887. Copying the *Oh-hashi Atake no Yūdachi* (Summer Evening Shower over the Bridge at Atake, 1857),¹⁸ Van Gogh pays attention to drawing the flow and power of the waves on the river and also shows his interest in the



architectural structure of the bridge. He succeeds in depicting the stormy mood of the scene. In his original print, however, Hiroshige draws the rain itself as straight lines interrupting the detailed description of the bridge or surface of the river. Hiroshige appreciates the scenery of the rain shower over the human figures on the bridge, not independent from people's lives; that is, his visual depiction presents the theme in the midst of the city life of Edo. Compared with Van Gogh's version, Hiroshige's can be considered as focusing on the rain and its effects. Usui Kojima characterized him as "the painter of fog, rain, and snow."¹⁹ Hiroshige also tends to concentrate his attention to scenes of dawn, evening, and moonlight, as if he avoids the direct light of day. In this respect, Hiroshige is similar to Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), a painter known for his landscapes of scenes at night, dawn, or in the evening, and storms, as well as for various scenes of the sea. In addition, we can mention Mokkei [牧谿 in Japanese or Muxi Fachang 牧谿法常] in Chinese (ca.1210-ca.1269)²⁰ who is known as a painter of eight views of the lake and river area Shoushou-Hakkei [Xiaoxiang Bajing in Chinese, 瀟湘八景]²¹.

¹⁸ Recently this picture has been interpreted freshly by Minoru Harashida, who sees in it a testimony from the days when the U.S.A. sent a delegation of navy ships to Japan. The picture tacitly depicts the hidden but strong Japanese navy power whose port is seen in the black silhouette of the picture. Minoru Harashida, Nazotoki Hiroshige "Edohyaku" (2007) Shūeisha

¹⁹ Citation from "All works by Usui Kojima", vol.13th, p129.

²⁰ Yoshimitsu Ashikaga (1356~1408) who loved Chinese arts and culture and established a library and museum of treasures, was also the patron of Zeami, and cherished the Chinese artist Muxi.

²¹ Xiaoxiang Bajing 瀟湘八景 in Xiangyin, in the north was selected as a literary and painting topos by (Souteki or Songdi) at the end of 11th century. The standard eight views are cited in the above text.

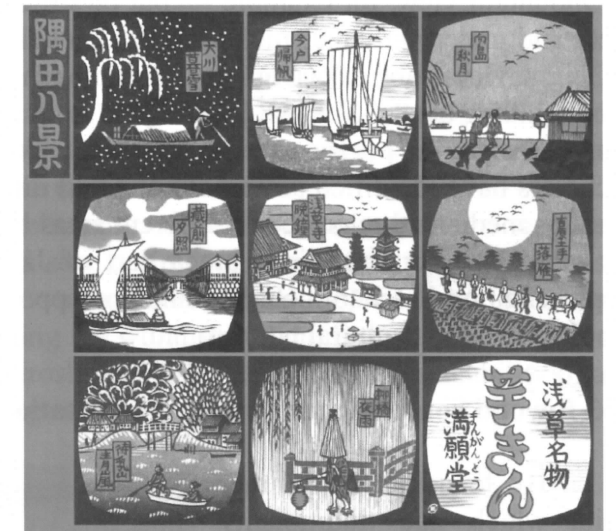
3-2 Hakkei-ga or Eight views in types of weather

The image at right is from the wrapping paper²² from a well-known type of sweet cakes. In Tokyo, on the opposite side of the Sumida River from where the new Tokyo Sky Tree now stands,²³ there is a neighborhood called Asakusa which flourished before World War II, preserving the atmosphere of the Edo era.

In Asakusa, a small confectionary shop sells a sweet called *Sumida Hakkei* which is popular as a souvenir among Tokyo residents. *Sumida Hakkei*, which means "Eight fine views around the Sumida River" includes scenes of night, twilight, and of rainy weather.

Choosing to depict such views might seem paradoxical, since we cannot enjoy fully the beautiful scene or landscape under such a negative meteorological conditions. Although the design of the packaging is not so refined aesthetically, the name of the sweet has an aristocratic lineage, and unrefined depictions here point to deeply-hidden prototypes of our views of what constitutes beautiful scenery.

The original eight views in China of the *Shoushou-Hakkei* are as follows²⁴.



The rain at night on the Xiao River [瀟湘夜雨]

The wild geese landing on the sand beach in the evening [平沙落雁]

The evening sound of the bell from the veiled temple in haze [烟寺晚鐘]

The stormy wind in the village of mountain [山市晴嵐]

The falling snow in the evening broad estuary [江天暮雪]

The fisher's village in the sunset glow [漁村夕照]

The moon in autumn over the Lake of Dongting [洞庭秋月]

The distant view of sailing ships returning home harbor [遠浦歸帆].

From the famous list of eight scenes, we recognize that every sight consists of two elements: an original location and a type of scene. The Chinese locations in the *Shoushou-Hakkei* are translated into similar scenes in the Japanese *Sumida Hakkei*. The locations are transplanted from Hunan, China into Edo, Japan, but the type of scenery is preserved. Each scene is not only of a particular type of geological formation — a lake

²² Wrapping paper for confectionary Mangandoh: *Sumida Hakkei* (Eight fine views around the Sumida River, 1832-38) < <http://kzmystar.web.fc2.com/syousyou0.html> > (1 September 2015)

²³ When this paper was prepared, the tower was under construction. Basho lived from his early 40s at the branch river area called Fukagawa near to the present site of the tower. *Mangandoh* sweet confectionary shops stand in this river side area called Asakusa.

²⁴ Here I have adapted the translation from the Wikipedia entry on Eight Views of Xiaoxiang. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight_Views_of_Xiaoxiang

or mountain view, for example — but of such a scene observed at a particular time of year and under particular meteorological conditions. Other Japanese versions of the set of eight views are relocated to Omi and other local beauty spots, including Omi²⁵. Though they began as visual landscapes, from medieval times the eight views became a popular *topos* in poetry and other cultural expressions, including, as we saw, cakes. Scholars have identified almost six hundred different versions of sets of eight views, in various media and relocated to different areas of Japan²⁶. This helps to explain why rain or other weather conditions are a part of Japanese aesthetics, not limited to visual representation but also including and presupposing literary understanding and common knowledge of its cultural background.

3-3 Beyond conventional visual representation of rainy scenery

By focusing on summer rain, which had traditionally been ignored in favor of spring or autumn rain, Hiroshige added a new theme to the history of rain aesthetics. His print *Summer Shower over the Nihon Bridge* (1832-1839)²⁷ illustrates this. Here we can see Hiroshige's love of rainy scenes of everyday life. Above the bridge, and storehouses in the middle distance, we can recognize the vague image of Mt. Fuji. At first sight, this scenery may seem realistic, but in fact from Tokyo we can't see Mt. Fuji under such rainy conditions. And of course even in ideal conditions the mountain wouldn't appear this large from Nihonbashi²⁸. It would be impossible to see such a view of Mt. Fuji from this perspective. So this image does not represent the real world. Instead we can say that it depicts an aesthetic or fictional world, transformed from the real view. Or rather, it has taken on aspects of the symbolic world. In the middle of the nineteenth century when Hiroshige was showing it in his prints, the flourishing Nihonbashi area and its famous



²⁵Tōru Haga, “*Fūkei no Hikaku Bunkashi Shōshō Hakkei to Ōmi Hakkei*”(1986) Hikaku Bunkaku Kenkyō,50:1-27. Takashi Horikawa, *Shōshō Hakkei Shiga to Kaiga ni Miru Nihonka no Yōsō* (Rinsen Book Co, 2002). Ruofen Yi, *Of Cloud Shadows and Celestial Light: Poems and Paintings of the Landscape of Xiao Xiang*. Lernbook (Taipei), 2013.

²⁶ *The Distribution of and Recent Research on Hakkei (Eight Views) of Japan “Date of the Historical Appreciation of Landscape in Japan”* .ed by Yōji Aoki and Eiko Sakakibara(National Institute for Environmental Studies, 2007).

²⁷ Tōto meisho, Nihonbashi no hakuu (Summer Shower over Nihon Bridge) “*TOKYO NATIONAL MUSEUM Image Search, Tokyo National Museum.* <<http://webarchives.tnm.jp/imgsearch/show/C0071746>> (1 September 2015)

²⁸ In the Edo era, the Nihonbashi [Japan Bridge] and its surrounding area was known for its prosperity. The bridge was the traditional starting point for journeys. It was a famous spot, and was depicted many times in Ukiyo-e or souvenir books.

bridge were synonymous with Edo or Japan itself.

Here we can interpret the combination of Nihonbashi with an exaggerated Mt. Fuji as a kind of stereotyped artistic convention. In the opinion of some researchers²⁹, this print shows only the standard combination of the bridge and Mt. Fuji, just like so many pictures containing the standard combination of a plum tree and a bush warbler in spring. Prof. Fumikazu Kishi is among those who hold this view³⁰.

However, the view that the combination of bridge and mountain is pure convention is overstated. The Edo period saw a time of transformation of people's sensibilities, from a literary imagination to a more visual approach³¹. We can demonstrate this change in part by comparing the work of Matsuo Basho, known for his haiku poetry, with the Ukiyo-e prints of Hiroshige. Basho represents the sensibility of a literary imagination, while Hiroshige belongs to a new trend in sensibility.

Chapter 4 Basho and the tradition of *fūga*

4-1 Mt. Fuji obscured by drizzle at Hakone

The ink painting shown here is in the traditional horizontal scroll style called *gakan*. Basho³² admired this style³³ and painted this image himself in his collection *Nozarashi Kikou*.

Whenever he made a journey, he recorded it in a poetic document, accompanied by Haiku. Among the five journeys he made in his later days, the record of the last, called *Oku no Hosomichi* [*Poetic journey into the depth of the northern district*, c.a.1690] is the most famous. The first, *Nozarashi Kikou* (1684) is also important, partly because the manuscript text written by Basho still exists, and partly because he sought with earnest effort the real state of *fūga* by completing this ascetic journey. At those days, though he could enjoy his life with his fame, he tried to find his new way out of

²⁹ Jun-ichi Ōkubo, *Nihonbashizu ni Miru ‘Teikei’ no Keisei: Hiroshigeto Ukiyo-e Fūkeiga*(Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2007), 128-136.

³⁰ *The View of the Mountains Was “Amusing” : Surveying the Application of the Japanese Aesthetic Term Omoshiroshi to Nature* Fumikazu KISHI. He showed his similar interpretation in his paper “Sansui Omoshiroku, mata Monosugoshi –Hiroshige Nikki nimiru Jōshosei” in *Bijutsu Forum* 21. Vol.16,pp.70-80

³¹ As another example of the transformation of sensibility from a literary or auditory model to a visual one, we could mention the change of dramatic presentation from puppet narrative drama in the first half of Edo era to the Kabuki performance in the latter half.

³² Basho revolutionized the poetry called haikai and became a founder of haiku, which is characterized by 17 syllables and using seasonal terms, founded on the aesthetic principle of *fūga* or *fūryū*. Here I used the image of Mt. Fuji in the midst of drizzle from “Basho “Nozarashi Kikou” no Kenkyū” Kan-ichi Yayoshi, p448, Ohfusha, 1987.

³³ Kan-ichi Yayoshi “Basho “Nozarashi Kikou” no Kenkyū”p59, Ohfusha,1987

Here I have to make a few academic comments. Basho's travel book has several versions, which we may divide into two types: the group which has illustrations drawn by Basho himself, and the other type, without any images. On the philological research of these texts, refer to above Yayoshi and Moritaro Hama. “ Matsuo Basho saku “Nozarashi Kikou” no Seiritsu” Mie-Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009

the artistic deadlock. The record of his first poetic trip launches itself with impressive descriptions and shows his resolution.

*Setting Forth from Fukagawa*³⁴

When I am going on a faraway journey, "Without food, I am spiritually awakened under the midnight moon." An ancient man, whose spirit I hold on to, said this. And I leave the hut on the riverbank in autumn, Hazuki (August) in the first year of Jōkyō, Kino-ene (1684), when the voice of the wind sounds somehow cold.

*I prepare for being a weather-exposed skeleton.
An autumn wind chills
To the heart*³⁵.

Following the famous opening of this book, there appears a famous description of cloudy scenery, and its brief expression in a Haiku poem.

The Barrier at Hakone

*On the day when I am to pass
the barrier at Hakone, all the
mountains have been hidden
behind clouds in rainy weather.*

*Today Mt. Fuji cannot be seen
Because of a thick mist like
drizzle,
It is also interesting.*³⁶



In the real situation that Basho experienced, Mt. Fuji couldn't be seen, but the scroll on which he wrote the poem, there is also an ink painting depicting the Mt. Fuji which he knew to be there. In the mind which deplores the weather conditions hiding Mt. Fuji, there is Mt. Fuji as well.

This is a complicated, however typical experience. So depending on the general case, we can say that in Basho's experience, although Mt. Fuji can't be seen, nevertheless he could consider the situation as interesting. In one way, when someone can't see his beloved (say, Mt. Fuji) due to some hindrance (say, rain), he may lament or deplore the absence of the beloved. However, on the other hand, he may feel a pleasure in absorbing himself deeply into such a situation, so as to imagine the invisible beloved. We enjoy the unviewable object not with physical eyes, but with imagination or contemplation.

When confronted with a rainy situation, one is inclined to recollect his or her past events, including meetings with valuable persons, love affairs and so on, in contemplation of the past. This connection and combination of looking quietly at the

rain while imagining and recollecting the past is conceived of as *nagame*³⁷. *Nagame* illustrates a kind of traditional rhetoric in Japanese poetry called *kake-kotoba*. The term shows a semantic combination of word, meaning, and pronunciation: one homophone word with two meanings. Or two meanings crystalized into one view by making use of the same pronunciation. The words pronounced *nagame* can be read, depending on which characters are used to write it, as "continuous rain falling quietly", or as "a fine view or a perspective." In a modern context, we suppose that a fine view presupposes fine weather. But in pre-modern days, even in bad weather people could enjoy *nagame*, that is, a fine view of a type. However, the fact that in conditions of poor visibility people can still enjoy a fine view suggests that especially in medieval days people could often enjoy a retrospective or introspective view similar to contemplation. Basho lived his life in this medieval spirit, emulating the ethos of the ascetic religion of Japanese medieval artists.

The fact that Basho's experience of an obscured Mt. Fuji falls at the beginning of his journey has a significance in the sense that a journey is a kind of search for truth. Poetic truth can't easily be found, even if one earnestly seeks it. Basho thus decides to enter into the poetic world through a renunciation of the world, like a monk of medieval days.

4-2 Winter Drizzle symbolizes a way of life

The ink painting by Basho referred to before does not represent the optical view described in his poem, because in the sketch we can see an image of Mt. Fuji. This is a poetic world where the poet can enjoy the circumstances of the obscuring fog, yet imagine the invisible Mt. Fuji, for which every traveler longs. Thus in the illustration, we can see Mt. Fuji being imagined and longed for by an aesthetic mind.

In this situation, both Mt. Fuji being enveloped by fog and Basho imagining the invisible mountain may be important aspects of this unique aesthetic experience. Paradoxically speaking, the absence of the beloved aesthetic thing evokes and promotes the aesthetic imagination of it, which may be as satisfying as actually experiencing it. So Basho could establish the state of the poetic mind with his poem:

Today Mt. Fuji cannot be seen / Because of a thick mist like drizzle, / It is also interesting.

In a sense, this mysterious mist is a blessing from heaven. So the invisible Mt. Fuji symbolizes the invisible artist that Basho aspires to become on his poetic journey. The old masters that Basho admires are the *kojin* [古人] or pioneering of artistic masters. In his Travel essay, *Oinokobumi*, he mentions Saigyō (1118~1190), Sesshū (1420~1506), Rikyū (1522~1591) and Sōgi (1421~1502) as representative artists of *fūga*, including masters from Chinese culture as well, we can add Tou Enmei [Tao Yuanming], and So Toba [Su Shi]. In his ambition to become like the greats of old, Basho finds the

³⁷ The representative use of *nagame* is found in like such a waka poem as one by Onono Komachi, Hananoiro wa utsurinikerina itazurani wagami yonifuru nagamesesimani. ("The flowers withered, Their color faded away, While meaninglessly I spent my days in the world And the long rains were falling", translated by Donald Keene.)

³⁴ I use the translation from *Nozarashikou-Eiyaku to sono kenkyu*, Takeshi Miki and Yasuko Miki, Kyoiku Shuppan Center, 1996.

³⁵ The translation derives from its original Haiku: *Nozarashio kokoroni Kaze no shimumikana*.

³⁶ The translation derives from its original Haiku: *Kirishigure Fujio minuhizo omoshiroki*.

experience of the cloud-enshrouded mountain in the first stage of his journey enlightening.

Here invisible Mt. Fuji may be seen as parallel to the invisible great masters of *fūga*, especially Sogi, who died in Hakone on a similar journey in around 1500³⁸, also seeking for *fūga* through poetry. Basho contemplates his great forerunner and feels a connection with him in the mystic mist and rain. Several years later, Basho composed these haiku:

Life in this world
just like a temporary shelter
of Sogi's³⁹

This haiku is an elaborate adaptation of an earlier poem by Sogi:

Life in this world
just like a temporary shelter
from a winter shower⁴⁰

We can hear the resonance and find the correspondence of many elements, among which *shigure*, winter drizzle, plays an important role. Basho received the basic image of the winter shower or *shigure* from literary tradition through Sogi. For us, life is a journey with four stages from spring to winter. Basho, who tries to welcome the harsh winter season of life through poetic ambition, could enjoy seeing his own figure as a traveler in the *shigure* winter shower.

*Let my name be "Traveler"—first rains of winter.*⁴¹

Chapter 5 *Yūgen*: aesthetic experience in the Rain

In the absence of a clear view of the landscape due to a veil of rain, poets may open another dimension of aesthetic experience through contemplation of the beloved. Here I would like to examine one phrase from the text called the *Mumyoushou* (ca. 1212) which deals with traditional *waka* style poetry — verse in 31 syllables. The author Kamo-no Chōmei (1155-1216) is also famous for his *Hojoki* [*The Ten Foot Square Hut*]. In his theory of traditional poetics, Chomei uses one instance of natural beauty to illustrate the aesthetic idea of *yūgen*, which often appears in short poems. It is

³⁸ Kinjirou Kaneko, 'Tabi no Shijin Sougi to Hakone', Kanagawa Shimbunsha, 1993.p26

³⁹ Here I use the translation by scholar Ueda Makoto. Original piece is *Yo ni furu mo sara ni Soogi no yadori kana*

Basho and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku With Commentary, Stanford University Press(1992)

⁴⁰ Ibid. *Yo ni furu mo sara ni shigure no yadori kana*

⁴¹ Here I make use of the translation by Robert Aitken and change the last word. *Let my name be "Traveler"—first rains of spring. The River of Heaven: The Haiku of Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Shiki* (2011) Counterpoint. Basho depicted his figure with the first rains of winter in the beginning part of his first poetic diary of the journey called *Nozarashi-kikou*. See footnote No.7.

difficult to explain the concept of *yūgen*, except through such examples.

*"When looking at autumn mountains through mist, the view may be indistinct yet have great depth. Although few autumn leaves may be visible through the mist, the view is alluring. The limitless vista created in imagination far surpasses anything one can see more clearly"*⁴².

In the aesthetic experience of *yūgen*, the poet enjoys the contemplation of the beloved thing through cloud, rain, or some other atmospheric veil. The weather is not only a screen but a medium between the beholder and the beloved thing.

Yūgen is a composite term made from the two characters 幽 and 玄. *Yu* shows subtle allusiveness or suggestiveness that something interesting exists beyond our vision, even though our perception and reason can't grasp it distinctively. This deep feeling which surpasses our ordinary reason is characterized as *gen*, the depth and blackness.

Mumyosho by Chomei shows a good example of this rain aesthetics, and that in the medieval days of Japan such a concept was already in place.

If we go even further back in history, to the *Wakan Rōeishū* (ca. 1013) which is the *Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Singing*, or to the *Bunkyou Hifuron* (820-835) which is a manual of Chinese literary theory, we can find the classification of rain as one of the regular topics of poetry. This fact suggests that in the Heian period from the late eighth century to the twelfth century, rain became an element of natural beauty like flowers or birds. It suggests that the basic perspective of rain aesthetics was formed in Japan under the influence of Chinese culture. In medieval days, the poetry anthology *Shinkokin Wakashu* (1205) illustrates this aesthetics in a refined style, and in the fourteenth century, the anthology *fūga Wakashu* (1346) establishes and formalizes this rain or weather aesthetics⁴³. The Buddhist monk Kenko concisely describes this aesthetics in his famous *Essays in Idleness*⁴⁴ (1333), chapter 137.

*Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, the moon only when it is cloudless? To long for the moon while looking at the rain, to lower the blinds and be unaware of the passing of the spring—they are ever more deeply moving.
And are we to look at the moon and the cherry blossoms with our eyes alone? How*

⁴² KOSHIRO HAGA *The Wabi Aesthetics through the Ages*. Hume, Nancy G., ed., 1995, *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, pp. 253–54, Albany: State University of New York Press. Haga cites this text from *Mumyoushou* by Kamo-no Chomei who is also famous for his essay *The Ten Foot Square Hut*

⁴³ Keijiro Kazamaki, *Chusei no Bungaku*, Kadokawa-sensho, 1947 Murao Sei-ichi, "The Waka poem style of Kyogoku faction; extension to waka poem style in the middle ages of Japan: essay from point of contact with Nijo faction," *Area and Culture Studies*, no.75(2007):359 -345. Noriko Yasuda, "A study of Poems of the Spring-rain - On the Growth of Impression of Gyokuyo-shu," *The Journal of the Faculty of Letters, Nagoya University. Literature*.30 (1984): 259-273.

⁴⁴ Here I use the translation from Donald Keene. Donald Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics." *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University, 1988).

much more evocative and pleasing it is to think about the spring without stirring from the house, to dream of the moonlit night though we remain in our room!

The moon and flowers — which here means exclusively cherry blossoms — after the tenth century, are representative natural beauties. This attitude of wishing to behold the full moon or blossoms at their peak is in a sense a *natural* stance toward nature. Adding to this “natural attitude”, Kenko advocates another attitude which does not focus on the moon or flowers in a merely visual sense. Instead, he stresses the imagination and feeling of rain, or being soaked in the mood of rain.

Rain [雨] in a narrow sense, and fog [霧], or haze [霞] etc. — has in poetry and the other arts the sense of a screen effect, giving a kind of veil to scenery or an object. We may see such an effect as negative if we look for clarity in a landscape, but, paradoxically, Japanese artists appreciate the obscuring veil of weather as a special aesthetic state.

Conclusion

The preceding sketch of the aesthetics of rain stands as a hint towards a fundamental feature of East-Asian culture which favors atmosphere, suggestive feelings, and obscurity with cultivated imagination over explicitness, clear form, and distinct optical views.

The poet-monk Shotetsu (1381-1459)⁴⁵ who was an admirer of Teika (1162-1241) and Kenko well understood the relationship between the aesthetic concept of *yūgen* and such weather as cloudy skies, snow in the wind, or flowers through haze. Though the term *yūgen* was used mainly in medieval times, it shows clearly a line of our aesthetic sensitivity which continues from the Sung dynasty in China, via medieval Japanese artists, to Basho, and to the present.

The principle of this aesthetics of rain has similarities to that of other cultures including Europe, but the rich development and expansion of this aesthetics in East Asia has been cultivated into all the arts. Especially in Japan, this aesthetic mood has transcended the divide between high culture and everyday aesthetics. Although I have been able to introduce a small sample of these aesthetic items in this paper, I hope that I have given some idea of their prevalence in Japanese culture.

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⁴⁵ Shotetsu wrote a kind of manual called the *Shotetsu Monogatari* (ca.1450). In this book, he explains the aesthetic concept or style of *yūgen* by illustrating such weather, seasons, or situations as flowers in the spring haze, autumnal crimsoned maple in the windy fog, or the goddess in the Fuzan [or Wu Shan in Chinese]. These expressions or concepts are also influenced by China through Japanese poetics.