ONE

The Introduction of Aesthetics

Nishi Amane

The introduction to Japan of the field of aesthetics in the 1870s entailed a subtle and complex reorganization of local epistemological systems. At the same time, Japanese intellectuals were challenged with the creation of a technical vocabulary that was sensitive to the newly imported ideas. Alien concepts, such as the Western distinction between mechanical and liberal arts, had to be assimilated during what Yamamoto Masao has called “the enlightenment period” of Japanese aesthetics.1 A major challenge came when the purposiveness and practicality of craftsmanship (geijutsu) had to be differentiated from the ideality of artistic creation (geijutsu). The basic difficulty—to find Japanese counterparts to the meanings that the Greek expression “techne” had come to assume in the West during the centuries—was further compounded by the idealistic argument that justified grouping under the same category different activities such as architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry: the argument that each particular “fine art” (bijutsu) partook of an alleged universal element.2

It was not simply a linguistic problem. Behind the vocabulary of aesthetics stood a thick layer of Western philosophy that extended from Pla-

1. The contemporary aesthetician Yamamoto Masao distinguishes three moments in the history of Japanese aesthetics. The first is the period of enlightenment (1868–1878), which is characterized by the translation and adaptation of Western works on aesthetics on the part of Nishi Amane (1829–1897), Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901), and Kikuchi Dairoku (1855–1917). This is also the time when the American scholar Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853–1908) was touring Japan and delivering lectures on aesthetics and the arts. The second moment is the period of criticism (1878–1888) as represented by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), Futabatei Shimeri (1864–1909), Toyama Masakazu (1848–1900), Ōnishi Hajime (1864–1900), Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), and Takayama Chogyū (1871–1902). The third is the period of reflection (1888–1910), which coincides with the institutionalization of aesthetics in Japanese academia. In 1899 Ōtsuka Yasuji (1868–1931) was asked to fill the first permanent chair of aesthetics at Tokyo Imperial University, followed in 1910 by Fukada Yasukazu (1878–1927) at Kyoto University. See Yamamoto Masao, Tōzai Geijutsu Seishin no Dento Kozyō (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1965), pp. 15–115.

2. See Chapter 3, note 16.
to’s notion of Idea to the Hegelian system of Absolute Spirit. The importation of aesthetics required Japanese scholars to explain and justify the new “science” in the light of Western epistemology. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Japan was faced with the introduction, study, and digestion—or indigestion—of more than two thousand years of Western thought.

In addition to the problem of mastering in a brief period of time the secrets of the political other, Japanese intellectuals were also faced with the delicate task of linking their traditional thought to the newly imported philosophical systems. In the field of aesthetics, the major challenge was to explain a basic paradox: how to make sense of fields of knowledge such as literature, for example, that for centuries had been justified by Neo-Con-fucian scholars in terms of ethical principles—“to promote good and chastise evil” (kanzen chūaku)—according to the Kantian notion of “purposiveness without a purpose.” How could the dependence (either religious or political) to which art had been submitted in Japan, on practical grounds, be transformed to a moment of autonomy and freedom?3

Nishi Amane (1829–1897) faced this challenge when, back from a few years of study at the University of Leiden in Holland, he translated “aesthetics” as “the science of good and beauty” (zenbigaku).4 The basic premise behind Nishi’s choice was a belief in a strong relationship between the ethical and aesthetic moments—with the obvious implications that only the person versed in the fine arts is good and that only an ethically good person understands beauty.5 Nishi could count on solid sources from both the Eastern and Western traditions: a combination of the Confucian “theory of good, beauty, capability, and refinement” (shan mei liang ueng) and the Greek “theory of goodness and beauty” (kalos agathos).6

3. Although, as Thomas Havens has argued, “it is doubtful that Nishi ever read Kant at all” (Thomas R. H. Havens, Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970], p. 55), we know from a letter that he sent in 1863 to Johann Joseph Hoffman (1805–1878), a professor of Japanese studies at Leiden University, about Nishi’s interest in studying Kant’s philosophy. In the letter we read: “In addition to what I previously mentioned, I would like to study the field of philosophy. I would like to learn from Descartes, Locke, Hegel, and Kant since what they expound is different from the religious thoughts allowed in my country.” There is no doubt that Nishi was exposed to German philosophy during his studies at Leiden under Professor C. W. Opzoomer (1812–1892), the most distinguished scholar of philosophy in Holland at the time, beginning in April 1863. See O¯ kubo Toshiaki, ed., Nishi Amane Zenshū, 2 (Tokyo: Munetaka Shōbō, 1960), pp. 701–702.

4. Nishi Amane used the translation “zenbigaku” in a work on politics and ethics entitled New Theory of the One Hundred and One (Hyakuichi Shinron, 1874), in which he analyzed the notion of harmony that finds “unity (ichi) among the diverse (hyaku).” See Havens, Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought, p. 118.


The strong Confucian background of Nishi’s education is evident when we think of the beginning of his *New Theory of the One Hundred and One (Hyakuichi Shinron)* in which he explains the word “learning” (oshie) as a process of cultivation that is strictly related to the regulation of the family, the order of the state, and the peace of the world. The message came primarily from *The Great Learning (Ta Hsüe)* in which we read: “The extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. For only when things are investigated is knowledge extended; only when knowledge is extended are thoughts sincere; only when thoughts are sincere are minds rectified; only when minds are rectified are our persons cultivated; only when our persons are cultivated are our families regulated; only when families are regulated are states well governed; and only when states are well governed is there peace in the world.”

The acceptability in Japan of the new field of aesthetics depended on its potential for inclusion in the network of knowledge leading to the *Bildung* of the Meiji citizen. Nishi understood aesthetics as an answer to the conflicts that had resulted from the encounter between the Confucian ethical system and the legalistic system imported from the West. In an effort to live up to the standards of “enlightened” nations by adopting their cultural and political systems, Japan was favoring the replacement of ritual with laws in the political administration of the country. The embracing of the other, however, meant a relaxing of the Confucian rules of morality. The easy availability of the written rule exonerated humankind from the painstaking search for moral improvement—or learning, whose basic structure had, in the Confucian world, been provided by the unwritten laws of ritual.

Nishi argued that whereas laws helped humanity to achieve a deep sense of justice (sei), only learning elevated people to the supreme goal of the ethical good (zen). While laws regulated the realm of human reason (chi), learning had the power to regulate the freer, but more dangerous, sphere of the will (i). Aesthetics was related to the good inasmuch as ethical good showed itself as form in beauty (bi), appearing in actual things as skill (no¯) and in matter as taste (ko¯). In Nishi’s thought, aesthetics had the potential to replace ritual, whose effectiveness was challenged by the strengthening of the law. Aesthetics could express the ethical world of the good in the form of beauty through the skill of a producer and the taste of a consumer (zenbi no¯ko¯).

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If, on the one hand, aesthetics could be seen as a moment of resistance against the power of the Western notion of the law, it could on the other hand also help resist the temptation to alienate humanity from the natural world along the lines of the Western natural sciences that were conquering nature by analyzing and classifying it. This explains Nishi’s efforts to locate aesthetics within the sphere of the human sciences—and, more specifically, “psychology” (shinri)—opposing it to that other science which regulates nature rather than appreciating it, namely “physics” (butsuri). Although Nishi was a fervent “enlightener” inasmuch as he spent most of his life writing on the benefits that Western science could bring to the Japanese government, he nonetheless saw in aesthetics the possibility of bringing a degree of moderation to the epistemological conflicts that were challenging his country during the Meiji period. The value of aesthetics, he argued, could be maximized when it was applied to the explanation of human behavior and human socialization.

Aesthetics could be used as a safety valve while importing natural sciences that were less concerned with human beings, their lives, and their values. Yet aesthetics should not be used to explain the physical world. Here lies a major difference between Nishi and Confucian thought. Nishi resisted the thought of collapsing “psychology” and “physics” according to the Confucian notion of analogical patterns between nature (the way of heaven) and the present human reality (the way of man). The naïveté of explaining natural phenomena according to the pattern of heaven, Nishi argued, was after all the main cause behind the fanciful interpretation by Shinto scholars of the failed Mongol invasion of Japan in the thirteenth century: divine rather than physical winds (kamikaze).

We cannot neglect the importance that Joseph Haven’s (1816–1874) Mental Philosophy (1857) had on Nishi’s notion of aesthetics. Nishi, in fact, translated this work, shortening the title to Psychology (Shinrigaku, 1870–1871). In his book Haven distinguishes what he calls “mental philosophy” from philosophy proper, inasmuch as the latter “seeks to discover, and scientifically to state, the general laws both of matter and mind,” while the former targets a narrower field of inquiry that is restricted to the human mind. To quote Haven: “Mental philosophy has for its object to ascertain the facts and laws of mental operation.” In the introduction, Haven distinguishes what he calls “the two great departments of human knowledge,” physics and metaphysics, to which he wants to add psychology.

Joseph Haven tackled the problem of aesthetics—or, as he called it, “the science of the beautiful”—in the section on intuitive power. The difficulty of finding a common denominator for the highly abstract category of the beautiful forced Haven to approach the matter historically by listing different definitions given to the subject in the past. Beauty, then, is portrayed in a multiplicity of ways: as the producer of feelings and sensations of the mind rather than as an objective reality; as the result of “associations of idea and feeling with the object contemplated”; as the sign or expression awakening emotions in the viewer or listener; or, for those who take beauty to be an objective category, as novelty, as unity in variety, as order and proportion, as “spiritual life in its immediate sensible manifestations.”

The quarrel between theories supporting the objective nature of the beautiful—the real presence of beauty in the object itself—and those that construct beauty as the result of the mental process of the imagination leads Haven to uphold a position in between: beauty as a relational encounter of mind and its object of contemplation. But he did not deny the objective presence of beauty in the external object that is perceived differently by different subjects and whose difference is dictated by social class, education, and personal sensibility.

In Nishi’s translation of Haven’s book we find the expression “the science of good and beauty” (zenbigaku) used for the first time. Nishi must have felt the inadequacy of this word, however, since he decided to change it to “the discipline of good taste” (kashuron) in a series of lectures he gave in his private academy. This new definition of aesthetics was based on the pragmatism of experience in the process of aesthetic appreciation, a strain of thought that was rooted in the positivism of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). This was a kind of aesthetic psychologism that led to “the aesthetics from below” (die Ästhetik von unten) of Gustav Theodor Fechner’s (1834–1887) Elementary Psychology.

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11. Ibid., pp. 263–266.
12. “As the spark from the smitten steel is not strictly to be regarded as itself a property of the steel, nor yet of the flint, but as a relative phenomenon arising from the collision of the two, so beauty, it may be said, dwells not absolutely in the object per se, nor yet in the intelligent subject, but is a phenomenon resulting from the relation of the two.” Ibid., p. 271.
13. “The perception and enjoyment of the beauty are subjective, relative, dependent; the beauty itself not so.” Ibid., p. 274.
14. Nishi published these lectures as Encyclopedia (Hyakugaku Renkan, 1870), a work in which he organized Western knowledge into the “common sciences” (history, geography, literature, and mathematics) and two “particular sciences”—the “intellectual sciences” (theology, philosophy, politics, political economy, and statistics) and the “physical sciences” (physics, astronomy, chemistry, and natural history). See Havens, Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought, pp. 93–94; Douglas Howland, “Nishi Amane’s Efforts to Translate Western Knowledge: Sound, Written Character, and Meaning,” Semiotica 83(3/4) (1991):292.
Course in Aesthetics (Vorschule der Ästhetik, 1876), as opposed to the ideality of the Hegelian system—"the aesthetics from above" (die Ästhetik von oben).\(^\text{15}\)

At this point in time Nishi adopted the "modern" strain of aesthetics of the age of science, when around 1870 the idealistic and metaphysical schools were being severely challenged in Europe. A general mistrust for the grand systems of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel was inducing philosophers to concentrate on the contingency of facts before gradually rising to the formulation of a generalized aesthetic system. This empirical approach to aesthetics led scholars to borrow from the fields of physiology, biology, psychiatry, sociology, and ethnology in the formulation of theories of experimental aesthetics.\(^\text{16}\)

The concept of aesthetics takes center stage in a series of lectures that Nishi gave in 1877 in the presence of Emperor Meiji, later published as The Theory of Aesthetics (Bimyo¯gaku Setsu).\(^\text{17}\) Nishi’s decision to modify further the Japanese translation of the word "aesthetics" into “the science of the beautiful and mysterious” (bimyo¯gaku) might have been dictated by his attempt to single out aesthetics as an independent field of study worthy of the attention of specialists. We should be careful, however, not to overemphasize Nishi’s belief in the autonomous status of art. He never became free of the Confucian belief in the ethical implications of the artistic object. In this work, Nishi considers “aesthetics” a third “elemental form” (genso) that, together with ethics and law, constitutes the pattern of human civilization (jinbun). While ethics is the science that codifies the human sense of morality (dōtoku no sei) which leads people to distinguish good from evil, and while the law is the result of a feeling of justice (seigi no kankaku) set up for the protection of the individual as a "natural" need to promote good and punish evil, aesthetics finds its justification as a science that explains the human need to distinguish beauty from ugliness. It is also the science that deals with the fuzzy realm of perception and feelings, which for centuries had been the target of Confucian contempt on the ground that passions disrupted the moral order and the perfection of the "principle of nature" (ri).

With respect to Neo-Confucianism, therefore, Nishi’s work was definitively a step ahead in daring to address the topic of the human psyche—always a challenge for political philosophers. At the same time, however,

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\(^\text{15}\) Gustav Theodor Fechner, Vorschule der Ästhetik (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1925), pp. 1–7. See also Yamamoto, Tōzai Geijutsu Seishin no Dento¯ to Ko¯ryu¯, p. 28.


Nishi presented aesthetics as a way to codify and control the last bastion of human freedom by connecting it with ethics and law in a triad that was required to operate simultaneously. On this Nishi maintained a position that was well in tune with the aspirations of the ideologues of the Meiji state: Beauty is found in the sage whose behavior is virtuous, and the writer’s brush is said to be right when his heart is honest.\(^\text{18}\)

Nishi’s major concern in this series of lectures was to make the abstractness of the field of aesthetics acceptable to government officials in the hope that they might sponsor the new science at the level of academia. The problem had already been solved in Europe when the alleged autonomy of the aesthetic field, as expounded by Kant and the emerging intellectual bourgeoisie, was transformed into a “scientific” discipline competing for power at the time of state formations. The crisis of metaphysical aesthetics during the second half of the nineteenth century allowed Nishi to stress at the end of his lectures the role that art can play as “an indirect objective of political tactics” (seiryakujo¯ kansetsu no mokuteki),\(^\text{19}\) without any fear of being untruthful to the Western development of the field. This softening of the Kantian position on the independence of the arts was also salvaging the traditional view of Confucian pragmatics.

The basic paradox of the social utility of an autonomous sphere of knowledge surfaced again when Nishi was obliged to justify the distinctiveness and the purpose of aesthetics. The answer came to Nishi from the theory of nonappropriation of Théodore Jouffroy (1796–1842). According to Jouffroy, art cannot be appropriated for practical ends. Nishi’s source was again Joseph Haven, who explained the theory in the following terms:

That only is useful which can be appropriated, and turned to account. But the beautiful, in its very nature, cannot be appropriated or possessed. You may appropriate the picture, the statue, the mountain, the waterfall, but not their beauty. These do not belong to you, and never can. They are the property of every beholder. Hence, as Jouffroy has well observed, the possession of a beautiful object never fully satisfies. The beauty is ideal, and cannot be possessed. It is an ethereal spirit that floats away as a silver cloud, ever near, yet ever beyond your grasp. It is a bow, spanning the blue arch, many-colored, wonderful; yonder, just yonder, is its base, where the rosy light seems to hover over the wood, and touch gently the earth; but you cannot, by any flight or speed of travel, come up with it. It is here, there, everywhere, except where you are. It is given you to behold, not to possess it.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{18}\) BS, pp. 4–5.  
\(^{19}\) BS, p. 14.  
\(^{20}\) Haven, Mental Philosophy, p. 278.
Nishi showed his originality by applying this theory to Japanese linguistics and concentrating on the Japanese process of adjectivation. He distinguished between adjectives expressing “ethical feelings” and those voicing “aesthetic feelings.” In the former he included words such as “good” (yoshi), “evil” (ashi), “cute” (kawayushi), “hateful” (nikushi), “happy” (ureshi), “pleasurable” (tanoshi), and “joyful” (yorokobashi). Nishi argued that in expressing joy, anger, sadness, pleasure, love, hatred, and desire, these adjectives are immediately related to the speaker’s or listener’s possible advantages and disadvantages, merits and demerits, profits and losses. He felt that these adjectives were complicit with personal interests. On the other hand, “aesthetic adjectives” such as “interesting” (omoshiroshi) and “funny” (okashi) convey what Nishi called “innocent feelings” (tsumi no naki sayō)—feelings that are unrelated to the action of the will and do not lead to the formulation of any moral judgment. Pure interest does not engender any anxiety of possession, for it is located outside the boundaries of property rights (shōyüken) and causality (in’yu).

The delicate balance between aesthetics and ethics—on which Nishi felt that the destiny of the philosophy of art depended—was masterfully articulated by Joseph Haven in a manner that must have pleased Nishi:

[The beautiful] differs from the true in that the true is not, like the beautiful, expressed under sensible forms, but is isolated, pure, abstract, not addressed to the senses, but to reason. It differs from the good, in that the good always proposes an end to be accomplished, and involves the idea of obligation, while the beautiful, on the contrary, proposes no end to be accomplished, acknowledges no obligation or necessity, but is purely free and spontaneous. Yet, though differing in these aspects, the good, the true, and the beautiful are at basis essentially the same, even as old Plato taught, differing rather in their mode of expression, and the relations which they sustain to us, than in essence.

The subject of aesthetics presented the experience of beauty as an encounter between the imagination (sōzōryoku)—a faculty inherent in the self that exists within human sensibility or internal feeling (kanju)—and the beauty inherent in the external object (mono). The theory was a rehearsal of Haven’s mental philosophy that stressed the subjectivity of perception and the objectivity of beauty.

As for the achievement of artistic beauty, Nishi was again indebted to the work of Haven when he introduced what he called “the major elemental form” (ichidai genso) of the aesthetic field: “the pattern of difference and
sameness” (idō seisun). Nishi explained it as the artist’s need to avoid the weariness of repetition by bringing variety into the unity of his work. Although an excessive number of variations destabilizes a work of art and confuses the observer, an obsession with sameness inevitably engenders boredom. Known as “the theory of unity in variety”—a totalizing view of the artistic object whose parts must be related to the whole—the basic idea had been made popular by Victor Cousin (1792–1867). Nishi took it from Haven’s *Mental Philosophy*, in which we read:

> The intellect demands a general unity, as, e.g., in a piece of music, a painting, or a play, and is not satisfied unless it can perceive such unity. The parts must be not only connected but related, and that relation must be obvious. At the same time the sensibility demands variety, as, e.g., of the tone and time in the music, of color and shade in the painting, of expression in both. The same note of a music instrument continuously produced, or the same color unvaried in the painting, would be intolerable. The due combination of these two principles, unity and variety, say these writers, constitutes what we call beauty in an object.24

What Nishi left out was the important objection that Haven had already moved against this Hegelian theory twenty years prior to Nishi’s work:

> Not every thing is beautiful which presents both unity and variety. Some things, on the other hand, are beautiful which lack this combination. Some colors are beautiful, taken by themselves, and the same is true of certain forms, which, nevertheless, lack the element of variety. . . . A bright red pebble, or a bit of stained glass, appears to a child very beautiful. It is the color that is the object of his admiration. We have simple unity but no variety there. On the other hand, in a beautiful sunset we have the greatest variety, but not unity, other than simply a numerical unity.25

Perhaps it would be unreasonable to ask of Nishi a state-of-the-art presentation of the aesthetic field at the end of the nineteenth century. His unmatched contribution lies in devising a language that would be sensitive to alien epistemologies and making it understandable to a reader who was mainly trained in the language of the Confucian classics. Nishi coined 787 original terms that cannot be found in dictionaries prior to 1874. Among them, 447 words were the result of newly devised Sino-Japanese compounds; 340 words were drawn from the Chinese and Japanese classics.26 Many of these words are common currency in contemporary language: “phi-
26 The Subject of Aesthetics

A branch of philosophy called "aesthetics" (tetugaku) is related to the fine arts and thoroughly investigates its underlying principles. It goes without saying that human nature is originally endowed with the nature of morality and with a mechanism that allows people to discern good from evil, right from wrong. Additionally, another branch of this nature is endowed with a feeling of justice that provides an avenue for protecting oneself and governing others. These two elements, morality and justice, are elemental forms essential to the formation of human society. Nothing surpasses them despite the myriad theories developed by the sages in ancient times. Confucianism calls them "humanity," Buddhism calls them "compassion," Christianity calls them "love." Although the name differs, arguments about the good and evil of human nature are simply to promote good and chastise evil.

Moreover, with regard to the sense of justice, all over the world, in both the ancient and modern countries, there exists the so-called elemental form of

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the law. It started in China with the five punishments of Kao Yao\textsuperscript{29} and in the Western world with the Greeks Solon\textsuperscript{30} and Lycurgus.\textsuperscript{31} So long as societies exist at all, everything is grounded in the law. Therefore, a discussion of the sources of these two elemental forms, accompanied by an exhaustive exploration, is the substance of philosophy. Even though there are infinite differences in people’s life, nothing exceeds the boundaries of morality and justice. Therefore, nothing is independent from the working of these two principles, neither the regulation of the life of the common people nor, on a larger scale, the governance of the country; not even the emerging from one’s own arena into the international sphere.

Although everything pertaining to human life is likely to be subsumed in these two elements, still one elemental form remains: namely, that of aesthetics. Besides the two elemental forms of morality, which distinguishes between good and evil, and law, which determines what is just and what is unjust, human nature is endowed with a third element that discusses beauty and ugliness. By the time human beings had barely moved away from the stage of savagery, a long time ago, this element had already become conspicuous in society and was having a powerful effect on it. The legend goes that Nüwa\textsuperscript{32} heard the phoenix bird’s song and made a free-reed mouth organ; using the zither, Emperor Shun\textsuperscript{33} created the southern airs; and when K’uei\textsuperscript{34} broke off stones and

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  \item \textsuperscript{29} Kao Yao was minister of crime under Emperor Shun. The five punishments in question include tattooing, the cutting of the nose, feet, and reproductive organs; and capital punishment. The Confucian \textit{Analects} (12:22) refer to Kao Yao as follows: “When Shun had all that is under Heaven, choosing from among the multitude he raised up Kao Yao, and straightway Wickedness disappeared.” See Arthur Waley, trans., \textit{The Analects of Confucius} (New York: Vintage Books, 1938), p. 169. The \textit{Book of Documents} further adds: “The Emperor said, ‘Kao Yao, the barbarous tribes disturb our bright great land. There are also robbers, murderers, insurgents, and traitors. It is yours, as the minister of Crime, to employ the five punishments for the treatment of offenses, for the infliction of which there are three appointed places; and the five banishments, with their several places of detention, for which three localities are assigned. Perform your duties with intelligence, and you will secure a sincere submission.’” See James Legge, \textit{The Chinese Classics}, vol. 3, pt. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 44–45.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Solon (early sixth century B.C.) was an Athenian statesman and lawmaker who resisted the establishment of Pisistratus as tyrant of Athens ca. 561.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Lycurgus (ca. 390–324 B.C.), Athenian statesman and orator, was well known for his efficient administration and his rigorous prosecution of crime.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} A culture hero of China, Emperor Shun was considered one of the three model emperors together with Yao and Yü. The \textit{Book of Rites} (17:1) states: “Anciennement Chouen inventa le luth à cinq cordes, et s’en servi pour exécuter le chant Nân fâung (le Vent de Midi).” See Couvreur, \textit{Mémoires sur les Bonséances et les Cérémonies}, vol. 2, p. 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Director of music under Emperor Shun. The \textit{Book of Documents} (1:5.24) states: “The emperor said, ‘K’wei, I appoint you to be director of music, and to teach our sons, so that the straightforward may yet be mild, the gentle may yet be dignified, the strong not tyrannical, and the impetuous not arrogant. Poetry is
struck them like chimes, one hundred animals were enchanted into dancing. Likewise, even in this country, in the ancient age of the gods there were kagura dances. Moreover, it is said that the thirty-one-syllable poem originated with Susanoo no Mikoto.

As soon as the course of human society was established, we instantly witness the germination of this elemental form. But far from being related solely to music, the object of aesthetic discussion applies to a much broader field. Presently included in Western art are painting, sculpture, engraving, and architecture. Yet it is appropriate to say that the principle of aesthetics applies also to poetry, prose, and music, as well as to Chinese calligraphy. Dance and drama should also be included in the list. All of these arts are the reverse side of practical sciences, and yet they are not at odds with practical sciences. Even practical sciences, when they truly flourish, no doubt imply the radiation of the aesthetic doctrine.

When we attempt to discuss what a division of the major philosophical categories means, we see that morality designates the study of good and evil; law encompasses justice and injustice; aesthetics designates the realm of beauty and ugliness. Once we understand this parallelism, we can argue that a good person is naturally moved to justice and his external appearance cannot be deprived of beauty. Likewise, an evil person is naturally unjust and his appearance ugly. Therefore, we can conclude that, even though the aesthetic doctrine is mainly discussed with regard to the fine arts, it is certainly not limited to them but also applies directly to everyday human society.

Consequently, the person who should be called a gentleman, regardless of his innate beauty or ugliness, has a complexion and appearance endowed with the expression of earnest thought; singing is the prolonged utterance of that expression. The notes accompany that utterance, and they are harmonized themselves by the pipe pipes. In this way the eight different kinds of instruments can all be adjusted so that one shall not take from or interfere with another, and spirits and men will thereby be brought into harmony. ‘K’wei said, ‘Oh! I smite the stone; I smite the stone. The various animals lead on one another to dance.’” See Legge, The Chinese Classics, vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 48–49.

35. Nishi refers to the fact that the sacred dances of Shinto rituals allegedly originated from the mad dance of Ama no Uzume, which the deity performed in an attempt to persuade the Sun Goddess Amaterasu to leave the cave where she had secluded herself. The Kojiki reads: “Ame no Tachikara no Kami stood concealed beside the door, while Ame no Uzume no Mikoto bound up her sleeves with a cord of heavenly hi-kage vine, tied around her head a head-band of the heavenly ma-saki vine, bound together bundles of sasa leaves to hold in her hands, and overturning a bucket before the heavenly rock-cave door, stamped resoundingly upon it. Then she became divinely possessed, exposed her breasts, and pushed her skirt-band down to her genitals.” See Donald L. Philippi, trans., Kojiki (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), p. 84.

36. The poem in question (waka) appears again in the Kojiki at the time of Susanoo’s exile to the human world. ‘Arriving at Suga, he said: ‘Coming here, my heart is refreshed.’ In that place he built his palace and dwelt there. Therefore that place is still called Suga. When this great deity first built the palace of Suga, clouds rose from that place. He made a song, which said: The many-fenced palace of Izumo / Of the many clouds rising— / To dwell there with my spouse / Do I build a many-fenced palace: / Ah, that many-fenced palace!’” See Philippi, Kojiki, p. 91.
both a warm, gentle nature that deserves to be loved and a solemn, austere aspect that musters respect. Even though a petty person may possess great beauty, his vulgarity will come out of its own accord, marking the man’s foolish demeanor, so that you will easily spot the man’s violent nature. That is, whether one is a gentleman or a petty person, what he carries inside will eventually reveal itself to the outside world. He cannot conceal his true heart, nor can he avoid “what ten eyes behold, what ten hands point to.”37 If this is the case with a petty person, you can imagine the demeanor of a thoroughly virtuous man: his virtue will glow from his visage and emanate from his stature. Chu Kuan-t’ing praised Ch’eng Min-tao,38 saying that to be with him was like sitting in a spring breeze for a month: future generations will continue to think about Ch’eng’s moral reputation.

Moreover, although they are certainly reflected in appearance and dignified manners, these characteristics also show in the performance of deeds and will remain as models for future generations. Confucius commented that Shao court music was both beautiful and good, while the Wu martial dance was beautiful but not yet good.39 This means that the performative aspect of raising arms and legs and violently stepping on the ground spontaneously reveals itself when singing and dancing, and nothing can be done to hide it. How much more so when composing Chinese poetry, reciting a Japanese poem, or making a calligraphic sample! The inside of the creator surfaces between the lines and emerges in the stroke of the brush, with no possibility for deception. Liu Kung-ch’uan40 said: “When the heart is rectified, one’s brush will be so too.” In short, the elemental form of aesthetics that emanates into society forms with the other element of morality the longitude and latitude through which human civilization is structured—something that cannot be taken lightly.

So far I have discussed how the elements of aesthetics, morality, and law form an enlightened society through their relation to each other. Yet we still need to ask where the principle of aesthetics lies and to what degree its influ-


38. Chu Kuan-t’ing (1037–1094) entered the Neo-Confucian school of the Ch’eng brothers, Ch’eng Hao (also known as Ch’eng Min-tao, 1032–1085) and Ch’eng I (also called Ch’eng I-ch’uan, 1033–1107).

39. Shao was the name of the music made by Emperor Shun; Wu was the music of King Wu. According to James Legge, the first was “perfect in melody and sentiment” while the latter was “also perfect in melody, but breathing the martial air, indicative of its author.” Arthur Waley argues that the first dance “mimed the peaceful accession of the legendary Emperor Shun” while the latter “mimed the accession by conquest of the Emperor Wu, who overthrew the Yin.” Nishi is referring to the Confucian Analects (3:25): “The Master said of the Shao that it was perfectly beautiful and also perfectly good. He said of the Wu that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good.” See Legge, The Chinese Classics, p. 164. Waley’s comments appear in Waley, Analects of Confucius, p. 101.

40. Famous calligrapher of the Tang period who lived between 778 and 863.
ence on society results in benefit and harm. This I will save for the following discussion.

2

We have seen in the previous section that, although the elemental principles of aesthetics, morality, and law are reciprocally interrelated and at the same time individually distinguished, they are not at cross purposes. They structure human civilization through their being inextricably linked to each other. Therefore, here we must discuss what kind of elemental forms aesthetics is made of.

The form of aesthetics is divided into two parts: one is inherent to the object; the other belongs to the subject. The form inherent to the object is its beauty as it fits our taste; the element belonging to the subject is our imagination. According to the logic of aesthetics, first of all there must be an external object whose beauty is appreciated through the auspices of the subject’s imagination. Even with a celebrated hanging scroll, for example, if we lack natural sensitivity then we see nothing but ink and paint smeared on a silk fabric or rice paper. On the other hand, once we possess sensitivity, we sense refinement even in one mere ink painting, and we perceive elegance in one word of a verse.

As for the beauty belonging to the external object, even birds and beasts are likely to perceive it to a slight degree. Yet it seems that they are not endowed with any inner imagination whatsoever. It goes without saying that among birds, beasts, insects, fish, and life of that kind, those of substantial size not only possess by nature the outer element of aesthetics but also have in their nature the elemental form of the law, as well as a bit of morality. Among the hundred species of animals, for example, they all know how to protect themselves; should someone step onto their rights, they become enraged and fiercely attack and bite the intruder. This attitude stems from the animals sharing with human beings the same elemental form of the law, which is at the root of the right to self-protection. This explains why fierce animals such as tigers and wolves make it their habit always to avoid humans. But if humans approach their den, the animals will attack and bite them without fail. This is why a tiger feeding her young should be feared.

Another example is a dog going from street to street with his tail hanging down, begging for pity. But if a dog from outside goes so far as to enter the gate of another dog’s master, the home dog will become enraged and growl and bare his teeth. This is how property rights come about in humans. Even birds and other animals possess a small bit of the elemental form of the law. To understand this, we sometimes find clues in examples like the ones mentioned here.

The elemental form of morality is often seen in situations that extend from the love between male and female to the raising of children: the space of un-
bound love. As everyone knows, it is like the pheasant saving its chicks first when its home is burning or the crane protecting the young from the cold under its warm wings. To return to our example of dogs, they love their master not only in order to be fed but also because they have a developed sense of duty: think of the Swiss Saint Bernard, which rescues humans in the snow. We can also think of animals such as oxen and horses, which often show their dutiful nature. There used to be a farmer who would feed an ox at dawn every day, pack supplies on its back, and send it off near and far. Only on rainy days would the ox rest. One day the ox did not eat. It was as if the ox thought, “If I eat this food, I’ll have to carry this load.” The farmer, reading the ox’s mind, sprinkled water from the roof of the barn. As the water dripped from the eaves of the barn, the ox thought, “It’s raining today, so even if I eat I won’t have to carry anything.” So he began to eat. Finally though, the farmer packed a load on the ox and put him on the road. This story shows that the ox knew that in order to eat, he had to work. It is as if the ox understood that it was his duty to work if he wanted to eat.

The elemental form of morality somehow seems to exist even in birds and beasts, and so too does the form of law. It appears that only the element of aesthetics is absent. And yet we can discover that even animals possess the faculty to perceive external elegance. Colorful birds like peacocks take pride in their beauty, and, it is said, if a person dressed in filthy, old rags comes close to its nest, the peacock will become indignant. Birds attract each other through the beauty of their plumage or the charm of their song. It is believed that they can differentiate between beauty and ugliness and can also appreciate beauty and disdain ugliness. The fact that dogs and cats cover their feces themselves is an indication of how highly developed the outer element of aesthetics is in them.

Yet when it comes to human beings, the inner element of aesthetics is developed from infancy. Not only do we see that a child in the early stages of language acquisition already has the ability to distinguish beauty and ugliness, purity and contamination; we are also witnesses to the fact that the imagination is already formed in childhood. When a butterfly sees a famous painting of a peony, for example, rarely will it light on it and try to draw nectar, mistaking it for the real thing. Similarly, when a kitten sees a fine painting of a sparrow or a mouse, rarely will it want to catch it. Although the proverb goes that animals can be deceived by pictures, it is probably not true.

But when a child who already understands language sees a picture of Chung Kui or a devil, though it may not be a great painting, he will certainly be seized with terror and will scream and cry hysterically. After a while, when the child grows and starts to play with brush and ink, he will inevitably draw a

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41. Chinese deity who protects humans from demons spreading illness. The name Chung Kui belonged to a scholar recluse who, according to Chinese legend, cured the sick emperor Hsuing-tsung by driving away his devils in a dream. The frightening appearance of Chung Kui comes from the fact that he was represented with large eyes, a bearded chin, high boots, and a head covered with a black scholar’s hat.
picture. He will draw a cross with a round shape at the top like a dumpling and call it a person. Even if he draws skillfully, it will still look like a wood-carved doll. This demonstrates that his imagination has developed sufficiently to where he sees that a person is like a cross with arms extending on both sides, a lower portion with legs, and an upper portion with a round head like a dumpling. He is not at all concerned with what the real thing looks like. This presents evidence that as a person matures, even a little, his imagination will develop.

Human language consists mainly of the ability to abstract, which for the most part springs from the imagination. For example, the expressions “purity” and “impurity” are both figures extracted from our ability to think abstractly. Should we try to grasp the meaning of purity and impurity in actuality, we realize that there is no substance behind these two concepts. Even if one tries to dissect the body of Confucius, one cannot find the site of benevolence. And if one were to dissect the body of robber Chih, there would be no site of injustice or immorality. If one perceives Hsi-shih as a bag of blood, then she becomes the symbol of utmost filth; if one believes a sardine head is a deity, then one expects fortune and misfortune to come from it. The imagination that looms over us, one step higher than abstraction, has a limitless impact on morality and aesthetics. Accordingly, it is thought that the millet Po-yi grew was pure, while the millet robber Chih grew was dirty. This is all the work of imagination.

Ultimately, then, we must ask: Where in art do we find the external and internal elemental forms? I will reserve this topic for some other day.
the sense of touch. Among the five organs, however, the ears and eyes are superior. Although the five organs share the same principle inasmuch as they all depend on the characteristics of the external thing, the pleasure derived through the three remaining senses depends exclusively on each specific organ. The pleasure emerging from the eyes and ears can be shared by everyone at the same time. With the pleasure of drinking and eating, it is only the person who indulges who can savor it. On the other hand, with regard to music, the person who does not play an instrument is precisely the one who enjoys it. This is why hearing and sight occupy a privileged position among the five senses.

The elemental form of aesthetics, together with the five senses, is endowed with a major elemental form that we will call the differential style. The pattern of the entire universe arises from the fact that there is sameness in difference and difference in sameness. If we incline toward difference, even in the slightest degree, we will reach the spiteful and loathsome limit of irregularity. If, on the other hand, we lean toward sameness, although we may follow the rules, a sense of weariness will grow to the point where it will be hard to stand. Therefore, the elegance of patterns arises from the sameness in difference and difference in sameness. The more detailed this pattern, the greater its ingenuity.

This is the outer element of aesthetics, and every object has evidence of this: think, for example, in the natural world of leaves, flower petals, or the feathers of birds. Everyone should know that the flatfish has a strange form. Now, roads that are flat are considered to be the best. But if one continues on a straight, even road for seventy miles, one will inevitably become tired. And in poetry, especially that which is monotonous, having the same beginning and the same conclusion is the most detested. But if there is the so-called occurrence of endless changes—despite the same repetitious thirty-one-syllable pattern, the same meter, and the following of the same compositional rules—the poem is much loved so long as there appear unexpected changes and each idea is different. This is the desired difference in sameness.

Having said this, however, if one composes poems and songs without following rules at all, merely expressing whatever comes to mind, surely what results is not a form of poetry. If a road is very dangerous, winding to the right, turning to the left, climbing a precipice, then it must not be called a road. This shows the necessity of sameness in difference: proportion and balance cannot be lacking.

If we take the five senses as an example, we will see that listening to the same tone at the same intervals is unbearable. Music can first be heard when there is pitch; tempo; the seven notes, do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, as well as the Chinese notes, kung, shang, chiue, chih, yii, pien-yii, pien-kung; the combinations of two and three of these notes that produce harmonies; and melody, in which notes jump unexpectedly from the lowest to the highest. Think of a concert in which you hear the diverse sounds that are peculiar to each instrument: bells
and chimes, string instruments, gourd and earth instruments, drums and wood instruments. Although you hear diversity, a final sameness of harmonious tunes and notes is achieved. Differences are valued in sameness.

So too, when looking at the seven colors of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and purple, and the opposites of black and white, colors close in hue do not please the eye as much as contrasts do. Therefore, red complements green (a mixture of yellow and blue), yellow complements purple (a mixture of indigo and red), and indigo complements orange (a mixture of yellow and red). So when we put black and white on opposite ends of a spectrum, with yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, and indigo streaming out in order from the white side, the opposites of black and white match well; orange and indigo, and green and purple, do not match as well. But because white, yellow, orange, green, and blue are similar in hue to blue, purple, indigo, and black, they do not match at all. Yet among them all, red complements almost all the other colors. Purple and indigo are other examples of two colors not matching because they reside next to each other. Therefore, if one seeks harmony among colors, the difference between any two colors must be a stark contrast. This is why sameness is necessary among differences.

When considering the human voice, “a” is produced as a middle sound; “u” and “o” are produced back in the throat; “e” and “i” are pronounced in the front of the mouth. Therefore, when pronouncing these sounds from back in the throat to the front of the mouth, the vowels should be in the order “u, o, a, e, i.” But it is inconvenient to pronounce them accordingly, because sounds of the same type stand side by side. Therefore, it sounds refreshing to pronounce the vowels alternately in the order of “a, i, u, e, o” starting with the middle sound, “a,” then moving to the very front of the mouth to produce the sound “i,” returning to the back of the throat to produce the sound “u,” reaching back to “e,” which is a sound produced between the middle and front of the mouth, and ending at “o,” which is a sound produced in between the back of the throat and the middle of the mouth. This is a further example of the necessity of difference in sameness.

Although there is not yet scientific research on whether this principle also applies to the other three senses of smell, taste, and touch, I have no doubt as to its applicability. With regard to taste, it is obvious that rich food complements simpler or spicy hot food. Therefore, broiled eel and carp should be seasoned with Japanese pepper; sea bream soup also requires pepper. After a satisfying meal, plain pickled radish is just what is needed. This is proof that rich and plain tastes complement each other. Therefore, people who eat mainly Western meals with a lot of meat prefer bitter beer or sour wine, while those who eat plain Japanese food are fond of rich, mellow sake. Once again we see that rich and simple tastes complement each other. This does not go beyond the principle of seeking difference in sameness and sameness in difference.

We still need much more explanation to see whether this principle also applies to the fine arts, such as drawing, sculpture, music, and poetry. Here I have
only discussed the principle of aesthetics—specifically, how external objects let people sense beauty.

4

As I discussed in the previous section, aesthetics values difference in sameness and sameness in difference, which means that this theory avoids the continuous repetition of the same pattern. Therefore, to keep repeating the same subject matter in this lecture violates the theory of aesthetics and creates feelings of boredom in the listeners. Yet there is still more to discuss, so I must continue until I have exhausted this topic. With all this in mind, I will make this section the final one.

What is called the inner element of aesthetics is human feeling. The imagination, which helps to formulate this feeling, is what makes human beings such that they cannot stop being moved. According to the findings of contemporary linguistics, generally the words that describe people’s character and feelings are those which follow the so-called *shiku*-conjugation: for example, “good” (yoshi), “evil” (ashi), “cute” (kawayushi), “hateful” (nikushi), “happy” (ureshi), “pleasurable” (tanoshi), “joyful” (yorokobashi), and so on. Yet even though these words belong to one category, upon further analysis one finds a distinction between those that describe feelings of morality and those that indicate aesthetic feelings. Namely, the adjectives “good,” “evil,” “cute,” “hateful,” and so on express feelings of morality. There is a voluminous number of words belonging to this category, probably because human action does not extend over and beyond the sphere of morality. Yet there are only two adjectives following the *shiku*-conjugation that denote aesthetic feelings: “interesting” (omoshiroshi) and “funny” (okashi). These two emotions arise as a result of the matching of the outer element with the principle of aesthetics.

What, then, makes these two adjectives indicate aesthetic feelings? Unlike the seven passions of joy, anger, sadness, pleasure, love, evil, and greed, “interesting” and “funny” do not occur in correlation with one’s personal interests. Feelings of joy, for example, arise in human beings when they obtain what they want and what benefits them. And feelings of anger arise when they sense something that they hate, abhor, and might harm them. This is all part of the ordinary course of nature. But in regard to feeling that something is interesting or funny, personal interest is not a consideration. Simply the sight of a particular thing is interesting or funny. Only when a person goes so far as wanting to possess this interesting thing does he start positing the aim of judging good and bad, thus making his feelings the work of the will. It goes the same way for the feeling of amusement. When you simply think that something is funny, there should not arise any sense of moral judgment. But once it falls into the will’s hands and a person goes so far as to laugh at people or ridicule them, that immediately indicates the purposiveness of moral judgment.

Therefore, these two feelings are an operation of pure aesthetics, an inno-
cent pursuit that does not fall prey to the will in the slightest measure, completely unrelated to the sphere of human morality. In contrast, the moral feelings of joy, anger, love, evil, and so on are somehow related to the consequences stemming from them, so that they put in motion a chain of causality. If I find delight in a person, for example, then that person will love me too. If I become angry with a person, then that person will come to hate me. Yet if I think something is interesting or funny, of course it has no bearing on others. When I look at a landscape painting and find it interesting, for example, or see a child at play and think it funny, these situations have absolutely no relation to my personal interests whatsoever.

Moreover, being different from moral feelings, these two emotions are located outside the boundary of property rights. If one finds a child delightful, then the parent will be happy. If one encounters a slave and becomes angry with him, then the master too will become angry. But if one looks at somebody’s garden or collection of calligraphy and paintings and regards them as interesting, the owner is not distressed by fear that the observer might want them. And when someone finds the garden and the house funny, there is no harm done. Therefore, because aesthetic feelings do not impose themselves on the will at all, they are outside the sphere of right and wrong.

Nevertheless, there is no mistaking that the feeling that something is interesting or funny is still a feeling. This is evidenced by the fact that these feelings are expressed facially like other feelings. When one is sad, for example, one cries; when one is angry, one’s eyes flash with rage. If one finds something interesting, it too will appear on the countenance to some degree. If one feels that something is funny, it will immediately give an impulse to the lungs, erupting in a spontaneous burst of laughter.

As we have seen, these two feelings arise from the outer element. In whatever one finds interesting, there is difference in sameness and sameness in difference; variation in regulation and regulation in variation; irregularity in order and order in irregularity. Nothing escapes this principle.

Although there are various theories by ancient philosophers regarding the origins of humor, we do not have one standard theory. Among those theories that should be considered is the aforementioned concept of variation in regulation. Feelings of humor seem to arise when unexpected changes occur in things that follow rules consistently and maintain internal order. One example would be when an extremely serious person dressed decorously, proceeding in a stately and dignified manner, suddenly loses his footing and trips and falls. Another would be when ten or more people of the same height and appearance line up and pass by, and among them one conspicuously tall man stands out. One more instance would be if during a refined and logical conversation, one suddenly makes a vulgar and gratuitous statement. Feelings of humor are evoked when something unexpected springs up from what you think will continue in a customary fashion. Nothing is funny when it is anticipated or it is repetitious. Laughter is psychologically an essential and lofty
feeling that is limited to the human species. Birds and beasts lack this capacity, their nature being particularly earnest and straightforward in all matters. They do not know the pleasure of laughing, joking, or frolicking.

The preceding has been a discussion of the inner element of aesthetics. To expand both inner and outer principles and apply them to human civilization—calligraphy and paintings, engravings, architecture, music and dance, poetry and prose, utensils and toys—would require an inordinate amount of time, since each of them has its own subtle, logical rules.

It goes without saying, then, that art fosters the flourishing of civilization; it elevates the human world into a lofty realm. Naturally, the ministers and officials appointed to legislate laws and govern society must not neglect it. Although it is not the purpose of the fine arts to have a direct bearing on policies, they nevertheless are an indirect objective of political tactics. This is why you will not find any example in any country of a sovereign who has not paid attention to this topic. After all, the true purpose of aesthetics does not conflict with the comparable purposes of morality, law, and economics. But if one is too partial in one direction, he will not be free from the abuse of making them reciprocally incompatible. Therefore, we should clearly distinguish what is of importance and find a proper balance between them. Here I end my theory of aesthetics.