

PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETIC PREFERENCES: SYMMETRY VERSUS ASYMMETRY, RATIONAL VERSUS INTUITIVE

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In this paper, it is argued that the difference in aesthetic preferences between the Western culture and Japan, is determined by the difference of their philosophical traditions, and not the unique features of the Japanese landscape itself, as it is commonly believed.

In support of the above argument, the relationship between the ontological paradigms of the early Greek philosophy with its logical formalism is compared with the intuitionism of the Zen philosophy to show how the implications of these two philosophical orientations affect the aesthetic preferences in the Western and Japanese cultures and consequently, the form and the content of their art works. First, the laws of thinking are recalled in relation to the >opposite approaches in the presocratic times, that is, to the Parmenidean theory of the material monism, and to the Heraclitean concept of the ever changing world. The latter, is discussed as an approach that reaches beyond the limitations of the formal logic, and as such, overlaps with the >Japanese attitude. Also, some concepts from the Zen philosophy are discussed to demonstrate that the ideas logically incongruous from the Western perspective are perfectly valid in the Zen tradition. Second, the Western rationalism and object centered perspective is contrasted with the intuitive approach of Zen with its sensitivity to the piritual aspect of the holistically viewed reality. The implication of the Parmenidean and Oriental perspectives on the concept of void are presented to demonstrate great influence of that concept on aestheti preferences. Thus, the negation of the existence of the empty space is related to the plenitude of the visual elements appearing in the Western art, while the acceptance of the existence of the void is shown as determining the minimalism in Japanese art. Third, the logical demand of non-contradiction is related to the idea of the primary function of the binary oppositions in conceptualization of the human experience to show how it does influence the search for balance in the reality and, consequently, in the works of art and design.

The Western dualism is contrasted with the Japanese hierarchy of the three essential elements, constituting not only the concept of the world, but also the visual hierarchy in art.

Fourth, the opposition between culture and nature is shown as related to the Western anthropocentric attitude which affects both, the form and the content of the Western art works. That in turn, is contrasted with the oriental submissive attitude which embodies the hierarchy o dominant, subdominant, and subordinant where the human always plays the secondary function, giving the priority to nature.

Fifth, the classical definition of symmetry is discussed to show that its modern and commonly used version is not only an indicationof an atomistic and formalistic mind-set, but is also inappropriate according the modern forma-mathematical classification of symmetry. Finally, it is concluded based on the above comparisons that the explanation of the differences in the aesthetic preferences between the two cultures lies in the internal dynamics, that is, in the philosophica traditions rather than external, that is, in the landscape.