Otabe Tanehisa
University of Tokyo

Nakai Masakazu and the Exploration of Japanese Aesthetics with a Focus on the Concept of *Ki*

Nakai Masakazu is widely recognized for his contributions to media theory, particularly in the medium of film, as well as his insights into sports. These interests mark him as a distinctly modernist thinker. However, his aesthetic theory also reveals a deep and sustained engagement with traditional Japanese thought. This aspect becomes especially clear in his late work, *Japanese Beauty* (1952), and his 1947 postwar essay on the concept of *ki* (気). While his interest in Japanese aesthetics may appear to have emerged only after the war, it forms a continuous thread throughout Nakai's intellectual career. Concepts such as *michi/dō* (道, the way), *iki* (息, breath), *kotsu* (骨, refined technique), and *kiai* (気合, focused energy) were central to his thinking from the outset. This paper seeks to reexamine Nakai's theory of Japanese beauty, highlighting how it integrates traditional concepts within a broader modernist framework.

KEYWORDS: Cassirer—Heidegger—empathy—fore-structure—the technique of nature—form (*kata* 型)—the way of art (*geidō* 芸道)—lightness (*karusa* 軽さ)—Mahāyāna Buddhism—genealogy of Japan's modernity

Nakai Masakazu is widely recognized for his contributions to media theory, particularly in the medium of film, as well as his reflections on sports. These interests mark him as a distinctly modernist thinker. However, as exemplified in his late work *Japanese Beauty* (1952) and his 1947 essay on the concept of "*ki*" (気), Nakai also undertook a sustained and profound engagement with traditional Japanese aesthetics. Although this interest may appear to have emerged primarily in the postwar period, it forms a continuous thread throughout his writings. Foundational concepts such as *michi/dō* (道, the way), *iki* (息, breath), *kotsu* (骨, refined technique), and *kiai* (気合, focused energy) formed the core of Nakai's aesthetic thought from the beginning. Despite their significance, these traditional elements have received comparatively little attention in previous studies on Nakai. This paper examines Nakai's theory of Japanese beauty, with a focus on its modernist aspects.

In 1925, Nakai graduated from Kyoto University with his bachelor's thesis titled *A Study on Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment*. During the late 1920s, he immersed himself in the study of Neo-Kantianism, particularly the works of Cohen and Cassirer, and undertook a critical engagement with Heidegger. Nakai published prolifically in the early 1930s. This paper examines Nakai's treatment of the body in these early writings.

Drawing on Cassirer's concept of "copying (模写, *Abbildung*)" in *Substance and Function,*[1] Nakai considers human consciousness and the body not as substantial entities but rather in terms of functional relations. Accordingly, "consciousness" does not exist independently of the world; rather, it is a "potential structure capable of projecting a whole series that forms the world," and the "body" serves as the "medium of this projection

1. Cassirer 2009, 36–7.

structure."[2] Nakai seeks to elucidate the contribution of this functional concept to aesthetics.

Nakai focused on the theory of empathy. Empathy theory systematized by Lipps was favored by modern Japanese scholars, such as the aesthetician Sono Raizō 園頼三[3] and the Germanist Tsuzumi Tsuneyoshi 鼓常良.[4] The widespread acceptance of the theory of empathy likely stems from its exceptional role in Western aesthetics, where it was used to theorize the animation of nature, which is almost self-evident in Japanese culture.[5]

The "technique of nature" in the body and mahāyāna buddhism

According to Nakai, when we experience empathy in response to a natural landscape, there is a "projection of the natural composition onto the bodily composition."[6] In other words, the functional similarity between the structure of nature (e.g., the vertical orientation of mountains) and that of the body (e.g., the bodily sense of orientation to the vertical axis) underlies what is commonly referred to as empathy.

Nakai's interpretation of empathy theory, which emphasizes function and the body, contrasts with contemporary understandings offered by scholars such as Sono and Tsuzumi. Furthermore, he rearticulates this functional resemblance as "the discovery of the character of existence (*Wer*) in the objectively present [*Vorhandenheit*]" or, conversely, "the recognition of the objectively present [*Vorhandenheit*] in the character of existence."[7] Nakai thus attempts to integrate Cassirer's concepts of function and symbolic form with Heidegger's notion of existence.

Nakai's focus on the body stands out even among his contemporaries. While interest in the body within the Kyoto School is generally traced back to Tanabe Hajime, particularly his 1931 essays,[8] Nakai had already

2. Nakai 1982, 328; cf. NMZ 1: 10–12.
3. Sono 1922, 117–32.
4. Tsuzumi 1926, 1: 172; 2: 64, 81–6.
5. Otabe 2007, 120–1.
6. NMZ 1: 193.
7. NMZ 2: 27.
8. THZ 3: 152–72; 4: 329–82.

emphasized the role of the *body* in his 1930 essay, "The Contribution of the Concept of Function to Aesthetics." His attention to the "interest in muscular control in sports" or the "mental states associated with *iki*, *kotsu*, and breathing," and his concrete examples like "rowing" and "using mountaineering pickets"[9] reflect his experience as an active member of the rowing and mountaineering clubs at the Third Higher School.

What is essential in sports or manners (etiquette or disciplined practice) is that a person "feels the proper functional adaptability within their own body and muscles." Whether in sports or manners, we must use our bodies appropriately in accordance with the characteristics of a given environment. Nakai uses the term "functional adaptability" to describe the dynamic relation between the environment and the body. In this context, Nakai refers to Eastern traditions: "In the East, every action is always related to the *michi/dō* (道, the way)…. The state of penetrating the natural world through the so-called '*kokyū* (呼吸, breathing)' encapsulates the profound meaning of the East."[10] Later, in the 1940s, Okazaki Yoshie (*The Inquiry into Art Theory*, 1941) and Ōnishi Yoshinori (*The Eastern Spirit of Art*, posthumously published in 1988) would advocate the theory of *gei-dō* (芸道, the way of art). In contrast to the Western concept of art, centered on artworks and knowledge and rendered in Japanese as *bi-jutsu* (美術, literally, the art of the beautiful), *gei-dō* emphasizes artistic practices in the broad sense, encompassing both physical and spiritual disciplines.[11] Nakai does not use the term *gei-dō* in his early writings, but his theory is a precursor to the later theory of *gei-dō* developed by Okazaki and Ōnishi.

Nakai, however, does not analyze bodily functions through the lens of Daoist thought. Rather, he focuses on the concept of "the technique of nature (*Technik der Natur*)" found in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,[12] which he explored in his dissertation. This concept refers to how the mechanical and purposeless workings of nature align with human cognitive faculties, which exhibit a kind of purposiveness. As his examples make clear, by nature Kant understood both individual natural objects,

9. NMZ 1: 195, 206.

10. NMZ 1: 195.

11. See OTABE 2022, 140–9 and OTABE 2023, 169–82.

12. KANT 2000, 21, 78, 129, 262, *et al.*

such as tulips or seashells, and organisms. Nakai, on the other hand, proposes understanding the structure of the human body as part of nature that manifests itself as technique. While the body mediates artistic practice (in the broadest sense), it does not function merely as a mechanical instrument in this process; rather, it perceives a "deep lawful order" within its own actions.[13] Training and practice, then, are the means by which one cultivates this lawful bodily activity.

> Every form of art, in its so-called "technique" and the inner structure of "skill," must always be based on a deep trust in the body's inherent "technique of nature"—that is, the refinement of muscle control. Only then does the importance of training, practice, habituation, ageing, maturity, and *wabi* (austere simplicity) become apparent.[14]

Thus, through the "technique of nature" in the body, Nakai explores the "organic sense" that Kant, "as a Protestant, had rejected."[15] This organic sense forms the foundation of artistic practices.

It is through training and practice that the "technique of nature" is integrated into the body. Nakai explores this process through the concept of *kata* (型). He equates the Japanese term *kata* with the Western word "form"; therefore, form is employed as its translation throughout this paper. While *katachi* (形) refers to a more concrete shape, *kata* operates at a deeper level beyond direct perception, conveying meanings such as pattern, mold, model, or type. It is worth noting that *kata* is a central concept in the *gei-dō* theory, and, to the best of my knowledge, it was first introduced by Yanagi Muneyoshi (*Sōetsu*) in his 1931 essay "On the Nature of Craft."[16] In this regard, Nakai's reflections were remarkably pioneering.

Nakai explores the concept of form (*kata*) using examples from sports, a field with which he was personally familiar. Because form (*kata*) "is not something articulated in words," it lacks the "*Als-Struktur* (as-structure)" that characterizes conceptual judgment. Instead, it is "already intuitively perceived as a *Vor-Struktur* (fore-structure)[17] by a certain mood (*kibun* 気

13. NMZ 1: 196.
14. NMZ 1: 196.
15. NMZ 1: 196.
16. YMZ 8, 455–72. See OTABE 2008, 56–8.
17. HEIDEGGER 2010, 146.

分), yet remains elusive in practice. Only through training does one come to recognize it clearly 'as such.'" In other words, we at first only anticipate form (*kata*) without fully executing it; then, through continuous training, there comes a moment when the form (*kata*) is "suddenly understood," that is, it emerges beyond conscious intention. "When one really grasps the form (*kata*), the feeling is utterly uplifting.... What is thrown out [i.e., what is spontaneously revealed] turns out to be exactly what was originally cast forth [i.e., what was envisioned or planned]."[18] Nakai interprets this experience in Heideggerian terms as "*geworfener Entwurf* (thrown projection)."[19] However, what he means by this diverges from Heidegger's original meaning. Rather, as Nakai himself acknowledges, it corresponds more closely to Oskar Becker's notion of the "experience of nature's favor,"[20] a concept that can be traced back to Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*.[21] Nakai accurately captures the process by which we "grasp" form (*kata*) through training.[22] This experience is characterized by "a feeling of entrusting oneself to the oar or to the water," "a state in which one rows effortlessly despite the greatest effort, that is, in which one finds relaxation even at the height of tension," "a feeling of acting with full force while at the same time getting into the flow," or "an experience of entrusting oneself to something at the extreme limit"—that which constitutes the "sharp clarity of *kiai* (気合, aligned spirit)."[23] There is a shift in orientation here, to "a moment when doing and being done coincide."[24]

Nakai's concept of "*geworfener Entwurf*" signifies the process of acquiring understanding through one's actions. More broadly, it suggests that understanding comes through expression. Although Nakai himself does not explicitly use the term "expression" in this context, the concept was widely employed in the intellectual circles around him. Moreover, the theory of expression was often linked to the theory of Konrad Fiedler, considered the father of the general theory of art. Fiedler's theory was widely adopted by

18. NMZ 1: 401.
19. NMZ 1: 401. Heidegger 2010, 175.
20. NMZ 1: 403. See Becker 1963, 32.
21. Schelling 1978, 221.
22. NMZ 1: 431.
23. NMZ 1: 402–3.
24. NMZ 1: 430.

many Japanese philosophers in formulating the poietic structure of experience, with Nishida's 1917 book, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness,* serving as a catalyst.[25] This stands in sharp contrast to its minimal impact on the philosophical community in his native Germany.

Fiedler's theory focuses on the visual arts. At its core is the idea that one truly sees by drawing, and that drawing, in turn, develops the act of seeing.[26] However, Nakai adds: "Even if we accept Fiedler's claim that 'all seeing is drawing,' we must recognize the infinite and profound distinctions within the act of drawing itself. These distinctions lie in the extent to which the 'inner technique of nature' penetrates this 'outer technique of nature.'"[27] In Nakai's terminology, the relationship between seeing and drawing is one of "projection (射影)."[28] Thus, the claim that drawing has different stages implies that projection also unfolds on different levels. Nakai argues that there are different levels of projection, ranging from "superprojection (reflection)," which involves distortions caused by habit, to "basic projection (orthographic projection)," which is free from all such distortions. A detailed account of this, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper. His emphasis is not on the connection between seeing and drawing, but rather on the process by which, and the extent to which, one can "approach" true seeing through drawing.[29] Furthermore, Nakai extends the relationship between seeing and drawing to "listening" and "playing." He thus reinterprets Fiedler's theory as the fundamental structure of human beings as sensory and bodily existences—a theme closely related to "common sense (*Gemeinsinn*)."[30] This interpretation reflects Nakai's remarkable insight into the bodily and sensory foundations of human experience.

Nakai does not employ the technical term "technique of nature" in two of his major postwar works, *An Introduction to Aesthetics* (1951) and *The Beauty of Japan* (1952), written for a general readership. However, the ideas Nakai once explored under this term are revisited in relation to Japanese

25. NKZ 2: 95–6.
26. See OTABE 2009, 61–2.
27. NMZ 1: 438.
28. NMZ 1: 439.
29. NMZ 1: 15.
30. NMZ 1: 421, 439; cf. NMZ 1: 179; 2: 7.

artistic perspectives. Using boat training as an example and referring to "a certain pleasurable, relaxed, and comforting feeling of immersion and its aesthetic pleasure" gained through training, he explains as follows:

> This spirit of valuing training and action is only possible when there is a deep trust in a greater reality.... In Buddhism, the concept of *Mahāyāna* [The Great Vehicle]—namely, the idea of surrendering completely to something vast and finding peace within it—remains alive in the Eastern tradition. It is a bold and daring assertion that could even be seen as a fearless challenge to the universe itself. Japanese art was sustained by this grand assertion up to the Meiji era. We must now turn our gaze back to it.[31]

Art becomes possible only through a deep trust in the *technique* (lawfulness) inherent in nature, whether it is the inner nature of the body or the outer nature that surrounds humanity. According to Nakai, this trust underlines Mahāyāna Buddhism. In *The Beauty of Japan*, he describes the significance of Mahāyāna Buddhism as a "belief that within this reality, the rational remains abundant, apart from human activity; indeed, even within human activity, the rational persists and will inevitably emerge."[32]

Nakai's aesthetics is characterized by a trust in the technique of nature (both internal and external) and the affirmation of human existence through this trust.

Ki (気), ki (機), and kizukai (気遣い)

We can now turn to Nakai's theory of "*ki* (気)." Employing once again Heidegger's language, Nakai emphasizes the "disclosure of knowledge" inherent in the concept of "*kibun* (気分, mood or *Stimmung*)."[33] He also focuses on the "sharp clarity of *kiai* (気合, focused energy)" in sports training.[34] In this way, "*ki*" seems to have become a central theme for Nakai. In 1932, Nakai published a paper entitled "*Kata-gi*" (気質),[35] which refers

31. NMZ 3: 37.

32. NMZ 2: 256.

33. NMZ 2: 204.

34. NMZ 1: 403.

35. The word *kata-gi* was originally pronounced *kata-ki*, but the *ki* underwent voicing—a phonological process that is quite common in the Japanese language.

to "temperament" or "character." This essay serves as a starting point for his exploration of the concept of *ki* (気).

We will now examine Nakai's 1947 paper, "The Development of '*Ki/Ke*' 気 as a Japanese Word." This paper is the result of the philological and philosophical research Nakai began in 1942 with funding from the Imperial Academy, and it remains a crucial reference for any research on "*ki*" to this day.[36]

According to Nakai, the concept of "*ki*" became firmly ingrained in Japanese with its unique meaning during the Heian period, appearing in various "monogatari" (tales) through the term "*keshiki*" (気色).[37] Nakai examines examples from works such as *Taketori Monogatari*, *Ise Monogatari*, and *Genji Monogatari*, revealing that "*keshiki*" is often used to express emotions, expressions, and the dynamics of feelings such as joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, as seen in phrases like "*mono omoeru keshiki*" (物思へるけしき), which indicates that someone "appears" to experience a particular feeling. At the same time, Nakai demonstrates that it is also used to describe natural phenomena, such as in "*yuki no keshiki*" (雪の気色), which means the "appearance" of snow. He notes: "The people of this time, without consciously perceiving themselves as observers opposed to nature, seem to enter into a timeless sense of desolate existence, as if they were one with nature."[38] Furthermore, focusing on the usage of the verb "*keshiki-bamu*" (気色ばむ, i.e., to take on *keshiki*), which applies equally to humans and nature, Nakai considers "*ki*" as a "sign of life."[39] He explains:

> The uncontrollable order present in both humans and nature moves within everything; that is, within the sentiments of nature, the workings of heaven and earth, the sky, clouds, mountains, fields, plants, and the causes of their generation. An unexpected order always overflows as a surprising sense of

36. This paper focuses on "*ki*" as it relates to the Japanese language, not the Chinese concept of "*qi*." In his 1932 essay「気質」, Nakai briefly touches on the expression *qi yun sheng dong* (気韻生動, NMZ 2: 205), but in his later works he is no longer concerned with the Chinese concept of "*qi*."

37. Nakai 1982, 274.

38. Nakai 1982, 278.

39. Nakai 1982, 279.

> reality. This expression of order seems to have been captured by the term "*keshiki*."[40]

According to Nakai, "*ki*" was a "pantheistic reality that entered into nature, the human body, and the spirit, acting in various ways during the Heian period."[41]

Nakai detects a significant shift occurring during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. This idea aligns with the perspective that the Song Dynasty in China represents a turning point, as noted by Okakura Kakuzō in his *Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (1903).[42] Nakai notes that the "new sense of the term" arose in *The Chronicle of the Great Peace* (*Taiheiki*), a work composed in the 1370s, where the word "*ki*" interacts with the Buddhist term "*ki*" (機), giving rise to a new connotation.[43] "*Ki*" (機) is "the spiritual ability that lies dormant in the nature of human beings and is activated by exposure to the teachings."[44] According to Nakai, "*ki*" (機) refers to "the passive self in relation to the Dharma."[45] In line with Nakai's interpretation, let us examine the usage of "*ki ni noru*" (気に乗る, literally, to ride on the *ki*), found seven times in *Taiheiki*. This phrase, used in scenes where warriors are inspired by the atmosphere of the battlefield, could be translated as "follow the natural flow of the atmosphere." However, in *The Chronicle of the Great Peace*, this expression "to ride on the *ki* (気)" is also written as "to ride on the *ki* (機)" (seven times), where the character "*ki*" (機) generally means a mechanical spring. Thus, the expression "ride on the *ki* (機)" can be rendered as "ride the momentum." In such contexts, "*ki*" (気) and "*ki*" (機) are often considered indistinguishable.[46] But Nakai points out that "*ki*" (気) is more closely related to "psychological aspects," while "*ki*" (機) is more about "timing or an opportune moment." Thus, he continues, "'riding on the *ki* (機)' means turning one's body in the midst of a singular moment, plunging into it without hesitation, without excess, in order to

40. Nakai 1982, 279–80.
41. Nakai 1982, 282.
42. Okakura 1984, 1: 93–6.
43. Nakai 1982, 284.
44. *Kadokawa Kogo Daijiten*, entry on "*ki* (機)," 2: 5.
45. Nakai 1982, 257.
46. *Kadokawa Kogo Daijiten*, entry on "*ki* (機)," 2: 4–5.

'ride on the *ki* (気),' that is, to gain freedom within the natural flow."[47] "*Ki*" (気), which previously functioned as a pantheistic reality working within nature, humans, and spirit, was still regarded as "something external." However, through its interaction with the word "*ki*" (機), the sense of "*ki*" (気) begins to encompass "the element of time, where one strives to restrain one's rising self and expectations, condensing into a decisive moment."[48] This marks the pivotal shift in the concept of "*ki*" that Nakai identifies during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. The issue at hand is the "sharp clarity of *kiai* (気合, aligned spirit)," which seeks to penetrate into the "*ki*" as the "technique of outer nature" through the actions of the body as the "technique of inner nature."

Nakai further emphasizes that expressions such as "*ki o tsukau*" (気をつかう) or "*kizukai*" (気遣い, to take care of) first appeared during the Muromachi period.[49] The self that is engaged in *kizukai* (気遣い) uses its own *ki* in a reflective manner. Thus, the term *kizukai* testifies to the emergence of "consciousness in the modern sense" that "controls, utilizes, and exercises" its own actions.[50] Nakai pays particular attention to the Edo playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon, who not only frequently used "*kizukai*," but also various other expressions involving *ki*, such as "*ki o tsukeru*" (気を付ける, to pay attention), "*ki ga tsuku*" (気が付く, to notice), "*ki o isogu*" (気を急ぐ, to hurry), and "*ki o momu*" (気を揉む, to be anxious). For Nakai, these expressions are the "linguistic-historical signs of the emerging self-awareness of Japanese townspeople."[51] By directing its own *ki* toward external phenomena, the self begins to construct space in a perspectival manner. According to Nakai, "the linguistic structure of Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa Japan" is "not very far removed from Chikamatsu's vocabulary."[52] By tracing the rise of modern self-consciousness among Edo-period townspeople, his argument centers on the genealogy of Japan's modernity.

The question of when Japan's modernity began is closely related to how

47. Nakai 1982, 285.
48. Nakai 1982, 286.
49. Nakai 1982, 286–7.
50. Nakai 1982, 286.
51. Nakai 1982, 297.
52. Nakai 1982, 298.

modern Japanese philosophers position themselves within history. As we have seen, Nakai sees the emergence of modernity in the civilization of the Edo-period townspeople and places himself within this historical development. Of course, Nakai has also expressed views that contrast with this one. For example, in his postwar lecture series "Introduction to Aesthetics," he notes that while Europeans became aware of modern consciousness in the sixteenth century, "the Japanese, unfortunately, have only begun to awaken to this consciousness in the last fifty or sixty years."[53] This echoes the familiar perspective that attributes the origins of modernity to the 1868 Meiji Restoration. However, in his 1932 essay "Aesthetics of a Turning Point," Nakai already explicitly states that the civilization of the Edo-period townspeople marks the beginning of "modern beauty."[54] Furthermore, in *Introduction to Aesthetics* (1951), he recognizes the 1600s as the turning point for the birth of "modern beauty," drawing a parallel between Shakespeare and Kanō Eitoku.[55] Nakai's true intention is probably here. For Nakai, the study of *ki* was indispensable to the genealogy of Japan's modernity.

"Lightness" (軽さ) or the characteristics of Japanese beauty

It is worth noting that drawing parallels between Eastern and Western modernity does not diminish their distinct characteristics. Based on the above analysis, we will now examine how Nakai conceptualizes the unique qualities of Japanese beauty.

In *Introduction to Aesthetics* and *The Beauty of Japan*, Nakai explores the nature of Japanese beauty in opposition to Greek and Hebrew aesthetics. Greek aesthetics, exemplified by the myth of Prometheus and the *Laocoön* sculpture, is defined by a soul that endures suffering. In contrast, Hebrew aesthetics, as reflected in the Messianic faith, is characterized by a soul that longs for something beyond its suffering. These distinctions also extend to architecture. In Greek architecture, *entasis* conveys the act of bearing weight, whereas in Hebrew and later Christian church architecture, tow-

53. Nakai 3: 354.
54. Nakai 2: 308.
55. Nakai 3: 24–5.

ering spires reach toward the heavens. However, Japanese architecture, whether in *Kinkaku-ji* or a tea house, seeks to embody lightness and thus deliberately avoids any sense of weight. Thus, from a typological perspective, Nakai portrays *lightness* as the essence of Japanese beauty.[56]

In *The Beauty of Japan*, Nakai further explores the characteristics of "Eastern beauty," by which he specifically refers to East Asian aesthetics. When people think of Eastern beauty, they typically envision the "vibrant, dignified, and weighty aesthetic" exemplified by *Beihua* (Northern School painting in the Academy style). This aesthetic developed under the bureaucratic state apparatus of northern China. In Japan, it finds its counterparts in the vivid colors of Nikkō Tōshōgū Shrine or the intricate craftsmanship of *netsuke*. Nakai argues, however, that a "second kind" of Eastern beauty exists, one that seeks "ever greater simplicity by reducing the number of brushstrokes," a beauty achieved through the deliberate elimination of heaviness. Originating in southern China, this aesthetic was "developed and championed by the *literati*, the free-spirited intellectuals of the South."[57] While Japanese painting inherited technical skills from northern China, it tends to reject heaviness in favor of lightness, freedom, change, and fluidity, aligning more closely with southern Chinese styles, and Japanese art exhibits an even stronger affinity with southern aesthetics than southern China itselfg does. This is evident in its deep appreciation of *Muqi* (牧谿) (active in the late thirteenth century), a Southern Song painter who remained largely unrecognized in China. Nakai's argument here is genealogical in nature.[58] Notably, in prioritizing the artistic characteristics of southern China over those of the North, Nakai shares a perspective with Okakura Kakuzō in *The Ideals of the East* (1903).[59]

According to Nakai, this second kind of beauty makes Japanese beauty unique. What exactly does Nakai mean by "lightness"?

Nakai defines the essence of Japanese beauty as "a spirit that seeks freshness, remains pure and new, and rejects stagnation, a quality akin to water

56. NMZ 2: 250–2; 3: 28–32.
57. NMZ 2: 220–3.
58. NMZ 2: 223.
59. Okakura 1984, 1: 35–43.

flowing through a light, soft, and shallow stream."[60] This is a defining quality that not only "permeates"[61] Japanese beauty, but also serves as the fundamental principle underlying its evolution: from the ancient ideals of "*sayakesa*" (さやけさ, clarity) and "*mono no aware*" (もののあわれ, the pathos of things),[62] through the medieval concepts of "*yūgen*" (幽玄, subtle profundity) and "*wabi*" (わび, austere simplicity),[63] to the Edo period notions of "*karumi*" (軽み, lightness) and "*iki*" (いき, chic refinement).[64]

The human mind, especially when it masters something, tends to solidify it into a "*manière*,"[65] which can lead to its stagnation. In Japanese, *manière* is called "*shūki*" (習気), a habitual stagnation of *ki*. Therefore, one must "break free" from one's *shūki*; that is, from the self that has become "stagnant and inert."[66]

The form (*kata*) discussed earlier can also become a *manière*. The meaning of training is to "free oneself from the distortions of one's way of being." Therefore, "fitting into a form" or "living within this form" is the goal of training.[67] Form exists in movement and persists only as long as we embody it. However, form is easily objectified and becomes an object of "conscious awareness."[68] At this stage, form becomes detached from movement and is seen as something that can repeat itself, and this is when it turns into *manière*. What is necessary at this moment? Nakai focuses on the phrase "after crossing the pass (峠)" found in chapter 71 of Kamo no Chōmei's (鴨長明) *Mumyōshō* (ca. 1221–1226), emphasizing the importance of "first undergoing training in poetry, reaching a state of freely composing, and then reversing course, shifting from the uphill path of training to suddenly descending by forgetting everything."[69] In other words, "there are times when a genius, having mastered the training to the fullest extent, arrives

60. NMZ 2: 224.
61. NMZ 2: 230.
62. NMZ 2: 231.
63. NMZ 2: 237.
64. NMZ 2: 243.
65. NMZ 2: 239, 243; NMZ 3: 44.
66. NMZ 2: 52.
67. NMZ 1: 11–12.
68. NMZ 1: 419.
69. NMZ 2: 240.

at a state in which, in a sense, they calmly even break their own form."[70] For those who train to master a form (*kata*), it exists before them, still elusive and unattainable. However, once the training is complete and the form (*kata*) is fully acquired, it is no longer before them. Rather, form (*kata*) is something a person lives through. Therefore, unlike a rigid *manière* that has become fixed, something detached from individual circumstances, the form (*kata*) remains a "living, growing *kata*," constantly adapting in new ways to each unique situation.[71] Nakai refers to this shift as a "change of direction."[72]

Nakai views this "change of direction" as a defining characteristic of the East, particularly as "a remarkable trait that developed in Japan."[73] He argues that capturing this shift through expressions such as "after crossing the pass"[74] is "a cultural heritage first achieved by medieval Japanese art."[75] While this tendency is consistent with the "second kind of beauty" that originated in southern China, Nakai argues that the significance of medieval Japan lies in the way it explicitly articulated this idea with phrases such as "after crossing the pass" and thus crystallized it into aesthetic ideals such as "*wabi*" (austere simplicity) and "*karumi*" (lightness). Furthermore, by recognizing these qualities as resonating with "the spirit of modern architecture pursued by Le Corbusier and Bruno Taut,"[76] Nakai reaffirms his modernist stance.

If *shūki* (a habitual stagnation of *ki*) is the opposite of lightness, what concept embodies lightness? Nakai highlights the term *kisaki* (気先, the tip of *ki*), which was passed down by Bashō's students. In *Kyorai-shō*, a collection of commentaries by Bashō and his followers, it is written: "Haikai should be composed by *kisaki* without overthinking." Similarly, *Akazōshi* states: "If one suppresses *kisaki*, the verse will not flow on *ki*. Our master taught that one should ride on *ki*." Nakai defines the *ki* as "a dynamically fluid force that

70. NMZ 2: 242.

71. NMZ 1: 419.

72. NMZ 2: 262.

73. NMZ 2: 262.

74. Nakai further sees a similar aesthetic inclination in expressions such as 闌けかへる by Zeami and "Enter the rule (格, *kaku*), then transcend it, only then can one attain true freedom" (from Bashō, NMZ 2: 262).

75. NMZ 2: 242.

76. NMZ 2: 252.

renews itself daily and never stagnates."[77] As noted above, Nakai's aesthetics is characterized by a trust in the technique of nature both within and outside of human beings, as well as an affirmation of human existence through this trust. The traditional artistic practices of Japan, deeply rooted in a trust in the technique of nature, convinced him of a modernism that constantly renews itself by responding to the ceaseless movement of *ki*.

References

Abbreviations

NKZ 『西田幾多郎全集』[*Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002–2009), 24 vols.

NMZ 『中井正一全集』[*Complete Works of Nakai Masakazu*] (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1964–1981), 4 vols.

THZ 『田邊元全集』[*Complete Works of Tanabe Hajime*] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1963–1964), 15 vols.

YMZ 『柳宗悦全集』[*Complete Works of Yanagi Muneyoshi (Sōetsu)*] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1980–1992), 22 volumes.

Other references

Becker, Oskar
1963 *Gesammelte philosophische Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske).

Cassirer, Ernst
2009 *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff. Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik*, ed. by Reinold Schmücker (Hamburg: Felix Meiner).

Heidegger, Martin
2010 *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press).

Kadokawa Kogo Daijiten 『角川古語大辞典』[The Great Dictionary of Archaic Japanese]. 1982–99, 5 vols.

Kant, Immanuel
2000 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Nakai Masakazu 中井正一
1982 『美学的空間』[*Aesthetic Space*] (Tokyo: Shinsensha).

77. Nakai 1982, 298–9.

OKAKURA Kakukzo 岡倉覚三
1984 *Collected English Writings* (Tokyo: Heibonsha), 3 volumes.

OTABE Tanehisa 小田部胤久
2007 "Tsuneyoshi Tsuzumi, a Pioneer in Comparative Aesthetics, and his Theory of 'Framelessness of Japanese Artistic Style': Toward Intercultural Aesthetics," *International Yearbook of Aesthetics* 11: 111–30.
2008 "Sōetsu Yanagis *Mingei*-Bewegung im Hinblick auf die Interkulturalität," *JTLA* 33: 45–61.
2009 "'Raphael without Hands': The Idea of the Inner Form and its Transformation," *JTLA* 34: 55–63.
2022 "The Pragmatist Understanding of the Dao: The Art of Living and the Way of Art," *Pragmatism Today* 13/2: 140–9.
2023 "Dō (Dao) in the Practice of Art: Everyday Aesthetic Life in Japan Through the Japanese Tea Ceremony," Man, E. K. W. and Petts, J., eds., *Comparative Everyday Aesthetics* (Amsterdam University Press), 169–82.

SCHELLING, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph
1978 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia).

SONO Raizō 園 頼三
1922 『芸術創作の心理』[*The Psychology of Artistic Creation*] (Tokyo: Keiseisha).

TSUZUMI Tsuneyoshi 鼓 常良
1926 『西洋美学史』[*History of Western Aesthetics*] (Tokyo: Ōmura Shoten), 2 vols.