

# The National Concept Behind Japanese Aesthetic "Wabi-sabi" -- Taking the Gold Ornaments in Nagoya City as an Example.

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## ABSTRACT

This article takes the gold jewelry of Nagoya Castle as an example, and through a case study method, discusses the correlation between the Japanese aesthetic concept of "Wabi-sabi" and the social tradition of "gaman" and the philosophical thought of "no-self" in the Japanese national character. The purpose is to point out that aesthetic preferences are affected by external factors such as national growth environment and moral concepts. Similarly, Japanese philosophical thoughts and national concepts have had a profound impact on the formation and development of wabi-sabi aesthetics. The research in this article not only helps the academic community to fully grasp the essential characteristics of wabi-sabi aesthetics; it also helps the academic community to deeply understand the similarities and differences between wabi-sabi aesthetics and other aesthetic concepts; it has certain academic significance for promoting the theoretical research and practical application of wabi-sabi aesthetics and realistic value.

## KEYWORDS

Wabi-sabi; Shadow; National Concept; Japanese.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gold is famous for its luxury and beauty, but Japanese gold jewelry often gives people a sense of gloom and loneliness. This aesthetic preference that is unique to Japan and crucial in Japanese culture is called wabi-sabi (Japanese: 侘び寂び), which is a traditional Japanese aesthetic centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. Behind aesthetic preferences are often concentrated the values and outlook on life of a nation. Discussing Japan's unique wabi-sabi aesthetic concept, which is different from other countries, can, on the one hand, better understand the development process of Japan's traditional aesthetics. On the other hand, It will also help to deeply explore the formation characteristics of Japanese national views that support the Japanese aesthetic concept of "Wabi-sabi". Research trends, the author takes the golden owl and golden screen of Nagoya Castle as an example to conduct a detailed discussion on the national character behind Japan's "wabi-sabi" aesthetic preference and explore why this unique aesthetic trend is highly praised and widely used in Japan. We look forward to enriching the research theoretical value of this topic and providing inspiration and reference for practical applications.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Take Sensu-mae Zu Byobu, the representative work of Japanese painter and tea ceremony master Ike no Taiga (1723-1776), as an example. Although the gold ornaments are many and complicated, the use of gold foil in this work is simple and elegant. It features a simple design and highlights the overall texture of the golden screen through simple decoration. It is one of the outstanding expressions of wabi-sabi aesthetics on the golden screen. Similarly, Japanese writer Jun'ichirō Tanizaki(谷崎潤一郎), expressed his profound understanding and praise of traditional Japanese aesthetics in "In Praise of Shadows(陰翳礼讃, In'ei Raisan)". He emphasized the soft, simple and hazy beauty brought by shadows, which is in sharp contrast to the aesthetic concepts in Western culture that pursue brightness, clarity, complexity and luxury.

The emergence of this aesthetic trend has been influenced by many factors. For example, Liu Chunting (2011) pointed out that the Zen thought in Japanese art makes the design more spiritual and profound, showing a kind of transcendent emptiness. If we start from the perspective of Zen Buddhism, Ruth Benedict mentioned the "No-Self Thought" in Japanese culture from the perspective of cultural anthropology in "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" (1946), a concept that reflects the influence of Buddhism, especially the core ideas of Zen Buddhism. In the existing literature research on Japan, there are many studies that correlate Japanese cultural concepts with specific examples. For example, Aysha Mendes (2016) started from Japanese aesthetic culture and explored the connection between Japanese culture and the aesthetic industry (plastic surgery).

However, among the existing studies, there are few special studies that correlate the philosophical thoughts and traditional thinking inertia of Japanese nationality with Japanese aesthetic cases. Therefore, this article relates the aesthetic preference of Japanese "Wabi-sabi" aesthetics to Japanese nationality, takes Nagoya Castle gold ornaments as an example, conducts research, and thinks about the causal relationship behind it. On the one hand, it is expected to fill the research field of the topic of Nagoya Castle gold ornaments. Research gaps provide theoretical academic research value for academic research. On the other hand, it is expected to enrich and expand the research content in this research field and provide inspiration and practical significance for in-depth understanding of the correlation between Japanese traditional aesthetics and national views.

## 3. JAPANESE AESTHETIC CONCEPT OF "WABI-SABI"

"Wabi" roughly means "the elegant beauty of simplicity", while "sabi" means "the evanescence of time and the impermanence of all things", which is regarded as a simple and restrained way of appreciation. Wabi-sabi aesthetics can be traced back to the practice of Japanese tea ceremony in the 15th century, especially the concept of "tea ceremony without tea" advocated by the tea ceremony master Sen no Rikyu. The word wabi-sabi comes from the idea of "simple tea ceremony props", and wabi-sabi embodies the beauty of tranquility and deepness. It is not only an aesthetic attitude, but also an aesthetic realm and aesthetic mind. Kori Onishi wrote in the book "Japanese Wabi-Sabi" that the concept of "Wabi-Sabi" not only has extremely complex and profound connotations, but also from a purely linguistic perspective, its etymological relationship is also particularly complex. ... Of course, as an aesthetic category, it is not only its linguistic issues that should be studied from an aesthetic standpoint. It must be based on a specific artistic field as the historical background, and it is necessary to explore not only its natural linguistic process, but also its linguistic issues. It is necessary to examine how it, as a generalized "beauty" or a generalization of special "beauty" in the general art field, evolves into a central concept or ideal concept in a specific art field, and how it exerts its guiding function in artistic creation.

During the Edo period from the 17th to the 19th centuries, wabi-sabi aesthetics gradually penetrated fields such as painting, literature, and architecture. Artists and architects began to focus more on

expressing ideas of simplicity, and instant beauty. The influence of wabi-sabi aesthetics gradually emerged in art forms such as literati paintings and haiku poetry during this period. During the Showa era from the mid-20th century to the end of the 20th century, Japan experienced post-war reconstruction and economic prosperity. During this period, some artists and architects began to reinterpret wabi-sabi aesthetics through modern techniques, and some designers who focused on simple design appeared in the field of architecture. Architectural works. In modern times, the concept of wabi-sabi aesthetics has gradually transcended Japan's borders and exerted an influence on international art and design. Some international designers and artists have also been inspired by wabi-sabi aesthetics and incorporated its unique aesthetic concepts into their own creations.

#### **4. THE SPECIFIC EMBODIMENT OF "WABI-SABI" AESTHETICS: TAKE THE GOLD JEWELRY IN NAGOYA CASTLE AS AN EXAMPLE**

In the existing Japanese wabi-sabi aesthetic decoration designs, clay, stone, wood, and sand are mostly used as carriers, reflecting the aesthetic pursuit of simplicity, simplicity, and peace in traditional Japanese culture. This section takes the gold ornaments in Nagoya Castle as an example. By sorting out the wide application of wabi-sabi aesthetics, the specific embodiment of Japanese "wabi-sabi" aesthetics - the golden owl, golden house and golden screen in Nagoya gold ornaments are discussed.

##### **4.1. Wide Application of Wabi-sabi Aesthetics**

In the tea ceremony culture, in the "tea ceremony without tea" concept advocated by Sen no Rikyu, the design and placement of tea sets emphasize simplicity and simplicity. For example, the production of tea bowls focuses on the simplicity of shape and natural glaze to show the simple beauty of the objects. Some tea bowls even retain the natural grain of the clay, emphasizing the texture of the natural material. In courtyard design, dry landscaping (dry stone garden) creates abstract landscape scenes through the use of stones, gravel and sparse plants, highlighting a simple yet deep reverence for nature; elements such as stone lanterns and pomegranate trees are often decorated with simple. The form is presented to create a tranquil space. These decorations not only emphasize practicality, but also focus on aesthetic peace and harmony. In traditional Japanese architecture, the simple design of the tatami and the paper transparency of the coat jointly create a quiet and soft living space, focusing on simplicity, ventilation, and integration with the natural environment. Window view design focuses on bringing nature indoors, emphasizing seasonal changes and instant beauty. This is consistent with the focus on nature and momentary beauty in wabi-sabi aesthetics.

Natural materials such as wood, stone and earth not only provide practicality to the design, but also naturally convey a sense of integration with nature. When designers choose materials, they often pay attention to the properties of the material itself and fit it with the theme they want to express. For example, many wabi-sabi designs now focus on the simplicity and natural texture of materials. Material textures, colors and shapes are used to express simple yet deep beauty. However, Japanese designers' processing and individual presentation of materials are often not limited by the properties of the material itself. Gold jewelry has always been bright and luxurious. It is not only a sense of material luxury, but also a symbol of glory and luxury. In the hands of Japanese designers, gold jewelry presents a completely different expression. The reasons behind this are thought-provoking.

##### **4.2. Wabi-Sabi in Nagoya Gold Jewelry**

Gold has been one of the important raw materials in art and design since ancient times. Different from the wide-open presentation of gold jewelry in universal aesthetics, Japanese gold jewelry is mostly dominated by the quiet tones of "shadow": Junichiro Tanizaki wrote in "Praise to Shadow", "Beauty does not exist in objects. and exists in the shadowy ripples and light and darkness produced by objects.

For example, the traditional Japanese art of kintsugi (a craft of repairing broken pottery with gold powder or paint) emphasizes highlighting cracks rather than covering them up. Cracks, making the cracks become part of the work. The daughter of Kazunori Hamana, one of the representative artists of wabi-sabi aesthetics, once accidentally broke some of his works, and Hamana said with a smile that he decided to put these works in They were left outdoors for several years to allow themselves to be colored and shaped naturally. After these works were restored by a local metalworking expert, the different colors formed a subtle, uneven contrast that was completely natural and could never be artificially altered. Of.

Nagoya Castle is a castle located in Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture, Japan. It was built by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1612. It was the main residence of the Owari Domain during the Edo period and is also known as "Golden Castle" (きんじょう, Kanjo). Historically, the outer walls of Nagoya Castle chose gold technology, which was the most labor-intensive and material-intensive among many materials, and used gold foil for decoration, which made the castle sparkle in the sunlight, presenting a brilliant golden scene. This brightly colored appearance makes Nagoya Castle unique among Japanese castles.

The specific manifestations of Nagoya's wabi-sabi aesthetics in gold jewelry can be seen from the following two aspects.

#### 4.2.1. Kinshachi

The shachi is a uniquely shaped roof animal head that is often vividly described as a fish-like animal with the characteristics of a dragon's head and a lion's body. This decorative animal head on the roof has both aesthetic value and a certain religious symbolism. It is considered a kind of patron saint in traditional Japanese architecture and is placed at the tip of the roof root of the building, implying the protection of the building and its residents. protect them from disasters and evil. Most of them are made of tiles, wood, and stone. Most of the city's keep or main towers and gates are made of pottery (zoo tiles), or wood clad with copper. The largest existing wooden copper-clad shrine is located at Matsue Castle Keep (height 2.08m). The tower of the Kochi Castle Keep is made of bronze.

The Kinshachi at the highest point of Nagoya Castle are designed as a pair, located on the roofs of the east and west main towers respectively, and are made of more than 200 kilograms of gold. The 2.74-meter-tall golden owl is the symbol of the Tokugawa family. Therefore, Nagoya Castle is also called Jinsha Castle. The unique image and building materials of this pair of Kinshachi fully demonstrate the worship of gold in the architecture of Nagoya Castle during the city's founding period. Among the many gold carving images (such as golden tigers and golden dragons) that can be combined with gold to reflect the majesty and nobility of the emperor, they continue the traditional style and meaning of "鯨 (shachi)". It is simple and has profound connotation, without too many cumbersome decorations, but it conveys a simple and profound beauty through the depth and solemnity of the form. The design of golden owl usually incorporates natural elements, such as fish images, water patterns, etc. This expression of natural elements makes Kinshachi closer to nature, which is consistent with the concept of wabi-sabi aesthetics that pursues the beauty of nature. At the same time, the golden owl, which carries the historical accumulation, stands on the top of the building, showing a unique beauty under the instant light and shadow, seeming to protect the entire building in tranquility. Its existence and its simple shape help to create a quiet atmosphere, which is consistent with the pursuit of silence, history, and instant beauty in wabi-sabi aesthetics. It also gives gold simplicity, depth, nature, silence, and harmony. The beauty and atmosphere of history and instant connection.

#### 4.2.2. Golden House and Golden Screen

"This kind of refraction is like the horizon at dusk spreading golden light into the surrounding darkness. I feel that gold can only show such sad beauty at this time." Jun'ichirō Tanizaki once described the golden screen in "In Praise of Shadows". It shocked him. During the late Muromachi period and early Edo period, artists often used gold leaf on screens, shoji screens, paintings, and

decorations. With gold foil as the main body, it is often decorated with landscapes, flowers, and birds. As a painting school that has led the Japanese painting world for nearly four centuries, the Kano School of painting combines the delicacy of Chinese landscape paintings with the popular gold foil rich color screen background, creating a delicate and gorgeous style through the combination of ink and gold. . The works of painter Kanō Eitoku, one of the founders of the Kano School, often use gold foil to enhance the luxury and luster of the picture.

The screen painting in the castle tower of Nagoya Castle is one of the representatives of Kano school painting. These screens depict a variety of subjects, including natural scenery, flowers and birds, people, etc. In terms of decoration and paintings of the castle tower, Toyotomi Hideyoshi's retainer and grandson of Kano Eitoku, Kanō Tan'yū, participated in the design. The rapid rise of Kanō-ha is also inseparable from this experience. The gold screens of the Kano School not only continued its painting style that focused on boldness and decoration, but also showed a unique and natural design through unique patterns, themes and compositions, such as tigers and bamboos, landscapes and birds, It embodies the pursuit of uniqueness and natural beauty in wabi-sabi aesthetics. The use of gold foil is usually in a simple and elegant way, making the screen show a faint golden color in the unique light and shadow, expressing the natural and simple beauty through concise and powerful brushstrokes. In this unique atmosphere of silence, the publicity of gold complements the simplicity and depth of wabi-sabi aesthetics, forming a unique gold jewelry aesthetic design style.

## **5. THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK BEHIND THE JAPANESE AESTHETIC CONCEPT OF “WABI-SABI”**

In Japanese society, the social tradition of "gaman" and the philosophical thought of "no-self" are two extremely important parts of the Japanese national character. This section provides a detailed explanation of these two parts, taking its performance in "Wabi-Sabi" aesthetics as an example to discuss the correlation between Japanese national concepts and aesthetic aesthetics.

### **5.1. The Evolution of the Social Tradition of "Gaman"**

"gaman" refers to patience, endurance, tolerance, and self-control. It is composed of "ga" (われ) which means self and individual, and "man" (まん) which means satisfaction, complacency and pride. The word comes from the Sanskrit word *Asmimana*, which originally means being too conceited, or arrogant and arrogant. However, the meaning of the word "がまん" in modern Japanese has fundamentally changed from the semantics introduced with Buddhism: turning a blind eye to the weaknesses of stubborn people with a patient state of mind, which means patience, tolerance, tolerance. , overcome, forgive, give in. In 1979 (Showa 54), a nationwide survey was conducted on "the most popular words spoken by the people", and the second-ranked one was "gaman". "gaman" runs through their cultural life and behavioral ideologies. Therefore, "gaman" has also formed a Japanese social tradition and culture. The underlying logic behind this tradition is that the Japanese believe that when the objective environment cannot be changed, by changing the subjective self, the same effect as changing the objective environment can be achieved. Therefore, self-cultivation, that is, transforming and perfecting oneself, has become the priority in Japanese culture.

As for self-cultivation, unlike Western philosophy that strictly distinguishes the two energies of body and soul, the Japanese have cut off this ideological basis. Spirit and body are not opposing forces in the universe. They believe that everyone has two souls, but this is not a struggle between his "good instincts" and "bad impulses". They are divided into elegant souls and rough souls. Every person's life, and even every nation's life, has a time when it needs to show its elegant soul, and there is also a time when it needs to show its rough soul, even if this expression is through repression. Expressed. Correspondingly, the "silence" of wabi-sabi aesthetics is not only reflected in the elegance and tranquility of silence, but also includes a suppressed and profound aesthetic. This is related to the

characteristics of "I'm slow" that emphasize introspection and control of emotional expression, which manifests as a kind of inner self-repression.

In wabi-sabi aesthetics, elegance is not complicated and luxurious, but more indifferent, elegant, and the pursuit of simple beauty. For rough and overly exaggerated elements, wabi-sabi aesthetics usually expresses a kind of restraint and suppression, pursuing a gentle and restrained aesthetic experience. The word "wabi" usually refers to simplicity, simplicity, and plainness, and is closely related to self-repression, humility, and the suppression of excessive publicity in traditional Japanese culture. For example, the gold screens of the Kano School usually adopt simple and elegant designs. The use of gold foil is simple and elegant, not overly ostentatious, so that the goldware also has an elegance and indifferent connotation, pursuing simple and exquisite artistic expression. Arouse the inner resonance of the viewer. At the same time, when depicting content on the golden screen, overly complicated and exaggerated elements were avoided, and the complexity of the picture was avoided, reflecting the restraint of roughness and excess. In the use of the element of gold, "wabi" emphasizes reducing elements of ostentation and excessive decoration and pursues the essence and true beauty of things. This is consistent with the attitude of the "gaman" culture that inhibits excessive exaggeration and over-the-top publicity.

This aesthetic concept can be interpreted as the inheritance of traditional cultural values, or as a reflection on the excessive publicity and ostentation of modern society. The origin of "wabi" in "wabi-sabi" aesthetics and the social tradition of "gaman" in Japanese society come from the same source and are closely related.

## **5.2. Changes in the Philosophical thought of “No-self”**

Anatta (no-self), is an important concept in Buddhist philosophy, also known as "selflessness" or "selfless" thought. In Japan, this idea is deeply rooted in Zen and other Buddhist schools, and has had a profound impact on culture, art, and life. For example, Zen Buddhism emphasizes experiencing intuitive cognition through sitting meditation and contemplation, transcending concepts, and discrimination, and thereby realizing the reality of "selflessness". Zen emphasizes momentary experience and direct awareness, transcending attachment to a fixed entity or self-existence. In architecture and art, the idea of "no-self" is expressed through the design principles of simplicity, simplicity, and nature. Traditional Japanese architecture and courtyard design emphasize harmony with the natural environment and pursue the experience of selflessness in silence and simplicity.

The "Sabi" in "Wabi-Sabi" aesthetics emphasizes the beauty of tranquility, depth, and taciturnity, and is like Japanese selfless philosophy in that it emphasizes transcending the individual self, pursuing deep introspection, and connecting with the whole. The idea of "no-self" believes that the individual's self-concept is an illusion, and the true self transcends the individual's body and mind. The "silence" in "wabi-sabi" aesthetics also includes the pursuit of deep introspection. Through silence and deep experience, individuals can transcend surface noise and distracting thoughts and achieve inner peace. Introspection in the philosophy of selflessness also pursues self-knowledge beyond the surface and achieves deeper awareness. At the same time, from the perspective of connection with the whole, the "silence" of "wabi-sabi" aesthetics expresses the relationship between the individual, nature and the whole. Connection, this is also an important concept in the thought of selflessness, that is, individual cognition and existence are not isolated, but an interconnected part with the entire universe. Although "sabi" in "wabi-sabi" aesthetics does not directly refer to the terminology of the philosophy of selflessness, they both aesthetically and philosophically emphasize the transcendence of individual self-knowledge and the connection with the greater whole; this kind of thinking The emphasis on the concept of transcending the individual self and integrating the individual into the whole has had a profound impact on Japanese aesthetics, manifested in simplicity, nature, silence, and the appreciation of momentary beauty and impermanence.

This idea of transcending oneself and connecting with the whole has a profound influence in Japanese culture and philosophy and is reflected in aesthetic designs such as the golden owl at Nagoya Castle. The simple shape and peaceful expression of Kinshachi reflect the pursuit of complexity and joy beyond the surface. The abstract characteristics and meanings presented by its images go beyond direct realistic expressions. This is also consistent with the view in the "self-less" philosophical thought that reality is relative and unstable, and that real existence is experienced in a realm beyond reality. At the same time, the fish image of Kinshachi is closely connected with natural elements, expressing respect and connection to nature. It comes from the "no-self" philosophical thought that emphasizes the integration of individual and nature and believes that individual and nature are not separate existences, but interdependent.

### **5.3. Thoughts on Japan's "Gaman" Social Tradition and "No-self" Philosophical thought, "Wabi-sabi" Aesthetics and National Outlook**

In Japanese society, the social tradition of "gaman" and the philosophical thought of "no-self" respectively constitute two important parts of the Japanese national character. These two are concretely expressed in "Wabi-sabi" aesthetics, and their causal relationship in Japanese national concepts and aesthetics is revealed through a detailed elaboration of the concept of self-cultivation, introspection and elegant soul, and appreciation of instant beauty. Both emphasize the concept of transcending the individual self and integrating into the whole, which is reflected in Japanese aesthetics, manifested in simplicity, nature, silence, etc.

In addition, the social tradition of "self-arrogance" and the philosophical thought of "no-self" are still integrated with each other in "wabi-sabi" aesthetics. This blend embodies the pursuit of transcending the individual self, achieving inner tranquility, and connected wholeness through self-cultivation and introspection. The emergence of this aesthetic concept not only reflects the inheritance of traditional cultural values, but also a reflection on the excessive publicity of modern society, injecting unique and profound connotations into Japanese art and culture.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In "Wabi-sabi" aesthetics, the aesthetic concept not only reflects the social tradition of "self-arrogance", but also absorbs the essence of "selflessness" philosophically, creating an aesthetic trend that is both simple and profound, embodying the essence of Japanese culture. unique national outlook. Aesthetic preferences are often influenced by and shaped by external factors such as the national growth environment and moral concepts. Japanese philosophical thought and social tradition complement each other and have a profound impact on the formation and development of wabi-sabi aesthetics. Understanding the national outlook behind wabi-sabi aesthetics enables us to better understand the formation background, evolution, and specific manifestations of this aesthetic concept. Analyzing wabi-sabi aesthetics in Japan's unique cultural background can promote researchers' cross-cultural comparisons, which can help the academic community gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between wabi-sabi aesthetics and other aesthetic concepts, and how these concepts are used in Evolved and systematically expressed in different cultures. In addition, this study can promote the academic community to think more deeply about how national views affect aesthetic concepts, and how aesthetic concepts are inherited and developed in culture. Finally, from the perspective of the practical value of the research, this study can better play a role in understanding the practical application of wabi-sabi aesthetics, which helps to combine theoretical research with actual concrete creations such as art and architecture, and further deepen the understanding of wabi-sabi aesthetics. A comprehensive understanding of the aesthetics of silence.

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