

Comparison of Aesthetic Ideas in Chinese and Japanese Gardens from the Aesthetics of Mono-no-aware in The tale of Genji

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Abstract. Chinese and Japanese gardens are in a continuous line, but due to regional cultural differences between the two countries, Japanese gardens have formed their own unique aesthetic designs that are different from Chinese gardens. Starting from the Aesthetics of mono-no-aware in The tale of Genji, this article compares and analyzes the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese and Japanese gardens, corresponding to the human beauty, material beauty, and emotional beauty reflected in the "mono-no-aware" view, and interprets the characteristics and origin in the humanistic aesthetics, scenic elements, and emotional connotations between the two. Aiming to correctly grasp the inherent correlation and comparison of Chinese and Japanese garden design ideas through a new perspective of "mono-no-aware" aesthetics.

Keywords: Chinese and Japanese gardens; comparative research; aesthetics of mono-no-aware; The tale of Genji.

1. Introduction

Archaeology and anthropology in China and Japan have repeatedly confirmed that the early Japanese nation included the people of the Central Plains in ancient China and a small number of Wu and Yue ancestors in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. According to the "Annals of Emperor Qin Shi Huang" in the "Records of the Grand Historian", in 219 BC, Emperor Qin Shi Huang sent Xu Fu to Japan to seek immortality, bringing writing, agriculture, medicine, and other things to ancient Japan, which led to the birth of Japan's "Yayoi culture" [1]. Subsequently, cultural exchanges between the two countries continued for more than two thousand years. Therefore, from a historical perspective, the main birthplace of Japanese culture is China, and the two have similarities and commonalities in many fields after cultural development. Similarly, as a form of cultural expression, the landscape design ideas of China and Japan also reflect the similarities between the two. It can be said that Japanese gardens are a branch of Chinese gardens. However, due to regional, cultural, and ethnic differences between the two countries, Japanese gardens have formed their own unique aesthetic design ideas. It is not a copy and paste of Chinese gardens, but an innovation based on inheritance [2]. This system of innovation not only reflects Japan's absorption of foreign cultures, but also reflects Japan's own national psychology and aesthetic atmosphere. At the end of the 11th century, Japanese literary creation flourished, and the emergence of "Genji Monogatari" had a profound impact on the development of Japanese culture. The emotional tone of "mono-no-aware" in the book was its biggest feature, dominating Japanese culture during the Heian period, and thus forming a long-term influence on the field of Japanese literature and aesthetics.

2. Japan's "Mono-no-aware" and China's "Sensation of Objects"

2.1. The Aesthetics of "Mono-no-aware" in The Tale of Genji

The term "mono-no-aware" (物の哀れ) is a literary concept proposed by the Japanese Edo period sinologist Motoori Norinaga. "mono" (物の) is the object of cognition and perception, encompassing all things including humans, objects, and emotions. "aware" (哀れ) is the subject of cognition and perception, which is the true expression of emotions. "Mono-no-aware" is the harmonious and calm



aesthetic cognition that arises from the integration of the two [3]. The first mention of incorporating the concept of "mono-no-aware" into literary works should be "The Tale of Genji", which is a classic literary work written by Japanese writer Lady Murasaki during the Heian period and is known as the world's earliest full-length novel. The literature revolves around the life experiences and emotional stories of the protagonist Genji, depicting the court story of the author's era and revealing the decadence of society and the power struggle between nobles at that time. The initial meaning of "mono-no-aware" in the book was the realization of the fleeting and fleeting nature of things, with meanings such as falling flowers, flowing water, and the sound of the wind. Faced with these beautiful and fleeting scenes, people cannot help but feel pity and regret, and this kind of pity and regret is the core connotation of "mono-no-aware". This special aesthetic consciousness is not only a literary concept, but also a worldview. Over time, "mono-no-aware" gradually evolved into an aesthetic concept about life and nature, human nature and emotions.

2.2. The "Sensation of Objects and Emotions" in Traditional Chinese Literature

The concept of "mono-no-aware" in Japan may seem similar to China's "sensation of objects and emotions" on the surface, but this is not the case upon closer inspection. Chinese people say that feeling things and hurting emotions, and the focus is on the word "emotion", expressing specific emotions will lead to selecting specific "objects". As the poet Su Shi said, expressing emotions through objects rather than placing emotions on them. For example, in poetry, "moon" is often used to represent "homesickness", "chrysanthemum" represents "live in splendid isolation", "bamboo" represents "nobility", and so on. Moreover, in poetry, "great rivers" are often used to express feelings for one's country and the world, showcasing boldness and grandeur. But for Japan's concept of "mono-no-aware", "mono" and "aware" are both subjects, and only when the two blend together can they form "mono-no-aware". They can calmly accept the disappearance of things and appreciate the beauty of sadness in their chants.

3. Ideological Foundation: Zen Aesthetics and Taoist Thought

3.1. The Zen Aesthetics of Japanese Gardens Based on the Concept of "Mono-no-aware"

From the formation process of the concept of "mono-no-aware" in Japan, this aesthetic consciousness has similarities with Chinese Buddhist thought, but it is an inherent form of aesthetic consciousness in Japan. Although Confucianism and Taoism have also had an impact on Japanese culture, by the time Confucianism was introduced to Japan, the Han Dynasty Confucian classics had already declined. This optimistic spirit did not have a direct impact on Japan's aesthetic concepts. However, Taoism advocates the harmony with nature, rule through non-action, which is fundamentally different from the Buddhist philosophy of pursuing "Everything visible is empty". Therefore, in terms of aesthetic consciousness, Buddhism plays a dominant role in Japanese cultural aesthetics with its transcendent charm and exquisite core. At the same time, due to Japan's polytheism, a harmonious approach is adopted to religious elements, allowing them to reconcile Shintoism with Buddhism into a Zen culture with their own national characteristics [4]. At this point, Japan has formed a Zen aesthetic art with "mono-no-aware" as the spiritual pillar. This Zen aesthetic is also deeply reflected in the development of Japanese garden design ideas, forming concise, exquisite, and rich in connotation garden characteristics. Among many representative Japanese garden types such as ponds, terraced courtyards, and stone courtyards, this Zen aesthetic consciousness based on "mono-no-aware" has permeated all aspects of its design ideas, including layout techniques, landscape materials, artistic features, and so on.

3.2. The Taoist Thought of "Harmony between Heaven and Man" in Chinese Gardens

The aesthetic consciousness of Chinese gardens is basically rooted in the Taoist school of thought, which was first established by Laozi and Zhuangzi, and emphasizes the harmony between heaven and man. Laozi believed that the origin of the world is "Tao", and that humans should merge with "Tao".

"Harmony with nature", indicating that "being one" leads to "doing nothing". Therefore, when facing all things, humans should follow nature to achieve "Rule through non-action". On this basis, Zhuangzi emphasized the "human spirit". He believed that "Co-existence of man and nature". There are laws of self operation in heaven and earth, and if one wants to understand the philosophical laws of all things, they must follow nature. "Non-action" is "non-non-action" [5]. The Taoist philosophy is reflected in the development of Chinese garden design, which advocates the aesthetic consciousness of adapting to non-action and forgetting both the object and the self, forming a "natural style" garden characteristic. For example, the famous YuanMing Yuan Imperial Garden and Summer Palace, Humble Administrator's Garden and The Lingerin Garden, their spatial layout and the use of mountains, waters, stones, and trees all reflect the Taoist philosophy of "Harmony between heaven and man".

4. The Humanistic Aesthetics in Chinese and Japanese Landscape Design Ideas

4.1. The Humanistic Aesthetics of Japanese Gardens under the Perspective of "Mono-no-aware"

Under the profound influence of the concept of "mono-no-aware", the humanistic nature of the Japanese nation reflects the characteristics of valuing human emotions and being meticulous. It emphasizes "matters are in the heart", that is, the ability to appreciate subtle emotions and the beauty of "mono-no-aware". This humanistic aesthetics has already been reflected in various aspects of Japanese humanistic life, including film and television works, literary works, aesthetics of appearance, clothing, and living habits. For example, in the Japanese film "Little Forest" uses nature as the story background, removes cumbersome narrative techniques, and reflects the details of character emotional changes in the narrative blank space, deepening the emotional beauty of character life into the spiritual core. For example, in the Japanese novel "Grass Pillow", the article ends with a "melancholic emotion", and the painter's sadness in the book is further highlighted by the "joy". This emotion is objectively rational to the others, but the emotional subject is sadness, bitterness, and silence. For example, the famous "Bushido" spirit in Japan, which is an epiphany towards life and ideals, a detachment from the soul and life, is considered a great "righteousness" sentiment. Correspondingly, in Japanese gardens, the Japanese people pursue exquisite and elegant courtyards and landscapes, seeing the big from the small. It will shrink a certain garden by several times or even hundreds of times to form a courtyard landscape, and it will transform a certain part of a tree into a potted plant, etc. Although this is closely related to Japan's geographical environment and national conditions, that is to say, Japan does not have the prerequisite for the great rivers and deserts, but the attention to details of the "mono-no-aware" has a unique style, which is also the most direct manifestation of its humanistic aesthetics in the Japanese people.

4.2. The Humanistic Aesthetics Reflected in Chinese Gardens

Under the aesthetic consciousness of "harmony between man and nature" in China, one of the humanistic aspects of the Chinese nation is reflected in the emphasis on collective thinking, which means a comprehensive thinking mode that considers problems from a holistic perspective. Its advantage is that it gives the Chinese nation a high degree of cohesion, which is the driving force for the continuation of Chinese civilization for thousands of years. Its disadvantage is that the Chinese nation's awareness of "self" is relatively weak, making it difficult to realize "self-worth". Secondly, it is reflected in the ethical and moral concepts [6], which establish social norms of the Three Virtues and Five Constants to maintain the ruling order and provide a theoretical basis for strengthening centralized authoritarianism. Correspondingly, in Chinese gardens, the symmetrical axis pattern of royal gardens also represents the solemnity and grandeur of the emperor's rule over the world. The garden form of private gardens that imitates nature highlights the humanistic aesthetic of China's "harmony between man and nature". Temple gardens, on the other hand, make more use of natural

scenery to construct landscapes, effectively handling the harmonious relationship between architecture and nature.

5. Landscape elements in Chinese and Japanese garden design concepts

5.1. The Manifestation of "Mono-no-aware" in the Landscape Architecture of Genji Monogatari

From "The Tale of Genji", it can be seen that this book repeatedly uses garden landscapes and the changing states of landscapes to allude to the profound connotation of the concept of "mono-no-aware" and the inner emotions of the characters in the book, thereby giving readers a profound understanding and feeling. The most direct manifestation of this is that the names of the women in the book are named after the palaces, flowers, and plants they live in, such as "sunset, last plucked flowers, Kui Ji, Huasanli, Jin Ji", etc. This not only makes the characters more recognizable, but also reflects the Japanese garden's integration with nature, implying profound aesthetic connotations in Japan. Secondly, the book is deeply influenced by Chinese literature, and the use of Chinese poet Bai Juyi's poetry in many places has become a major feature of this book. The author, Zi Shibu, flexibly quotes Bai Juyi's poetry according to the needs of the plot by "taking its scenery, imitating its emotions, and using its meaning" [7]. For example, in the poem "A Song of Everlasting Sorrow," the line "The lovebird tiles grew chilly with hoar frost so strong, And his kingfisher quilt was cold, not shared by a mate." originally described the sadness of Tang Xuanzong after losing Yang Guifei. However, in this book, it expresses the endless sadness of Genji's longing for his deceased wife, Kui Ji. For example, in Chapter 19 of the book, the poem directly describes the landscape, "The setting sun is like blood, the mountain and wild tree tops are all adorned with golden hanging colors, and the branches and strands are distinct" shrouded a faint sadness in the mood of the young master Genji at that time. The most aesthetically pleasing form of this spirit in Japanese gardens is the Dull landscape, which uses a freehand technique of "seeing the big from the small" to create a "desolate" and beautiful atmosphere [8]. In the garden, the stones representing "mountains" are dead, the sand representing "water" is dead, there are no flowering plants, and there is no change of seasons. This desolate phenomenon deeply reflects the Japanese nation's revered view of "mono-no-aware".

5.2. The Landscape Spirit of "Learning from Nature" in Chinese Gardens

The spirit of "learning from nature" in Chinese gardens reflects the Chinese people's complex of mountains and waters. In the state of "harmony between heaven and man", mountains and waters are what people aspire to. Therefore, the most primitive natural state of mountains and waters provides guidance for Chinese garden design, that is, "learning from nature". Under the natural conditions of vast territory, abundant resources, and abundant mountains and rivers in China, the inspiration of garden designers is influenced by the landscape environment, thus forming a spirit of natural reverence [9]. To express the essence of the landscape complex, Chinese gardens extract the natural landscape without a fixed shape in form, and require that the landscape be interdependent and complement each other on the basis of following the natural landscape. The rugged mountain body highlights the softness of the water body, and the stability of the mountain highlights the liveliness of the water. In the design elements of mountain pushing, different stacking methods need to be carried out according to the different characteristics of the stone, and the overall requirement is to unify the texture and texture of the mountain; In the design elements of water use, it is necessary to express the beauty of the dynamic flow line of water, whether it is static and natural, or it is rotating and tortuous, or it is a spring eruption.

6. The Emotional Connotation in Chinese and Japanese Landscape Design Ideas

6.1. Emotional Expression under the Perspective of "Mono-no-aware" in Japanese Gardens

In the work "The Tale of Genji", the plot portrays expresses a kind of sadness, which belongs to the aesthetic concept of "mono-no-aware" and emphasizes the word "emotion" rather than "sadness". "Emotion" contains emotions towards all things, which can be pity, sympathy, or exclamation of joy, while "sadness" is a faint external manifestation shrouded in these "emotions". It is worth mentioning that the aesthetic of "mono-no-aware" in "The Tale of Genji" is reflected in simple human nature and emotions, and less reflects current ethical and philosophical ideas. This can be directly felt from the description of natural scenery such as spring and autumn, flowers, birds, and trees in the article [10]. In Japanese garden design, the main landscape is to arrange scenery with mountain and water intentions. These natural landscapes leave marks through the baptism of time, and human emotions are expressed in these marks. Among them, common elements such as stones, sand, moss, and bonsai are organized in an orderly manner according to Japanese garden design ideas, making it easy to create unique situations [11]. In such situations, the expression of human sorrow is the beauty of garden space brought about by the "mono-no-aware" concept that Japanese gardens want to reflect.

6.2. Emotional Expression of Chinese Gardens Originating from the Heart

In China, it is common to see "emotions embedded in scenery". These emotions are based on the subject of "human", reflecting one's personality and quality, that is, "originating from the heart". The difference between this emotional expression based on the heart and the "mono-no-aware" view of emotion is that it emphasizes "expressing one's aspirations", and emotions will be positively expressed between "achieving or losing one's aspirations", making Chinese gardens an art of "expressing one's aspirations" [12]. That is to say, the builders of gardens not only expressed their longing for a peaceful and leisurely life through gardens, but also used gardens as a place of belonging for their career failures. For example, from "Jia Xuan Ji", it can be seen that Xin Qiji prepared for seclusion in gardens during his tenure. For example, from "Presented to Zhao Shaoqing from the Medicine Garden", it can be seen that Sima Guang retreated to Luoyang and built a unique amusement park due to his humble nature, bitterness, and seclusion. As a result, gardens inherit personal honor and disgrace, as well as the context of the times. Therefore, it can be said that the construction process of Chinese gardens is an emotional expression originated from the heart.

7. Summary

Starting from the aesthetic perspective of "mono-no-aware" in "The Tale of Genji", this paper compares and analyzes the different characteristics reflected in Chinese and Japanese garden design ideas from three aspects: humanistic aesthetics, scenic elements, and emotional connotations. On the basis of being influenced by Chinese Zen Buddhism in terms of people, objects, and emotions, Japanese garden design ideas have also integrated the aesthetic consciousness of Japan's local concept of "mono-no-aware", thus forming a garden design concept with its own unique temperament; The design philosophy of Chinese gardens is deeply influenced by the local Taoist aesthetics in terms of people, objects, and emotions, forming a gardening concept of "pursuing nature and surpassing it". Prior to this, due to the differences in natural resources and ethnic temperament between the two, different techniques and forms of expression were ultimately formed in the design of Chinese and Japanese gardens, as well as the different garden artistic conception that needs to be reflected.

Both Chinese and Japanese gardens are important components of the world's garden art field, but most of the Chinese gardens left over today are from the Ming and Qing dynasties, and can only reflect a small part of Chinese garden art. Therefore, Japanese gardens, deeply influenced by Chinese garden design, have many places to learn from. At the same time, studying the origin and development of landscape design ideas between the two countries based on the characteristics of "mono-no-aware" is of great significance and value for promoting the exchange of landscape design ideas between the two countries.

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