The Essentials of Aging Beauty in Japanese Culture

Kakusho Tachibana. Ph. D.

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This study is on the essential meanings of the so-called Aging Beauty and its psychological analysis. This term implies Sabi, Wabi, or Shibui in Japanese language, which is probably familiar to the American people or specialists through the articles in the magazine "House Beautiful", titled "Discover Shibui the word for the highest level of beauty", published in August 1960.

In our country, Japan, several attempts to esplore its essential meanings have already been made from the viewpoints of philosophy, aesthetics and literary arts. Therefore it should be the best way to trace and review them and try to give a psychological analysis to such meaning.

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First of all, the following interpretation¹⁾ must be presented. The Sabi Experience has, in general, two aspects to its meaning, that is, the extensive or spatial limitation and the intensive or temporal accumulation. It also has various attributes of meaning, such as exquisiteness, irrationality and further humor, irony in their two irreconcilable aspects.

We can assume that the concept of Sabi or Shibui originated from Yugen (profundity in mediaeval cultural philosophy (Heian and Kamakura era), influenced by Buddhistic doctrines and Taoism²) and the concept of Yugen can be explained as follows³:

- 1) hidden or covered by something
- 2) dimness
- 3) silence accompanied by dimness
- 4) deepness (intrinsic meaningfulness)
- 5) richness in contents
- 6) mystic or supernatural
- 7) irrational, exquisite

Thus to be after-reverberant in the Waka-theory, to be expressive in the lack of expression of No-masks in No-plays, to acquire peace and silence in the Tea ceremony and to get reasonableness against the reasonable in the Haikai-theory these developed with similar meanings on somewhat different environmental backgrounds in each period.

In the next place, we will introduce and examine the Sabi theory of other several specialists in our country.

- 1) Sabi means the limitation of spatial expressions by resistance and interruption of patina and also the discrepancy between the expressed and that to be expressed⁴⁾.
- The Sabi experience is to find complexity in simplicity like in Indian-ink paintings⁵⁾.
- 3) Sabi is the specific tendency to catch the sober, sedate mood and to experience the silence beyond the attractive brightly colored, gaudy reality⁶⁾
- 4) The Sabi mood is the naive quality of Jimi. The literal meaning of Jimi (sober) is the taste of earth and it means the submerging within one's own disposition of his person⁷.

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From the preceding statements and illustrations, the general philosophical meaning of Sabi or Shibui can almost be understood. Finally its psychological qualities in our perceptual experiences should be pointed out.

Regarding color experience, dark, shaded, unsaturated and so-called film colors are the qualities adhered to in Sabi, and in our tonal perception so high-pitched or loudness is remote from it. To feel vibration in Japanese music may be greatly favorable. To enjoy sweet in bitterness in our taste and to feel roughness, coarseness or coolness in touch may also be required for it. Further, in regard to spatial and temporal traits, asymmetry, non-equilibrium, rejection of repetition, unpatterned, generally imperfection and lack of artifice in spatial form and softness, steadiness and serenity in motion are naturally assumed as Sabi characteristics. These characteristics can be found in the principles of construction of japanese tea rooms and No-plays.

The japanese have always had sayings as follows: Sabi of a person is the aging spiritual-enlightened state. Sabi of things is crackled and distorted objects. Sabi of time is the old and antique against the new and modern. Sabi of number is the small against the large, the odd against the even.

References

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- 追記 : 本稿は昭和38年8月コペンハーゲンで開催せられた第6回国際老年学会で発表したものである。
 (本学教授 橘 覚 勝)