

# Comparison of "Material Sense" and "Mono No Aware" Between Chinese and Japanese Modern Heavy Color Paintings from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology

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**To cite this article:**

Jing Sun, Xintong Li. Comparison of "Material Sense" and "Mono No Aware" Between Chinese and Japanese Modern Heavy Color Paintings from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 7, No. 6, 2019, pp. 160-164. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20190706.15

**Received:** July 4, 2019; **Accepted:** November 7, 2019; **Published:** November 19, 2019

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**Abstract:** "Material sense" and "mono no aware" are respectively an important concept in the traditional aesthetic consciousness of China and Japan. "Material sense" embodies the Chinese aesthetic concept and philosophical thinking, rational consciousness, and pays attention to the unity of reason and reason. On the basis of China's "material sense" concept, Japan has injected its own cultural temperament to develop a "mono no aware" concept. "Aware" indicates that Japanese aesthetic concepts are related to direct feelings and perceptual knowledge, attaching importance to people's emotional attitudes and highlighting sadness. The commonality between the two is that the emotion is triggered by the image, and then it is empathized with the object to achieve the aesthetic experience of the scene. Material sense and mono no aware are both psychological feelings of natural aesthetic taste, reflections and reactions to emotions. The difference between the two is that the connotation of material sense is greater than the connotation of mono no aware. Material sense is the concentration of various emotions. Although mono no aware also expresses multiple emotions, it is still full of sadness. The focus of mono no aware is placed on the "sorrowful beauty". Compared with material sense, mono no aware is more sentimental, sly and quiet. This article will use the "material sense" and "mono no aware" views as the foothold to analyze the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese modern heavy color paintings on their respective aesthetic pursuits.

**Keywords:** Sino-Japanese Modern Heavy Color Painting, Cultural Anthropology, Material Sense, Mono No Aware, Aesthetic Appreciation

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## 1. Introduction

The aesthetic appeals of Sino-Japanese modern heavy color paintings are derived from the respective cultural backgrounds of the two countries. The ancient Chinese painters often express your own ambitions and feelings with objects. Therefore, they used the "plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum" to express their noble character and express their high ambitions with great mountains and waters. Chinese culture is in the same vein. Today, Chinese modern heavy color painters still use objects to express their feelings. Therefore, they depict the old and desolate beauty of life with a few pieces of residual lotus flowers, and they tell the complex life sentiments with cloves. Due to the characteristics of the geographical environment, Japan's

national cultural character is introverted. They admire nature and beauty, their emotions are delicate and easy to be sentimental, they like the mourning aesthetic sentiment, and they are fascinated by their personal emotions. Therefore, they can clearly see their pursuit of sadness, lingering and slender aesthetic style in Japanese modern heavy color paintings.

## 2. The Occurrence of "Material Sense" and "Mono No Aware": The Taste of Natural Aesthetics

"The original thinking is limited to the recent and felt environment, that is, what people can think about is what

they directly feel."<sup>1</sup> People are in contact with nature at first, in which the sun, the moon, the mountains, trees, streams are all living in their eyes, thus a "all things have a spiritual" view<sup>2</sup> is created. As people feel the changes in nature, the beauty of life is particularly profound to touch the aesthetic consciousness of human beings. The human heart and nature gradually reach the realm of mind sensing. "'The symbiosis of heaven and earth and me, and the fact that everything is with me" has become the aesthetic ideal pursued by mankind<sup>3</sup>. This kind of aesthetics is particularly prominent in the concept of the oriental people. The praise and ode to natural life has become an important topic. This is reflected in the aesthetic thoughts represented by China and Japan, and "material sense" and "mono no aware" are two aesthetic concepts derived from this.

The essence of "material sense" is embodied in the pursuit of a balance between subject and object, the harmony between man and nature, and the pursuit of a duction effect between heaven and man effect."<sup>4</sup> In this process, people use the feelings to make the natural person personified. To achieve the realm of "Heaven and human synthesis". Therefore, it can be said that in order to achieve the realm of "the integration of heaven and humanity", we must constantly improve self-cultivation, blend nature into my perception, and appreciate nature in an aesthetic way. This way is a kind of conscious coordination between "inside" and "foreign objects", rather than the subject copying the object or imposing the subject on the object.

Suzuki Shuji thinks: "Japanese culture is a culture of love."<sup>5</sup> The concept of "mono no aware" is born from this cultural soil. The Japanese have placed complex emotions on the thousands of things in nature. In the state of the blending of the scene, the transcendence of the existence of the object and the emotion itself is achieved. For the Japanese, human beings are a part of nature. People and nature should be symbiotic relationships. Therefore, the natural beauty embodied in "mono no aware" occurs in the aesthetic relationship between man and nature. This is a kind of aesthetic feeling influenced by subjective emotions. It produces slender, elegant and mournful aesthetic feelings when it comes to the change of natural landscape.

### 3. The Connotation of Two Aesthetic Categories

"The sense of matter" is based on the philosophical

<sup>1</sup> [German] Marx, Engels. "The German Ideology" excerpts, compiled by the Central Compilation Bureau, People's Publishing House, 2003, pp2.

<sup>2</sup> Ge Zhaoguang: History of Chinese Thought (Volume I), Fudan University Press, 2014, pp15.

<sup>3</sup> Xiang Huailin: "The Description of Chinese Traditional Culture", Chongqing University Press, 2016, pp25.

<sup>4</sup> Zhou Jianping. A Comparative Study of Classical Aesthetic Scope between China and Japan, China Social Sciences Press, 2015, pp162.

<sup>5</sup> [Japanese] Suzuki Shuji: "Chinese Literature and Japanese Literature", Strait Literature and Art Publishing House, 1989, pp11.

thoughts of heaven and man. It is the external matter that triggers the inner heart of the human being, which triggers various emotions and leads to the creation of various artistic categories. The objective 'object' and subjective sense integrate and become an opportunity for aesthetic creation."<sup>6</sup> In the early days of agricultural people paid close attention to the natural things that have a great influence on their own existence, such as changing seasons and changing clouds, and thus formed a cultural form that is interdependent with the natural life of the universe, initiating the induction of heaven and human beings, then gradually developing "material sense", the integration of heart and matter into the aesthetic realm of sublimation of love.

Liu Xie wrote in the "Spirit of the Heart" of "Wen Xin Diao Long:" When the writer quietly thinks, he can think of the millennium; and when his face changes faintly, he has observed thousands of miles away. The writer is swaying in the shackles, just like hearing the sound of Zhu Yu. When he is concentrating on meditation, there is a stormy scene in front of him... When the writer begins to conceive, countless ideas come to mind; writers must These give abstract ideas a concrete form and sculpt things that have not yet been shaped. When the writer thinks about mountain climbing, the brain is filled with the beauty of the mountains; when he thinks about the sea, his heart is filled with the wonders of the sea."<sup>7</sup>

It can be seen that the aesthetics of classical objects has been basically fixed, and the concept of "things" has had independent aesthetic value and aesthetic meaning. "Things" not only refers to external objective objects, but also refers to the appearance of things in the imagination of the creative subject. In the activities of artistic imagination and creation, the concept of "object" is gradually established. "Things" can be emotional because "things" are expressive, and "things" are no longer simple objective objects. A kind of living body can express human emotions and can convey different emotional colors. In the process of experiencing sentiment, people produce a variety of different emotional experiences, and the combination of things and feelings creates artistic works that are born and dynamic. "The feeling of 'physical sense' is an emotion with social and political ethical meaning, both 'beauty' and 'good', but also 'true', pursuing the unity of truth, goodness and beauty."<sup>8</sup> "Material Sense" shows China's aesthetic concept is closely related to philosophical thinking and rational understanding. It pays attention to the unity of reason and reason, and the integration of things and things.

"Mono no aware as the idea of Japanese classical aesthetic consciousness, it is a kind of touch triggered by foreign objects, and it is an aesthetic world full of emotions generated by the integration of internal emotions and external objects."<sup>9</sup> "Mono no aware does not simply express sorrow.

<sup>6</sup> Zhou Jianping. A Comparative Study of Classical Aesthetic Scope between China and Japan, China Social Sciences Press, 2015, pp120

<sup>7</sup> Liu Wei: Wen Xin Diao Long, Writers Publishing House, 2017, pp295-296.

<sup>8</sup> Zhou Jianping. A Comparative Study of Classical Aesthetic Scope between China and Japan, China Social Sciences Press, 2015: 138.

<sup>9</sup> Zhou Jianping. A Comparative Study of Classical Aesthetic Categories between

In fact, as long as it is influenced by foreign objects, all kinds of feelings are "performance". However, the most prominent thing in "moving beauty, reconciling beauty, grace, sentimental beauty, and beauty of mourning" is "beauty of mourning". The aesthetic category of "aware" was first proposed by the Japanese evangelist in the Edo period in Japan. His main points are as follows: First, the emotions such as boredom, worries, and lovesickness will make people understand the world and understand. The sensation of the sorrow of the object is sighing; the second is to feel the sorrow of others, so that they can also be relieved; the third is that the feeling of "aware" refers to all kinds of feelings, but the feeling of happiness is not as charming as the feelings of grief and depression.

Mr. Yuqu Ye, a famous scholar in China, wrote in the book "History of Japanese Literary Trends": "The 'object' is an objective existence, and the 'aware' is a subjective feeling. The two are reconciled into one, reaching the unity of things, so 'aware' will be further sublimated and will enter a higher stage."<sup>10</sup> From "aware" to "mono no aware", the aesthetic concept is a higher level of development. "Aware" is a relatively simple, only emotional description of the subject, but "mono no aware" is the connection between foreign objects and emotions, intertwined and infiltrated, and then deepen and enrich the original "aware" There is connotation, so "tmono no aware" is a generalization and summary of a special aesthetic modality in Japanese aesthetic concept.

#### 4. "Feeling from Things" and "Sorrowing from Things"

There are many similarities between "material sense" and "mono no aware" subject on foreign objects. They are all aesthetic activities in which subjective emotions are transferred to the imagery to achieve the blending of scenes. Hegel said: "In art, sensible things are spiritualized, and the thoughts of mind are manifested by perceptualization."<sup>11</sup> Objects are in front of feelings, but things are also subject to emotional constraints, and sometimes can play a leading role. Therefore, whether it is the "feeling" of things or the "aware" of things, as a kind of "feelings", it collides with things and stirs, and carries out two-way construction activities of interactive migration in mutual influence and mutual restraint. Therefore, in the creation of modern heavy color paintings, the painters of both China and Japan emphasize the emotional appeal of the aesthetic object to the subject and the empathy effect of the subject on the object. However, the Chinese modern heavy color painting emphasizes on the relationship between the aesthetic subject and the aesthetic object. The aesthetic object is the aesthetic image of the

objective external object, and finally realizes the harmony of the subject and object of the aesthetic, in order to achieve the beauty of "artistic environment". However, "the feeling and setting blended" in Japanese modern heavy color paintings is different. It does not focus on either aesthetic subject or aesthetic object. In fact, more attention is paid to the creator's natural expression and deep understanding of human nature in his works, as well as letting the appreciator taste the natural feelings, and understand the human condition, only by which, spiritual resonance between the author and the appreciator could be achieved.

Both "material sense" and "mono no aware" involve all kinds of emotions. They all emphasize that the internal feelings are generated by the trigger of foreign objects, so whether it is the emotional expression of "sense" or the inside feelings of "aware", "material" is the origin, and the first thing. Therefore, in the modern heavy color paintings of China and Japan, we see that the creators drawing landscape may span across both columns paintings, draw birds and fish, and draw a moment in the scene of life. This is because the creators are influenced by foreign objects and thus have inner feelings of joy or sorrow. They also put these emotions into the object of creation, relying on the depiction of foreign objects to express the subjective emotions or reflections of the creators. Finally, they realized a subjective expression, where they had their sense of "sense" and "aware" in object. Zong Baihua pointed out: "in order to explain the plot, the preface of George Bernard Shaw's script is very long. Problem play focuses on thinking. On the contrary, Chinese opera focuses on moving people, which can make people cry and laugh."<sup>12</sup> The modern heavy color painting creation activity is also such an empathy activity that internalizes colors, objects and externalizes emotions. In the paint, the eyesight of the characters, a petal that falls, and a dead wood standing alone are the externalized manifestations of inner emotions. As for Japanese modern heavy-colored painting, which is influenced by the idea of "mono no aware", tends to be emotionally moved and sentimental. Such emotions are the "aware" felt in life. It is full of helplessness and loneliness for the impermanence and the indefiniteness of the world.

The connotation of "material sense" is generally broader. Although "mono no aware" also expresses a variety of emotions, it is more of a sentiment full of mourning and grief. Its moving focus is on "sorrowful beauty", the essence of the beauty of aesthetic thought, which is more slender, sentimental, and quieter than the "material sense". Moreover, the emotional tendency of "mono no aware" is more singular. Unlike "material sense", where there is no obvious tendency in emotional control, and all kinds of emotions are relatively balanced, Japanese culture is a culture based on emotions. Therefore, "mono no aware" is mainly based on emotions in terms of aesthetic tendency, and its emotional color is mainly biased towards "aware". The reason why this emotional

China and Japan, China Social Sciences Press, 2015, pp127.

<sup>10</sup> Ye Yiqu. "History of Japanese Literary Trends", Economic Daily Press, 1997: 136.

<sup>11</sup> [German] Hegel. The first volume of Aesthetics, The Commercial Press, 1979: 46-47.

<sup>12</sup> Zong Baihua. "Arts", Peking University Press, 1987: 366.

tendency is derived from the Japanese nation's unique aesthetic perception of nature, this sensibility is called "the aesthetic view of the plant-based world view" by people sharing the same religion. The Japanese people felt that the nature was coming and going with the seasons. In the sense of feeling the time that went by, they experienced the precious joy and change of life. The contradictory and complicated emotions made people feel sad about life. This pursuit of "aware" gradually rose to the beauty of art and the integration of sorrow and beauty, from which art and aesthetics reached unity, and rose to the spirit of "Centralism"<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, we can often feel the various feelings that the author wants to express in Chinese modern heavy color paintings. While in Japanese modern heavy color paintings, no matter what the subject is, we can always feel the faint sorrow in the paint.

Regarding the "material sense" and "mono no aware", the scope of "material" includes "thing" in addition to everything in nature. The "material" or "thing" in "material sense" carries certain political colors and ethical concepts. To make "sense" and social ethics united, we need to achieve "start with love, end with virtue", and reach the combination of emotion and will. However, the "material" or "thing" in "mono no aware" has nothing to do with social ethics. The concern is entirely on personal emotional feelings. "Material" is a highly abstract and universal category. It is a static objective existence, which refers to the objective things that are external to the aesthetic subject, and also have strong dynamics."<sup>14</sup> However, the "material" in "material sense" and "mono no aware" has some differences in connotation and extension. In the "material sense", the object is first and the feeling is behind, so the emotion is restricted by the object, and the object plays the leading role of the whole aesthetic activity, even though at some time, the emotion plays an action on the object. "Material" is called the external world in ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts, so the "material" in "material sense" is a general term, including external objective objects and all social folk customs, especially the political education and ethical concept at the moral level. Because of the influence of traditional Confucian culture, the life feelings and artistic life experiences of Chinese modern heavy color painters are greatly influenced by the social and political education, and the "love" expressed in their works through the "material sense" It is no longer just the emotions inspired by the external objective objects, but more of the emotions of the painter's own morality, knowledge, and spiritual cultivation. Moreover, under the guidance of the Confucian "neutral" beauty, the feelings in the picture tend to be neutral, which is more rational comparing to the Japanese modern heavy color painting.

In Japan, the "material" and "emotion" are both exist as the mainstay, because only the "emotion" and "material" can be

integrated to form the aesthetic consciousness of "mono no aware", so the two are the mainstay. Our choice of "object" is very particular: it must be able to make the moving object more clear, whether it is a natural object or a human world, and at the same time, it can record the most touching and emotional things in reality. Therefore, some scholars believe that "all aspects of Japanese culture form are based on sensibility"<sup>15</sup>. "Material" is an objective existence. It must be able to be reconciled with the subjective feelings of "aware" so that the "aware" can be sublimated. Japanese geographical environment as an island nation in the earthquake zone makes the Japanese nation naturally prefer a short-lived, quiet and elegant thing. For them, whether it is a tall mountain and an open-ocean or a delicate flower and small pebbles, there is inherently a kind of "aware" thought, which is not only in human feelings, but also in these things themselves, so the feelings of life in the sense of natural things reach convergence and trigger the feeling of solitude. In "mono no aware", "material" is the object of cognition, while "aware" is the subject of cognition, that is, the subject of emotion. Therefore, "mono no aware" is a sense of beauty that is produced when a certain object and the emotional subject are consistent, the expression of which is showing the aesthetic value relationship between the subject and object. "Mono no aware" is not a narrow sense of sorrow and compassion. It is an ultimate calm aesthetic consciousness achieved after the integration of intuition and emotion. It is not a deliberate artificial sorrow, but the normality, the true thought, the true existence and the ultimate in beauty of all things.

## 5. Conclusion

"Material sense" is a kind of "feeling triggered by touching objects", and "mono no aware" is a kind of "sighs because of objects", which shows that they are very similar in terms of emotional expression. The emotional expression of "material sense" is relatively strong and straightforward, and the expression is relatively simple. It is derived from the unconscious life reaction of foreign objects. This kind of reaction also contains the "aware" factor, but it does not appear as the main emotion, so the "material sense" is generally full of subjective aesthetic feelings triggered by expressive subject, which makes China's modern heavy color painting have certain subjective consciousness in the creation of the subject and the appreciation of the aesthetic subject.

The feeling of "mono no aware" is a kind of temperate and forbearing feelings, slender and euphemistic. Only those who know "mono no aware" can appreciate the natural scenes and comprehend the world's human feelings. Those who do not know "mono no aware" are cold and ruthless people. Therefore, "mono no aware" is not a strong feeling, but more a kind of harmonious beauty. The emotions that have been

<sup>13</sup> Ye Yuqu, Kang Yuemei: "Things and Secrets: The Aesthetic Consciousness of the Japanese", Guangxi Normal University Press, 2002, pp11.

<sup>14</sup> Zhou Jianping. A Comparative Study of Classical Aesthetic Categories between China and Japan, China Social Sciences Press, 2015: 155.

<sup>15</sup> Ye Yuqu, Kang Yuemei: "Things and Secrets: The Aesthetic Consciousness of the Japanese", Guangxi Normal University Press, 2002, pp23.

reconciled are beautiful and elegant, so the beauty of “mono no aware” is also elegant in the sadness, and the Japanese modern heavy color painting influenced by the aesthetic consciousness of “aware” has its slender and deep performance style. The profound connotation reveals the spirit of Japanese beauty in a bright but not glamorous color scheme, dignified and concise painting language.

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