

THE PENUMBRAL SHADOW: A WHITEHEADIAN
PERSPECTIVE ON THE YŪGEN STYLE OF ART AND
LITERATURE IN JAPANESE AESTHETICS

Steve ODIN

Scholars of Asian civilization have often pointed to the primacy of aesthetic value experience or artistic intuition as the distinguishing feature of Japanese culture. In his anthology entitled *The Japanese Mind*, Charles Moore summarizes the conclusions of several renowned Japanese and Asian scholars on this subject as follows:

Tagore has called aesthetics Japan's unique *Dharma*. Kishimoto, here, speaks of the aesthetic as being so significant as to be identical with the religious in Japan, in what is surely a unique emphasis on the aesthetic. Kōsaka, here, points to the *essential* aesthetic emphasis in Japanese culture practically throughout its history—such that Japanese culture is an aesthetic culture. And Nakamura, here and elsewhere, stresses what he calls the primacy of the aesthetic, the intuitive and the emotional. . . . So important is the aesthetic in Japanese culture that it has been accepted by many scholars of Japan as the outstanding positive characteristic of Japanese culture as a whole (1976, p. 296).

During the medieval period of Japan (ca. 950–1400 A.D.) religious and aesthetic values became virtually co-terminous in what was called *geidō* 芸道—the "tao (or Way) of aesthetics," i.e. what in the above passage Tagore refers to as "Japan's unique *Dharma*." In contrast to this, Western culture has usually established a premium

on cognitive and moral over aesthetic dimensions of experience. Moreover, the Judeo-Christian religious tradition has long emphasized doing the will of God through conformity to universal ethical imperatives and moral obligations, rather than the visionary apprehension of beauty through aesthetic feeling and artistic intuition. However, in the twentieth century, Alfred North Whitehead has framed a radically innovative axiological cosmology which establishes the primacy of aesthetics over morality and logic, while at the same time positing the equivalence of religious and artistic values. In his work *Religion in the Making* Whitehead writes:

The metaphysical doctrine here expounded finds the foundation of the world in the aesthetic experience. . . . All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God (1960, p.116).

Among medieval canons of taste in Japanese aesthetics, the first principle of beauty is termed *yūgen* 幽玄 meaning "shadows and darkness" or "mystery and depth." The Japanese aesthetic principle of *yūgen* is a rich, multi-nuanced concept resonating with various Taoist and Buddhist metaphysical overtones, insofar as it denotes the bottomless depths of *mu* 無 or nothingness described by Zen as well as the darkness and mystery of the *tao* 道 or Way described by Taoism. The shadowy darkness or profound depths conveyed by the aesthetic quality of *yūgen* pervades the various medieval arts comprising *geidō* or the "tao of aesthetics" in Japan, including *waka* poetry, *sumie* monochrome inkwash painting, *nō* theatre and *chanoyu* or the ceremony of tea. There is also an important stream of *yūgen* aesthetics running throughout the tradition of modern Japanese literature since the Meiji Restoration period (1868-1912), including certain novels by Natsume Sōseki, Tanizaki Junichirō, Kawabata Yasunari and Mishima Yukio. In this paper, I would like to interpret the *yūgen* style of Japanese art and literature from the standpoint of Whitehead's aesthetic theories, focussing especially on his key organismic metaphor of a "penumbral shadow" or "penumbra of feeling" which he employs throughout his various

discussions on the function of art and the structure of beauty.

THE "PENUMBRAL SHADOW" IN WHITEHEAD'S AESTHETICS

In his essay "The Philosophy of Nishida," Takeuchi Yoshinori of the Kyoto School summarizes the organismic model of consciousness in the East-West syncretic metaphysics formulated by Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), the foremost philosopher of modern Japan, during the second period of his speculative writings:

According to Nishida . . . the self ultimately finds itself in the abyss of darkness (corresponding to the *Ungrund* or *Urgrund* of Jacob Böhme) enveloping within itself every light of self-consciousness. This darkness, however, is "dazzling obscurity" (cf. Dionysius the Areopagite) giving the self an unfathomable depth of meaning and being. The self is thus haloed with a luminous darkness (1982, p. 183).¹

Although significantly influenced by the Western speculative mysticism of Böhme and Pseudo-Dionysius, Nishida's descriptive profile of consciousness as being "haloed with a luminous darkness" with "dazzling obscurity and unfathomable depth" is also a modern phenomenological reformulation of a traditional Japanese model of consciousness—an organismic model based on functional interdependence between parts and the whole, which is ultimately rooted in the religious-metaphysics of East Asian Buddhism as well as Taoism.

In contemporary Western metaphysics, this model of perceptual experience wherein consciousness is "haloed with a luminous darkness" has received its most profound expression in Alfred North Whitehead's "philosophy of organism." Whitehead writes:

Consciousness flickers; and even at its brightest, there is a small focal region of clear illumination, and a large penumbral region which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension (1978, p. 267).

And elsewhere he explains:

Elements which shine with immediate distinctness, in some circumstances, retire into penumbral shadow in other circumstances, and into black darkness on other occasions (1978, p.15).

Throughout his major speculative works, Whitehead repeatedly makes reference to this notion of a background field or fringe of penumbral darkness which he variously terms the "penumbral shadow" (1978, p.15), "penumbral region" (1978, p.267), "penumbral welter" (1978, p.187), "penumbra of consciousness" (1967, p.249) or "penumbra of feeling" (1967, p.260). The word "penumbra" etymologically derives from the Latin prefix *paena* meaning "almost" added to the noun *umbra* meaning "shadow." Whitehead's recurrent notion of a "penumbral shadow," in its sense as a halo of faint darkness which envelops the clearly illuminated focal regions of consciousness, functions in the context of his writings as an *organismic* metaphor for expressing the undivided continuity, interfusion, and wholeness of the perceptual field as well as the beauty intrinsic to all phenomena by virtue of their hidden depths. Hence, Whitehead's organismic metaphor of a penumbral shadow is important not only to his general phenomenology of perception, but also to his concept of aesthetic experience as well as the function of art and the structure of beauty.

In a chapter entitled "Beauty" from *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead develops a phenomenological profile of the "foreground-background" structure of beauty in the perceptual field, wherein clear and distinct sense-objects articulated in the foreground gradually shade-off into a vague and obscure penumbral region in the non-articulated background:

This is the habitual state of human experience, a vast undiscriminated or dimly discriminated background of low intensity, and a clear foreground (1967, p.260).

It is precisely this "vast undiscriminated, or dimly discriminated background of low intensity" which Whitehead calls the "penumbra of feeling" (1967, p. 260) in his description of beauty in *Adventures of Ideas*. Or in terms of his phenomenology of the perceptual field given in *Process and Reality*, the discriminated foreground represents a "small focal region of clear illumination" whereas the massive undiscriminated background signifies a "large penumbral region which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension" (1978, p. 267). In this context we can also invoke Whitehead's discussion of values from *Modes of Thought* wherein he describes "Clarity and Vagueness" as an ultimate pair of opposites characterizing the foreground-background structure of the perceptual field, stating:

The finite focus of clarity fades into an environment of vagueness stretching into the darkness of what is merely beyond (1968, pp.75 and 83).

As Donald Sherburne asserts in his seminal work entitled *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, the function of art from a Whiteheadian perspective is to bring clarity to the "vague and inarticulate feelings from a dim, penumbral region" (1961, p.179). Thus, in another chapter from *Adventures of Ideas* called "Truth and Beauty," Whitehead writes:

The deliverances of clear and distinct consciousness require criticism by reference to elements in experience which are . . . dim, massive and important. These dim elements provide for art that final background apart from which its effects fade. The type of Truth which human art seeks lies in the eliciting of the background to haunt the objects presented for clear consciousness (1967, p.270).

In order to more fully comprehend Whitehead's theories on art, beauty and aesthetic value experience, it is necessary to make reference to some of the technical aspects of his categoreal scheme. According to Whitehead's axiological metaphysics, "the

teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty" (1967, p.265). Throughout his various speculative works he argues that each "occasion of experience" or quantum-pulsation in nature is an *aesthetic event* arising out of a process of *creative synthesis* which unifies a multiplicity of causal influences (prehensions, feelings) into a background field for the foreground focus of attention; the *patterned contrast* between foreground focus and background field is the primordial structure of beauty or depth. The ultimate *telos* or "subjective aim" of each creative synthesis is to elicit *maximum depth of intensity of feeling* through patterned contrast:

This "aim at contrast" is the expression of the ultimate creative purpose that each unification shall achieve some maximum depth of intensity of feeling (1978, p.114).

And again:

Contrast elicits depth, and only shallow experience is possible when there is a lack of patterned contrast (1978, p.114).

In this context, Whitehead specifies that the fundamental condition for achieving maximum "depth of feeling" or "depth of satisfaction" in an occasion of experience is through the evocation of patterned contrasts between the "narrowness and width," characterizing the foreground focus and the "triviality and vagueness" characterizing the background field (1978, pp.111-12). The "triviality and vagueness" of the non-articulated background designates its dim remoteness and massive uniformity; the "narrowness" of focal objects in the foreground enables them to be articulated with clarity and distinctness, while their "width" allows for patterned contrasts eliciting maximum depth of feeling.

Whitehead relates the foreground-background structure of beauty and art to the metaphysical distinction between Appearance-Reality:

Thus it is Appearance which in consciousness is clear and distinct, and it is Reality which lies dimly in the background with its details hardly to be distinguished in consciousness (1967, p.270).

By Appearance is, therefore, meant those clear-cut focal objects situated in the foreground as apprehended through ordinary sense perception (i.e. "perception in the mode of presentational immediacy"); while Reality designates the *non-articulated whole* in the background of the perceptual field as prehended or felt through "perception in the primordial mode of causal efficacy." He writes:

. . . the Appearance is simplification of Reality, reducing it to a foreground of enduring individuals and to a background of undiscriminated occasions. Sense-perception belongs to Appearance (1967, p.281).

All occasions of experience enjoy beauty or depth of feeling in that they harmonize multiplicity into patterned contrasts between foreground and background components. Whitehead thus writes:

Each occasion lifts some components into primacy and retreats others into a background enriching the total enjoyment (1967, p.226).

Moreover, each occasion of experience or aesthetic event is *dipolar*, having both a "mental pole" and a "physical pole." The "physical pole" is simply conformal or receptive in nature, insofar as it prehends (feels) the objective given Reality of the past as the background of causal efficacy from which creative synthesis begins. While describing the operation of the physical pole, he writes:

The objective content of the initial phase of reception is the real antecedent world, as given for that occasion. This is the

'reality' from which that creative advance starts (1967, p.210).

However, the "mental pole" is primarily *originative* in nature, insofar as it introduces *creative novelty* into the occasion of experience, thus giving rise to Appearance as over against the objective Reality inherited from the past:

In other words, 'appearance' is the effect of the activity of the mental pole, whereby the qualities and coordinations of the given physical world undergo transformation (1967, p.211).

Moreover, each aesthetic event or occasion of experience elicits beauty or depth of feeling by seeking "contrast between the Appearance resulting from the operations of the mental pole and the inherited Realities of the physical pole" (1967, p.258). In this *generic* sense, then, *each* occasion of experience is comprehended by Whitehead as a natural work of Art:

The Appearance is a simplification by a process of emphasis and combination. Thus the enduring individuals, with their wealth of emotional significance, appear in the foreground. In the background there lie a mass of undistinguished occasions providing the environment with its vague emotional tone. In a general sense, the Appearance is a work of Art, elicited from the primary Reality (1967, p.281).

Furthermore, all occasions of experience are aesthetic events or creative works of Art in the generic sense in that they interweave Appearance and Reality in patterned contrasts so to express the organismic interdependence or mutual relationship of parts to the whole:

Appearance is beautiful when the qualitative objects which compose it are interwoven in patterned contrasts, so that the prehensions of the whole of its parts produce the fullest harmony of mutual support. . . . The whole heightens the

feelings for the parts, and the parts heighten the feelings for the whole; and with harmony of feeling its objective content is beautiful (1967, pp. 267-268).

When distinguishing human art from natural art in the generic sense he writes: "Art is the purposeful adaptation of Appearance to Reality" (1967, p. 267). All aesthetic events in nature seek maximum beauty or depth of feeling by introducing contrast between Appearance resulting from novel originations of the mental pole and the causally inherited Reality of the physical pole, and in this generic sense are creative works of Art. However, human art involves much greater degrees of creativity, novelty and origination in the mental pole (through the mechanisms of conceptual valuations, reversions and propositional feelings), such that the Appearance in the articulated foreground is more innovatively distinct from the initial Reality given in the non-articulated background. For this reason, Whitehead argues that the distinguishing characteristic of human art lies in its "artificiality and its finiteness" (1967, p. 270). He elucidates this characteristic of human art as follows:

The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative effort, so that it stands alone against the vague infinity of its background (1967, p. 271).

There are thus three major aspects of Whitehead's technical analysis of human art: (i) The first aspect of Whitehead's theory of human art is that "the type of truth which human art seeks lies in the eliciting of the background to haunt those objects presented for clear consciousness" (1967, p. 270). This aspect emphasizes that the function of human art is to disclose the dim and vague non-articulated background as the Reality of the given past. (ii) The second aspect is expressed by his statement that "art is the purposeful adaptation of Appearance to Reality" (1967, p. 267). This aspect emphasizes the high degree of creative novelty and spontaneous originality springing from the mental pole of human occasions, such that the Appearance of creative articulations

introduced into the foreground are innovatively distinct from the initial Reality of the non-articulated background. (iii) However, in the final analysis, ultimate beauty is elicited through the *interweaving of Appearance and Reality in patterned contrasts*, thereby evoking maximum depth of intensity of feeling through harmonic tension between creative articulations in the foreground and the vague infinity of their non-articulated background.

Whitehead's analysis of aesthetic value experience as well as the function of art and literature can be further explicated on the basis of his earlier discussions on English lyrical nature poetry in a chapter entitled "The Romantic Reaction" from *Science and the Modern World*. Citing the empirical testimony provided by Wordsworth's romantic nature poetry, Whitehead argues against the separation of acts from values in modern scientific materialism, in favor of a "philosophy of organism" which holds beauty or aesthetic value as being intrinsic to all events by virtue of the haunting presence of enveloping nature on to its parts: "Wordsworth's greatest poem is, by far, the first book of *The Prelude*. It is pervaded by this sense of the haunting presences of nature" (1967b, p.83). In this context, he quotes directly from Wordsworth's poem:

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
 And on the earth! Ye Visions of the Hills! . . .
 Haunting me thus among my boyish sports.

Continuing his polemic against scientific materialism, Whitehead states:

Both Shelly and Wordsworth emphatically bear witness that nature cannot be divorced from aesthetic values; and that these values arise from the cumulation, in some sense, of the brooding presence of the whole on to its various parts (1967a, p. 88).

In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead goes on to clarify that this brooding presence of the whole on to its various parts in fact signifies the brute *causal efficacy* of enveloping nature, directly felt in the concrete aesthetic immediacy of lived experience as a vague undiscriminated background of affective tone which forever presses in upon us:

In the dark there are vague presences, doubtfully feared; in the silence, the irresistible causal efficacy of nature presses itself upon us; in the vagueness of the low hum of insects in an August woodland, the inflow into ourselves of feelings from enveloping nature overwhelms us; in the dim consciousness of half-sleep, the presentations of sense fade away, and we are left with the vague feelings of influence from vague things around us (1978, p.176).

To conclude, the key point of Whitehead's theory of art that I have emphasized is that "the type of Truth which human art seeks lies in the eliciting of the background to haunt the objects presented for clear consciousness" (1967, p.270). Hence, human art seeks to disclose the dim, vague and massive background of irresistible causal efficacy from enveloping Nature, which is the Reality behind all Appearances in the foreground. In other words, the ultimate creative purpose of human art and literature is to depict the beauty of phenomena arising from the haunting presence of the whole on to its various parts. For Whitehead, then, the fundamental structure of beauty is expressed by the organismic interdependence between parts and the whole, as conveyed through art by irreducible patterned contrasts between foreground focus and background field. According to Whitehead's phenomenology of aesthetic experience, it is the vague undiscriminated background field surrounding all objects clearly discriminated in the foreground focus which confers upon them their quality of beauty or depth. Through his recurrent metaphor of a "penumbral shadow," he characterizes this foreground-background structure of the perceptual field as a "small illuminated focal region" encompassed by a "large penumbral region which tells of intense experience in

dim apprehension" (1978, p.267). The image of faint darkness or dim obscurity expressed by his metaphor of a "penumbral shadow" further conveys the sense of *hidden* or veiled depths ordinarily concealed in the background of perceptual experience. Whitehead's organismic metaphor of a penumbral shadow therefore signifies the beauty or aesthetic value intrinsic to all phenomena by virtue of their *hidden depths*. For this reason, the function of art and literature in Whitehead's aesthetics is precisely to *manifest* the beauty of hidden depths, by raising into clarity the vague and indistinct overtones of feeling from a dim penumbral region of shadowy darkness, which forever haunts those objects clearly illuminated in the foreground focus of attention.

THE PRINCIPLE OF YŪGEN IN TRADITIONAL JAPANESE ART

There is no doubt that foremost among the canons of beauty in medieval Japanese aesthetics was the principle of *yūgen* 幽玄. The two Chinese ideographs that constitute the word *yūgen* literally designate "shadowy darkness" or "dim blackness," and by extension, "hidden depth" or "profound mystery." As Izutsu Toshihiko and Toyo in their etymological analysis of *yūgen* explain:

Yū 幽, the first component of the word *yūgen* usually connotes faintness or shadowy-ness, in the sense that it negates the self-subsistent solidity of existence, or that it suggests insubstantiality. . . . Gen 玄, the second component of the word means dimness, darkness or blackness. It is the darkness caused by profundity; so dark that our physical eyesight cannot possibly reach its depth. . . . (1981, p.27)

Hence, like Whitehead's notion of a "penumbral shadow" used to describe the foreground-background structure of art and beauty, the traditional Japanese principle of *yūgen* or "shadowy darkness" signifies the aesthetic value content intrinsic to all phenomena due to their *hidden depths*. Moreover, like Whitehead's organismic metaphor of a penumbral shadow, the Japanese *yūgen*

concept indicates the total *unsubstantiality* of events due to their impermanence. For this reason, the beauty of *yūgen* is inseparable from two other peculiarly Japanese aesthetic sentiments, namely, *mono no aware* 物の哀れ or the "sadness of things," and *mujō* 無常 or the "sense of impermanence" – both of which represent an awareness of beauty shadowed by the sorrow of existence due to its ephemeral nature. The counterpart of these ideas in Whitehead's aesthetics is his concept of "Tragic Beauty" (1967, p.296), which arises from the character of temporal process as "perpetually perishing" (1978, p.210), such that "Decay, Transition, Loss, Displacement belong to the essence of Creative Advance" (1967, p.286).

The *yūgen* concept was first introduced into the canons of medieval Japanese aesthetics by the leading *waka* (31 syllable) poets and theorists of the Kamakura period (1192-1333), especially Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114-1204), Kamo no Chōmei (1153-1216), and Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241). As emphasized by W.R. Lafleur in his book *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan*, Shunzei's poetics of *yūgen* had an *acknowledged* basis in the meditative practice of *shikan* 止観 (samathā-vipaśyanā) or "tranquility and contemplation," as propounded by the Tendai School of Buddhism in Japan (Lafleur 1983, pp.89-91). Hence, for Shunzei, phenomena are perceived in their *yūgen* or "mystery and depth" when apprehended through the Tendai Buddhist meditation practice of *shikan* or "tranquility and contemplation." The counterpart of this in Whitehead's aesthetics is discoverable in his concept of "Peace" elaborated at the conclusion of *Adventures of Ideas*, wherein he states: "The Peace here meant . . . is a positive feeling which crowns the 'life and motion' of the soul. . . . It is primarily a trust in the efficacy of Beauty" (1967, p.285).

Kamo no Chōmei (1153-1216), the second major *waka* poet and theorist during the Kamakura period, went on to define the beauty of *yūgen* or "shadowy darkness" in terms of his key notion of *yojō* 余情 or "overtone of feeling." In his *Mumyō-shō* Chōmei explicitly identifies *yūgen* with *yojō* or "overtone of feeling," while also providing an example of a tranquil scene of monochrome darkness

in autumn dusk:

. . . according to the views of those who have penetrated into the realm of *yūgen*, the importance lies in *yojō* (overtone of feeling). . . . On an autumn evening, for example, there is no color in the sky, nor any sound, and, although we cannot give a definite reason for it, we are somehow moved to tears. A person lacking in sensitivity finds nothing particular in such a sight, he just admires the cherry blossoms and scarlet autumn leaves that he can see with his own eyes (Lafleur 1983, pp.99 and 177).

Chōmei's identification of *yūgen* or "shadowy darkness" with *yojō* or "overtone of feeling" assumes special significance in light of Whitehead's notion of a "penumbra of feeling" described in his chapter on "Beauty" from *Adventures of Ideas*. The above example of "a person lacking in sensitivity" who sees only the brightly colored cherry blossoms and scarlet leaves while neglecting the more subtle experience of *yūgen* or *yojō*, is in Whiteheadian terms an instance of one who apprehends merely the clear and distinct sense-data of "perception in the mode of presentational immediacy" (sense-perception), while neglecting the vague and dim "penumbra of feeling" prehended through "perception in the mode of causal efficacy." According to Whitehead's epistemology, sense-perception belongs to Appearances in the clearly discriminated foreground (1967, p.281). However, perception in the more primordial mode of *causal efficacy* prehends those vague overtones of feeling from the undiscriminated background field:

In the background there lies a mass of undistinguished occasions providing the environment with its vague emotional tone (1967, p.281).

Moreover, "perception in the mode of causal efficacy" is "perception of the settled world in the past as constituted by its feeling-tones" (1978, p.120). It is this primordial mode of causal efficacy which alone prehends the dim and massive "penumbra of feeling" in

the indiscriminated background of the perceptual field. Hence, to use a phrase from the speculative thought of F.H. Bradley, Whitehead's "penumbral shadow" may be said to represent the *felt background* of immediate experience.

Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), the third major *waka* poet of the Kamakura period, has composed the *waka* poem most often cited by Japanese literary critics as epitomizing the aesthetic principles of *yūgen* or "shadowy darkness" and *yojō* or "overtone of feeling."

miwataseba	Gaze out far enough
hana mo momiji mo	beyond all cherry blossoms
nakarikeri	and scarlet maples
ura no tomaya no	to those huts by the harbor
aki no yūgare	fading in the autumn dusk

Izutsu Toshihiko and Toyo have aptly remarked on Teika's celebrated *waka* poem about autumn dusk as follows:

In this poetic field only a solitary hut remains positively articulated in the twilight faintness of the atmosphere as if half diffused into it (1981, p. 51).

Teika's *waka* poem at once calls upon us to visualize the image of an unsubstantial phenomenon in the foreground which seems to shade-off into the monochrome darkness of twilight at dusk, as if to be continuous with the background of nothingness in which it stands. In his *waka* poem on autumn dusk, Teika thereby provides us with a vivid illustration of Whitehead's image of a "penumbral shadow," wherein "a small focal region of clear illumination" fades into the mystery and depth of "a large penumbral region which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension." Moreover, as Japanese literary critics often point out (Izutsu 1981, p. 278), the subject matter of a *waka* poem is not simply the object discriminated in the foreground, but also the "black space" (*yohaku* 余白) of *mu* or "nothingness" in the indiscriminated background, i.e.,

what Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto school term *mu no basho* 無の場所 or the "locus of nothingness." Hence, in this way Teika's *waka* poem on autumn dusk also functions to illustrate Whitehead's theory on the function of human art, namely, the "eliciting of the background to haunt the objects presented for clear consciousness."

Although the *yūgen* concept was employed as a standard of literary criticism in the area of *waka* poetry for several centuries before Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), the foremost author and theorist of classical *nō* theatre, it was with him that it was finally raised to its full meaning as the unifying aesthetic principle underlying all of the arts in traditional Japanese *geidō*, the "*tao* (or Way) of aesthetics." In Zeami's words:

Yūgen is considered to be the mark of supreme attainment in all of the arts and accomplishments. In the art of *nō* in particular the manifestation of *yūgen* is of first importance (Tsunoda 1958, vol. 1, p. 283).

Hence, as one authority explains:

The aesthetic ideals which pervaded the poetry, drama, painting, gardens, tea ceremony, and most other activities during this period were summarized in the conception of *yūgen* (Tsunoda 1958, vol. 1, p. 278).

Of all the traditional Japanese art and crafts comprising *geidō* or the "*tao* of aesthetics," it is perhaps *sumie* inkwash landscape painting which most graphically portrays the beauty of *yūgen*. The *sumie* style paintings are typically monochrome in design, being composed of tonal variations of a single color, namely, black India ink. It is precisely this monochrome blackness which confers upon *sumie* style painting and calligraphy its pervasive aesthetic quality of *yūgen* or shadowy darkness. This aesthetic preference for monochrome blackness over the use of color in the compositional design of Japanese *sumie* inkwash painting in part springs from traditional Taoist and Zen Buddhist attitudes of cultivating detachment from

worldly things and pacifying the emotions (in the Japanese written language, the ideograph for color, pronounced *iro* 色, also means passion or desire). A second reason for this aesthetic preference is that *sumie* inkwash painting aims to manifest not merely the multi-colored surface aspect of things as in *ukiyo-e* or "pictures of the floating world," but to portray their endless reverberation and bottomless depths. A third reason is that in contrast to the naturalistic and representational styles of Western landscape painting, wherein myriad substantial objects are sharply distinguished through multivariate colors, the monochrome spread of black inkwash in a *sumie* picture instead functions to suggest the organismic wholeness, continuity and interfusion of nature, as expressed through the Kegon (Hua-yen) Buddhist doctrinal formulas *riji muge* 理事無礙 or "interpenetration of solid with void" and *jiji muge* 事事無礙 or "interpenetration of solid with solid" (Odin 1980).

The *sumie* style of monochrome inkwash painting culminated in Japan during the Muromachi period (1333-1573), with the lineage succession of Zen Buddhist artist-monks who trained at Shōkoku Temple complex in Kyoto, including Josetsu, Shūbun and Sesshū. As the authors of *Zen Ink Paintings* describe in their analysis of the Zen tradition of *sumie* inkwash painting during this period:

The usual format in the fifteenth century is a hanging scroll of vertical composition depicting three planes of depth (Barnet and Burto 1982, p. 68).

These three planes of depth characterizing a *sumie* inkwash painting include: (i) a clear foreground with sharply defined rocks in the lower quarter; (ii) a midground; and (iii) a distant background with a dominating mountain which fades into the mystery and depth of enveloping pictorial space. The monochrome spread of black ink conveying the pervasive aesthetic quality of *yūgen* or shadowy darkness in a *sumie* picture establishes an *unbroken continuity* between all three planes of depth, thereby suggesting Kegon Buddhist *riji muge* or "unobstructed interfusion of solid and void." Moreover, an atmospheric haze of concealing mists and vapors usually veils the transitions at each plane, thereby further

enhancing the quality of *yūgen* in its sense as "hidden depths."

The Zen tradition of *sumie* monochrome inkwash painting as perfected by Josetsu, Shūbun and Sesshū in Japan provides yet another vivid illustration of Whitehead's phenomenology of the perceptual field as elaborated in his various writings on the function of art and the structure of beauty. In his chapter entitled "Organisms and Environment" from *Process and Reality*, Whitehead first describes aesthetic value experience as a "depth of feeling" elicited by irreducible patterned contrasts between foreground focus and background field. However, at a more technical level of phenomenological description he then proceeds to distinguish three planes of depth in the field of perception, including: (i) a clear and distinct foreground; (ii) a relevant background; and (iii) a remote chaotic background. He therefore writes:

According to this account, the background in which the environment is set must be discriminated into two layers. There is first the relevant background, providing a systematic uniformity. . . . Secondly, there is the more remote chaotic background which has merely irrelevant triviality. . . . In the background there is triviality, vagueness and massive uniformity; in the foreground discrimination and contrasts (1978, p.112).

In such a manner, Whitehead's description of the perceptual field in terms of three planes of depth provides a comprehensive phenomenological basis for the interpretation of Japanese *sumie* inkwash paintings with their characteristic foreground, midground, and distant background structure of compositional design. It is these same three planes of depth which Whitehead describes through his penumbral imagery of gradual recession into the darkness of space when he writes:

The finite focus of clarity fades into an environment of vagueness stretching into the darkness of what is merely beyond (1968, p.78).

With its irreducible patterned contrast between clear foreground and obscure background, *sumie* inkwash painting also suggests the Taoist metaphysical principle of tension between object (shih 實) and void (hsü 虛). In *The Way of Chinese Painting*, Mai-mai Sze explains that the articulated object in the foreground is associated with light, clarity and nearness, while the void of enveloping pictorial space, with its concealing mists and vapors, is associated with darkness, obscurity and farness (Mai-mai Sze 1959, pp.106-107). In the canons of Chinese painting this contrast between clear foreground and obscure background is technically termed the "near-far" (chin-yuan 近遠) perspective. Moreover, this dynamic interaction between the elements of light and dark, clear and obscure or near and far represent the complementary polar forces named *yang* and *yin* 陽陰, whose tension and harmony manifest the flow of the *tao* or Way. The interaction of *yang* and *yin* in the near-far perspective also corresponds to esoteric Taoist "circulation of life-force" (ch'i-yün 氣運), the First Canon of Chinese and Japanese painting, represented in a *sumie* inkwash painting by the expansion (*yang*) and contraction (*yin*) of mist (symbolizing *ch'i* or life-force). From the standpoint of Taoism, it is this tension of light and shade or *yang* and *yin* in the near-far perspective of an Oriental landscape painting which constitutes the aesthetic-metaphysical content of *yūgen*. Indeed, in the opening paragraph of the *Tao-te ching* attributed to Lao-tzu, the second ideograph of the word *yūgen* (yu-hsüan), pronounced *hsüan* in Chinese, is used in order to express the inexhaustible depth and profundity of the *tao*, calling it not only a "mystery" (*hsüan*) but also the "Mystery of mysteries" (*hsüan chih yu hsüan* 玄之又玄). For this reason, the Japanese aesthetic concept of *yūgen* resonates with important Taoist metaphysical overtones. From the Whiteheadian perspective, it can be asserted that the Taoist elements of Oriental inkwash painting, such as the polar tension between *yang* and *yin* or light and shade in the near-far perspective, basically represent the irreducible patterned contrast between clear foreground and obscure background requisite for eliciting maximum depth of feeling in aesthetic experience. This polar tension of *yang-yin* forces in the near-far perspective of Oriental art can

also be comprehended in terms of Whitehead's notion of "Clarity and Vagueness" as ultimate pairs of opposites characterizing experience as developed in his chapter on "Perspective" from *Modes of Thought*. In the final analysis, Oriental inkwash landscape paintings function to show the *tao* or Way as Primordial Creativity which everywhere harmonizes multiplicity into contrasts through the dynamic interaction of *yang* and *yin*.

YŪGEN IN MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

With the advent of the Meiji Restoration period (1868-1912) arose a renaissance of Japanese literature, which developed as a synthesis of traditional Japanese and modern Western literary techniques. The *yūgen* ideal of literary aesthetics forms an important stream in modern Japanese fiction, and numerous contemporary classics in this genre could be cited, for instance, *The Three-Cornered World* by Natsume Sōseki (1868-1912), *Snow Country* by Kawabata Yasunari (1898-1972), *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* by Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) and *A Dark Night's Passing* by Shiga Naoya (1883-1971). All of these novels are pervaded throughout by the image of *yūgen* or shadowy darkness as the basic symbol of sublime beauty as well as ultimate reality. However, in this discussion I would like to focus on the literary aesthetics of Tanizaki Junichirō (1886-1965). In his acclaimed treatise on Oriental aesthetics entitled *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki contrasts Western versus Japanese ideals of beauty in terms of a distinction between light and shade, surface and depth or revealed and hidden. According to Tanizaki, whereas modern Western culture may be characterized by its aesthetic preference for bright multicolored objects explicitly revealed in the glare of electric lights, traditional Japanese culture has developed a highly refined aesthetic preference for the *patterns of shadows* cast by things as they recede into darkness, conjuring in their stead and inexpressible aura of depth and mystery, of overtones but partly suggested:

We orientals . . . create a kind of beauty of the shadows we have made We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates (1977, p.30).

Tanizaki argues that the principles of Japanese architecture are designed to create a mysterious world of faint darkness through the strategic use of massive roofs with overhanging eaves, in order to cast deep spacious shadows over the whole structure, in contrast to Western architectural principles designed to expose the interior and exterior of a structure to maximum sunlight:

In the temple of Japan . . . a roof of heavy tiles is first layed out, and in deep, spacious shadows created by the eaves the rest of the structure is built. . . . Even at midday cavernous darkness spreads over all beneath the roof's edge (1977, p.30).

While discussing the principles of interior decorating, Tanizaki further describes how the mysterious beauty of a Japanese room in the *wabi* style, with its barren simplicity and austere poverty, lies not in ornamental furniture or decorations, but in its intertwining *variations of shadows* alone:

And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows—it has nothing else (1977, p.18).

He compares a traditional Japanese room to a *sumie* monochrome inkwash painting, the paper-paneled *shōji* (sliding door) being the expanse where the ink is thinnest, and the *tokonoma* or picture alcove where it is darkest (1977, p.20). The *tokonoma* or picture alcove, characterized by its deep recession into darkness and shadows, typically displays a *kakemono* or hanging scroll of painting and calligraphy, as well as an *ikebana* flower arrangement:

But the scroll and flowers serve not as an ornament but rather to given depth to the shadows (1977, p.19).

Then, while contemplating the subtle beauty of lacquerware trays and bowls used in *chanoyu* or the tea ceremony, as they glow with a faint, smoky lustre or sheen of antiquity in the flickering shadows of a candlelit room, Tanizaki exclaims:

And I realized that only in the dim half-light is the true beauty of lacquerware revealed. . . . Darkness is an indispensable element of the beauty of lacquerware (1977, p.13).

What is the reason for Japan's aesthetic preference for the beauty of darkness and shadows? To this question, Tanizaki replies that the patterns of shadows cast by things as they recede into darkness confers upon them a bottomless dimension of mystery and depth:

This was the genius of our ancestors, that by cutting off the light from this empty space, they imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and depth (1977, pp.20-21).

However, at the conclusion of *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki expresses his view that the function of literature and the arts is to restore and preserve the mysterious world of darkness and shadows so rapidly disappearing with the modernization of Japan:

I would call back at least for literature this world of shadows we are losing. In the mansion called literature I would have the eaves deep and the walls dark, I would strip away the useless decoration (1977, p.42).

In his various novels and short stories, Tanizaki therefore deliberately turns off the electric lights imported from modern Western technology in order to create a strangely beautiful dream

world permeated with haunting visions of *yūgen* or shadowy darkness.

In Tanizaki's celebrated novella entitled *A Portrait of Shunkin*, a young man named Sasuke is the servile music student and secret lover of a domineering female *koto* teacher who has been blind since her youth, and who thus lives in a world of darkness. One of Shunkin's adversaries disfigures her face with scalding water, whereupon out of loyalty, Sasuke at once blinds himself by thrusting a needle into his eyes, thereby to hold the image of Shunkin's former beauty forever in his mind. Yet, Sasuke's blindness does not admit him into a world of total blackness, but a "faintly luminous" world of dim twilight:

Youthful memories of the dark world of the closet where he used to practice came flooding into his mind, but the darkness in which he now found himself seemed completely different. Most blind people can sense the direction from which the light is coming; they live in a faintly luminous world, not one of unrelieved blackness. Now Sasuke knew that he had the inner vision in place of the vision he had lost. Ah, he thought this is the world my teacher lives in—at last I have found it (1963, pp. 74-75).

The spiritual nature of Sasuke's new "inner vision" attained by his entrance into this world of dim twilight is made further explicit when his perception of Shunkin is transformed by blindness into the sacred iconographic *maṇḍala*-image of a Buddha enhaloed with an aura of luminous darkness:

He could no longer clearly distinguish between the objects around him, or the way Shunkin herself looked; all he could detect was the pale blurred image of her bandage-swathed face—as it had looked only two months ago—that hovered before him in a circle of dim light, like the radiant halo of the Buddha (1963, p. 75).

The theme of Zen Buddhist "sudden enlightenment" and its relation to the visionary apperception of beauty as luminous darkness finally culminates in the last sentence of Tanizaki's story, which reads:

It seems that when the priest Gazen of the Tenryu Temple heard the story of Sasuke's self-immolation, he praised him for the Zen spirit with which he changed his whole life in an instant, turning the ugly into beautiful, and he said it was very nearly the act of a saint (1963, p. 84).

Tanizaki's novella *A Portrait of Shunkin* as outlined above is pervaded throughout by the image of *yūgen* or shadowy darkness. However, the climactic fusion of aesthetic and religious values in the experience of *yūgen* or shadowy darkness is realized finally with Sasuke's beatific vision of Shunkin as encompassed by "a circle of dim light, like the radiant halo of a Buddha." This is at once reminiscent of the phenomenological profile of consciousness as "haloed with a luminous darkness" elaborated by the modern Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō. It is also reminiscent of Whitehead's descriptive analysis of consciousness as "a small focal region of clear illumination" encircled by "a large penumbral region which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension."

However, Tanizaki also comprehends the abyss of darkness and mystery in which human consciousness is grounded as related to the notion of a "subconscious psyche" as formulated by modern depth-psychologists. In his novella *The Secret Tale of the Lord of Musashi*, a young feudal lord is enjoying a fantasy of a pathological nature, when suddenly he wonders as to how his mind could produce this flow of reverie. The story's narrative explains the origins of these fantasies and images as follows:

But at the bottom of that mind there lay something alien, something like a *deep well* that no conscious effort could reach, . . . clutching the edge of the well, he looked into the dark interior. The unfathomable depth frightened him (1976, p. 56).

In his analysis of this passage presented in *Modern Japanese Writers*, Ueda Makoto has stated:

In sum, the outstanding feature of Tanizaki's literary aesthetic is his preoccupation with the subconscious (1976, p.60).

Indeed, for Tanizaki the *yūgen* or "hidden depths" of human nature ultimately signifies the nocturnal darkness and depths of the unconscious psyche, including not simply the Jungian underworld of religious *maṇḍala* symbolism produced by archetypal imagination, but also the Freudian psyche with its erotic and demonic fantasies. According to Tanizaki's literary aesthetic, then, the source of all fiction is this "deep well" of the unconscious, and the function of literature is to express the contents which spring from its dark interiors.

In this context, it is interesting to note the views of Mori Ōgai (1862-1922), the first great novelist and literary personage in Japan to import modern Western philosophical and aesthetic theories during the Meiji Restoration period. At one point early in his career Ōgai endeavored to interpret traditional Japanese artistic and literary ideas through the aesthetic Idealism propounded by Eduard von Hartmann in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*. Based on von Hartmann's aesthetic Idealism, Ōgai argued that the Unconscious is the source of all art and beauty. Ōgai then analyzed the Japanese aesthetic concept of *yūgen*, using it as synonymous with von Hartmann's notion of the Unconscious (Bowring 1979, pp.73-77 and 129-130).

In his chapter on "Truth and Beauty" from *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead also discusses the unconscious origins of art, stating:

Thus consciousness, spontaneity, and art are closely interconnected. But that art which arises within clear consciousness is only a specialization of the widely distributed art within dim consciousness or within the unconscious activities of experience (1967, p.270).

He adds:

In this way the work of art is a message from the Unseen. It unloosens depths of feeling from behind the frontier where precision of consciousness fails (1967, p. 271).

CONCLUSION

Tanizaki's aesthetic theory as expressed in this treatise *In Praise of Shadows* is that true beauty lies not in things themselves, but in *patterns of shadows* which they cast as they "recede into darkness, conjuring in their stead an aura of mystery and depth, of overtones but partly suggested." Moreover, he argues that the purpose of literature and the arts is to preserve the beauty of shadows and darkness so rapidly disappearing with the modernization of Japan. In such a manner Tanizaki reaffirms the primacy of *yūgen* or "shadowy darkness" as foremost among the Japanese canons of beauty and taste.

Throughout the present essay I have endeavored to interpret this key Japanese aesthetic concept of *yūgen* in terms of A.N. Whitehead's organismic metaphor of a "penumbral shadow"—visualized as a "finite focus of clarity" which "fades into an environment of vagueness stretching into the darkness of what is merely beyond." From the Whiteheadian perspective, then, the ultimate function of art and literature in the *yūgen* style of Japanese aesthetics is to manifest the beauty of hidden depths, by raising into clarity the vague and indistinct "overtones of feeling" from a dim penumbral region of shadows and darkness, which forever haunts those objects clearly illuminated in the foreground focus of attention.

NOTES

1. Takeuchi Yoshinori, "The Philosophy of Nishida" in *The Buddha Eye*, ed. Fredrick Frank (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), p.183. In this essay Takeuchi outlines the four major stages marking Nishida's long and prolific literary career, including: (I) The stage of "pure experience" introduced in *A Study of Good*, 1911 (II) The stage of "Voluntarism" introduced in *Intuition and Reflection In Self-Consciousness*, 1917 (III) The stage of *mu no basho* or the "locus of nothingness," signifying the shift from a Hegelian dialectical logic of "synthesis" to a Mahāyāna Buddhist logic of negatives, introduced in *From the Acting to the Seeing Self*, 1927, and (IV) The final stage applying the "locus of nothingness" to an explanation of the social-historical world. It is in this context that I refer to the "second" stage of Nishida's philosophical career.

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