

# APPENDIX: TWO ESSAYS BY NISHIDA KITARŌ

## 1. “THE BEAUTY OF CALLIGRAPHY” (*SHO NO BI* 書の美) (MAY 1930)<sup>1</sup>

西洋では書というものは美術の中へ入らないが、東洋では書は美術の大なる領分を占めて居ると云うことができる。書は如何なる種類の美術であろうか。美は主客の合一にあるのはいうまでもないが、芸術には客観的対象を写すということが主となって居るものと、主観的感情の発現ということが主となって居るものがある。

絵画とか彫刻とかいうものは前者に属し、音楽という如きものは後者に属するのである。建築の如きも感情の発現とは云い難いが、それが何等かの対象を写すというのでなく、一種のリズムをあらわすという点に於て、寧ろ後者に属すると考へべきでもあろう。

右の如く芸術を分類して見ると、書というものも何等かの対象を模するというのではなく、全く自己の心持を表現するものとして、音楽や建築と同じく、全くリズムの美をあらわすものということができるであろう。その静的な形のリズムという点に於ては建築に似て居るが、建築の如く実用に捉われたものでなく、全く自由なる生命のリズムの発現である。そういう点に於ては音楽に似て居る。つまり建築と音楽との中間に位するとでも考へべきであろうか。「凝結せる音楽」とでもいうべきであろう。

Whereas in the West calligraphy may not be considered to belong to the genre of fine arts, in the East it occupies a significant place. What kind of art is calligraphy? It goes without saying that beauty resides in the unity of the subject (i.e. the viewer) and the object, but art is of two types—what mainly copies or imitates the appearance of objective things, and what mainly expresses subjective emotions and feelings.

Such art forms as painting and sculpture belong to the first type, while music belongs to the second type of art. Although it is difficult to characterize architecture as the “expression of emotions and feelings,” it, too, belongs to the second type of art in that it expresses a certain rhythm, instead of copying some objective things out there.

If we classify art in this manner, calligraphy belongs to the second type, as what expresses the inner feelings rather than copies the appearances of things, and as such it expresses the beauty of the rhythm just as music and architecture. In this presenting the “static rhythm,” calligraphy resembles architecture, but unlike architecture, calligraphy is not constrained by utility but is an utterly free expression of the rhythm of life itself. In this sense, it resembles music. Calligraphy then stands somewhere in between architecture and music. One could perhaps call it “congealed music.”

ショーペンハウエルは音楽は物自体たる意志そのものを表現するものだから、最も深い芸術だと云った。リズムそのもの程、我々の自己そのものを表すものはない。リズムは我々の生命の本質だと云ってよい。音楽と書とは絵画や彫刻の如く対象に捕われることなく、直にリズムそのものを表現するものとして、我々の自己に最も直接した芸術と云ってよい。而もかかるリズムを静的に見る所に、芸術としての書の特殊な点があるのである。

それで書の価値というものは、所謂技巧というよりも、多分にその人によるものでないかと思う。無論、如何なる芸術もその芸術家自身の人格の発現でないものはなからう。併し絵画や彫刻の如きものはいうまでもなく、音楽の如きものであっても、客観的制約が多いと思う。然るに書に至っては、それが極めて少なく、筋肉感覚を通して、簡単なる線とか点とかより成る字形によって、自由に自己の生命の躍動を表現するのである。

## 2. “ON JAPANESE SHORT POETRY, TANKA” (TANKA NI TSUITE 短歌について) (JANUARY 1933)<sup>2</sup>

ベルグソンは『創造的進化』に於て、動物的生命から植物的生命、さては物体運動の如きものに至るまで、物質面を破って進展する飛躍の生命の種々なる形態なることを論じて、人間の生命は生命の大なる息吹であると言って居る。

我々の生命と考えられるものは、深い噴火口の底から吹き出される大なる生命の焰という如きものでなければならぬ。詩とか歌とかいうものはかかる生命の表現ということが出来る、かかる焰の光ということが出来る。物質面に突き当たった生命の飛躍が千状万態を呈する如く、生命には無限の表現がなければならぬ。熹微たる暁の光も清く美しい。天を焦がす夕焼も荘厳だ。

It was Schopenhauer who said that music, as expressing the will of the “thing in itself” (*Ding an sich*), is the profoundest form of art. Nothing expresses our being (*jiko*) better than rhythm. Rhythm is the essence of life. Music and calligraphy, without being confined by external objects and unlike paintings and sculptures, directly express the very rhythm of being, and as such they are the art forms most immediate to our being. Moreover, the unique feature of calligraphy qua art consists in how this dynamic rhythm is viewed in its stillness.

This leads me to think that if we speak of such a thing as the value of calligraphy, it derives not so much from the technical merit as from the personality of the artist. Certainly, every art in one way or other is an expression of the artist as a person. In contrast to such art forms as paintings and sculptures, and even music, which are bound by many objective restrictions, in calligraphy such objective restrictions are quite few. Through the muscular sense, a calligrapher freely expresses one's dynamic impetus of life (*élan vital*) in letters that are composed of simple dots and lines.

In his *Creative Evolution*, Henri Bergson advanced his view that everything from animal life to plant life and even the material movements are but various modes of vital force (*élan vital*) that unfolds by piercing through the material crust; in this regard, he describes human life as the great emanation of this life force.

Human life is like the flames of great life that erupt from the dark depths of a volcano. Poems of all kinds can be described as the expressions of such vibrant life—the radiant rays of the volcanic flames. Just as the leap of vital force that crashes into matter refracts and sparkles in myriad directions, so are infinite the expressions of life. The faint glow of the dawn is pure and beautiful; the evening sunset that scorches the heavens is solemn and majestic.

私は何でも西洋の文物が東洋のものに勝れると考えるものでもないが、さらばと云って何でも東洋のものでなければならぬと考えるものでもない。東洋の文化は東洋の文化として、西洋の文化は西洋の文化として、それぞれ他の有せない人間性の一面を現すものとして貴いのである。西洋画によって南画の美を現すことができないと共に、南画によって西洋画の美を現すことはできない。而も南画は南画として、西洋画は西洋画としてそれぞれに美しいのである。自由な豊富な偉大なる芸術として、我々は西洋画の前に頭を下げねばならないと共に、南画は南画として西洋画によって現すことのできない深い人間性の一面を現して居ると思う。

我国の短歌とか俳句とかいうものは、文学上如何なる意義を有し、他の文学に比して如何なる位置に置くべきかの論は別として、兎に角ユニークなものであるということが出来る。支那の五言絶句というものも、短詩の形式に於てよく発達したものと思うが、内容によっては俳句の如きものによって、同じ内容を一層よく言い表し得るとも考えることができる。

例えば、唐詩の

「反照入閨巷  
憂来誰共語  
古道少人行  
秋風動禾黍」

という詩は

「この道や  
行く人なしに  
秋の暮」

という句と殆んどその内容を同じくするものといひ得るであろう。

I do not consider things Western to be indiscriminately superior to things Eastern, nor do I merely insist on the merit of things Eastern. Both Eastern and Western cultures are precious because each expresses the aspects of humanity that the other does not. Just as an artist cannot express the beauty of “*nanga*”<sup>23</sup> by a Western-style painting, so it is impossible to capture the essence of Western painting by the medium of *nanga*. Moreover, *nanga* drawings and Western paintings are each in their own way beautiful. While we admire Western paintings as the art form that embodies the free and great human spirit, we must also recognize the *nanga* drawings to reveal yet another profound dimension of humanity that cannot be depicted by Western paintings.

Putting aside the discussion of the literary merit of the Japanese *tanka* (the thirty-one-syllable poems) and *haiku* (the seventeen-syllable poems), or where they should belong in the genre of literature, we can nonetheless say that these poetic forms are unique. The Chinese poetic form of quatrain with five-characters per line (*gogon zekku*) is a nicely perfected short poetic form, but depending on the content, some of them can be more succinctly expressed by *haiku*. Take, for example, the poem of the Tang period:

“The evening sunlight shines upon a hamlet;

The sense of melancholy takes over me, but is there anyone to talk with?

Hardly a soul travels on the old country road.

Only the autumn wind moves the head of rice plants and millet leaves.”<sup>24</sup>

The content of this poem comes very close to the *haiku*:

“Ah, this path!

not a soul is traversing—  
the autumn dusk is falling.”<sup>25</sup>

西洋でも二三行位の短詩というものはないではないが、多くは概念的であって、教訓的とか風刺的とかいうものが多い。短詩の形式によってのみ言い表される芸術的内容を言い表したものとて我国の短歌の如くそれ自身の芸術的領域を有つものは少ない。短詩の形式によって人生を表現するということは、単に人生を短詩の形式によって表現するということではなく、人生には唯、短詩の形式によってのみ掴み得る人生の意義というものがあることを意味するのである。

短詩の形式によって人生を掴むということは、人生を現在の中心から掴むということではなければならぬ、刹那の一点から見るということではなければならぬ。人生は固より一つである。併し具体的にして動き行く人生は、之を環境から見るということと、之を飛躍的生命の尖端から掴むということとは同一ではない。そのいずれより見るかによって、人生は異なった観を呈し、我々は異なった意義に於て生きるということとなるのである。

過去を忘れ未来を思わず、現在に即して見、現在に即して行なうというのが我々日本人の特徴である様に思われる。そこに日本文化の長所もあれば、欠点もあるのであろう。俳句は短歌よりも更に短いものであるが、俳句には俳句の領域があり、短歌には短歌の領域がある。私は短歌によっては極めて内面的なるものが言い表されると思う。短歌は情緒の律動を現すものとして、勝義に於て叙情的というべきであらう。

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嘗てホメロスを読んで、私はその素朴なる中に、能く深い人情の機微に触れ、且つ事物の描写の精緻なるに驚いた。ホメロス以来文学は如何程進んだのであろう。シルレルがホメロスは詩の海だと云ったのも尤もだと思った。

Certainly, there is the tradition of short poetry in the West consisting of two or three lines. But most of them are conceptual in tone, and many are didactic or satirical. Short poetic forms that can boast its own artistic merit, comparable to the Japanese *tanka*, which deftly expresses artistic contents possible only in short poetic form, are scarce. To express life-experience in a short poem does not simply mean to express it in short poetic form, but rather that there is a significance of our lives that can only be captured by short poems.

To grasp life-experience by way of short poetic form (“*tanshi*”) is to grasp it from the center of the present moment. It is to view life from the very moment of experience. Life, surely, is one whole unity, but in grasping this concrete and vibrant life, it is one thing to look at it from the environment; it is quite another to grasp it at the very tip of a vividly pulsating life. Depending on which angle we take to view life, it presents a different vista, and we actually live a different significance of life.

To forget the past and not think about the future, but look at reality at the given moment and act accordingly appears to be characteristic of Japanese mentality. I suppose both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Japanese culture derive from this mentality. Haiku is even shorter than *tanka*, but it has its own domain as art form, just as *tanka* has its own. I think that one can express a very profound inner feeling in *tanka*. *Tanka*, as that which retains the rhythm of emotion, is essentially “lyrical.”

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Years ago when I read Homer, I discovered that deep and subtle furrows of human feelings were so deftly described by his simple verses, and I was surprised by how precise and detailed his descriptions of things and events were. It makes me wonder how much progress literature has made since Homer. I fully see why Schiller called Homer “the sea of poetry.”

万葉というものに就ても同様の感なきを得ない。その中には今日青年男女をして正にその心緒を述べしめるも、これ以上にはと思わしめるものもある。歌に於て万葉を師とすべきはいうまでもない。併し徒らに万葉を模倣することは真に万葉を学ぶものではない。万葉に学ぶべき所はその純真なる所になければならぬ。素朴的と云い客観的というも、既に一種の外殻たるに過ぎない。殊更らしい万葉調は却って非万葉的というべきである。

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我国の短歌というものは形式が簡単であるだけに何人も容易に試み得る如くに考えられる、併しそれだけに却って内容の充実したもの、鍛錬せられたものでなければならぬ。

I cannot help but feel the same way about the *Man'yō* poetry collection. Some of the poems compiled in this collection perfectly capture the feelings of love between young men and women of today, and they can hardly be surpassed by today's poems. There is no question that the *Man'yō* collection should be considered the master teacher of poetry composition, but if we end up merely imitating the *Man'yō* style, we are actually not learning from it. What we must learn from the *Man'yō* poetry is the purity and sincerity of human heart that is at work behind the poetry composition. Just to praise the *Man'yō* tone as "simple" or "objective" is to miss its spirit, and we gain nothing but a dead husk. Overt imitation of the *Man'yō* style is actually to miss the spirit of the *Man'yō* poetry.

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Many are under the impression that anyone can compose the Japanese *tanka* poem, because of the simplicity of its form. The truth is exactly the opposite. Precisely because of the brevity of the poetic form, its content has to be richly developed, thoroughly refined, and carefully wrought out.

## NOTES

- 1 Collected in the *Zoku shisō to taiken* 『続思索と体験』 (*Contemplation and Experience II*), NKZ 12.150–151/NKZ-N 7.331-332. These two essays are translated by M. Yusa.
- 2 NKZ 13.130–132/NKZ-N 11.162–164.
- 3 It is also known as "*bunjinga*," the so-called amateur paintings drawn by the literati. This genre of painting became popular in the eighteenth century during the Edo period. Celebrated *bunjinga* artists included Ike no Taiga and Yosa no Buson.
- 4 This poem, "Autumn Day" 秋日, is by Geng Wei (J. Kōi) 歌津 (734?-?).
- 5 Matsuo Bashō composed this verse on the lunar calendar, September 26, 1694, about a month before his death.