

# The Research of the Comparison of the Aesthetic Isomorphism of Zen Poems, Zen Tea and Simple Landscape

Deng Tingyin

*Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, Zigongshi 643000, China*

**ABSTRACT.** *This passage analyzes the aesthetic isomorphism of Zen poems, tea and Simple landscape and further develops the core of why the aesthetics has its strong vitality, from the aspects of the relationship of the mutual development of the three and the influencing factor of them. And on this basis, this passage analyzes the isomorphism of the three based on the ideology and forms. This passage expects to build a bridge of the different forms of Zen aesthetics and to explore the law of the common aesthetic feeling that surpasses history and forms so that we can pave the way for the research of the Zen aesthetics afterwards and bring in more inspirations.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Zen poems; Zen tea; Simple landscape; Isomorphism*

## 1. Introduction

“Zen” originated from the Sanskrit word “Dhyāna”, which was translated as “Zenna” by pronunciation and was abbreviated as “Zen”. “Zen” means a practice method of Buddhist monks at first and is one of the basic skills. The aesthetics of Zen belongs to the aesthetics of life, which is reflected in the connotation of “Zen”. The connotation of “Zen” includes 2 aspects as the ontology category. The first is “a random, natural, comfortable, real, peaceful but lively state”, which is what we call “the state of Zen”<sup>1</sup>; the second is an ideal personality, which is “the original face” and final purpose of the people in the world in the theory of Zen. The core of the thought of Zen is the theory raised by Huineng that the way is found out by our hearts and that the way to find out is actually Zen’s instant understanding to the meaning of life. And it’s also one of the experience activities of people’s self-value and life meaning, which is in the category of the theory of aesthetic experience.

In Indian Buddhism, there has never been a Buddhist genre or religion which specially mainly promotes Zen. It was not until Buddhism entered China that the situation had started to change. I think, this happened because the culture of China benefits the development of Zen better. For example, the class of scholar-bureaucrats had close contact with Zen monks and Zen had more containers

to utilize, such as the Zen poems, Zen tea and simple landscape that we mentioned in this passage. And they are all the containers and forms of Zen.

After my research, I found out that the aesthetic of Zen nowadays still has more for us to explore. In many researches and books about specific questions, the scholars emphasized the relationship of method and Zen much. On the contrary, it was the Zen's literary proposition and containers of its forms and the mutual relationship of influence of Zen and the forms of other arts that were ignored. Some scholars take Zen poems as Zen's philosophical extension, and some scholars analyzed the spiritual original source of the culture of Zen tea and the way of tea and the influence that Zen has on the simple landscape, but they did not express clearly the nature of aesthetics and mutual relationship of Zen poems, Zen tea and the simple landscape. And so I came up with the idea that the spiritual temperament of Zen poems and Zen tea and the simple landscape of the Japanese classical gardens should have some aesthetic isomorphism in their artistic conception.

Usually, isomorphism has 2 meanings: one is the isomorphism under the circumstance that different arts didn't influence or borrow from each other and this is self-evident. The other is that the common things that were formed as a result of being influenced or offering to learn or borrow. The "isomorphism" we refer to nowadays is the second one, which was built on the foundation of the artistic traits of the original Zen. And researching the aesthetic isomorphism of the three is the original intention of this passage.

## 2. Zen and Poems

The container and the form of the Zen poems that hold "feeling" as its core is the main subject of research of the Zen aesthetics. Yongjia's *Song. To Prove the Way* talks about Zen with poems; Shitou's *The Kinship of the Three* expresses the Zen concept that things and hearts are combined and things and the reasons behind them are one; the monk of Ming dynasty Guanheng pointed out in *The Preface of Ancient Poems* that poems illustrating Zen are the same, but they must make senses and they are only different in the senses they make, which is the so-called "The poems illustrating Zen are the same, but their senses are different." Mr. Qian Zhongshu said in *Talking about Arts*, "Zen and poems are the what they are; the feeling is the ability. The places where they place emphasis are different but the effect is the same. After feeling, what Zen is can not be put into words, but the poems must be. But in order to feel, the initial intention is the same."

The traditional Chinese way to observe things is to observe things subjectively and observe things objectively. Observe things subjectively and the things will show in the way that the observer feels; observe things objectively and the things will show themselves with no subjective feelings. But the way that Zen observes things is a third way to observe things. It is not the theory of observing, but the theory of feeling in things' own places---to see things (feel in the thing's own place) with instincts to prove the real way that exists everywhere in the universe, which is "the state of feeling like things themselves". I think, the view about the world like this

directly influenced the creation of Zen poems, which we can see from the careful analyses of Zen poems by ancient Zen masters and recent literati, who not only paid much attention to the content of Zen poetry and expressing their emotions by talking about their ambitions, but also emphasized the artistic forms and the artfulness of the language of Zen poetry.

Throughout the related researches on Zen poems, Zhang Bowei raised three traits that came into being on account that the form and the content of the five generations in the late Tang dynasty were influenced by the Zen of Buddhism. Zhou Yukai analyzed the conspicuous feature specifically that the poetics in Song dynasty made poems with Zen ideas. Cheng Yalin analyzed the influence that Zen had on the general style of the poets' poems and many aspects were influenced.

### **3. Zen and Tea**

Zen and tea are two different cultural phenomena, but they were combined into the culture of Zen tea, which is a great contribution of the Chinese nation to the world civilization. The history of Chinese tea culture and Zen are very long. They are mutually reasons and results and pushes each other forward. They are both the intelligence and art of life, whose real purpose is to get closer to life and experience life.

Tea is not only simply a beverage. It is with higher spiritual value. Tea is connected to the six arts and a container of Chinese traditional culture. The spirit of tea is the core and soul of the way of Tea, such as "clarity, politeness, happiness and authenticity"----the spirit of the Tea Arts Association of the Republic of China. The authenticity is the authentic truth and the authentic knowledge. The supreme kindness is the combination of the authentic truth and the authentic knowledge. The state of supreme kindness is to preserve nature, get rid of the material desires, not be seduced by the benefits and disadvantages, study the nature of things and keep improving, which is the same as the Zen's theory of seeking the truth.

Poet Huang Tingjian in Northern Song Dynasty was not only a famous poet, but also a tea lover and a Buddhist. He always combined the Zen theory of Buddhism with tea when creating, leaving the Zen tea culture in Northern Song dynasty completely exposed.

Zen emphasizes feeling the heart to see the nature and becoming immortal by feeling. Confucianism emphasizes the doctrine of mean thought and refining oneself from the inside. These are the same in nature as the process of tasting the tea peacefully. Lao Zhuang's theory that the nature and humanity are one and the theory of doing nothing and forgetting oneself can also be understood as another "Zen understanding" in the behavior of thinking. In this perspective, the purpose of the three are the same. In the same way, the way of tea demands people to surpass the enjoyment of the sense organs to reach an ultimate experience, which also emphasizes the harmony between the bodies and hearts of human beings and the nature. Therefore, tea, Zen and Confucianism are the same in spirit.

#### **4. Zen Poems and Zen Tea**

Drinking tea is a high culture, so every tea meeting was also a poem. meeting. The poetry and the tea are mixed. Maybe they were bound to meet. The way of tea spread out through the mouths of celebrities and literati. Poets and famous literati always got together to taste tea and make remarks, so the tea meeting became the meeting point of poetry, tea and Zen. Zen has its artistic conception, correspondingly, Zen also has its own, which is to have some feelings while tasting tea. In Zen, people combined the artistic conceptions of tea and Zen. They understand Zen with tea, to help develop Zen with tea and then combine them as one, and so came the culture of Zen tea.

#### **5. Zen Tea and Simple Landscape**

The Zen theory of “Pass the spirit with heart, with no words to describe it” has a still and calm mind state, which is exactly the state and height that simple landscape wanted to reach. Simple landscape is the essence of Japanese classical garden. She extended the minimalism of the Zen aesthetics to the fullest. Her spiritual origin is Zen. The reason why the simple landscape could be developed is the development of Zen of Buddhism and the way of tea, which put the cultural meanings of Zen and tea into the simple landscape.

The simple landscape and the culture of Zen tea borrowed from each other, influenced each other and combined each other during their. development. After their long-term development, the artistic state and spiritual connotation of Zen tea culture were brought out.. The Japanese tea garden is one kind of gardens of simple landscape. It is not only a place to refine oneself, but also a sacred place to practice Zen, so the Japanese tea gardens always have a very strong artistic state of Zen.

The simple landscape emphasizes the “emptiness”, with emptier lawns and a garden built with natural materials. Whether it’s the visual sense, auditory sense or the spiritual feeling, they can all experience the calmness, peace and quietness that the Zen culture promotes. Therefore, the simple landscape tea gardens do not only play the role of building an atmosphere of Zen state, but also carries the eagerness of people’s spiritual world and value. People use the material state to express their eagerness inside and spiritual pursuit.

#### **6. The Analysis of the Isomorphism of Zen Poems, Zen Tea and the Simple Landscape**

(1) Poems for freshness, tea for clarity, scenery for cleanness

Guanheng emphasized that poetry should be clear in meaning, to show. the clarity of the temperament and the otherworldly life attitude and the aesthetic taste of Buddhism. The nature of its heart is clear and bright, with no worries, and is very clear, which is the state of life that Zen pursues. The Zen poems are insipid and natural. They show an indifferent interest of Zen and a comfortable mood through a

lonely state of Zen, quiet, comfortable and calm nature and the distant scenery. Some of the poems show an otherworldly feeling that is far from the reality and an artistic style of “quietness, depth, clarity and distance”.

Now let's talk about Zen tea. Understanding Zen with tea, Helping develop Zen with tea, combining Zen and tea as one, forming the culture of Zen tea, mental balance, meditation, forgetting oneself, surpassing the mundane world can only be done by being quiet. What the simple landscape pursues is to be otherworldly, to be clear in thoughts. Clarity is the practice, which means showing with no more things to hide. The three containers of Zen make the observer quiet and clean, concentrate on himself and inspire intelligence and so the heart of Zen will come out. We can see that the clarity, quietness and cleanness of the three all hold Zen as its source, but they are different in forms. The combination of poems, tea and Zen reflected the honest and upright state of mind without desires. And this is the aesthetic isomorphism.

(2) “Nothing” is the quietness

Zen master Damo demands the monks to calm their hearts, stop feeling the outside environment completely and enter the state of mind of forgetting themselves. The brain of every one of us is filled with studies, knowledge and differences, which blocked our nature. To get rid of “what I insist on”, “my heart”, empty “myself”, “clear myself” and get along with others calmly is the trait of the Zen's theory of passing the spirit with heart.

Zen means nothing, and Zen poems have no heart. “Nothing” is a word that the monks always wrote in history, and it always shows up in Zen poems. “Nothing” doesn't mean something exists or not but means absolute no difference, which is the reaction of the view of the world of Buddhism, and so “nothing” means quietness. The world has no energy conversion with the original body. For example, a monk faces a wall, without any activity, which, therefore, looks very boring. The biggest trait of the simple landscape is “nothing”, which shows a state of clarity. It is as quiet as the dead wood and cold mountains and as clear as the still water; the nature of tea is also high and quiet and otherworldly. From the ancient times, many Zen poems fit the spirit that Zen and tea are one and show the charm of the connection of the spirit and material under the cover of the simple language, fully manifesting the Zen state of “nothing”.

(3) Words cannot tell the meaning fully, and the tea cannot be fried to boil, and the landscape should be left blank

The total amount of words, the profundity and the richness of human emotions and thinking and humans' spiritual world's eagerness towards the state of eternity are full of conflicts, therefore, “there must be unspeakable truths and unspeakable things, and we will confront their images, but the reasons and the things are all laid bare before the people.” The words cannot tell the meaning, but the meaning must be put to words. In this case, we need to make some settings on the form. In *Send Master Cen Liao*, Su Shi pointed out, “In order to make words artful, you need to empty yourself and be quiet. Be quiet and you will know everything's change, and

empty yourself so you can take in everything.” The “emptiness” here means making a more wonderful and endless images in poetry creation with the blanks left on purpose, which means the words cannot explain the meaning to the fullest. IN the simple landscape, we make blanks with white sand, performing the beauty of imperfections and quietness. The landscape shows quietness and “emptiness”, which means not insisting, whether it’s beautiful or ugly; emptiness means things change from limitations to endlessness, which is the impressive simplicity and quietness. Fry the tea until it boils three times. Whe it boils the third time, it’s time to put the water scooped out before back into the pot to make it stop boiling. These arts of sparing some force, not overdoing and not telling the meaning to the fullest are all the outside appearances of Zen. They are just different in forms.

#### (4) Let go

Letting go means letting go of the worries, which is much emphasized during the practice of Zen. Let go of the inner six roots, outer six dusts and middle six senses. You have to let go of them whether it’s your body or heart or the world. Because people can feel much more relaxed only when they let go of everything. Look at the world’s blue skies and green seas, beautiful mountains and clear waters, nice weather and peaceful winds, shining moon and twinkling stars and then you can have a good mood and make good poems like “There are many beautiful flowers in spring and the shining moon in fall, and there are cool winds in summer and beautiful snow in winter. Even poet Lu You also said, “I wanted to add to the quietness after return, so I fry the tea before the candle”, from which we can see that even tasting the tea also emphasizes “letting go”---letting go of the work in hand and relaxing to ease the nerves and the imprisoned nature. The simple landscape is the perfect place of “letting go”, where we are surrounded by sand and stones and the whole place is quiet, mysterious and empty. When people are in a lonely and quiet place, they must be able to feel the thing that touches their hearts, and that is Zen.

## 7. Summary

This passage analyzed the aesthetic isomorphism of Zen poems, tea and. the simple landscape with the mutual relationship of the development of the three and the influencing factors to better understand the core why the aesthetics of Zen has strong vitality. Based on this, the passage analyzed the ideological isomorphism and the isomorphism based on their forms. This passage expects to build a bridge of the different forms of Zen aesthetics and to explore the law of the common aesthetic feeling that surpasses history and forms so that we can pave the way for the research of the Zen aesthetics afterwards and bring in more inspirations.

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