

## Preface

The term “globalization” was coined in the previous century to explain the relaxation of border controls and the promotion of interactivity between nations. Nowadays, the term is commonly subdivided into the three main categories of economic globalization, political globalization, and cultural globalization, although it is more often used in relation to international trade and communications.

Despite its short history as a noun, the start of globalization is generally attributed to advances in transportation technology, such as the steam locomotive and steamship, and the telecommunications infrastructure; both of which are comparatively modern advances. Some scholars, however, prefer to trace its origins back much further to the European Age of Discovery in the 15th century.

However, if we take the word “globalization” at face value to mean “integration on a global scale,” then it is possible to trace it back to the moment when the human race took its first step outside of Africa and began to spread throughout the world. From this point of view, the true meaning of globalization is buried in cultural exchange, not in trade and communications.

This book concentrates on the cultural side of globalization under the name of “transculturalism” in order to separate its cultural aspect from its broader meaning. The aim of the book is to put forth the idea that although there is a strong tendency for us to believe that cultures evolved independently and are completely different from each other, they all share certain underlying similarities that link them together. In many cases, the cultural elements prevalent in our own nations originated in other countries and were adapted to fit local tastes over time. In other cases, certain cultural aspects would not exist were it not for pre-existing cultures. For example, were it not for the culture of Ancient Greece, the Italian Renaissance would never have occurred.

But, more than anything, the book is designed to emphasize the fact that despite our own national identities, beneath the surface we are all members of the same human race, and understanding and keeping an open mind about other cultures is the most important form of globalization.

And lastly, please note that all opinions stated within the book are mine. Hopefully, you will be able to find points of contention so that you can form your own opinions.

Christopher Belton

# TRANSCULTURE

Transcending Time, Region and Ethnicity

## Table of Contents

### Unit 1

## The Concept of Beauty ..... 8

「美」の概念

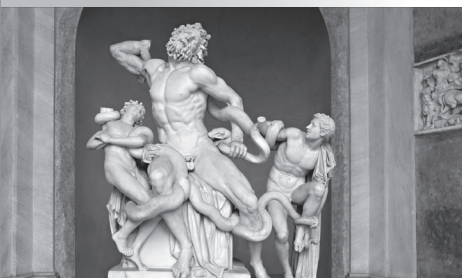


### Unit 2

## Greek Mythology

Stories of Gods and Humans ..... 14

ギリシア神話 — 神々と人間の物語



### Unit 3

## The Bible

Mainstay of Christianity ..... 22

聖書 — キリスト教の支柱

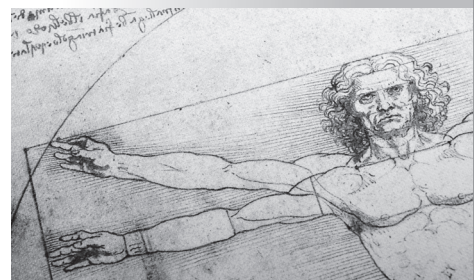


### Unit 4

## Renaissance

Transcending Cultural Movements ..... 28

ルネサンス — ジャンルを横断するムーブメント



### Unit 5

## The Structure of Fictional Literature ..... 34

物語の構造



### Unit 6

## The Theater and Acting ..... 40

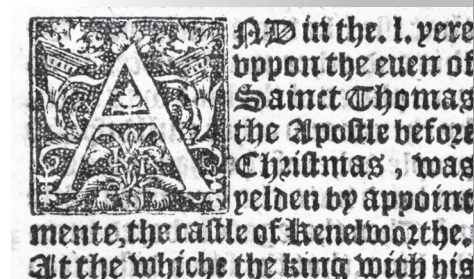
「演じる」という行為



### Unit 7

## The English Language ..... 46

英語の変遷





## Unit 8

### The Rise of Cities ..... 52

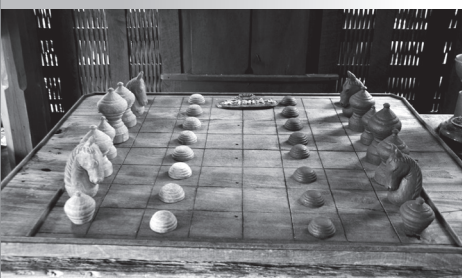
都市の隆盛



## Unit 9

### Trusting in Recorded History ..... 58

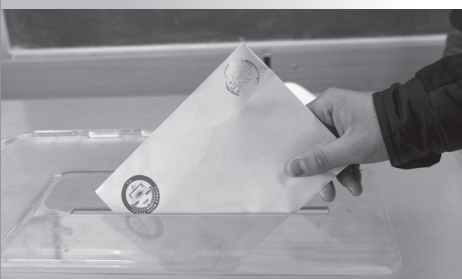
歴史という記録の信頼性



## Unit 10

### Battles on Board Games ..... 64

盤上の戦い —— チェス/将棋/チャトランガ...



## Unit 11

### How Democracy Works ..... 70

民主主義という制度

## Unit 12

### Marriage and the State ..... 76

結婚と国家



## Unit 13

### The Meaning of Prayers ..... 82

「祈り」のもつ意味



## Unit 14

### Mankind and Laughter ..... 88

笑いと人間



## Unit 15

### The Importance of Discipline ..... 94

「しつけ＝規律」の重要性





# The Concept of Beauty

## 「美」の概念

「美」とはいったい何か。わたしたちはどのような基準に基づいて、あるものを「美しい」と感じるのか。ひいては絶対的な美の基準なるものは存在するのか。

古代ギリシアや日本の「侘び／寂び」を例に、時代や地域によって異なるさまざまな「美」のありかたを概観する。

### Keywords

symmetry/asymmetry    regularity    simplicity  
imperfection    impermanence    incompleteness



A Zen rock garden in Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto

DL 02 ~ 08    CD1-02 ~    CD1-08

### 1 *Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*

This proverb was first recorded in the English language in its current form in the 19th century. However, the concept of people viewing beauty differently from a subjective point of view has been around in most cultures of the world since ancient times. But what exactly is beauty, and is it really subjective? The definition in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “the qualities in a person or a thing that give pleasure to the senses or the mind.” This definition, however, fails to mention whether there is a universal standard for beauty, or whether each individual person views beauty based on a totally different set of criteria. Some of the arts seem to suggest the latter if we consider the fact that everybody has their own favorite piece of music or painting that they consider to be beautiful. Nature, on the other hand, consistently comes up with scenes that are universally considered to be beautiful.

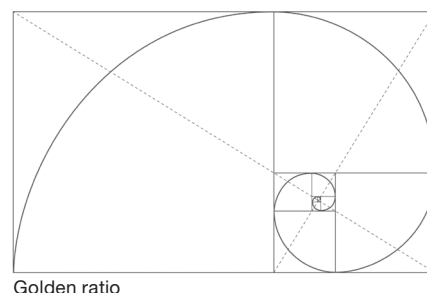
2 There is little doubt that physical beauty—or the beauty inherent with the physical appearance of people—is subjective. The ideal “beautiful woman” differs between cultures, and in many cases is based on fashion. Some cultures cherish obesity, while others believe that body mutilation is the epitome of beauty. The women of the Mursi tribe of Ethiopia, for example, slice open their bottom lips and insert discs made from clay or wood; a custom that stretches back to at least 8700 BC. Body art in the form of piercings and tattoos is also increasingly recognized as a sign of beauty in many countries of the world today, although there are also many people in these same countries who continue to disagree with this assessment.



Mursi woman with lip plate



25 [3] Certain ancient Greek philosophers, including Pythagoras, believed that beauty was based on symmetry and regularity, and they were therefore convinced that mathematics was at the core of true beauty. This concept was triggered by them noticing that objects proportioned in accordance with the golden ratio appeared to be more attractive than objects that were more random in shape. Symmetry and regularity also seem to play a part in physical beauty. At the end of the 19th century, British anthropologist Francis Galton discovered that “averaging” out human faces by overlaying them to form a composite image achieved a level of regularity that was more attractive than each of the individual components.



[4] Despite this, there are many forms of art that are considered beautiful yet are far removed from symmetry and regularity. Some examples of this include Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, and many other forms of modern art. And, one of the most profound concepts of beauty lies not in symmetry, conformity and regularity, but in imperfection, impermanence and incompleteness; *wabi-sabi*.



Parthenon in Athens, Greece



Picasso Avignon Ladies at MoMA, New York

[5] *Wabi-sabi* is a Buddhist concept introduced to Japan from China, where it evolved into a distinctly Japanese aesthetic concept. The word *wabi* originally referred to the loneliness of nature and *sabi* to something that is minimalistic or withered. The meaning gradually changed over time, and by the 14th century *wabi* meant “rustic simplicity” and *sabi* “beauty” or “serenity.” Nowadays this concept is usually described as “natural simplicity” or “flawed beauty.”

[6] *Wabi-sabi* is based on the three Buddhist marks of existence known as *sanboin*, which are impermanence, suffering and emptiness. It was thought that understanding the beauty contained within emptiness and imperfection was the first step to achieving a state of enlightenment. *Wabi-sabi* places the emphasis on simplicity,

economy, modesty, asymmetry and asperity, and the main message that it includes is that nothing is finished, nothing is perfect and nothing lasts forever. A withered autumn leaf, for example, could be considered to be *wabi-sabi* because it expresses the beauty of nature while at the same time emphasizing its flaws and impermanence. In its artistic form, *wabi-sabi* is best expressed in pottery. Simple asymmetric bowls glazed in unsophisticated base colors and exuding a rustic style of imperfection stimulate the mind into considering the beauty of the three marks of existence laid down in *sanboin*.



Black Raku Tea Bowl, Kuroraku type

[7] Whether the true essence of beauty lies in mathematics, as believed by the ancient Greeks, or in the aesthetic emptiness of *wabi-sabi*, as believed by the Japanese, remains open to conjecture, but one thing is certain.

Beauty will always remain in the eye of the beholder.

## Notes

[2] **mutilation** 切断 / **epitome** 典型 / **Mursi tribe** ムルシ族 (エチオピアの少数民族)

[3] **Pythagoras** ピタゴラス (紀元前570頃 - 紀元前495頃。ギリシアの哲学者、数学者) / **golden ratio** 黄金比 (美術や建築などで美しいとされる比率。1: (1+√5) / 2 = 1:1.618) / **Francis Galton** フランシス・ゴルトン (1822-1911。イギリスの人類学者、統計学者、遺伝学者) / **composite image** 合成画像

[4] **Fauvism** フォービズム (20世紀初頭のフランスにおける芸術運動。自由な色彩を特徴とし野獣派ともよばれる。代表的な画家はアンリ・マティス、ジョルジュ・ルオー、ラウル・デュフィなど) / **Cubism** キュビズム (20世紀初頭にパブロ・ピカソとジョルジュ・ブラックによって始められた芸術運動。さまざまな角度から見たものをひとつの画面に立体 (cube) 的に

収めることによって伝統的な写真から脱却し、その後の現代美術に大きな影響を与えた) / **Expressionism** 表現主義 (20世紀初頭にドイツから始まった芸術運動。感情を作品に表現することを中心に据え、文学・音楽・演劇・映画にも広がっていった) / **Futurism** 未来派 (20世紀初頭にイタリアで始まった前衛的な芸術運動。芸術を含めた旧来の世界を否定し、機械文明による新時代のスピードやダイナミズムを礼賛した) / **conformity** 調和

[5] **minimalistic** 最小限主義的な / **withered** 枯れた

[6] **sanboin** 三法印 (仏教の存在論における3つの印「諸行無常」「一切行苦」「諸法無我」を指す) / **enlightenment** 悟り / **asperity** 粗さ、凹凸 / **glaze** 釉薬 (うわぐすり) を塗る / **exude** にじみ出させる

[7] **conjecture** 推測

## Comprehension Check

**A** Read the sentences below about the passage and circle T (True) or F (False).

1. The idea that whether something is beautiful or not depends upon how you see it subjectively originated as recently as the 19th century. T / F
2. It is hard to define the universal standard for beauty, though there are some things universally considered to be beautiful. T / F
3. Some parts of the body artificially transformed by cutting and painting are sometimes regarded as beautiful. T / F
4. Some forms of beauty are considered to be based on regularity while others on irregularity. T / F
5. The concept of *wabi-sabi* is originally and exclusively unique to Japanese mentality and culture. T / F

**B** Select the best answer for each question.

1. According to the passage, ancient Greek philosophers believed beauty was based on
  - (A) symmetry and regularity
  - (B) regularity and simplicity
  - (C) simplicity and asymmetry
  - (D) asymmetry and modesty
2. What is indicated about *wabi-sabi*?
  - (A) It has nothing to do with any kind of religion.
  - (B) It was initially introduced to Asian countries from Japan.
  - (C) It gradually formed into an aesthetic concept specific to Japan.
  - (D) It is based on the countless Buddhist marks of existence.
3. Which is NOT the main message *wabi-sabi* includes?
  - (A) Nothing is finished.
  - (B) Nothing is perfect.
  - (C) Nothing lasts forever.
  - (D) Nothing is asymmetric.

## Writing a Summary

**A** Determine the main idea of the following paragraphs.

Paragraph 1

Paragraph 2

Paragraph 3

Paragraph 4

Paragraph 5

Paragraph 6

Paragraph 7

**B** Summarize the passage in about 50 words.

The concept of beauty is ...

## Extensive Learning

Discuss and share your opinion on “The Concept of Beauty” with a partner.