
The Beauty and Burden in Japanese Snowscape Pictures

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abstract

The beauty of snow has been an important subject of Japanese arts for a long time, as well as in other East Asian countries. Japan has a rich diversity in the climate of each region, and the most obvious difference from the other Asian countries is the heavy winter snowfalls in mainly the regions by the Sea of Japan. However, images of heavy snowfall seem to be uncommon in Japanese paintings until the 19th century, around the same time, some ukiyo-e prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige that depict the burden of heavy snowfall attracted city dwellers. And after a while, the documentary photography of snowy regions by Hiroshi Hamaya was published and fully appreciated in the mid-20th century.

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on a feature of landscape representation in Japan by focusing on snowscapes and to trace the moments of transition in the three types of pictures: ink painting, ukiyo-e print, and photography. I assume that the uniqueness of Japanese snowscape pictures is noticed in sensitivity to the weight of snow rather than to the coldness. Tracing the transitions in snowscapes focusing on the weight of snow reveals not only the artistic sensitivity to a feature of climate in Japan, but also the tendency of the artistic sensitivity toward the description of immediate experience of artist that appears in the relationship between human and nature.