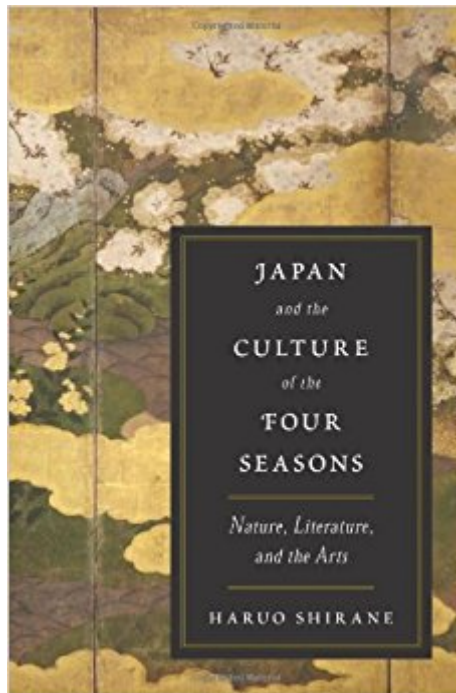


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Japan And The Culture Of The Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, And The Arts



Synopsis

Elegant representations of nature and the four seasons populate a wide range of Japanese genres and media—from poetry and screen painting to tea ceremonies, flower arrangements, and annual observances. In *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, Haruo Shirane shows how, when, and why this practice developed and explicates the richly encoded social, religious, and political meanings of this imagery. Refuting the belief that this tradition reflects Japan's agrarian origins and supposedly mild climate, Shirane traces the establishment of seasonal topics to the poetry composed by the urban nobility in the eighth century. After becoming highly codified and influencing visual arts in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the seasonal topics and their cultural associations evolved and spread to other genres, eventually settling in the popular culture of the early modern period. Contrasted with the elegant images of nature derived from court poetry was the agrarian view of nature based on rural life. The two landscapes began to intersect in the medieval period, creating a complex, layered web of competing associations. Shirane discusses a wide array of representations of nature and the four seasons in many genres, originating in both the urban and rural perspective: textual (poetry, chronicles, tales), cultivated (gardens, flower arrangement), material (kimonos, screens), performative (noh, festivals), and gastronomic (tea ceremony, food rituals). He reveals how this kind of "secondary nature," which flourished in Japan's urban architecture and gardens, fostered and idealized a sense of harmony with the natural world just at the moment it was disappearing. Illuminating the deeper meaning behind Japanese aesthetics and artifacts, Shirane clarifies the use of natural images and seasonal topics and the changes in their cultural associations and function across history, genre, and community over more than a millennium. In this fascinating book, the four seasons are revealed to be as much a cultural construction as a reflection of the physical world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For most Westerners, Japan today is viewed as a mecca of high technology, martial arts, video games, manga, culinary achievement, flower arranging, or fine art and design. But in taking a longer view, one that stretches back well more than a thousand years, it can be argued that Japan's most enduringly important contribution is its exquisite sensitivity to the changing seasons. In previous publications, art historians, specialists in Japanese poetry, and devotees of kimono design, among others, have all touched on this subject. Never before, however, has such a formidably-talented academic as Haruo Shirane made available in English a rigorous study of the subject. And that study is his 2012 book "Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts." Shirane's chronological approach demonstrates how a focus on the seasons first developed in the poetry of the Nara (710-784) and Heian (794-1185) periods and thereafter permeated ever more aspects of life as Japan itself became more sophisticated, prosperous, and modern. Readers interested in further exploring how a seasonal sensitivity shapes the lens through which the Japanese view the world may wish to acquire some of the following books: Liza Dalby's "East Wind Melts the Ice," any book of haiku arranged by season, Ivan Morris's "The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan," and my own "Symbols of Japan: Thematic Motifs in Art and Design." For those wishing to experience the continuing influence of the four seasons in everyday life, even in today's urbanized hi-tech Japan, the following are particularly useful: bakery and sweet shops; tea ceremony venues; restaurants serving bento-box and kaiseki meals; flower shops; and stationery boutiques.

Very disappointed that the beautiful color plates appear in grayscale in the Kindle edition, and that lack of proofreading of the converted file resulted in many typos, especially at the beginning of the book, which was annoying because they were so laughable: ckanoyu, kaski, skibakari, matsumuski, "([agi)" etc -Also many hyphenated words appearing mid-sentence, a common issue in converting a PDF to ebook, but easily correctable. Distracting. There is no question that this is an instant classic. It needs to look like a classic too.

This book gives you about the understanding of true root of Japanese culture. It comes from practical life of tea culture in terms of humble and sincere attitude of life. And it also shows the true Japanese culture from Muromachi era is better influenced to the ordinary people of Japan than in Edo period.

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