

## THE SEASONALITY OF NATURE

### **Any activity, thing, circumstance, or moment is always within a season.**

There is nothing outside of a season.

This is an example of “contextual” consciousness, as opposed to objective universality of the West.

That seasonality is essential. It is not merely a secondary background, but rather the basic framework of any moment or event. This is different from the Western tradition, where season & nature can be largely ignored.

Also (though less important) a time of day, except dusk.

*Note: nature and culture are integrated and imply each other*

### **There is a natural pattern to seasons.**

There is a natural pattern of change in nature as a whole (season)

There is also a natural pattern to the appearance, growth, and prominence of particular flora and fauna. Compare with the Western concept of “phenology.”

Human culture, in particular cultural events, are an integrated part of that pattern. There is a natural pattern and sequence to human culture and activity. This is “natural” in two senses: (1) true to the essential nature of human culture, and (2) integrated into the patterns and processes of the natural world.

*Note: nature and culture are integrated and imply each other*

### **Seasons and their passing have an “objective” feeling-tone.**

The “mood” of early spring is very different from the “mood” of late autumn.

The aesthetically and spiritually sensitive person is able to feel that mood deeply. And the poet is able also to suggest that in a poem and catalyze that experience in the reader.

*Note: nature and culture are integrated and imply each other.*

### **So nature poems are seasonal poems.**

The greatness of a poem or poet is found in part with

- (1) the way it is true to the season and feeling-tone of that season
- (2) the way it connects with past poems related to the topic
- (3) but also “freshness” – it is new and original (not merely an imitation).

Poems have season words, which indicate what season the poem is. Sometimes this is very obvious (e.g., “spring rain”). Other times you need to know the literary “code” (e.g., “cuckoo” signifies summer).

There is a tradition of poems that exemplify that season (authoritative poems). One early spring poem is read with earlier spring poems in mind.

Over time, season word dictionaries appeared, listing season words, explaining their specific associations, and giving examples of famous poems that illustrate the use of those season words.

### **The Moment**

This way of thinking is sometimes applied to particular moments in the day.

For example, early evening (yugure) has an objective feeling tone to it, that is different from midnight.

Not as prominent or universal, and there are no “moment of the day dictionaries.

But some moments (e.g., early evening) are very important.

### **Your own experience**

Try to think in terms of the “essential” nature of seasons.

Try to think in terms of a plant or animal or human activity that is associated with a particular season.

Does this help you enter more intimately with the natural world, or does it seem like an artificial imposition of culture onto nature?

What is it about Japanese culture that makes this approach seem a door to true nature?