

# Extreme Japan

At its roots, Japan has two deities who represent opposite extremes – Amaterasu, a *Nigitama* (peaceful spirit), and Susano, an *Aratama* (wrathful spirit). The dichotomy can be seen reflected in various areas of the culture. There is Kinkaku-ji (the Golden Pavilion) to represent the Kitayama culture, and Ginkaku-ji (the Silver Pavilion) to represent the Higashiyama culture. *Kabuki* has its *wagoto* (gentle style) and *aragoto* (bravura style). There are the thatched huts of *wabicha* (frugal tea ceremony) as opposed to the golden tea ceremony houses. Japan can be punk – flashy and noisy. Or, it can be bluesy – deep and tranquil. Add to flash, the *kabuki* way. Subtract to refine, the *wabi* way. Just don't hold back - go to the extreme. Either way, it's Japan.

## Japan Concept 5

### Kabuku

## Japan Concept 6

### wabi

If we awaken and recapture the basic human passions that are today being lost in each moment, new Japanese traditions will be passed on with a bold, triumphant face.

Taro Okamoto, *Nihon no Dento* (Japanese Tradition)

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① Photograph: Satoshi Takase



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## Eccentrics at the Cutting Edge of Fashion

① Lavish preferences of truck drivers are reflected in vehicles decorated like illuminated floats. ② The crazy KAWAII of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. ③ The band KISHIDAN. *Yankii* style, characterized by *tsuppari* hairstyles and customized high school uniforms. ④ *Kabuki-style* cosmetic face masks made by Imabari Towel. *Kabuki's Kumadori* is a powerful makeup for warding off evil spirits. ⑤ Making lavish use of combs and hairpins, *oiran* were the fashion leaders of Edo.

⑤

*The “face-showing” event is a glimpse into the sleepless world of night.*

Saikaku Ihara



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# kabuku

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The outrageous folk of *noh*, *kabuki* and youth culture.

## Basara Spirit at the Root of *Noh*

*Kabuki* takes its naming from *kabuki-mono*, a term given to those who dressed themselves in strange and bizarre attire. The verb *kabuku* –written with the Chinese character translated as “to lean” – means “excessive” or “too much”.

The essence of *kabuki* can be found in *furyu*, also called *furyu-kasa* – an aesthetic value from medieval Japan, meaning “excess in extravagance”. People who were especially outlandish – sometimes to the point of lunacy – were called *basara*. For city dwellers, such lunatics were considered loud and annoying; at the same time, people envied them for their ability to go crazy over their obsessions.

The trend of lunatics and *furyu* were absorbed into *sarugaku*, a prototype of the *noh* play. It was Kan’ami, the founder of the Kanze school of *noh*, who recognized the value of lunacy which lay at the heart of *furyu* and *basara*. It was the beginning of *noh* as an artform in its own right.

## From *Kabuki* to *Kyary Pamyu Pamyu*

The establishment of *noh* marked the end of the old *furyu*, which subsequently became *furyu* (tasteful elegance) in the Edo era. The Edo shogunate prepared licensed red-light districts and playhouses as venues for managing transient folk such as courtesans and popular entertainers. Such places were called *akusho* (bad places), and it was here that *kabuki* was born, destined to captivate the Edo masses.

The concept of *kabuki* can be seen in modern day youth fashions. The postwar *yankii* subculture with its *bankara*, *tsuppari* and *sukeban*, as well as the *gyaru* girl and *gosloli* (Gothic & Lolita) fashions of the 2000s and beyond developed as counterpoints to mainstream fashion trends. Drag queens, underground idols, Kiyoshiro Imawano and *Kyary Pamyu Pamyu* are all *kabuki-mono* pioneering the trends of today.



### Ukiyoe

Beautiful women and stage actors were frequent themes of *ukiyo-e*. The giant portraits of actors were akin to the movie star posters of today. Sharaku’s prints are bold in trimming and *basara* in style.



### Kabukicho, Shinjuku

This district was named after the kabuki theater, which was intended to be built as part of a post-war revitalization project for the devastated district of Shinjuku. Construction of the theater was eventually suspended, but the district itself now embodies the spirit of *kabuki-mono*.



Provided by: NORITAKA TATEHANA

### Heel-less shoes by Noritaka Tatehana

Made famous by Lady Gaga, these shoes were inspired by the tall wooden clogs worn by *oiran* courtesans. Whatever the era, fashion leaders are always avant-garde.



Photo: Taro Karibe

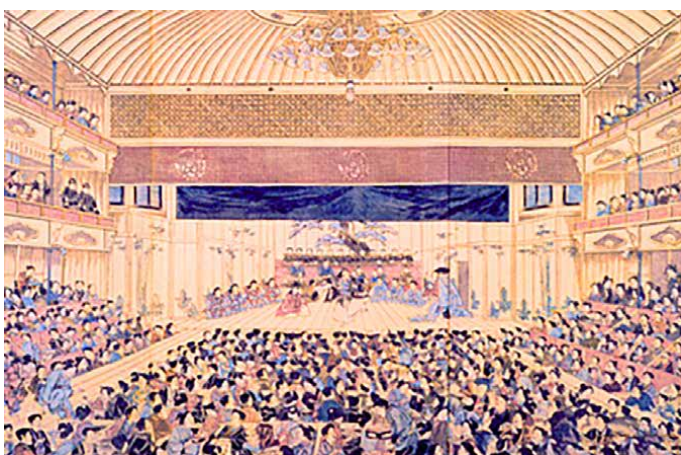
### Tokyo Rainbow Pride

The connection between the LGBT movement and *kabuki* culture is very interesting. *Kabuki* itself transcended gender from the get go, with female performers playing male roles.

*Their favorite flower is of course the cherry blossom, precisely because the period of blossoming is so poignantly brief and the danger that the flowers may scatter even before one has properly seen them is so terribly great.*

Donald Keene, “*Nihonjin no Biishiki* (Japanese Aesthetics)”

## Edo Aragoto and Kamigata Wagoto



### Kabuki

Popular today – the *kabuki* stylization of manga. Following “Super Kabuki II ONE PIECE”, “NARUTO” is being performed as a new *kabuki* production. Meanwhile, as an avant-garde trend, the independent efforts of Kyoto-based Kinoshita Kabuki are receiving high acclaim. The picture shows the interior of the Kabukiza Theatre around 1893.

Kabuki’s roots date back to the beginning of the 17th Century, when the female performer, Izumo no Okuni, danced on the banks of Kyoto’s Kamogawa river in the guise of a male *kabuki-mono*. *Onna-kabuki* performances by women dressed as men soon exploded in popularity, followed by *wakashu-kabuki*, performed by young men. These *kabuki* troupes were the *Takarazuka* or Johnny’s groups of the Edo period.

In time, older men began performing *yaro-kabuki*, which became the precursor to *kabuki* as its known today. Ichikawa Danjuro emerged as a superstar during the Genroku era, wearing *kumadori* makeup and performing in the *aragoto* style, featuring extravagant appearance and dynamic characters. Meanwhile, in Osaka, a more elegant and delicate style of *kabuki* was preferred. The contrasting styles—*aragoto* of the east with its emphasis on bold patterned performances, and the softer *wagoto* of the west which preferred realism—would thus expand the range of diversity in *kabuki* culture.

## The Pop and Crazy World View of Harajuku KAWAII

Harajuku is a mecca for eccentrically dressed girls wearing *gosloli* and gaudy fashion. Of course, this is no modern *akusho*, but it is an important “asylum” that permits the extravagant attire of *kabuki-mono*. Art director, Sebastian Masuda, regards the district as a monster in and of itself. The popular tourist destination, “KAWAII MONSTER CAFÉ”, is a concept restaurant filled to the brim with the pop and crazy world view of Harajuku KAWAII.

Apparently, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu used to visit “6%DOKI DOKI” (the first shop Sebastian opened in Harajuku) before she became famous. Once Kyary asked Sebastian to be arts director for the video of her debut song “PONPONPON”, Harajuku KAWAII gained global fame in no time at all.

Someday, we may find unique variations of KAWAII culture developing in different regions of Japan. If so, we may have the fortune of witnessing a *kisoi*, similar to that between east and west styles of *kabuki*.



© KAWAII MONSTER CAFÉ

### KAWAII MONSTER CAFE HARAJUKU (Harajuku, Tokyo)

“Colorful Rainbow Pasta” and “Colorful Poison Parfait Extreme” on the garish menu! The MONSTER GIRLS attract tourists as an embodiment of the cafe’s concept.



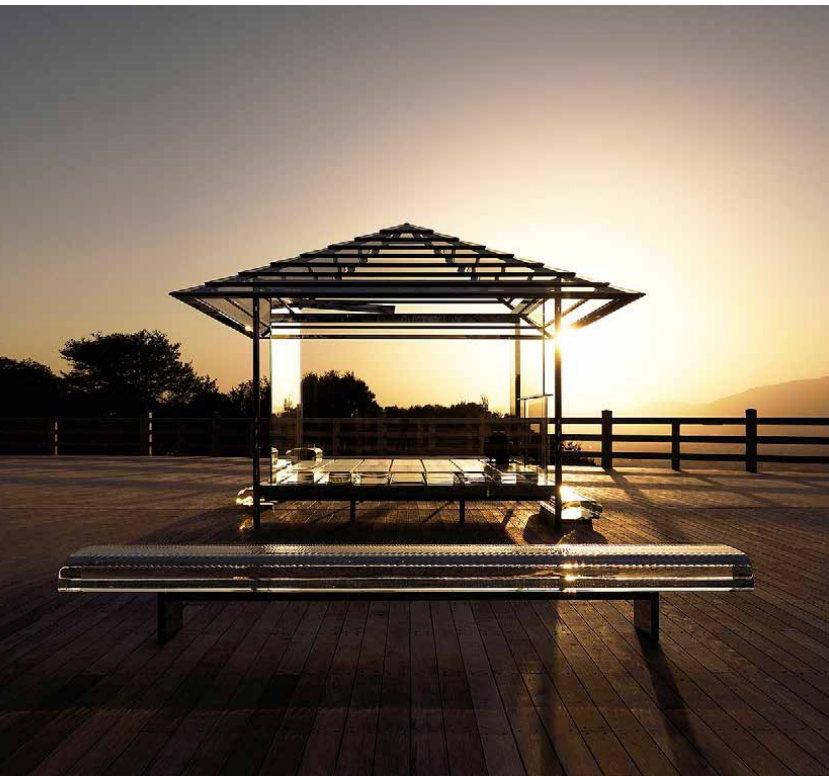
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## The Imagination of Subtraction

*As I gaze out, neither blossom nor  
Autumn leaves are here; In a beachfront  
thatched hut on an Autumn evening*

Fujiwara no Teika

④



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Black Raku tea bowl named “Shūgiku”. Made by the 15th generation Raku Kichizaemon. On the underside of the lid of its box, a poem by Tao Yuanming is inscribed by Kichizaemon: “Beautiful color of fall chrysanthemum. I, wet with dew, pick the petals. Floating them in my sake, I forget mundane things.” (seal) *Kichiza* (potter’s stylized signature)

① MUJI pursues simple, functional beauty. ② Bonsai are an artificial symbolization of the Japanese views on nature. ③ *Raku* tea bowls were first made under the instruction of Sen no Rikyū. This is the black *Raku* tea bowl “Shūgiku” by the 15th generation Raku Kichizaemon (Raku Museum). ④ The glass tea room “Kōan” by modern artist Tokujin Yoshioka. ⑤ The simplicity of *Hinomaru bento* (white rice with a single pickled plum on top).

⑤



## The essence of *omotenashi* (hospitality): conveying one's utmost sincerity with what is available.

### The Beauty of “Sorry”

One of the key concepts of Japanese culture is *wabi-sabi*. The word is often used to describe desolate and lonely states; however, surprisingly little is known about their original meanings.

*Wabi* shares its roots with the verb, *wabiru* (to apologize). It originates from the feeling of making an apology; an apology for not being able to offer more. The sentiment of *wabi* lies in offering the best one can while sincerely apologizing for one's inadequacy. The frugal art of tea we know as *wabicha* developed from such a sentiment.

### Japanese Aesthetics – Augmenting Margins with Imagination

The concept of *wabi* already existed in the age of *Manyōshū*, as evidenced by words such as *wabi-uta* (poem of disappointment), *wabi-goto* (words of worry, refusal, or desperation), *wabi-bito* (the miserable), and *wabi-goe* (despondent voice). It was Murata Jukō—the founder of *wabicha*—who elevated *wabi* into an aesthetic value as well as a mysteriously appealing worldview. Whereas it was conventionally thought that a proper tea ceremony couldn't be performed without authentic Chinese teaware, Jukō developed a revolutionary approach based on the idea that the true spirit of tea could be reimaged by exercising great sincerity and care with the utensils one has on hand.

Jukō discovered the beauty of associations and combinations that spring from individual ingenuity. This thinking led to the radical and incredibly modest philosophy of *mani-awase* (making do) and *tori-awase* (using and combining what is available). *Wabicha* continued to refine the aesthetics of subtraction, finding beauty in “negation” and the “negative”, and through the *renga* poet, Takeno Jo, would reach its culmination in Rikyu.

*Wabi-sabi* is a sensibility which spilled out of the cup that held the orthodox, conventional, and established. Therefore, any attempt to capture it through public discussions or expressions is incongruous to its nature, and will only lead to something that is neither *wabi* nor *sabi*. With the spirit of OMOTENASHI too, the more extravagant it becomes, the more it will move away from the *motenashi* (the art of handling) originally conceived by Jukō. True Japanese hospitality begs to be sought in the spirit of *wabi*.

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#### Ochazuke (rice with tea)

An exquisite combination of rice and tea makes a supreme dish out of meager ingredients.



#### Minimalist Lifestyle

“Living without possessing”—a lifestyle that incorporates only what's important. *Danshari* (decluttering) is another related trend.



Photograph: Noriaki Yokosuka

#### A Piece of Cloth knitwear (1977 spring/summer)

Issei Miyake's “A Piece of Cloth” derives inspiration from a primordial approach to wear. Folding, creasing, cutting, and boring holes are some of the ingenious methods applied in its production.



#### Tree-Free Tableware WASARA

The Spirit of *Omotenashi* in the paper plate. “The Art of blank spaces” contained in simplicity. Organic forms accentuate the detail of cuisine, and even promotes elegance in the bearing of persons who handle them.

*Wabi-sabi is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional.*

Leonard Koren, “*Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers*”

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## The *wabi* of *onjaku* (warm stone), *kaiseki*, and *ichiju-sansai*

At a tea ceremony, a simple meal is served before tea. This was previously referred to as *furumai*, *kaishoku*, or *kaiseki*. Retaining the same pronunciation of *kaiseki* (party seating), the word later came to be spelled using characters that mean “bosom stone” derived from the *zen* concept of *onjaku*, referring to the warm stones that monks would hold against their chests for comfort against cold weather. Therefore, *kaiseki* in no way refers to gorgeous course meals in high-class restaurants. Moreover, it is not necessarily synonymous with Japanese cuisine. Its origins can be traced back to Buddhist vegetarian dishes from southern China, and the word means a meal sufficient to temporarily tide over hunger for just as long as the warm stone remains warm.

*Suimono* (clear broth soup), *kuzukiri* (kudzu starch noodles), and *somen* (vermicelli) were all foods that emerged with tea ceremony *kaiseki*. The cuisine underwent further culinary refinement during the Edo period, eventually resulting in the rule of *ichijusansai* (one soup and three side dishes).



HIGASHIYA GINZA *Ichiju-sansai* (Ginza, Tokyo)

“HIGASHIYA GINZA” is a contemporary Japanese “tea salon” in pursuit of traditional beauty. Their standard lunch meal includes seasonal tea, main dish, three side dishes, seasonal soup, boiled rice, pickled vegetables, and fresh wagashi. The contents change according to the 24 divisions of the solar year.



Provided by: Big John Corporation

## Faded Jeans that Melt into the Japanese Landscape

Jiro Shirasu is said to have been the first person to wear jeans in Japan. Half a century since the first domestic jeans went into production during the 1960s, tough denim jeans are now an essential everyday item for Japanese people. More than a simple fashion item, denim jeans have melted into the Japanese landscape. Faded jeans hung out to dry in the windows of urban apartments take on the appearance of urban style manifestation of *mani-awase*.

“Fading” is also a key point in the Japanese style. It was a Japanese corporation that developed stone wash processing to fade jeans. Damaged jeans, which highlight negatives such as color fading and wear-and-tear, match well with the Japanese sense of *wabi-sabi*. Whether they be called *G-pan*, *jinzu*, or *denimu*, jeans are a permanent fixture in the *wabi* style of modern Japan.

### Big John Damaged Denim (Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture)

The first domestically produced jeans are said to be the “Canton” jeans made by Maruo Clothing (present Big John Corp.) in Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture. In 1980, the company developed a new processing technique which used warped yarn manufacture vintage-style jeans.