

Comparison of natural landscapes appreciation between Russia and Japan: methods of investigation

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Abstract — The research focusing on the aesthetic evaluation and appreciation of natural landscapes in recreational and protected areas is of great importance. While selecting landscapes for special care and protection one should take into consideration not only objective appraisal of their natural peculiarities, significance, and usefulness but also their aesthetic features. People belonging to different cultures differ by their landscape preferences due to a number of ethno-cultural factors as well as historical, social, and environmental peculiarities. The purpose of this study is to compare the landscapes appreciation in Russia and Japan, in two countries with deep-rooted traditions of landscape appreciation. The photo database of landscapes both similar and unique for Russia and Japan was made using the same methods. The respondents in both countries are suggested to classify and group photo images of different landscapes according to their personal perception as well as to estimate the attractiveness of given landscapes images. The results of the study will help us to answer: do representatives of different cultures – people in Russia and Japan – like similar landscapes due to aesthetic appreciation laws, which are common for the whole humanity, and if they don't – then why not?

Index Terms — aesthetic evaluation, appreciation of landscapes, landscape preferences in Russia and Japan

1 INTRODUCTION

Geography and other geosciences regard natural landscapes as geosystems having common origin and development history, homogenous

basement, the same dominant relief type, similar climate and soil conditions, plant communities, and local geosystems. Geographical, geological, and biological studies investigate various natural components of landscapes, their interrelationships, spatial distribution, and temporal development. Ecological studies take into account potential resources of landscapes and environmental conditions. An approach considering not only the natural processes and patterns in the natural landscapes, but also their aesthetic features, which determine emotional perception by people of their beauty and particular qualities, is relatively new for geosciences.

This approach focusing on aesthetic evaluation and appreciation of landscapes is of great importance especially for the research in recreational and protected areas. While selecting landscapes for special care and pro-

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tection one should take into consideration not only objective appraisal of their natural peculiarities, significance, and usefulness but also their aesthetic originality, because it is very important to preserve beautiful landscapes for the next generations. The beauty and attraction of a landscape for visitors play the most important role in choosing natural objects for recreational purposes too. The scenic beauty and high aesthetic value of a landscape is for example one of the key prerequisites for giving to the territory a National Park status.

The purpose of this study is to compare the appreciation on natural landscapes in Russia and Japan, in two countries that are situated so close to each other but differ so greatly in cultural aspects, in two countries, which both have deep-rooted traditions of landscape appreciation.

2 CONCEPTION OF LANDSCAPE APPRECIATION

2.1 Factors affecting landscape preferences

During the last decades, a large number of studies devoted to psychological and aesthetic evaluation of landscapes have been published [1]. However, the concept of landscape appreciation has not yet been defined clearly, nor has agreement on methods of evaluation, factors of landscape preferences, and the steps of the appreciation (i.e., what the phenomenon of landscape is, how people experience landscape, what attributes affect the landscape appreciation and why) been found [2].

Majority of researchers agree that people from various cultures prefer natural environments better than built or other wise human-influenced ones. Such phenomenon has been interpreted as supporting evolutionary theory of human landscape preferences. Several studies conclude that similarities in evaluations of natural scenes exceed greatly the differences across cultures or smaller groups [3]. However, some other studies recognize individual and inter-group distinc-

tions in environmental preferences within an evolutionary framework, in addition to these similarities. Thus, both cultural and genetic factors may contribute to evaluative responses to environmental types [4]. Bourassa [5] suggested that the difficulties in understanding landscape derive from human evolution, being affected by both ontogenesis and phylogenesis. He proposed the need for three steps of clarification: biological, cultural, and personal landscape acquisition.

It was ascertained that two kinds of respondents' attributes could influence on landscape preferences [2]. The first involves identities of a human group, e.g. the nationality, human race, living environment, gender, age, etc. The second includes individual characteristic, e.g. hobby, social location, personal history, educational level, professional interests, etc. According to the famous Russian ethnologist and the founder of ethnogeny theory Gumilyov [6], ethnos and its landscape surrounding are indissoluble, so this relationship can influence upon people appreciation of the world as a whole and natural landscapes in particular.

With regard to the authors cited above, in our conception of landscape appreciation we assume that people belonging to different cultures differ by their landscape preferences due to a number of ethno-cultural factors as well as historical, social, and environmental peculiarities. The "outside view" of another culture representatives allows us to see unusual in usual, to assess originality and beauty of familiar landscapes, and to find out new aesthetic features. A good example is the effect that Russian literature made on the forest landscapes in Japan. In Meiji era, Japanese writers became interested in Russian literature and translated some novels into Japanese. The poetic descriptions of forest by Russian writers helped them to see the beauty of deciduous forests surrounding Tokyo City, called Musashino, and to praise it in their works [7], though in previous time people in Japan used the forest (*zokibayashi* in Japanese) only for firewood without regarding any

aesthetic value in it. In that way, Russian appreciation of forest landscapes was the first step to starting of preservation of these natural landscapes in Japan.

2.2 Russian traditions of natural landscapes appreciation

The Russian philosopher Berdyaev referred to the power of space over the Russian soul. He said, that scenery of Russian land and “scenery” of Russian soul were inseparably linked [8]. According to him, landscape thinking is natural for Russian ethnos, and it is caused mainly by immensity of Russian expanses. The Russian writer Bunin [9] also believed that Russian people “are liable primeval to influences of nature”.

From ancient time, people in Russia worshiped remarkable natural objects and landscape components (high hills, rocks, lakes, rivers, forest, big trees, large stones, etc.). For example, people in Pereslavl-Zalesky (Central part of Russia) worshiped the “blue stone” – a boulder of glacier origin lying on the lakeside. Even nowadays, some people believe in his wonder-working forces, that is how strong these beliefs are.

While choosing a cloister site or a place to settle, people traditionally took into account its natural surroundings, they preferred attractive landscapes and beautiful view.

A question of spiritual harmony of Russian people with Nature is among favorite themes of Russian classic literature. Famous Russian writers such as Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekhov, Ivan Bunin, Lev Tolstoj, etc. devoted many high-sounding words to this theme. The poetic descriptions of Russian natural landscapes are also traditional for Russian literature. The best examples of such descriptions one can find in the works of Turgenev, Prishvin, Paustovsky, etc.

Russian paintings and music also reflect this love to Nature. There are many Russian folk songs and classical musical compositions about nature (for example, “The Seasons” of Tchaikovsky). Some Russian artists specialized in drawing landscapes: everyone knows

the names of Shishkin and Ayvazovsky, but there are also many others.

2.3 Japanese traditions of natural landscapes appreciation

The Japanese people highly appreciate the nature and its phenomena. It's essential for Japanese to pay respect to natural objects (mountains, trees, lakes, etc.) and to landscape places, many of which are well known throughout Japan for their scenic beauty: for example, Yoshino Mountains are extremely famous because of Cherry blossom trees; hundreds of Japanese visit the area every April for admiring them. These traditions of natural phenomena and scenery admiration are reflected in poetry, paintings, and in people every day life – some traces can be found even in Japanese language. There exist special words such as hanami (which means “admiration of flowers”; having in mind “to look at the flowers and enjoy”), tsukimi (“admiration of moon”), yukimi (“admiration of snow”). One can say there is an aesthetic cult for flowers, moon, and snow in Japan, which include special features and traditions [10].

The Japanese people often try to imitate nature in their garden. There are stone garden, water garden, moss garden, and scenery garden as a whole. The main components of these gardens are symbolic; they form a metaphorical landscape that evokes associative aesthetic appreciation.

Japan's indigenous religion Shinto, what means “the Way of the Gods”, is an animistic belief system. It worships not only anthropomorphic deities, but also the spirits of awe-inspiring elements of nature, especially certain mountains and trees. Some Shinto shrines, like Miwa Shrine (Nara Prefecture) and Tsukubasan Shrine (Ibaraki Prefecture) have as their central object of worship the mountains behind them [11]. In the case of Tsukubasan Shrine, Mt. Tsukuba is the god of the Shrine. Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the kami, meaning gods or spirits. For example, Mount Fuji is regarded as the spirit of a particular place.

The landscape appreciation of Japanese was greatly affected by the western cultures after the opening of their country at the end of Edo era, i.e. the middle of 19 century. The landscape appreciation popularized in Europe including the appreciation of Russian cultures was introduced to Japanese and it changed the way of landscape appreciation of Japanese completely. Then Japanese has three types of landscape appreciation in their culture, e.g. the traditional landscape appreciation on natural phenomenon, the Chinese landscape appreciation of "Sansui paintings" including "Eight Views" and the western landscape appreciation.

3 METHODS

Taking into consideration both Russian and Japanese traditions of natural landscapes appreciation, we will try to find out differences between aesthetic evaluation of landscapes by representatives of both cultures. Very important point of our research is method of visual landscapes presentation. In the early stages of landscape studies in Russia, Japan, and other countries, the on-site approach prevailed, when respondents visited the sites and described their impressions. However, this approach limited the number of respondents, visits, and sites that could be used [1]. Thus, we have chosen another approach focusing on the use of colour pictures. At the first step of our investigation, we have made a photo database of natural landscapes. Both Russian and Japanese researchers have been taking pictures of landscapes both similar and unique for Russia and Japan using the same methods of taking pictures. All the pictures were taken at eye level, with a focal distance of 28-35 mm (in equivalent of 35 mm film camera) that corresponds to spanning angle of human eye. Then we have selected landscapes images for the questioning. The selected photo images were printed in post card format for respondents' conveniences.

The next step of investigation is forming

respondent groups in different regions of Russia and Japan similar by their age, education, and social level in order to reveal their landscape preferences resulting from ethno-cultural reasons.

Additionally, a questioning will be carrying out. The respondents in both countries are suggested to classify and group photo images of different landscapes according to their personal perception, give their appraisal for every obtained group, and explain their classification criteria as well as to estimate the attractiveness of given landscapes images.

4 RESULTS EXPECTED

Our research project is not finished yet. We are expecting to obtain the first results this autumn. Using the methods referred above, we will try to answer the following questions: do representatives of different cultures – people in Russia and Japan – like similar landscapes due to some aesthetic appreciation laws, which are common for the whole humanity, and if they don't – then why not?

The results of the study will help us to find out: 1) new criteria for protection of natural landscapes with consideration of aesthetic features basing on comparison of their appreciation and evaluation by the Russians and the Japanese; 2) the most aesthetically valuable and attractive components of landscapes for the purpose of their protection and careful use basing on comparative analysis of landscape preferences of the two cultures representatives; 3) new developed classification of natural landscapes according to their attractiveness.

CONCLUSION

We are now at the entrance of clarifying landscape appreciation. We hope that our results will be helpful for finding a common and consistent scientific language for landscape appreciation to assist comprehension between cultures and across linguistic boundaries, to understand better the world surrounding us,

the world we live in and have to protect and keep in its complete beauty for the generations to come.

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