

# The Scope of *Aisthetics* for Comparative Aesthetics: An Examination of *Kanseigaku* in Japan

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the concept of *aisthetics*, which was proposed by Wolfgang Iser as an extended understanding of aesthetics as a study of sensory perception. This has recently been a topic of interest amongst Japanese aestheticians under the heading of *kanseigaku* [感性学]. This article contextualises the growing acceptance of *aisthetics* in Japan with a historical analysis of the development of the term ‘*kansei*’ (*aisthesis*) over the course of a century, and further by examining the problem of translation between European and Japanese aesthetic terminologies. Thus it is important to re-consider the concept of ‘the aesthetic’ from a perspective of *aisthetics*. Subsequently, the actual method of *aisthetics* is discussed through an examination of a recent theorisation of *kanseigaku* proposed by Eisuke Tsugami. His *kanseigaku* provides a method to describe aesthetic experience, which is independent of the European concepts of beauty or art. Furthermore, Tsugami’s methodology illuminates affinity and differences between his *kanseigaku* and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s ‘science of sensory perception’. Through characterising Baumgarten’s aesthetics in the context of the traditional dichotomy between *aisthesis* and *noesis* in Europe and that of the rationalistic conceptualisation of perception, this article provides a basic denominator for comparison between European and non-European cultural or philosophical discourses as a tool to initiate comparative *aisthetics*. Ultimately, the scope of *aisthetics* is broader than what a philosophy of art or beauty can cover. Thus it has the potential to develop a new cultural paradigm.

## Introduction

In 1991 and 1992, Kyoto University conducted an aesthetic research project entitled “The Possibility and Genealogy of Aesthetics as the Science of Sensitive Cognition.”<sup>1</sup> “The science of sensitive cognition” (*kanseiteki ninshiki no gaku*) is a common translation of the Latin “*scientia cognitionis sensitivae*,” which was employed as a definition of aesthetics by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten.<sup>2</sup> By introducing the concept ‘*kansei*’ (sensibility) as a central topic of research, Kyoto University’s project posited aesthetics as the exploration of knowledge derived from human experience, and the nature of such knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In current Japanese terminology, this new stream of aesthetics focusing on ‘*kansei*’ is called ‘*kanseigaku*’: a combination of the two nouns ‘*kansei*’ and ‘study’ (-*gaku*).<sup>4</sup> In 2000, the Japanese Society of Aesthetics held a symposium to review the traditional concept of aesthetics and open a new understanding of aesthetics for the twenty first century. ‘*Kansei*’ was again brought to the fore as the main topic.<sup>5</sup> The first controversy that

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<sup>1</sup> The Japanese title of the research project is “‘*Kanseiteki ninshiki no gaku*’ to *shiteno Asthetik no kanōsei to sono keifu*.” See: “The Possibility and Genealogy of Aesthetics as the Science of Sensitive Cognition,” Database of Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research, accessed April 29, 2012, <http://kaken.nii.ac.jp/en/p/03301008>. Given in their official translation, the adjective ‘*kanseiteki*’ is translated as ‘sensitive’, thus the noun ‘*kansei*’ should be translated into English as ‘sensitivity’. Nevertheless, I use ‘sensibility’ in order to avoid confusion between the terms ‘*kansei*’ and ‘*kanjusei*’, which is the common translation of the English word ‘sensitivity’. Because the word ‘*kanjusei* 感受性’ includes ‘*ju* 受’: derivative of the verb ‘*ukeru* 受ける’ (receive), this term emphasises a passive and receptive quality of sensitivity. Nevertheless, the concept of “sensitive cognition” envisaged by the researchers expresses an active and dynamic quality of sensory perception. In order to include those qualities, ‘*kansei*’ (and therefore its common English translation ‘sensitivity’) is more appropriate than ‘sensitivity’. The translation ‘sensitivity’ is also subject to doubt, and the new translation ‘*aisthesis*’ was subsequently adopted – the process of which will be examined in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: I.C. Kleyb, 1750).

<sup>3</sup> “The Possibility and Genealogy of Aesthetics as the Science of Sensitive Cognition.”

<sup>4</sup> ‘*Gaku* 学’ is commonly used in Japanese as a suffix – that is, a radical or a root word applied to many branches of knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> Kyoto City University of Arts, Research Group of Aesthetic and Cultural Theory, ed., *Kanseigaku, nijūisseiki no bigaku ni mukete* [Aisthesis – Towards 21st Century Aesthetics] (Kyoto: Gyōji Sha, 2001), 127-234. [English translation of book titles supplied by Tomoe Nakamura].

arose in this symposium was the validation of the current translation of ‘*kansei*’ into foreign languages.<sup>6</sup> In English, ‘*kansei*’ is usually translated as ‘sensibility’ but doubt was cast on this translation. ‘*Kansei*’ is ‘sensibility’ in that both of the words signify a capacity to respond to sensory stimuli in the widest sense. In English, however, ‘sensibility’ can mean a capacity for higher or more refined feelings, or a temperament which experiences emotion intensely.<sup>7</sup> These connotations do not exist in the Japanese concept of ‘*kansei*’. A similar problem arises from the German translation of ‘*kansei*’ as a philosophical use of the term ‘*Sinnlichkeit*’ (sensibility). This word derives from Kantian terminology and does not exactly reflect ‘*kansei*’, as I will discuss later in this article.

One attempt to resolve the problem of translation was adopted in the proceedings of this symposium, published in the following year.<sup>8</sup> ‘*Kansei*’ was translated not as ‘sensibility’ or ‘*Sinnlichkeit*’ but as ‘*aisthesis*’ (sensory perception).<sup>9</sup> This translation was inspired by the contemporary philosopher Wolfgang Welsch.<sup>10</sup> In his book *Aisthesis*, Welsch explores a new potential for aesthetics through an examination of the Aristotelian concept of ‘*aisthesis*’ (αἴσθησις), which signifies the highest form of ‘practical wisdom’ (φρόνησις, *phronésis*) in ‘a practical mind’ (νοῦς, *nous*).<sup>11</sup> Based on the claim that ‘the sensible’ (*Sinnenhafte*) increases in importance, Welsch argues that a re-evaluation of Aristotle is necessary because from the time of Plato onward, Aristotle was the only philosopher who denied the philosophical condemnation of sensibility and posited instead the concept of ‘*aisthesis*’ as a legitimate subject for philosophical inquiry and its relevance for both theory and

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<sup>6</sup> Kyoto City University of Arts, *Kanseigaku*, 131-134.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Jane Austin’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) provides a clear contrast between the concept of ‘sense’ and ‘sensibility’ in this context.

<sup>8</sup> Kyoto City University of Arts, *Kanseigaku*. This book consists of a transcript of the symposium, and essays written by the attendees of the symposium.

<sup>9</sup> Although the Greek word *aisthesis* is usually translated as ‘perception’, I use ‘sensory awareness’ in order to emphasise both the sensory aspect of perception and its relationship to knowledge. This translation is based upon the works of Wolfgang Welsch, who defined the Greek word class *aisthesis* as expressions that designate sensation and perception combined together. See Wolfgang Welsch, “Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics,” in *Practical Aesthetics in Practice and Theory*, ed. Martti Honkanen (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1997), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Kyoto City University of Arts, *Kanseigaku*, 235-238. The introductory chapter of Welsch’s *Aisthesis* was included in this book.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, *Aisthesis: Grundzüge und Perspektiven der Aristotelischen Sinneslehre* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 20-21.

practice.<sup>12</sup> The attention paid to Welsch and the concept of ‘*aisthesis*’ marked an attempt to expand a Japanese term, ‘*kansei*’, into a more internationally comprehensible philosophical concept and to compare and contrast it with terms of sensory perception in other philosophical traditions.

Recently, aesthetics viewed from a perspective of ‘*aisthesis*’ has been called ‘*aisthetics*’.<sup>13</sup> In this article, my English translation of ‘*kansei*’ and ‘*kanseigaku*’ borrows this phrase ‘*aisthetics*’ in consideration of the connection between Welsch’s attention to ‘*aisthesis*’ and the interest in ‘*kansei*’ in Japan. During the last decade, *Kansei-gaku*, or *aisthetics*, rapidly permeated Japanese academia. It is now possible to say that the concept of aesthetics in a wide sense has been understood in Japanese society mainly through three perspectives: aesthetics in a narrow sense as a study of aesthetic properties such as beauty (*bi-gaku* 美学), ‘artistics’ – a study of art (*geijutsu-gaku* 藝術学), and *aisthetics* as a study of *aisthesis* (*kansei-gaku* 感性学).<sup>14</sup> The relationship between these areas is illustrated below:



Three Perspectives of Aesthetics in Japanese Society

<sup>12</sup> Welsch, *Aisthesis*, 19-26.

<sup>13</sup> Birgit M. Kaiser, “On Aesthetics, Aisthetics and Sensation – reading Baumgarten with Leibniz with Deleuze,” *Estheticatijdschrift* (2011), accessed April 9, 2012, <http://www.estheticatijdschrift.nl/magazine/2011/artikelen/aesthetics-aisthetics-and-sensation-%E2%80%93-reading-baumgarten-leibniz-deleuze>.

<sup>14</sup> The word ‘artistics’ is also based upon the works of Welsch. He defined ‘artistics’ as “an explication of art with particular attention to beauty.” See: Welsch, “Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics,” 18.

The development of *kanseigaku* seen in the Kyoto University research project of 1990s and the Japanese Society of Aesthetics conference in 2000 suggests that the concept of ‘*kansei*’ was thought to be a significant and necessary topic for contemporary aesthetics in Japanese society. There seem to be two different, but connected, reasons for the adoption of *aesthetics* in Japan. One is related to the historical background of the word ‘*kansei*’ and the other is related to the difficulty in translating ‘aesthetics’ into Japanese discourses. Below is an attempt to elucidate these two reasons. Furthermore, through clarification of the relationship between the recent development of *aesthetics* in Japan and Baumgarten’s aesthetics, this article suggests that re-consideration of aesthetics from a perspective of *aesthetics* contributes to the study of comparative aesthetics. To illuminate the scope and potential of this perspective is the main purpose of this article.

### **An Historical Reason for the Growing Acceptance of *Kanseigaku***

The word ‘*kansei*’ does not have a long history in Japan. In 1875, ‘*kansei*’ was employed in the first volume of Nishi Amane’s translation of *The Mental Philosophy* written by American psychologist, Joseph Haven.<sup>15</sup> Haven differentiated his mental philosophy from metaphysics and posited it as a psychology among the natural sciences, that is, a science that rests on experimental observations and induction.<sup>16</sup> Hence the term ‘*kansei*’ began as technical terminology in the area of natural sciences. Nishi’s translation project was a reflection of the requirement of the time that Japan should open its door to foreign countries after more than two hundred years of national seclusion.<sup>17</sup> There was an increasingly prevalent view in the late nineteenth century that Japan needed to catch up with European and American modernisation as quickly as possible. The philosopher Nishi was a member of the diplomatic missions sent to Europe, and later took on the task of introducing so-called Western academic disciplines into the country. In terms of philosophy and psychology, Nishi believed that it was necessary to coin new Japanese terms

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<sup>15</sup> Yoshiteru Asō, *Kinsei Nihon Tetsugaku Shi* [The History of Modern Japanese Philosophy] (Tokyo: Kondō Shoten, 1942), 310-312.

<sup>16</sup> For the definition of Haven’s mental philosophy, see Joseph Haven, *Mental Philosophy: Including the Intellect, Sensibilities and Will* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1857), 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> The history of the development of aesthetics and philosophy in the Meiji era is explored in further detail in both Tetsuhiro Katō, *Meijikinihon no Bigaku to Geijutsu Kenkyū* [Aesthetics and Art Studies in Modern Japan] (Kyoto: Kyōwa Insatsu, 2002) as well as Asō, *Tetsugaku Shi*.

because the conceptualisations of ‘mind’ in Western thought were more diverse than Chinese or Confucian ideas and their vocabularies did not share similar connotations with any existing Japanese word.<sup>18</sup> Nishi’s translation of Haven’s concept of ‘sensibility’—‘*kansei*’—was one of his creations. In Haven’s psychology, the concept of ‘sensibility’ was distinguished from that of intellect and will, and was understood as the mind’s capacity for psychological feeling or emotion, not mere physical sensation.<sup>19</sup> Although Nishi did not directly explain the process of the translation of the term ‘sensibility’, his sketchy notes show that he looked for Chinese characters that corresponded to the Haven’s trichotomy: intellect, will, and sensibility. The outcome, ‘*kansei* 感性’, was a combination of two Chinese characters: ‘*kan* 感’ (feel) and ‘*sei* 性’ (natural quality). Essentially, this combination matched Haven’s concept of ‘sensibility’, which signified a capacity for psychological feeling. In 1881, the first Japanese dictionary of philosophy was published and the word ‘*kansei*’ was included as a translation of the English term ‘sensibility’.<sup>20</sup>

Soon the word ‘*kansei*’ was applied as a concept that was used in metaphysics and transcendental philosophy when German philosophy joined the mainstream of philosophical research in Japan.<sup>21</sup> It was used as a translation of the Kantian term ‘*Sinnlichkeit*’, which is translated into English also as ‘sensibility’.<sup>22</sup> Kantian ‘*Sinnlichkeit*’ signifies a receptive and non-conceptual capacity.<sup>23</sup> Sensibility itself has no ability to construct a concept. It

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<sup>18</sup> Nishi Amane, “*Shinrigaku* (1878-9),” [Psychology] in *Nishi Amane Zenshu* [Complete Works of Nishi Amane] vol 1., ed. Toshiaki Ōkubo (Tokyo: Munetaka Shobō, 1970), 8-9. See also: Asō, *Tetsugaku Shi*, 312.

<sup>19</sup> Haven, *Mental Philosophy*, 377-378.

<sup>20</sup> Shūichi Ueda, “*Kansei Kīwādo no Hatten to Sono Genkai*,” [The Evolution and the Development of “*Kansei*” Keywords] *Library and Information Science* 41 (1999): 18. See also: Asō, *Tetsugaku Shi*, 317.

<sup>21</sup> According to Asō, the lecture on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* given by Michael Cooper at Tokyo University triggered an earnest investigation into Kantian philosophy post-1878. The interest in Kant, German idealism, and the Enlightenment became intense as a result of the rapid industrialisation of Japan, the establishment of the Diet, a rise of democracy, and the introduction of Prussian despotism. See: Asō, *Tetsugaku Shi*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Izuru Shinmura ed., *Kōjien* [Wide Garden of Words] (Tokyo: Iwanami-Shoten, 1955) 476.

<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Redwood Press, 1973), 65: “The capacity for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects, is entitled *sensibility*. Objects are *given* to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us *intuitions*; they are *thought*

simply allows a response. The combination of an active function of ‘understanding’ (*Verstand*) and a receptive function of ‘sensibility’ (*Sinnlichkeit*) is necessary to establish cognition as ‘knowledge’ (*Erkenntnis*).<sup>24</sup> Consequently the original meaning of *kansei* entailed two meanings of the term ‘sensibility’: first the term as used in nineteenth century American psychology, and secondly as used in Kantian and post-Kantian epistemology. In the Meiji era, aesthetics was particularly influenced by German Idealism so the meaning of ‘sensibility’ was generally understood in the Kantian sense. The word ‘*kansei*’ was widely accepted in intellectual life, but not adopted into common usage in Japanese society.

This situation changed suddenly in the 1970s. The word ‘*kansei*’ entered the vernacular in the context of high economic growth. In the early 1980s, market research reported a new type of consumption motivated by desire for self-actualisation and self-expression. This desire was titled ‘*kansei yokkyu*’ (desire driven by *kansei*).<sup>25</sup> Not long after, the notion of ‘consumption based on *kansei*’ was introduced in contraposition to ‘consumption based on rationality’. In response to this market research, designers and the car industry wanted engineers to mount a new marketing strategy utilising the connection between designs, individual preferences, and vocabularies (such as ‘casual’, ‘elegant’, ‘cool’ *et cetera*). The appearance of the new phrase ‘*kansei yokkyu*’ illustrates how *kansei* came to mean an active source of personal inclination. It has a power to promote individual judgment concerning the appeal of language used in marketing. It reflects on multifaceted characteristics of a person and synthetically represents a personal taste.

This expansion of the meaning of *kansei* separates it from the Kantian definition for the following reasons. Firstly, *kansei* no longer refers to a mere passive reception of sensory stimuli. Secondly, *kansei* is no longer clearly independent of intellect or will. The concept of *kansei* now involves the influence of conceptual knowledge or practical reason. Indeed, following engineering, education as a branch of academia turned its attention to *kansei*. As a result, from 1994 to 1999, the number of academic treatises whose titles included *kansei* increased nearly six times. Interest in the term from the perspective of engineering and education was especially conspicuous. The word *kansei* gained popular currency and nowadays is commonly used in daily

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through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*.”

<sup>24</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 93: “Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. ... Only through their union can knowledge arise.”

<sup>25</sup> Statistical data showing the use of the word *kansei* in 1970s onward is referenced in Ueda, “*Kansei Kīwādo no Hatten to Sono Genkai*,” 17-25.

life. Although contemporary use of the word might seem to be abused, there are at least three pragmatic implications here. Firstly, *kansei* is used not only as a receptive but also an active faculty to promote judgment or awareness. Secondly, *kansei* is used as a mirror of individuality and of social groups, as well as universality. In this way it is altered from the Kantian definition that sensibility represented only a universal quality. Thirdly, *kansei* is understood to be a cultivatable human faculty not just a passive sensory experience, and one that is desirable to encourage within the academy.

In summary, the original meaning of *kansei* in the context of experimental psychology or Kantian philosophy was retained in academic society, but its use did not prevail widely. Through a re-configuration of the term *kansei* in the 1970s, it came to mean a conscious manipulation of unconscious sensory experience, and the use of the term became widespread in society. This application and development of the term required philosophers or aestheticians to review the meaning of *kansei* from a different perspective, not only as a mechanical translation of European or American concepts, but also as a symbolic concept which reflects how Japanese society has recognised the sensory. The term *kansei* was once again re-examined in academia from a new perspective. This is a historical reason why *kanseigaku*, or *aisthetics*, has been adopted and enjoys widespread use in contemporary Japan.

### ***Aisthetics as a Response to a Problem of Translation***

The second reason for the adoption of *aisthetics* in Japan lies in its potential to offer a new approach in response to the difficulties in translating aesthetics into Japanese discourses or vice versa. Although *aisthetics* does not resolve the difficulties completely, it may offer a different approach to the problem. Writing about European aesthetics in Japanese or writing about ‘Japanese’ aesthetics in European languages automatically involves comparative aesthetics because this activity confronts the dilemma of the translation of terminologies. Traditionally, aesthetics is understood as the philosophy of art or aesthetic properties such as beauty. In terms of the philosophy of art, since the term ‘Japanese art’ is already common in the vernacular, it seems possible to compare it with ‘European art’. Nevertheless, this view is not sufficient for comparative aesthetics, because the concept of ‘art’ itself is not as universally applicable as one might think. It is a concept deeply rooted in the course of Western European philosophical and cultural history. European ‘art’ has its genealogical root in the Latin word ‘*ars*’ (art) and the Ancient Greek word ‘*τεχνη*, *tekhnē*’ (technique), which has long played a central part in art, including the movement of anti-technique in both the modern and contemporary eras. The Japanese translation of art is ‘*gei-jutsu* 藝術’.

Nishi also considered the issue of the translation of the word ‘art’ and coined the term ‘*gei-jutsu*’ derived from an ancient Chinese text – *The Book of the Later Han Dynasty*.<sup>26</sup> Historically, the word ‘*gei-jutsu*’ meant the mixture of ‘*jutsu*’ (technique) and ‘*gei*’ (practical skill). Nishi employed it as a translation of ‘liberal arts’ as used in European aesthetics. Nishi also translated ‘fine arts’ as ‘*bi-jutsu* 美術’, which consists of ‘*bi*’ (beauty) and ‘*jutsu*’ (technique), and included the traditional *kagura* dances, the *tanka* poetry and calligraphy, as well as genres of fine arts in Europe such as painting, sculpture, engraving, and architecture.<sup>27</sup> Nishi’s translations of the terms ‘liberal arts’ and ‘fine arts’ were more than a mere conversion of terms. Rather, his translation project was an attempt to determine the direction of Japanese reflection on the cultural history of pre-Meiji times, and the direction of education in the Meiji era. In this sense, it was a political project. Therefore, the application of the word *geijutsu* or *bijutsu* was intrinsically an act of accommodating Japanese cultural discourses in a European system of thought, which was an important directive of the new government in the Meiji era. Nowadays, nobody would doubt that ‘art’ has existed right throughout Japanese history regardless of the existence of the word. What this means, however, is that nothing more than the fact that some Japanese phenomena can be appreciated from the European perspective of art. With this understanding, the necessary reason for the coinage is dismissed. For the sake of detailed comparative aesthetics, the disjunction found in translation should be taken into consideration rather than ignored, and in order to do so, it is necessary to avoid presupposing ‘art’ to be a common denominator of comparative aesthetics.

The same problem arises in the philosophy of ‘the aesthetic’. If an aesthetic property, such as the Japanese translation of beauty—‘*bi* 美’—is taken as a static criterion for comparison, and the significance of disjunction is missed when the term is translated. Indeed, it has been stated that the Japanese sense of beauty is incomprehensible without understanding a particular kind of metaphysics in Japanese philosophical discourses.<sup>28</sup> One of the roles of

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<sup>26</sup> Nishi, “*Hyakugaku Renkan* (1872),” [Encyclopaedia] in *Nishi Amane Zenshu* vol. 4 (Tokyo: Munetaka Shobō, 1981), 23-294. Also, in terms of the origin of the term ‘*gei-jutsu*’, see: Ken’ichi Sasaki, *Bigaku Jiten* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. [Dictionary of Aesthetics] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 2004), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Nishi, “*Bimyō Gakusetsu*” [The Theory of Aesthetics] in *Nishi Amane Zenshu* vol. 1, 477.

<sup>28</sup> Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, preface to *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan* (The Hague; Boston; London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), *viv.*

comparative aesthetics is to put aside a European system of thinking and explore systems which are forged from a different perspective. In order to do so, it is necessary to re-consider whether it is possible to think about ‘the aesthetic’ without recourse to the concept of art and beauty. Consequently, it is vital to re-consider what ‘the aesthetic’ itself signifies. This requirement also applies when considering aesthetic perception or aesthetic experience. Once the concepts of art and beauty are both temporarily excluded from the definition of aesthetics, it is necessary to re-define the criteria of ‘the aesthetic’. It would be possible, for example, to make a meaningful comparison between Japanese and European ceramics, but in order to understand fully the essence of the differences between societies, it is necessary to examine the cultural foundations underlining their perspectives on cultural phenomena. When the process of *kanseigaku* is considered as *aisthetics*, we then encounter a philosophy of ‘the aesthetic’ in this alternative context – although what we have is a re-definition of the Western concept of ‘the aesthetic’ itself. Therefore, the perspective of *kanseigaku* or *aisthetics* is required when comparative aesthetics is thoroughly pursued.

### **A Methodology of *Kansei-gaku* Theorised by Eisuke Tsugami**

So far this article has attempted to ground the growing acceptance of *aisthetics* in contemporary Japan by examining the historical development of the term *kansei* and the problem of translating aesthetic terminologies between European and Japanese philosophical discourses. This coming section will discuss the actual method of *aisthetics* by examining one of the recent outcomes of *kanseigaku* proposed by Eisuke Tsugami and *aisthetics* posed by Baumgarten.

Baumgarten’s aesthetics can be seen as *aisthetics*, given he envisaged it as a re-consideration of the concept of *aisthesis*.<sup>29</sup> The recent development of *aisthetics* in Japan has indicated the usefulness of Baumgartens’ work for the construction of its methodology. This point is articulated by a theorisation of

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<sup>29</sup> In Baumgarten’s *Reflections on Poetry* the definition of aesthetics, (“the science of perception”) is supplemented with the Greek “*aistheta episeimes aisthetixes.*” Thus aesthetics was destined, at least in part, as epistemology of *aisthesis* its foundation. See: Baumgarten, *Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis ad Poema* [Reflections on Poetry] (Magdeburg: C.H. Hemmerde, 1735), 39; Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §1: “Aesthetics (the theory of the liberal arts, the lower study of perception, the art of thinking in the fine style, the art of analogical reasoning) is the science of perception that is acquire by means of the senses.” The English translation is available in Charles Harrison, Paul J. Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory 1648-1815* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 489.

*aisthetics* proposed by aesthetician Eisuke Tsugami. Tsugami's theorisation of *aisthetics* was triggered by his reconsideration of Baumgarten's concept of '*perfectio*' in his text *Aesthetics*. Tsugami conceived it to be a 'completion' of sensory perception.<sup>30</sup> This interpretation differs from the traditional understanding of '*perfectio*' as 'perfection': a qualitative property that an object possesses. The traditional interpretation is premised on the concept of '*perfectio*', which Baumgarten developed in his *Meditations on Poetry* and *Metaphysics*. In both treatises, he attributed "unity in multiplicity" in an object to aesthetic perfection. If more diverse representations are united in a single object, it was regarded as more aesthetically perfect, hence more beautiful.<sup>31</sup> His introduction of the concept of "unity in multiplicity" reflects Leibniz. Leibniz grounded the sensory perception of perfection as a fusion of parts, or unity in multiplicity, and attributed the source of unity to a "pre-established harmony": the rational order that permeates through the universe. The task of the rational mind—namely intellect—was then to reveal this natural law as much as possible. Baumgarten's account of aesthetic perfection appears to follow this Leibnizian doctrine. A bridge is expected between perfection gained through sensory perception and perfection gained through intellectual understanding.

Tsugami has, however, pointed out that this bridge was broken in Baumgarten's *Aesthetics*. Baumgarten eliminated the concept of "unity in multiplicity" from his concept of '*perfectio*' and instead stated that "the aim of aesthetics is the perfection of our sensual cognition as such. This, however, is beauty."<sup>32</sup> '*Perfectio*' is not a description of an object anymore. Rather it signifies the perfected state of sensory perception. Tsugami argues that this elimination of "unity in multiplicity" and the emphasis on the phrase "sensory

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<sup>30</sup> Contemporary philosopher Steffen W. Gross also translates the Latin '*perfectio*' in *Aesthetics* into 'completion' not 'perfection'. See: Steffen W. Gross, "The Neglected Programme of Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42 (2002): 404.

<sup>31</sup> The number of points that construct a single perception is called "extensive clarity" by Baumgarten and distinguished from "intensive clarity," which leads to logical distinctness by means of distinguishability from a different perception. Aesthetic perfection only relates to "extensive clarity." Baumgarten stated as follows: "In extensively very clear representations more is represented in a sensate way than in those less clear; therefore, they contribute more to the perfection of a poem." See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), 43.

<sup>32</sup> Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §14. English translation cited from Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *Art in Theory*, 489.

cognition ‘as such’ (*qua talis*)” demonstrates Baumgarten’s intention to define perception of perfection as completion of sensory perception. That is to say, Baumgarten aimed to provide the principles to move beyond the enhancement of mere sensory perception to the completion of sensory perception, regardless of an intellectual resolution of a representation. In fact, Baumgarten stated that the purpose of his aesthetic project lay in the cultivation of sensory perception from merely sensory to the level of the ‘beautiful’ within the aesthetic realm. It should be noted that Baumgarten considered the relation of ‘things’ (*res*) and ‘thinking’ (*cogitatio*) to form the basis of the cognition of beauty and warned his readers not to confuse ‘things’ with materials or objects.<sup>33</sup> Therefore his definition of beauty is the completion of a process, not a quality of an object. The technique of such cultivation was called ‘art’ (*ars*). Tsugami’s interpretation is further supported by Baumgarten’s claim in *Aesthetics* that *perfectio* was no longer to be included in the study of aesthetics if the perfection was able to be grasped by the rational mind.<sup>34</sup> Through this reconceptualisation of ‘*perfectio*’ in the aesthetic realm, Baumgarten finally broke the nexus between the aesthetic realm and the intellectual realm in his *Aesthetics*.

In support of Tsugami’s focus on the concept of ‘*perfectio*’, another shift from *Metaphysics* to *Aesthetics* is also noteworthy. It is the shift from Baumgarten’s attention to objective truth to a relational truth between object and subject. Given that the “unity in multiplicity” in an object is excluded from his conception of aesthetic perception, ‘the aesthetic’ is nothing but the result of the interaction between subject and object. In fact, Baumgarten claimed that aesthetic phenomena should not be understood as objects or materials, but should be understood as the manifestation of a mind.<sup>35</sup> Baumgarten accepted the subjectivity and relativity of aesthetic experience. What he was after was neither purely objective nor subjective, but relational – what he called ‘representational truth’ (*veritas repraesentationis*), which is attested only intuitively through the completion of sensory perception.<sup>36</sup> *Aisthesis* in aesthetic experience is envisaged as an active faculty to produce intuition through an act of representation as a result of interaction between an individual subject and an object of thought. It is not a merely receptivity.

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<sup>33</sup> When he defined sensory cognition of beauty in *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten also noted that the relation of ‘things’ (*res*) and ‘thinking’ (*cogitatio*) form the basis of the cognition of beauty. See Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §18.

<sup>34</sup> Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §16.

<sup>35</sup> Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §§18-20 and §425.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, §427.

Paying heed to the intuitive aspect of aesthetic experience, Tsugami developed his own *aisthetics*.<sup>37</sup> Tsugami agrees with Baumgarten in that he considered *aisthesis* to be a subjective, dynamic, and active faculty. This conceptualisation is unlike Kantian ‘sensibility’, which signifies universal receptivity. Tsugami re-configured the aesthetic experience as a positive experience via the Japanese concept of *kansei*. Furthermore, *aisthesis* is posited as a faculty that is influenced by an individual personality, his or her culture, as well as universality. As was mentioned in the second section of this article, *kansei* was thought to be a faculty that determines personal inclination and also reflects other multifaceted influences. This feature is different from Baumgarten’s concept of *aisthesis*, which is related yet determined by intellect or practical reason. According to Tsugami, the experience of positive values is taken to move dynamically from sensory input to the formation of a judgment, and is described as intuition based on multifaceted influences such as intellect and morality. The dynamics from sensory perception to an intuition of a value is called ‘*aisthetisation*’ (*kanseika*). Since Tsugami takes subjectivity of *aisthetisation* into consideration, his statement should not be understood to mean that *aisthetisation* as a response to a particular object—whether or not it is nature or a work of art—is a universal experience. On the contrary, he suggests that *aisthetisation* may be different depending upon time and space, and to be attentive to these differences is a task of *aisthetics*.

Based on this understanding, he proposed the method of *aisthetics*, that is, a description of *aisthetisation*. This method is developed through his investigation of the shift of language. One of the examples he analysed is the change in the use of the word ‘nostalgic’. Initially, this term could be used in the form of ‘a person gets nostalgic’. Subsequently, the proposition ‘a thing is nostalgic’ came to be accepted. In addition to this change, a further proposition: ‘a person feels nostalgic’ also emerged. The first shift from ‘I get nostalgic’ to ‘I feel nostalgic’ illustrates the way in which a word describing an objective situation can morph to a word that indicates a subjective feeling. The transition from ‘a person feels nostalgic’ to ‘a thing is nostalgic’ shows that a word that describes a quality of feeling can turn into a word that describes a qualitative value of object as felt by the speaker. The word ‘nostalgic’ is *aisthetised* by endowing an object with a qualitative value of an object, which is intuitively felt. This kind of linguistic shift is traceable by means of dictionaries and this is an example of an *aisthetisation* happening within each

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<sup>37</sup> For the details of Tsugami’s aesthetic theory of *kansei*, see: Eisuke Tsugami, *Ajiwai no Kōzō: Kanseika Jidai no Bigaku* [The Structure of Taste: Aesthetics in the Era of Aisthetisation] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2010), 52-59.

linguistic area. Tsugami has been reporting the outcomes of this kind of linguistic change, which he calls *aisthetisation*, using this methodology.

Using Tsugami's method, *aisthetics* enables the articulation of a particular kind of linguistic change as aesthetic experience, which is independent of the concepts of beauty or art. Aesthetic experience can involve various words in daily life, which may include the terms that describe non-beautiful or non-artistic phenomena. It is possible to discuss aesthetics without determining the definition of beauty or art. Therefore this methodology is useful for investigation into aesthetic phenomena in the non-European cultural discourses, where the concepts of beauty or art are not easily translatable. Led by Baumgarten's definition of aesthetic experience and taking the concept of 'kansei' into account, *aisthetics* thus finds an appropriate locus in the realm of aesthetics.

### **The Method of *Aisthetics* for Comparative Aesthetics**

It is noteworthy that Tsugami constructed his *aisthetics* with reference to the development of the term 'kansei'. Examination of the difference between *kanseigaku* as proposed by Tsugami, and Baumgarten's *aisthetics* reveals a deeper use for *aisthetics* in the general development of comparative aesthetics. This point relates to the philosopher Tanehisa Otabe's statement that comparative aesthetics between Japan and Western Europe is not a characterisation of either the purely Western European or purely Japanese cultures; rather the outcome of comparative aesthetics has to be considered as an interactive production.<sup>38</sup> Aesthetic theories devised in non-European regions are created from theoretical and practical interests. This thinking arises amidst a transcultural dynamism where Japanese perspectives and non-Japanese perspectives (in this case Western European perspectives) interact with each other. 'Transcultural' here means neither a single globalisation nor an excessive particularisation of the meaning of 'the aesthetic'. Its scope should be understood along with the concept of Welsch's understanding of the compass of 'transculturality': "away from the concentration on the polarity of the own and the foreign to an attentiveness for what might be common and connective wherever we encounter things foreign."<sup>39</sup> *Aisthetics* from a

<sup>38</sup> See: Tanehisa Otabe, "Tsuzumi Tsuneyoshi to 'Mususei' no Bigaku – Kanbunkateki Bigaku no Tameni," [Tsuzumi Tsuneyoshi and Aesthetics of 'Framelessness' – For the Sake of Intercultural Aesthetics] *Bigakugeijutsugaku Kenkyu* 25 (2007): 195-196.

<sup>39</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality – The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 194-213.

transcultural perspective is a continuous act to move beyond the limitation of one's own '*aisthetic*' paradigm in the face of a different paradigm. This recognition permits the creation of another '*aisthetic*' paradigm through the interaction between the two. Through this dynamism, Otabe argues that comparative aesthetics may produce perspectives that could be applied to other societies and help through analysis to form a different point of view. If comparative aesthetics ignores the cultural assumptions behind aesthetic theories, aesthetics cannot be free from a tendency to try to distinguish the particularities of each culture, which may not exist, or universalise perspectives in a single paradigm.

Taking the view above into consideration, it is possible to think about a method of comparative *aisthetics* that begins with an examination of philosophical formulation which enables *aisthetics* to be utilised as the background. That is to say, given that *aisthetics* originated within a European philosophy, comparative *aisthetics* can begin with investigation into the philosophical background of European *aisthetics* and the articulation of the ambit of commonalities with other discourses in order to reveal a further potential paradigm of *aisthetics* in a different philosophical discourse.

In order to think of the ambit of commonalities, it is necessary to go back to the concept of perception in its widest sense. This approach was taken by Baumgarten who also began his conceptualisation of *aisthesis* with an attempt to articulate a most fundamental description of perception.<sup>40</sup> According to Baumgarten, *aisthesis* is a branch of a perception in its widest sense: a primitive type of supraliminal consciousness that is prior to the distinction between subjective and objective, or sensory and intellectual. Any thought may be the starting point of consideration of *aisthetics*. This is the broadest kind of denominator in aesthetics, which is to be also taken into consideration in terms of comparative *aisthetics*.

Then, when it is recognised how Baumgarten separates *aisthesis* from any other type of perception, the European philosophical background is brought to the fore. There was a dichotomy between *noesis* (knowledge) and *aisthesis* (perception) and the devaluation of the latter, which had been dominant in European philosophy since the Greek era. This devaluation is in accord with an attempt to separate human beings who have an ability of *noesis* from other animals who possess *aisthesis* only. This tendency does not exclude the era of Baumgarten. Being a rationalist, Baumgarten's establishment of aesthetics was not a simple matter because there was a Cartesian tradition in

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<sup>40</sup> Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Magdeburg: C.H. Hemmerde, 1779), §§504-506.

the seventeenth century that revived the Platonic devaluation of sensory perception.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, at that time there was a tension between the demand for the reconciliation of sensationalism and rationalism that took place against the background of the tension between German Pietism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In this context one may observe the tension of the dichotomy between *noesis* and *aisthesis*. Baumgarten attempted to reconcile the two by retaining the dichotomy but elevating the value of *aisthesis* closer to the level of *noesis*. This dichotomy in itself can be an object of comparative *aisthesis* between European and non-European aesthetic discourses.

Furthermore, it is also possible to illuminate characteristics of the conceptualisation of *aisthesis* that are particular to rationalism. Baumgarten's concept of *aisthesis* was expressed in his own terminology as 'clear' but 'confused' perception. This terminology is rooted in Descartes's taxonomy of perception—'clear', 'confused', 'distinct', and 'obscure'—which may be traced to Scholastic epistemology.<sup>42</sup> Descartes separates himself from the past in terms of his prioritisation of perception to already accepted truths. To be more specific, according to Descartes, the manner in which a subject perceives matters more than what is to be perceived. Priority of perception is also taken over by Baumgarten, but what separates the two lies in the classes of perception adopted for the acquisition of truth. Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* divides the degrees of perception into four modes: distinct (*distincta*) – a possibility of differentiating a perception from another through reasoning; clear (*clara*) – vivid consciousness of a perception; confused (*confusa*) – impossibility of differentiating each perception through reasoning; and obscure (*obscura*) – impossibility of differentiating a perception from other perceptions.<sup>43</sup> For Descartes, they are not only mere modal differences, but also determinant of truth. Among the four modes of perception, only what is perceived clearly and distinctly is considered truth by Descartes. Following Descartes' epistemology, howsoever 'clear' a perception may be, it is eliminated from the path of truth not because it is not 'distinct' but 'confused'.

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<sup>41</sup> Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus differentiated between 'distinct' knowledge and 'confused' knowledge. For the Scholastic use of these four terminologies, see: David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 182-194.

<sup>43</sup> René Descartes, "Principles of Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* vol.1, trans. and ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 209.

Such clear but confused perception was labelled as ‘inferior’ because it was conceived to be the source of error. This devaluation is due to his criterion of the concept of ‘distinctness’ consisting in demonstrability by means of deductive inference. Universal agreement itself is necessary but insufficient for the attainment of truth because of its recourse to the connection between personal views not interconnection between things perceived.<sup>44</sup> According to Descartes’ methodology, it was vital to eliminate any pre-judgment for the attainment of the firmer truth. If this is the case, emotion can never be the source of truth because emotion can never be articulated by deductive reasoning and thus remains ‘confused’. A subject can tell which emotion he or she possess only through subjective feeling itself, not through articulation by means of intellectual reasoning. Emotional perceptions are attributed to personal views. On this account alone they cannot be considered ‘distinct’ no matter how strongly they are manifested. Thus Cartesian epistemology is radically different from the views of Baumgarten who attempted to vindicate an epistemic value of ‘clear-confused perception’.

Nevertheless, even Descartes attempted to elevate a particular type of ‘emotion’ (*commotio*) to the level of the ‘distinct’ by separating ‘intellectual emotion’ as opposed to ‘animal emotion’.<sup>45</sup> In particular, pleasure contrasts ‘intellectual joy’ (*gaudium intellectuale*) with ‘animal joy’ (*laetitia animalis*). This only occurred later when he explored morality and the experience of art which was later dealt with by Baumgarten as the subject of aesthetics. For Baumgarten, practical reason (in contrast to intellectual reason) engaged in aesthetic perception, and in this sense moral philosophy and aesthetics were not completely separated. Despite this, ‘distinctness’ in emotional perception is different from ‘distinctness’ in deductive inference simply because it relies on

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<sup>44</sup> The term ‘interconnection’ is borrowed from the Descartes’ passage: “It must be acknowledged that all the sciences are so closely interconnected [*omnes inter se esse connexas*] that it is much easier to learn them all together than to separate one from the other. If, therefore, someone seriously wishes to investigate the truth of things, he ought not to select one science in particular, for they are all interconnected and interdependent.” See: René Descartes, “Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> The concept of ‘emotion’ expressed as ‘intellectual emotion’ should not be confused with other kinds of emotion, which are generally described as ‘passion’. As Abel B. Franco interprets, unlike ‘passions’, ‘intellectual emotion’ is thought to “occur without the intervention of the body.” See René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Elizabeth S. Halane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 381; Abel B. Franco, “Descartes’ Theory of Passions” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006), 70-71.

a personal view rather than the demonstrable interconnection between things. Thus it still remains in the realm of probability which Descartes strictly eliminated in his epistemology elsewhere. There is a tension in Descartes' epistemology between a devaluation of 'clear-confused perception' seen in his main epistemology and its positive re-evaluation in his conception of perception related to morality and art. In other words, in one sense Descartes devalued 'clear-confused perception', or *aisthesis*, but on the other hand Descartes attempted to re-evaluate it by introducing the concept of 'intellectual emotion'. The latter happened when he explored the issues of morality and art.

It was Leibniz who explicitly advanced the conceptualisation of 'confused' perception: *aisthesis* in contrast to 'distinct' intellectual perception. He conceived 'confusion' as an irresolvable complexity of unity and attributed the source of this unity to the rational order, which permeates the universe by introducing the doctrine of 'pre-established harmony'. In virtue of the doctrine, it was possible for Leibniz to accept the certitude of perception even if it was 'confused' because it was possible to state that the 'confused' perception was not due to its epistemic value but due to its inability to be self-reflective. The question is then how the certainty of knowledge in the 'confused' realm was vindicated. Regarding this point, Leibniz' answer was ambivalent. On one hand, he believed that the task of philosophy was to reveal the universal law behind perception through analysis of the 'unity in variety'. In this way, he created a bridge between 'confused' and 'distinct' with an expectation to render 'confused' perception into more 'distinct' perception. Nonetheless, he also conceded that confused perception might never be explained even by the rational mind even if it has a high epistemological value.<sup>46</sup> In this case, on an experiential level, acquisition of truth is only attributed to pleasure. Such truth, as Leibniz claimed, is "...understood *a priori* by the infinite mind alone, and cannot be demonstrated by any resolution."<sup>47</sup> That is to say, there is no reflective analysis possible even by the rational mind. It follows that the independent truth, which exists only in the realm of 'clear-confused perception', is still not articulated. Thus, despite his revolutionary conceptualisation of 'confused', his philosophy did not lend itself to the establishment of aesthetics.

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<sup>46</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas," in *Leibniz Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. and ed. Leroy E. Lowmker (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956), 291-295.

<sup>47</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Necessary and Contingent Truths," in *Leibniz Philosophical Writings*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson and trans. Mary Morris and G.H.R. Parkinson (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1973), 98.

Baumgarten attempted to redeem the value of ‘clear-confused perception’, or *aisthesis*, by offering *a priori* principles of the completion of sensory perception. According to Baumgarten, the cognitive value of *aisthesis* is not at all identical to conceptual truth. He envisaged it as a result of the mastery of perception. In other words, it was described as something to be pursued rather than something explained. That is why he expressed aesthetic truth as ‘light’ or a result of enlightenment. From the perspective of the history of *aesthetics*, an aesthetics, the era of rationalism can be seen as an attempt at the redemption of the value of *aisthesis* through the consideration of morality and the experience of art in relation to the realm of *aisthesis*. This attempt at redemption coincides with the priority of perception in terms of the judgment of epistemic and moral value. That is to say, when the determiner of truth was attributed to perception itself, not the outside authority, it was also then necessary to ground the certitude of ‘goodness’ in morality and of art to our perceptions. In order to do this, a detailed conceptualisation of ‘clear-confused perception’ and its positive re-evaluation was thought to be inevitable. Taking the rationalistic tradition into consideration, the background of the establishment of aesthetics as the redemption of *aisthesis* can be interpreted in this context. To contrast this understanding with a different background of conceptualisation of perception can also form an object of comparison.

### **Conclusion: The Scope of *Aesthetics* for Comparative Aesthetics**

*Kanseigaku*, or *aesthetics* has been developed over the last couple of decades in Japan. It is grounded in both historical and theoretical reasoning. As argued in the second section of this article, the term ‘*kansei*’ was initially a simple translation of a European word, but it started possessing a cultural meaning in late twentieth century Japan. This change promoted a new philosophical reflection on the concept of ‘*kansei*’. Furthermore, the translation problem that was focused on in the third section of this paper illuminates the necessity of constructing a different aesthetic theory from *artistics* or a study of beauty by re-considering the meaning of ‘the aesthetic’ itself. *Kanseigaku* as an *aesthetics* is an attempt to respond to these expectations, taking the development of the concept of ‘*kansei*’ into full consideration.

As this article has demonstrated, it is important to elucidate a method of *kanseigaku* as an *aesthetics* in this context. Based on the re-interpretation of Baumgarten’s *aesthetics* and an understanding of the meaning of the word ‘*kansei*’, Eisuke Tsugami’s *aesthetics* provides a way of observing and describing *aisthetisation*, which is not necessarily reducible to “art” or “beauty.” Following this viewpoint, *aesthetics* expands the range of objects that comparative aesthetics can deal with. This expansion is especially useful for an

investigation of culture that has a different system of thought from European discourse. The final section of this article identified a process of comparison where a concept of *aisthesis* is understood within a framework of the history of ideas. The broadest denominator of *aisthetics* can be traced back to the perception in the mind itself as Baumgarten posited. This comparison begins with exploring how such initial manifestation of the perception may be conceived as *kansei* or *aisthesis* depending on cultural paradigms. From a macro perspective, the dichotomy between *aisthesis* and *noesis*, which traditionally underlies European philosophy, simply does not exist in a Japanese context. The word '*kansei*' as given in Japanese daily language has a different reference point from this European dichotomy. Such a cultural difference requires *aisthetics* to assist in exploring such cross-cultural comparisons.