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ART THOUGHTS BY GREAT THINKERS OF CHINA AND JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

The role of art aesthetics, religion and spiritual thoughts of great thinkers is very deeply built in the life style and culture of the people of a country. In view of variations over space i.e. country to country this study covered the comparative stance in the philosophies of China and Japan in specific and India and Western countries in general. Therefore, views of some eminent philosophers and saints namely Lao Tzu, Confucius and Gao Xingjian of China and Yoko Ono, Shinichi Suzuki and Akira Kurosawa of Japan, are examined in this article. These great thoughts shaped the lifestyles and culture of the people of China and Japan respectively. However, the philosophies and lifestyles of the people of China were relatively more religious and spiritually oriented than that of Japan. In case of Japan, professional orientation is relatively more apparent. In comparison to China and Japan, the lifestyles, religious, cultural and socio-economic practices / values in the western countries, say Europe and America, are materialistic and art thoughts by great thinkers of these countries are in general on scientific observations and feelings on the very physical aspects of human forms and natural phenomenon etc. But Indian thought process is predominantly spiritual and religion oriented. Indian artists and philosophers in general express mostly the very inner subtle experiences and feelings of beauty and ecstasy.

KEYWORDS

China's thinkers, Japan's thinkers, art thoughts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The role of art aesthetics, religion and spiritual thoughts of great thinkers is very deeply built in the life style and culture of the people of a country. These teach us to be a good citizen. However, the Indian scene has been predominantly influenced by art aesthetics, religion and spirituality as is depicted in the visual & performing art works, religious and spiritual preaching / philosophies. The most forceful form of these art thoughts are cited as "QUOTES" of eminent thinkers or philosophers.

2. DEFINITION

A 'QUOTATION' may be defined as words of wisdom and advice said by eminent philosophers, thinkers of various professions or fields. These may include saints in spiritual meditation, professionals of fine arts like painting, sculpture, music, photography, theatrical arts or art-aesthetics, political and social work, religion and culture, writers and poets with significant contribution to literature, and observations / writings of academicians and scientists. ⁽¹⁾

3. IMPORTANCE

The very purpose of a 'Quotation' is to tell the people in general routine mode of life, the very subtle truths or phenomenon which the quoting personality had realized or attained after life-long hard work and struggle with adverse circumstances. Certainly such achievements are beyond the capability of an ordinary person even if he or she devotes his/her entire life for that mission. One cannot be master of all professions or virtues for successful life. Each person has different potential capabilities vis-à-vis resources and circumstances. One's own life is too short to learn and gain experiences of such a wide spectrum of space and time. Wisdom lies in learning and following the virtuous path from the truths revealed and guidance provided / available through the 'QUOTES' of eminent philosophers and thinkers. Hence, the role of Quotations in our life as such is of paramount importance. ⁽²⁾

4. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To collect and compile the great thoughts/ideologies quoted by great thinkers of China and Japan which had deep impact in shaping the lifestyles and cultures of their people.
2. To compare and highlight the differences in the philosophies of great thinkers of China and Japan reflected in their lifestyles and cultures.
3. To compare and highlight the differences in the philosophies of China and Japan with that of India and the western countries say America and Europe.

5. METHODOLOGY

The available studies or publications of quotations of vast number of philosophers and thinkers of various professions and subjects are in the form of individual booklets, pamphlets, preaching, discourses, poems, verses, paintings, footnotes and other forms of literature etc. There is no single publication where attempt has been made to compile together all such important Quotations from various professions / fields across the space and time dimensions. Therefore, the first step was to select the most eminent philosophers/thinkers of China and Japan who played major role in shaping the lifestyles and culture of their people. It was decided to select Lao Tzu, Confucius and Gao Xingjian of China and Yoko Ono, Shinichi Suzuki and Akira Kurosawa of Japan for this study.

The main input for this study being great thoughts/ideologies of the selected eminent philosophers/thinkers, it required exhaustive surveys for collecting and compiling the Quotes from available sources as cited above and surfing of important websites on the internet.

In view of the objectives of this study, there is little scope for use of statistical techniques. Hence the techniques of comparative analysis of thoughts/ideologies reflecting the differences in lifestyles and cultures of China and Japan were attempted.

Similar comparative analysis has been attempted to highlight these differences with respect to thought processes/lifestyles and cultures of India and the western countries like America and Europe.

6. DISCUSSION

The great thoughts/ideologies of selected eminent artists, philosophers and saints on art and aesthetics namely Lao Tzu, Confucius and Gao Xingjian of China and Yoko Ono, Shinichi Suzuki and Akira Kurosawa of Japan, are compiled and presented in the following:

6.1 THINKERS OF CHINA**LAO TZU**Born: 6th - 5th century BC, Died: 5th - 4th century BC

Chinese Philosopher and Poet



Lao Tzu was also known as Laozi. In ancient China, he was a famous philosopher and poet. He wrote 'Tao Te Ching' and was the founder of TAOISM. His quotes vouch for his mystic achievements of self-realization and inner visions. ^(7,8,9)

- Silence is a source of great strength.
- One should be content and enjoy whatever way the things are. Then one feels there is nothing lacking and the whole world is yours.
- The music of soul can be heard in the whole universe.
- The life and death are two ends of one thread which are viewed from different sides.
- Being at the centre of yourself you get the answer to know who you are and what you want.
- The key to growth is in the awareness of higher dimensions of consciousness in your being.
- The sublimity of the Creative is great indeed, to which all beings owe their beginning and permeates all its heaven.
- Every journey begins with a single step.
- The clay is shaped into a bowl, but it is the empty space that makes it useful.
- All streams flow to the sea because it is lower than they are. Humility gives it its strength.
- To know others is intelligence, to know you is wisdom. To master others is strength and to master you is true power.
- The soft overcomes the hard. The slow overcomes the fast.
- He who defines himself can't know who he really is.

CONFUCIUS

September 28, 551 BC – 479 BC

Chinese Editor, Teacher, Politician and Philosopher



Confucius was most famous ancient Chinese philosopher and politician. He emphasized morality in personal, governmental and social relationships etc. His quotes speak of his high mental capabilities. His philosophy was given the name of "Confucianism" which found acceptance in government circles. ^(10,11)

- I wish you to become what you are deep at the center of your being.
- Life as it comes is really simple. But we make it complicated.
- It does not matter how slow you are unless you stop.
- Our greatest glory is in rising every time we fall and not in ever falling.
- Birth and death are pre-determined; honours and riches depend on destiny.
- It is perfect virtue to practice kindness, earnestness, sincerity, gravity and generosity of soul under all circumstances.
- Humility is a solid foundation of all virtues.

GAO XINGJIAN

Born on January 4, 1940

Chinese Novelist, Painter and Critic



Gao Xingjian is a very famous Novelist, Painter and Critic of Art in China. He was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000. His quotes depict his deep thoughts of inner visions and spirituality. ⁽¹²⁻¹⁵⁾

- Literature can never die, because it is a stronghold of spiritual freedom and forms the last line of defense of human dignity.
- Observing oneself and others help clear-minded starting point for literature.
- In the history of literature there are many great enduring works which were not published in the lifetime of the authors. If the authors had not achieved self-affirmation while writing, how could they have continued to write?
- The thirst for truth comes with the beginning of life but the ability to lie is gradually acquired in the process of trying to stay alive.
- Whatever you wish to do, do it without loss of time as life is not too long.
- Art is the artist's spiritual heaven. He looks to creativity for spiritual fulfillment. This is his way of resisting rampant materialism and mercantilism.
- Seeing urges us to paint this rather than that. I select according to how happy I am with what I'm painting.
- The human need for language is not only for transmission of meaning but also for listening and affirming one's existence.
- The truth is not subservient to politics or the market.
- Sometimes men, particularly intellectuals tend to think that they are creator like God and forget that they are like everyone else.
- Poetry can be written by everybody, just like everybody knows how to make love,
- Everybody has to have one or the other problem. Otherwise he will have no reason for living.
- One can contemplate and wander without any worries, between heaven and earth, in one's own private world, and in thus acquire supreme freedom.
- No beautiful new world is created by literary revolution or revolutionary literature. Rather it killed the basic nature of literature.
- The ability of a writer to scrutinize self as well as others in the process of observing the boundless universe would help his observations surpass the objective descriptions of reality.
- Truth has many layers and the simple and superficial statement of facts cannot satisfy the writer.

6.2 THINKERS OF JAPAN

YOKO ONO

Born: February 18, 1933

Japanese Artist, Musician



Yoko Ono is a well known Multimedia Artist, Painter, Musician, Songwriter and Filmmaker. She is also acknowledged as peace activist. ⁽¹⁶⁾

- Every drop in the ocean counts.
- The power to bring peace is vested only in art and music.

- Everybody dreams for seeking a beautiful world for self and our children.
- Life is an art. Art is the way of survival.
- Art is my breath and without art I feel choked.
- The nature of art and creativity make the artists controversial. Otherwise they are mere artisans.
- Initially my art work was not accepted in the art world because of being ahead of my time.
- Any art is great if it inspires you greatly. Otherwise it is not great for you whatever the museums, critics and art galleries may comment.
- It requires great courage for the artist to reveal the truth.
- Art is an effort to make you walk half an inch above ground.
- I never thought I'm going to be an artist. When I actually began to become successful in the art world I made it a point to say. I am a dilettante; I am not a professional artist, which is true.
- Everybody's an artist. Everybody's God. It's just that they're inhibited.
- I never went or intended to be trained in any art school. Some ideas I had which I expressed.
- One gets immense love in creating art unless driven by lust for money.
- Sometimes I have compared myself with a scientist or something when you discover something and you don't expect the whole world to understand it. I always thought I was doing that kind of activity, in art and in music too.
- Experiencing sadness and anger can make you feel more creative, and by being creative, you can get beyond your pain or negativity.
- Creativity is innate and it manifests itself in so many forms. It needs to come out somehow or it destroys you in some way.
- I think people place limitations on each other and on us. There is a great fear of expressing ourselves, of making creativity happen.

SHINICHI SUZUKI**Oct.18, 1898- Jan. 26, 1998****Japanese Violinist and Teacher**

Shinichi Suzuki was the Japanese inventor of the International 'Suzuki Method' of music education and developed a philosophy for educating people of all ages and abilities. His method helped millions of young children worldwide to learn, to play the violin. Instead of trying to teach them to read music, he emphasized listening, imitation, and repetition, theorizing that children could learn to play music the same way they learn language. ⁽¹⁷⁾

- Art is meant for human beings. All those who love art or teach it, should work to save this world.
- One has to find art within oneself and not outside. For that one has to become first a fine person.
- A work of art is the expression of a man's whole personality, sensibility and ability.
- Nobody acquires talent by birth. Many people leave it to fate without trying to work for it.
- Musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed. Any child who is properly trained can develop musical ability just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited.
- I have come to the definite conclusion that musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed.
- Patience is the absence of expectation.
- Knowledge is not skill. Knowledge plus ten thousand times is skill.
- Every child grows; everything depends on the teacher.
- It is necessary to be concerned about the importance of educating a really beautiful human spirit.
- Tone has the living soul.
- If one wants to do something, should start with courage immediately. This habit will open up many doors for success.

AKIRA KUROSAWA**March 23, 1910 - 1998, Japan****Director, Screenwriter, Producer and Editor**

Akira Kurosawa was the first Japanese film director to win International acclaim. Regarded as one of the most important and influential filmmakers in the history of cinema, Kurosawa directed 30 films in a career spanning 57 years. In 1990, he accepted the Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement. Posthumously, he was named "Asian of the Century" in the "Arts, Literature and Culture" category by Asian Week Magazine. ⁽¹⁸⁾

- I have chosen cinema as my life's work because in a film you combine literature, painting, music and theatre all together.
- I often think as to why people cannot be happier together and this is the common theme in all my films.
- To be understood well, a film has to depict properly the common problems of human beings.
- Which films are enjoyable in making are the ones really enjoyed by the audiences. But you cannot get the pleasure of work done unless you put in your best to give it life and that's the spirit to be revealed also by the crew from heart.
- Many ideas come up for making a film one of these grows fast to express a particular issue at appropriate time. The script is written and the film is produced like a tree blossoms and bears fruit.
- Just like the techniques of modern art, silent pictures are simple and beautiful. I like this simplification.
- The inner need to express something is the root of my films. The script nurtures its growth into a tree and direction develops its flowers and fruits.
- To live honestly and develop ones abilities best is my belief. So in my films, characters live honestly and make the most of their roles. The real heroes are such people.
- The great appeal of film is its reliability.
- To be an artist means to search, to find and look at the realities.
- People who delight in torturing others are insane.

7. OBSERVATIONS

The contributions made by these eminent philosophers, artists, political, economic and social thinkers and particularly spiritual poets/preachers are priceless. It presents a wide spectrum of thoughts on art, aesthetics and spirituality and their significant influence on the lifestyles of the people of China and Japan respectively. However, a comparative analysis of these art thoughts between these two countries brings out that the philosophies and lifestyles of the people of China were relatively more religious and spiritually oriented than that of Japan. In case of Japan, professional orientation is relatively more apparent. In comparison to China and Japan, the Indian scene and lifestyles were deeply influenced by the thoughts of great thinkers on art aesthetics, spirituality and religion in the past as well as present.

On the other hand, the lifestyles, religious, cultural and socio-economic practices / values in the western countries, say Europe and Americas, are materialistic and art thoughts by great thinkers of these countries are in general on scientific observations and feelings on the very physical aspects of human forms and natural phenomenon etc. ⁽³⁾ Indian thought process is predominantly spiritual and religion oriented. The quotes of Indian artists and philosophers in general express mostly the very inner subtle experiences and feeling of beauty and ecstasy. ⁽²⁾

8. CONCLUSION

This article presents a wide spectrum of priceless thoughts on art aesthetics, religion and spirituality which influenced the lifestyles and culture of the people of China and Japan respectively. However, a comparative analysis between these two countries brings out that the philosophies and lifestyles of the people of China were relatively more religious and spiritually oriented than that of Japan. In case of Japan, professional orientation is relatively more apparent. In comparison to China and Japan, the lifestyles, religious, cultural and socio-economic practices / values in the western countries, say Europe and America, are materialistic and art thoughts by great thinkers of these countries are in general on scientific observations and feelings on the very physical aspects of human forms and natural phenomenon etc. But Indian thought process is predominantly spiritual and religion oriented. The quotes of Indian artists and philosophers in general express mostly the very inner subtle experiences and feeling of beauty and ecstasy.

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