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## Perceptions of Ambiguous Reality – Life, Death and Beauty in *Sakura*

### 1. *The Pair “Transiency and/but Eternality”*

#### 1.1 *Introduction*

This article will discuss how cherry blossoms and trees provide examples of ambiguous reality or paired images in which polar natures co-inhere. The plants remind people of the ambiguity of life, of “mortality and/but<sup>1</sup> immortality, with beauty.” The ambiguity is expressed through metaphors characteristic of the Japanese view of life.

The perspective of ambiguous reality will contribute to the reconsideration of dualistic ways of thinking, because it will provide visions of “joining” or “both-and.” Dualism is a map in which “dividing,” “splitting,” “analyzing,” or “dichotomizing” is a basic pattern of behavior and thought. This map tends to think little of the “other,” which is seen as the inferior, giving rise to a rift between the binary natures.<sup>2</sup> “Dividing” sometimes does not offer a place for relative and subjective intuitions, equal co-relationship between two domains, or interrelationships of conflicted things. Even though dualistic ways of thinking occupy a dominant position in the conceptual system of many people, visions of “joining, coexistence, or ambiguity” should also be considered.

#### 1.2 *Cherry Blossoms and Trees in Japan*

*Sakura* 桜, “cherry blossoms and trees,” are deeply loved by many Japanese. They have been intimately related to Japanese culture since early times. Even though they are mere plants and only one of a variety of flowers, the blossoms are sometimes regarded as a symbol of life’s fleeting transience because of the brief period of their flowering. If one pays attention to diverse features of cherry

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the term “and/but” to describe the state in which polar natures coexist and influence each other, and their boundaries are sometimes ambiguous, as if their opposing elements are identical.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Bruce Lincoln (2003) in *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* exhaustively discusses the dualistic point of view concerning influences on a contemporary political issue, such as the conflicts between the United States and terrorists.

blossoms, one notices that the flowers offer fertile material for the imagination, but aside from the blossoms, one should study the images derived from the cherry trees as well. Cherry trees will provide quite different images from those of transient flowers – eternal life and beauty. Cherry blossoms and trees will remind of ambiguous images in which opposites make a pair.

Belonging to the genus *Prunus* of the subfamily *Prunoideae* of the family *Rosaceae*, *sakura* are originally found in nine wild varieties in mountain areas throughout Japan, and they are also widely bred in 200 to 300 species. (Iwaki et al., 1997: 114) According to Somegō Masataka (2000: 23), a botanist, Japanese cherry trees evolved from *Prunus cerasoides*, *P. carmesina*, and *P. rufa* in Nepal and Bhutan. Although spring is the season of the cherry blossoms in Japan, *P. cerasoides*, one of the ancestors of the Japanese cherry trees, blooms in October in the temperate climate areas in Nepal from 1300 to 2000 meters above sea level. The other ancestors, *P. carmesina* and *P. rufa*, come out in March in the cold regions of the Himalayan Mountains, from 2000 to 2600 meters above sea level. (Somegō 2000: 134) As a result of the process of their evolution, the cherry trees which flower in spring enter into a resting stage during winter to live through the cold of the Himalayan mountains. (Somegō 2000: 25) In Japan, also cherry trees have to wait until a suitable temperature is reached to come out of dormancy and bloom in the spring.

*Yama-z(s)akura* 山桜 (*Prunus jamasakura* Sieb. ex Koidz.<sup>3</sup>), “the mountain cherry tree,” is one of the original wild cherry trees in Japan. On the mainland of the Japanese archipelago, these trees are in bloom for a couple of weeks in early April. Although *P. cerasoides* in Nepal blooms for several months (Somegō 2000: 21), the life of Japanese cherry blossoms is significantly shorter than their progenitor. Biologically speaking, the short period of the Japanese cherry’s blooming is closely related to the ecology of the trees. In the spring, the cherry trees have to drop their flowers in a hurry to reduce the strong wind pressure against their branches; this is because, in April, at the peak of the cherry bloom’s beauty, storms often come to Japan. (Somegō 2000: 139) The transience of Japanese cherry blooming is derived from the tree’s self-defensive adaptation to the hard spring weather in Japan.

A preeminently popular subject in poetry and literature since the eighth century, the word *sakura* さくら・桜 in Japanese classics usually refers to *P. jamasakura*. Its trees reach their peak after twenty years and they are on the decline at the age of fifty, finally dying at seventy years of age. (Somegō 2000: 105) Since this life cycle is similar to that of human beings, the tree of *P. jamasakura* is often regarded as a metaphor for human life. Meanwhile, some trees of *edo bigan* 江戸彼岸 or *Prunus pendula* Maxim. f. *ascendens* (Makino) Ohwi, another wild cherry tree in Japan, live over fourteen hundred years. (Somegō 2000: 157) This species is so long-lived that it readily provides an image of the cherry tree graced with eternal life.

These biological features of cherry blossoms and trees evoke many images, such as beauty, fertility, beginning of life, short life of blossoms, death, eternal life

<sup>3</sup> See Makino Tomitarō (1989) for the scientific terms of cherry trees. Cf. Tsuchida et al. (2000).

of trees, and renewal of life and beauty. It is interesting that the botanical qualities of cherry trees and blossoms have reminded people of the quite contradictory image of the transience of flowering and/but the eternal life of a tree. Such images appear in Japanese beliefs, poetry, legends, and one *Nō* 能 drama. I am going to look more closely at the polyvalence of the cherry blossoms and trees in Japan.

## 2. *The Images of Cherry Blossoms and Trees*

### 2.1 *Divine Images*

#### 2.1.1 *Sacred Cherry Trees*

Cherry trees have been regarded as sacred since the early times of Japan. Archeological evidence attests the identification of cherry trees as divine beings in the prehistoric hunting cultures. The remains of Torihama 鳥浜 shell mound, a Jōmon 縄文 period site (13000-300 BCE), indicate such beliefs about the sacredness of cherry trees. Of two hundred bows found at the site, five were wrapped in cherry bark and, moreover, two of these wrapped bows were lacquered with red color. (Yūasa 1993: 87) Ancient people may, as Fukushima Chikako (1994: 96) points out, have used them in hunting ceremonies asking earth spirits for fertility; the red color may have been thought to ward off evil spirits. Thus, with their belief in the special powers of cherry bark and the red color, ancient Japanese would pray to the earth spirits for their safety and fertility.

Second, in Shinto, cherry trees are believed to be one of the sacred plants in which *kami* 神・カミ reside. Shinto shrines are usually established in awe-inspiring forests, mountains, or places with trees. In particular, it is believed that *kami* stay in huge trees called *shinboku* 神木, or “divine trees.”<sup>4</sup> Cherry trees are regarded as one of the various *shinboku*, along with camellia, pine, oak, hackberry, ginkgo, chinquapin, Japanese plum (*ume* 梅), wisteria, and Japanese Judas (*katsura* 桂). (Mitsuhashi 1999: 895) Decorating a huge tree with a sacred rope, people respect it as divine.

The *Nihon-shoki* 日本書紀 (*Chronicles of Japan*), one of the oldest works from Japan, provides an interesting story documenting the belief in the sacred status of trees in Shinto. According to this book, the Empress Saimei 齋明 has a terrible experience when she shows disregard for trees in a shrine:

5<sup>th</sup> month, 9<sup>th</sup> day [in 661 CE]. The Empress removed her residence to the Palace of Asakura no Tachibana no Hironiha. At this time trees belonging to the Shrine of Asakura were cut down and cleared away in order to build this Palace. Therefore the gods were angry and demolished the building. (Aston 1998: 2. 271; cf. Sakamoto 1980: 348-349).

According to this early source, the trees of shrine precincts are so sacred that traditionally people are prohibited from rashly cutting them down.

<sup>4</sup> *Kami* are originally believed to descend anywhere if people request something. (Yanagita 1980: 298)

*Shinboku* beliefs bring to mind images of sacred, long-living cherry trees. According to the legend of Jissō-ji 実相寺 temple in Mukawa 武川 village in Yamanashi 山梨 Prefecture, the huge cherry tree (*edo bigan*) called Yamataka-jindai-zakura 山高神代桜, whose trunk is thirteen meters in girth, has grown over two thousand years. (Makino K. 1994: 82-112) The word *jindai* 神代 in the tree's name means the "age of deities." According to the traditional beliefs of this village, the cherry tree has been there since mythical times, having watched over the villagers. (Makino K. 1994: 87) The villagers have also passed down a story that this cherry tree was planted by Yamato Takeru 日本武尊, a mythic hero who conquered the tribes resisting the Yamato 大和 clan, which formed the first government of central Japan. (Okabe 1986: 322) According to this story, Yamato Takeru planted the young cherry tree of Yamataka-jindai-zakura when he went to the village after subjugating the east of Japan two thousand years ago. Another later legend of Yamataka-jindai-zakura says that Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-1282) came to the temple fourteen hundred years after the planting of the tree and prayed for it because it was dying. (Okabe 1986: 322) According to the legend, the tree recovered its life force again owing to Nichiren's special power.

### 2.1.2 Rice Farming and Cherry Blossoms

In striking contrast to the symbolism of long life derived from cherry trees, cherry blossoms have been used to divine the yearly rice harvest according to the period of their bloom. This form of divination also becomes a symbol of the fertility of the earth, in which death and rebirth are reenacted.

It is said that farmers were able to predict a good and bad rice harvest according to the length of the cherry trees' annual blossoming. This tradition says that it will be a good harvest if cherry blossoms flower for many days. A folk song from *Hanashizume no matsuri* 鎮花祭, or the "Festival of appeasing flowers," provides evidence of beliefs about the cherry blossoms and the rice harvest. The song that used to be sung was *Yasurae hanayo* やすらへはなよ, which can be translated: "Oh cherry blossoms, please have peace of mind and remain flowering for many days." (Ishigami 1983: 621; translation by author) Farmers would sing the song each spring to express their wishes for a long period of blooming and, thus, for an abundant harvest. The song also indicates that people personify the cherry blossoms, as if they could talk with them. It is a feature of Japanese literature, especially from the classics to the Middle Ages, that entities of nature are described as having their own souls.

Origuchi Shinobu (1995: 440-442) describes the religious background of the flower festival in this way:

The flowers of the "Festival of appeasing flowers" symbolize the rice flower. In the festival a man walks with a cane which foresees the year's crops, in order to get the earth spirits' agreement about the flowering and fertility of the rice plants. [...] Seeing cherry blossoms as an advance notice of fertility from the earth spirits, people desire that the cherry blossoms will flower for many days. (Translation by author)

## 2.2 The Cherry Blossoms in the Kokinshū

The *Kokinshū* 古今集<sup>5</sup> is sometimes called “the poetry of cherry blossoms” because of its rich variety of cherry blossom imagery from the Heian court culture. Of all 134 poems in the first and the second chapters, titled “Spring,” 74 poems refer to cherry blossoms. Because cherry blossoms have been a synonym for all flowers in Japan since the tenth century, some poems in the *Kokinshū* simply denote cherry blossoms with the word *hana* (はな・花) “flowers.” I am going to look at several images and poetic metaphors of the cherry blossoms described in the *Kokinshū*, as translated by Rodd and Henkenius. The original Japanese poems will be transcribed on the left side of following pages, with the translated versions on the right side.

### 2.2.1 The Brevity of Life

The *Kokinshū* (abbreviated as KKS) remarkably likens cherry blossoms to human beings by use of the “people are plants” metaphor.<sup>6</sup> This represents a mapping from conventional images of cherry blossoms onto the various images of the life stages of human beings. Through such metaphoric work, the poets of the *Kokinshū* expressed similarities between the biological nature of cherry blossoms and of people.

Ono no Komachi 小野小町, a poet who was considered as a beautiful woman, expressed the brevity of life and beauty by likening the ephemeral life of cherry blossoms to that of human beings:

<i>hana no iro wa</i>	the color of the
<i>utsurinikeri na</i>	blossoms have faded and passed
<i>itazura ni</i>	as heedlessly I
<i>waga mi yo ni furu</i>	squandered my days in pensive
<i>nagame seshi ma ni</i>	gazing and the long rains fell.
(Rodd and Henkenius 1996: 80; KKS 113)	

This poem suggests the beautiful lady’s melancholic emotion as she grieves over the loss of her beauty while the light pink colors of the cherry blossoms fade during the rains. The delicate cherry blossoms, which bloom briefly and soon scatter, remind Ono no Komachi and other people of ephemeral beauty and life. This represents an important aesthetic sensitivity of Japanese culture.

### 2.2.2 Eternity of Beauty

The annual flowering of cherry blossoms also reminds people of quite opposite images. The blossoms provide a poetic metaphor for the eternity of beauty. Seeing cherry trees in bloom, an unknown poet expressed their eternal beauty this way:

<sup>5</sup> *Kokinshū*, an abbreviation of *Kokin Wakashū* (*Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*), is an anthology of poetry compiled from 905 to 945 CE.

<sup>6</sup> According to the linguists and cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1989: 6), the “people are plants” metaphor universally constitutes cognitive models of one’s life because “the stages of the plants and parts of plants in their yearly cycle correspond to the stages of life.”

<i>haru goto ni</i>	each spring the blossoms
<i>hana no sakari wa</i>	reach their brilliance once again
<i>arinamedo</i>	but seeing them so
<i>aimin koto wa</i>	we are reminded that to
<i>inochi narikeri</i>	watch them fall is our lot.

(Rodd and Henkenius 1996: 76; KKS 97)

Here, the poet is very happy to see the fully blooming cherry blossoms. This poet knows that they are not as transient as they look, because their trees come into flower every year. Yet, the poet also realizes from the beauty of each spring that as a human he or she decays every year. Compared to the cherry blossoms, which renew their beauty, the destiny of human beings is to lose their life permanently some day. The flowers are reborn at all times even as human beings are transient.

### 2.2.3 Pleasure and Sadness

The poets of the *Kokinshū* created poetry when their feelings are aroused upon viewing cherry blossoms. For example, Sosei 素性, a son of Henjō 遍照, a Buddhist priest of high rank, composed the following poem:

<i>itsu made ka</i>	how long might my heart
<i>nobe ni kokoro no</i>	enraptured linger here in
<i>akugaren</i>	the meadows of spring—
<i>hana shi chirazuba</i>	if the blossoms never fell
<i>chiyo mo henu besbi</i>	I would stay a thousand years.

(Rodd and Henkenius 1996: 76; KKS 96)

The *akugaren* あくがれむ of the third line in the Japanese version refers to the great joys Sosei felt, as if his soul parted from his body when he observed the beautiful flowers. (Kyūsojin 1979: 150) This poem tells of the transience of the bloom by saying, “if the blossoms never fell.”

Ariwara no Narihira 在原業平, a noble man who descended from the Emperor Heizei 平城, gives an image of his complicated feelings of joy and sorrow. When viewing the cherry blossoms at a villa of an imperial prince, he composed the following poem:

<i>yo no naka ni</i>	if this world had never
<i>taete sakura no</i>	known the ephemeral charms
<i>nakariseba</i>	of cherry blossoms
<i>haru no kokoro wa</i>	then our hearts in spring might match
<i>nodokekaramashi</i>	nature's deep tranquility.

(Rodd and Henkenius 1996: 64; KKS 53)

According to this poem, Ariwara no Narihira has no peace of mind during the season of cherry blossoms. Although he longs for spring until the onset of the cherry flowering, he also worries about the weather because strong winds and rain might scatter the beautiful blossoms. He grieves for the transient life of the flowers.

### 2.2.4 The Internal and/but the External World

The beauty of scattering blossoms combines the external world with the imaginative world in Ki no Tsurayuki. One day, after he enjoyed viewing the falling cherry blossoms, Ki no Tsurayuki had a dream:

<i>yadori shite</i>	last night while I slept
<i>haru no yamabe ni</i>	here in the vernal mountains
<i>netaru yo wa</i>	I found that in my
<i>yume no uchi ni mo</i>	dreams as in my waking there
<i>hana zo chirukeru</i>	were fading falling petals.

(Rodd and Henkenius 1996:81-82; KKS 117)

In both the external world and the dream world, the beautiful scattering blossoms so captivated Ki no Tsurayuki that he needed to describe his strong emotions in his poem. Through the beauty of the scattering petals, the external world is internalized.

### 2.3 The Metaphor of “Soldiers are Cherry Blossoms”

The “people are plants” metaphor in the context of the scattering cherry blossoms may evoke darker images for some Japanese writers. Cherry blossoms have been used since the nineteenth century as a symbol to explain the short life of samurai and soldiers. Sakura Azumao 佐久良東雄, a samurai in the nineteenth century, composed a poem that reads:

In time of emergency  
 A man should work for an Emperor  
 at the cost of his own life  
 as cherry blossoms are scattered.  
 (Yamada 1995: 393-394; translation by author)

During World War II, some Japanese had a view of life similar to the samurai Sakura and expected soldiers to die bravely. From 1934 to 1945, when Japan had conquered China, Korea, and other Asian countries and had also gone to war against the Allied Powers, the militarists of Japan used the image of the short life of cherry blossoms for propagandistic purpose, saying: “Soldiers are fated to their transient lives like cherry blossoms.” (Saitō 1980: 109-129) Hiraizumi Kiyoshi 平泉清, an ultranationalistic scholar of Japanese literature, who in 1934 published the book *Chū to gi* 忠と義 (Loyalty and justice) which provided the militarists a theoretical basis for rendering cherry blossoms as a metaphor for the short life of soldiers. (Saitō 1980: 125) According to Saitō Shōji (1980: 117), Hiraizumi argues in his book that cherry blossoms symbolize *yamato-damashii* 大和魂, or “the Japanese spirit,” because the petals falling in unison from a tree are similar to the Japanese who devote their lives to their Emperor and nation. It seems that Kamikaze suicide attacks were encouraged through the use of such an image of cherry blossoms. During the war, soldiers often sang the military song “*Dōki no sakura*” 同期の桜, which reads: “You and I are the cherry blossoms which come into flower at the

same time as our class in military school. The blooming flowers are destined to scatter soon. Let us fall bravely for our country. ... ” (Gotō-shoin henshūbu 1996: 178; translation by author) Later in the war, Japan also built a plane for Kamikaze attacks which was named *Ōka* 桜花, meaning “cherry blossoms.”

In an essay “Hana” 花 submitted to the magazine *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 in 1938, Yamada Takao (1995: 440-448), a scholar of Japanese classical studies, objected to the symbol of cherry blossoms as samurai or soldiers who are destined to very transient lives. He argues in this essay that the scholars who make such a comparison distort the original Japanese images of cherry blossoms, and insists that the elegant, lovely, and graceful beauty of the flowers represents the primary image of cherry blossoms for Japanese culture from the classics to modern literature. As Saitō (1978: 4) in “*Yamato-damashii*” *no bunkashi* 「やまとだましゐ」の文化史 (The cultural history of “Japanese spirit”) explains, the word *yamato-damashii* やまとだましゐ, a symbol which for the militarists fuses death and cherry blossoms, originally referred to the delicate and feminine sensitivities of the Heian court culture for which the *Kokinshū* or *The Tale of Genji* are the most important works. However, during the war, Yamada’s suggestion was ignored. Reducing the diversity of the images of cherry blossoms to just the single aspect of their transient life, the militarists likened the death of many young soldiers to the scattering of blossoms. When focusing on one image alone, people may lose plural views of their reality, as the Japanese militarists did through their misuse of the metaphor of cherry blossoms.

## 2.4 Beauty Never Dies

### 2.4.1 The Cherry Tree “*Fudan-zakura*”

*Fudan-zakura* 不断桜, which means “ever-blooming cherry tree” (the botanical name is *Prunus lannesiana* cv. *Fudanzakura*), is a peculiar cherry tree in Japan because of its long period of flowering. Although the *fudan-zakura* is a deciduous tree, it is in leaf all year round, always puts out buds, and bears flowers from October to May. Thus, compared with other species of Japanese cherry trees such as *P. jama sakura*, which blooms for a few weeks and then loses its flowers, the *fudan-zakura* is indeed extraordinary.

Botanically speaking, the long flowering of the *fudan-zakura* seems to reflect the biological phenomena of its atavism in relation to the Nepalese *P. cerasoides*, the origin of the Japanese cherry trees. As mentioned above, cherry trees in Nepal start blooming in autumn and they are in flower for several months, like the *fudan-zakura*.

Because of its uncommon period of flowering in Japan, the *fudan-zakura* provides people with sacred images. The traditions of the Buddhist temple Shiroko Kannon-ji 白子観音寺 in Mie 三重 Prefecture tell the following:

One day, a monk heard the sound of a drum from the sea bottom. Curious about the sound, the monk cast a net into the sea. Thereupon, the bodhisattva Kannon 観音 getting on the drum was pulled up to the surface. The monk built a temple for worshipping the Kannon. Since then, people believed that Kannon protected pregnant women and gave easy childbirth.

Afterwards, the temple was reduced to ashes in a fire. Thereupon, a cherry tree sprung up from the ashes and came into flower all the time. Therefore, people called the tree *fudan-zakura*.

One day, the Emperor Shōtoku 称徳 ordered the *fudan-zakura* to be transplanted from the temple to the garden Minami-den 南殿 in his Imperial Palace because he wished to own the curious cherry tree. However, the tree died after one night. Wondering about this phenomenon, the Emperor sent the tree back to the temple and composed the following poem,

If the cherry tree  
takes an oath to bloom always,  
I am sure,  
the tree would show its blossoms only to a loved one.  
(Aoyama 1984: 226; translation by author)

#### 2.4.2 The Nō Drama “Fudan-zakura”

The legend of the *fudan-zakura* of the temple Shiroko Kannon-ji is a model for the Nō drama “Fudan-zakura.” The drama tells a story of the manifestation of the spirit of a *fudan-zakura* cherry tree in a mysterious dual character of a “young boy and/but old wise man” or “a gray-haired young boy.” This is how the drama “Fudan-zakura” unfolds in the *Mikan yōkyokushū* 未刊謡曲集:

One day, a retainer of the Emperor from the Imperial city of Kyoto visits the temple Shiroko Kannon-ji in order to verify the rumor of the *fudan-zakura* cherry tree. Strangely enough, it blooms in all seasons, though typical cherry trees are in flower for a couple of weeks and scatter quickly.

The retainer meets an old fisherman under a fully blossoming cherry tree at a beach. The retainer wonders about the fisherman because he does not go fishing during the daytime and just stays under the cherry tree. The retainer asks the fisherman, “Why are you here? You are a fisherman who should be working now, aren’t you?” The fisherman says, “I agree with you. I come to this place to clean up fallen petals when I have time.” The retainer admires the fisherman who is so cultured that he loves the beauty of the cherry blossoms even though he is a lowly person. Then they enjoy discussing poems, aesthetics, and emotions evoked by viewing the cherry blossoms. The fisherman also tells the retainer about the origins of the *fudan-zakura* cherry tree and the temple Shiroko Kannon-ji where the tree grows. According to the fisherman, the tree has eternal life because of the mercy of Buddha and of Kannon, who was pulled up from the sea bottom as the legend of the temple describes.

After that, the fisherman tells the retainer, “You will experience something marvelous tonight if you stay under this tree and enjoy the moonlight.” Then, the fisherman hides himself behind the cherry tree before the retainer is aware of it.

For a while, the retainer looks forward to the event which the fisherman foretold. Later, when the retainer meets the old fisherman again after he appears from behind the cherry tree, he looks at the fisherman’s face in wonder because he looks as youthful as a sixteen-year-old boy even though he is a gray-headed old man. Revealing his identity to the retainer, the fisherman says,

“Actually, I am a spirit of the flowers of the *fudan-zakura* tree. I never age.” The retainer asks, “Why are you here?” The spirit says, “Don’t ask such an unromantic question. Let us listen to my court music and dance all through the night. Please enjoy it and report to the Emperor about this night after you go back to the capital.” According to a song the spirit sings, “It is as if flowers, plants, waves, and winds talk with each other.” (Tanaka 1996: 244-254; translation by author)

Unifying the characters of the young man and the wise old person, the spirit of the cherry tree in “Fudan-zakura” represents a balance in the tensions between polar natures, such as the cherry blossoms symbolizing youth and the tree recalling the long life. The face of the fisherman is fresh as a teenager’s because he never ages. Meanwhile, the fisherman knows the origins and histories of the temple and the *fudan-zakura* tree because he has been in the temple since long ago. As the legend of “Shiroko Kannon-ji” speaks about the eternity of flowering, the old man reminds of the eternal life of a sacred tree. The spirit of the tree fascinates the retainer with his song and dance in the moonlight, thereby inviting him to the other world of *yūgen*<sup>7</sup> where the beauty of hidden truth manifests.

The drama “Fudan-zakura” tells of eternal beauty with the dual image of young and old man. Here, the short life of cherry blossoms and the long life of cherry tree seem to be regarded as a combination, reminding people of different aspects of life. After cherry blossoms scatter, people see fresh green leaves in the cherry trees and know that spring has finally come. Seeing the changing of colors from light pink to fresh green in the trees, people receive an image that the life of the cherry blossoms is not finished, but is transferred to the young leaves. People also receive hope that they will see beautiful cherry blossoms next year if the trees are still alive. Since the cherry blossoms are renewed each spring, it is as if their beauty never dies.

### Conclusion

In an environment where the conceptual system is shared among people, concepts communicate one’s abstract ideas or thoughts to others. The conceptual system allows people to make sense of their ordinary lives. In order to understand how people perceive and understand their realities and the world, we should consider human conceptual systems.

Dualism has sometimes been understood as the dominant pattern in the human conceptual system. However, dualism is not a sufficiently inclusive map for encompassing diverse worlds and realities because of “dividing oppositions as

<sup>7</sup> *Yūgen* 幽玄 is a highly important aesthetic ideal of *Nō*. Etymologically, *yū* 幽 means “deep, dim, or difficult to see,” and *gen* 玄, originally describing the dark, profound, tranquil color of the universe, “refers to the Taoist concept of truth.” (Ueda 1991: 60) Ueda Makoto (1991: 60-61), a scholar of Japanese studies, notes that Zeami 世阿弥, who developed *Nō*, seems to regard the combination of elegant beauty, the mysterious truth of the universe, and the pathos of human life as the main principles of *yūgen*.



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