



Tragic Beauty in Whitehead and Japanese Aesthetics (Contemporary Whitehead Studies)

Steve Odin



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The present volume endeavors to make a contribution to contemporary Whitehead studies by clarifying his axiological process metaphysics, including his theory of values, concept of aesthetic experience, and doctrine of beauty, along with his philosophy of art, literature and poetry. Moreover, it establishes an east-west dialogue focusing on how Alfred North Whitehead's process aesthetics can be clarified by the traditional Japanese Buddhist sense of evanescent beauty. As this east-west dialogue unfolds it is shown that there are many striking points of convergence between Whitehead's process aesthetics and the traditional Japanese sense of beauty. However, the work especially focuses on two of Whitehead's aesthetic categories, including the penumbral beauty of darkness and the tragic beauty of perishability, while further demonstrating parallels with the two Japanese aesthetic categories of *yûgen* and *aware*. It is clarified how both Whitehead and the Japanese tradition have articulated a poetics of evanescence that celebrates the transience of aesthetic experience and the ephemerality of beauty. Finally it is argued that both Whitehead and Japanese tradition develop an aesthetics of beauty as perishability culminating in a religio-aesthetic vision of tragic beauty and its reconciliation in the supreme ecstasy of peace or nirvana.



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