

Book Review by Pamela Asquith

“Spontaneity in Japanese Art and Culture” by David and Michiko Young

ISBN: 978-0-9881110-0-4

Published by Coastal Tides Press, Gabriola, BC December 2012

Japanese culture is widely appreciated for the beauty of its gardens, pottery, traditional architecture, and fabrics, as well as its arts in terms of poetry, paintings, calligraphy, dance and the beauty of rituals such as the tea ceremony. Many people have also been taken with the exuberant modernity of Japanese manga, modern body art and design. Most would draw a distinct line between these art forms, as traditional and modern, the past and present. Instead, David and Michiko Young in *Spontaneity in Japanese Art and Culture* identify a particular aesthetic (shibusa) underlying what they refer to as a Restrained Tradition and an Exuberant Tradition. They show the connection between them as a continuum between private and public, the mundane (everyday) and the exuberant (ritual and ceremonies) in peoples' lives.

The richness and complexities of Japanese art and aesthetics are presented so clearly and illustrated so beautifully in this book, the reader truly is transported to the heart of Japanese culture and given a wonderful tool by which to see the logic and connection among such different aspects of Japanese life, while also making clear the profound concepts underlying different forms of art. To make sense of diversity in a culture and to reveal the social norms that underlie it is the heart of the anthropological enterprise. This book is not only one of the clearest expositions of Japanese aesthetics; it is an anthropological triumph.

Pamela Asquith (formerly Professor of Anthropology, University of Alberta) conducted research on Japan from 1981. Among her research interests are Japanese concepts of nature and the culture of Japanese natural science. (Asquith & Kalland, 2001, 2nd printing, *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*; 2002, *A Japanese View of Nature. The World of Living Things* by Kinji Imanishi). <http://www.pamelaasquith.ca/>