

Japanese Philosophy Network

10th Meeting

Title: Exploring Atmosphere as Resonance and Rhythm:
A Japanese Perspective on the Concept of “Ki”

Abstract:

The word “atmosphere” is usually rendered in Japanese as “fun’iki” (雰囲気), a term coined in the 18th century as a translation of atmosphere. However, the Japanese word fun’iki carries connotations not usually recognized in the Western concept of atmosphere. This difference seems to stem from the different meanings associated with the word “ki” (気), which corresponds to the Chinese concept of “qì.” In my talk, I will first discuss the concept of ki as it is treated in art theory, focusing in particular on “ki-in sei-dō” (気韻生動, qì yùn shēng dòng), which is interpreted as the resonance between people or between a person and the world. I will then also discuss the importance of perceiving subtle signs, a skill related to “ki” and expressed by the terms “keshiki” (気色: literally, the color of ki) and “kehai” (気配: literally, the disposition of ki). Furthermore, when combined with the similarly pronounced word “ki” (機), which literally means a mechanical spring, ki becomes something to be actively grasped and used. People are not captured by the fun’iki, but rather seize the fleeting opportunity, respond to its energy, and freely exert their own energy in alignment with it. For the Japanese, fun’iki is not simply something that people are “affected by” or “seized by” (as Gernot Böhme suggests), but rather something to be sensitively or finely perceived and felt, or even responded to and used.

Date & Time: Nov 26, 2024, 5pm - 6:30pm

Venue: EAA Seminar Room

(Room 11, 1F., Bldg.101, The University of Tokyo Komaba Campus 1)

Speaker: Prof. Otabe Tanehisa

Co-organized by: EAA & UTCP, UTokyo