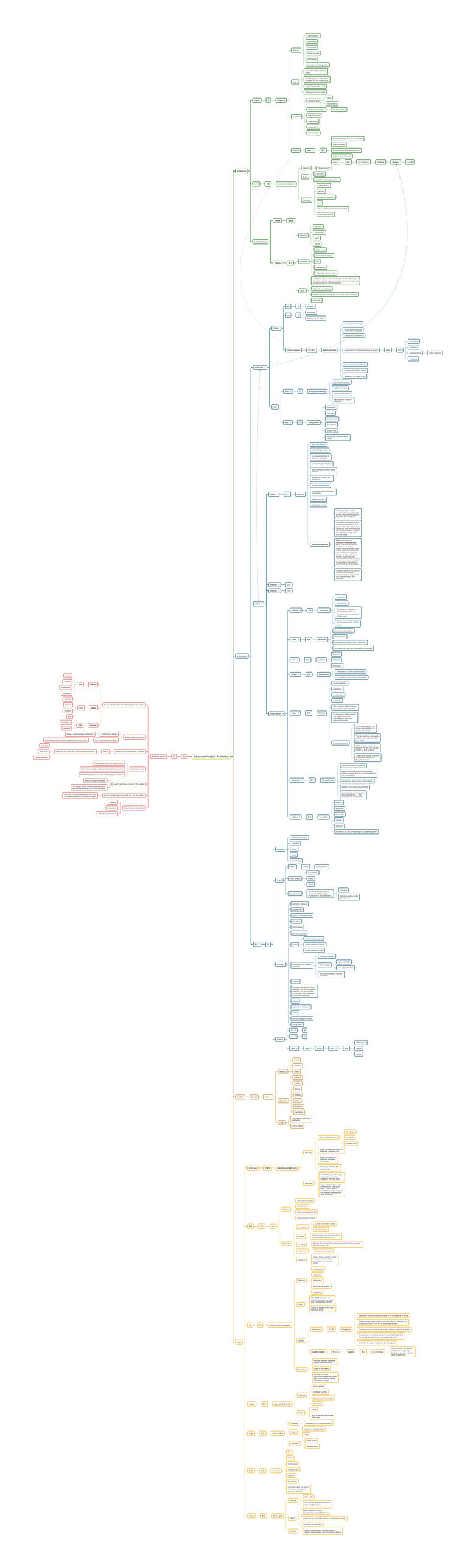

Japanese Design & Aesthetics

- **wa** — 和 — **harmony, peace**
  - Living with the limits that materials and media have.
    - **yokusei** — 抑制
      - control
      - restraint
      - suppression
      - constraint
    - **seigen** — 制限
      - restiction
      - restraint
      - limitation
      - limit
    - **setsudo** — 節度
      - moderation
      - standard
  - Repeat design elements.
    - Uniformity in design
      - Gives a clear message of limitation
    - But it also requires variation.
      - Selected elements should be repeated as nature does.
  - Keep things clean and free of clutter.
    - shintō
      - Gods can not come into a house that is in disorder.
        - less stuff
        - more room
        - natural materials
  - Avoid symmetry.
    - The natural world is full of asymmetry.
    - Symmetrical designs lack spontaneity and movement.
    - Asymmetrical balance is more challenging and creative.
  - Avoid the obvious in favor of the subtle.
    - Beauty through the subtle.
    - The design should contain clear elements, but also have subtle and implied elements.
  - Do not just think about yourself, but also the others.
    - Harmony only exists where you can think of creating something bigger with others.
  - Stay modest and humble.
    - modesty
    - moderation
    - Absolute assertiveness

- **sumptuous**
  - **miyabi** — 雅 — **elegance**
    - *Meaning*
      - "heartbreaker"
      - cleanliness
      - friendliness
      - social etiquette
      - helpfulness
      - eliminate everything vulgar
    - *Origin*
      - one of the oldest aesthetic ideals
      - opulent elegance of the elites of Japan and the intellectuals.
      - Heian Periode (794-1185)
      - Dying and returning to life
    - *Examples*
      - gold and silver
        - dust
        - decorations
      - idealization of history
        - *The Tale of Genji*
      - beautiful robes
      - cherry trees
      - palace porch
      - Chinese style
    - *Related*
      - **fūryū** — 風流
        - events and things that are not ordinary
        - poetry contests
        - unconventional floral arrangements
        - opulent, decorative arts
        - sencha — 煎茶 — Tea Ceremony — ***Contrast*** — **chanoyu** — 茶の湯
  - **karei** — 華麗 — **sumptuous elegance**
    - *Meaning*
      - "flowery beauty"
    - *Origin*
      - 1300-1850
      - objects of nobles and warriors
    - *Examples*
      - golden leaves
      - lacquer
      - pomp and ceremony
      - silk
      - fans, bamboo, plums, pines as motifs
      - silver, gold, lacquer
  - **kabuku/basara**
    - **basara** — 婆娑羅
    - **kabuku** — 傾く
      - Meaning
        - eccentric
        - unrestrained
        - fancy
        - Dandy
      - Examples
        - bright green
        - asymmetrical designs
        - odd
        - floral pattern
        - "Outlandish Warrior" style
      - Origin
        - masterless samurai who became rōnin in the 17th century, moved to the cities and devoted themselves to recreational activities in the new red light districts.
        - clash with conventions.
        - rebellion against conventional social and artistic attitudes
        - gay/queer

- **understated**
  - **wabi-sabi**
    - *Related*
      - **ku** — 苦
        - suffering
      - **kū** — 空
        - emptiness
        - absence of self-nature
      - **mono no aware** — 物の哀れ — **pathos of things**
        - compassion for things
        - strong aesthetic sense
        - a sensitivity to ephemera
        - appreciation of the fleeting nature of beauty
          - **mujō** — 無常
            - uncertainty
            - transiency
            - impermanence
              - cherry blossom
            - mutability
        - the transcendence of things
        - sadness when things perish
        - sadness of the reality of life
    - 侘寂
      - **wabi** — 侘 — **simple, strict beauty**
        - old, but well repaired
        - slightly damaged
        - poverty and simplicity
        - wabi reaches its peak in emptiness
      - **sabi** — 寂 — **rustic patina**
        - abandoned
        - well aged
        - become rusty
        - got a patina
        - antique look
        - mature with experience and insight
  - **shibui**
    - **shibui** — 渋い — *Meaning*
      - ideal from the zen
      - overarching concept
      - no precise definition in Japanese language
      - beauty through mitigation
      - direct and easy, without being intrusive
      - something is exactly as it should be
      - do not worked beyond
      - something cool, but beautiful minimalistic
      - elegant simplicity
      - articulated brevity
      - **4 essential qualities**
        - They must appear simple overall, but have subtle details such as textures that balance simplicity and complexity.
        - The balance of simplicity and complexity ensures that one does not tire of an object, but constantly finds new meanings and enriching beauty, so that the aesthetic value growth over the years.
        - **Shibusa is not to be confused with wabi-sabi.** Many wabi and sabi objects are shibui, not all shibui objects are wabi or sabi. Wabi or sabi object can be stricter and sometimes exaggerate intentional imperfections to such an extend they can appear artificial. Shibui objects are not necessarily imperfect or asymmetric, thought the may contain these properties.
        - Shibusa moves on the fine line of contrasting aesthetic concepts such as elegant and raw or spontaneous and reserved.
    - **shibusa** — 渋さ
    - **shibumi** — 渋味
    - **Shibui Seven**
      - **fukinsei** — 不均衡 — **Asymmetry**
        - irregularity
        - imperfection
        - The observer takes part in the creative process by completing the uncompleted in their mind.
        - The imperfect circle of Zen (ensō)
      - **kanso** — 簡素 — **Simplicity**
        - Elimination of confusion
        - No decoration
        - Expression in a simple, plain, natural way
        - Non-essential things are suppressed or excluded
      - **koko** — 考古 — **Austerity**
        - Exclusion
        - Omission
        - Reluctance
      - **shizen** — 自然 — **Naturalness**
        - The absence of sham and artificiality
        - Full creative intend without compulsion
      - **yūgen** — 幽玄 — **Subtlety**
        - yūgen is a feeling
        - suggestion
        - no disclosure
        - profundity
        - The sensation of life, of nature, going without going nowhere.
        - An awareness of the universe that triggers emotional responses too deep and powerful for words.
        - Poetic expressions
          - "The moon is behind the clouds and suddenly the clouds move away"
          - "You are watching wild geese and they are suddenly hidden by a cloud"
          - "When you are looking at ships on the see and they are hidden by a far of island"
          - "yūgen is to wander on and on in a great forest without thought of return"
      - **datsuzoku** — 脱俗 — **Unworldliness**
        - transcendent the conventional
        - feeling of surprise and some excitement, when you realise that you can have freedom from conventions
        - escape from daily routing or the ordinary
        - freedom from custom and scheme
        - Car breaks down, trains don't drive, you get sick, ... the interruption of everyday life.
      - **seijaku** — 静寂 — **Tranquility**
        - stillness
        - quietness
        - active rest
        - solitude
        - reflection
        - the feeling you get, while sitting in a Japanese garden
  - **iki** — 粋
    - *Meaning*
      - (refined) uniqueness
      - originality
      - stylish
      - fancy
      - spontaneity
    - *Origin*
      - **ukiyoe** — 浮世絵 — Floating World
      - urban centers
        - Edo (Tōkyō)
        - Ōsaka
        - Kyōto
      - Tokugawa era
        - The result of living under a repressive military regime. Expression of urban residents.
          - coquetry
          - boldness and joy of life (*joie de vivre*)
    - *Examples*
      - geometric designs
      - parallel lines
      - pattern of vertical stripes
      - thin fabric
      - little makeup
      - hair not to formal
      - colors
        - certain shades of grey
        - certain shades of browns
        - certain shades of blues
      - juxtaposition of dualistic opposites
        - wood and bamboo
        - dimmed light
          - indirect daylight
          - lit by paper lanterns
        - the game of different textures and colors
      - Audi A8
      - Well-educated person who is excellent. But not for money in the family, but because the environment sees the person as something special.
      - Geisha
      - Japanese architecture
      - Tatami
      - Haruki Murakamis books
      - Eating sushi
    - *Related*
      - tsū — 通
      - sui — 粋
      - yabo — 野暮 — non-Iki — busui — 無粋
        - Off-road car
        - gossip
        - a posh

- **modern**
  - **kawaii** — かわいい
    - *Meaning*
      - sweet
      - adorable
      - lovely
      - innocent
      - childlike
    - *Examples*
      - Anime
      - Manga
      - J-Pop
      - Pokémon
      - Hello Kitty
    - *Origin*
      - new modern Japanese aesthetics
      - 1970s-1980s

- **misc**
  - **jo-ha-kyū** — 序破急 — **beginning, break, hurry**
    - *Meaning*
      - Slow, acceleration, end
        - Start slowly
        - Accelerate
        - Suddenly end
      - Motion concept in a variety of traditional, Japanese arts
      - Artistic modulation in traditional Japanese performance
      - The beauty of things that come and go
    - *Examples*
      - A plant that grows for a year, only to bloom and then disappear for a few days
      - As an example, Steve Jobs presentations: One more thing ... Play with the expectations of the audience and let them anticipate the great revelation.
  - **kire** — 切れ — slice
    - *Meaning*
      - See your own nature
      - Cut off the life
      - Dying and returning to life
      - Impermanence of things
    - *Examples*
      - rock garden
        - Cut off environment by wall
        - Cut on the edge
      - ikebana
        - Death transforms the plant by cutting, the goods nature comes out.
      - nō drama
        - Slipping the foot and raising toes with sudden end of movement. Episodic nature of life.
      - haiku Poem
        - Sudden scene change
      - breathing
        - Inhale - Pause - Exhale - Pause. A cut between the cycles, Impermanence of life (Last breath).
  - **ma** — 間 — **interval in time and space**
    - *Meaning*
      - empty space
      - vagueness
      - abstraction
      - asymmetrical balance
      - irregularity
    - *Origin*
      - After WW2 it became an aesthetic concept, but exists as a concept since 700 AD.
      - Space as a place for the kami (spirits) in shintō
    - *Related*
      - **tokonoma** — 床の間 — **focal point**
        - A powerful focal point does not need to be overbearing or failing
        - A deliberately created range of contrast leads the viewer to the primary focal point, then to the secondary, tertiary, ...
        - Avoid symmetry in favor of asymmetric balance wherever possible.
        - The exclusion of decorative and non-essential things from other areas allows to focus on a single focal point.
        - Void helps the visitor to discover the focal point.
      - **mushin no shin** — 無心の心 — **mushin** — 無心 — no-mindness
        - mental state in arts. A mind not fixed or occupied by thought or emotion and thus open to everything.
    - *Examples*
      - Veranda between Japanese garden and inner space.
      - Stage in Nō theatre
      - Concept in various performing, martial and visual arts, music, fashion, garden, architectural design
  - **mingei** — 民芸 — **Japanese folk crafts**
    - *Meaning*
      - local materials
      - utilitarian function
      - anonymity of their makers
      - handmade
    - *Origin*
      - ~1926
      - Term to describe the various "folk crafts"
  - **rinpa** — 琳派 — **jewel faction**
    - *Meaning*
      - decorative art of the Kōrin school
    - *Origin*
      - Founded in imperial Kyōto
      - ~1600
    - *Examples*
      - bright colors
      - gold and silver
  - **ensō** — 円相 — The Circle
    - Zen
    - Infinity
    - Nothingness
    - Enlightenment
    - elegance
    - the universe
    - Enso exemplifies the various dimensions of Japanese aesthetics ➜ Shibui
  - **nōtan** — 濃淡 — **Dark-Light**
    - *Meaning*
      - Dark-Light
      - The dynamic interaction between dark and light values
    - *Origin*
      - **Not** a Japanese concept! Developed by modern Westerners.
      - Used since the early 20th century in international design
      - Principle of Yin and Yang
    - *Example*
      - Usage of positive and negative space in designs for symmetric and asymmetric balance