

ornament, the pet, the glamorised pot plant. Another reason that some westerners grow small bonsai is, I suspect, the dominance of the grower over it: the bigger he is in relation to it, the more he dominates it and symbolically, nature.

The westerner getting involved in bonsai is taking the first step in the right direction – that of becoming part of nature again. There is a lot to learn before one can grasp what bonsai is about, especially since bonsai did not originate from a western mind; but as you grow it with a western mind, you are bound to fail until you understand the thought that created and developed it. A comparison between eastern and western thought will demonstrate this.

Times are changing, but the way westerners used to think was “bigger is best” – in houses, food-helpings, etc. This kind of thinking came about through apparently unlimited resources, whereas the Japanese, being an island people, were very aware of limited resources, even more so since they cut themselves off from the outside world for a few hundred years. The kind of thought that this produced was not only economical and efficient, but also creative. Even ordinary utensils became works of art through their simplicity and beauty. Resources were limited and had to be utilised fully and looked after.

ACHIEVING THE MAXIMUM WITH THE MINIMUM IS THE KEY

This is amply demonstrated in building methods, utensils and tools and today's electronics. Traditional Japanese tools were designed to last forever, to require the minimum amount of force and, as with the carpenter's saw, worked more efficiently in the exact opposite direction to a western saw. Further manifestations of this thought are the martial arts, using the opponent's force to defeat him, and the arts – sumie, painting a bamboo leaf with light and shade, requires only one brush stroke. An easterner will see black and white as belonging together – ying and yang. A westerner sees black and white. Westerners are individualistic and segmented; easterners are team-spirited and holistic and part of nature. The westerner sees himself as

above nature, separating himself from it, which can be seen from the way he builds his house. A Japanese house flows into the garden; a western house with solid walls will prevent the garden from flowing in. It is up to the individual to familiarise himself with the many aspects of Japanese thought. It is not necessary to become Japanese to be able to create good bonsai, but it is necessary to understand the thinking behind it before you can develop further and, eventually, as a westerner contribute to it.

HOLISTIC HARMONY

A tree cannot grow up if it does not grow down. Also, seeds thrown on to hard ground get washed away with the first rain: you need to prepare the ground first. A lot of knowledge about bonsai is wasted because people have not got the right attitude to it to be able to absorb it. You have to loosen up your mind and open up to other forms of thinking. Unfortunately, a westerner has been brought up to think in a segmented way – maths, algebra, geography, etc. The sphere of his life is made up of segments – job, family, house, car, sport, hobby, etc. In every segment he has accumulated and developed knowledge which he uses virtually exclusively within each segment; he does not apply it to any other aspect of his life. This means that he has got a wealth of knowledge, and knowledge is power that he cannot fully use since it is fragmented. Knowledge accumulated and developed within a segment means a small base and, therefore, small potential development.

Imagine that all barriers between segments were removed and all your knowledge was available to you at once. You would be operating from a much bigger base and could, therefore, expect far greater development. All you need to do is to cross-reference between segments, to break barriers and then find the essence underlying everything. This obviously requires conscious effort but, as you progress, your development will become more rapid; but not only your development but also that of your bonsai. After all, from the time that