

Classical Chinese Aesthetic Ideals meet the West: Modern Japanese Art as a Contact Zone

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This article engages with the notion of an aesthetic “chiasma” developed by the Japanese philosopher Imamichi Tomonobu in the 1960s. According to Imamichi, the nineteenth century saw an inversion of basic ideas associated with the artistic traditions of East and West. While in the East, the earlier dominance of expression was replaced by an emphasis on the importance of representation, for the West, the idea of mimesis-representation was superseded by a focus on expression. Imamichi’s argument remain influential.

Drawing on a series of philologically relevant reflections by several generations of scholars and artists, from Watanabe Kazan to Hashimoto Kansetsu, and situating them in relation to their Western and Chinese counterparts, this article clarifies the developments which occurred and the conflicts which emerged over the course of this interaction. In doing so, it demonstrates that Imamichi’s notion of chiasma remains too restricted to capture the degree of exchange between the Eastern and Western aesthetic ideals taking place in modern Japan. The article concludes that Imamichi’s chiasma was made possible by the awkward mapping of a pair of fundamental dualities associated with Eastern and Western thought onto one another, in a manner which reveals more about the geopolitical imperatives of the 1960s than the process of intellectual exchange itself.

Keywords: *qiyun shengdong*, *kiin seidō*, Imamichi Tomonobu, chiasma, confluence, Watanabe Kazan, Ernest Fenollosa, Okakura Tenshin, Arthur Dow, Hashimoto Kansetsu

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In all forms, ordinary or extraordinary, I seek that life rhythm (pranachhanda) of the reality whose vitality has generated the whole world and all its forms, actual and imaginary, and pulsates within them.

Nandalal Bose, "The Art Pursuit"¹

Modern Western art theories did not simply supersede classical Chinese ideas on painting when Japan modernized. The relation between the two was one of mutual superimposition rather than competitive alternatives. The Chinese framework that constituted literati culture in Japan continued to serve as a basic reference. Indeed, it was an indispensable seedbed within which newly introduced Western ideas finally took root. Even if Westernization was the leading slogan of the Meiji Restoration, Chinese culture remained the touchstone. It is for this reason that "official recognition" of *bunjinga* 文人画 (usually translated as "literati painting"), regarded as "contradictory" and "paradoxical" by Christine Guth, should actually be considered a logical consequence of the confluence of Western and Chinese ideas in Japan.² This article argues that this confluence occurred during the late Meiji 明治 (1868–1912) and early Taishō 大正 (1912–1926) periods.

This is important because Chinese culture was formally rehabilitated in early twentieth-century Japan, initially in the aftermath of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. The outbreak of World War I interrupted this process, but the interwar period of the 1920s evidenced a clear shift. Instead of seeking to catch up blindly with the latest vogue in the West, Japanese intellectuals began explicitly measuring their understanding of Western values according to "Oriental" criteria and templates.³ The current article will critically reexamine the idea of an aesthetic "chiasma" initially developed by the Japanese philosopher Imamichi Tomonobu 今道友信 (1922–2012) in the 1960s.⁴ According to Imamichi's formulation, a historical inversion in basic ideas related to aesthetics occurred over the nineteenth century. During this period, while in the West the idea of mimesis-representation was superseded by that of expression, the opposite occurred in the East, where the former dominance of expression was replaced by an emphasis on the importance of representation.

In order to examine the relevance of Imamichi's chiasma hypothesis, this article will trace Japan's role in the mutual development and emplacement of aesthetic ideas. It will engage with the following issues: first, how the interaction between Chinese and Western aesthetic ideals took place; second, the process of trial and error that led to a synthesis

1 Bose 1999, p. 18. The epigraph demonstrates the global relevance of the issue examined in this article. Bose was an Indian artist interested in *qi yun shengdong*, having been introduced to Chinese aesthetics by Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō, two Japanese painters sent to India by Okakura Kakuzō (discussed below). For more on these "transnational dynamics," see Inaga 2009.

2 Guth 2006, p. 192. This well-balanced overview of the re-appreciation of the *bunjinga* in the Meiji period remains the standard overview in English. While not refuting Guth's argument, this article shows that a different facet is revealed by tracing the genealogy of the history of ideas.

3 "Oriental" here emphasizes that the notion was uncritically used in prewar scholarly discussion. The author does not think it sufficient simply to remove such historically-charged terms as Oriental or "Far East" (officially used by the FEN American military broadcast up until the end of the 1990s) because they are taboo in current English-language scholarship; for more on this, see Inaga 2012. On templates, see Inaga 2017.

4 "Chiasma" and the related term "osmose" were put forth by the Ishibashi Foundation International Symposium "Modern Japanese Art and China," held on 2–4 November 2018 at the University of California, San Diego. The present article was initially prepared as a paper for this conference.

of Chinese and Western viewpoints in Japan; and third, the conflicts that emerged during the course of this synthetic process.⁵ Conducting this analysis in dialogue with Imamichi's ideas will allow for the following critical questions to be answered. What is the hidden background to Imamichi's hypothesis? Why and how did an eminent scholar of aesthetics come to develop such a global but unidirectional idea of the chiasma between East and West? And in what circumstances was this hypothesis accepted in the West in the 1960s?

The article covers a range of periods from the 1840s to the 1960s. It draws on a series of philologically relevant reflections by several generations of scholars and artists, from Watanabe Kazan 渡辺華山 (1793–1841, to whom the Imamichi paper is explicitly indebted) to Hashimoto Kansetsu 橋本関雪 (1883–1945), and situates them in relation to their Western and Chinese counterparts. The first section analyzes Watanabe Kazan's treatises in order to give an overview of the Chinese aesthetic tradition in Japan at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The subsequent influence that these ideas would have in Europe and America is examined over the course of the following two sections. The fourth section examines the rehabilitation and reconsideration of Kazan's insights through research on the aesthetic confrontation of Western ideas and Far Eastern tradition that took place in the Taishō era. Chinese contemporary reactions to this chiasma are analyzed through the case of Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898–1975) in the 1930s, while the concluding section shows how this reaction is closely connected to postwar Taiwanese aesthetic debates. The timeline and contours of the debate outlined here offer a drastic modification to Imamichi's notion of chiasma by better contextualizing both its creation and reception.

***Kiin Seidō* vs. *Shasei*: Kazan unites East and West**

Watanabe Kazan was a Japanese contemporary of Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858), memorialized in Japan's high-school history textbooks for his insights regarding Japan's diplomacy. Following the Morrison Incident in 1837, Kazan was among the first Japanese to recognize the danger of Japan maintaining its isolationist policies in the face of the Western menace.⁶ Caught up in the fallout over the incident, Kazan took responsibility by committing suicide, and thus did not survive to bear witness to Commodore Perry's arrival at Uraga 浦賀 in 1853.

Yet Kazan is also considered one of the pioneering artists of his generation, who tried to achieve a synthesis of Chinese and Western paintings.⁷ Kazan elucidates this intention in a reply to a question posed by his disciple, the *bunjinga* artist Tsubaki Chinzan 椿椿山 (1801–1854). In it, Kazan demonstrates his erudite and critical knowledge of *kiin seidō* 氣韻生動 (Ch. *qiyun shengdong*), which we might translate as “rhythmical resonance and vital movement.” The notion of *ki* 氣 (Jp.) or *qi* (Ch.) is notoriously difficult to translate, and is the source of much philological as well as ideological controversy. The present article

5 For more on the first of these objectives, see Fogel 2013. On the third, see Inaga 2011. Otabe 2020 has also recently criticized Imamichi's position.

6 The *Morrison*, a U.S. merchant vessel returning seven Japanese castaways, was fired upon by shore batteries in accordance with 1825's Edict to Repel Foreign Vessels.

7 Haga 2017, pp. 318–346.

will try to elucidate some of the historical aspects of this troublesome key term by recovering Kazan's interpretation of *kiin seidō* in relation to his other key notion, that of *shasei* 写生.⁸

In defining *kiin seidō*, Kazan first summarizes the explanations given by successive generations of Chinese writers before expressing his own opinion. He sees *ki* present in every brush stroke, in every trace of ink, while in *in* 韻 he recognizes the rhythmical movement of execution. When one divides *kiin seidō* into its component concepts of *kiin* and *seidō*, the former constitutes the “body” (*honsbi* 本旨), and the latter the exegesis (*kyakuchū* 脚注), so that the *ki*, or energy, offers “life” or “vitality” (*sei*), while the *in*, or rhythm, defines “movement” (*dō*). Though different scholars used a variety of characters to compose the same idiom, Kazan himself put forward that it was “propensity” (*sei* 勢), “force” (*ryoku* 力), and “occasion” (*ki* 機) which come together to constitute the rhythm, going on to argue that, “Within this rhythm, propensity avoids sclerosis” (*ketsu no yamai* 結の病), “the force must be smooth to avoid a lack of coherence” (*koku no yamai* 刻の病), and “the occasion must be spontaneous and unpatterned” (*han no yamai* 板の病).⁹ These three elements are essential, according to Kazan, to produce a smooth rhythmic execution through “brush and ink” (*hitsuboku* 筆墨), through which *kiin* is made manifest.

On the relationship between *kiin* and *hitsuboku*, Kazan develops his own original idea by introducing the compound *fūshu* 風趣, or wind (external) and taste (internal), as an explanation of what must be brought together in the execution of action. Both of these factors (wind and taste) oscillate between “elegance and vulgarity” (*gazoku* 雅俗). Something like the wind (*fū* 風; glossed as *noema* here) requires refinement (*shōsha* 瀟灑), while taste (*shu* 趣; *noesis*) cannot be satisfied without comprehending rarity (*ki* 奇) through exhausting all varieties (*ben* 變). In his analysis of Kazan's reply, Sakazaki Shizuka 坂崎坦 (1887–1978), art critic and pioneering Japanese scholar of Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), made a point relevant to this article, namely that Kazan was the first scholar to distinguish between elegance and vulgarity in his articulation of vital resonance (*kiin*) and the *noema-noesis* (*fūshu*) combination.¹⁰

In his letters to his master, Chinzan confesses that he previously avoided the effects of *fūin* 風韻 (breeze) or *kiin* (resonance) as he could not understand them. He instead sought to achieve *shasei*, or copying life through the objective imitation of the outer shape of things, and assiduously sought to imitate the brush technique of the famous Chinese painter, Yun Nantian 惲南田 (1633–1690). Chinzan's pursuit of realism was appreciated by his master. “Copying the real” (*shashin* 写真)—the term would later refer to photography in Japanese—may have invited criticism for being “vulgar” (*zokuin* 俗韻), but Chinzan was confused as people tended to critically appreciate his work on account of its resonance. Kazan replied that it was thanks to Chinzan's learning from the old masters that he could copy the real without approximating reality too closely. The results were not vulgar because Chinzan faithfully followed the lessons of Yun Nantian. Kazan added an anecdote about Yun Nantian attaining a level of “excellence” (*myō* 妙) thanks to his engagement with his friend

8 On the notion of *shasei*, see Satō 2011, pp. 231–254. The classic study of the multiple historical interpretations of *kiin seidō* remains Tanaka 1964. For a critical survey of the issue in Japanese, see Inaga 2022.

9 These are periphrases by the author; Kazan's originals are too concise to be fully comprehensible in English.

10 Sakazaki 1942, pp. 93–111, especially p. 96. Kazan's original texts are reproduced in pp. 281–320. *Noema-noesis* draws from Husserl's phenomenology and is the author's theoretical gloss intended to paraphrase Sakazaki's idea.

Wang Shigu 王石谷 (Wang Hui 王翬, 1632–1717), and of Wang Shigu doing likewise. This emphasis on mutual emulation implicitly alludes to the role Kazan would assume toward Chinzan.

Etymologically, *shasei* 写生 means “copying and duplicating life,” but it also connotes an objective depiction similar to the idea of realistic representation taught in the Western academic tradition of Aristotle’s mimesis, or imitation. In their discussions, Chinzan and Kazan describe Western painting techniques using the six rules of painting (Huihua liufa 繪畫六法), which come from the preface to *The Record of the Classification of Old Painters* (*Gubua Pinlu* 古畫品錄) written by Xie He 謝赫 in the early sixth century. The six elements that define a painting are: (1) “Spirit-resonance” (*kiin seidō* 氣韻生動, translated as such to distinguish the term from Kazan’s later interpretation); (2) “Bone method” (*koppō yōhitsu* 骨法用筆), the use of brush, texture, and strokes to link handwriting and personality; (3) “Correspondence to the object” (*ōbutsu shōkei* 応物象形), the depiction of form, including shapes and line; (4) “Suitability to type” (*zuirui fusai* 隨類賦彩), the application of color, including layers, value and tone; (5) “Division and planning” (*keiei ichi* 經營位置), the placing and arrangement, composition, space, and depth; and (6) “Transmission by copying” (*den’i mōsha* 伝意模写), the replication of models, not only from life but also from the works of antiquity.¹¹ Kazan, in a letter several months before his death in 1840, confesses that he was on the point of inventing a new method of “copying form and transmitting color” (*shakei densai* 写形伝彩), but that it had proved impossible. Kazan justified his failure by noting that “there had been no complete formulation on the matter since the beginning of the world.”¹² What Kazan was undoubtedly aiming at was a tentative synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions.

We can thus appreciate why Sakazaki took an interest both in Kazan’s theoretical writing and in Courbet’s realism. While it is common in aesthetic studies to regard Courbet as the ultimate representative of the notion of mimesis in the European realist tradition, Kazan, without knowing anything of Courbet, was part of the second generation of Japanese painters exposed to Western influence, following in the footsteps of Satake Shozan 佐竹曙山 (1748–1785), Odano Naotake 小田野直武 (1749–1780), and Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818). However, Kazan is singled out here as his reflections provide an early attempt to synthesize the Oriental theory of *kiin seidō* with Western practice.¹³

In searching for an East-West synthesis through the chiasma between *shasei* and *kiin seidō*, there remains the question of whether the sixth rule, namely “Transmission by copying” in Chinese, is equivalent to mimesis-imitation in Western terminology. In his hypothesis, Imamichi argued that the two terms should be understood as being “*äquivalenz*.”¹⁴ In the West, the notion of mimesis-imitation was predominant in art theories up until the end of the nineteenth century, when expression finally assumed importance, culminating in the German Expressionism of the 1920s. The opposite is observable in East Asia, where the classical Confucian theory of expression finally began to grant respect for representation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In arguing for this East-West

11 The present article treats only the first and the last of the six rules, given their relevance to cross-cultural dialogue. On the methodology of comparison, see Inaga 2007.

12 This can be found in a document commonly known as “Letter 7” in Sakazaki 1942.

13 For other Dutch studies scholars and painters in Japan, see Inaga 2014.

14 Imamichi 1961; Imamichi 1971, pp. 198–199. On *äquivalenz*, see Iser 1976.

chiasma, Imamichi invoked the pioneering importance of Watanabe Kazan to shed light on the exchange between East and West in aesthetic ideas. As we will see below, however, Imamichi's aesthetic assessment simply overlooks many facts in art history.

Chiaroscuro, *Nōtan*, *Mōrōtai*: From Fenollosa to Okakura and Arthur Dow

A new idea of mimesis, or naturalistic representation, prevailed in Japan in the second half of nineteenth century, mainly due to the introduction of Western academic education. Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) was a key contributor to this process, and promoted the Kanō school (Kanōha 狩野派) as representing Japan's classical tradition in painting. Adapted from prescribed Chinese styles, the Kanō school had enjoyed shogunal recognition and distinguished social status in the early modern period, and in accentuating its position as an established tradition, Fenollosa was arguing for the presence of an authentically Japanese style of painting. On the other hand, in the introduction to his 1912 book on *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Fenollosa singled out the Japanese notion of *nōtan* 濃淡, the “harmonious arrangement of values,” as being characteristic of Japanese and Oriental painting in general.¹⁵ Fenollosa insisted on the use of this Japanese notion to assert a fundamental difference between Oriental principles and the Western tradition. While *nōtan* bears a superficial resemblance to the conventional Western art historical term of chiaroscuro, Fenollosa argued the two were fundamentally incompatible. In Fenollosa's understanding, chiaroscuro refers to the contrast between the highlights and shadowy parts of each object, but *nōtan* refers to the general tonal harmony and contrast of the surface of a pictorial work as a whole (figure 1). However, while *nōtan* originates in the Oriental tradition, Fenollosa was of the opinion that one might also talk about *nōtan* in relation to the paintings of Velázquez or Rembrandt. Thus Fenollosa insisted on the universal aesthetic validity of an Oriental notion at the scale of global art history.

The notion of *nōtan* allows us to appreciate the dripping or blot effects and blurred expression typical of ink paintings in the Chinese literati tradition.¹⁶ Imamichi's hypothesis assumes that the contrast between representation and the expressivity of *kiin seidō* superimposed itself on the distinction that Fenollosa drew between chiaroscuro and *nōtan*. In the 1920s and 1930s, a Chinese scholar trained in Germany, Teng Gu 滕固 (1901–1941), pushed this superimposition further by borrowing the Wölflinian pair of *malerisch* and *linearisch* to account for stylistic differences between the Northern and Southern Song dynasty painting styles in Chinese art.¹⁷ Layering up these dichotomies left *malerisch* as equivalent to *nōtan* and *linearisch* to chiaroscuro.¹⁸ In the Oriental tradition, as understood

15 Fenollosa 1963, pp. xxiv–xxvi. In the sense used by Fenollosa, *nōtan* is not a classical Chinese term, but a Japanese neologism of the early nineteenth century.

16 Exemplified in Japan by the seventeenth century Kyoto artist Tawaraya Sōtatsu 俵屋宗達, see his *Renchi suikinzu* 蓮池水禽図 (Waterfowl in Lotus Pond), Kyoto National Museum (A甲261), <https://www.kyohakugo.jp/jp/collection/meihin/kinsei/item03/> (last accessed 7 November 2022). The contrast between these paintings of Caravaggio and Sōtatsu was first proposed by the art historian Yashiro Yukio 矢代幸雄 (1890–1975).

17 Objective classifying principles proposed in the early twentieth century by the Swiss art historian, Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945).

18 If *linearisch* (linear) is closely connected with *klarheit* (clarity), *malerisch* (picturesque) shows more affinity with *unklarheit* (ambiguity) and *bewegtheit* (motion). Ten Gu and his Japanese contemporaries referred to the original German. See Tsukamoto 2007.



Figure 1. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. 1601. Fenollosa contrasted the “extravagance” of Caravaggio’s chiaroscuro, or contrast between light and shade, visible in paintings like this one, with the total harmony of *nōtan*. Property of the Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam. Image courtesy of the SPSG Painting Collection, Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg (GK I 5438).



Figure 2. James McNeil Whistler. *Nocturne: Grey and Silver*. 1875–1880. Oil on canvas, Part of the John G. Johnson Collection, 1917. Cat. 1111. Image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

by Fenollosa, Ten Gu, and their contemporaries, the mountain-and-water ink paintings of the Southern Song dynasty tradition were considered to reflect the prioritization of *nōtan* by their Zen-Buddhist artists, to the detriment of clear linear depictions of the contours of the objects represented.

For Fenollosa, the notion of *nōtan* had the merit of going beyond realistic representation. The generation of Western avant-gardists associated with Manet and the Impressionists from the 1860s onwards openly questioned the value of representation. One key representative of this tendency, the American artist James Whistler (1834–1903), “composed” a series of “Arrangements” (as the artist referred to the sequence of paintings) from the late-1860s onwards and entitled some of the pieces *Nocturne* (figure 2).¹⁹ *Nōtan* was a more useful term to describe this shift toward non-representational rendition than any Western terminology. In his later years, Fenollosa praised Whistler’s work for having realized a synthesis of Western and Oriental arts, and argued that the contemporary confluence of those two currents, the two primary traditions in world art history, would lead to the “isolating” of the “island of three hundred years of academic extravagance,” which Caravaggesque chiaroscuro represented.²⁰

Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覚三 (often referred to as Tenshin 天心, 1863–1913) was another who was fully conscious of this shift in contemporary aesthetic tastes.²¹ This was the context within which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, he advocated for the newly invented style of *mōrōtai* 朦朧體, an intentionally obscure rendering of the shape of things. *Mōrōtai* epitomized *nōtan* aesthetics. Yokoyama Taikan 横山大観 (1868–1958), Okakura’s faithful disciple, applied this technique to the pieces he exhibited during his tour of the United States, some of which were entitled *Nocturne* in a clear homage to Whistler’s aesthetics.²² The Bengal School, the avant-garde, nationalist artistic movement that emerged in British India around the turn of the century also adopted the Chinese ink brush stroke, which they had learned from Japanese painters like Yokoyama and Hishida Shunsō 菱田春草 (1874–1911), whom Okakura had sent to India in his place, as another manifestation of their rejection of the Occident. This Bengali movement also applied the same style of *mōrōtai*, and developed a technique called “wash.” Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), Nandalal Bose (1882–1966) and their colleagues made use of this watercolor effect that they obtained by washing freshly painted paper in a water tub—a symbolic gesture distancing themselves from the Mughal miniature tradition while washing their hands of the bondage of old-fashioned conventions derived from Western academic training in the fine arts (figure 3).²³

19 This deployment of musical terminology by Whistler is indicative of the shift in aesthetic tastes influenced by French *Japonisme*.

20 Fenollosa 1903, p. 15.

21 The author disapproves of the current non-critical usage of “Okakura Tenshin,” unless for the purpose of posthumous veneration. “Tenshin” was the Chinese sobriquet to his poetic works during his lifetime. See Inaga 2014, p. 132. Contrary to convention, “Tenshin,” “Taikan,” or “Shunsō” will not be used here as the artists are clearly identifiable by their family names.

22 Satō 1989, pp. 127–138. See for instance Yokoyama’s *Gekka no umi* 月下の海 (Waves in Moonlight) at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/29312/waves-in-moonlight> (last accessed 5 August 2022), known as *Nocturne* during its initial exhibition in the United States.

23 Inaga 2009.



Figure 3. Abanindranath Tagore. *Music Party*, also called *Nocturne*. 1908. Woodblock print reproduction published in *Kokka* 國華 226, 1909. Photograph by the author.

Yet the experience of the Bengal School shows that what Whistler pursued and the Japanese *mōrōtai* intended were neither identical nor equivalent. Even if similar in outcome, their vectors were in opposite directions. Whistler, guided by his highly personal aestheticism, tried to “Orientalize” his oil painting by deviating from Western academic rules. On the other hand, Yokoyama and Hishida tried to compete with Western oil painting. It was imperative for them to realize works worthy of appreciation in the Western market and at Westernized exhibitions. To attain this aim, and to realize similar pictorial effects, they renovated their own traditional techniques based on glue paste (*nikawa* 膠). They also made use of shell powder (*gofun* 胡粉) in order to enhance the thickness of pigment on the pictorial plane.

An American observer of these Japanese artists and assiduous student of Japanese art, Arthur Dow (1857–1922) was appointed assistant curator under Fenollosa at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1893, and adopted the notion of *nōtan* as his central principle. Subsequently a teacher at the Pratt Institute (1895–1903), and at Columbia University (1904–1922), Dow would exert a huge influence on artistic education worldwide, and would structure the whole of *Composition*, his artistic manual for students and teachers, around two elements; composition on the one hand and *nōtan* on the other.²⁴

For composition, Dow referred to the wooden structure of Japanese houses in general, and to the timbers of the *tokonoma* alcove in particular, and showed a variety of models reframing and arranging partitions in geometric forms. While almost contemporary to Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) and his Japan-inspired architectural plans, Dow’s exercise in composition also resembles the geometrical abstraction of Piet Mondrian (1872–1944).²⁵ Dow’s idea of framing, freely cutting out significant fragments according to the anticipated

²⁴ Dow 1913.

²⁵ Nute 2000.

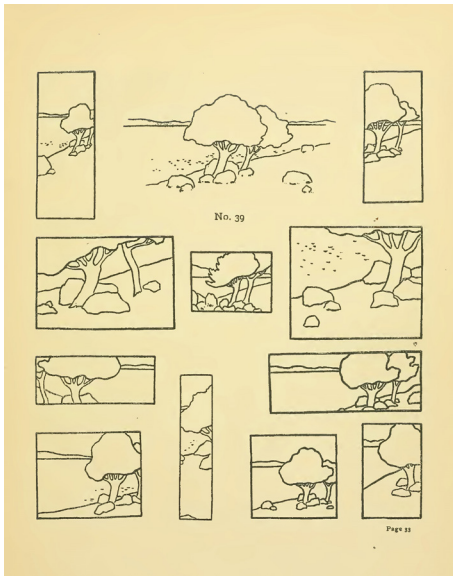


Figure 4. Arthur Wesley Dow. *Composition*. 1905 edition. Exercise No. 39, p. 33. Reproduction of material in the public domain.

effect, shows a strong affinity with what Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948) would develop in his film-editing techniques.²⁶ In the 1920s, the French avant-garde would deploy specific terms to describe such intentional arrangements in composition, like *montage*, *assemblage*, *découpage*, and *collage* (figure 4).²⁷

Dow developed these compositional principles through his systematic study of the Japanese landscape prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige, from which he distilled their essence. Dow proudly claimed to have systematized what Whistler had been intuitively searching for in his tentatively experimental, trial-and-error way. He declared:

Nōtan in landscape, a harmony of tone relations, must not be mistaken for light-and-shadow which is only one effect or accident ... Light-and-shadow is a term referring to modeling or imitation of solidity ... It does not help one to appreciate tone-value in pictures ... Roundness and solidity lead to sculpture.²⁸

Composition excludes the traditional Western notion of chiaroscuro, which Dow intentionally replaced with *nōtan* as a universal artistic principle.²⁹ To this renewed grammar of decoration, Dow would produce variations in color in his woodblock landscape prints, modifying the atmosphere according to the four seasons or the hours of a day. Fresh air in the morning, bright sunshine at noon, dim blurred scenery at dawn and nightscape: Dow claimed that the artist could render such temporal and seasonal variations on the same set of woodblocks by careful tone-value control, and through the differentiated application of color. In later editions of *Composition*, Dow established a “synthesis” by integrating

²⁶ Berger 1980, appendix.

²⁷ Kōmoto 2007.

²⁸ Dow 1913, p. 69.

²⁹ Dow 1913, p. 53.



Figure 5. James McNeil Whistler. *The Peacock Room*. 1877. Freer Gallery of Art, gift of Charles Lang Freer. Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

lessons from William Morris' Arts and Crafts Movement, which had sought to reform design and decoration. While Whistler regarded spatial art as a visual music, he had largely, notwithstanding his decorative panels, confined himself to painting, faithfully respecting the traditional definition of Fine Arts. Dow was convinced that in his *Composition* he had gone beyond Whistler, and achieved "synthetic exercises" of fine arts and design over the course of his life-long artistic career.

Kandinsky and the "Oriental Tradition"

Okakura, the mentor of *mōrōtai*, was also conscious of these developments in Western art. In his lecture "Current Problems in Painting," delivered at the World Fair in Saint Louis in 1904, Okakura pointed to the limits displayed by the art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900), who had been unable to understand Whistler's swift execution.³⁰ Going on to praise the plein-air effects of the impressionists, Okakura insisted that the Rinpa school 琳派 in Japan had achieved a similar result two hundred years earlier through its application of gold foil to obtain highly decorative effects on a variety of objects.³¹ Okakura emphasized the Rinpa tradition with Whistler's decorative panels in mind. *The Peacock Room* (1877) was Whistler's most significant attempt at decoration under Oriental inspiration, and it convinced Okakura of the relevance of emphasizing the decorative aspects of Japanese art in front of the learned American and European audiences he was addressing (figure 5).

30 Okakura 1984b, p. 77. On the Nocturne controversy, see Whistler 1967.

31 *Rinpa* artists worked in various formats, notably screens, fans and hanging scrolls, woodblock printed books, lacquerware, ceramics, and kimono textiles. In his 1904 lecture in New York on "The *Bijutsuin* or The New Old School of Japanese Art," Okakura introduced Yokoyama Taikan as an "ardent researcher" of the Tosa 土佐 and Kōrin 光琳 traditions, and promoted the Nihon Bijutsuin 日本美術院, the private institution Okakura had established in 1898, as the successor to Edo-period artists like Kusumi Morikage 久隅守景 (1620–1690) or Ogata Kōrin 尾形光琳 (1658–1716); see Okakura 1984a.

In 1914, one year after Okakura's death and publication of a revised edition of *Composition*, Arthur Eddy (1859–1920), the art dealer, critic, and close friend of Whistler, published *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*. Written under the direct impact of the Armory Show the previous year, the book contains a chapter entitled “Esoragoto.”³² In it, Eddy captures the attention of his readers by asserting that Japanese viewers are unsurprised by either the Cubists or Kandinsky, for these reflect “the teachings they have been accustomed to for a long time.” Instead of minimizing the self, so as to transcribe reality, modern art is shifting toward the maximization of the self to create compositions as an idea. According to Eddy, who claims to be well informed of things Japanese, *esoragoto* 絵空事 is an apt term for these post-impressionists, who no longer intend to make representations of reality. As there is no equivalent of *esoragoto* in either English or French, Eddy claims his right to use the Japanese term, and further argues that *esoragoto* was what Velázquez, Rembrandt, and Frans Hals were searching for.³³

This chapter on *esoragoto* does not survive in the Japanese translation by Kume Masao 久米正雄 (1891–1952).³⁴ This is curious because Kume was a member of the Shirakaba school (Shirakaba-ha 白樺派), famous for the kind of self-affirmation and naked manifestations of the ego (*sekirara* 赤裸々) which would accord with Eddy's ideas. Perhaps the intention of the translation was limited to providing a Japanese readership with an outline of recent developments in the West, from Postimpressionism to Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism. Yet the intentional elimination of Oriental factors—the whole chapter is excised—allows us to hypothesize that the Japanese editor or translator was rather reluctant to transmit to his domestic readership the fact that the latest developments in Western art and theory had a close relationship with Western critical understandings of Oriental aesthetics.

As the previous section detailed, Fenollosa had already understood the latest tendencies in world art as emerging from a confluence of Western and Eastern currents, which came to be personified by Whistler. In her wonderful study on Yorozu Tetsugorō 萬鐵五郎 (1885–1927), Alicia Volk makes it clear that as early as 1913 young Japanese artists, including Yorozu, were conscious of the fact that “Western and Eastern Art are drawing together.”³⁵ However, this convergence did not necessarily allow them to spontaneously return, or immediately refer, to the so-called “oriental aesthetic tradition,” and it is significant that it was not considered relevant during the Shirakaba school's early period.³⁶ Kume's 1916 translation clearly avoided emphasizing the modern Japanese confluence with Western avant-garde. Kume and his collaborators were apparently uncomfortable with Eddy's use of the term *esoragoto* to explain the latest tendencies in the West. This may be because *esoragoto* has a negative connotation of “falsehood,” or “lack of sincerity” similar to the idea of “baseless fantasy,” if not of “forgery.” And yet *esoragoto* (literally meaning “fantasy like floating in

32 The Armory Show, or International Exhibition of Modern Art, was organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors in 1913 as the first large exhibition of modern art in America.

33 Eddy 1914, pp. 147–153.

34 Kume 1916.

35 Volk 2010, p. 41

36 Volk 2010, p. 36. For more on Yorozu, on whom Volk's book concentrates, see also Inaga 2015. Volk judiciously notes that the omitted chapter of Kume's translation was presented as an abridged summary in *Chūō-Bijutsu* magazine (No. 2, 1915), see Volk 2010, p. 270, fn. 59.

the sky”) was singled out by an American as designating visual images beyond the limit of mimesis-representation. This clearly shows a cognitive gap between the Japanese (for whom it was a pejorative expression) and English-speaking readers (for whom it meant positive appreciation).³⁷

Where do Eddy’s ideas come from? Though his references remain incomplete, this article argues that Eddy’s understanding of Japanese aesthetics can be traced back to Henry Bowie’s (1848–1920) *On the Laws of Japanese Painting* (1911). Bowie came to Japan in 1893, and became a student of Kubota Beisen 久保田米僊 (1852–1906), Shimada Sekko 島田雪湖 (1865–1912), and Shimada Bokusen 島田墨仙 (1867–1943). Bowie explains *esoragoto* as “invention,” and gives *seidō* as “living movement,” which Eddy paraphrases as “matter responsive to mind,” and explains that in this Chinese principle resides one of the bases of Japanese art.³⁸

Significantly, from around 1910 onward, *seidō* and, by extension, *kiin seidō*, were frequently compared by young Japanese scholars in aesthetics with the Western notion of *Einfühlung* (empathy), originally proposed by Theodor Lipps (1851–1914) and Johannes Volkelt (1848–1930). Students at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Abe Jirō 阿部次郎 (1883–1959), Tanaka Toyozō 田中豊藏 (1881–1948), Abe Yoshishige 安倍能成 (1883–1966) and others, organized a gathering named the “Rippusu kai.”³⁹ In Kyoto, Sono Raizō 園頼三 (1891–1973), teaching aesthetics at Doshisha University, also reacted to Eddy’s understanding of *seidō*. Sono’s book, *Geijutsu sōsaku no shinri* 芸術創作の心理 (Psychology of artistic creation), includes a chapter on “From *Einfühlung* to *Kiin seidō*.”⁴⁰ Here Sono insists, “Eddy’s ideas are wrong, as he misleadingly confines the idea of *seidō* within the sphere of Oriental Art. However, *Einfühlung* in Lipps’ sense exists both in the East and in the West.”⁴¹ Obviously, Sono considers here that *Einfühlung* and *seidō* overlap, and to a certain degree are equivalent. However, Sono adds that Yun Nantian’s phrase, “the Creation in my mind and bosom leaks out from the tip of my brush,” manifests a much higher state of spirituality. The idea of *Einfühlung* alone can therefore no longer properly explain this mental state.

Based on this interpretation, Sono displays his pantheistic tendencies and goes as far as to identify *kiin seidō* with the Hegelian idea of “der Absolute Geist,” which generates the world as phenomenon. Sono was also the translator of Kandinsky’s *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (*Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1912), and suggests that Yun Nantian’s thinking reminds him of Kandinsky’s “die Innere Notwendichkeit” (inner necessity) connecting man’s inner nature with Nature, that is, the Universe. Sono also recognized Watanabe Kazan’s writings as offering the ideal synthesis between inner- and outer-nature. Thus,

37 In fact, *tsukuneimo sansui* 捏ね芋山水 or “mountain-and-water paintings in a mashed potato-like style” was a common term of contempt for amateur literati painting in late Meiji-period Japan. The critical reassessment of such works in the Taishō era not only coincided with, but was directly influenced by, the import into Japan of the latest literati painting from late Qing and early Republican China. Kuze 2012 and 2013 gives detailed accounts of this gap in art appreciation between China and Japan through a meticulous analysis of the entries on Chinese pictorial pieces in the periodical *Kokka*.

38 See “esoragoto” p. 36 and “seido” pp. 79, 149 in Bowie 1911. On Bowie, see Minami 2015, pp. 270–271, 294–296.

39 This refers to the Theodor Lipps Society. On the “Rippusu kai,” see Inaga 2015.

40 Sono 1922, pp. 120, 125, 133, 142–143.

41 This judgment by Sono may be misleading, and yet it is true that Eddy talks of *kiin* (if not *esoragoto*) as if it were particular to Oriental and Japanese painting practice.

Sono, with his philological expertise in Chinese classical texts, judged that the ancient Chinese notion of *kiin seidō* contained the theoretical potential to go beyond that of “*Einfühlungstheorie*” (given in German in his Japanese text).

Sono’s theoretical reflection led him to a conviction of the superiority of Oriental classical notions in comparison to what he supposes are their Western equivalents. However, Sono did not pay attention to the historical evolution that the notion of *kiin seidō* had undergone in China, and merely made a synchronic comparison between Eastern and Western aesthetics.⁴² Yet while this theoretical competition between *kiin seidō* and *Einfühlung*, which obviously relied on their alleged, if inadequately demonstrated, affinity, was to have far-reaching effects, it was entirely absent from Imamichi’s discussion of the chiasma between Western and Eastern art.

From Hashimoto Kansetsu to Feng Zikai

The Taishō era’s immersion in Western aesthetic ideas, illustrated above, encouraged contemporary artists to seek to synthesize Western notions with Oriental traditions. A typical case would be that of Hashimoto Kansetsu, one of the leading figures in the rehabilitation of the Southern school of Chinese painting in Japan.⁴³ Kansetsu’s own referencing of Chinese classics and his “Orientalist” ideology have been discussed elsewhere.⁴⁴ Here, attention will be given to *nōtan*, *kiin seidō*, and Kansetsu’s evaluation of modern Western masters.

First, according to Kansetsu, “what has been typical in Oriental pictorial rendering is currently being taken over by Western painting.” If tableaux in the West mainly consisted of painting, covering the pictorial plane with a layer of pigments, Japanese painting used to excel in linear drawing. However, in recent years, “while Western oil painting has been showing thrillingly interesting brush strokes, young Japanese painters in the national style have begun taking care to blur the surface of the painting with a misty and foggy touch, as if it were covered by frosted glass.”⁴⁵ Western painters from the Impressionists onward began emphasizing the importance of the brush strokes. The predominance of brush and knife effects reached their culmination in van Gogh and Cézanne (figure 6). Fauvists and Expressionists followed suit.

However, in Japanese painting, the opposite was happening. Color blots and spots were replacing sharp definition. The frequent use of *karabake* 空刷毛 (course deer-hair brushes used dry to blur the paint) and the mixing of *gofun* seashell chalk powder into the pigment seem to have contributed to this tendency of erasing lines. These were characteristic of the paintings of Kansetsu’s contemporaries and rivals, particularly members of the *Nihon*

42 In his classic 1913 paper, Tanaka elucidates in detail the historical evolution of the notion in the Chinese theory and practice of aesthetics, Tanaka 1964. On this basis, Sono’s facile identification of *kiin seidō* as *Einfühlung* with the *qi yun shengdong* of Xie He’s era (roughly, the first half of the sixth century) is simply misleading, and open to question.

43 On the development of Kansetsu’s idea as well his influence on Feng Zikai, see Nishimaki 2005.

44 On Kansetsu’s references to Chinese classics in his historical painting, see Inaga 2017. On his Orientalism, see Inaga 2015. The comparison of Shi Tao 石濤 (1642–1707) with the Western Postimpressionists was frequently proposed in Japan. At around the same time in China, Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896–1994) published an essay on “Cézanne and the Postimpressionists,” in *Shishi Xinhao* 時事新報 in Shanghai in 1923. See Kure 2015.

45 Hashimoto 1924, p. 83.



Figure 6. Paul Cezanne. *Le Garçon au gilet rouge*. 1888. Oil on canvas. While in Cezanne's painting the knife and brush effects are evident, in the piece by Tsuchida Bakusen, traces of lines and the effects of the brush work have been completely effaced, as Hashimoto judiciously remarks. Emil Bührlé Collection, on permanent loan at Kunsthaus Zürich. Image courtesy of Kunsthaus Zurich.

Bijutsuin, who inherited Okakura's teaching, or those of the Kokuga Sōsaku Kyōkai 國画創作協会 (National Painting Creation Association) in Kyoto.⁴⁶ This evolution suggested to Kansetsu that *nōtan* had suffocated and excluded the linear element from recent Japanese paintings.

Second, Kansetsu recognized a “tendency toward the Chinese painting of the Southern school” in Western painting from the Impressionists onwards. According to Kansetsu, the ancient Oriental ideal of *kiin seidō* was reincarnated through Western painting becoming “filled with Life.” And yet, Kansetsu emphasized that “the Orient is in advance of the

46 Contrast Cezanne's *Le Garçon au gilet rouge* in figure 6 with Tsuchida Bakusen, *Serving Girl in a Spa*. 1918. Tokyo National Museum, viewable at <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/serving-girl-in-a-spa-tsuchida-bakusen/VQFB-ilwu5t9yg?hl=en> (last accessed 5 August 2022).



Figure 7. Yosa Buson 与謝蕪村. *Fugaku Resshō zu* 富嶽列松図 (*Mount Fuji seen beyond Pine Trees*). 1778–1783. Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art (Kimura Teizo Collection) 愛知県美術館 (木村定三コレクション). Image courtesy of the Aichi Prefectural Museum.

Occident by at least two hundred years,” arguing that “the superiority of the East to the West in the art of painting would turn out to be evident” if one “put a Cézanne side by side with a Yosa Buson” (figure 7).⁴⁷

Third, Kansetsu proposed an audacious comparison of modern Western masters with their historical Chinese counterparts. Kansetsu thought it evident that “the Western expressionist tendencies stem from Oriental subjective depiction,” and that “the West still has much to learn from the Oriental tradition.”⁴⁸ He therefore compared Renoir to Yun Nantien, Cézanne to Wang Shigu, and van Gogh to Chen Laolian 陳老蓮 (1598–1652). Kansetsu shared a basic understanding of Qing dynasty Chinese masters with Watanabe Kazan, among others.⁴⁹ This was obviously no innocent analogy. By classifying modern Western masters using a Chinese template, Kansetsu sought to rehabilitate Chinese painting and claim Oriental superiority, as these Chinese masters were active over two hundred years earlier than their Western counterparts.

Kansetsu’s assertions struck a chord: the contemporary Chinese painter and essayist, Feng Zikai, one of the representatives of Shanghai Modernism, was to quote from Kansetsu’s essay in his “The Triumph of Chinese Modern Painting in Contemporary World Art,” a nationalistic essay which appeared in the January 1930 issue of the *Oriental Review*, an influential monthly magazine based in Shanghai.⁵⁰ Feng Zikai followed Kansetsu in proposing his own three-point comparison between Western painters and Chinese calligraphers, whom he stylistically selected regardless of chronological order. For Feng, the strength and experimentalism of Cézanne was comparable to Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785), while the fluidity of Matisse was compared to Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), and the eccentricity of Picasso to Zhang Xu 張旭 (eighth century).⁵¹

47 Hashimoto 1925, pp. 124–127, 265. Yosa Buson 与謝蕪村 (1716–1784) was an Edo-era artist and poet. Compare figure 7 with Paul Cezanne. *The Plain with Mont Sainte Victoire, View from Valcros*. 1882–1885. Pushkin Museum, viewable at https://pushkinmuseum.art/data/fonds/europe_and_america/j/2001_3000/zh_3412/ (last accessed 5 August 2022). Kansetsu would have been familiar with this painting, which was reproduced as a monochrome plate in an introductory text on Cezanne by the German art critic Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935), and frequently referred to by Japanese artists at the time. See Meier-Graefe 1910, p. 67.

48 Hashimoto 1925, pp. 4, 12.

49 Kansetsu’s “trio” of Expressionists, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, may also have drawn on Meier-Graefe. For more on this, see Inaga 2015, p. 160.

50 Attributed to Ying Xian 嬰行, one of Feng Zikai’s pen-names, see Feng 1930. This was part of a “Special Issue on Art” which Feng edited.

51 Feng 1934. On this book, see Nishimaki 2005, pp. 245–246, 251.

Kansetsu and Feng's comparative classifications were outcomes of an aesthetic dialogue between East and West. This had led to a renewed appreciation of the primacy of traditional Oriental aesthetic notions in Japan and China, under which Western masters and aesthetics were to be judged according to Chinese criteria and precedent (rather than vice versa). What, though, were the consequences of this chiasma of Western and Eastern art that had been played out over the past century? Its broader East Asian implications will be analyzed through the lens of postwar Taiwan, before we conclude with the significance of Japan as an artistic contact zone in the modern era.

Oriental Abstract Expressionism in Taiwan

The chiasmatic cross-fertilization between East and West in the arts took place in a modernizing Japan. One of its outcomes saw a reprisal of this process in a place where modernizing Japan had been. This was on Taiwan, and involved a confrontation between abstract painting (which identified Kandinsky as an originator), and the Chinese landscape painting tradition known as “mountain-and-water scenery.” Pursuit of a synthesis of the two resulted in a debate called the “controversy on modern and contemporary painting” (*xiandai huihua lunzheng* 現代繪畫論爭).

A dozen years after independence from Japanese imperial rule, painters in Taiwan still owed most of their knowledge on modern western art to Japanese sources, including Japanese translations of the latest Western trends.⁵² Prior to the outbreak of the controversy, the first organization for contemporary abstract painting, the Eastern Painting Society (or Ton Fan Painting Association; Dongfang Huahui 東方畫會) had been founded in Taiwan in 1956. Around the same time, another avant-garde group initially influenced by Western modern art, the Fifth Moon Group (Wuyue Huahui 五月畫會; named after the “Salon de Mai” in France), was established, and would ultimately include painters of international renown like Zheng Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983), who excelled in the *pomo* 澆墨 splash-ink technique.⁵³

The leader of the Fifth Moon Group, Liu Guosong 劉國松 (b. 1932), sought to develop abstract landscape painting, and from the early 1960 began to insist upon the necessity of rehabilitating the Chinese tradition of “brush and ink” (*bimo* 墨筆), while recognizing a common “non-pictoriality” (*bikaigasei* 非繪畫性) in the brush strokes of late Ming and early Qing painters like Shi Tao and Bada Shanren 八大山人, as well as painters of the republican era like Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864–1957). Liu Guosong stirred up the “controversy on modern and contemporary painting” in 1961 through his opposition to the ideas of Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–1982), one of the representatives of the New Confucian school. Xu, a close friend of Aisin-Gioro Puru 愛新覺羅溥儒 (1896–1963), younger cousin of Puyi, the last Emperor of China, was conservative in his opinion. Although respecting Xie He's idea of *qiyun shengdong*, and influenced by the philosophy of Zhuang Zhou 莊子 (369 BC–286 BC), Xu strongly adhered to the Platonic idea of *eidōs* (visible forms), and could not accept the notion of abstraction. Conversant with phenomenology, Xu saw in abstract expression the menace of Communism, an artistic tendency inherently opposed to order and security.

52 Kure 2014, pp. 110–114.

53 North American abstract expressionism searched for a similar effect as the Chinese ink-brush *pomo* splash-ink technique, and was also inspired by classical Chinese aesthetics, see Munroe 2009.

Liu fought back in defense of abstract expressionism, arguing that the Communist Party was responsible for the repression of spiritualist tendencies in contemporary art. Due to the political situation, their exchange lacked logical coherence.⁵⁴

Yet although the Taiwanese controversy was far from constructive, it did contribute to a revival of Chinese-style ink-wash painting in the contemporary art scene in Taiwan. In fact, Taiwanese abstract painting in the 1960s revealed a conspicuous affinity with the Chinese literati tradition. The resultant divergence perceived between socialist realism on the continent and the abstraction in ink-wash painting in Taiwan in the 1960s largely replicates the opposition between the Western paradigm of mimesis-representation, and that of *qiyun shengdong*, “spiritual resonance and vital movement,” in the East.

Conclusion

Imamichi Tomonobu developed his own chiasma hypothesis to explain East-West aesthetic intersections at around the time this Taiwanese controversy was raging. The ideological confrontation between socialist realism and abstract expressionism in the Cold War period, which characterized the aesthetic controversy in Taiwan, provides the background conditions which help explain the general acceptance of Imamichi’s paper as a valid aesthetic hypothesis in both the West and the East.

Nevertheless, the opposition that Imamichi sought to capture through his notion of chiasma was not, and could not be, merely a simple dichotomy between Western and Oriental artistic tendencies, as the Taiwanese controversy shows us. Rather, a fundamental duality in Western thought (between spiritualism and materialism) and another duality in Eastern artistic ideals (between “spiritual resonance and vital movement” and “transmission by copying”) were, hesitatingly and awkwardly, mapped onto one another. The overlapping and heterodox interpretations that characterized the Taiwanese aesthetic controversy provide evidence for the complexity of the chiasma in question, one which ultimately stems from the mutual lack of equivalent notions between the West and the East.

In this context, one may better understand Japanese modernity to be a contact zone, wherein a historical metamorphosis took place via a process of reciprocal trans-cultural translations between the Eastern and Western artistic traditions.⁵⁵ Did this exchange constitute an initial step towards a global art history for the twenty-first century, one which encompasses both East and West? That question remains to be addressed in future investigations.

54 For more details on this controversy, see Kure 2014.

55 For earlier accomplishments, see Fogel 2013.

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