

***Kokka*, Okakura Kakuzō, and the Aesthetic Construction of Late Meiji Cultural Nationalism**

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Abstract

This paper outlines the history of *Kokka*, an influential Japanese art magazine founded in 1889, with particular reference to its principal founding presence, Okakura Kakuzō, as they negotiated the ambiguities and complexities of Meiji cultural nationalism. The connection between its creation of a national aesthetic tradition and its experimental adoption of new methods of mechanical reproduction for its illustrations represented its split agenda of both consolidating a unique cultural prestige and advertising its engagement with modernity for the Western gaze. The evolution of Okakura's ideas in cooperation with the American art critic and philosopher, Ernest Fenollosa, was associated with the photographer, Ogawa Kazumasa, reflecting the tensions between aesthetics and propaganda. Okakura resolved his cultural politics with a theory of aesthetic idealism based on his analysis of the distinctive history of Japanese cultural assimilations from India and China in *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan*, 1903, offering a model for liberal internationalism, and, in *The Book of Tea*, 1906, for the mutual regard of East and West. The upshot was a diasporic influence in India and Europe while proposing an alternative to cultural fascism in Japan that was available for reconsideration after World War II.

Part One: *Kokka*

Kokka, An Illustrated Monthly Journal of the Fine and Applied Arts of Japan and Other Eastern Countries is a monthly periodical that was first issued in October 1889, originally published by The Kokka Publishing Company, 10 Yazaemon-cho, Kyobashi-ku, Tokyo. The oldest international art periodical from Japan and referred to by its publishers as “The Queen of Art Journals in the East”, it has spanned five eras of Japanese history, from Meiji to Reiwa, and remains “a leading academic journal of East Asian art history” to the present.¹ It started as an innovatory publication that first appeared during a critical moment of Japanese national development: the declaration on its first page was “Art is the Quintessence of the Nation”. At a time when Japan was keen to assert its individual cultural prestige while at the same time emulating Western scientific and industrial power, it attempted to integrate a combined agenda to match the West on both fronts: representing the great traditions of Japanese art and doing so with the most sophisticated modern methods of mechanical production.

The *Kokka* Tradition

The journal brought Japanese art to the serious attention of national and transnational scholarship, fashioning a tradition that gained definition from the 1890s through the rise of international modernism and beyond. The heritage it has consolidated over its history was retrospectively represented in an exhibition in

¹ *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, trans. by Kevin Singleton, Vol. 24, Dec. 2012 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), p. 10.

Tokyo National Museum in 2018, “Echoes of a Masterpiece: The Lineage of Beauty in Japanese Art: Celebrating the 130th Anniversary of *KOKKA* and of The Asahi Shimbun [Asahi Newspaper]”, highlighting the central canon of Japanese arts over the course of more than 1,000 years through a display of National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties. The artworks were divided thematically into three aesthetic “lineages”: Buddhist Faith; Individual Geniuses (Sesshū Tōyō, Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Itō Jakuchū); and Classical Japanese Literature (*The Tales of Ise* and the *Tale of Genji*). The first two lineages represent particularly the naturalization of Indian and Chinese influences into a developing national culture. A final section on Motifs and Images (“landscapes,” “flowers and birds,” “people,” and “old and new”) demonstrated the continuity and developments of “various motifs, images and forms that were passed down from medieval times to the early modern period, and from the early modern period to the modern era.”² That is, it extended up to the time of ukiyo-e and then acknowledged the influence of Western art in the works, for example, of Kishida Ryūsei, 1891-1929.

Inspired by the American philosopher and art critic, Ernest Fenollosa, 1853-1908, the historical recuperation of *Kokka* involved Ryūichi and Kajima Seibei, a wealthy Tokyo merchant and avid amateur photographer. Also closely involved was the Asahi Shimbun editorial writer, Takahashi Kenzō. A luxury publication, the journal was issued in two binding styles: ribbon-tied and stitch-bound, and appealed to a connoisseur readership. Its originality and impact derived from the combination of its revival of ancient and medieval masterpieces from different eras in Japanese civilization together with high quality experimental plates including fine black and white collotype plates, superb colour woodblock prints, generally engraved by “S. Izumi” with “colour press” by “T. Wada” or “T. Tamura”, and chromo-xylographs.³ Each issue typically contained five or six plates, of which two were in colour, and included a number of articles, mostly by Japanese scholars, on Oriental art, history and architecture, with a strong emphasis on Buddhist works. Occasional special issues focused on a single topic. The aim was to provide authoritative and expert material illustrated by accurate reproductions, so that, unusually, it attempted to print paintings and other art objects precisely as they then existed, including marks of deterioration, soiling and tears.

The journal’s mission was both the identification and transnational transmission of the Japanese art tradition, a drive that was marked by its gradual opening up to an international readership from 1901 with scholarly and commercial motivations owing to the increasing circulation of the magazine among Europeans. That initiative coincided with Taki Seiichi’s becoming chief editor, possibly at the behest of readers and researchers like Laurence Binyon, 1869-1943, who was actively using the publication for instruction at the British Museum, where he curated from 1893 to 1913. Nos. 1-132, 1890-1900, are in Japanese only, though there is occasionally an insert in English simply mentioning titles and artists; Nos. 133-181, 1901-June 1905, are in Japanese with a brief explanation of the plates in English; Nos. 182-337,

² The exhibition catalogue, *Echoes of a Masterpiece: The Lineage of Beauty in Japanese Art, Celebrating the 130th Anniversary of KOKKA and the 140th Anniversary of The Asahi Shimbun*, Tokyo: Tokyo National Museum, 2018, p.ix.

³ By the early 1900s illustrations increased and included black and white halftone plates and text illustrations. Typographical work is credited to the Tokyo Tsukiji Type Foundry. For these and other details see, <http://kazumasaogawa.com/japanese-photographer-baxley-stamps> [accessed 16/03/2017]

July 1905-1918, were published in both Japanese and English language versions, with some French inserts, while they were not always identical in content. Though the journal generally opened from right to left in Japanese style, from 1905-1918 an English version was stitch-bound with gilt edges and assembled in the western format, reading left to right.⁴

Constructing the Tradition

Okakura was the central presence who was well-placed to negotiate the interconnections culturally and linguistically. Yokohama, where he was born and raised, was the first Westernized city in Japan. Living in a shop, where foreign customers spoke English as a main language, he acquired proficiency in the language from the age of six, and when his family moved to Tokyo in 1873 to start up a Japanese-style hotel business, he enjoyed constant contact with overseas guests. According to Irokawa Daikichi, he was unusual in the period in not experiencing any inferiority complex towards Western thought and cultures.⁵ Yet, humiliated by ironically not being able to read Japanese signs in Tokyo at the age of eight, he decided to study Japanese in the Chōenji, a Zen Buddhist temple, where the chief monk, Gendō, was a scholar of the Chinese classics who lectured on *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*.⁶ When he became a student in the Department of Literature in the Imperial University of Tokyo, he focused on the study of English and Chinese, and, momentarily, became a disciple of Fenollosa, who began lecturing there on Western philosophy and political economy in 1878, focusing on Hegel, Darwin and Herbert Spencer, thereby introducing an emerging élite to Western ideas. He soon became absorbed in collecting the works of the Kanō and Sesshū Schools and Buddhist paintings, inspired by *Kanga-kai*, a Painting Appreciation Society, “the last of the great artists from the Kano lineage”.⁷ After his graduation in 1880, Okakura pursued the same admirations with Fenollosa and their virtual partnership was to develop into a powerful agenda for their recovery and appreciation of neglected Japanese masterpieces.

Fenollosa reacted radically to the early Meiji period’s conversion to Western style arts that in 1876 the *Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō* (the College of Engineering Art School) had been founded to import. Italian artists such as Antonio Fontanesi, a Barbizon School landscape painter and a professor in the Royal Academy in Turin, a sculpturist Vincenzo Ragusa, and a decorative artist, G. V. Cappeletti, were invited as teachers.⁸ Kawakami Tōgai, for example, who learned Dutch-style methods of composition and perspective in Nagasaki, where he ran his own painting school, sent his pupils to Fontanesi to learn Italian-style landscape paintings. As well as Western realism, new developments in mechanical reproduction of artefacts were also being introduced. In 1877, Ōkubo Toshimichi, a political leader in the Meiji government, promoted the First National Industrial Exhibition in Ueno to display Western technologies for

⁴ From No. 338 it was published in Japanese only.

⁵ Daikichi Irokawa, *Rekishika no Uso to Yume [Lies and Dreams of Historians]*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1974), p.97.

⁶ See Emiko Arai, *Okakura Tenshin Monogatari*, (Yokohama: Kanagawa Shimbunsha, 2004), pp.30-31.

⁷ José María Canbeza Lainez and José Manuel Almodóvar Melando, “Ernest Francisco Fenollosa and the Quest for Japan: Findings of a life devoted to the Science of Art”, *Bulletin of Portuguese Japanese Studies*, No.9, December, 2004, p.77.

⁸ These artists’ works are all represented in the Tokyo National Museum.

the home population, especially Japanese art workers. John M. Rosenfield depicts the effects in the beginning of the Meiji period on the entire artistic community:

Scores of old-style artisans—lacquer makers, potters, weavers, wood carvers, bronze casters—were being absorbed into mechanized industries and given entirely new skills. For painters and sculptors, a totally new system of training was devised to replace the master-apprentice method of traditional workshops. A new apparatus of patronage was built to replace the one which had collapsed with the impoverishment of the Buddhist temples and many old samurai or aristocratic families.⁹

In order to counter what was happening, in 1879 Fenollosa and Okakura founded *Ryūchi-kai* (the Dragon Pond Society, that in 1887 became the Japan Art Association) with the aid of the Ministry of Finance and that of Home Affairs, reviving traditional Japanese arts and crafts. It later held exhibitions abroad in Paris in 1883 and 1884. A fresh tendency was entering into the field when in 1882 the first national art school, *Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō*, that had exclusively taught Western media, was closed down.¹⁰

Over time, Fenollosa's appreciation of Japanese craft skills was to broaden his reception of the diverse heritage. His first important pronouncement for a Western readership was a review of Louis Gonse's chapter on painting in his *L'Art Japonais*, 1883, that criticizes Gonse's emphasis on woodblock printing at the expense of classic art. In his mind at that time it was associated with modern mechanical processes and he suspected the Western vogue for its commercialization, but when he saw its influence on painters in Paris in 1887 he changed his mind and became an assiduous collector and promoter of the technique, so that on his return to Japan he helped to persuade the Japanese art establishment of its importance.¹¹

Okakura had started to work in the Art administration section of the Ministry of Education, and began to make journeys to old temples in Kyoto and Nara with a superior official. "In the summers of 1880 and 1881 [Fenollosa] travelled extensively ... visiting all the temples and castles he could find",¹² and Okakura accompanied his research tours throughout the archipelago, interpreting for Fenollosa's lectures to learned societies. Okakura and Fenollosa took lessons on Buddhism from Keitoku, a learned monk of the Tendai sect,¹³ and Fenollosa also studied with Hirokata Sumiyoshi, the Tosa elder, who advised him on the secrets of the Yamato school painters."¹⁴ "These years between 1886 and 1889 marked the height of [Fenollosa's] personal influence in Japan",¹⁵ as he was given a team of archaeological and art assistants to register all the country's art treasures for the Imperial Commission of Fine Arts. The two enthusiasts collaborated intimately in establishing *Kanga-kai* in 1884 in order to further protect traditional Japanese

⁹ John M. Rosenfield, "Western-Style Painting in the Early Meiji Period and Its Critics", *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.184.

¹⁰ *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, p.9.

¹¹ Kevin Nute, "Ernest Fenollosa and the Universal Implications of Japanese Art", *Japan Forum*, Vol. 7, No.1, April, 1995, n.12.

¹² Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: the Far East and American Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), p.49.

¹³ Yasuko Horioka, *The Life of Kakuzō, Author of The Book of Tea* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1963), p.23.

¹⁴ Chisolm, p.49.

¹⁵ "Ernest Francisco Fenollosa and the Quest for Japan", p.78.

arts, especially the classical art of the Heian and Nara periods.¹⁶ But they were also concerned with sustaining Japanese culture in the present. Along with their recovery of past art was their sponsorship of the contemporary Kanō painters, Hashimoto Gahō, 1835-1908, and Kanō Hōgai, 1828-88, whom they supported in their experimental creation of the *Nihonga* style that sought to combine traditional approaches, excluding literati painting and ukiyo-e, with Western methods.

In 1886-7 Okakura was appointed to the Imperial Art Commission and sent abroad with Fenollosa and the government's Director of the Bureau of Colleges, Viscount Hamao Arata, 1845-1929, to study Western fine arts and art education in Europe and the United States, when they purchased a huge collection of photographs and books for use in Japan, while becoming convinced of the comparative excellence of Japanese work. After these academic travels they helped create *Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō* (the Tokyo School of Fine Arts), representing "the first serious reaction against the lifeless conservatism still affected by adherents of the Bijitsu Kyokai Art Association and the equally uninspired imitation of Western Art fostered heretofore in the old Government Art School."¹⁷ Fenollosa taught aesthetics there and Okakura became the principal in 1890, as well as director of the Fine Arts section of the Imperial Museum, today the National Museum. The members published a magazine, *Japanese Art*, and put on travelling exhibitions.

Okakura's address in the first issue of *Kokka*, to which he also contributed an essay on the painter Maruyama Ōkyo, articulated his vision of art in the new nation.¹⁸ He evokes its distinctive range: "the exquisite appearance of Buddhist statues, the high refinement of landscapes, the appeal of picture scrolls showing the lives of holy men, the poetic charm of flower and animal paintings".¹⁹ He presented the Meiji era as ideally placed to celebrate a newly conceptualized tradition, that had been historically impeded by "the feudal system with rivalry among local warlords"²⁰ and its geographical and historical insularity, establishing "strategies for learning from the past and utilizing this knowledge in the present",²¹ displaying it to the world outside and attracting new influences from abroad: "Now is a rare and glorious time... [when] ... we search for models everywhere, drawing on ancient and modern times, and seek knowledge broadly, from the East and West."²² But he was keen to insist on the preservation of his nation's distinctive heritage, as in:

Architectural form [that] must take into account our country's historical development and be based on the particular characteristics of the people, such that the architecture of the future will develop naturally. It is entirely unnatural for the Japanese people to transform Tokyo into a microcosm of Berlin, or to remake Kyoto in the image of Paris.²³

¹⁶ In 1886, Fenollosa became recognized as an art connoisseur by the Kanō school and received the Japanese name, Kanō Eitan, which means the eternal quest. See Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp.124-39.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Though anonymous, there can be little doubt he wrote it.

¹⁹ Kakuzō Okakura, *Kokka* (1889), transl. Timothy Unverzagt, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, p.176.

²⁰ Ibid., p.178.

²¹ Ibid., p.180.

²² Ibid., p.176.

²³ Ibid., p.181.

He was conscious that the writing of an “[E]astern art history”²⁴ had hardly begun. The broad outlines of the future ideas and concerns that were to preoccupy him are already evident, advocating “the promotion, preservation, supervision, and instruction of the arts ... and the various branches of the art industry”.²⁵ He already supported the combination of characteristic Japanese techniques “of brush movement, the depth and smoothness of ink, and the harmony of colors” with “[a]natomical study ... and perspective ... there is no reason why applying these [European] methods should harm the distinct characteristics of Japanese painting.”²⁶ Furthermore, he made his first attempt to demarcate the period, relatively “hidden away”, when:

Japan developed its own particular style from around the Hōan-Tenji period (1120-25) to the Genkō-Kenmu period (1331-36), when emulating the Tang style had already waned and the Song style had not yet achieved popularity. It was at this point that true Japanese painting was first perfected, with Toba Sōjō casting the first stroke

—to be followed by the artists who “depicted the circumstances of their era, transmitting them to posterity.”²⁷

He ends with promising that it is *Kokka* that will formulate that great tradition and promulgate the practices and policies that would give it effect nationally and abroad:

Kokka also desires to preserve the true essence of Japanese art, and hopes that Japanese art will make advances by building on its distinct characteristics. The art of the future will be the art of the people. *Kokka* will not stop calling upon the people to protect and preserve the art of their country.²⁸

It was a programme he was to pursue throughout the cross-currents of the succeeding decade. Accordingly, when in 1898, as a result of a personal scandal and institutional politicking, Okakura was expelled from both the art school and the museum, he was to inspire a group of his followers to found the alternative, non-governmental Japan Art Institute (*Nihon Bijutsuin*, Hall of Fine Arts) with its emphasis on major and minor arts that became influential, symbolically moving from Yanaka, in central Tokyo, to the remote fishing village of Izura. Hashimoto Gahō was again a close associate together with Yokoyama Taikan, 1868-1958, another influential proponent of *Nihonga*, combining Western techniques of perspective and shading with the native styles. It opposed the serious threat from the unmodified Western-style painting, or *Yōga*, whose chief advocate was artist Viscount Kuroda Seiki, 1866-1924 who imported an enthusiasm for French impressionism and in 1896 became the director of the Department of Western Painting at the *Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō* (the forerunner of the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music), introducing a new curriculum that reinforced a new turn to Western taste.

²⁴ Ibid., p.181.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p.179.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p.182.

A New Medium

Okakura's agenda of recuperating the national tradition was paralleled by Ogawa's assimilation of Western photographic techniques to produce a happy harmonization between Eastern aesthetics and Western technology that brought great art into relation with international modernity. Ogawa's career as a printer and publisher derived from the new techniques he had studied in Boston and Philadelphia from 1882-4, including the high quality colotype printing that provided precise tones that he influentially pioneered in Japan. In 1888 he was appointed as photographer for the Kinai survey that initiated the Japanese Government's project for a Painting Survey Group (*Zuga Chōsakai*), renamed in 1885 as the Painting Investigation Section (*Zuga torishirabe kakari*), to document and catalogue cultural treasures held in shrines and temples throughout the country. It brought him into contact with Okakura and, accompanied by the Chief of the Imperial Library, Ogawa photographed a range of antiquities, including architecture, sculpture and paintings, in the Kinki region of West Central Japan. He was subsequently assigned by the Government to conduct similar photographic surveys throughout Japan, producing images of Japan's cultural treasures that were to be reproduced in *Kokka* and his other publications. His contributions to The Kokka Publishing Company's prized photographic presentations of Japanese and Chinese art was to continue into the next century, as for example in *Choice Masterpieces of Korin and Kenzan*, 1906; *Masterpieces of Thirty Great Painters of Japan (Honcho Sanjikka Meiga-shu)*, c. 1907; *Hokusai's "Nisshin Jomajo"*, c. 1907; and *Art Treasures of the Koyasan Temples*, c. 1910.

Most significantly Ogawa contributed the colour colotype plates for the magnificent 10 volume *Japan, Described and Illustrated by the Japanese, Written By Eminent Japanese Authorities and Scholars*, Boston & Tokyo, J.B. Millet Company, 1897-8, compiled by the English Japanophile and gunnery instructor, Francis Brinkley. He supervised the printing by the Kokka Publishing Company of the covers by the Xylograph process, decorated with brocade, bevel edged and tied with thick cord stitching in traditional Japanese manner. Okakura supplied articles on ten Japanese paintings, and the De Luxe Edition announces on the title page an extra inclusion: "With An Essay on Japanese Art by Kakuzo Okakura".

Ogawa's photographic illustrations for *Kokka*, through to approximately mid-1907, were crucial to its quality and success. He was the principal supplier of classic art reproductions in a range of publications, and in the same year as the journal began he also edited and published the monthly *Shashin Shimpo* (East Asia's first and Japan's only photographic journal at the time) until 1896, contributing his newly improved colotype plates for both. Other enterprises based on his photographic work included the monthly *Japanese Art Folio* in 1898-99, and the first six volumes of the 20 volume *Selected Relics of Japanese Art*, published by Nippon Bukkyo Shimbi. After Ogawa's collaboration with *Kokka* ceased in 1907, his kind of collotypes together with the pure woodblock method were retained until around 1913, when a mixed method of