
Aesthetics and Art Studies in Modern Japan

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Introduction: Abstracts of Research Project

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8. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The aim of this research is to think over the ideal image of aesthetics at present and in future by reflecting on the situations in which aesthetics and art studies in the Meiji era Japan were placed.

Concretely, the time span this exploration covers is limited within the period from 1870's (beginning of importation of aesthetics) to 1900 (Otsuka's inauguration into the chair of aesthetics at University of Tokyo), so that the background of the birth of institutional framework of aesthetics in Japan, which keeps the strong controlling power even now, might be investigated efficiently.

As is shown in the Report, where six papers are collected, it can be said that the initial aim has been almost adequately attained. Aesthetical texts by Nishi, Fenollosa, Otsuka etc. and their social contexts are analyzed here successively, and the situations in Japan are compared with those in the advanced European countries like Germany. By using the method of "sociology of knowledge", this research tries to relativize the then "aesthetics" which was inspired with a kind of neoclassic view of art and was shared widely with many intellectuals everywhere in the world.

Of course, there may be lots of insufficiencies and inaccuracies. Art genres and countries to compare with have been reduced. And it is also regrettable that the descriptions tend to be concentrated to the academic mainstream aesthetics around University of Tokyo. Overcoming these inadequacies will be my future task.

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YASHIRO Yukio and the Cultural Policy of Modern Japan
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I. The Study of Aesthetics and Art Studies in Modern Japan

(Summary of 1. [pp. 1-8.])

It is not unusual for the professors and students of art history at Japanese universities to be part of the philosophy or aesthetics departments of the university's faculty of letters. The reason for this positioning can be readily understood through an examination of the historical process that led to the establishment of the study of the history of art.

Records show that Japan's first lectures on "shimbigaku" or the appreciation of beauty, were held at University of Tokyo in 1881 (Meiji 14). In 1889 (Meiji 22) the title of these lectures was changed to „Shimbigaku bijutsushi," or appreciation of beauty and history of art, and then again two years later, in 1891 (Meiji 24), this title was once again changed to „Bigaku bijutsushi" or aesthetics and art history. In 1893 (Meiji 26) the Ministry of Education established „the world's first" chair of aesthetics, and many of the lectures held were related to the history of art. This then led to the establishment of the 2nd chair in bigaku, or aesthetics, in 1914 (Taisho 3), which was titled a „bijutsushi-gaku koza" or art history studies chair.

In fact, Japan is not alone in the emergence of the study of art history from the study of aesthetics. This same phenomenon can also be confirmed in regards to the lectures held at universities in the Germanic countries, generally considered the birthplace of the study of aesthetics and art history.

In the case of Germany, it was the study of art history that was first recognized as an independent field of research, as opposed to aesthetics. When the first modern art history studies chair was established in 1860 at the university of Bonn, however, it was the professors of the philosophy departments who had, at most universities, expressed the most scholarly interest in works of art. These professors were involved in teaching and research on the classical languages that formed the heart of the humanist education then sought by their countries, and as a result, art objects from antiquity became the subject of their lectures. It was the professors of aesthetics who first attained the status of „ordentliche Professor" or full professor, sooner than their art historian colleagues.

What, then, were the differences between Japan and Germany? Simply stated, the establishment of an art history studies chair in German universities was a result of alternative process of selection. In Germany's case, the establishment of a department of the study of art history as a chaired position was a result of a variety of competing movements within the philosophy department, particularly the harsh movement to separate and become independent from aesthetics. In fact, there were quite a few instances where art history chairs were established as a victory that signaled the abolishment of full professorships in aesthetics. On the other hand, in Japanese universities, art history has maintained a peaceful coexistence with aesthetics and this situation continues today. Of course, it is not important whether or not these departments have shared titles of aesthetics and art history. In whatever form, the study of art history always entails, in addition to the use of art as object of study, the inclusion of the study of aesthetics in its research. The question then is, whether or not the study of art history in Japan has been able to sever its relationship from the idealistic aesthetics that were introduced by Fenollosa and other early

scholars in the field. Can't we then say that the study of aesthetics-which sees the existence of „art" as a clear, universal form, loves the arts of antiquity "kobjutsu" and famous western paintings "taisei-meiga" as "art," and is supported by universities and national policy aiming to educate its human resources, and thus educating people in this knowledge-determined the characteristics of the study of art history in Japan?

(Translated by Martha J. McClintock)

II. Social Function of Aesthetics in Modern Japan:

The Case of NISHI Amane

(Short summary of 2. [pp. 9-18.])

The theme of this article is, so to speak, the "aesthetics before aesthetics". One of the chief interests of the aesthetics before being established as an academic discipline in Japan lay in the cultural policy of the newly born nation-state. This could be relatively easily seen on the surface, as is often the case with Nishi Amane. This paper tries to make clear the social role Nishi intended to confer on the aesthetics at that time, by analyzing his three texts ("Hyakuichi-shinron", "Hyakugaku-renkan", "Bimyo-gakusetsu") where he referred to aesthetics for the first time in Japan,

III. E. F. Fenollosa and the Importation of Aesthetics into Japan

(Original text of 3. [pp. 19-27.])

Aesthetics as an academic discipline was not completely established in Japan until 1900, when Yasuji Otsuka (1869-1931) returned from study abroad to become the first chair of the Aesthetics Department at University of Tokyo. Before that, however, there were several significant lectures or publications connected with aesthetics. "The True Meaning of Fine Art (Bijutsu-Shinsetsu)," a speech given in 1882 by American educator and orientalist E. F. Fenollosa (1853-1908), was one of the most influential among them. What Fenollosa advocates in this lecture cannot yet be called aesthetics because it contains a definite measure of specific and biased value judgment. Perhaps for this very reason, however, his pre-aesthetics discourse exerted a far-reaching influence on the later development of academic and nonacademic aesthetics in Japan.

My aim in this paper is, by examining the main points of Fenollosa's speech, to clarify the process in which Western aesthetics was imported into the non-Western, modern nation-state of Japan.

1. "The True Meaning of Fine Art"

This lecture was sponsored by the Ryuchi-kai, a nationalistic organization for the protection of cultural properties and the promotion of Japanese arts in the midst of a post-Meiji Restoration national trend to look to the West. The Ryuchi-kai was established in 1879 (three years before Fenollosa's lecture), and its members were mostly government officials with experience visiting European countries. What this nationalistic society expected from the young American professor of philosophy was to certify the excellence of Japanese culture, and Fenollosa answered this expectation successfully by showing that the "true meaning" of art is inherent in Japanese art.

This speech can be divided into three parts: first, a theoretical explanation of the "true meaning" of art; second, a comparative analysis of Japanese and European works of art; and finally, particular proposals for the promotion of fine arts.

a) Theoretical Explanation

The first part of this lecture is often called "Fenollosa's aesthetics." Actually, it is highly abstract and difficult to understand. This theoretical explanation, however, was indispensable to Fenollosa. He states that, although art once reached its peak, it has again fallen into decay: "It is by no means an accident, there must be some grounds for that.... And, to make clear this reason, some speculative consideration cannot be avoided" (1).

To begin with, Fenollosa introduces three typical ways in which the fine arts have been defined, giving his objections to each (2). The first theory is the "skill theory"; it regards the artist's skillfulness as the determinant factor of fine art. Fenollosa, however, insists that skill has nothing to do with art because it belongs to both art and non-art. The second theory can be called the

"pleasure theory," and considers art to be that which brings us pleasure. According to Fenollosa, this view is also inaccurate in that it confuses cause and effect: "We can say art is pleasant because it is excellent. But we cannot say art is excellent because it is pleasant" (3). The third theory is the "imitation theory," according to which art is that which imitates natural reality. Fenollosa argues that art is not always excellent when it mirrors nature by pointing out the fact that people often like paintings better than photographs.

As we have seen, Fenollosa considers these three theories to be inadequate because they do not touch on the inner relation, mentioning only exterior conditions. For Fenollosa, the notion of art cannot be described merely by such physical or psychological approaches: "The notion of music is not the same as the sound of music" (4). Art is an interior matter that exists only when its parts form an intrinsic organic unity in our minds. Fenollosa calls this subtle unity of inner elements "idea" (5), and explains that it is this "idea" that is the true meaning of art.

This definition of art seems fairly idealistic and formalistic. The audience of the lecture and the early readers of its translation must have been troubled or tormented by this highly academic doctrine. In actuality, this argument was almost synchronized with contemporary European post-Hegelian aesthetics and the growing trend of "kunstwissenschaft." In a sense, as T. Mori points out (6), Fenollosa's statement precedes Woelfflin's "Principles of Art History" (1915).

After having made these theoretical preparations, Fenollosa applies them to concrete examples from Japanese and Chinese paintings. In Fenollosa's view, the aesthetic idea in a painting can be found in its harmonic state of form and subject (7). This form consists of three elements: line, shade (light and dark), and color. Harmony of form and subject can be realized either by the "synthesis" of the whole picture plane or by the "beauty" ("partial idea" produced by contrast and order) of each section in the picture. Therefore, argued Fenollosa, if these factors are combined, eight elements of artistic painting (from the "synthesis of line," the "synthesis of shade," to the "beauty of subject") can be obtained. He also added two extrinsic elements (the "power of design" and the "power of technique"); in this way, his aesthetics of painting was complete.

Though a more detailed explication must be omitted here, it is remarkable that Fenollosa emphasizes total synthesis over partial beauty, form over subject, and line over shade and color. He has, in fact, generalized the traditional European framework of academic notions about artistic form and applied it to non-European painting. Fenollosa has no doubt here about the universality of his ideas on fine arts. For him, art is that which is sanctioned by this supreme "aesthetics," while non-art is that which deviates from this definition. According to Fenollosa, it is when non-art prevails due to ignorance or oblivion of the true meaning of art that true art declines.

b) Comparative Analysis

In the second part of his lecture, Fenollosa attempts a comparative analysis between Western and Eastern art using his "true" notion of art. In contrast with the first, this section was understood fairly well. Or, rather, Fenollosa's impassioned defense of Japanese traditional art so incited the nationalistic mentality of his audience that it acquired great powers of influence. Consequentially, this argument determined the basic tendencies of artistic thought in Japan for years to come.

Fenollosa proposes five points of comparison (8): first, "the resemblance to the nature of the Western oil painting"; second, "the shading effect of oil painting"; third, "the existence of contour in the Japanese style painting"; fourth, "the thickness and variety of oil colors"; and finally, "the complexity of Western painting and the simpleness of Japanese painting." He stresses the superiority of Japanese painting on all of these points. Behind this sympathetic vindication can be perceived a kind of Japonisme or primitivism: an expectation that Western art will be saved from its decay by non-European, native art.

Fenollosa's amicable outlook on Japanese art was, in fact, based wholly on nineteenth-century European aesthetics. Proof of this can be found in his rejection of *bunjin-ga* (literati painting). The reasons Fenollosa rejects the "artistic" nature of *bunjin-ga* and its promotion are as follows (9): first, *bunjin-ga* is contrary to the true meaning of painting as art--it is impure in the sense that it brings literary factors into painting; secondly, it has only a small range of subjects; and thirdly, it easily invites unnatural mannerisms. From these lessingean, or purist aesthetic viewpoints, *bunjin-ga* can be discarded as non-art, as an enemy to the promotion of true art in Japan. It cannot be denied that this indicates an intervention of Fenollosa's personal tastes and judgments, ones that were shared by his contemporary intellectuals in the West.

Consequently, it may be inappropriate to characterize this section as a "comparative" analysis because Fenollosa does not demonstrate the originality of Western or Eastern painting from a neutral stance. Rather, with a strongly Western point of view, he "discovers" what meets the Western taste and what sells well when exported to the Western world and advises his Japanese audience to discontinue their support of "non-art" that does not please Western customers.

c) Concrete Proposals

In the last part of his talk, this young, 29-year-old professor of philosophy and politics offers some brief but concrete suggestions on how to promote the fine arts in a newly born nation-state. He mentions the establishment of art schools, the support of traditional Japanese painters, and the enlightenment of the public (10).

Curiously, Fenollosa immediately denies the validity of the first topic, saying, "the appearance of such a school is a sign of decline." He stresses that the "idea of nature cannot be taught": what can be instructed is no more than "to copy the styles of past works of art." It may be surprising to hear this opinion from one of the founders of the Tokyo School of Art. However, as Jutta Stouter-Bender shows us (11), most instructors who came with artistic ambitions from Europe to non-European areas adopted almost the same attitude. In their "workshops," they tried to teach nothing, fearing contamination from the European tradition. The pupils cleverly comprehended the predilection of their teachers and created excellent "works of art." Later, in the Tokyo School of Art, there was a strange mixture of this type of workshop and another type of national academy.

Fenollosa's next advice is to give more production opportunities to Japanese-style ("Nihonga") painters, which reminds us of the U.S. Federal Art Project in the 1930s. In the end, however, he fears that "this policy might limit the spirit of freedom" of the artists. As in the case of art schools, here again we see the aesthetics (or myth) of the inviolable imagination of genius.

For his final suggestion, Fenollosa proposes the founding of an institute of art to sponsor the eliciting, exhibition, and purchase of first-rate contemporary works. On the other hand, he recommends holding special exhibitions for antique paintings. He also emphasizes the need for permanent institutions for both kinds of paintings; in other words, museums.

2. Appraisals of Fenollosa's Aesthetics

Two seemingly opposing attitudes developed in response to Fenollosa's lecture, as well as to his later activities (which cannot be discussed here). The promoter of the speech, the "Ryuchi-kai," eagerly welcomed his arguments. The introduction added by "Ryuchi-kai" members on the occasion of its publication speaks eloquently for this fact (12): "He is a scholar from the U.S. who studied the profound truth of art.... He has been in Japan so long and knows so well about the situations of traditional art in Japan that...we can easily understand his explanation about why our country excels in art [above] all other countries."

This lecture, especially the second part, was surely agreeable to contemporary Japanese political leaders as well. To be taught that traditional Japanese paintings as "art" are not inferior to Western oil paintings not only healed the soul of a nation suffering from an inferiority complex but also awakened consciousness and national pride in the Japanese people. As a result, Fenollosa was to be used with his collaborator Okakura as a kind of symbol in later art promotion projects by the Meiji government. Moreover, this "discoverer of the beauty of Japanese art" was exalted as a benefactor who saved Japanese art in the midst of anti-Buddhist and anti-tradition movements. As K. Hosaka points out (13), this myth, together with the legendary episode of the opening of the doors of Horyu-ji Temple, was widely circulated; even after World War II, it was included in school textbooks on "morals." Fenollosa is still popularly respected as a national hero in Japan today.

On the other hand, most scholars of aesthetics and art history have expressed relatively cool, negative opinions. For example, researchers such as M. Yamamoto (14) and T. Kaneda (15), and S. Takashina(16) say with almost a single voice that Fenollosa's arguments are "unoriginal," "too simple," "general and conventional," or "lacking in particularity." Some, including E. Conant (17), criticize that the arguments in this lecture are not only too abstract and speculative but also biased and, in many aspects, contrary to fact.

These two attitudes are not necessarily opposed to one another. Rather, I think that they can be thought of as two sides of the same coin. No doubt Fenollosa's aesthetics was banal and erroneous; but perhaps it was for this very reason that his conclusions have been so highly influential through the ages.

This is more easily understood when we take into consideration the later development of academic aesthetics in Japan. According to early records (18), the first lecture course on aesthetics in Japan was held in 1881 at University of Tokyo, just one year before Fenollosa's talk. The following year, Fenollosa took over the class and continued to teach it through 1886. Though various professors taught the class (Knox, Busse, Koeber, Otsuka), and its name was changed to

"Aesthetics and History of Fine Arts" after Fenollosa left, the basic character of the course did not. Along with more concrete courses on art history and music theory, abstract "aesthetics" remained a mainstay at the university. In this way, aesthetics continued to function in Japan as a theoretical study based on a classical understanding of art, in which art is distinguished from non-art. The aesthetics of inner relations so emphasized by Fenollosa resulted in the separation of art from other cultural activities and gave the study of art an aristocratic self-image.

The popularization of an autonomous notion of art was not found only in Japan. For example, German sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand, active at almost the same time, states that, "paintings and sculptures [have been] declining since the ancient ages." According to Hildebrand, this is because "the progress of science and technology [has] made us lose the sensibility to art"(19). Despite differing opinions in areas such as the theory of evolution or impressionism, Fenollosa actually had quite a few things in common with German artists and intellectuals in the end of nineteenth century: an outlook that laid emphasis on the "synthetic" structure of partial elements; disappointment at the contemporary trends to imitate; the transference of this disappointment to a nostalgia for classical antiquity; emphasis on the mentality of genius above and beyond technical abilities; and a tendency to go back to the intrinsic "origin."

What Hildebrand's Munich, and Fenollosa's Boston and Tokyo had in common was that, although (or rather because) these cities were developing areas, they were full of zeal for civilization. Under such circumstances, there were various possibilities to incorporate aesthetics into political strategy. In this sense, contemporary government officials must have welcomed Fenollosa's aesthetic views on art: nostalgia for antiquity, for example, could play an important role in absorbing more unpleasant aspects of the Bunmei-Kaika (Civilization and Enlightenment) movement's radical progress.

Conclusion

It is simple to disregard Fenollosa's theory as merely an outmoded, commonplace, and inaccurate aesthetics. We should not forget, however, that it was under the strong influence of Fenollosa's artistic philosophies that the history of academic aesthetics developed in Japan.

What we need to do now is neither to praise nor to accuse. Instead, without oversimplification, we should keep our eyes open to various possibilities, nurturing undeveloped ideas and notions that lie hidden beneath mainstream trends. Through this process, we should be able to rethink the meaning of art from the very point at which we stand today.

We do not need aesthetics as a discipline if it is confined to a limited repertoire, reluctant to come in contact with the outer world. Nor do we need aesthetics if it regards particular tastes or value judgments as self-evident, failing to try to place them in relative contexts. What we do need from the field of aesthetics is critical theory that certifies freedom of thought. It is this kind of aesthetics, I believe, that is indispensable for an analysis of the importation of aesthetics into modern Japan.

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IV. OTSUKA Yasuji and the Foundation of Art Study in Modern Japan

(Short summary of 4. [pp. 29-36.])

In 1900, OTSUKA Yasuji was inaugurated into the “world's first” chair of aesthetics at University of Tokyo. In the lecture titled "Feature and Research Method of Aesthetics" which was given in the same year, he criticized the conventional method of aesthetical inquiry based on the ideological tradition, and emphasized the necessity of scientific and positivistic investigation of art. This article tries to elucidate the historical significance of Otsuka's proposal from the following three perspectives: "Catching up with the contemporary European situations", "Emerging of the institutional logic", "Aesthetics as Culture".

V. YASHIRO Yukio and the Cultural Policy of Modern Japan

(Short summary of 5. [pp. 37-46.])

Although the object of this paper goes a little beyond the chronological framework of the whole project, it is added here because the investigation of the works of YASHIRO Yukio, one of the most famous and important art historians in modern Japan, is really indispensable for the precise understanding of aesthetics in the Meiji era. According to the conclusion of this article, there is a remarkable readiness to pay attention to the social function of art in his theory in spite of the purely formalistic appearance. Also a lot of interesting suggestions about the political role of art it plays for the national security or for the national pride can be found in his writings.

VI. Art History as Institution, and Its Objects of Research

(Short summary of 6. [pp. 47-57])

The last article examines firstly the process of institutionalization of art history in Germany, secondly the circumstances, under which research objects were selected, when the "Fach" of art history was imported in Japan, and thirdly, the expansion of research themes brought by the "New Art History" after 1970's. Although this paper does not primarily discuss the problem of the Meiji era, it is included as a series of institutional study, to think adequately about the relation between the conditions of art studies in the Meiji era and the present situations.

Aesthetics and Art Studies in Modern Japan

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