

Reacting to the Past:

Rimpa Artists' Engagement with the Changing View of History

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Rimpa as a Presentation of the Past

Central to any definition of the Rimpa style of art is the combination of bold visual qualities and a foundation of engagement with the past, both of artistic and literary style in general and of Rimpa's own artistic tradition. The artists' attention to the past is at once evident in the Yamato-e techniques they used to present their re-working of classical themes. The painting methods often emphasize color over line and make liberal use of gold, silver and pigment. However, artists subtly altered some aspects of the techniques to twist or update the aesthetic. Tawaraya Sōtatsu (fl. early seventeenth century), notably, introduced *tarashikomi*, the pooling of one ink into another before the application of the first had dried. This marbling technique became a hallmark of the style and proved to be a perfect vehicle for the simultaneously evocative and graphic style of Rimpa.

The subjects of Rimpa art works, though not exclusively, do largely center on the poems and tales of the courtly past. *Ise monogatari* [*The Ise Stories*] and the poetic anthology *Shinkokin wakashū* [*New Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*] are particularly well represented in works of Sōtatsu and Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558-1636). Subsequent artists continued to paint subjects from these classical tales and poetry anthologies making copying a well-established practice and creating a Rimpa "language" of forms to be placed in compositions. Despite individual stylistic differences and generational breaks, Rimpa artists' subject choices and the manner of depiction make for a readily distinguishable style that presents at once as

both courtly and contemporary.

Rimpa's engagement with the past also relates to its own history as an artistic style. One factor contributing to the sense of history for later artists is that its key practitioners lived in three different generations, each of which was in effect separated by another generation. This circumstance of timing meant that the leading artists of one generation could not have worked with or even have met the masters of the preceding generation. The first generation, in the late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth centuries, is associated with Sōtatsu and Kōetsu; the second generation in the late seventeenth- and early-eighteenth centuries with the Ogata brothers Kōrin (1658-1716) and Kenzan (1663-1743); the third generation in the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries with Sakai Hōitsu (1761-1828) and his followers. The copying and repetition of motifs not only defined the style, contributing to its marketability, but also served as a connection between generations and as a memorial or memory device. In this way, a sense of history is expressed in the reiteration of motifs from Rimpa's own artistic tradition.

Another key aspect of the manner in which the past has informed Rimpa's visual form is in the response of the artists to the meaning of history in contemporary society. The three formative generations of Rimpa overlap with critical periods within the Edo period itself: The first generation of Rimpa developing between the end of the Momoyama period and the shift to Ieyasu's conception of a centralized regime; the second generation in the Genroku era (1688-1704), the Golden Age of the Tokugawa regime; and the third generation in the Kansei era in the mid-eighteenth century when the Bakufu set out policies with the aim of curing mounting problems that were besetting the realm and foreshadowing a new and different world to come.

The Tokugawa period is seen as a period of shift to a modern society.¹

¹ Masao Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 191.

One feature of this shift is the nature of the society's relationship to its past. This paper will first examine Rimpa artists' activities and treatments of classical themes in connection with various responses to the past that were concurrent with Tokugawa Japan's shift from a pre-modern to a modern society. The article will next examine how Edo Rimpa artists, in particular Sakai Hōitsu, responded in paintings to contemporary debates over the meaning of the past and how they thereby helped ensure a place for Edo Rimpa as a viable artistic style.

History, Confidence and Cultural Ownership

Rimpa, because of this relationship to the classical past and to its own past in the practice of visual quotations from the work of earlier practitioners, qualifies as a revivalist, renaissance style. In the Japanese literary tradition, the ideal technique for addressing the past was *honkadori* (allusive variation), as formulated by Fujiwara Shunzei and Teika, the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth-century *Shinkokinshū* poets who took their inspiration from earlier poets, especially Ariwara Narihira and his ninth-century contemporaries. The *Shinkokinshū* poets did not advocate imitation. Rather, they called for a revival of earlier poetic forms, with elements of innovation. Their motto was *kotoba furuku, kokoro atarashii* [old diction, new heart], using the technique of *honkadori*.²

The *Shinkokinshū* poets' theory of the creative use of the past corresponds to the Renaissance humanists' terms—*translatio*, *imitatio* and *aemulatio*. In the Renaissance, faithful copying was recognized as a useful lesson, beyond which the ultimate goal was to reach an original balance between the old and the new. According to Erasmus, 'If we wish to imitate

² R.H. Brower and R.R. Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (London: The Cresset Press, 1962), 14-15.

Cicero successfully, we must above all disguise our imitation of Cicero.³ This may be compared with Teika's words of advice to a disciple: "I do indeed feel that it is very bad for a poet not to be acquainted with the *Man'yōshū* style after many years of practice have enabled him to consolidate his own individual poetic manner."⁴ Both of these ages, for all their differences in time and space, produced a similar practical theory for the positive use of the past.

A common denominator in these successful harnessings of the past is confidence. Clearly, Renaissance humanists approached the past with a new confidence derived from material, social and political advances. Although the court in Teika's time was reduced to political impotence, it did have complete control over its heritage. The court enjoyed a monopoly over this heritage, giving it a confident grasp of its material, albeit within a tight circle.

In the Rimpa context, it is significant that Sōtatsu and Kōetsu, as non-aristocrats, were able to depict these themes because for the first time in history the courtiers were teaching their heritage to commoners who could and would pay to learn it.⁵ They successfully depicted the themes for courtiers, as well as for merchants. In this sense, they did manage almost by default to take over unofficially the position of an orthodoxy—the increasingly defunct Tosa school which had traditionally served the court in the way that the Kanō artists had served the Shogunate.⁶ One can imagine, if not confidence, at least the leeway or latitude felt by Sōtatsu, Kōetsu and

³ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 80.

⁴ Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 246.

⁵ Joshua S. Mostow, *The Ise Stories and the Politics of Cultural Appropriation* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014).

⁶ John Rosenfield, "Japanese Studio Practice: The Tosa Family and the Imperial Painting Office in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Artists Workshop: Studies in the History of Art*, ed. Peter Lukehart (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Study of the Visual Arts, 1991), 1. The Tosa School, although it was in existence throughout the Tokugawa period, failed to maintain its viability because it lacked the ability to adapt to changing social political conditions.

other artists who followed their style as they reworked the classical themes, somewhat less burdened by the weight of convention.

Preserving Culture when Confidence Wanes: Exhibitions and Curation

Although outwardly a shining era of cultural accomplishment, there were portends of trouble even as early as the Genroku period: Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) is described by Masao Maruyama as “the first great crisis thinker produced by the Tokugawa period.”⁷ The Shogunal reforms of the time (Kyōhō, Kansei and Tempō) are evidence enough of the Bakufu's own awareness of trouble. The reforms were generally concerned with restoration of the early Tokugawa precepts, which were in fact the root cause of many of the troubles.⁸

While Tokugawa Ieharu was Shogun (1760-86), during the early years of Hōitsu's life, the signs grew more obvious and ominous. Great disasters, both man-made and natural, befell the realm, particularly during Tanuma Okitsugu's term as Senior Councillor (1772-86). Rising inflation, starvation resulting from failed crops following drought and flood, and an erupting volcano must have contributed to a popular sense that something was rotten in the state of Edo. Anti-Bakufu plots and subsequent trials between 1759 and 1767 are indicative of this awareness. Comments made by the two defendants to their inquisitors stand out as honest, if bold, statements of their fears: Takenouchi Shikibu explained, “I believe that society is in a precarious state,” while Yamagata Daini declared, “I find nothing worthwhile in the government of the East since the 1180s.”⁹ Following Tanuma, Matsudaira Sadanobu became Senior Councilor (1787-93) and undertook reforms in

⁷ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 134.

⁸ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 118.

⁹ Peter Nosco, *Remembering Paradise: Nativism and Nostalgia in Eighteenth Century Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 125-126.

response to the perceived corruption of the Tanuma era.

With Sadanobu's reforms, a particular response towards the past became prominent: A movement towards archaism and an interest in documentation. Sadanobu himself would appear to have set the example in his own project to gather the past and to preserve it in a series of handscrolls, which Sadanobu commissioned from the versatile artist Tani Bunchō (1763-1841). For this project, which involved extensive travel, Bunchō and his team accurately recorded the appearance of most of Japan's great buildings, statuary and paintings. Bunchō's skill at depicting external likeness, using Western techniques of *chiaroscuro* and perspective, was well matched to the task of recording everything which Sadanobu considered of lasting value, everything that should be preserved after purging the heterodox elements of thought and material.¹⁰

In retirement, Sadanobu sponsored another artist, Kuwagata Keisai (Kitao Masayoshi, 1764-1824). Kuwagata executed several genre handscrolls for Sadanobu, which were catalogues of past, as well as present, customs and occupations. Titles include "Tōto hanjō zukan" ["The Illustrated Handscroll of Prosperity of the Eastern Capital," 1803] and the "Kinsei shokunin-zukushi ekotoba" ["Annotated Illustrations of all the Trades of the Recent Past," 1804].¹¹ As Clark observes, Kuwagata was a prime mover behind the turn towards archaism in Ukiyo-e.¹² From the late-eighteenth century, the visual arts began to be considered for the documentary value.¹³ Ise Sadatake (1717-84), an antiquarian of the samurai class, wrote a book entitled *Ansai Zuihitsu* [*Writings of Ansai*], in which the following comment appears:

¹⁰ See St. Louis Museum of Art, *Okyo and the Maruyama-Shijō School of Japanese Painting* (St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 1980), 47-48 for discussion of Okyo's commissions, including work for the Imperial Palace.

¹¹ Timothy Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum Press, 1992), 31-2.

¹² Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, 30.

¹³ Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, 29.

It is common practice to use old paintings as evidence when considering matters of the past. Because artists of these times painted the appearance of things they saw with their own eyes, their paintings constitute evidence for later scholars.¹⁴

Santō Kyōden (1761-1816), poet, writer and artist, made use of the historical content of Ukiyo-e in an updated version (1802) of Ota Nampō's (1749-1823) biographies (c. 1795-1800) of past and present Ukiyo-e masters.¹⁵

Francis Haskell notes a similar change that marked the study of history from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries in Europe, a change that is articulated in the writings of a Swiss historian, Simonde de Sismondi (1773-1842). According to Haskell, Sismondi:

moved far beyond that vein of poignant nostalgia ... and made use of specific visual sources in order to evoke the economic and constitutional realities of a now-vanished society.¹⁶

Similar views were held by Alexandre Lenoir (1761-1839), a French archaeologist. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Lenoir set about to rescue the artistic treasures of the nation, which were being destroyed as symbols of a conquered aristocratic past. The resultant collection was officially opened to the public in 1795 as the Musée des Monuments Français. Haskell notes that:

it was just this relentless destruction, and the subsequent reaction to it, that gave to the arts an historical (and, by implication, ideological) dimension hitherto lacking or, at best, taken for granted.¹⁷

¹⁴ Nobuhiko Maruyama, "Fashion and the Floating World: The Kosode in Art," in *When Art Became Fashion: Kosode in Edo-Period Japan*, ed. Dale Carolyn Gluckman and Sharon Sadako Takeda (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992), 213.

¹⁵ Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, 29.

¹⁶ Frances Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 215-216. Sismondi wrote *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age*, in sixteen volumes between 1807 and 1818.

¹⁷ Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, 236.

In the Edo period, a similar position of historical consciousness was reached through a fear that the past might disappear, or at least it was secondarily driven by that fear as a result of the artistic limitations imposed by the Kansei Reforms.

At about the same time, exhibitions, at first displaying contemporary works, became a feature in Tokugawa society. The scholar and painter Minagawa Kien (1734-1797) of Kyoto organized biannual exhibitions of contemporary paintings and calligraphies from 1792 onwards; Maruyama-Shijō and Bunjin (including Tani Bunchō) artists were represented.¹⁸ Works by the Kansai-based Rimpa artist Nakamura Hōchū (fl. late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries) may have been included, but it seems unlikely that Hōitsu's paintings would have been. Despite Hōitsu's connection with Bunchō, he was at this time more closely associated with Ukiyo-e styles. Hōitsu's patron Sawara Kikuu, significantly an antique dealer and collector himself, was the first in 1804 to hold an exhibition in Edo of contemporary works.¹⁹ According to the catalogue for Kikuu's exhibition, works by both Hōitsu and Bunchō were displayed. People of all classes would also have been able to see paintings during festivals at such places as the Inari Shrine at Asakusa where, in 1803, Hōitsu's paintings were on view.²⁰

During the period of Hōitsu's life, the latter part of the Edo period, the classics were claimed by a broader public, as evidenced in their frequent depiction in Ukiyo-e, and confidence was certainly in decline. The relationship with the classics and this crisis of confidence was reflected in the arts—no least in Edo Rimpa. Hōitsu's revival differed in a key respect from previous Rimpa revivals, which were primarily concerned with the exploration and absorption of artistic style and expression. Although these were Hōitsu's

¹⁸ Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, 31.

¹⁹ Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, 31-32.

²⁰ Tani Nakamura, *Hōitsu kachō-gafu* vol. III (Kyoto: Shikōsha, 1982), 113.

concerns as well, his efforts to honor Kōrin's memory and define his predecessor's style imply a concern with historical knowledge. Notably, he tapped into the current trends by organizing an exhibition of forty-two works by Kōrin to mark the centenary celebration of Kōrin's death. He published *Kōrin Hyakazu* [*A Hundred Designs by Kōrin*] in four volumes. The first two, published in 1815, accompanied the centenary activities, while the second two appeared later in 1826. Hōitsu's publications are veritable catalogues of specific compositions from Kōrin's oeuvre, at least as far as Hōitsu was able to establish. He followed a similar program for Kenzan, publishing in 1823 *Kenzan Iboku* [*The Works of Kenzan*] in color.²¹ He had plenty of examples to inspire his activities on behalf of his Rimpa predecessors and, in this way, he was able to keep the memory of these artists alive.

Emergence of a New Conception of History: The Past is Different

The historical consciousness of Hōitsu and his contemporaries, which sought to define and hold onto the past, implies recognition that the past was different from the present. This development is the theme of Lowenthal's book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, which explores the implications of different reactions to and uses of the past in Western societies.²² Lowenthal's underlying thesis is that recognition that the past was different is particular to modern societies. Pre-modern societies, he maintains, referred to remote events as if they were contemporary. Even as these events were recorded, there was a belief that they were excited by "passions and prejudices" that operated throughout time.

Scholars often look to the Tokugawa period for the origins of modern Japanese beliefs and practices. Maruyama, for example, asserts that certain aspects of modern thought emerged during the Tokugawa Period: "We can

²¹ Nakamura, *Hōitsu kachō-gafu* vol. IV, 134.

²² Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, xvi.

find in the development of Tokugawa thought many logical strands common to modern thought of the period after the restoration..."²³ It is reasonable, therefore, to postulate that it was in the Tokugawa Period that the past started to become a "foreign country."

The issue of the past and its role in contemporary thought had its first articulation with the scholar Itō Jinsai (1627-1705). In reacting against the moral rationalism of Chu Hsi Confucian thought, Jinsai introduced historical consciousness into Neo-Confucian thinking.²⁴ Maruyama, for example, states that up through the beginning of Tokugawa period scholars tended to analyze the problems they sought to solve by reference to the classics and "in most cases they were unaware of the real gap between what was in the classics and existing in society."²⁵ After the middle of the period, however, they sometimes applied their own empirical observations. Through an examination of Tokugawa society's views of its past, we can detect how this gap was expressed in the visual arts. According to the following evidence, it seems that the arts echoed these developments in intellectual history.

Evidence will first be examined suggesting that, in the first half of the Tokugawa period, people viewed the past in proximity to the present. Along with a fundamental belief that people of the past and present shared the same sentiments, it was expected that people would move freely between past and present in their expression. Naoki Sakai in his book *Voices of the Past* looks particularly at language in eighteenth-century discourse. His observation on early Tokugawa literature, generally before the end of the seventeenth century, is consistent with this view:

In early Tokugawa literature, no discontinuity existed in the field of presentation; the authors maintained a sense of continuity between

²³ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 191.

²⁴ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 58-59.

²⁵ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 192.

their own discourse and classic writing... They did not see any fundamental rupture between their own literary language and the world they inhabited.²⁶

C. Andrew Gerstle discusses Jōruri drama in the context of commoners' claims to the past, knowledge and virtue. He notes, in the plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725), "the trend to put the present into the past world of heroic virtue," by making traditionally minor figures the focus of heroic action in the history plays and writing new plays based on contemporary events of commoners.²⁷

The same situation appears to operate in Ukiyo-e *mitate* paintings and prints, wherein "modern" courtesans and lovers stand in for the classical subjects. For example, a painting (before 1752) by Miyagawa Isshō (1689-1779) in the British Museum is a *mitate* parody of episode 6 (Akutagawa) from *The Ise Stories*, in which two samurai, instead of a Heian courtier, each carry a woman piggy-back, which is the clue to the story.²⁸ In Rimpa, Sōtatsu and Kōetsu's revival was of the pre-Sismondi, "poignant nostalgia" variety. They were concerned with loss and in identifying a parallel between themselves and Narihira and the *Shinkokinshū* poets, they implied that feelings about loss were the same across ages. Sōtatsu's "Genji" screens (undated) in the Seikadō Foundation, Tokyo, illustrate the Sekiya and Miotsukushi episodes from the novel. In these scenes Genji meets former lovers by chance. In both cases, the affairs ended unsatisfactorily. Thus, a brief encounter many years later brings thoughts of missed opportunities.

²⁶ Naoki Sakai, *Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 302.

²⁷ C. Andrew Gerstle, "The Sense of History in Eighteenth Century Jōruri Drama," *Maske and Kothurn* 35 (1989): 48-49.

²⁸ Joshua S. Mostow and Royall Tyler, trans., *The Ise Stories: Ise Monogatari* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 25-27.

These images are not from the standard iconography²⁹ which makes Sōtatsu's depiction of them more significant in the context of the period of Sōtatsu's life. Kōrin and Kenzan's work similarly uses the elegance of the courtly past as a synonym for the ebullience of their own era. Their particular finesse in applying gorgeous designs to functional objects, such as Kenzan's ceramics and Kōrin's *kosode* garment, suggests a luxury wherein every aspect of life should be informed by beauty.

Sakai notes with particular reference to parodist literature that, as the period progressed, a general shift occurred:

... Classics that had long been regarded as transparent and intelligible became problematic when it was realized that historical distance had indeed separated people from antiquity... Classics belonged to a certain "world," but it was perceived that everyday speech, feeling, and desire formed a constituency beyond the scope of the classical "world". Many came to view the classics as completely alien to their own experience.³⁰

With reference to Jōruri drama, Gerstle notes the following trend in the plays of Chikamatsu Hanji and Suga Sensuke who were writing during the 1770s:

an ambivalence or ironical view toward heroic virtue, twisted plots and duplicity of motives—with a consequent breakdown of narrative line.³¹

This rupture finds clear visual expression in an Ukiyo-e painting (c. 1789-1818) by Hosoda Eishi (1756-1829) in the British Museum. Eishi was a high-ranking samurai and friend of Hōitsu's. The painting depicts a woman dreaming. Her dream, revealed in the "bubble" device, is from episode 12 of

²⁹ Miyeko Murase, *The Iconography of The Tale of Genji: Genji Monogatari Ekotoba* (New York and Tokyo: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1983), 27.

³⁰ Sakai, *Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse*, 202.

³¹ Gerstle, "The Sense of History in Eighteenth Century Jōruri Drama," 51.

The Ise Stories.³² In this episode two lovers have escaped their homes and attempt to hide from the authorities. A copy of *The Ise Stories* dangles from the sleeping woman's hand. She may see herself as the heroine of this romantic story, which is significantly dreamt in Heian period costume.³³ She transports herself back to a past quite different from her own world.

In Rimpa, this rupture between past and present is particularly evident in the disjunctive treatment of classical narratives, such as episodes from *The Ise Stories*. Possibly the first example of this change in Edo Rimpa occurs in a triptych by Tatebayashi Kagei (fl. mid-1730s-50) held in a private collection. Little is known about Kagei.³⁴ He can, however, be considered one of the first fully Edo Rimpa artists, since he probably studied under Kenzan during the latter's years in Edo.³⁵ Kagei can also probably be credited with inaugurating the triptych in Rimpa, a format greatly favored by Hōitsu and his followers.

It is perhaps not coincidental that the triptych format came to favor among Edo Rimpa artists. Sets of hanging scrolls became more common from the mid-eighteenth century in various arts, which seems related to the developing interest in documentation. Assembling sets of scrolls is analogous to collecting things, like Bunchō's presenting, in one work, many different national treasures in his project for Sadanobu. Watanabe's Nangaku's (1767-1813) screens of daimyō possessions in the Joe and Etsuko Price Collection could also be considered as part of the same development. The objects are antiques depicted as still-life objects on exhibition. Itō Jakuchū's (1716-1800) *Dōshoku sai-e* [Colorful Realm of Living Beings] (c. 1757-1770) in the Imperial Household Collection, doubtless the most ambitious hanging scroll set

³² Mostow and Tyler, *The Ise Stories*, 43-44.

³³ Clark, *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, 126.

³⁴ Nakamura, *Hōitsu kachō-gafu* vol II, 121. Kagei was an official doctor who served the Maeda family of Kaga-han. Kaga-han had a close connection with Rimpa; many works by Sōtatsu and his disciple Sōsetsu are to found there. In 1738 Kagei became a disciple of Kenzan, who gave him a book of fan paintings by Sōtatsu and Kōrin.

³⁵ Nakamura, *Hōitsu kachō-gafu* vol. II, 121.

(comprised of thirty scrolls and the Shakamuni triptych), brings together natural and mythical creatures as an expression of his own Buddhist-inspired philosophy of equality among beings. The success of the multiple scroll format, in aesthetic terms, lies in the artist's ability to provide a purely formal or thematic link between the parts so that they function as a whole.

The parts of Kagei's Narihira triptych, however, have no implicit relationship with each other. He has not attempted, as Kōrin did in his Iris screens, to abstract elements which might have linked the parts through relationships between color and shape, but nor has he suggested a narrative from which the viewer could construct the logical connections. An isolated Narihira appears gazing backwards into a blank distance, oddly divorced of context. The flanking autumn views, one a deer with a maple tree and the other a bird with chrysanthemums, are in themselves appealing Rimpa compositions with an effective use of *tarashikomi*. They have, however, no direct relationship with Narihira. Kagei directed Narihira's gaze to the right, when conventionally a central figure is shown looking left.

An undated triptych (private collection) by Hōitsu of the Mount Fuji scene, episode 9 from *The Ise Stories*, is similar.³⁶ It denies a narrative, while somehow implying one. All the elements—Mount Fuji, the attendant with back turned, and Narihira—are represented. Yet each element is depicted on its own scroll in solitude. The sharp line and purity of color make each element more remote, even quite shocking. A triptych (undated, private collection) by Suzuki Kiitsu (1796-1858) flanks Narihira (this time with attendant) on a blank ground with an image of the Sumida River on one side and Mount Fuji on the other. Kiitsu became Hōitsu's disciple in 1813. The landscapes, especially the Sumida River, have their own internal coherence, as do Kagei's autumn scrolls, which makes the Narihira scroll appear more

³⁶ Mostow and Tyler, *The Ise Stories*, 32-39.

stark.

A related characteristic in Edo Rimpa is the amalgamation of thematic elements from different narrative sections or sources. An example from Hōitsu's oeuvre is an undated triptych in a private collection. Sakuramachi Chūnagon³⁷ is the figure on the central scroll. This image is flanked by depictions of two separate sections from *The Ise Stories*: A scroll of Narihira at Mount Utsu is on the left and a scroll of Narihira with attendant at Mount Fuji is on the right, both are scenes from episode 9 and the iconography is from Sōtatsu.

In a single hanging scroll (undated, the University Art Museum, Berkeley), Hōitsu depicts the poet Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (c. 662-710),³⁸ one of the *sanjūrokkasen* or thirty-six poetic immortals. The remote quality of Edo Rimpa classical themes is not confined to the triptych or necessarily even to the narrative classics. Hitomaro, in canonical form, faces neither the viewer nor the view, but rather looks to the distant left. He is separated by an empty gold ground from a few trees and the shore on the far right corner of the composition. Poems by Hitomaro mention shorelines and convey an atmosphere of loneliness.³⁹ However, Hōitsu has not given an indication that a particular poem was referenced.

Hōitsu's revival of Kōrin matches the archaistic trends of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, along with the move towards a perception of the past as more distant. The precision and attention to detail

³⁷ The pen-name for the Heian Courtier Fujiwara Seiki who was fond of cherry blossoms and asked Amaterasu Omikami to prolong the season of the blossoms in his garden; from an episode in volume 1 of the *Heike Monogatari*.

³⁸ Hitomaro, a middle-ranking courtier, is one of the thirty-six poetic sages [*sanjūrokkasen*].

³⁹ Ian Hideo Levy, trans., *The Ten Thousand Leaves: A Translation of the Manyōshū* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). In his best-known poem addresses the corpse that washed to the shore after a storm. "In the Sea of Ivy-Clothed Iwami" and "The Bay of Tsuru" are two other poems from the Manyōshū with shoreline settings.

in depicting standard themes from *The Ise Stories* was not lost; indeed, it was even enhanced in the work of Hōitsu and other Edo Rimpa artists. Yet these works did not generally have narrative coherence. It seems to matter less what happened in the story, in spite of the detail. The standard depiction became not clues to an episode, as in Kōrin's "Iris" screens in the Nezu Museum of Art, Tokyo, but general symbols of the past, and of a past, which had less relevance in Edo. It had moved from being viewed as a past experience to acceptance as tradition. For this reason, the authenticity of the image was crucial. The great "rupture" in Rimpa with regard to its treatment of the Heian classics reached a strong articulation in Edo Rimpa. However, the concern with history was not limited to a changing perception of the meaning of the classics in contemporary society. The engagement with history also brought an ideological perception, which was tied to notions of the country in relation to foreign cultures. The influence of these currents is also reflected in the style and themes of Edo Rimpa art.

Ideological Change and Changing Conceptions of History

Japanese history gained an ideological dimension when Kokugaku scholars exploited the implications of Article I in Ieyasu's "Laws Pertaining to the Court" by using the classics as the basis for Kokugaku philosophy. This document established that the court's essential function in serving the state was to uphold the arts and scholarship.⁴⁰ As such, the document formalized a practice, which was meant to keep the court from interfering in political affairs and so posing a threat to the Bakufu system. At the same time, however, it sanctioned a formal separation of cultural court history from military government ideology. Kokugaku was one of the philosophical schools of the period founded by men of common birth to articulate the nature of

⁴⁰ Herschel Webb, *The Japanese Imperial Institution in the Tokugawa Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 60.

society's problems. Gerstle discusses these schools and notes their underlying theme: "That individuals can confront the past and that each has the capacity for virtue and consequently the right to public knowledge."⁴¹

Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) and his predecessors, Keichū (1640-1701) and Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769), located a historical source of Japan's problems in the influence of China, a trend in thinking which had become more pronounced in the ninth century.⁴² Kokugaku theorists turned to Japanese court anthologies and histories, which had been written before Chinese influence was as strongly present.⁴³ They believed that the sentiments of these works were authentic expression of the pure Japanese heart. In the contemporary predicament, Chinese thought was so entrenched that only by returning to the classics could people re-learn the responses that were once innate.⁴⁴

Kokugaku thought also developed in a way consistent with Lowenthal's theory about the emergence of a new sense of the past. The thought of Norinaga and his predecessors relied on the classic writings.⁴⁵ They believed that the past was accessible in the present; this idea changed under Norinaga's successor, Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843), who saw the past as fundamentally

⁴¹ Gerstle, "The Sense of History in Eighteenth Century Jōruri Drama," 42.

⁴² Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 156. Leon Zolbrod, trans., *Ugetsu Monogatari: Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, by Ueda Akinarai (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), 38-39: A fictional exploration of the subject occurs in Akinari's story "White Peak," in which a dialogue between the Priest Saigyō and the spirit of the ex-Emperor Sutoku reveal the Neo-Confucian and Nativist viewpoints.

⁴³ Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 4. Kokugaku scholars referred to the *Kojiki* (712), *Nihongi* (720), *Manyōshū* (c. 759), or *Kokinshū* (905),

⁴⁴ H. D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 405.

⁴⁵ Thomas Harper, "The Tale of Genji in the eighteenth century: Keichū, Mabuchi and Norinaga," in *18th Century Japan*, ed. C. Andrew Gerstle (Sydney: Allen and Unwin), 106-123. The article examines Norinaga's critical writings on *The Tale of Genji* and discusses how his work, as well as that of the others, fits into the process of commoners claiming the past.

different from the present.⁴⁶ He reached this position by stripping the classics of their pre-eminence as a source of knowledge in favor of religious feeling, which he maintained to have existed prior to written language. Thus, he emphasized folk culture and country lore over the ancient texts. Hirata helped direct the intellectual change of the latter half of the Tokugawa period toward a new definition of restoration — *fukkō*, a revival of antiquity, “that liberated man from history into the undemanding and flexible world of myth,” which laid the groundwork for a change to the political order in the eventual restoration of imperial rule.⁴⁷

The Vogue for Folk History in Art

It hardly seems coincidental that during this time, the Edo Rimpa repertoire began to include native folk and festival subjects. The only remotely similar subject matter by the earlier Kyoto Rimpa artists, including both Sōtatsu and Kōrin, was a few genre scenes. Judging by the number of extant examples of folk and festival works to appear in the Edo Rimpa repertoire, it would seem that the artists responded to changing demands in the market. The majority of these works were done in hanging scroll format, for display in *tokonoma* at the proper time of year. There do not appear to be any examples on screens.

Hōitsu’s oeuvre includes a triptych (undated, Okura Shukokan Museum, Tokyo), which is an amalgamation of the *Legend of Momotarō* and two other scenes from ancient tales not identified. Hōitsu also did a series of five scrolls (1827, Okura Shukokan Museum), each showing a different seasonal festival. There are scrolls especially for various festivals, including New Year, Boys’ Day, and Girls’ Day. These appear in various formats, including single, double

⁴⁶ Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen*, 141.

⁴⁷ H.D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 11-13.

and triple hanging scrolls. Such works which now seem the most peculiar and “atypical” of Rimpa are in fact numerous and again imply a strong market.

The Challenge of the West

One of the most important changes in the intellectual and political climate of Tokugawa Japan was the gradual displacement of China as the Other in exchange for the West. Although knowledge of the West had penetrated into Japan by the Momoyama period with the Portuguese Jesuits, influence on the arts remained exotic, as in the Namban (Western Barbarian) screens, which exhibited curious figures from around the globe shown in native costume but rendered in Japanese style. Chinese influence had preoccupied the Japanese in intellectual, artistic and political terms for centuries. David Pollack offers Kōrin's screens of “Red and White Plums” in the MOA Museum of Art, Atami, as the symbol of this assimilation of Chinese and Japanese sensibility: the branches standing as the Chinese Kanō-derived element and the flat, swirling *tarashikomi* rendered stream as the Japanese element. As such the work represents the two cultures as fully assimilated.⁴⁸ There is beauty, balance and nothing stands out or jars. According to Pollack:

By the mid Edo (that is, around 1700) adaptation and digestion of Chinese ideas had proceeded to the point where Chinese and Japanese concerns — which is to say the antithetical pressures of external form and internal passion — had arrived at a balance point.⁴⁹

It is also of interest that Kōrin produced several works on the theme of *Hakurakuten*, the title of a Nō play by Zeami and the Japanese name for the

⁴⁸ David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 213.

⁴⁹ Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning*, 225.

Chinese poet Bo-ju-i.⁵⁰ In Zeami's play, the Chinese poet sails to Japan to engage in a bit of cultural imperialism. He encounters a seemingly humble fisherman; in their parley of poems it emerges that those of the fisherman are superior because they accord with the sounds of nature, as proclaimed in the preface of the *Kokinwakashū*. Gradually, the fisherman's identity as Sumiyoshi no Kami, the god of poetry, is revealed. Joined by other gods, he dances to stir up waves and winds, which send Hakurakuten back to whence he came. As such, the story can be extended to proclaim the superiority of *waka* on the grounds that the expressions are purer and more in tune with nature's rhythms. The divine intervention accords with Sumiyoshi no Kami's appearance in episode 117 of *The Ise Stories* in which the god appears before an unnamed emperor.⁵¹ As a god, he promises to protect the emperor. Sumiyoshi no Kami's pledge is to protect what is purely Japanese — be it an emperor or a cultural genre.

Kōrin produced two screens on the theme and smaller works in various media around 1700, Pollack's general date for synthesis. These works would seem to be another unconscious response or distillation of the view towards China of this time. It makes use of Yamato-e techniques, which are of central importance of Rimpa's painting tradition in the use of gold cloud to consume and to negate space and solid banks of green pigment. No element, in contrast to the branches in the "Red and White Plum" screens, is anything but Yamato-e. In terms of the theme of the work, to assert a Japanese genre over the Chinese counterpart, this treatment is absolutely crucial. Conspicuously, the green Yamato-e hills in the landscape appear on the same side as the Japanese god-cum-fisherman. The contrast between their stillness

⁵⁰ Hōitsu included one of Kōrin's screens of this theme in the *Kōrin Hyakuzu*. Otherwise, it seems not to have been depicted by any other Rimpa artists, other than Kōrin. Pollack, *Fracture of Meaning*, 74 and 209 for discussion of the background of Zeami's play.

⁵¹ Mostow and Tyler, *The Ise Stories*, 236-247.

and the turbulent waves, which tilt Hakurakuten's boat to a nearly vertical position, summons up the image created in the play. Both the "Plum" screens and "Hakurakuten" have been read as effective statements for Japanese painting over Chinese.⁵²

The Emergence of Western Influences and Techniques

Although China was not expelled from Japanese consciousness during the Tokugawa period, China's weakening power, Japan's own internal problems and the growing threat from Western countries combined to shift the focus away from China and increasingly towards the West.⁵³ This shift is also evident in the arts, especially after the 1720s, when the ban on foreign books was lifted and Western techniques became better known.⁵⁴ From the mid-eighteenth century, people seemed to look more seriously at Western ideas about painting and perception. The radically different approach encouraged a questioning attitude towards the meaning and function of art.

Shiba Kōkan was an unabashed advocate and practitioner of Western ideas in the arts and sciences. He felt only Western techniques succeeded in conveying the objective appearance of the world. Chinese and Japanese techniques conveyed only a subjective impression.⁵⁵

⁵² Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning*, 209, Kōrin was working at roughly the same time as Chikamatsu. Chikamatsu's 1715 play *Battles of Coxinga* was his most popular. The main character, half Chinese and half Japanese, overthrows the Qing invaders and restores the native Chinese Ming rulers to the throne.

⁵³ Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discover of Europe* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1952), 39-69. The letters of the Hungarian Baron Moritz Aladar von Benyowsky were discovered in 1771, and warned of possible invasions by the Russians. The reaction prompted discussion about Japan's defense policy, as well as plans for exploration. Bunchō and Sadanobu, for example, conducted a defensive tour of the Izu and Minura Peninsulas.

⁵⁴ Tomoko Ono, "Sakai Hōitsu no gafu tenkai to sono tokushoku," *Bijutsushi* 38, no. 2 (March 1989): 139.

⁵⁵ Calvin French, *Shiba Kōkan* (Vermont and Tokyo: John Weatherhill Company, 1976), 173-174.

Norinaga wrote a short essay on painting in which he gives a confusing impression of what he did admire in art. He discussed Japanese, Chinese and Western styles, but none received his full praise. Traditional Japanese methods clearly worried him for reasons similar to those of Kōkan; namely, they failed to convey the actual appearance of the world. Yet he was also deeply suspicious of realism in art and to some extent preempts the ideas behind Magritte's painting, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" which is written above a realistic depiction of a pipe. Norinaga wrote: "Realistic art. Now I doubt not that the principle is an excellent one. At the same time there must be some differences between real objects and the pictures of such objects."⁵⁶

Artists themselves, including Kōkan, explored the options and considered how Western techniques might be used to enhance their own repertoire. The influence of *chiaroscuro* and perspective communicated in Dutch copper prints and Ming and Qing style painting were practiced in Japan as the Nagasaki School and had a profound influence on artists. In the Nagasaki style, Western influences were tempered by Chinese styles, the traditional and more familiar Other. Furthermore, these techniques were becoming more integrated with native styles, as seen in the work of Jakuchū and the Maruyama-Shijō school, as well as in the Ukiyo-e prints of Hōitsu's teacher Utagawa Toyoharu (1735-1814) who is credited with naturalizing perspective in his prints of historical, genre and landscape subjects.⁵⁷ For this achievement, he is considered the precursor of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) who further developed the technique.

Hōitsu's blending of Styles

Hōitsu applied Nagasaki-derived Western approaches to his works even

⁵⁶ Basil Hall Chamberlain, trans., "Notes by Motoori on Japanese and Chinese Art," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 12 (1884): 223.

⁵⁷ Richard Lane, *Images from the Floating World* (London: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, Ltd., 1978), 174-78.

before he began practicing the Rimpa style. His first dated work is the Ukiyo-e painting (private collection) of the titular sisters in the Nō play *Matsukaze and Murasame*. He completed this painting in 1785 at the age of 24. Ono, in analyzing this painting as well another Ukiyo-e, “Beauty Catching Fireflies” of 1788 (private collection) identifies Nagasaki, Western influences in these two early works in Hōitsu’s oeuvre. These influences persisted throughout his career. In “Matsukaze and Murasame” Ono notes the use of the thick and thin undulating line is characteristic of the Nagasaki school.⁵⁸ This line is quite different from that employed by Hōitsu’s teacher Toyoharu. In “Beauty Catching Fireflies” Ono comments upon Hōitsu’s use of modulated ink tones on the bench for shading.⁵⁹ Hōitsu also did a Dutch-inspired portrait of Hippocrates (undated, Kobe City Museum).

Hōitsu included Nagasaki techniques in Rimpa while also maintaining the classical and historic characteristics of the style. Two examples are triptychs in which he flanks episodes from *The Ise Stories* with flowers depicted in the Nagasaki-style idiom. One such triptych (undated, private collection) features the Mount Fuji scene from episode 9 and another (undated, Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Feinberg) shows the woman from Takayasu (episode 23).⁶⁰ The central *Ise* scrolls give all the essentials for the narrative and derive from similar compositions by Kōrin, which Hōitsu reproduced in *Kōrin Hyakuzu*. The Mount Fuji scene is flanked by one scroll of peony and the other of chrysanthemums; the Takayasu scene is flanked by scrolls of flowering plants of summer and spring. The flanking pieces are much more influenced by the Nagasaki style, extracted floral motifs quite realistically depicted. However, having applied a softer palette and line with the use of *tarashikomi*, Hōitsu has transformed them into the Rimpa mode. Although

⁵⁸ Ono, “Sakai Hōitsu no gafu tenkai to sono tokushoku,” 136.

⁵⁹ Ono, “Sakai Hōitsu no gafu tenkai to sono tokushoku,” 138-139.

⁶⁰ Mostow and Tyler, *The Ise Stories*, 65-69.

these floral scrolls are narratively superfluous, they add an aesthetic finish when viewed together.

Hōitsu's sets of twelve hanging scrolls based on Fujiwara Teika's twenty-four poems of the twelve months are especially fine examples of Hōitsu's style in this Nagasaki-inspired manner of Rimpa. There are four sets of these scrolls, which is remarkable considering the expense of the materials and the time involved in completing them. All were done during the Bunsei era (1818-30). Nakamura suggests that Hōitsu probably needed to raise money to fund his Kōrin and Kenzan revival projects. Along with smaller paintings in fan and album leaf formats, he might have done the scrolls for particular patrons to increase his income.⁶¹ The set in the Imperial Household Collection was done first, in 1823. The one from the Joe and Etsuko Price Collection was probably done after 1824. Instead of presenting the images to create a pattern, as seen in Kōrin, or in a cluster of flower sprays in the Rimpa tradition, Hōitsu offers the views as framed sections removed from a larger scene, which is typical of Nagasaki compositions. Hōitsu uses *tarashikomi* in a very controlled and delicate manner to achieve Nagasaki goals; namely, to render naturalistically the mottled quality of the leaves and to suggest the rounded form and texture of the tree trunks. Several of the scrolls have a defined ground plain and a sense of recession. Hōitsu's method of depicting accumulated snow in the scroll for the tenth month, leaving sections of the silk unpainted, also derives from Nagasaki school techniques.

A feeling of distance from the past and the growing relevance of Western scientific instruments and painting styles that sought to reveal objective reality invited new treatments of classical themes of art in Edo Rimpa. Hōitsu did not displace the classics in his works; rather he de-emphasized their narrative element. One can say that he even sacrificed some of the rarified atmosphere of elegance that these motifs conveyed in Kyoto Rimpa.

⁶¹ Nakamura, *Hōitsu kachō shū-gafu* vol. IV, 149.

In exchange, he offered “natural” imagery of the flowers that occur in the poems and narratives. In the scrolls of Teika’s poems, Hōitsu did not follow the imagery exactly and he may have chosen seasonal motifs based on his own direct observation of nature. For example, the poems for the tenth month include chrysanthemums and cranes, whereas Hōitsu depicted a crow in a persimmon tree, perhaps a more common autumn scene around Edo. In short, he brought “observed” nature into the cultured artifact quality that had been an established quality of the botanical in the classics. In this way, he extended the base for the seasonal reference. Flanking *Ise* views with seasonal flowers, placing poets on a background of flowers, inventing his own seasonal motifs while also drawing on established images gave his works a dimension that was neither past nor present, but imbued with the ideas of eternal nature.

Rimpa is ultimately much more than “decorative,” the label with which it is often saddled. It is, in the phrase of Pierre Bourdieu, ‘a euphemized form’ of a larger issue.⁶² In this case, that issue is the meaning of history in contemporary life. Just as Tokugawa society’s view of his history was not static, so Rimpa was a complex and dynamic artistic movement. Edo Rimpa artists maintained the relevance of their style by applying contemporary themes, styles and approaches without losing the historical dimension.

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⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 101-102.

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