# A Fantasy in Ink: How Japanese Export Art Reflects the West's Obsession with the Exotic

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#### Images:



Figure 1. Cockatoo and
Pomegranate.
Woodcut print by Ohara Koson, c. 1927.

Woodcut print by Ohara Koson, c. 1927. Caroline Black Collection of Japanese Woodcuts, Connecticut College, New London, CT.



Figure 2. Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi Bridge and Atake. Woodcut print by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1857.

Shain Japanese Print Collection, Connecticut College, New London, CT.



**Figure 3. Ōhashi Bridge at Night.** Woodcut print by Shōda Kōhō, c. 1920s.

Shain Japanese Print Collection, Connecticut College, New London, CT.



Figure 4. Evening at the Edge of Shinobazu Pond.

Woodcut print by Kasamatsu Shirō, 1932.

Caroline Black Collection of Japanese Woodcuts, Connecticut College, New London, CT.



Figure 5. Cabinet of Twelve Inrō. Lacquer cabinet by unknown artisan, c. 1875-1900. Khalili Collections.



Figure 6. Vase with Landscape.
Underglaze blue on porcelain by
unknown artisan, c. 1900.
Khalili Collections.



Figure 7. Cloisonné Vase with Flowers (one of a set of two). Cloisonné enamel vase with gilt and silver wire by Namikawa Sōsuke, c. 1883. Khalili Collections.



Figure 8. Satsuma Vase.
Painted and gilded earthenware vase by
Kinkōzan Sōbei VII, c. 1905.
Khalili Collections.



Figure 9. Five White Egrets.

Woodcut print by Ohara Koson,
1927.
Caroline Black Collection of Japanese
Woodcuts, Connecticut College, New
London, CT.

#### Introduction

In one of Connecticut College's Japanese print collections there is a particular print that struck me when I first saw it. Designed by Ohara Koson (1877-1945), it depicts a white cockatoo on a pomegranate branch against a pitch-black background (Fig. 1). It is recognizable as shin-hanga (new print) by its use of Western chiaroscuro in the branches and leaves, but other features, including a debossed textural element to the feathers and that striking black ground, were unfamiliar to me, and not easily identifiable as either an import from Western art or an adaptation of traditional Japanese artistry. The subject matter is also unusual; the piece is obviously kach ō -e (bird-and-flower picture), a genre in which Koson specialized, but a cockatoo and pomegranates are not typical subjects of this genre, which is based in a Chinese painting tradition and so often features either local species or those from China and its cultural sphere of influence. This combination of a Middle Eastern fruit and a bird from the Indo-Pacific seemed like more than simply a new take on an artistic tradition. Upon investigating I discovered that Koson often made prints that were primarily intended for export to the West (including this one), and from there I stumbled onto the topic of this paper: The influence of Western tastes that favored an idealized, exotic, Orientalist construction of Japan on Japanese artists' design and subject choices for Japanese export art during the Japonisme period (1853–1931).

## A Fantasy in Ink

When Commodore Matthew Perry (1794-1858) arrived in Japan in 1853, he took note of many of the art forms that, despite the isolation of the Edo period, had already found eager audiences in the West. His account relates:

The lacquered ware has all the lightness, neatness of cabinet-work structure, and exquisite polish, that seems possible in work of that description, and the porcelain is equal to the choicest specimens of similar Chinese work. The forms and ornamentation of the various articles, although frequently grotesque, showed much grace and skill, and proved great advancement in the application of the arts of design to manufacturing purposes.<sup>1</sup>

Perry's expedition marked one of the first times an American had ever visited Japan and left with his head. Soon, Japan had been opened to trade with the West by force, and the same kinds of unequal treaties that had been imposed on China after the Opium Wars were in effect in Japan. Unlike China, Japan in the early days of contact did not have many items to sell that Western companies were willing to buy; Japan's largely handmade manufactures were no match for the industrial might of the Western world. However, Commodore Perry's early interest in Japanese crafts was indicative of a more widespread interest by Westerners in the mysterious, distant Japanese archipelago, and many Japanese artisans, recovering from the shocks of Japan's domestic instability following the arrival of Perry's black ships, found a new niche selling luxury wares, decorative objects, and woodblock prints to fascinated audiences in Europe and America. Soon, the new Meiji government saw the potential to gain international legitimacy and economic power through a West-tailored art trade, while potters, printers, and lacquer artists

<sup>1</sup> Francis Hawks, Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, Performed in the Years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the Command of Commodore M. C. Perry, United States Navy, by Order of the Government of the United States, 1,Vol. 1, (Washington, DC: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1856), 458–9. 2 Dean Flower and Christopher Benfey, "That Double-Bolted Land Japan," The Hudson Review 57, no. 1 (2004): 168, https://doi.org/10.2307/4151396.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Flower and Christopher Benfey, "That Double-Bolted Land Japan," *The Hudson Review* 57, no. 1 (2004): 168, https://doi.org/10.2307/4151396.

<sup>3</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia. "Harris Treaty." Wikisource. Wikimedia Foundation, April 19, 2018. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Harris\_Treaty.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Teasley, Designing Modern Japan, (London: Reaktion Books, 2022), "Design by Committee."

<sup>5</sup> Clare Pollard, "Meiji Ceramics: The Art of Japanese Export Porcelain and Satsuma Ware 1868-1912," in *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 13, no. 1 (2005): 134, https://doi.org/10.1086/studdecoarts.13.1.40663219.

<sup>6</sup> Nanami Kawade, "Japonisme in Japan: The Japanese Reaction to Japonisme as Manifested in the Art of Watanabe Seitei," Aspectus: A Journal for Visual Culture, 2020, https://aspectus.york.ac.uk/Issues/2-2020/japonisme-in-japan.

sought to absorb all they could learn about the West, with many adapting their wares to Western tastes. Western audiences bought works by the thousands at exhibitions and curio-markets, but already on Perry's expedition, Japanese works were being identified with "the barbaric character of the past," grouped together with Chinese works, observed as indicative of the collective character "of this remarkable people," and measured against stereotypes of "the gaudy tendencies of oriental taste." In other words, the discourses of Orientalism were already rushing forward to greet Japanese culture, and these discourses embedded themselves into what was said and thought about Japanese art, how it was received in the West, and the tastes of Western audiences for the various art objects flowing out of Japan. This paper will demonstrate that Japanese export artworks that used stereotypically Eastern motifs regardless of their local relevance and conformed to stereotypes of Japan as pure, serene, mysterious, and in harmony with nature were a direct result of Western influence and power over the global art market.

## The Appearance of the East

Among the first woodblock prints to arrive in the West were the landscapes and bird-and-flower prints of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). These prints were uniquely positioned to provide the first view into the character of Japan. Existing stereotypes about the natural purity and quaint barbarism of the broader East were already well established in Western discourse, and the first trickle of Edo period prints that reached Western audiences confirmed through colorful depictions of plants, birds, and mountain landscapes that the Japanese had that same ancient Oriental character that had long been propped up as an "other" to the normalcy and modernity of Westernness. It did not matter that the typical *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world) of old, which had always been art for the lower classes, had mostly been book illustrations and portraits of *kabuki* actors

<sup>7</sup> Yoshie Itani, Export Porcelain from Seto in the Meiji Era: The Development of Noritake Porcelain in the Context of the Japanese Ceramics of the Meiji Period, (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2005), 3–4. 8 Hawks, Narrative of the Expedition of... Commodore M. C. Perry, 459.

<sup>8</sup> Hawks, Narrative of the Expedition of... Commodore M. C. Perry, 459.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Julia Meech-Pekarik, "Early Collectors of Japanese Prints and the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1982), 95. https://doi.org/10.2307/1512790.

<sup>12</sup> Edward W. Said, Orientalism, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Wester Wagenaar, "Wacky Japan: A New Face of Orientalism." Asia in Focus (July 2017), 46.

and prostitutes. <sup>14</sup>*Meisho-e* (literally "pictures of famous places"), for example, were a relatively recent innovation that responded to the regularity of travel by the *chōnin* (merchant and artisan classes, who were the target audience of prints) around Japan in the late Edo period. <sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, to ignorant early collectors in the West, these pictures of natural scenes were the essence of Japan's Oriental character, <sup>16</sup> steeped in age–old tradition, and these pictures were arguably the ones that most captured Western imaginations.

Hiroshige's Sudden Shower (Fig. 2) was one piece that clearly got widespread attention in the West, as Van Gogh painted a reproduction of it, 17 and Japanese-style arched bridges are a common theme in the works of other masters like Monet and Whistler. Hiroshige's original depicts travelers shielding themselves from a downpour while they cross a bridge. In the typical style of the time, there are no shadows or reflections on the water, and there is a sense of flatness to the Western eye. The colors, including Hiroshige's signature stripe on the bottom in deep blue (likely Prussian blue, which was an exciting new pigment imported from the West), <sup>18</sup> were bright at the time of printing, and the bridge is well-lit, as if there were no rain clouds at all. Most importantly, the print is about the people: ordinary travelers, traders, and pilgrims going about their business in an iconic area with much foot traffic, dealing with the major inconvenience of the day—the weather. This subject would have appealed to Hiroshige's primary audience, the lower classes of Japan, many of whom could even have claimed to have been to the very site depicted, which was part of the novelty that would have helped prints in this series to sell.

Though the setting of Kōhō's *Ōhashi Bridge at Night* (Fig. 3) is exactly the same, what differs greatly is the audience of this print, which was made around seventy years later, when most prints went straight to the export market. <sup>19</sup>The audience is likely the reason for the absence of any cartouches

<sup>14</sup> Penelope E. Mason and Donald Dinwiddie, *History of Japanese Art*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 278.

<sup>15</sup> Mason and Dinwiddie, History of Japanese Art, 289.

<sup>16</sup> Julia Sapin, "Merchandising Art and Identity in Meiji Japan: Kyoto Nihonga Artists' Designs for Takashimaya Department Store, 1868–1912," Journal of Design History 17, no. 4 (2004): 318, https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/17.4.317.

<sup>17</sup> Nina Siegal, "Van Gogh Never Visited Japan, but He Saw It Everywhere," The New York Times, March 26, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/26/arts/design/vincent-van-gogh-japan.html#:~:text=The%20almond%20blosso ms%2C%20gnarled%20trees,country%20he'd%20never%20visited.

<sup>18</sup> Guth, "Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture," 474-5.

<sup>19</sup> Meech-Pekarik, "Early Collectors of Japanese Prints and the Metropolitan Museum of Art," 97.

in the later work, since the primary consumers of this print would not have been able to read them anyway. The main visual difference is that the scene in this piece takes place at night, just like the other prints in its series, a choice that incorporates the features of the Orient of the Western imagination. If Hiroshige created multiple series about travel to appeal to the merchant class of Japan, then it is reasonable to expect that a whole series about Japan at night, made primarily for Western audiences, was designed to appeal to their tastes, and indeed this piece accommodates the desire for a mysterious, exotic Orient quite well. While no viewer who has seen Hiroshige's corresponding work of the same subject can deny that a sense of Japanese tradition is preserved in this newer work, the mysteries of the (literally) dark East are played up significantly by the night scene. Gone are the bright colors of Hiroshige's time, for the Orient of the Western imagination is obscured by darkness and lit only by the mystical glow of paper lanterns. Gone is the sudden rain, which would only serve to project the discomfort of reality when the fairy-land that is the Orient is meant to be tranquil. This piece is not about the people, for the people are mere silhouettes, providing a glimpse into the West's disdain for the Oriental<sup>20</sup> even as it extols the beauty and quaint virtue of the Orient. The lack of importance of the people of the East has long been a common feature of the visual Orient: "eastern figures as portrayed in western chinoiseries were often strangely androgynous, indicating a European apathy towards individual identities."21 Casting the figures on the bridge in darkness is simply another way to remove their individuality and turn them into nameless Orientals. Depicting the bridge at night was a deliberate choice that allowed the undesirable parts of the East to be concealed while enhancing the sense of mystery. In the background can be seen the true subject of the piece, the Orient itself: a blur of houses and trees obscured by mist and reflected on water, showing those archetypal characteristics of the East: harmony with nature, mystery, and serenity. The ripples and reflections on the water, the use of areas of solid color to suggest form rather than outlines, and a few elements of Western linear perspective identify the style of the piece as shin-hanga, a visually realistic style of prints influenced by Western chiaroscuro and linear perspective.<sup>22</sup> Even as Japan was, in the words of Edward Said, being "submitted

<sup>20</sup> Said, Orientalism, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth H. Yusem Meyers, "Meiji Craft and Japonisme: The Japanese Exhibits at the Philadelphia and Chicago World's Fairs and the Structuring of American Taste," Academia, 2013, 12.

<sup>22</sup> David Bell, "A New Vision: Modern Japanese Prints from the Heriot Collection," Tuhinga: Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, no. 31 (2020), 92.

to being [-] made Oriental,"<sup>23</sup> by a West-dominated art market, Japanese artists made continuous efforts to adapt their work and modernize their techniques. That effort did not extend to the subject and motifs of the piece, however, because the innovation that was taking place within those aspects was the creation of a new Japan that was in line with the Orient. Western demand clearly favored what Europeans and Americans saw as the authentic East of ancient times, which is why the subject is the same seventy years later, and the details that have changed are mostly the auto-exoticist performance of an artist trying to sell his works to an ignorant audience.

# A Foreign Paradise

The Orient had (and still has) an important role in the Western imagination, especially as seen in Eastern art. Because the Orient was positioned as the West's opposite, it could be made to be devoid of any corruption or insecurity that plagued the West. Marius Jansen points out that, to Westerners fed up with the depravity of industrial capitalism, choking on air thick with smog in the polluted cities of Western Europe in the mid-to-late 19th century,

Japan seemed a lotus land that should be preserved at all costs from the ravages of nineteenth-century mass production. Their sentiments were one facet of a broader nineteenth-century fascination with the Orient as primitive, exotic, and somehow 'authentic,' an idealization that led Delacroix to Morocco, Gauguin to the South Pacific, and Lafcadio Hearn to Matsue.<sup>24</sup>

As machines created ugliness all over the West, many Westerners went looking for a place full of natural beauty and what they saw as an inherent primitiveness that precluded its people from industrializing. They found an escape from the ills of their own civilization in the art of Japan, and insisted that Japan, which was rapidly industrializing in the hope of becoming a world power, <sup>25</sup> remain the same so that it might continue to serve as Europe's daydream:

The reactions of dismayed Westerners had considerable impact. When so much of the effort was impelled by determination to create a state and culture that would be judged worthy of the West, the shocked

<sup>23</sup> Said, Orientalism, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Marius B. Jansen, "Cultural Change in Nineteenth-Century Japan," In *Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Art*, edited by Ellen P. Conant, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 52.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Buruma, Inventing Japan 1853-1964, (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2004), 45-7.

remonstrances of Westerners that Japan was destroying its cultural heritage struck home.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, Japan's cultural heritage was not some unchanging thing like the West imagined in the Japan that existed before Perry's arrival. Still, many Western scholars, including those who had been hired by the Meiji government to help the country advance, in fact advocated for Japan not to advance significantly<sup>27</sup> because what they valued in Japan was its function for the West as an exotic escape and a backdrop to their own journey. Their advocacy had considerable impact on a country recently traumatized by a violation of its sovereignty and trying desperately to enter the West's good graces, <sup>28</sup> and Japan's art, which had always been the lens through which Europe saw Japan itself, <sup>29</sup> was especially affected.

Kasamatsu Shirō's (1898-1991) Evening at Shinobazu Pond (Fig. 4) presents exactly the "lotus land" Westerners wanted to see in Japan. Another shin-hanga piece, the blue outlines of the background give the impression that the scene is obscured by evening mists, heightening the sense of mystery and spirituality provided by the dim evening light. The willow branches in the front further obscure the scene, providing both a delicate natural element that feels traditionally feminine, a common trope in discourse about the East, 30 and also creating the final layer of this classic depiction of the Orient: a natural landscape hidden by darkness and fog, lit only by lanterns, reflected on water, and viewed from a distance through an obscuring haze of leaves. One can almost smell the incense and hear the poets scrambling to describe the jadegreen of the foliage. The print depicts an exotic European fairytale as much as it does a real place in Tōkyō, purposely only showing the exact place from the exact angle that best hides the surrounding modernity, a common practice in Japanese commercial photography that was known to appeal specifically to a Western clientele.<sup>31</sup> The *torii* in the background brings a sense of spirituality to the scene, but the magnificent  $t\bar{o}$  (pagoda) towering in the distance puts it to shame in that regard, and belies another Western conceit-turned-motif.

<sup>26</sup> Jansen, "Cultural Change in Nineteenth-Century Japan," 32.

<sup>27</sup> Schepers et al. "Exoticism in Early Twentieth-Century German Literature on Japan," 104.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen P. Conant, "Japan 'Abroad' at the Chicago Exposition, 1893," in *Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Art*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 257.

<sup>29</sup> Schepers et al. "Exoticism in Early Twentieth-Century German Literature on Japan," 105.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>31</sup> Schilcher, "Invented Tradition," 39.

#### 64 • Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal

Buddhism had fallen from grace in Meiji Japan.<sup>32</sup> It was viewed as an archaic frivolity, imported from a now humiliated China, and was cast out in favor of *Shintō*, the native religion that gave the newly-empowered Emperor the divine right to rule.<sup>33</sup> However, by the late Meiji and Taishō periods, it had made a comeback thanks in no small part to the urging of Westerners, who viewed it as an inseparable part of Japan's ancient cultural heritage that they were keen to preserve.<sup>34</sup> In fact, one particularly vocal and condescending<sup>35</sup> member of this camp, Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), took such an avid interest in Buddhist art that he was even known to bully priests into revealing relics that had been locked away for centuries.<sup>36</sup> The presence of a Buddhist structure in this piece is no accident. Like the fog and the willow tree it represents Japan's imagined essence which Europeans and Americans sought as an escape and fought to preserve against the rising tide of modernity.

The cabinet of *inrō* (meaning "seal box") (Fig. 5) illustrates perfectly how feudal Japan had come to be romanticized in Europe and the United States. In the Edo Period, inrō were small boxes of lacquered wood that were fixed to the belt to serve as a pocket and accessory,<sup>37</sup> but they fell out of fashion in the early Meiji when social elites began adopting Western dress.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, in the West, inrō were coming into vogue as collectible trinkets, and makers of inrō wasted not a second in switching over to export-oriented production.<sup>39</sup> Because these exported inrō were collectibles and not functional, some came in large sets with their very own cabinet, like this one decorated with a model inrō in *kinji* (polished gold finish), so that they could be collected and stored in quantities that had never needed to be accommodated when they were sold to native audiences. Clearly inrō were seen in the West as something special, and with their long history as well as their tendency to use animal and plant motifs (like the image on this cabinet which has pine trees

<sup>32</sup> Jansen, "Cultural Change in Nineteenth-Century Japan," 32.

<sup>33</sup> Buruma, Inventing Japan 1853-1964, 35-56.

<sup>34</sup> Jansen, "Cultural Change in Nineteenth-Century Japan," 32

<sup>35</sup> Flower and Benfey, "That Double-Bolted Land Japan," 171.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Oliver Impey, "Japanese Export Art of the Edo Period and Its Influence on European Art," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 4 (1984): 690, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00016383.

<sup>38</sup> O. Impey, M. Fairley, and J. Earle, "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period: Cabinet of Twelve Inro," Khalili Collections, Accessed July 18, 2022, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/japanese-art-of-the-meiji-period/khalili-collections-japanese-art-of-the-meiji-period-cabinet-of-twelve-inro-l113/.

<sup>39</sup> Impey et al. "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period: Cabinet of Twelve Inro."

and a crane-shaped *netsuke*, or fastener, both symbolic in Japan of longevity), 40 they must have been seen in Europe and the United States as symbolic of the older, more innocent, feudal Japan that had captured many an imagination in the West. 41 The depiction of a sanbaso dancer on the front of the model inrō, which, like the inrō itself, is more symbolic of Japan's idealized feudal past than of the modernizing nation that was current to the work, fits in well with the imagined landscape. Though I could find no picture of the real inro inside the cabinet, the description of the piece says they are each decorated with an animal of the Japanese zodiac, surrounded in most cases by natural scenery. 42 These designs are perfectly suited to the West's romantic fantasy of the Orient, as natural subjects fit into the characterization of the East as being attuned to nature, and the zodiac gives a Buddhist lotus-land-esque context to the pieces, since Buddhism is the religion with which it is associated. The Japan represented in this work is the spiritual, tranquil, and natural Japan of the samurai, not the modernizing and industrializing Japan that was actually current to the piece. Collecting such large quantities of inro, then, was an attempt to preserve in Western collections the unique flavor of "old Japan" as it was imagined in (and as an alternative to) the West, even as many in Japan were donning suits and bowler hats.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the fight over Japan's future and identity was binary: a Western desire to preserve vs. an Eastern desire to advance. By the 1880s a massive conservative movement among Japan's civilian population and government officials alike had risen up in opposition to the early Meiji's Westernize-at-all-costs attitude. 43 It would also be inaccurate to imply, however, that the exotic version of Japan sold to Western audiences was a result of a domestically-located desire to preserve tradition. First, the conservatism of the time was largely directed toward bringing back Confucian values, especially in education, 44 and had very little, if anything, to do with art. Second, no woodblock print would have been a part of domestic ambitions to preserve culture because, while they were adored in France as treasures of the far East, at home woodcuts were held in contempt as the mass-produced

<sup>40</sup> RISD Museum, Nuance in Nature: Birds and Flowers in Japanese Textile Design, (Providence, RI: RISD Museum, 2007), exhibition catalog, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Schepers et al. "Exoticism in Early Twentieth-Century German Literature on Japan," 108.

<sup>42</sup> Impey et al. "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period: Cabinet of Twelve Inro."

<sup>43</sup> Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi and Kenneth B. Pyle, "Meiji Conservatism," in Modern Japanese Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104-6.

<sup>44</sup> Wakabayashi and Pyle, "Meiji Conservatism," 105-8.

art of the unwashed masses. 45 Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913), a prominent art historian and an influential figure in the push to preserve traditional art styles, even once said, "the history of Japanese art cannot be written through ukiyoe."46 By the time *Evening* was produced, ukiyo-e was primarily sent abroad and would not have been given much consideration by the Japanese public. Third, depicting Japan in a supposedly traditional way likely did not matter much to Japanese artists, who generally cared much more about making a living and learning new Western techniques than preserving some intangible sense of Japan's cultural heritage.<sup>47</sup> In initiatives to preserve Japan's historic character in its art, Okakura often found himself aligned with a crowd of white Westerners, 48 being himself an Orientalist. 49 It is also telling that one of his greatest projects to preserve traditional Japanese art, the first official history of Japanese art compiled in Japan, was originally written in French for an exposition audience in Paris. 50 Western consumers of Japanese art jealously guarded their authority to determine what art was authentically Japanese,<sup>51</sup> and it seems that the purpose of the Meiji or Taishō artist, in order to compete with the antiques that were rapidly leaving Japan at the time,<sup>52</sup> was to create pieces that were convincing enough to fit into the generic and exoticized Western idea of "old Japan." The push to show an older, serene, Buddhist Japan with prominent vegetation and a more tranquil, stereotypically Eastern spirit was primarily a Western one, based in Western conceit about the exotic East.

# The Institutionalization of the Orient

The Meiji government was another strong proponent of autoexoticist art, and exhibitions curated by their representatives proved to be key points for exoticism to become incorporated into the works of Japanese artists. Observing the function of international exhibitions as vital public relations for

<sup>45</sup> Christine M. Guth, "Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture," *The Art Bulletin* 93, no. 4 (December 2011): 468, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2011.10786019.

<sup>46</sup> Guth, "Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture," 468.

<sup>47</sup> Carmen Vendelin, "20th Century Japanese Prints," La Salle University Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues, no. 4 (2006), 7–8.

<sup>48</sup> Manuel Schilcher, "Invented Tradition," In *Appropriate Japan - How Western Art Prepared a Nation for War,* 13–75, (Linz: University of Art and Design Linz, 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Kakuzō Okakura, The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2007) 11-12.

<sup>50</sup> Schilcher, "Invented Tradition," 74.

<sup>51</sup> Pollard, "Meiji Ceramics: The Art of Japanese Export Porcelain and Satsuma Ware 1868-1912," 140.

<sup>52</sup> MFA Boston, "Art of Japan Collection and History of Cultural Exchange," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accessed June 10, 2022, https://www.mfa.org/news/japan.

world powers,<sup>53</sup> the new Imperial government saw them as a way to legitimize their rule in the eyes of Europe, even in the early days when the Tokugawa *bakufu* (the military dictatorship of feudal Japan) still claimed to rule Japan, and had its own exhibition booths.<sup>54</sup> In an early exhibition in 1867, the carefully curated Satsuma (a region in southern Japan that was among the first to rebel) booth won significantly more awards than that of the bakufu,<sup>55</sup> and that victory would inform decades of procedure for a country hoping to enrich and empower itself through the art trade.

The Meiji government would continue to carefully curate exhibition works to ensure they were in line with Western taste, hiring Western experts like Gottfried Wagener (1831–1892) to judge pieces that were submitted.<sup>56</sup> The committees that selected the final works to be shown tended to choose handmade luxury pieces for the Eastern curio craze that was emerging in Europe, rather than everyday manufactured goods that could not compete with the West's industrial prowess.<sup>57</sup> For Vienna:

Wagener stressed objects that were particularly large or small, required noticeable technical skill or employed techniques not available in Europe, marking a difference from the European crafts displayed while emphasizing the ingenuity and history of Japanese luxury manufacturing.<sup>58</sup>

The purpose of the exhibitions was never to construct a realistic display of what Japan had to offer, but rather to emphasize the bizarre, exotic curiosities that Europeans would flock to see. Pieces were favored that emphasized Japan's cultural distance from Europe, or could be seen as indicative of an idealized Japanese history rather than a Westernized Japanese present. The success of this method at the 1873 exhibition in Vienna was plain: nearly 200 prizes were given to various Japanese artists and artisans, and the Viennese joined the Japonisme craze in short order, flocking to buy up entire collections. <sup>59</sup> So far, success in exhibitions had not significantly changed the variety of pieces produced by Japanese artists, but the Meiji government saw those exhibitions as a matter of national importance, as it hoped to use the sales to amass foreign

<sup>53</sup> Conant, "Japan 'Abroad' at the Chicago Exposition, 1893," 255.

<sup>54</sup> Teasley, Designing Modern Japan, "Design by Committee."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

currency and gain enough economic power and international respect to avoid the worst of the West's colonial ambitions for Asia. <sup>60</sup> To streamline production and selection, the government created the *onchi zuroku*, a catalog of sample works that served as a guide to help artists create pieces that would appeal to the West. <sup>61</sup> The catalog, named after an abbreviation of a proverb meaning, roughly, "to learn from the past to develop new ideas," promoted the kinds of imitations of historic styles <sup>62</sup> that Westerners had valued in past exhibitions as aesthetic symbols of an older, more innocent Japan. Now the selection process would be simpler as artists changed their styles in response to the catalog, and pieces flooded in that could grab the attention of Western audiences by appealing to their fantasy of the Orient.

At the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the power of the Japanese government over Japanese exhibition works was revealed. Two aesthetics were represented among the Japanese artworks: a modern, Westernized style as seen in  $y\bar{o}ga$  (literally "Western image") paintings, and the blend of traditional styles and exotic subjects of the onchi zuroku. Both styles received mixed praise by officials, critics, and attendants, 63 but in the realm of fine art specifically, the Japanese painters who had studied Western technique and produced truly modern works received significantly more praise than their counterparts by American experts, 64 who by the 1890s were wising up to the pandering exoticism of many previous pieces. How unfortunate then that the Meiji government, one of the few governments at the exposition that asserted the sole authority to determine which of its country's works were to be displayed, 65 had, anticipating failure, cut down the number of yoga paintings with such extreme prejudice that many artists who worked in that style boycotted the exposition. 66 Such was the favoritism given to works and styles which had, for the last four decades, been extremely successful in the West (and would continue to be successful in genres that did not fit into the category of fine arts, like ceramics<sup>67</sup> and prints), and such was the pressure from above on artists in Japan.

<sup>60</sup> Pollard, "Meiji Ceramics," 133.

<sup>61</sup> Kawade, "Japonisme in Japan."

<sup>62</sup> Teasley, Designing Modern Japan, "Design by Committee."

<sup>63</sup> Conant, "Japan 'Abroad' at the Chicago Exposition, 1893," 264.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 268-9.

<sup>67</sup> H. D. "Arts and Crafts of Japan Shown," The New York Times, March 10, 1936.

The vase with a landscape by an unknown artist (Fig. 6) was shown at the Paris Exposition Universelle<sup>68</sup> in 1900, and exhibits the same dreamy landscape, this time in underglaze blue on porcelain, that the Meiji government proved so eager to promote abroad. What the audience in Paris would have seen in this vase, though, was not just the preservation of a traditional Japanese artistic style, but a recreation of the stereotypical blueon-white chinoiserie Europeans had been collecting for centuries.<sup>69</sup>They would have seen not just the preservation of Japanese creative methods, but the preservation of the true nature of Japan, for a misty blue landscape painted onto a vase was the real Japan: the real Japan that Western customers were willing to buy, and the real Japan that the Meiji government was willing to sell. The gentle gradients of blue to white that fill in each of the features of the landscape contrast with the sharpness of some outlines to confusing effect. There is also a mix of both Western and Japanese conventions of perspective, with the enlarged foreground of Western compositions and the diagonal layering of planes typical of Japanese tradition. The scene is rounded, softened, tranquil, harmless, robbed of the true harshness of nature necessary to bend and twist the small tree in the forefront into such a wild shape. The landscape, while constructed in a mostly Japanese style, also contains elements of the sedated, silent East of Western discourse.

Namikawa Sōsuke's (1847-1910) pair of vases (Fig. 7) were sent to the Amsterdam Exhibition of 1883, where Sōsuke and his company won the first-class gold medal and Mr. Muramatsu, the company's president, was decorated by the King of Holland. Decorated in multicolored enamel outlined with gilt and silver wire, the award-winning vases present a colorful scene of ornate flowers and insects. In this set old and new are juxtaposed. Cloisonné as made in Japan was a recent invention, while the subject of flowers and insects against a solid-color background imitates kachō-e, a style of painting and printing that was already centuries old, as many Western viewers would

<sup>68</sup> J. Earle, "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period:Vase," Khalili Collections, Accessed July 14, 2022, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/japanese-art-of-the-meiji-period/khalili-collection-japanese-art-of-themeiji-period-vase-p77/.

<sup>69</sup> Impey, "Japanese Export Art of the Edo Period and Its Influence on European Art," 690.

<sup>70</sup> J. Earle, "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period:Vase," Khalili Collections, Accessed July 14, 2022, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/japanese-art-of-the-meiji-period/khalili-collection-japanese-art-of-themeiji-period-vase-p77/.

<sup>71</sup> Earle, "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period: Pair of Vases."

<sup>72</sup> William E. Harkins, "Shijō Bird, Animal and Flower Prints in the Meiji Period," Impressions, no. 12 (1986): 10.

have known, or at least guessed. That among the first works to influence European perceptions of the newly-opened Japan were prints of birds and flowers is likely why such a scene was on these vases, which were government approved and so highly praised in Europe. The close-up view of simple and elegant natural features, like flowers, insects, and grasses, that is characteristic of *kachōga* (bird and flower paintings) gives an impression of the Japanese reverence for nature that Europeans so sought as a contrast to their industrial world, and the empty or solid-color background that is another common feature of kachō-e provides a sense of etherealness and mystery that plays into Orientalist discourse. These vases represent Japan as its government wanted it to be seen: a mix of ancient tradition and modern innovation all bundled up in an intangible sense of the East that would win awards, international prestige, and money for Japan.

## Performance of the East

All of the pressure from across the world and from the government did not mean that Japanese artists were not themselves willing to pander. Many artists, who had lost their patrons when the feudal elite had been deposed, depended on exhibitions and export work for most of their income.<sup>73</sup> This, added with the fact that making art for export to enrich the country was seen by some as a patriotic duty,<sup>74</sup> and that art in Japan had traditionally been defined differently than in the West<sup>75</sup> and wasn't treated with the same reverence as "fine art," meant that many artists were happy to create whatever would sell. Their eagerness to please their new, foreign audience is most clear when examining Satsuma ceramics of the Meiji period.

The idea of Satsuma ware as it came to be known in exhibitions and export markets was somewhat of a Western invention. The Satsuma domain was home to a number of different styles, only one of which was the enameled *nishikide* (named after the ornate patterns of brocade) that became so popular in Paris. <sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, this relatively new style, less than a century old at the time, became known in the West only as "Satsuma," <sup>77</sup> as if it were the

<sup>73</sup> Clare Pollard, "Gorgeous with Glitter and Gold: Miyagawa Kōzan and the Role of Satsuma Export Ware in the Early Meiji Ceramic Industry," In Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Art (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 139.

<sup>74</sup> Pollard, "Gorgeous with Glitter and Gold," 135

<sup>75</sup> Itani, Export Porcelain from Seto in the Meiji Era, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Pollard, "Gorgeous with Glitter and Gold," 138.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 138.

only style that mattered in the centuries-old history of Satsuma earthenware. The pieces were prized among exhibition-goers for their ivory glaze, floral patterns, and gold highlights, 78 and potters around Japan looking to sell to foreigners began recreating those elements to create imitation Satsuma wares from Kyōto, Kōbe, and Yokohama, as well as traditional ceramic manufacturing centers like Seto.<sup>79</sup>These new studios, like the Kinkōzan studio in Awata, could mass produce these wares at significantly higher volumes than the original studios in Satsuma, so much so that in England, for example, as many as ninety-nine percent of Satsuma-style pieces had come from Awata. 80 In truth, these works were an entirely separate style that could be easily differentiated from ko-nishikide by anyone familiar with both styles, but the public was so enamored with the exotic luxury of new Satsuma, and so easily fooled by roughness, archaic designs, and floral patterns that the new pieces sold easily, and when they were found out they were decried as counterfeit.81 An entirely new variety of ceramic had been produced for the express purpose of performing exoticism to the West, and it flew off the shelves.

It wasn't just the pottery itself that performed to the West, however. The presentation of the works to Western audiences on the retail end was deliberately embellished in order to make them seem like a part of old Japan rather than a modern innovation of style. At exhibitions, organizers frequently made use of ornate displays based on traditional Japanese religious structures to house the works, 82 even hiring geisha to serve drinks at one exhibition. Some artists would sell their Satsuma pieces to domestic curio shops in treaty ports like Yokohama, rather than exporting them, for tourists who were more likely to trust in the age and value of a piece if they had to hunt for it 44 among mountains of exotic bric-a-brac. These sellers often intentionally dirtied and stained their wares in order to make them seem like antiques, 55 in a manner reminiscent of the tactics used by Hayashi Tadamasa (1853–1906) at his print shop in Paris, which sold prints that had been purposely faded, for Westerners

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 140-1.

<sup>82</sup> Manuel Schilcher, "Japan Debuts in the West: Historic World Fairs on Display," in *Appropriate Japan: How Western Art Prepared a Nation for War* (Linz; University of Art and Design Linz, 2020), 5.

<sup>83</sup> Schilcher, "Invented Tradition," 31.

<sup>84</sup> Pollard, "Gorgeous with Glitter and Gold," 140.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

#### 72 • Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal

suspicious of fresh color, in a shop that deliberately treated customers with an air of mystery, and gave the impression of a quiet, empty curio shop from the far East. <sup>86</sup>The implication is clear: to the average Western tourist, the "true" Japan is something ancient, elusive, and slightly tea-stained that can only be found when sifting through junk in a dimly-lit, dusty shop in the middle of a tourist town. The sellers of the works were happy to provide the dusty shops and the tea stains, knowing they would increase the prices they could charge. Artists and merchants alike carefully curated an exotic aesthetic in order to attract Western audiences to their products, and at the center of that aesthetic was the new Satsuma style.

The vase made by Kinkōzan Sōbei VII (1867-1927) (Fig. 8) is characteristic of the new Satsuma style as realized by one of its most successful producers. It has the classic components: ivory-colored glaze, a liberal application of gold, and abundant floral motifs: what appear to be plum blossoms and chrysanthemums (a herald of spring and a symbol of Imperial power, respectively)87 in this case. All of these components, to a Western eye, heighten the sense of luxury that had come to be associated with the art of Japan because of the pieces historically selected for exhibitions. As always, there is a natural spirit to the florals and the wooded landscape, made ethereal by the empty background, either solid-color ivory or gold, or literally intangible given the holes between the plum blossoms that allow a view of the interior of the vase, cast in shadow and obscured by vegetation, just like the scene in the Kasamatsu print. Also obscured by vegetation is the central landscape, showing a  $daimy\bar{o}$  (a sort of hereditary governor) and his procession of courtiers and attendants, 88 an irrelevant subject to domestic audiences since Japan's feudal domains had already been abolished.<sup>89</sup> It is doubly anachronistic next to the chrysanthemums; a symbol of the obsolete bakufu is out of place next to a symbol of the emperor. This scene is just another case of the romanticization of Japan's past by a Japanese studio for its Western customers. The smaller landscape above, a Shintō shrine, makes more sense, though it certainly still would have fit within Western stereotypes of Japan as spiritual and mystical. In this new style can be seen the taste of Western audiences for

<sup>86</sup> Meech-Pekarik, "Early Collectors of Japanese Prints and the Metropolitan Museum of Art," 96-7

<sup>87</sup> RISD Museum, Nuance in Nature, 6.

<sup>88</sup> J. Earle, "Japanese Art of the Meiji Period: Vase," Khalili Collections, Accessed July 16, 2022, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/japanese-art-of-the-meiji-period/khalili-collection-japanese-art-of-themeiji-period-vase-s159/.

<sup>89</sup> Pollard, "Gorgeous with Glitter and Gold," 134.

the exotic Orient, carefully catered to by studios that had mastered the exact right combination of old and new.

## **Defining Japan**

The East as it was presented to Western collectors and tourists in Japanese export art was not wholly irrelevant to Japan. While the stereotypes of femininity, barbarism, tranquility, mystery, spirituality, and instinctual harmony with nature often attached themselves to the depictions of flowers, animals, and landscapes so common in pandering export art of the Japonisme period, those subjects had a history that began long before they had been co-opted into Western imaginations. As Japan was trying to create an identity for itself that would meet the approval of the Western powers, it often looked to the same things that Europe did. Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), an ardent modernist, once proclaimed that "If we compare the knowledge of the Japanese and Westerners, in letters, in techniques, in commerce, or in industry... there is not one thing in which we excel... All that Japan has to be proud of... is its scenery."90 While this was no doubt meant as a rejection of Japanese tradition, designed to spur change in a Western direction, in the rampant conservatism of the decades following the initial rapid Westernization of the Meiji period, many hoping to bring back Japan's supposed "unique essence" agreed, after a fashion. At a time when Japan's international reputation was being built on art that emphasized nature, so was its domestic sense of self:

These designs played to both foreign and domestic audiences. Designs destined for the foreign market emphasized Japan's spiritual singularity and responded to foreign market demands for themes that emphasized nature. Landscape painting and bird-and-flower painting (kachoga) were the most common genres sent abroad; they complemented foreign perceptions of an intuitive Japanese grasp of nature. Domestically, the same designs became symbols of Japan's revolutionary political and artistic focuses, such as the ascendancy of imperial authority after hundreds of years of samurai rule. <sup>91</sup>

The stereotypically pan-Asian, spiritual and nature-loving Japan that could be seen in international exhibitions in the floral patterns, animals, and landscapes that appealed to the Western eye was the same Japan presented at home as Okakura Kakuzō and his influential network organized domestic exhibitions, collected works for a national museum, founded new art institutions, and

<sup>90</sup> Wakabayashi and Pyle, "Meiji Conservatism," 101.

<sup>91</sup> Sapin, "Merchandising Art and Identity in Meiji Japan," 318.

#### 74 • Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal

wrote extensively on the history of Asian and Japanese art. <sup>92</sup> It is hard to deny that Okakura's pan-Asianism and pro-tradition stances had an impact on narratives of Japan's history and culture, as Japanese audiences were shown the same pseudo-historic art that had been sent to Paris, <sup>93</sup> while already-impoverished Buddhist temples had their relics systematically confiscated so that Japan's art history canon (and nationalist narrative) could include them. <sup>94</sup> As the new imperial incarnation of the Japanese nation was still solidifying, it created a national identity for itself based on its already-formed identity abroad and its long and varied artistic tradition (including recent works), which had long been seen both domestically and abroad as an indication of Japan's civilized nature. <sup>95</sup>

Ohara Koson's kachō-e stemmed from a tradition hundreds of years old, and one that indeed had become symbolic of Japan's history. 96 Yet his works, though they did preserve some elements of the dying Shijō school, like an often whimsical treatment of animal subjects, were far from traditional. In his Five White Egrets (Fig. 9) can be seen a number of ways in which he departed from convention. The forms of his egrets are almost realistic, and with sharp outlines that contrast with the traditional impressionistic style. He uses debossing to add texture without interrupting the brilliant white of the egrets' coats, which especially stands out against the dark background, a feature he often used that departs from the Shijo convention of leaving the ground fully or mostly blank, in the style of Chinese ink painting. The darkness and texture are both rather reminiscent of lacquer, which had in the past been used as a medium for bird-and-flower motifs, and was likely a deliberate way to connote a broad sense of Eastern luxury to the same Western audiences that eagerly collected inro. Perhaps most daring of all, there is not a single flower or plant to be seen, meaning that this work technically cannot even be considered kachō-e, which literally means "flower-bird picture," and typically requires both animals and plants. Though more recent artists had often prioritized animal subjects over plants, they always included some type of vegetation.<sup>97</sup> While Koson certainly had every right to adapt his work to modernity and his own tastes, it should be noted that his primary audience was made up of

<sup>92</sup> Schilcher, "Japan Debuts in the West," 10-12.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>94</sup> Schilcher, "Invented Tradition," 46-8.

<sup>95</sup> Buruma, Inventing Japan 1853-1964, 12-13.

<sup>96</sup> Harkins, "Shijō Bird, Animal and Flower Prints in the Meiji Period," 10-11.

<sup>97</sup> Harkins, "Shijō Bird, Animal and Flower Prints in the Meiji Period," 11.

Western importers, who loved prints of animals mostly because they satisfied a common stereotype, while critics have called Koson's style a Westernized bastardization of traditional kachō-e.98 The problem with catering to Western exoticism is not that it makes the artwork "un-Japanese" or invalid in any way, but rather that it promotes the view implied by exoticism that the West is central and all other civilizations and cultures are peripheral, strange, and dependent on their orbit about the West. The West's power to define and narrate grows, while Japan's art history canon becomes a stereotyped version of itself. Indeed, Koson's art, stereotypes and all, became a part of the "unified Japanese style" that was used to build Japan's national reputation and narrative. It surely did not help that many of his subjects, including egrets, 100 as well as the subjects depicted in the works above, had a not insignificant history of inclusion in kachō-e, and had symbolic meaning locally even as they meant something quite different to their primary audience abroad. The fact that the piece could be construed to be relevant to Japanese audiences was a bonus, but not the goal, as the greatest concern of the artist was to create a work that would sell, but that bonus would certainly have served to make the stereotyped narrative more convincing. Perceptions of Japan as it was becoming a modern nation-state, not only in the West, but also within Japan itself, were in large part based on self-stereotyping works of art that were designed to fit the Western taste for the exotic. What the West decided was validly Japanese became the essence of Japan's supposed character.

### The Essence of the East

Koson's *Cockatoo and Pomegranate* (Fig. 1) has many of the features common to West-oriented export art of the Japonisme period. The focus is on a natural subject, both animal and botanical. The ground is solid-color, giving a sense of etherealness and mystery to the piece, while the black hints at the luxury of lacquer. Most of the color is muted where there is any, except for the exotic, Eastern fruit that stands out in bright crimson. The bird is also meant to be exotic, since like the pomegranate it is no more from Japan than it is from Europe, but represents a sort of pan-Asian aesthetic that was more real in Western discourse than the real Japan. These are the components, among others, that came together not only to shape generations of Japanese

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> MFA Boston, "White Heron and Iris," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Accessed July 26, 2022, https://collections.mfa.org/objects/235524.

#### 76 • Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal

art, but also to construct a narrative about Japan as the harmonious, tranquil, spiritual, archaic, and nature-friendly alternative to the West's greed, violence, progressiveness, and industrial ugliness that many in Gilded-age Europe and America were desperate to escape by any means. That narrative, conceived as Japan was first being forcefully opened to the world, became the narrative that defined Japan as a state and a people. A combination of political, economic, and personal factors led to a widespread incorporation of the West's exoticizing gaze into the subjects, techniques, and motifs of decades of Japanese artistic production, reinforcing that narrative and creating a national character for Japan that was based in Western imagination. The West's hegemony over the global market for Japanese art became a hegemony over the privilege to define what Japan is, and the definitions that came rushing out of Vienna, Paris, Chicago, and Boston confirmed already-old narratives about the East, which were then reflected in the art sold in those same cities. It was Western audiences' power to define Japan that led to Japan's selfreconstruction in its 19th and 20th-century art, and it was Westerners' tastes for the exotic and surreal that turned Japan, through its art, into a distant and mysterious fairy-land full of flowers, birds, mountains, and evening fog. The authority of the West to validate and critique Japanese culture was such that craftspeople and political institutions alike tripped over themselves to meet the standards placed on them, a religion was raised from the grave, and a new national identity was created that matched the mythologized Japan of export art. Japan became nothing more than the mist that mingles with the willow leaves and the paper lanterns that light up the night: in other words, a fantasy rendered in ink.

# **Glossary**

- Bakufu (幕府) "tent government" the military government of feudal Japan
- Chōnin (町人) "town people" the lower merchant and artisan classes of feudal Japan
- Daimyō (大名) "great name" the ruling elite/aristocracy of feudal Japan
- Inrō (印籠) "seal box" small boxes of lacquered wood worn on the belt as a pocket
- Kabuki (歌舞伎) "song dance technique" a traditional style of theater popular with the lower classes of the Edo period
- Kachō-e (花鳥絵) "flower bird picture" a style of ukiyo-e that featured natural subjects up close, based on a Chinese style of painting
- Kachōga (花鳥画) "flower bird painting" the style of painting on which kachō-e is based, practiced in both China and Japan
- Kinji (金地) "gold ground" in this usage, a style of lacquer decoration where gold dust is applied to wet lacquer, coated with a layer of clear lacquer, and polished
- Meisho-e (名所絵) "famous place picture" a style of ukiyo-e that depicted iconic landscapes from around Japan
- Netsuke (根付) "root attached" a fastener, often intricately carved, that attached an inrō to one's belt
- Nishikide (錦手) "brocade hand" a style of pottery native to the Satsuma domain in western Japan, characterized by liberal gilding, ivory glaze, and brocade-like patterns
- Onchi zuroku abbreviation of "onko chishin zuroku" (温故知新図録) "consider old idea new illustrated record" a catalog of sample works provided by the Meiji government to help artists adapt their styles to Western preferences
- Samurai (侍) "warrior" the elite class of warriors that served the bakufu
- Sanbasō (三番叟) "third gentleman" a dance traditionally done to mark the opening of a kabuki season
- Shijō (四条) "four division" a school of kachōga named after the street in Kyōto where it was headquartered
- Shin Hanga (新版画) "new woodblock print" a style of printing that incorporated Western concepts of shading and linear perspective
- Shintō (神道) "god path" a polytheistic religion native to Japan
- Tō (塔) "tower" in this usage, a pagoda, or multi-tiered religious structure important to Buddhism
- Torii (鳥居) "bird seat" a gateway that marks the entrance to a Shintō shrine
- Ukiyo-e (浮世絵) "floating world pictures" a genre of woodcut prints and other reproducible media traditionally characterized by depictions of the "floating world," the Buddhist term for the illusory pleasures of kabuki theater and brothels
- Yōga (洋画) "Western painting" a style of painting that became popular in the Meiji period for its adoption of Western styles and themes

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