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YUKIO YASHIRO (1890–1975) BETWEEN
THE EAST AND THE WEST IN SEARCH
OF AN AESTHETIC DIALOGUE

I. Earthquake

It was shortly before the Christmas of 1924. Yukio Yashiro, then at the age of 34, wrote the dedication to his 3-volume *Sandro Botticelli* in London: "To My Father who died waiting/ And To My Mother who waits"¹. Yashiro had lost his father in the Great Kanto Earthquake which broke out on 2 September 1923. Despite the disaster, Yashiro stayed in Europe until he could finish the editing of the book. The dedication is said to have been written the day before his definitive departure to Japan.

Sandro Botticelli, published by the Medici Society, remains practically the only memorable monumental publication that

¹ Yukio Yashiro, *Sandro Botticelli*, 3 vol. Medici Society, London 1925.

a Japanese scholar could have achieved in the research on Western Renaissance Art history. Sir Kenneth Clark (1903–83), a close friend of Yashiro, and a co-disciple of Bernard Berenson, remarks in his obituary to Yashiro that “his three magnificent volumes on Botticelli (...) were written with exceptional insight and a vein of poetry appropriate to the subject. They also had an effect on the whole approach to publishing works of art because Yashiro was the first man to make considerable use of photographic details from pictures. This has now become common form but at his time it was a revelation”. The obituary was published in the “Times Literary Supplement” in the 23 August 1975 issue². The author concludes his obituary with the words: “If an understanding between East and West is ever to be possible, it can be achieved only through such a man as Yukio Yashiro”.

My intention here is to critically examine what kind of mutual understanding between East and West Yashiro has achieved. What can the implication of his achievement be when it is re-examined especially in terms of aesthetic dialogue in the international or global context?

2. Career in brief

Let us first have a look at Yashiro's career in brief³. Born in 1890 in Yokohama, Yashiro graduated from the Imperial University of Tokyo. Though he had studied British law at the First High School following his father's will, he majored in English literature, against his father's expectations, in the University of Tokyo. He was to become the first student to see his watercolor admitted to the official Salon sponsored by the Ministry of Education. His graduating thesis on “Emotional Principles of Art”, though it did not deal with English literature, was awarded

² Kenneth Clark, “Yukio Yashiro”, *Times Literary Supplement*, Aug. 23, 1975.

³ Yashiro's career as described below follows in principle Yukio Yashiro, *Watashi no Bijutsu Henreki (My Artistic Pilgrimage)*, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1972. Yashiro's obituary is published in *Nichi Bunka Kenkyū*, No 14, March 1976, pp. 3-32.

first prize in 1915 and he was honored by the Emperor with a silver watch at the graduation ceremony. No one was more delighted by the honor than Yashiro's own parents. The feeling of the filial piety that the anecdote expresses is also evident in the dedication that Yashiro inscribed in the front page of his *Sandro Botticelli*.

Upon his graduation, Yashiro was appointed to the position of lecturer at the Tokyo University of Fine-Arts. The following year, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), the first laureate of the Nobel Prize from Asia visited Japan and stayed in the Sankeien Villa constructed by silk tycoon Hara Sankei 原三溪 (1868–1939). During his stay in Japan, Yashiro served as interpreter to the Indian poet. Yashiro was the person who saw Tagore delighted at the sight of birds coming to his Shōfū-rō 松風楼 Wind of Pine-Tree Pavilion, which gave inspiration to a poem. The English translation goes as follows:

Stray birds of summer come to my
Window, to sing and fly away.
And yellow leaves of autumn, which
Have no songs, flutter and fall with a sigh.

After his return from Europe, he continued to teach at the Tokyo University of Fine-Art and in 1930 he was appointed the Director of the newly founded Institute for Art Research (which Kenneth Clark refers to as National Institute of Fine Art). Yashiro's idea of the art research library, modeled after the Witt Library in London (recently closed), was accepted in 1928 and became the guiding principle of the Research Institute. In 1932, he founded the *Bijutsu Kenkyū*, or *Art Research* magazine, which is still published to this day⁴. Since its foundation, the institute experienced several administrative reforms before being remodelled into the current Tokyo Research Institute for Cultural Properties and remains the national center serving this purpose, and the building, transformed into a Museum, is still present at a corner of the Ueno Park in Tokyo⁵.

⁴ Yukio Yashiro, “Bijutsukenkyūjo no Setsuritsu to Bijutsu Kenkyū no hakkan” (The Foundation of the Institute for Art Research and the Publishing of the Art Research), *Bijutsu Kenkyū*, Vol. 1, January 1932, pp. 1-7.

⁵ National Institute for the Research of Cultural Properties, *70 Years of N. I. R.C.P.*, 2008, in 2 volumes.

Shortly after the outbreak of the War with the United States of America and the United Nations, Yashiro resigned, taking on responsibility for a scandal: He was allegedly mispronounced the Imperial edict at a public address in the Institute. The fact he showed up without wearing a flock coat at that ceremony also caused resentment among the ultra-nationalist staff members who accused him of anti-patriotism. During his forced early retirement, at the age of 51, he completed the first edition of his *Essence of Japanese Art* (1943) which was to be enlarged into a monumental book of more than 800 pages in 1965, at the age of 75.

In the meantime, his close ties with eminent British, American as well as European scholars led him to the position of commissioner of major exhibitions of Japanese art abroad. In 1931 he wrote a long "Einführung in die Japanische Malerei" as a preface to the *Japanische Malerei der Gegenwart* held in the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin. This experience preludes his work in post-war period as a commissioner of the *Exhibition of the Japanese Painting and Sculpture* organized in five places in the United States in 1953. A similar exhibition followed suit in Europe, traveling to London, Paris, den Haag and Rome in 1958-59. The same year, 1958, saw the publication of *2000 Years of Japanese Art* which was translated into major European languages. Yashiro was not very much pleased with the text edited and modified by Peter C. Swann and he wished to correct many misinterpretations in due time. The *Art Treasures of Japan* was published in 1960 in two volumes with Yashiro as editor in chief. The highly personal preface summarizes his understanding of an international mission in promoting what seems to him to be the authentic vision of Japanese Art. His tenacious will is also evident in his selection of pieces of work and the search for the best available photography.

Among his numerous publications, *My Artistic Pilgrimage*, published in 1972, when he was 82, gives vivid accounts of his exceptional career and life, while *Re-examining Japanese Art*, posthumously published in 1978, reveals his life-long pursuit in the research of Japanese Art. There, somewhat iconoclastic revisions of the current ideas are proposed in the form of numerous questions.

As Kenneth Clark pointed out, Yashiro gained fame through his use of photographic details in his study on Botticelli. Evidently, the method was proposed by Giovanni Morelli for the purpose of attribution. Morelli emphasized the importance of the insignificantly looking details, as in such details one can detect the quasi-automatic repetition of the almost unconscious traits on an individuality. As Carlo Ginzburg proposed, the microscopic attention paid to the details combined with the systematic sampling characterizes the scientific approach of the fin-de-siècle. Detecting relevant symptoms in the diagnosis was one of the key-issues, encompassing criminology (Conan Doyle), hygienics or even psychoanalysis (S. Freud)⁶. Yashiro's sensibility was revealed in this approach when he identified *The Holy Trinity with St. John and Mary Magdalene* in the Viscont Lee of Fareham collection as an authentic Botticelli's work. Not only did Yashiro convincingly attribute the painting to Sandro Botticelli, he also proved that the painting of the predella of the *Story of the Magdalene* in the Johnson Collection in Philadelphia initially belonged to the same *Trinity with St. John and Mary Magdalene*, identifying them as together forming the famous Botticelli altarpiece in the monastery of Santa Elisabetta della Convertite. With the *Newly Discovered Botticelli*, published in "Burlington Magazine" in 1925, Yashiro seems to have established his reputation as the only Oriental student of Bernard Berenson. The meticulous observation of the details was decisive to establish the hypothesis⁷.

As Shûji Takashina mentions, the Japanese are usually more talented in the observation of details while they are not always

⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, "Spie, Radici di un paradigma indiziario" (1979), in: *Miti, emblemi, spie*, Turino, Einaudi, 1986, pp. 158-209. This hypothesis is criticized by Georges Didi-Hubermann, in his paper translated into Japanese: "Pour une anthropologie de la singularité formelle", published in *Rhetorik der Leidenschaft-Zur Bildsprache der Kunst im Abendland*, National Museum of Western Art, Tōkyō, 1999, pp. 237-245. For more on this controversy, see Tanaka Jun, *Imēji no Shizenshi (Natural History of images)*, Tōkyō, Hadori Shoten, 2010, pp. 166-172; p. 284, note 4.

⁷ Yukio Yashiro, "Newly Discovered Botticelli", *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 46, 1925, pp. 156-167.

good at grasping the whole⁸. In this sense, Yashiro made a good use of his national character or “temperament” in his study on Botticelli. At the same time, Yashiro should have noticed his own Japanese sensibility through his approach to the details of Botticelli paintings which Western scholars had overlooked. This also accounts for Yashiro’s affinity with Botticelli, whose “oriental character” *tôyôteki seikaku*, had been discussed by Western contemporary scholars, especially in the depiction of numerous flowers on the green ground of *Primavera*⁹.

48 In his paper “The ‘Oriental’ Character in Italian Tre- and Quattrocento painting” (1952), published in *East and West*, Yashiro, while discarding any fundamental influence of Chinese painting on the Italian Tre- and Quattrocento, generalized his remark: “When Japanese painters come over to Europe, they are invariably attracted and fascinated by the colours of Italian tempera and frescos, particularly of Masolino at S. Clemente in Rome or at Castiglione d’Olona, of Piero della Francesca at Arezzo and at Borgo San Sepolero, and of Botticelli in the *Primavera* and in the *Birth of Venus*, which they are inclined to call almost ‘Japanese’ in the sense of colours”. The “similar sense of beauty”, or “interesting features in common” are to be found, he claims, “if you analyse them in detail” (p. 87).

Yashiro returned from Europe in 1925, when a major exhibition of the Oriental Buddhist painting conserved in Japan was held at the Imperial National Museum. At the exhibition he was overwhelmed by the greatness of the triptych of *Kwanin, Monkey and Glue* by Muqi=Mokkei 牧谿. For an eye heretofore so absorbed in the masterpieces of Western paintings, it was an unexpected and an almost shocking rediscovery. The Orient seems to him to demonstrate a deep spiritual dimension in the almost mono-tone *Shuibokuga* (*sui-mo-hua*, in Chinese). This surprise aroused in him a feeling of confidence vis-à-vis the Oriental artistic heritage. This revelation also provided him with a firm conviction which sustained his life-long quest for beauty. Thus his coming home

⁸ Takashina Shûji, “Commentary”, in: Yukio Yashiro, *Sekai ni okeru Nihon Bijutsu no Ichi*. (*Position of the Japanese Art in the World*, Tōkyō, Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko edition, 1988, p. 209. (P. J. A. W. hereafter).

⁹ On the issue see Yukio Yashiro, “The ‘Oriental’ Character in Italian Tre- and Quattrocento paintings”, *East and West*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1952, pp. 81-87.

from Europe constituted the core of his interpretation of Oriental Art¹⁰.

One may find here a common pattern of spiritual return to the homeland after the *Wanderjahre im Westen*. Yashiro himself used to recall this experience as his personal revelation. Yet, the context of the epoch should not be ignored. The rehabilitation of the *literati* tradition under the banner of New Southern Painting was in vogue in the 1920s in Japan. It was in this context that W. Kandinsky’s *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was reinterpreted in terms of Oriental Aesthetics, and French Post-impressionism as well as German Expressionism was compared to the Oriental tradition of *Qi-yun sheng-dong* 氣韻生動, or rhythmic resonance and vital movement¹¹. The huge exhibition of Zen Buddhist paintings, a revelation for a newly home-comer, Yashiro, was not held accidentally.

Three additional factors must be taken into account in this context. In his final years, he recalls as follows. First of all, he felt ill at ease with British Orientalists when he was invited to the *Great Exhibition of Chinese Art* held in London in 1935–36. He noticed that the accounts provided by specialists in Chinese archaeology or Oriental studies missed the point and did not convince such art critics as Kenneth Clark or painters as Sir Gerald Kelly. Contradictions or gaps between the scholarly knowledge and artistic appreciations by the amateurs were revealed in front of the Chinese paintings belonging to the former Qing Imperial Collection¹².

Secondly, Yashiro was not satisfied with the explanations provided by his compatriot. It is true that Yashiro felt strong sympathy to Tenshin, Okakura Kakuzō (1863–1913), who also grew up in Yokohama to become one of the greatest messengers of Oriental aesthetics to the West. And yet he could not help feeling that Okakura’s publications, such as *The Ideals of the East* (1904) or *The Book of Tea* (1906), exaggerated Oriental spir-

¹⁰ Yukio Yashiro, *Suibokuga*, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, 1969, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ Shigemi Inaga, “Paul Cézanne in Japan: Between Revolutionary and Oriental Sage – Appreciations, Impacts and Collections”, *Russia and the Global Cézanne Effect, 1900–1950*, International Academic Conference devoted to the Global Influence of Paul Cézanne, Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library, Saint-Petersburg, Russia, March 26–28, 2010.

¹² Yukio Yashiro, *Nihon Bijutsu no Saikentō* (*Reexamining the Japanese Art*), Tōkyō, Shinchōsha, 1978, pp. 15-19.

ituality contrasted with Western materiality. The vivid theatrical style of Okakura's writing attracted Western readers and moved them. And yet, his writings are marked by the "will of the epoch" (*Zeitgeist*) of the beginning of the 20th century, when too little was known of the Orient. Yashiro worries that too much philosophical emphasis on the tea ceremony would prevent the on-lookers from innocently approaching the pieces of art.

"Okakura certainly contributed to the development of the studies in Japanese Art, and we cannot thank too much Okakura for his contribution, but we have to be careful not to forget the natural way to the essence of art"¹³. Yashiro's precaution also reveals his own historical limit: his intentional avoidance of theoretical framework as well as his lack of training in aesthetical thinking rendered him a supporter of an empirical approach.

Thirdly, Yashiro also must have discerned the difference in appreciation between China and Japan. In his *2000 Years of Japanese Art*, he clearly states:

50 The Chinese painter most popular in Japan was Mokkei (Mu Ch'i). His misty southern landscapes of the Yangtzu River greatly influenced Japanese painters and inspired them to produce a style notable for superb effects of light and for shade and for softness of line. It is strange that, although Mokkei is perhaps the best appreciated Chinese painter in Japan, the Chinese histories hardly mention his name. Almost all his works were brought to Japan and have been treasured to this day. The fact that Chinese and Japanese evaluations of his importance differ so greatly is an indication of the different standards of the two peoples in their approach to *suiboku* painting. The Chinese Academy painters, following their preference for strong decisive brushstroke, completely disregarded the soft brush of Mokkei¹⁴.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ Yukio Yashiro, *2000 Years of Japanese Art*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1958, pp. 179-180.

4. Yashiro's View of Japanese Art in the World Context

Yashiro's approach to Oriental aesthetics may be circumscribed by the above-mentioned three conditions: Firstly, the resistance to the Western scholarship in Oriental studies, secondly, the avoidance of reducing Oriental Art to Oriental philosophical treatises, and thirdly, a clear distinction between Chinese and Japanese art appreciations. His basic conviction was already formulated in a simple phrase at the beginning of his *Sandro Botticelli*:

This is a book of Art. Its appeal is to the human heart. In the appreciation of Art there is no such thing as authority. Scholarship adorns, even dignifies criticism, but does not authorize it. A Critic should not pose as a judge: he is a friend. My wish is to deliver Art from the guidance of specialists and return it to the simple desire of man. (...) I long to see my book reach congenial hearts that love beauty, rather than brains of pure scholarship¹⁵.

51 Yashiro's search for Oriental aesthetics was motivated by his strong nationalist will to position Japanese Art on an equal footing with the Western canon of beauty. For this reason, he stressed the necessity of respecting the Western framework. As the director of Institute for Art Research, he deplored the lack of reliable monographs on individual Japanese artists and encouraged visual, photographic documentation so as to establish a solid biographical study of representative masters of East Asia. In his English writing for foreign readers, he tried to give the overview of Japanese art history by dividing it into sculpture and painting. However, an apparent faithfulness to the Western framework and the effort to catch up with the Western standard do not mean a simple subordination to the Western value judgment. On the contrary, Yashiro could question the common understanding of Japanese art by apprehending pieces only from the Western perspective.

In his lecture delivered in 1934, shortly after his stay in Berlin, "Position of Japanese Art in the World", Yashiro proposed to eval-

¹⁵ Yashiro, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1925, preface.

uate Japanese art not by isolating it from abroad but instead, by comparing it with Fine Arts in the World. He confessed that when he saw the *Kwannon in white* by Mokkei, of the Temple Daitokuji, the piece which came to his mind was the image of *Santa Chiara* in Assisi. Such a cross-reference enabled him to re-evaluate historical masterpieces. In his opinion, the fresco mural paintings of the Hôryû-ji Golden Pavilion, usually seen as magnificent and ample, under the strong influence of the Tang Dynasty turns out to be rather graceful and extremely soft and rhythmical when compared with the so-called Italian primitives, as Giotto, Duccio or Cimabue¹⁶.

52 Yashiro proposes similar kind of re-evaluation in terms of the realistic depiction of the Edo Tokugawa period. The so-called realistic depiction of Maruyama Ôkyo 円山 応挙(1733–1795) turns out to be rather decorative, and the westernized style portrait of *Takami Senseki* by Watanabe Kazan 渡邊華山 (1793–1843) looks more impressionistic than realistic if compared with portraits by Holbein or Dürer¹⁷. These comparisons in artistic appreciation (which look blatantly old-fashioned now) lead Yashiro to synthesize his view. By subdividing the essential characteristics of Japanese art into four terms: impressive, decorative, symbolic and sentimental, Yashiro tried to analyze the *Characteristics of Japanese Art* in 1943. After the War, Yashiro indefatigably put an enormous amount of energy and time to develop the initial project. The revised edition was originally intended for an English translation to be published by the Stanford University Press. It was, however, never realized¹⁸.

Yashiro's basic idea of the essential character (*honshitsu*) of Japanese Art had been already succinctly formulated in his "Artists of Japan Speak The Soul through Symbols", which appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, 6 September 1936, when Japan's involvement in the "Manchuria Incident" was severely criticized by American intellectuals.

All Japanese art is more or less decorative and symbolic. The Japanese contribution to the esthetics of the world is this: that

¹⁶ Yashiro, P.J.A.W., pp. 74-80.

¹⁷ Yashiro, P.J.A.W., pp. 80-81.

¹⁸ Yukio Yashiro, *Nihon Bijutsu no Tokushitsu. (Characteristics of Japanese Art)*, Tōkyō, Iwanami Shoten, First edition, 1943, revised enlarged edition in 1965.

through all its history of 1200 years Japanese art has had little to do with realism in its strict sense. Even when, from the eighteenth century onward, the filtration of Western influence encouraged the direct study of nature, as in the color-prints of which America possesses such superb examples, Japanese artists continued to avoid realism. They absorbed vivid impressions from nature and expressed them in symbolic decorative combinations which penetrate the human soul with greater directness than any mere explanatory representations of the real could do¹⁹.

Why was it necessary for Yashiro to emphasize the non-realistic nature of Japanese art?

The key to this question resides in the following statement. Now, as nature is always alive, vibrating and moving, the genius of realistic sculptures finds its supreme expression in the representation of human figures in all the vigor of movement. In this respect, Japanese sculpture is not to be compared with Greece and the Renaissance. The real question, however, is whether the art of sculpture must always be judged by the "classical" criterion, and whether there is not another kind of sculptural art which, breaking through the narrow bounds of realistic representation, tries to call forth and embody something of the spiritual²⁰.

53 Instead of judging non-western art through the Greco-Roman criterion, Yashiro was searching for an alternative to it. However by doing so, Yashiro followed the same path as the one proposed by Okakura Tenshin: ironically enough, the dichotomy between Eastern spirituality and Western materiality, which Yashiro had criticized, was still alive in Yashiro's framework despite the fact that Yashiro did not wish to prove Oriental superiority to the Western civilizations as Okakura allegedly claimed.

¹⁹ Yukio Yashiro, "Artists of Japan Speak The Soul through Symbols", *The New York Times Magazine*, September 6, 1936.

²⁰ Ibid.

5. *Bulletin of Eastern Art* – a War Time Propaganda?

It is well known that almost in the same period, the writer, Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1897–1947) was in Europe (1936) and made a dramatic nationalistic conversion through his novel *Ryoshû* 旅愁 or *Voyage of Melancholia* (unfinished 1948). By a curious coincidence, the protagonist of Yokomitsu's novel was also named Yashiro. However, Yukio Yashiro escapes from the kind of nationalistic conversion in which Yokomitsu was trapped. Yashiro's above-mentioned article published 1936 in the *New York Times Magazine*, intended for American readership, is worth attention, as Yashiro also proposes to distinguish Japanese aesthetics from its Chinese origin.

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Historically speaking, there is little in Japanese art which does not owe its origins to China, the great fermenting pot of all Far-Eastern culture. From this fact it is easy to conclude that in the study of art, just as in the study of the history of civilization, only China, the land of origins, is worth studying, and that Japan, the land of derivative and later development, is esthetically less important. But in the true appreciation of art what counts is esthetic value; scholarly considerations of date or origin should not obliterate it²¹.

This account must be seen as Yashiro's nationalistic reaction to the unprecedented success of the *Great Exhibition of Chinese Art* held in 1936 in London, which Yashiro carefully observed²².

However, Yukio Yashiro was not seduced by the temptation of the ultra-nationalistic idea of Greater Asianism which was to prevail with the declaration of the "Greater Asian Prosperity zone" in 1937. In the difficult international situation after the outbreak of the second Chinese-Japanese war in 1937, Yashiro founded a bulletin in English, *Bulletin of Eastern Art* published by the Society of Friends of Eastern Art. His intention was to maintain friendly communication with English speaking enthusiasts of the Eastern art. For the founding ceremony Yashiro invited

²¹ Ibid.

²² Yashiro, *Characteristics of Japanese Art*, First edition, 1943, pp. 14-15.

Joseph Grew (1880–1965), American ambassador to Japan, and explained to Grew his detachment from the crudely political orientation of the cultural diplomacy of Japanese government, including K.B.S. (Kokusai Bunka Shinkôkai, or the Foundation for the Promotion of Culture). In the September 1941 issue (vol. 21) of this bulletin, Yashiro publishes an essay on the "Eight View of Hsiao-Hsiang by Mu-Ch'i", based on his lecture on the subject. Here, Yashiro analyzes how the Japanese aesthetics, deriving from the Chinese origin, deviated from it so as to establish a distinctive character as well as a specific aesthetic value judgment.

As is well known, Mu-qi's *Eight Views of Hsian-Hsiang* was one of the most highly appreciated Chinese paintings in Japan. However, in China, the painter was not highly estimated. *T'u hui pao chien* 圖繪寶鑑 by Hsiao Wen-yen 夏文彥, of the Yuan Dynasty, criticized Mu-qi as "gross and unfaithful to the old art of painting, not suited to elegant taste"²³. This negative view is regarded as the representative Chinese opinion. "Evidently, the artist Mu-ch'i had not been very highly estimated among his native people". Why, then, did such a huge discrepancy take place between China and Japan, despite the fact that Hsian Wen-yen's book had been accepted and regarded as a highly authoritative guidebook even among Japanese amateurs?

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The translation provided by Kurata Bunsaku 倉田文作 (1918–83) summarized Yashiro's view: "Japan is a vapourish country throughout the year as she is surrounded by water; and mountains and rivers are ever to some extent veiled in mist, clouds or smoke, sometimes dense and sometimes light. No wonder that Japanese painters received there subjects with warm kindred affection – the subjects so familiar to them and so vibrating to the Japanese emotions and sentiments. It is no exaggeration to say that the Japanese *suiboku* painting developed upon the basis of the 'Eight Scenic Views of Hsiao-hsiang'"²⁴. Yashiro highly appreciates "the vague but eloquent strokes that successfully represented the dim and deep-breathing atmosphere with the marvellous blotting effect of the ink" which are "almost

²³ Yukio Yashiro, "Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang by Mu-Ch'i", *Bulletin of Eastern Art*, Vol. 21, Sep. 1941, p. 10. Similar remarks are to be found in Yashiro's *Suibokuga*, p. 72. We respect here the original transcription in the Wade system.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

unequalled for beauty"²⁵. And adds: "To me Mu-ch'i seems to have been a rare genius whose soft but deep tone of chiaroscuro and fluent brush-strokes were more congenial to the Japanese taste than to the Chinese, and thus he was bound to be appreciated in this country"²⁶. In a sense Mu-qi was resuscitated in the Japanese archipelago and awoke a new sensibility of Japanese aesthetics which had remained dormant, in a virtual state, until then.

6. Reflections on the Blotting and Dripping Effects

Shortly after the defeat of Japan, in June and September 1946, Yashiro further develops the thesis of the "marvellous blotting effect of the ink" as he put it, and tries to summarize one of the characteristics of the Japanese aesthetics, namely the effect of the blurred ink spot. Though it is a modest reflection on a purely aesthetic matter, this essay on "The Sensation of blurred ink spot" may be regarded as a post-war manifest by Yashiro, who is firmly convinced of the rebirth of Japan²⁷.

The blurred ink effect or *bokashi* 暈し, characteristic of Mu-qi's misty landscape, was highly appreciated by the successive generation of various warlords and votaries of the tea-cult. "As a natural result of this popularity – Yashiro adds – the similar eight scenic views came to be selected in the lake district of this country, modeled on the Chinese prototype"²⁸. Soft brush strokes with the ample use of diluted ink were intentionally practiced by generations of painters, including the technique of blowing the ink on the screen 吸雲/吹き墨. The most eminent examples resulting from such practices are the so-called broken ink splash 破墨山水/潑墨 of Sesshū 雪舟, or the *Pine Wood* 松林図 Screen by Hasegawa Tōhaku 長谷川等伯, where the pine trees are half

dissipated in the misty fog. Spontaneous brush-strokes engender the expressionistic vital rhythm which is combined with an instinctively calculated sense of equilibrium, realizing a sublime decorative effect, as if it were the monochromic negative of the colorful and vivid splendor of the screens of the Momoyama era.

Yashiro does not hesitate to explore a personal hypothesis that the famous tri-color terracotta figurine of the Tang Dynasty 唐三彩 may be one of the possible sources of inspiration. The diluted color pigments of blue and yellow combine with each other to create a subtle green color as if by chance. A similar effect of chance image was highly appreciated by tea-masters, as shown in the example of a tea bowl with the rain-drip blot effect. This piece in the Nezu Collection is named *Minomushi* 蓑虫, meaning a tiny insect wearing a straw raincoat, indicating the subtle effect of liquid permeation.

Tarashikomi 垂らし込み or the dripping effect, which consists in putting ink on the thin water pond on the surface of a painting, gives the opposite effect to the simple ink dilution 滲み. Instead of letting the ink run and penetrate the paper or silk screen, *tarashikomi* gives a clear contour to an amorphous pattern with an instable nuance of a half-tone within the circumscribed pattern. Tawaraya Sōtatsu 俵屋宗達 (ca. 1570s–ca. 1640s) made inventive use of this technique in his collaboration with calligrapher Hon'ami Kōetsu 本阿弥光悦 (1558–1637). Ogata Kōrin 尾形光琳 (1658–1716) and the so-called Rinpa 琳派 school adopted the decorative designs, culminating in the famous screen of the *Red and White Plums in bloom* 紅白梅図. The trunks of the old plum tree are rendered as if this were an application of the dying technique of irregular patterns, called *shiborizome* 絞り染. The moss-covered rough tactile sensation of the trunk miraculously appears on the screen surface with all its broken or coarse skin, eaten up by the insects and exposed to the sun and the wind. Yashiro points out to the fact that both Tawaraya and Ogata are the family names of the textile craftsmen in Kyoto and believes that a synthesis of the Suiboku ink painting and the tradition of hand-craft was achieved there.

One particular design is called *suminagashi* 墨流し, which consists in transposing various natural patterns of the diluted *sumi* ink as it spreads on the water surface on the paper. The hierarchy between the high art of painting and applied lesser art in the Western tradition is negated here by such a crafting ingenuity which was in close correlation with the *literati* prac-

²⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁷ Yashiro, "Nijimi no Kankaku", *Zayūhō*, No. 3, 4–5, June–September 1946. The paper is included in Yashiro's, *Suibokuga*, 1965, pp. 41–106.

²⁸ Yashiro, "Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang by Mu-Ch'i", 1941, p. 4.

tice of spiritual brushstroke. Indeed, Yashiro was of the opinion that Japan is a country of arts and crafts in which the so-called category of Fine-Arts in Europe is integrated. In this respect, Yashiro willingly subscribed to Okakura's opinion.

In his later, richly illustrated publications, Yashiro traces the offspring of such achievement, particularly in the *literati* painting of the Edo Tokugawa period. Such are the cases of Uragami Gyokudō 浦上玉堂 (1745–1820), with his diluting ink brush sprash in *Snow-covered Mountain in the Chilling Wind* 凍雲篩雪図, in possession of the Nobel prize winner in literature, Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972), author of the famous *Snow Country*, or the pointillist dotting dry brush stroke of the *Rain in the Mountain* 山雨染衣, the title literally meaning that Mountain is wearing the dyed cloth of rain.

In this lineage, Yashiro chooses, among pieces of his contemporary painters, 蘇州の雨 *Rain at Soochow*, by Takuchi Seihō 竹内栖鳳 (1864–1942), on the one hand, in the Musée Guimet in Paris' collection. The choice reveals Yashiro's firm conviction that the work of art has to play the role of a diplomat in the cultural mission in international relations, contributing to the mutual understanding of nations. The subject, referring to Suchou 蘇州, or the famous "Venice in China", also suggests that the *bokashi* diluting ink technique, introduced to Japan thanks to Muqi, is now applied by the Japanese master to the Southern Chinese historical scenery. If Takeuchi Seihō represents the contemporary Kyoto school, Yokoyama Taikan stands for the Tokyo school with his *Chichibu Mountains in Early Dawn of Spring*, in Prince Chichibu' collection. The fact also suggests Yashiro's strong tie with the imperial family, and one may remember the fact that Yashiro strongly believed in the efficiency and value of the imperial initiative in promoting friendship through international cultural missions.

Though Yashiro himself is not explicitly hinting at the fact, I would gladly suggest that Yashiro is implicitly echoing what Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) remarked in his obituary to James McNeil Whistler (1834–1903), in terms of the role the so-called *Japanisme* had played in the context of world art:

"Oriental influence was no accident, no ephemeral ripple on the world's art stream, but a second main current of human achievement sweeping around into the ancient European channel, and

thus isolating the three-hundred-year-long island of academic extravagance"²⁹.

In Fenollosa's view, the Japanese influence on Western art was not a mere anecdote, an ephemeral ripple of the Eastern wave touching on the coast of the West by chance. Quite the opposite, it was one of the two main currents of World Art History which found decisive confluence in Whistler's art. Needless to add that J.M. Whistler's *bokashi* and *nijimi* effect was nothing but a predecessor of what Yokoyama Taikan and Takeuchi Seihō realized in the first half of the 20th century.

Conclusion

In his final years, at the age of 75, in 1965, Yashiro was the first laureate of the Freer prize among the Asian races for his life-long contribution to artistic dialog between the East and the West. The honor was not given to Yashiro by a whimsical nepotism or favoritism. As a matter of fact, Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919) was a devoted collector of Japanese art and was a close friend of Whistler himself. In his address at the reception ceremony, "Mr. Freer and the Japanese Businessmen-Collectors", Yashiro insisted on Fenollosa's indebtedness to Freer. Fenollosa made "a serious mistake" by taking "it for granted that the Kanō School was altogether representative of Japanese painting". Freer, who possessed the *Matsushima Screen* by Sōtatsu, helped Fenollosa open his eye to Hon'ami Kōetsu or Tawaraya Sōtatsu which he had neglected because of his devotion to the Kanō School³⁰.

²⁹ Ernest Fenollosa, "The Place in History of Mr. Whistler's Art", *Lotus*, Déc. 1903, pp. 14-17.

³⁰ Yashiro quotes an anecdote of Gaston Migeon's visit to Japan. Asked by Masuda Takashi, famous businessman and eminent collector what he wanted to see, Migeon, at that time Curator of Oriental Art at the Louvre in Paris, surprised Masada by asking for Sesshū and Kōetsu. Migeon is said to have replied that it was Fleer who had advised him "to make such requests when he went to visit the great collectors in Japan. This was what I heard from Mr. Masuda himself in his lifetime". See Yukio Yashiro, "Mr. Freer and the Japanese Businessmen-Collectors", *Japan-America Forum*, April 1966, pp. 1-29.

In his penetrating insight into the “marvellous blotting effect of the ink” and in his elucidation of the technical inventiveness of the blurred ink spot, Yashiro does not fail to mention Leonardo da Vinci, criticizing Botticelli for his rough treatment of the landscape³¹. Take a sponge impregnated with pigment, and throw it on the wall. The blot on the wall may suggest something. Although Leonardo was against such an easy-going execution, he was nonetheless sensitive to the range of suggestiveness that the sponge blot can exercise on the viewers’ imaginative mind. Needless to say, Claude Viallat (1936–) intentionally reversed Leonardo’s remark and put it into his own painting practice of the *support-surface*. This example might suggest the ‘universal’ relevance of Yashiro’s approach to the *suiboku-ga* ink treatment.

Yashiro’s reflection on the amorphous form, containing simultaneously “impressive”, “decorative”, “symbolic”, and “sentimental” aspects, is worth being carefully re-examined and analyzed in relation to the post-war movements, such as abstract expressionism, minimal art. His view might be reinterpreted as a prelude and a Japanese antithesis to what Roger Caillois (1913–1978) speculated on chance image in his *Écriture de pierre* (1970); Yashiro’s attention to the expressive details in decorative ink-blot might be judiciously confronted with what Georges Didi-Huberman states in his reflection on the seemingly meaningless marble patterns in the works of Piero Della Francesca³². Yve-Alain Bois & Rosalind E. Kraus’s *Informe* may also be enriched by Yashiro’s approach. However, this intellectual task of searching for the “empreinte-informe” will be the subject of another paper to come.

³¹ Yashiro, *Suibokuga*, pp. 45-48. Yashiro is quoting from *Trattato* by Leonardo da Vinci, which he compares with Kōetsu.

³² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance et figuration*, Paris, Flammarion, 1990. Further, Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’Empreinte*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997, there a fruitful extension of Yashiro’s reflections on the blotted images. Yve-Alain Bois, Rosalind E. Kraus, *Informe*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996; *Formless: a User’s Guide*, Zone Book2, 1997, should be extended and enlarged by incorporating non-Western phenomena suggested by Yashiro.

**Yasahiro Yukio
(1890-1975)
between the East and the
West
in Search of an Aesthetic
Dialogue**

*Aesthetics in the
World, First Polish-
Japanese Meeting
Cracow, May 23-24,
2011*

Shigemi INAGA

International
Research Center for
Japanese Studies

美術研究所創設当時の矢代幸雄 (1930年頃)
Yashiro Yukio in the founding days of the
Institute for Art Research, ca. 1930



Botticelli, *Primavera*
(detail)



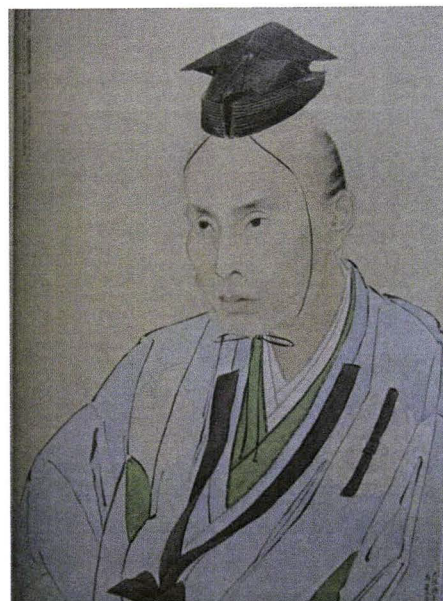
Assisi, photo by Yashiro

Santa Chiara,
Assisi, Chiesa St. Francesco



Muqi Fachang, *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane*, Daitokuji Temple

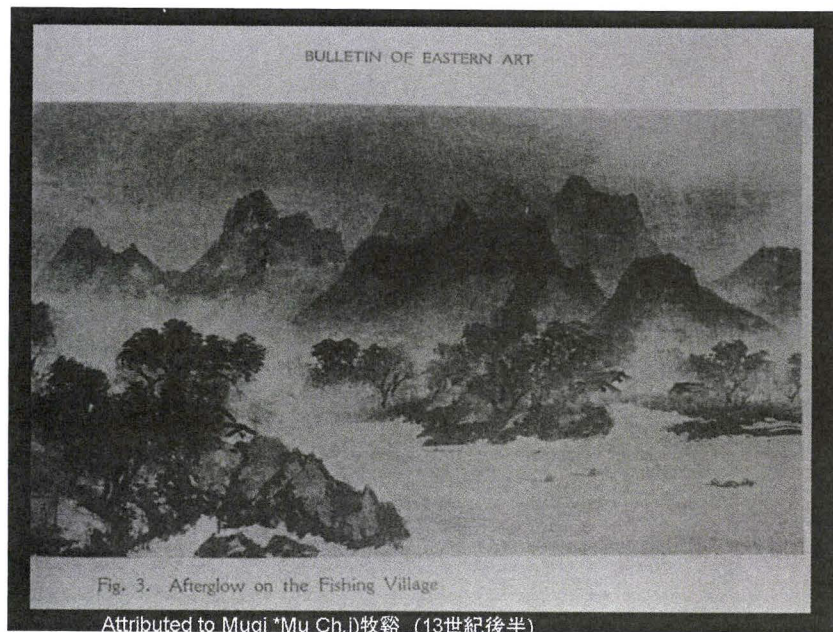
牧谿 (13世紀後半) 《観音猿鶴図》大徳寺蔵 三幅対 絹本墨画淡彩



Watanabe Kazan,
Portrait of Takami Senseki

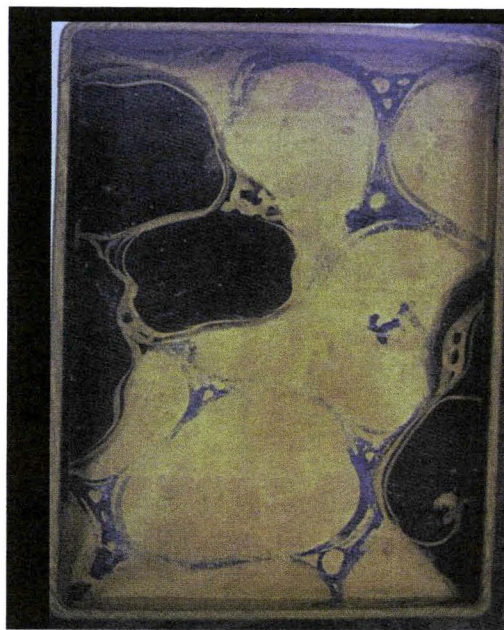


Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of a Man*



雨漏茶碗 銘「蓑虫」 根津美術館
Tea Bowl with the effect of rain-drip blot, named *Minomushi*,
or a 'tiny Insect covered by a straw raincoat'





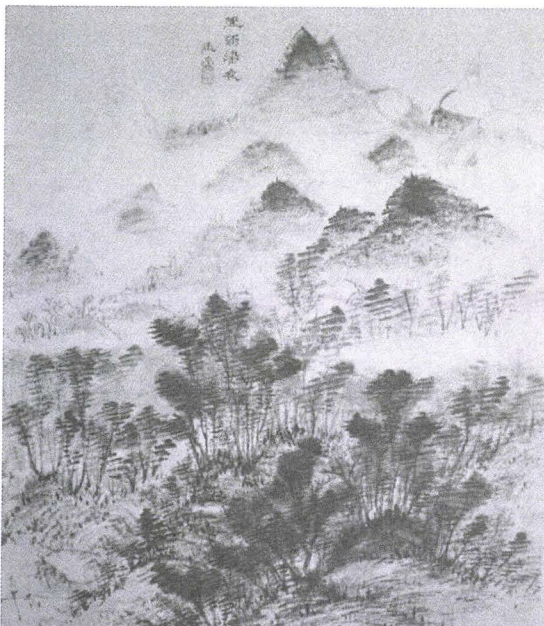
墨流し suminagashi

transposing on the
paper the patterns of
the diluted sumi ink
as it spreads on the
water surface

尾形光琳
流水図乱箱 京都民藝館 旧蔵

Decorative Pattern of the reflecting
Sun-shine on a shallow water
surface?

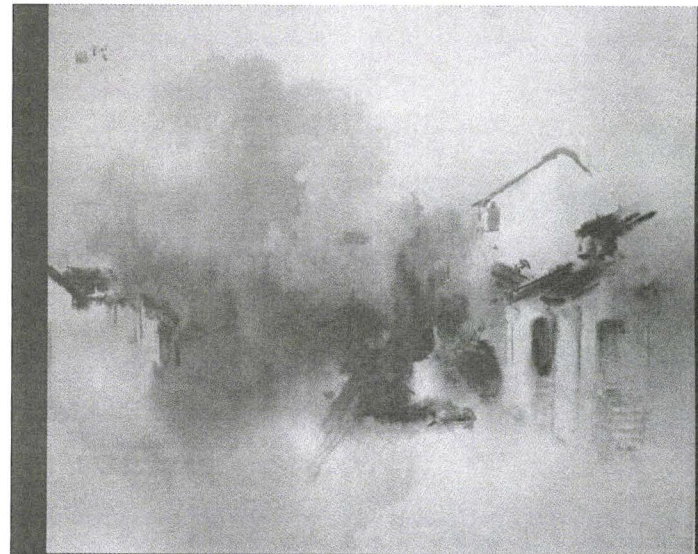
Ogata Kōrin, Ink-box
Bottom of the inside of the box
early 17th Century



San-u, Sen-i
(Rain in the Mountains)
Uragami Gyokudō (1745-1820)
Collection Mr. S. Ohara,
Kurashiki

《山雨染衣図》
浦上玉堂 個人蔵

2000 Years of Japanese Art (1959, 昭和三十三), p.257



Soshū no Ame (Rain at Soochow)
By Takuchi Seihō (1864-1942)
Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris

竹内栖鳳《雨の蘇州図》
パリのモダン美術館

2000 Years of Japanese Art (1959, 昭和三十三), p.257

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