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THE MAKING OF HOKUSAI'S REPUTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF JAPONISME

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Hokusai's reputation is beyond question, but his popularity is an historical product. Some scholars would certainly hesitate to regard him as the greatest master in Japanese art history. Still Hokusai is undoubtedly the most well-known Japanese painter, especially in Western countries. Many Hokusai studies have contributed to justify and consolidate his reputation, while leaving behind the social and historical context which required Hokusai as the most eminent hero of Japanese art. By questioning the apotheosis of Hokusai in the context of the second half of 19th century Europe under the vogue of “Japonisme,” this paper tries to elucidate some of the underlying conditions which enabled and prepared Hokusai's glorification. How was a simple Japanese ukiyo-e print craftsman transfigured into the ultimate oriental master comparable to such giants as Michelangelo, Rubens or Rembrandt, and why was he so much admired by such champions of Modern Art as Edouard Manet and Vincent Van Gogh?¹

I.

It must be pointed out that Hokusai's reputation as the most eminent Japanese painter owes mainly to French Japonisants' interpretations. In his *Chefs-d'œuvre des Arts industriels* (1866), Philippe Burty, a leading republican French art critic, appreciates Japanese prints as superior to Chinese prints or European lithographs and points out as the most curious example, “28 (sic.) books by famous Hokusai,” namely the *Manga* and other books, with countless illustrations of specimens from natural history, scenes from family life, caricatures, demonstrations of martial arts, depictions of pilgrimage to the sacred Mt. Fuji etc. Burty compares these sketches to Watteau in their elegance, to Daumier in their energy, to Goya in their fantasy and to Eugène

¹ The basic article on the subject remains Giovanni Peternolli ジョヴァンニ・ペテルノッリ 「1800 年代のフランスにおける北斎評価の変遷」 『浮世絵芸術』 58 号 pp. 3-18, 1978.

Delacroix in their movements. Burty also declares elsewhere that Hokusai's richness in subject matter and dexterity in brush strokes are only comparable to Peter Paul Rubens.²

Such a whimsical comparison is not as gratuitous as it looks at first glance. On the one hand, Burty insists on Hokusai's importance as a master in European category, thus recognizing to a non-Western nation an artistic status and a competitiveness with European nations. On the other hand, let us remember that Burty's book was treating industrial arts. By comparing Hokusai as a Japanese industrial and popular designer to European masters of Fine Arts, Burty ostentatiously tries to violate the academic hierarchy. The high esteem of a Hokusai implies criticism toward the dominant authority of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and challenges conservative professors of the École des Beaux-Arts.

In 1867, the year following the publication of Burty's book, Japan made a public appearance at the Exposition universelle held in Paris. In a semi-official report of this World Fair, *Les Nations rivales en Art* (1868), Ernest Chesneau, another republican art critic, recognizes Hokusai as "le plus libre et le plus sincères des maîtres japonais" and praises his rapidity in sketching, his richness in expression, his incomparable vivid depiction of human figures in every imaginable gesture, his variety of subject matter, his sureness in skill, his keen eye of observation and the truthfulness of the emotions grasped by his simple lines of ink brush on paper. "All the virtues and vices, all the frankness and violence are depicted there with a subtle tone of derision while betraying a mischievous, ironical and philosophical smile, free from any rancour..."³

From Chesneau's exaggerated and redundant description, four characteristics can be drawn: (i) encyclopedic nature of Hokusai's illustrated books, (ii) its detached and somewhat ironical observation of the lives of the common people, (iii) a slightly caricaturized but sharp and spontaneous sketch, and (iv) a simple but skillful technique of fixing the image and the effectiveness of its graphical reproduction. Curiously enough, these four characteristics are what the French realists and naturalists of the epoch were searching for in the movement of "Société des graveurs et aquafortistes," for example, which was organized as a reaction to the mainstream academic hierarchy of Fine Arts.⁴

Probably the most comprehensible example of this tendency is found in Champfleury's illustrated anthology of cats, *Chats*, published the next year in 1869. Novelist and caricaturist, Champfleury, known as one of Gustave Courbet's earliest defenders and combatant

² Phillipe Burty, *Chefs-d'oeuvre des Art industriels*, Paris, 1866, p.209

³ Ernest Chesneau, *Les Nations rivales en Art*, Paris, 1868, pp. 421-422.

⁴ 稲賀繁美 『絵画の黄昏』名古屋大学出版会, 1997, p. 277 sq.

propagandist of Réalisme, inserts in this popular encyclopedia several sketches of Japanese cats he believes to have been drawn by “a Japanese extraordinary artist, dead about 50 years ago” (thus killing Hokusai 30 years earlier than in reality, which reveals the lack of precise biographical data, and what is still worse) without distinguishing Hiroshige and Kuniyoshi from Hokusai. It is worth being reminded that Edouard Manet’s famous lithography, *Le rendez-vous des chats* was executed for the advertisement poster of this book by Champfleury. The primitive brush-stroke, the contrast between black and white, and the humorous caricature of the cats’ behavior “en chaleur” could be Manet’s intentional imitation (*mane*) of Hokusai’s illustrated books.

II.

During the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune which followed, Edouard Manet deposits his main paintings with a young republican friend and art critic, Théodore Duret. And Duret happens to become the first French specialist of Hokusai. In 1872 Duret makes a world tour with Henri Cernuschi and stays for two months in Japan. In his *Voyage en Asie*, published in 1874, Duret refers to “Hokousai” as one of the masters in Japan, famous for his 14 representative illustrated books, in which Duret admires the gestures, the behaviors, and even the grimace of the Japanese people marvelously rendered just as he has seen them himself in Japan. As an early and privileged eyewitness of Japan, Duret publishes an influential article “L’art japonais, les livres illustrés, les albums imprimés, Hokousai,” in a prestigious art magazine, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1882, in which Duret, follower of Herbert Spencer, recognizes Hokusai as the culminating figure of Japanese art, incarnating by himself the whole evolution of its history, and declares “Hokusai is the greatest artist that Japan has produced”.⁵

That following year, in 1883, Louis Gonse, chief editor of the same magazine, organizes a Great retrospective exhibition of Japanese art, at the Parisien Galerie Georges Petit and also publishes a sumptuous book *L’Art japonais*, the first tentative synthesis of Japanese art in the world. Of the ten chapters that compose the book, one whole is given to Hokusai, this “viellard fou de dessins” and Gonse repeats Duret’s assertion by explicitly quoting from him. And Gonse adds that Hokusai’s “works rise high in the domain of aesthetic Japanese art, and...they establish for it a definitive formula.” “[A] talent so complete and so original should belong to all humanity” (pp. 289-90), and Hokusai bears comparison to such European artists as “Rembrandt, Carot, Goya and Daumier at the same time” (pp. 269-270).⁶

⁵ Théodore Duret, “L’Art japonais, les livres illustrés, les albums imprimés Hokousai,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1882, 2ème période, pp. 113-131; pp. 300-318.

⁶ Louis Gonse, *L’Art japonais*, Paris, 1883, pp. 289-290; pp. 269-270.

We have already analysed elsewhere in detail the sarcastic reactions and objections that this high French appreciation of Hokusai caused among Anglo-Saxon specialists such as Ernest Fenollosa, who published a harsh attack on Gonse in his review of Gonse's book in *Japan Weekly Mail* on July 12, 1884, and William Anderson, author of *The Pictorial Art in Japan* in 1885. From this controversy, let us illustrate four main points. (i) Both for Anderson and Fenollosa, it was out of the question to dare to compare a simple print craftsman like Hokusai to 15th century Zen Buddhist master painters. For Anderson, it was no less scandalous to compare Hokusai with Chô Densu, Sesshû or Shûbun than to draw a parallel between John Leech, "Mr. Punch," and Fra Angelico. (ii) It is already clear that these Anglo-Saxon specialists apprehended Japanese art and its history according to the classical and academic value judgment which they never put into doubt. (iii) While these Anglo-Saxon connoisseurs, with their own long stay in Japan, respected domestic Japanese judgment, French amateurs insisted on their own aesthetic judgment. Both Anderson and Fenollosa found French overestimation of Hokusai not only ridiculous but even harmful to his posthumous reputation in his native country. French critics, including Edmond de Goncourt on the other hand, were proud of having discovered Hokusai's talent when the Japanese still did not fully recognize nor acknowledge Hokusai's significance. But Fenollosa found these Frenchmen's attitudes arrogant, and judged that they were "amazingly and amusingly" duped by the Japanese merchants' condescending flattery toward them. (iv) While the "conservative" Anglo-Saxon specialists disdained the "vulgarity" of Hokusai's art, French avant-garde critics praised Hokusai's "vulgarité" precisely to attack such conservative, academic and aristocratic views which were still predominant in the European art world. For Duret, Gonse and de Goncourt, "L'école vulgaire" was by no means a pejorative notion, but they apprehended it positively as a mark of anti-academic "avant-garde" in artistic achievement. Significantly, Duret's book dedicated to his late friend Edouard Manet in 1885, was titled *Critique d'Avant-garde*, which included his study in defense of Manet, Monet, and the Impressionist painters alongside his pioneering study on Japanese art and Hokusai...⁷

III.

It is already quite clear that French "Japonisant" art critics were mainly responsible for Hokusai's glorification. To elevate Hokusai to the rank of Master had something to do with the liberal republican criticism towards the conservative academic aesthetics. It also suggested

⁷ Théodore Duret, *Critique d'Avant-garde*, Paris, 1885. For the precise analysis, see Shigemi Inaga, "Impressionist Aesthetics and Japanese Aesthetics..." *Kyoto Conference on Japanese Studies [1994]*, International Research Center for Japanese Studies/The Japan Foundation, 1996, vol. ii, pp. 307-319. A part of this paper is repeated hereafter.

that Hokusai's reputation was made concrete in a close relation with the aesthetic program these French "Japonisant" critics were elaborating. Both Duret and Edmond de Goncourt called their beloved Japanese prints "impressions." A certain ideological affinity between Japanese prints and the Impressionist aesthetics is also easily supposed. Let us now take a closer look at the meaning Hokusai would take in context of aesthetic renovation (or even revolution, for some.) Three points can be made, namely: (i) composition or lack of composition, (ii) drawing technique and brushstroke, and (iii) vividness of color.

Firstly, in terms of composition, both Ernest Chesneau and Théodore Duret remark that the Japanese dislike symmetrical repetition. In 1869, Chesneau invents the term "disymmetrie" to characterize Japanese aesthetics. This idea is implicitly borrowed by an American artist, John Lafarge, in his "Notes on Japanese Art" in 1870, and is also developed by another American critic, James J. Jarves in his *A Glimpse at the Art of Japan* (1876).⁸ Duret remarks, "Following their caprice the Japanese abandon themselves to the fantasy, and throw freely decorative motifs, without any apparent system, but thanks to their secret instinct of proportion, the result fully satisfies the visual taste" (p. 169). As Oshima Seiji has suggested, Auguste Renoir's manifest of "irrégulariste" aesthetics (1884) is also understood as an outcome of this conception.⁹

The most striking example of this "disymmetrie" and "irrégulariste" approach would be *Mt. Fuji off the coast of Kanagawa* by Hokusai, known as the "Great Wave." The view of Mt. Fuji at sunrise was a marvelous scene for foreign navigators (the best example of which being probably the description given by Lafcadio Hearn in his "A Conservative,") and Duret himself described it in his *Voyage en Asie* with some emotion. Still it is an open question whether or not this dynamic contrast between the great wave in the foreground and the small corn figure in the background was a result of Hokusai's free and exaggerated interpretation of Western linear perspective.

Western linear perspective, reinvented in the Italian Renaissance, consists of reducing the three dimensional space into two dimensions by a series of geometrical operations. As Naruse Fujio has already proposed in the case of the Akita school of Western-style painting, this Western technique was reinterpreted and transformed into an aesthetic device of exaggerating the effect of supernatural contrast between the near and the far,¹⁰ which is clearly suggested by the Japanese translation for the word perspective: "degree of far/near" (Satake Shozan, 1778,) or

⁸ John Lafarge, "Notes on Japanese Art," in Raphael Pampelly, *Across America and Asia*, New York, 1870; James J. Jarves, *A Glimpse at the Art of Japan*, 1876, reimp. Tokyo, Tuttle, 1874.

⁹ cf. 大島清次『ジャポニスム印象派とその周辺』講談社学術文庫 1996, 稲賀解説.

¹⁰ 成瀬不二雄「江戸からパリへ」『季刊藝術』Winter 1977, pp. 86-115.

“principle of far-near” (Shiba Kôkan, 1799.) Instead of implanting European rationalism in Japan, the introduction of linear perspective among Japanese artists contributed to elaborate a sense of editing pictorial plane by “*assemblage*,” “*montage*,” and “*decoupage*.” This sense of arrangement “without apparent system” (Duret), which Tsudumi Tsuneyoshi will name “*Rahmenlosigkeit*” of Japanese aesthetics finds its typical application in Hokusai’s landscape prints. Paradoxically enough, therefore, what Duret and other French Japonisant regarded as typically Japanese composition was in reality the result of recent European influence among the Japanese artists.¹¹

The free arrangement of the pictorial plane, clearly deviating from the principle of linear perspective is commonly observed in the layout of Hokusai’s *Manga*. Duret observes that “in the first volume of *Manga*, the human figures and objects have only one inch or so, and scattered here and there, from the top to the bottom of the pages, without the ground to sustain them nor the background to put them forward. And yet they are posed there with such a convenience and economy that each of them retains its movement and characteristics of its own line and position”.¹² This description shows the astonishment Europeans felt in observing a page of *Manga*.

And curiously enough, the similar strangeness of “*assemblage*” and “*montage*” was what the contemporary critics blamed Manet for. Quoting freely from diverse sources ranging from such classics as Titian, Velasquez, and Goya to graphic illustrations and reproduction prints, Manet used to make up a combined image, and where the public noticed apparent lack of composition skill, distorted or miscalculated perspective and anatomically disproportionate human figures. Such shortcomings in Manet, however, can be perfectly defended in terms of Japanese aesthetics visualized in Hokusai’s *Manga*.

Secondly, similar lack of perfection is also frequently noticed in Manet’s violent brushstrokes and uncertain drawing techniques. Once again, Théodore Duret’s remark on Japanese art justifies these apparent defects in Manet and turns them into Manet’s merit. “Using exclusively the brush sustained by the hand, the Japanese artist, for whom no retouch is possible, fixes his vision on the paper by his first attack, with such a boldness, gracefulness, and confidence that even the most talented European artists cannot attain. It is thanks to this procedure, unfamiliar in Europe, along with their particular taste that the Japanese had been recognized as the first and the most perfect Impressionists”.¹³

¹¹ Shigemi Inaga, “La Réinterprétation de la perspective linéaire et son retour en France (1760-1910),” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, No. 49, 1983.

¹² Théodore Duret, in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1882, p. 125; *Critique d’Avant-garde*, p. 197.

¹³ Ibid., p. 167.

Already in 1874, shortly after Duret's return from Japan, Manet has imitated this oriental brushstroke. A drawing conserved at the British Museum is a typical example, as it gives on the same sheet, the head of a raven, prepared for the illustration of Edgar Allen Poe's poem, translated by Mallarmé, some awkward imitations of Japanese painters seals and the head of a Japanese Spaniel, "Tama," which Duret has brought from Japan. The "tache hardi," (bold dripping) of *The Raven* was applauded by Ernest Chesneau in 1878 as a successful "Japonisant" achievement. It is also well known that in his later executions, Manet avoided retouching the painting but preferred re-painting anew the whole canvas in a spontaneous way. To "fix a vision by the first attack, with rapidity, boldness, gracefulness and confidence" was what Duret and Manet meant by "impressionistic" execution.¹⁴

It is therefore no surprise that Duret, in his biography of Manet (1902), draws a parallel between Manet and Hokusai in order to convince his readers of Manet's "unfinished-ness" as his merit rather than a defect. "The drawings by Manet generally remain in the state of a sketch or a *croquis*. These drawings were done in order to grasp a fleeting aspect, a movement or an eminent detail. The slightest object or a detail of it which has interested him, was immediately fixed on the paper. These drawings which one can call an instantaneous photograph show how surely Manet grasped the characteristic trait and the decisive movement to be singled out. To compare with Manet in this order I can find nobody else but Hokusai, who knew how to combine the simplification with a perfect determination of the character in his drawing made of the first attack of the *Manga*".¹⁵

Thus Manet's "unfinished" brushstroke is justified as an instantaneous fixation of the fugitive aspects. His "impressionistic" manner is also explained "by the first jump" ("de prime saut") of Hokusai. Of course, Duret's explanation would have easily lost its ground if the fact had been known that Hokusai and other ukiyo-e craftsmen did not make their drawings "de prime saut" or "saisi sur le vif" (captured living) but that their technique depended much more on "de chic," i.e. by a "memory of the hand" as Baudelaire despicingly defined. The apparently improvised "dessin d'après nature" (sketch made after life) of the *Manga* was in reality more based on the physical skill of the habitual hand trained by the repetitive copying of the master's model, than on the direct observation of nature and the spontaneous fixation of its effects. In short, Duret's effort of authenticating "Impressionistic" aesthetics by referring to Hokusai's *Manga* proves to be baseless and positively misleading...

The third problem is relative to color. Duret observes: "When we looked at Japanese images

¹⁴ cf. Wilson Juliet-Bareau and Breton Mitchell, "Tales of a Raven, The Origins and Fate of *La Corbeau* by Mallarmé and Manet," *Print Quarterly*, vol. VI, No. 3, Sep. 1989, pp. 258-307.

¹⁵ Théodore Duret, *L'Histoire d'Édouard Manet et de son œuvre*, Paris, [1902], 1906, p. 211.

[in the print], where the most contrasting and harsh colors were spread out, side by side, on the leaf, we finally understood that there was a new procedure worth trying which would reproduce certain effects of nature which we had neglected or thought impossible to render until then. For, these Japanese images, which we had at first taken for a 'bariolage' were, in reality, particularly faithful to the nature".¹⁶

"Bariolage" was the term chosen by a conservative art critic, Paul Mantz, when he criticized in 1863 the violent tone of colors Edouard Manet had employed in his *Laura de Valence*. Here Duret tries to justify this "bariolage," or an inharmonious jam of primary colors, by insisting on the faithfulness of the Japanese prints to nature. As a privileged traveler to Japan, Duret was entitled to testify such "fidelité" of the Japanese landscape ukiyo-e prints, where, as Duret put it, "the green, the blue, the red in their brightest tone [were] juxtaposed without any intermediate half-tone or transition".¹⁷

Partly influenced by Duret's debatable statement, not only Monet but also Manet went to Argenteuil to paint the landscape by juxtaposing "side by side," without attenuation, the most striking tones, just as the Japanese saw nature with such "vivid colors full of luminosity." The effect was so supernatural and inhabitual that even a friendly critic like J.-K. Huysmans ironically called it "indigomanie," or an indigo-maniac disease.¹⁸ According to his diagnosis, the Impressionist painters were suffering from a sort of "daltonisme." It was against such an ill-natured criticism that Duret proposed the above mentioned comparison of Monet and the Japanese. In his opinion, it was not Impressionists' eyes that were ill, but that the European's eye was too weak and too lazy to resist the truth of light effect experienced in the "plein air" (open air.) How valid is this statement?

Henry Smith II has recently advanced a hypothesis that without the importation of the Berlin blue chemical pigment, invented about 1706, the vivid color expression in Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* would not have been possible.¹⁹ Here is an example of interesting cross-purposes in cultural exchange. Contrary to Duret's fantasy, the blue of the "indigomanie" or the red of the anilinmanie (beni-gurui) of the late ukiyo-e prints were by no means proof of the Japanese faithfulness to the color effect under the open air sun light. Far from justifying the

¹⁶ Théodore Duret, *Critique d'Avant-garde* (as in note 12), p. 67.

¹⁷ Paul Mantz, "Exposition du Bd. des Italiens," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1863, première période, p. 383; Théodore Duret, *Critique d'Avant-garde*, p. 17.

¹⁸ Joris-Karl Huysmans, "Les Expositions des Indépendants en 1880," *L'art moderne/Certain*, Paris, Union générale des livres, 1975, pp. 103-104.

¹⁹ 山口県立萩美術館, 国際シンポジウム「浮世絵--東西の架け橋」; 「世界のなかの浮世絵」, 『中国新聞』1997年10月16日.

cause of Impressionist aesthetics, as Duret fancied, these chemical pigments, newly imported from Europe, bear witness to the exotic color revolution Hokusai and his contemporary Japanese were prepared to undertake.

IV.

Throughout the three points we have examined so far, i.e. (i) composition, (ii) drawing technique, and (iii) coloration, French “Japonisant” interpretations of Hokusai proved to be strongly biased. Yet it cannot be denied that these interpretations, however whimsical and distorted, did contribute to the development of European art in the second half of the 19th century.

Take some prominent examples in the *Fin de siècle*. Emile Bernard’s experimental composition, *Les Bretonnes dans la prairie* (1888) which intentionally gets rid of the yoke of linear perspective by scattering the human figures on the pictorial plane is evidently an application of the layout we have observed in the *Manga* pages. Bernard himself complains that this arrangement has been plagiarized by Paul Gauguin’s appropriation in *La Vision après le sermon* (1888), where the composition is cut off into two separate parts by the trunk of a tree. Gauguin inserts a sketch of this painting in a letter to Vincent Van Gogh in Arles. Probably inspired by this spatial effect, the latter executes *Le Semeur* (1888). Both of these works have strong affinity with the way Hokusai, and Hiroshige after him, have reinterpreted the newly imported Western linear perspective. Even Paul Cézanne, who seems to have ostentatiously opposed Gauguin’s Japonisme still betrays some resemblance to Hokusai in his tentative of transgressing the academic linear perspective. The comparison between *La Montagne Sainte Victoire* and *Mishima*, or that of *Jas de Bouffan* and *Hodogaya* even show some parallels between the two in their efforts of destroying the Renaissance pictorial space, to use Pierre Francastel’s terminology.²⁰

As for the juxtaposition of primary colors, it is evident that Van Gogh is also contaminated by the “indigomanie.” *Le Pont de Langrois*, executed shortly after his arrival in Arles can be regarded as an application of the color effect Van Gogh has already experienced by copying Hiroshige’s *Evening Rainfall at the Bridge of Atake*, which Van Gogh has mistaken to be a print by Hokusai. Not only the vivid blue of water directly contrasted to the yellow of the bridge, but also the identification of the Japanese climate with the Midi in France could be inspired to him by the following passage on Monet written by Théodore Duret and published in his *Critique d’Avant-garde* in 1885:

²⁰ Pierre Francastel, *Peinture et société*, Lyon, 1951; Paris, 1978; cf. Shigemi Inaga, art. cit. (note 11).

“It was not until the Japanese albums arrived to us that the painters could juxtapose on the canvas a roof of audacious red, an yellow road and the bleu of water. Before the model had been given by the Japanese it was impossible (...). Every time I contemplate the Japanese albums, I say to myself, yes, it was just like that that the nature appeared to my eye in the luminous and transparent atmosphere (...) without attenuation nor gradation [just like] in the Midi of the France, where every color appears glaring and intense in summer...”²¹

Finally, as for the “oriental” brushstroke that Manet has already tried to master, some of the sketches by Vincent Van Gogh accentuating the dots suggest his appropriation of Hokusai’s vocabularies already accessible to him by the illustrations given in the monthly publication, *Le Japon artistique*. As Ursula Perucchi Petri has already proposed, these expressive brushstrokes are tactfully transposed into the lithographs by Toulouse Lautrec, Vuillard, and also by Bonnard, surnamed “Nabis Japonard.” Members of the Nabis group are also known to have subscribed to *Le Japon artistique*.²²

V.

Yet we cannot finish without proposing a new hypothesis as for the spiritual inspiration Hokusai and other Japanese print craftsmen could have given to Vincent Van Gogh. In a famous passage sent to Théo, we read:

“If we study Japanese art, we see a man who is undoubtedly wise, philosophic and intelligent who spends his time doing what ? In studying the distance between the earth and the moon? No. In studying Bismarck’s politics? No. He studies a single blade of grass (“un seul brin d’herbe.”) But this blade of grass leads him to draw every plant and then every season, the great views of the countryside, then animals, then the human figure. So he passes his life, and life is too short to do the whole. Come now, isn’t it a true religion which these simple Japanese teach us, who live in nature as though they themselves were flowers”.²³

Dr. Kôdera Tsukasa has already demonstrated that the “blade of grass” refers directly to the words seen in the “programme” written by S. Bing for the first volume of *Le Japon artistique* (mai 1888) which Théo has sent to Vincent in Arles. An anonymous illustration inserted in the same issue also must have been the source of direct inspiration. Bing says “there is nothing in

²¹ Théodore Duret, *Critique d’Avant-garde*, pp. 63-66.

²² Ursula Perucchi Petri, *Die Nabi und Japan*, München, Prestel Verlag, 1976.

²³ Vincent Van Gogh, *Correspondance générale*, Paris, Gallimard, [1960], 1990. Lettre à Théo, 542 (Sep, 1888). The following letters by Vincent Van Gogh are from the same edition (referred to by the number of the letter.)

creation, not even the smallest blade of grass, which does not deserve a place in the elevated conception of art".²⁴ Still the encyclopedic view of nature ranging from natural history to human figures in the countryside may be reflecting the idea the European Japonisant circle has been sharing of the *Manga*, as we have already examined at the beginning of this paper. The name of Hokusai represents for Vincent this image of Japanese artist as a philosopher.

In addition, an illustration of crabs, in the same magazine, attributed to Hokusai is also borrowed by Vincent. A crab thrown upside down used to be interpreted as a metaphor of Vincent's own struggle for existence. By the way, "life is too short to do the whole" was the message picked up by Akira Kurosawa in his short film story on the Life of Vincent Van Gogh, *Dreams*.

Along with this idyllic image of Japan, Vincent fancies that the Japanese artists were living in an idealized community sustained by their mutual emulation and brotherhood. He writes to Emile Bernard, "Since long I have thought it touching that the Japanese artists used to exchange works among themselves very often. It certainly proves that they liked and upheld each other, and that there reigned a certain harmony among them, and that they were really living in some sort of fraternal community, quite naturally, and not in intrigues" (B. 17, Sep. 1888).

The supposed exchange of works which Van Gogh believes the Japanese artists practiced remains a mystery among Japanese specialists. Dr. Kôdera has mentioned one copy of *Shinsen Kachô zukushi* of Vincent's possession as a source of inspiration.²⁵ Yet this album of birds and flowers is executed by an individual artist and does not suggest any possibility of "exchange." A personal hypothesis I want to advance here is that Vincent Van Gogh would have had a look at some example of *surimono* prints put together and bound as an album. One such specimen is still preserved intact today at the Cabinet des estampes in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. This piece composed in three albums as *Ten-chi-jin* by a certain *kyôka* satirical poet, Nagashima Masahide, in token of his collaboration with other poets, contains rare *surimono* prints made by such famous contemporary ukiyo-e craftsmen like Santô Kyôden, Suhunman, Kiyonaga, Utamaro and especially Hokusai. I hasten to mention that this album was rediscovered by Kondô Eiko and is already studied in detail by Asano Shûgô, but I am responsible for the following proposal.²⁶

²⁴ S. Bing, "Programme," *Le Japon artistique*, 1ère année, No. 1, May 1888.

²⁵ Tsukasa Kôdera, *Vincent Van Gogh, Christianity vs. Nature*, Amsterdam, John Benjamin, 1990, p. 54.

²⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, cote Od. 171-173.

近藤映子「パリ国立図書館蔵米発表摺物アルバム三巻について」、『浮世絵芸術』80-82号, 1980;
浅野秀剛「デユレ旧蔵摺物帖の概要とその意義」, 『秘蔵浮世絵大観』第8巻パリ国立図書館,

Van Gogh might have seen this while he was in Paris, because this album belonged to Théodore Duret, who is supposed to have had his collection deposited with Maurice Joyant, and the latter was going to take over the direction of the Montmartre branch of the Société Goupil, after the death of nobody else than Theodore Van Gogh. It is difficult to suppose that Vincent missed the chance of visiting this collection while he was in Paris. The brothers Van Gogh would also have had the chance to examine similar specimens at the Bing's shop, where they had free access. One glimpse at such an album would have been enough for Vincent to be convinced of the practice of exchange by the Japanese, as many prints of different size by several artists were assembled together on the face of the folder composed of 8 panels each. Van Gogh expresses his desire to realize such an album in his letter to Théo: "The albums of 6 or 10 or 12 pen sketches, like the Japanese albums of the original sketches. I really want to make such a one for Gauguin, another for Bernard" (492).²⁷

Here we can see two conjunctive reasons why Vincent repetitively declares that "the future of new art ("art nouveau") is in the Midi." On the one hand, the climate and light effect in Arles is said to be comparable to that of Japan; on the other hand, the ideal community of artists is now under construction in Arles by Vincent's own initiative, after the Japanese model. From this conjugation—possibly suggested by Duret's writing—Arles is finally identified with Japan. "Here in Arles, I am in Japan." Is Vincent dreaming of becoming a Dutch "Hokusai" in Arles?

VI.

In 1896, Edmond de Goncourt publishes his last book, *Hokusai*, as a series of "biographie des impressionnistes japonais." It must be noted that shortly before, S. Bing has publicly protested in *La Revue blanche* that his project of publishing a translation of Hokusai's biography has been smuggled by the hands of Hayashi Tadamasa and Edmond de Goncourt.²⁸ This controversy of priority suggests two things. First, the dispute on Hokusai was of primary importance in the fin de siècle European art market. Second, Hokusai's biography promoted by Kobayashi Bunshichi and realized by Kyoshin Iijima Hanjûrô had been involved in this dispute from the outset. The first serious historical research on the life of Hokusai in Japan had been therefore

講談社 1990, pp. 300-334

²⁷ 稲賀繁美「ヴァン・ゴッホの見た摺り物?」, 『本の窓』1993年12月号, pp. 16-19.

²⁸ Edmond de Goncourt, *Hokusai*, [1896],; *Outamaro, Hokusai*, Paris, Union général d'édition, 1986 (which omits the preface and catalogue of the original edition.) S. Bing, "La vie et l'œuvre de Hokusai," *La Revue blanche*, 1er février, 1896, pp. 97-101. On this dispute, see Giovanni Peternolli, ジョヴァンニ・ペテルノッリ「エドモン・ド・ゴンクール宛の林忠正未刊書簡について」, 『浮世絵芸術』62-63号, 1979/1980, which gives transcriptions of Hayashi's letters to de Goncourt, preserved at the Département des manuscrits at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

undertaken under the instigation of French request.

The same year, in 1896, Michel Revon also published his *Étude sur Hokusai*, as the Ph.D. dissertation presented to the Faculty of letters of l'Université Sorbonne. While Edmond de Goncourt's biography represents the end of Japonisant interpretation, the latter announces the change in perspective. Edmond de Goncourt enthusiastically compares Hokusai's erotica, identified as *Kinoyé no Komatsu* to a sketch of a hand attributed to Michelangelo with such an emotional expression as "cette force...cette énergie de la linéature qui fait du dessin d'un verge un dessin égal à la main du Musée du Louvre, attribuée à Michel Ange".²⁹ In contrast, Michel Revon rectifies French Japonisant's excessive praise of Hokusai by saying in his conclusion that the cultivated Japanese were no less astonished by French admiration of Hokusai than what would happen if the Frenchmen saw the Japanese put Gavarni at the summit of French Art.

The World Fair in Paris in 1900 contributes to relativizing French Japonisant interpretation of Hokusai. *L'Histoire de l'Art du Japon*, the first official version of Japanese art history published by the Japan Imperial Commission for the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900, lists Hokusai's name among 40 or so ukiyo-e designers with a short biographical summary in twelve lines illustrated by only one plate. No discussion at all on his meaning in Japanese art history. The gap between Japan's official art history, based on the "national treasures" transmitted from antiquity, and the European Japonisant amateurs' view of Japanese art, based on "vulgar" ukiyo-e and applied arts, is made decisively clear, even for the European public.³⁰

In 1914, Henri Focillon publishes his *Hokusai* and recapitulates in the introduction this debate

²⁹ Edmond de Goncourt, *Outamaro, Hokusai*, (as in note 28), pp. 100-101; p. 240.

"Et je parlais alors de la peinture érotique de l'Extrême-Orient, 'de ces copulations comme encolérées, du culbutis de ces ruts renversant les paravents d'une chambre, de ces emmêlements des corps fondus ensemble, de ces nervosités jouisseuses des bras, à la fois attirant et repoussant le coït, de ces bouillonnements de ventres féminins, de l'épilepsie de ces pieds aux doigts tordus battant l'air, de ces baisers bouche-à-bouche dévorateurs, de ces pamoisons de femmes, la tête renversée à terre, la *petite mort* sur leur visage, aux yeux clos, sous leurs paupières fardées, enfin de cette force, de cette énergie de la linéature qui fait du dessin d'une verge un dessin égal à la main du Musée du Louvre, attribuée à Michel-Ange."

The paragraph including the quoted passage has been omitted in the pre-war period Japanese translations independently made by Yone Noguchi and Nagai Kafû, probably to avoid censorship for the sake of "bon moeurs." The erotica in question was first attributed to Utamaro, then de Goncourt rectified the error and attributed it to Hokusai.

³⁰ See Shigemi Inaga, "Cognition Gaps in the Recognition of Masters and Masterpieces in the Formative Year of Japanese Art History, 1880-1900," paper read at the *International Symposium on Nature of Master and Masterpiece in Japan and in the West*, University of East Anglia, Norwich, Sep. 1997 (forthcoming).

of appreciation. Focillon is not satisfied with keeping a neutral position between the European view and Japanese view. Nor does he agree with German scholar Julius von Suidlitz's view, which he criticizes as a deviation from the "historical sense," caused by the "outdated Japonisant principle" confused with the German scholar's "idealist preference." In contrast, Focillon proposes to rehabilitate Hokusai's value as an artisan by refusing to yield to the "literary culture" of Japan's most sophisticated connoisseurs.³¹

In the second edition published in 1925, Focillon adds a new preface. In order to justify his view of Hokusai, in the midst of these oscillating estimations, Focillon refers to Okakura Tenshin. At first glance, the choice is surprising, for Okakura was mainly responsible for the conception of *L'Histoire de l'Art du Japon* which ostentatiously ignored and officially denied Hokusai's high appreciation in Europe. Yet, in *The Ideals of the Orient*, Focillon sees Okakura "rescue a probably fictive but nonetheless genuine-like continuity—as a structure—of an organic thinking," of the idea of Asia "as a common heritage, constituting the patriotism of the continent" (pp. ii-iii). In this context, Focillon tries to recognize Hokusai as the genius of the whole Asian people, who made Asian virtue communicable to all human beings. Let us conclude by quoting from Focillon the following passage as a historical testimony of the epoch of "Japonisme" pronounced by a cosmopolitan art historian *d'entre deux guerres*.

"A travers ces oscillations de nos préférences, Hokusai demeure intact. C'est qu'il conserve en lui, c'est qu'il porte à leur plus haut degré de puissance expressive, c'est qu'il rend communicables à toute l'humanité quelques-uns des traits permanents et profonds de l'âme asiatique. Il n'est pas seulement un des plus grands créateurs de formes vivantes qui furent jamais, il appartient à l'ordre héroïque, il est au nombre de ces artistes, qui, visibles de tous les points de l'horizon, nous font connaître, en même temps qu'un génie singulier, celui de leur race et quelque chose de l'homme éternel".³²

³¹ Henri Focillon, *Hokusai*, (Collection Art et esthétique), Paris, 1914; 1925, pp. 29-42.

³² Ibid., Deuxième édition, 1925, pp. ii-iv. The following is our tentative translation:

"In the midst of our oscillating preferences, Hokusai remains intact. That is, he conserves in himself some of the permanent and profound traits of Asiatic soul, takes them up to the highest degree of their expressive power and makes them communicable to the whole of humanity. Hokusai is not only one of the greatest creators of the living forms in history, but he belongs to the heroic order, he is one of the artists who, being visible from all the points of the horizon, lets us know simultaneously his own singular genius, and the genius of his race, as well as something of the eternal man."