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# Japonisme in Japan: The Japanese Reaction to Japonisme as Manifested in the Art of Watanabe Seitei

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Studies on *Japonisme*—the influence of Japanese art in nineteenth-century Europe—are generally conducted from the Western, especially European, perspective. Most studies on the topic probe how Western cultures have adopted Japanese art, especially Japanese woodblock prints (*Ukiyo-e*), and investigate specific Japanese artworks or motifs European artists referenced in their own work.<sup>1</sup> However, the dynamic of Japonisme was more interactive than it is usually considered, because Japanese artists also responded to the Western craze for their work. Did Japanese artists react consciously to the phenomenon of Japonisme, selling Japanese-looking objects that were somewhat invented and fabricated to cater to Western tastes? Did they change their art styles and subjects in reaction to the growing Western interest in Japanese art to augment sales? This article will present evidence that Japanese art was itself shaped by the encounters of artists and officials with foreign art practices, and that Japanese art was influenced by their consciousness of the outside world's interest in Japanese culture. This tendency may be observed in the advent of Japonisme between the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when both artists and non-artists in Japan became aware of the attention paid to them by other countries. In this article, I will argue that Japanese artists consciously selected representative images of Japanese art in the course of their exposure to Western culture, and globally established their national art, by focusing specifically on a Japanese artist named Watanabe Seitei, who visited foreign shores and was engaged in the export of Japanese objects d'art.

## EXPOSITIONS

Japan's long national seclusion policy ended in the mid-nineteenth century. The isolation rule that lasted hundreds of years prevented the export of objects from Japan and restricted the influx of foreigners into the country. Thus, knowledge of the country and its art was not sufficiently available to the outside world. After Japan ended its self-imposed isolation after it signed the Kanagawa Treaty with the United States in 1854, it began to become better known to other countries. The subsequent spurt of foreign trade created new opportunities for the trade of Japanese objects, including woodblock prints, via the agency of traders and diplomats in Japan's port cities. However, the main venues through which Japan introduced its art to the world were international expositions in Europe.

The first display of Japanese objects in Europe occurred at the 1862 International Exhibition in London, which was arranged by Rutherford Alcock, the British ambassador to Japan at that time. Five years later, the Japanese mounted their own displays in Europe for the first time at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867. However, Japan's displays were not competently organised: a number of distinct entities planned displays without effective collaboration. The new government and the Satsuma and Saga domains arranged separate displays, which gave

the viewers the impression that Japan was still a feudal state; therefore, the disorganised displays damaged the government's image by implying that the national administration was not the sole ruling body of Japan.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the government took the lead in organising exhibitions from the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. A committee was instituted by the Japanese government to prepare for the exhibition, and in a narrow sense, this venture became the government's first official appearance in Europe. By this time, Japan was able to describe itself in its own words instead of having its displays introduced by Western outsiders as in the earlier cases.

Viewers of the Japanese displays at the world fairs were especially attracted to Japanese crafts. Their favourable reaction to Japanese arts and crafts happened in the context of European movements seeking to reform applied art and to enhance its quality. For example, French ceramic firms and designers such as Félix Bracquemond (1833–1914) were especially receptive to Japanese crafts and incorporated these Eastern influences in their own work. At the time, Britain's applied art practitioners were also undergoing a reformation, with the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum, at the centre of the movement to improve industrial design. The boundaries between art and design were somewhat blurred by Britain's Arts and Crafts movement, which attempted to introduce beauty in daily life through the re-conception of mundane objects such as furniture, tableware, and fabrics. Whereas Britain became occupied by this reformation in applied art, France was left behind and was driven to improve its applied art quality to compete with other countries. French objets d'art were, in a sense, eclipsed by Britain's industries—in this context, the Japanese crafts exhibited at European expositions came to be regarded especially by the French as fresh sources of inspirations and new designs.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Japanese crafts were applied art in the modern sense, this categorisation was not necessarily applied at the time. 'Fine art' was a concept imported from the Western world and was first introduced in Japan during the Meiji period. It is noteworthy that historically, the Japanese did not distinguish between the fine and the applied arts in the same way as European countries, at least not until the country opened up its borders in 1854. It is said that the term *bijutsu*—a translation of the European concept of fine arts—began to be used in relation to adjusting the categorisation of objects to the world's fairs in the early 1870s.<sup>4</sup> Before that, 'art' objects were deemed to be more or less practical in Japan—for religious reasons, for ornamental purposes, and for descriptive supplements, such as illustrations for books. In addition, woodblock prints, which particularly fascinated the West as fine art at the time, were regarded as trivial and were considered cheap entertainment commodities in Japan. Thus, it would be fair to say that business-oriented people such as traders discovered an economic opportunity in the recognition of these objects by the West: there was a period when the woodblock prints were not valued in Japan, but Westerners held them in high regard as pieces of fine art.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Japan's long history of recognising the practical dimensions of art drove the Japanese to appreciate the economic potential of their art forms.

When the Japanese government observed the attention devoted to Japanese craft objects at world fairs, it sensed an economic prospect and decided to turn craft objects into a source of export income. Consequently, the government undertook special efforts to promote the export of contemporary Japanese crafts, such as ceramics. The government also intervened in the creative realm and encouraged artisans to generate designs that would satisfy the tastes of foreign purchasers.

At the same time, Europeans tended to confuse Japan with other Asian countries at world fairs and Japan lacked adequate exposure to foreign art because of its long and self-imposed isolation. Thus, Japan was incentivised to create a unique identity for itself on the world stage. Participation in a series of European expositions provided Japan with the opportunity to establish a sense of Japan and Japanese objects. This identification, definition, and differentiation of the essence of Japanese art applied even to Japanese officials and artists, who had never been required to reflect on the issue. The Japanese displays at these expositions were often seen as exotic and drew viewers who wanted to admire something new and different from their own culture. However, some individuals, especially the Japanese exhibitors, desired increased scholarly attention from Western visitors and sought to enhance and intensify the global understanding of the current realities of Japan. For example, government officer Maeda Masana (1850–1921), who later became responsible for the 1878 Exposition Universelle, prepared a series of articles for the 1876 Exposition Universelle regarding a wide range of topics such as the lacquerware, pottery, social order, and agriculture of Japan.<sup>6</sup> These publications suggest that Japan tried to distinguish itself and its art from other countries through these expositions, and attempted to establish its own unique image in the international arena.

Luring international buyers for Japanese objets d'art required the creation of craft items that were simultaneously differentiated and identifiable, exotic, and attractive to Europeans. The government thus circulated a design guide entitled *Onchi Zuroku* (published 1875–1881) to assist artisans in making suitable changes to their designs. This guide was probably named after the Japanese saying *onko chishin*, which signifies discovering something new by studying the past. The guide purposed to disseminate knowledge of good design as well as designs that would sell well in export markets.<sup>7</sup> Craft items were increasingly generated to match the demands of foreign buyers, and the market for such specialised art items became more business oriented. The practicality of such endeavours harmonised with the original Japanese conception of art, and such an alignment boosted the business side of the creation of artistic objects. Art was always practical and sellable throughout Japan's history, so it was easy for the artisans to follow and execute the government's policy of promoting art sales to foreigners.

However, the policy exerted the unintended side effect of degrading Japanese art. Some lamented that Japanese art deteriorated in quality because of efforts to adapt to the demands of foreign buyers, considering that this conscious shift caused Japanese art to lose its original beauty; such criticism was sometimes repeated by non-Japanese critics.<sup>8</sup> However, their critiques were grounded in the Western conception that fine art ought to be independent of ordinary life and commerce. The criticism also exemplified the manipulated ideals of foreign viewers in terms of their expectations from Japanese art objects. They desired *fine art*, a phenomenon that could be distinguished from ordinary daily life; and they coveted *Japanese art*, a manifestation of aesthetics that could be differentiated from Western art.

## **WATANABE SEITEI**

The situation surrounding objets d'art in Japan for Western consumption was shaped by conscious decision-making, and these conditions influenced the creation of Japanese art. The changes mentioned in the previous section occurred in the realm of crafts. Could a similar attitude also be discerned with regard to paintings? This section focuses on Watanabe Seitei

(1851–1918), a painter who produced designs for applied art in addition to paintings in the generally accepted sense, and who was one of the first Japanese artists to visit Europe.

Seitei has not been studied as much in the existing literature as other artists. It was only recently that the first single cohesive monograph on his biography was published by Akiko Furuta in 2018, which is rather concise in each section but covers every stage of his life.<sup>9</sup> As Doshin Sato and Masayuki Okabe emphasised, Seitei was preferred more by foreigners and his oeuvre dispersed all over the world; thus, he had been forgotten in Japan for a long time.<sup>10</sup> Hence, this article will locate Seitei and his artworks in the context of the national art of Japan through several viewpoints: his training and experience in craft and art, his practice of *kachō-ga* (bird and flower paintings), and his conceptualisation of Japanese art. It is contended that his career was always closely connected to the national art of Japan and was shaped by his exposure to foreign perspectives. Certain aspects of his artistic career can be more comprehensively understood if his art is analysed through the lens utilised in this article.

Seitei trained under Kikuchi Yōsai (1788–1878), after he was recommended to the master by another established painter, Shibata Zeshin (1807–1891).<sup>11</sup> However, he did not follow Yōsai's path: Yōsai was famous for his historical paintings, while Seitei achieved acclaim for his paintings of birds and flowers. Seitei and Yōsai showed certain commonalities even though they were quite different in their specialisation and styles of paintings. Yōsai taught Seitei his method to observe and recall real objects and to replicate them in his paintings, in a manner akin to Western art practices, while it was more common in Japan to study artworks previously created by other artists.<sup>12</sup>

Circa 1875, Seitei began to work as a designer for Kiriū Kosho Kaisha, a company that produced crafts for export. Kiriū Kosho Kaisha was a quasi-governmental trading company for Japanese objects such as lacquerware, ceramics, and copperware. It was established a year after the 1873 Vienna World Fair, at which Japan made a successful showing and substantial sales. The company led the international trade of Japanese objects and had established branches in New York in 1877 and in Paris in 1878. However, the company's success was short-lived, and it was dissolved in 1891. Seitei worked for the company by providing designs for the products they sold. Because craft objects from the company and other similar enterprises were intended to maximise profits, their designs incorporated motifs that were suited to the particular sensibilities and expectations of Western buyers. Therefore, it could be said that Seitei's work for the company exposed him to the type of Japanese arts and crafts that would be appreciated in export markets and introduced him to the styles and techniques of Western art.

In addition, Seitei sometimes collaborated with Namikawa Sōsuke (1847–1910), who was famous for his ceramics, especially in the international export market. Seitei sometimes assisted Sōsuke with Japanese designs for his ceramic items (Fig. 1, c.1880). Sōsuke invented a technique for producing cloisonné without wire lines. Previously, cloisonné enamel required a wire to be embedded to draw lines to separate enamels of different colours. In the non-wired cloisonné enamel, an artisan would also use wire to make segments but could remove it before the final firing, resulting in a slight merging of colours, as well as smooth shifts between differently coloured areas without disruptions created by the embedded wire. This enabled ceramic wares to portray effects similar to watercolour-painting with a delicate gradation of colours and translucency. This technique allowed the pictorial effects of



Figure 1. Namikawa Sōsuke, after Watanabe Seitei (manufactured by Tokyo Cloisonné Company), kidney-shaped tray with two pigeons, c. 1880, copper, inlaid with gold and silver wire cloisonné enamel, 24.5 x 30 x 1.8 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

enamelware to be enhanced, allowing the accomplishment of pictorial designs that included birds, flowers, and landscapes, in which Japanese artists, including Seitei, often specialised. Seitei sometimes provided designs for Sōsuke's ceramic objects. It seems likely that Seitei contributed to the shaping of images depicted on Japanese objects that were admired by foreign buyers, and that Seitei was familiar with the motifs and colours attractive to Westerners.

In relation to the job for Kiriū Kosho Kaisha, Seitei had the opportunity to travel to Europe for the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878.<sup>13</sup> Although the duration of his stay in Europe is not exactly known, it is estimated roughly from 1878 to 1880 because Seitei exhibited a painting at the second domestic industrial exhibition in Japan in 1881 after he had returned to Japan.<sup>14</sup>

Seitei was one of the first artists trained in Japanese traditional art to travel to Europe. Some artists had been to Europe to learn European techniques before him or around the same time as him. However, unlike Seitei whose specialisation was in traditional Japanese painting, most of the other artists who had travelled abroad specialised in the Western style of painting. In Japan, paintings have been regarded roughly separated into two categories since Western art was officially imported into Japan and began to be learned by the Japanese: *yoga*—which literally means Western painting—and *nihonga*—Japanese painting which perpetuated traditional Japanese art. The art education of the period was also based on this categorisation. For example, the *yoga* painter Yamamoto Hōsui studied fine arts in Paris between 1878 and 1887. Part of his visit coincided with Seitei's stay in Paris. While Seitei was in Paris for his job for Kiriū Kosho Kaisha and had more autonomy, Hōsui—like other *yoga* painters who were also in similar situations—was there as an art student, learning from the French academic painter Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). Hōsui's role restricted him to the study of academic



Figure 2. Watanabe Seitei, *Birds on a Branch*, watercolour on paper, 24.4 x 19.4 cm, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA. Courtesy of Clark Institute. © The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown MA, 2010.

realism; therefore, he did not have autonomy and does not seem to have been involved in more progressive circles such as that of the Impressionists.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, in Paris, Seitei joined social gatherings that included diverse figures of French art patrons, artists, and intellectuals. French writer Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896) recorded some occasions in his journal in which he dined with other French and some Japanese people. Seitei's name is mentioned in the journal, although Goncourt inaccurately registered his name as Sei.<sup>16</sup> Seitei might have introduced himself using a shortened name, or it could have been misremembered. Regardless, according to Goncourt's journal, Seitei made a painting of birds and flowers with quick brush strokes at the gathering in November 1878 and amazed the other guests.<sup>17</sup> He gave that painting to Edgar Degas (1834–1917). The work, *Birds on a Branch*, is now at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and its inscription reads "Degas-kun, Seitei sekiga (to Mr Degas, painted by Seitei)" (Fig. 2, ca. 1871–1917).<sup>18</sup>

The Japanese art tradition encompasses an impromptu performance called *sekiga*, in which an artist makes a painting in front of other guests, often in the presence of literati and painters, at gatherings in places such as restaurants.<sup>19</sup> It has been suggested that some foreign visitors to Japan attended such gatherings during the Meiji period—these art productions were new to them because they were not accustomed to the tradition of demonstrating the process of



quick art making to the public, or of having food and drinks at such occasions.<sup>20</sup> Seitei's painting at the aforementioned gathering might have been inspired by this tradition. Seitei might have had prior experiences with *sekiga* and been familiar with rapid paintings at a banquet. Pieces generated in a *sekiga* performance sometimes used poetry and classical knowledge as their motifs and themes, as these could be understood and appreciated by the audience. However, Seitei's piece did not cite Japanese literature subjects or anything that would require prior knowledge from an audience that included French guests. Instead, he selected birds and flowers for the subject, probably considering it was an appropriate choice for this occasion to please the audience, as the subject would be relatable to his French audience, and it increased its popularity as a representative theme of Japanese art, as examined in the section below.

Seitei and Degas both worked with quick brush strokes and therefore Degas and the Impressionists' work and Seitei's *sekiga* performance shared certain attributes. Although the painters met at least once, it is not known whether either artist was influenced by the other to a great extent. However, there is one known example of a Western painter who admired and was influenced by Seitei, the Italian painter Giuseppe de Nittis (1846–1884).<sup>21</sup> Seitei's style is often described as incorporating Western influences and it is regarded as similar to that of European paintings because of its realistic, three-dimensional depictions of details.<sup>22</sup> This might have resulted from the lessons from Yōsai, in combination with his international experience. It is however pertinent to note that specific European artworks or artists might not have had a direct influence on Seitei, because it is difficult to find examples of borrowed compositions and motifs in his art pieces from specific European painters.

## **KACHŌ-GA AS NATIONAL ART**

Seitei was known for his paintings of birds and flowers, an important subject in the context of Japanese art as received by foreign audiences. In her monograph on the nineteenth-century Japanese painter Taki Katei (1830–1901), Rosina Buckland indicated that Katei's *kachō-ga*—and *kachō-ga* in general—was an invented tradition. Katei used the form as an attempt to break away from the Chinese pictorial tradition, especially Chinese-influenced *bunjinga* (literati painting).<sup>23</sup> Although the term *kachō-ga* literally translates to 'flower and bird paintings', the form does not depict merely birds and flowers: it can include any kind of plants, marine life, insects or animals. If one had to define it, it is probably most similar to the still life in Western art. Although the subject was popular before the nineteenth century, it evolved and became distinguished from the conventional context in this period. *Kachō-ga* painters were well-trained and significantly influenced by Chinese art of the Ming and Qing periods, especially through *Nanpin-ha*, which Japanese artists adopted and adapted to create new unique forms.<sup>24</sup> In the period of Japonisme, *Kachō-ga* came to be recognised as a style that was representative of Japan in Western eyes, and eventually became the most popular style of design for exported craft objects. Emphasising a connection to and admiration of nature by depicting birds and flowers probably also appealed to Western audiences, which idealised Japan as the opposite of industrialised European countries. They also found it easier to understand *kachō-ga* than other popular themes and styles in Japanese art which required prior knowledge of history and mythology.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 3. Totoya Hokkei, *Hokkei Kachō Zue: Kyōka Hyakkachō* (Hokkei's Guide to Birds and Flowers: One-Hundred Birds and Flowers with Kyōka Poems), 1826, woodblock-printed book, 20 x 15 cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Japanese woodblock prints also featured similar types of compositions that predominantly portrayed birds and flowers. Those prints, including book illustrations, showcased the development and increasing popularity of birds and flowers as subject matter significantly. Since the mid-Edo period the subject of flowers and birds became forming an independent genre, while, in earlier periods, those prints often combined visual images with literature (especially poetry), with encyclopaedic interests in natural history or served practical purposes as studies and models for later painters who wanted to learn drawing and motifs.

Illustrations or visualisations that referenced literature, such as poems and word games, focused more on the poetry or on interpretations of literary references rather than on the birds and flowers themselves. Thus, the visual representations of the flora and fauna were often somewhat subordinate (Fig. 3, 1826). Natural history paintings depicting birds and flowers were more focused on revealing and recording the details and structures of the subjects (Fig. 4, c.1844–1846). These images often depicted their subjects in detail from various angles, although they were often aesthetically well-executed. The disjointed perspectives fulfilled a scientific purpose, and such paintings were probably meant to be used as study material for further artistic development as well. However, as Riko Imabashi suggested, *kachō-ga* had established its own identity in prints as an aesthetic subject by the late Edo period and had separated itself into a legitimate genre.<sup>26</sup> In alignment with this view, Seitei also published



Figure 4. *Honzō Zufu* (Natural History Album), c. 1844-1846, ink and colour on paper, 25.2 x 17.6 cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum.





Figure 5. Watanabe Seitei, *Lacquer Tree and Japanese Tit*, in 'Seitei Kachō Gafu' (Picture Album of Birds and Flowers), 1903, woodblock-printed book, 25 x 17.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. © Photo SCALA, Florence.

albums of *kachō-ga* prints in 1890–1891 and in 1903. These are independent as *kachō-ga* and are worth being appreciated by the readers in their own right (Fig. 5, 1903).

As *kachō-ga* became more popular and familiar, royal commissions of such works ensured that it was soon considered a representative style of Japan and its art. Buckland listed one example in which Katei was involved, the ceiling paintings for the Meiji Palace, which was begun in 1884 and completed in 1888.<sup>27</sup> Twenty-seven artists, including Katei, were commissioned to create *sugido-e* (paintings on cedar panels) for the ceiling. *Kachō-ga* was chosen as the theme for the ceiling due to its popularity and also possibly as a symbol of Japan's national identity for foreign visitors.<sup>28</sup>

Seitei also collaborated with Namikawa Sōsuke to accomplish a project to decorate a room in a royal building, Akasaka Palace, which was completed in 1909 as a residence for the crown prince.<sup>29</sup> The palace was designed in the Baroque revival style and its rooms were decorated in various European styles of beauty and magnificence, though the interior decorative scheme also reflected Japanese nationalism. Certain elements considered representative of Japan and Japanese art that were popular in Japan at that time were incorporated into the decorations.

In a room now called *asahi no ma* (the room of the dawn), the ceiling painting by a French artist depicts the Roman goddess Aurora in her chariot.<sup>30</sup> Aurora is the goddess of the dawn, and this theme was probably selected because of its similarity to Japan's national symbol of the



Figure 6. Namikawa Sōsuke, after Watanabe Seitei, Cloisonné Medallions of Flowers and Birds, 1906-7, in Kachō no ma, Akasaka Palace, Tokyo. Courtesy of Cabinet Office State Guest Houses [https://www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/akasaka/kacho\\_no\\_ma/](https://www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/akasaka/kacho_no_ma/).



Figure 7. Namikawa Sōsuke, *Pair of cloisonné vases with designs of geese*, c. 1895-1905, private collection. Photographed by Wmpearl, 2014, CC0 1.0 Universal. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pair\\_of\\_cloisonn%C3%A9\\_vases\\_with\\_designs\\_of\\_geese\\_by\\_Namikawa\\_Sosuke.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pair_of_cloisonn%C3%A9_vases_with_designs_of_geese_by_Namikawa_Sosuke.jpg).

rising sun. In the *sairan no ma*, named after the Chinese/Japanese legendary bird *ran* (*luan* in Chinese), motifs of this legendary bird were used to adorn a mirror and a fireplace. Some of the reliefs in the same room are based on Japanese armour, which seem to combine European and Japanese characteristics, by adopting European displays and usages of armour as decorative motifs yet using traditional Japanese armour designs. The dance hall, *hagoromo no ma*, also completed by a French painter, features a ceiling painting based on the Noh play *Hagoromo*. The walls between the windows are adorned with reliefs that combine various art-related motifs, especially music. Western instruments are depicted alongside Japanese ones, such as a Japanese drum (*tsuzumi*) and a Japanese lute (*biwa*). Seitei's designs were used in a room called *kacho no ma*—'the room of birds and flowers' (Fig. 6, 1906–7). Thirty oval-shaped plates, which were designed by Seitei and manufactured by Sōsuke, are set in niches on the walls of the room: 16 on the west side, six on the south, and eight on the east. Each plate depicts a different combination of species of birds and plants with one exception: *Japanese Bantam*, which features only birds.

Since the palace was first used as a royal residence and was later utilised to welcome state guests, it is reasonable that the decorative scheme and the motifs were chosen to convey specific messages. It could be said that the palace was particularly designed to showcase Japan's unique cultural identity, as well as its development and its ability to compete with other powerful countries of the world. In this context, the birds and flowers depicted on the medallions by Seitei and Sōsuke should be also considered representative of Japan's cultural identity. The subject of birds and flowers was regarded as a representative image of Japan at the time. Other nationalistic motifs are present throughout the palace: decorative themes based on Japanese national symbols, such as the rising sun in the *asahi no ma*; local legends and stories, such as *ran* and *Hagoromo*; and Japanese objects, including traditional armour and musical instruments. Furthermore, Sōsuke's ceramics, such as pairs of vases, were also used as gifts for state guests. A depiction of a chrysanthemum, the symbol of Japan's royal family, was often added to such objects (Fig. 7, c.1895–1905), and many of these items were also decorated with bird and flower motifs.

### SHAPING JAPANESE ART: *BIJUTSU SEKAI*

Japan's artistic tradition before the Meiji period was shaped by individual aesthetic schools such as *Kanō-ha* and *Shijō-ha*. This situation, however, began to change when the Japanese encountered foreign art and the Western world's interest in Japanese objects. At the same time, the growing influence of overseas art and their interest prompted a nationalist response and led to the new conceptualisation of Japanese art as a whole, subordinating the conventional categorisation of schools of art to an overall identity defined by its marked difference from foreign art. The introduction of the concept of *nihonga* accelerated this transformation. The term *nihonga* was initially used to describe art which predated the import of European art into Japan; it soon became a genre that was opposed to, and competed with, *yoga*, Western painting. Seitei seemed to be aware of this aspect, the necessity of the national art, as evidenced by his publication *Bijutsu Sekai* (*The Art World*), which will be discussed in this section. This publication showcased Japanese art as a whole, as opposing to Western art, by including artworks from various different schools of art in Japan that had previously been





Figure 8. Watanabe Seitei, ed., *Bijutsu Sekai* (The Art World), vol. 1, front cover, 1890, woodblock-printed. Courtesy of Harvard Library. © Harvard Library.

regarded as independent. It appears to have been grounded in his belief in the necessity of a unified national artistic tradition, instead of individual schools of aesthetics.

Late in his career, Seitei created and edited this interesting journal, which was published by Shun'yōdō, a book publisher based in Tokyo (Fig. 8, 1890).<sup>31</sup> *Bijutsu Sekai* comprised a series of albums of woodblock prints from various artists. A total of 25 volumes were published between 1890 and 1894. The journal featured prints of various genres of art and from both historic and contemporary Japanese painters belonging to diverse schools that were previously considered to be distinct from each other. Some later examples of similar publications, such as *Nihon Gafu* (1891, published by Kinkōdō), *Miyo no Hana* (1892, Gosharō Shoten), and *Meika Gafu* (1896, Kinkōdō), also included artists from various groups, but *Bijutsu Sekai* was the first of its kind.<sup>32</sup>

In *Bijutsu Sekai*, many famous old masters, including the founders of different schools of art, were represented. Painters including Kanō Eitoku and Tosa Mitsunori from *Kanō-ha* and *Tosa-ha*, the two major schools of art, were also represented. Goshun, the founder of *Shijō-ha*, and Maruyama Ōkyo, the founder of *Maruyama-ha* (often called *Maruyama-Shijō-ha* because he trained in the *Shijō* tradition with Goshun) were also featured. Works from *Nanga* (*bunjinga*)

and Shen Nanping of *Nanpin-ha*, which were related to the *Kachō-ga* tradition, were reprinted, as well as *Rinpa* works such as those of Ogata Kōrin. The variety extended to some more independent painters such as Hanabusa Itchō, Kaihō Yūshō, Hasegawa Tōhaku, Sesshū, and others. Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige, and Itō Jakuchū were amongst the *Ukiyo-e* painters included in the journal. The journal also showcased modern masters who had only recently passed away, Kikuchi Yōsai (Seitei's own master), Kawanabe Kyōsai and Shibata Zeshin, whom Seitei had first approached for art training, were also included. Those images from various old masters must have enabled the readers, including artists and art critics, to learn about historic masterpieces beyond the division of the different schools, some of which were rarely accessible by viewers, by disseminating reproductions for a fair price.

In the autobiographical essay he included in volume 25, Seitei listed 16 masters he especially respected and learned from: Sesshū, Shūgetsu Tōkan, Kanō Tan'yū, Hishikawa Moronobu, Hanabusa Itchō, Ogata Kōrin, Soga Shōhaku, Yosa Buson, Ikeno Taiga, Maruyama Ōkyo, Nagasawa Rosetsu, Ganku, Tani Bunchō, Miyagawa Chōshun, Kitagawa Utamaro and Katsushika Hokusai. Most of them were represented in the volumes of *Bijutsu Sekai*, apart from Shūgetsu Tōkan, Soga Shōhaku, and Ikeno Taiga. This was possibly due to their specialisations in *suiboku-ga* (ink wash paintings), as Seitei might have preferred the inclusion of more coloured images than black and white pieces, to take advantage of the technique of multicolour woodblock printing.

Seitei also called for images from living painters, and the journal promoted contemporary artists, offering opportunities for aspiring masters to create and publish new pieces. The contemporary contributors featured in it included other painters who had studied under his master Yōsai, Mishima Shōsō (who had also worked for Kiriū Kosho Kaisha) and Matsumoto Fūko; *Nanga* painters, such as Taki Katei and Sugawara Hakuryū; *Kanō* painters Hashimoto Gahō and Kobayashi Eikō; *Shijō* painters Kubota Beisen and Kōno Bairei; and *Ukiyo-e* painters such as Tsukioka Yoshitoshi and Tomioka Suisen. The contemporary contributors belonged to diverse groups, as well as the aforementioned old masters. Among them, Beisen exhibited a strong interest in Western art and his work demonstrated his reactions to it. Volume 24, pages 10–11 of *Bijutsu Sekai* featured Beisen's *Shinsen'en Ryūjo Shutsugen* (a depiction of the rain-god dragon Zennyō Ryūō) (Fig. 9, 1893). The posture of the main figure of the dragon god in the image is modelled on that of the principal figure in John William Waterhouse's *Circe Invidiosa* (1892).

Seitei seemed to have arranged some of the volumes around specific themes to ensure that the full range of diverse types of images found in the history of art in Japan was showcased, in addition to covering numerous artists from different schools. For instance, volume 15 was dominated by images relating to the new year, volume 17 was dedicated to paintings of female figures (*bijin-ga*), and volume 11 featured historical paintings. Volume 23 is also interesting: it was based on the tradition of *meisho-zue* (directories of renowned places), books with illustrations and maps that explain famous places, their histories and legends.





Figure 9. Kubota Beisen, *Shinsen'en Ryūjo Shutsugen* (a depiction of the rain-god dragon Zennyō Ryūō) in *Bijutsu Sekai*, vol. 24, 1893, woodblock-printed. Courtesy of Harvard Library. © Harvard Library.

The last volume, 25, was an album specifically dedicated to Seitei's own *kachō-ga* works. In addition to *kachō-ga* in a narrow sense, it included origami cranes, departing from the strict interpretation of *kachō-ga* that only included realistic paintings of flora and fauna. This volume also included one particular image on pages 22–23 that resembled a natural history painting or a study for further creation, depicting details of birds in several different styles. However, exceptions apart, most of the volumes of the series featured various genres of paintings. Another interesting point is the selection of certain images from the past; these selections were also quite varied and not limited to certain types of objects or art. Screens, fans, hanging scrolls, prints and calligraphy were all featured.

Seitei's series of albums reprinted artworks of various different types and from varying stages of Japan's history. They incorporated ancient and contemporary creations, multiple schools of art, and examples from a wide range of subjects and genres. It seems that Seitei tried to provide an overview of the history of Japanese art, or at least a collective sense of the identity of Japanese art, through his project. In other words, he used *Bijutsu Sekai* to present his idea of Japan's national art, encompassing various artists and artworks, intending the journal to represent Japanese art as a whole.

In addition, the publication also reflects some connoisseurial interest in aspects such as the signature stamps of the painters, which were used to evaluate and verify the authenticity and the period of artworks, because some painters changed their stamps

over time.<sup>33</sup> Most of the volumes also featured essays written by Kawasaki Chitora, a professor at *Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō* (Tokyo Art School), as epilogues. This effort to create a unified catalogue of knowledge about Japanese art and to promote the understanding of the artistic traditions of Japan seems to support the view that this publication series was driven by Seitei's desire to establish a unified definition of the Japanese art tradition. This publication also probably helped to establish the idea of Japanese art among its foreign readers. It was popular with foreign visitors in addition to domestic audiences, particularly tourists staying at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, which reportedly ordered fifty to sixty copies of each volume.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear that Seitei consciously promoted his own work and shaped his presentation of Japanese art in reaction to Western art and Western attention. The Japanese art world changed in this era and the art produced in this period was specifically designed to appeal to Western tastes as well as to differentiate itself from others. In the early part of his career, Seitei was involved in a market-oriented practice whose aim was to sell Japanese products to Western audiences by focusing on designs which would appeal to foreign buyers. Furthermore, in the later part of his career, he seemed to focus more on the institution of identity for Japanese art and to emphasise its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the national art of other countries.

Alongside the popularity of the subject in the international art market, *kachō-ga* began to be identified in Japan itself as the foremost national representation of Japanese art, and Seitei was one of the contributors to this phenomenon. In his later career, he contributed to the conceptualisation of Japanese art and to art education in Japan through his publication, *Bijutsu Sekai*. His career was always closely associated with the formation of a national art for Japan, which was shaped by reactions to Japan's acute exposure to foreign cultures and audiences. However, Seitei was hardly the only artist to react to the West. Japonisme was a dynamic and interactive movement that encompassed two aspects: it influenced Japan and Japanese art even as it caused Western art to be affected by Japanese aesthetic traditions.

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<sup>2</sup> Noriko Teramoto, *Pari Bankoku Hakurankai to Japonisumu no Tanjō* [Paris Expositions and the Birth of Japonisme] (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 2017), 70–71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Goro Yamamoto, *Ishosetsu: fu Orimono Tokeihyo* [Theory of Design: with Statistics of Fabric] (Tokyo: Shokusen Kenkyūkai, 1890), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Yu Kawazoe, “Yokohama ga Uru ‘Nippon’: Samurai Shōkai wo Chushin ni” [‘Japan’ Sold by Yokohama: Trading Company Samurai Shōkai] *Bungaku* 16, no. 6 (Nov and Dec 2015): 150–151.

<sup>6</sup> Teramoto, *Pari Bankoku Hakurankai*, 281–284.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>9</sup> Akiko Furuta, *Hyōden Watanabe Seitei: Seiryū no Kage ni* [Biography of Watanabe Seitei: In the Shadow of Willow] (Tokyo: Brucke, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Doshin Sato, “Watanabe Seitei ha Naze Ōbei de Konomaretaka [Why Watanabe Seitei Was Favoured by Westerners],” in Ikuro Hirayama and Tadashi Kobayashi ed., *Hizō Nihon Bijutsu Taikan 10 Kurakuho Kokuritsu*

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- Bijutsukan* [Japanese Art: The Great European Collections 10 Kraków] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993), 225–229; Masayuki Okabe, “Kashō-ki Watanabe Seitei Kaiko: Reisoku Watanabe Suiha, Sakuhin Shozai, Bijutsu Sekai Jihitsu Rireki [Watanabe Seitei: His Son Suiha, Locations of Artworks, and Autobiography in Bijutsu Sekai],” *Teikyo University Teikyo Shigaku* 22 (Feb 2007): 191–247.
- <sup>11</sup> Masayuki Okabe, ed., *Watanabe Seitei: Kachō-ga no Kokōnaru Kagayaki* [Watanabe Seitei: The Glory of Bird-and-Flower Painting] (Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu, 2017), 88.
- <sup>12</sup> Koichiro Noji, “Kindai Shoki Nihonga ni okeru Seiyō Kaiga Hyōgen no Chokusetsuteki Juyō: Watanabe Seitei no Kouseki wo Megutte [The Reception of Western Pictorial Expression in Nihonga: Watanabe Seitei],” *Seijō University Bigaku Bijutsushi Ronshū* 19 (March 2011): 480.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.
- <sup>15</sup> Seitei and Hōsui seem to have shared some part of their personal networks in Paris, because they are both named as contributors for a periodical, *La Vie Moderne*. “Collaborateurs Artistiques,” *La Vie Moderne* (10 Apr 1879) cited in Takashina Erika, “Pari Jidai no Yamamoto Hōsui [Hōsui in His Stay in Paris],” *Kindai Gasettsu* 4 (1995): 49–50.
- <sup>16</sup> Okabe, ed., *Watanabe Seitei*, 6–8.
- <sup>17</sup> Edmond De Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt (Deuxième Série, Troisième Volume Tome, Sixième 1878–1884) Mémoires de la Vie Littéraire*, “Jeudi 28 Novembre,” accessed 30 Mar 2020, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17505>.
- <sup>18</sup> Noji, “Kindai Shoki Nihonga ni okeru Seiyō Kaiga Hyōgen,” 478.
- <sup>19</sup> Susumu Hayashi, *Nihon Kinsei Kaiga no Zuzōgaku: Shukō to Shin'i* [The Iconology of Modern Japanese Paintings: Taste and Meaning] (Tokyo: Yagi Shoten, 2000), 308.
- <sup>20</sup> Tomoko Kawasaki, “Rainichi Seiyōjin to Bakumatsu-Meiji Zenki no Shogakai [Western Visitors in Japan and Performances at a Banquet in the End of the Edo and the Early Meiji Period],” *Kindai Gasettsu* 19 (2010): 47–50.
- <sup>21</sup> Noji, “Kindai Shoki Nihonga ni okeru Seiyō Kaiga Hyōgen,” 477. Nittis bought a painting *Pigeons at Sensōji (Asakusa Kannon Temple)*, which is now at the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
- <sup>22</sup> Sayoko Ueda, “Niwatori no Byōsha ni Miru Seitei no Yōhu Hyōgen [Seitei’s Westernised Expressive Style in His Depictions of Hens and Roosters]” in Okabe, ed., *Watanabe Seitei: Kachō-ga no Kokōnaru Kagayaki*, 25.
- <sup>23</sup> Rosina Buckland, *Painting Nature for the Nation: Taki Katei and the Challenges to Sinophile Culture in Meiji Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 127.
- <sup>24</sup> Rosina Buckland, “Taki Katei no Kachō-ga ni okeru Nihon Hyōshō [The Representation of Japan in Kachō-ga by Taki Katei],” trans. Fumiko Kobayashi, *Bungaku* 16, no. 6 (Nov and Dec 2015): 116–117.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.
- <sup>26</sup> Riko Imabashi, *Edo no Kachō-ga: Hakubutsugaku o Meguru Bunka to sono Hyōshō* [Bird and Flower Painting in the Edo Period: Culture and Representation of Natural History] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2017): 322, 401–405.
- <sup>27</sup> Rosina Buckland, “Taki Katei no Kachō-ga ni okeru Nihon Hyōshō,” 118–119. The palace was destroyed by a fire in 1945.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 119–123.
- <sup>29</sup> It now serves as a state guest palace for official guests to Japan.
- <sup>30</sup> The artist is not identified, merely described as a French painter. Naikakufu Geihinkan, “Geihinkan Tenjō Kaiga Shūfuku (16) Gyōmu Hōkokusho: 36 gō shitsu [Restoration of State Guest House’s Ceiling Painting (16) Report: Room 36],” May 2019, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Watanabe Seitei, ed., *Bijutsu Sekai* [The Art World] (Tokyo: Shun’yōdō, 1890–1894). Images are available on the Harvard University Library website, accessed on 30 March 2020: [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:52409570\\$1j](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:52409570$1j).
- <sup>32</sup> Sae Arai, “Tashokuzuri Mokuhanga Zasshi Bijutsu Sekai [Multicolour Print Magazine: The Art World],” *Kindai Gasettsu* 26 (2017): 154.
- <sup>33</sup> Ōkyo’s stamps were reproduced in volume 13, Yōsai, Kyōsai and Zeshin’s in volume 16, and volume 25 included several of Seitei’s stamps.
- <sup>34</sup> Arai, “Bijutsu Sekai,” 157.