

Radu Leca

A Heidelberg decked in autumn colours hosted this three-day symposium celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Visiting Professorship in Japanese Art History made possible by the support of the Ishibashi Foundation. While this mode of sponsorship for the academia is a familiar scenario in the US, it is rare in Europe. Furthermore, it has been implemented within a research community in which research on Japan is continuously exposed to other regional and cultural spheres, and thus included in a larger conversation. I think this is the way forward from the insularity of Japanese academia. The uniqueness of this approach was visible in the structure of the event: some presenters and most discussants were from outside Japanese Studies, and the majority of the presentations talked about issues and objects not confined to the Japanese archipelago. So rich were the proceedings (see the programme on <http://iko.uni-hd.de/histories-of-japanese-art>) that my review is necessarily fragmentary. I identified two often overlapping themes:

1. The Complexity of Flows

By flows I mean economic and cultural exchanges into which the artefacts studied by art historians are enmeshed. These were most central to a series of presentations related to trade: for example, Sofia Sanabrai explored the buzz created by the Japanese embassy of 1614 in the colonial hub of New Mexico. The events were captured on folding screens (biombo), already a coveted export item, and the format and techniques were adapted to local iconography. Similar pick-and-match material strategies were conspicuous in presentations on the variety of lacquer objects across Asia (Hidaka Kaori), import textiles substituted with local silk for the internal market (Fujita Kayoko) and Japanese imitations of Chinese ceramics based on diplomatic reports (Maezaki Shin'ya). They made obvious the fact that, throughout history, the Japanese archipelago formed merely one node in a complex global trade network, and the analysis of artefacts originating therein needs to be coordinated among various disciplines. Maritime exchanges were often the focus, resonating with recent calls for an alternative view to land or continent-based national histories (see for example *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, edited by Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Kären Wigen).

Komine Kazuaki's lecture on Mount Sumeru iconography reminded us that Buddhism was one of the most influential pan-Asian flows, and this is why, for example, a quote from the Tale of Genji could be explained through the configuration of King Rama's throne. Max Moerman corroborated with a talk on the enduring Buddhist vision of the world outside Japan, mediated by synthetic cartographic attempts at reconciliation with other world views. Flows were, however, not always fluid, and interaction could also lead to conflict. Thus, Melanie Trede explored the question: 'what made Japan's self-perception as "land of the gods" possible?' through a series of case studies of sites of dispute, including her recent project on digitized handscrolls of the legend of the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman: <http://hachiman.uni-hd.de/>. Trede appealed to the current revitalization of microhistories, following Carlo Ginzburg's recent observation that 'close analysis and global perspective reinforce each other'. The panel's discussant, Bernd Schneidmüller, found parallels with medieval European maps which similarly tried to fit all available knowledge into a pervasive Christian paradigm. In her keynote, Christine Guth raised

the issue of access and participation in the making of worldviews within the 'library of public information' of early modern Japan. To this Moerman acknowledged the need for more rigorous studies of image transmission across different media. An example of such a study was Lai Yu-Chih's discussion of Kishida Ginko's copperplate printing enterprises in late nineteenth-century Shanghai. Kishida played an active role in the reproduction of books, even carving out the phonetic transcriptions of Japanese-published Chinese texts to be able to then sell them in China. His case problematizes distinctions between artist, editor and publisher.

2. The Malleability of Discourse

The very formation of the art historical discipline in Japan and the West is worth reviewing, as was expertly done by Doris Croissant's lecture, for the lessons it can yield for current art historical methodology. As Emiko Yamanashi's talk proved, no one must have been more familiar with the vagaries of canons than the dealer Hayashi Tadamasu, who devised his own alternative system of Japanese art history while playing a central role in reinforcing the stereotypical view of Japanese art in the West. Hayashi mediated between Western scholars such as Ernst Grosse (in Ingeborg Reichle's presentation) and Japanese Sinologists such as Naito Konan (in Tamaki Maeda's presentation), each elaborating alternative aesthetic hierarchies. This was concomitant with the establishment of modern art in Asia. Thus, Aida Wong's paper demonstrated the problematic Japanese influence on the artists of the Lingnan School, most excitingly by showing Japanized works which were used for anti-Japanese resistance. Overall, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century emerged as particularly fruitful for considerations of global flows and the definition of 'Japanese Art'.

Challenges brought by the introduction of new media were central to Mio Wakita's paper, which took up the issue of 'seeing and being seen' in the context of nineteenth-century globetrotting. Wakita discussed the struggles of an indigenous Japanese photographer to subversively take control over the power hierarchy of the gaze surrounding Western consumption of nineteenth-century souvenir photography. One of the illustrations was a very intriguing 'ghostly' photograph which reminded me of the ghosts of discourse floating around the room. The ghoulish tone was continued by Michael Lucken's sophisticated look at incineration practices in modern Japan and their affinity to photography, as illustrated in the work of Araki Nobuyoshi. Lucken's presentation, though theoretically brilliant, did lack historical context, and served as a reminder for me that concepts can take on a balloon-like buoyancy of their own if not anchored to historical facts.

Timon Screech's keynote lecture tackled the fragmentary history of perhaps the most important of early modern Japanese bridges, the Nihonbashi. A possible European urban model mediated what was to become an important element in the symbolic discourse of authority. Screech's analysis was convincing while full of conjectures, but by opening up the toolbox of the art historian, gave the audience the opportunity to reflect on the possibilities on their own. It was a lesson in methodology and craft in putting together an argument.

A similarly instructive approach structured Reiko Tomii's paper: by tracing the use of the medium of stone in postwar Japanese art, Tomii was able to draw unexpected connections between various clusters of artistic production. The range and significance of this production is still far from being fully documented, as was shown by Eugenia Bogdanova's study of the

postwar calligraphy group Bokujinkai with strong connections to the international avant-garde. She explored the controversial term “avantgarde” in relation to the members of this group. On a larger scale, Hayashi Michio performed a cross-section analysis of postwar cultural imagination in connection with the nostalgia for a ‘mother-land’, which reached a high-water mark in the exuberance of the late 1960s. However, Hayashi did not address the gendered nature of this trope. The observation was my contribution to an intense Q&A session spurred by the immediacy of postwar topics. The intensity was preserved by Jacqueline Berndt’s analysis of manga exhibitions outside of Japan, a type of media now so intensely circulated worldwide that any attempt to recover it as ‘Japanese’ is inevitably tinged with political and nationalistic interests.

The two themes above were assembled in Christine Guth’s keynote speech, which resurrected the concept of ‘hybridity’ as a tool to think about the pluralism of material culture. Guth moved away from the post-colonial context of Homi Bhabha’s definition of hybridity while retaining the emphasis on its creative agency. Guth pointed out the nuanced cross-cultural negotiations in which ‘hybrid’ objects – such as sword scabbards using imported ray-skin - were implicated, and therefore the difficulty of their categorization. According to Guth, they ‘should be understood rather as the aggregate products of labour materialized through the forces of local interregional and global trade’. The discussant, Monica Juneja, introduced some necessary questions on the agency of discourse: hybridity crosses boundaries, but does it also create boundaries? And does the study of hybridity also create its own canons? Guth addressed these while answering a question from the audience about the poetic conventions of ray-skin connoisseurship: ‘poetic language is a way of translating something from a commodity into something beyond its materiality’. In a way, this was a comment on the nature of discourse itself, whose rhetoric often tends to obscure its material embodiments. The same issues were taken up in the final discussion (thanks to Yasuko Tsuchikane for letting me consult her final discussion notes).

New Directions

In every field there are purists and connectors. Although the former were able to take delight in the detail of the presentations, this was an event for the latter, and in this sense effectively constructed a space of reflection usually only achievable at a large international conference such as the AAS. It made clear that the study of Japanese Arts is fruitless without considerations of interconnections with its various contexts. And in some cases, it was apparent that even the term ‘Japanese art’ is unwieldy. The proceedings did feel celebratory, and reminded me of the title of a festschrift dedicated to Kobayashi Tadashi, ‘The Abundance of Japanese Art’ - a possible inspiration for the title of the eagerly awaited publication of the proceedings. However, the plurals used in the title of this symposium made all the difference.

Radu Leca

Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Fellow

Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Culture

<http://sainsbury-institute.org/fellowships/robert-and-lisa-sainsbury-fellowship/radu-leca/>