Introduction

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In Japan, the seventeenth century was a time of remarkable artistic innovation developing in the midst of ineluctable social change. A protracted phase of civil strife had ended, and a triumphant military clan was inaugurating a new regime of power. This clan, the Tokugawa, installed their administration—a military government (*bakufu*) headed by a shogun—at Edo, launching the Edo period (1600–1868). Preoccupied with the challenge of establishing dominance, the Tokugawa set to work at several tasks: consolidating their military victories, solidifying political authority, encouraging commercial and agricultural growth, and constructing a new social order. Virtually all forms of cultural production were affected by the changing times, not least of which was art. And in art, it was not just the new that interested people.

Perusing the cultural artifacts from early-seventeenth-century Japan, we begin to sense that many artists and patrons longed for a restoration of stability after years of uncertainty and privation. Some hoped to restore stability by creating continuity with the past; others attempted to fabricate a past that lifted them above the troubles of the present. With these and a multitude of other motivations, artists and patrons turned time and again to traditional themes and styles. And while the past they referred to was only quasi-historical, to their contemporaries they projected an identity of themselves by manipulating time-honored images. Indeed, references to the past are so common in early-seventeenth-century art that many modern historians of Japanese art—using terms that will be examined more closely in what follows—describe this phase as a classical revival (*koten fukkō*), an era of classicism (*kurashishizumu*), or a renaissance (*runesansu*). The early years of the Edo period experienced great diversity in visual culture, and classicism—at least as the authors of this book define the term—was a leading concern in art, a concern that would foster surprisingly varied outcomes later in the period. Thus while this book surveys only one of the many movements in seventeenth-century Japanese art, it offers critical perspectives on a number of significant issues in the study of Edo art history.
Early Edo artists and patrons shaped a variety of images of bygone eras without limiting themselves to a specific place or moment. In many cases it was court culture of the Heian period (794–1185); in other cases, warrior culture of the Kamakura period (1185–1333); in others, yet another cultural phase. Although art historians often imply that early Edo classicism is a well-defined, self-evident concept, clearly it is not. Setting aside for the moment the historical and cultural specificity of the term “classic,” it must first be emphasized that people in the seventeenth century shared no unitary understanding of a classical age for artists to resurrect. Nevertheless, the phrase “classical revival” is still widely used to describe artistic developments in Edo Japan and, for that matter, in other periods—which is to say that artists and patrons in several phases of Japanese history referred to the past thematically and stylistically to edify, to glorify, and to sanctify. Their purpose might have been the edification of a particular audience, the glorification of a ruler, or the sanctification of a place or event.

But how did seventeenth-century artists and patrons imagine the past? Why did they so often select styles and themes from the past, especially from Heian court culture? Were references to the past something new, or were artists and patrons in previous periods equally interested in manners that came to be seen as classical? How did classical manners relate to other styles and themes found in Edo art? And what consequences have arisen from the modern designation of this development as a classical revival? In considering such questions, the contributors to this book posit that classicism is an amorphous, changing concept in Japan, just as in the West. Nettlesome in its ambiguity and its implications, it cannot be separated from the political and ideological interests of those who have employed it over the years.

Central to our study is an understanding of classicism as an instrument employed consciously and consistently by various groups; that is to say, we look at classical art as it was instrumentalized for use in larger social settings. Ranging from faithful replicas of early models to works creatively inspired by traditional imagery, classical art did not follow a fixed style but employed a grammar or vocabulary of visual forms. In looking anew at seventeenth-century classicism, we aim to reconsider the narratives of production and reception of seventeenth-century visual forms. By extension we also consider ways in which the act of defining this art as classical in the early twentieth century served ideological agendas specific to that moment. Classicism—which now ranks as a dominant paradigm in cultural studies of the West and the East alike—was an important device in early Edo art, but it is also an important device in modern studies of
early Edo art. Thus the essays presented here bridge many gaps between centuries and between cultures to address a leading issue in cultural studies: classicism and its problems. Rather than positing a consistent or comprehensive analysis of seventeenth-century classicism, the authors of this book present varied perspectives and contribute to an ongoing dialogue about a complex historical and historiographic concept.

Defining Classicism

Most fields of Japanese cultural studies employ the concept of classicism, each defining it in a slightly different way. Of these fields, it is perhaps literary studies that engage the concept most extensively. The term commonly used in Japanese today to designate the “classics,” *koten* (C: *gudian*), was borrowed centuries ago from Chinese textual sources, where it generally referred to works that set a standard. The term “*koten*”—written with Chinese characters that mean “old texts”—implies veneration for writings from early times, and the centuries-old term “*koga*” (old paintings) reveals a comparable appreciation for art from times past. Today Japanese literary historians do not follow a single definition of classicism, but they tend to apply the term to poetry and prose of the Heian and Kamakura periods. Along similar lines, modern Japanese art historians employ the phrase “*kotenteki bijutsu*” (old textlike art) to mean “classical art,” often in reference to art of the Heian and Kamakura periods. Literary texts played a central role in classically inspired visual arts of seventeenth-century Japan, and, furthermore, the literary concept of *koten* was adopted by modern scholars engaged in identifying a classical revival in Edo art. From this it is perhaps natural to conclude that classicism in Japanese art, while heavily dependent on literary associations, has an ontological status as a distinct category.

But is this necessarily so? Few concepts found in early Japanese writings on art equate with the modern notion of classicism, so it is doubtful that “classical art” was understood as a distinct category of art in the early Edo period. In the seventeenth century, there was a concept of “old texts” and a concept of “old paintings,” but not until the modern era was there a concept of “old textlike art.” As Melanie Trede explains in Chapter 1, several late-Edo authors did borrow concepts related to classicism from Chinese aesthetic discourse; however, it was scholars and enthusiasts of the Meiji period (1868–1912) who began to formulate the modern notion of Japanese artistic classicism following Western notions. According to the Western definition, classicism is synonymous with
harmony, dignity, restraint, balance, simplicity, and objectivity; it also refers to the cultures and aesthetic principles of ancient Greece and Rome. Johann J. Winckelmann (1719–1768), the German scholar credited with founding modern art history and archaeology, spoke of ancient Greek art as the epitome of artistic excellence: grand, noble, and ideal. Although he did not use the term “classical”—in fact, the term was little used until the nineteenth century—his assessments were in keeping with intellectual and artistic elites of his era who aspired to embrace timeless truths and absolute values. Winckelmann established Greek arts of antiquity as archetypal forms against which like forms can be judged and as sources of inspiration for other artists.

For Winckelmann’s successors engaged in the scholarly project of connoisseurship, classicism came to play a central role in the evaluation of artistic quality and the establishment of a canon. By the time that Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) articulated a notion of the classic in High Renaissance art, the concept of classicism in art-historical analysis was firmly set as if in stone. This is the concept that Meiji writers integrated into Japanese art history. And while little stylistic commonality unites the classical arts of Edo Japan and those of the Renaissance in the West, they are comparable in several conceptual respects: both relate to a veneration of antiquity, both employ a rise–peak–decline theory of artistic development, both are canonical, and both set standards for future generations.

In recent years, Japanese and Western scholars involved in a sweeping cultural critique have scrutinized and deconstructed the worldview that gave birth to classicism, and they implicate classicism in an ideologically loaded project of canon formation. Whereas authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to uphold the Western canon of classical art and literature as an epic landscape of unchanging monuments, many historians today find fault with the vagaries and limitations of modern canon formation. In keeping with that critique, the contributors to this book reject the traditional definition of classicism as a core of transcendent and universal ideals given expression in archetypal objects because this notion obscures its role as a mechanism legitimizing dominant cultures. Specifically, the contributors implicate classicism in the West’s “cultural colonization” of Japan (or the self-imposed westernization of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Japan) as well as in the nationalism rampant in imperial Japan of that day.

We can begin to understand how notions of “old textlike art” were formulated in Japan by considering the Meiji-period writings of Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913) and his mentor, Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908). Okakura and
Fenollosa borrowed “classicism,” as well as other terms embedded in Western cultural discourses, to shed a more positive light on Japanese traditions at a time when “precious works of Art and valuable paintings were prized no more than rubbish [in Japan].” Okakura and Fenollosa, whose narratives are generally considered foundational in modern Japanese art historiography, labored valiantly to promote Japanese art. But in basing their analyses on Western canonical models, they introduced concepts foreign to Japanese art and harnessed art to the nationalistic and imperialistic agenda of their own time.

Japan, just emerging as a world power, was making its expansionist intentions evident in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and the annexation of Korea (1910). Given the xenophobic nationalism and imperial absolutism developing in Japan, it is perhaps paradoxical that Japanese commentators found inspiration in Western models. Granted, their motivation was to present home audiences and the wider world with a positive image of Japan’s exclusive cultural heritage. Yet theirs was not an unbiased interpretation of the past. Meiji authors who heralded classicism in Japanese art, like those who valorized a unique literary heritage, found their remarks tied to disturbing nationalistic and totalitarian tendencies.

Recent scholarship has done much to remove the veils cloaking the ideological function of modern discourses on “a unique Japanese culture.” Kuroda Toshio, for example, a Japanese religious historian, has presented a systematic critique of Japan as the “land of the deities” (shinkoku), debunking suprahistorical concepts of Japan as a sacred territory and the emperor as a divine being. These concepts fed into the exclusivist and supremacist tendencies of early-twentieth-century Japanese cultural commentary. According to Kuroda, post-Meiji interpretations of shinkoku were formulated along with the creation of an imperial system (tennishō) and national Shinto (kokka shintō)—an amalgam that precipitated a contemptuous, violent stance toward the outside world. Another case of scholarship demystifying modern Japanese cultural constructs is the philological study conducted by Roy Andrew Miller, who counters the view that the Japanese language is unique and untranslatable. This “myth of the Japanese language” developed hand-in-hand with nationalism in early-twentieth-century Japan.

Art historians and connoisseurs are not immune to the modernist tendency to isolate and aggrandize Japanese culture, but some have begun to work against it. Satō Dōshin, one of those seeking corrective measures in the writing of art history, argues that the modernist understanding of art history in Japan was built upon a “Japanese imperial historical view.” Satō notes that early-
twentieth-century Japan “saw itself as the ‘leader of East Asia’, [and accordingly] ‘East Asian art history’ was constructed as one element of Japan’s exultation of its national prestige.” Despite this growing recognition of problems with exclusivist and nationalist discourses on Japanese culture, many Japanese art historians preserve terms and concepts with troublesome connotations that stem from these discourses. One such term is “miyabi” (courtliness), widely defined in academic circles as an ancient word with meanings that are purely aesthetic—in fact, a word closely associated with classicism in many cases. As Joshua Mostow has noted, however, miyabi was only introduced into common usage in the 1940s and “is thoroughly implicated in the war-time cult of the emperor.” Thus Japanese art and cultural historians are beginning to re-appraise aggrandizing concepts like classicism, a development that foregrounds the present study. This historiographic project must begin with a question: how did the concept of an early-Edo classical revival in art come to assume such an accepted role in modern Japanese art history?

The “Classical Revival”

Writers in Japan began comparing early Edo art and classical Western art at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following Okakura and Fenollosa, the art historian Fukui Rikichirō in 1915 drew analogies between art of the Momoyama period (1573–1600 or 1615) and European art of the Renaissance, assigning to the Momoyama period many works considered in this volume as early Edo paintings. But not until the mid-twentieth century did the cultural historian Hayashiya Tatsusaburō and members of his circle begin to speak of a classical revival (koten fukkō) in seventeenth-century culture. These scholars paid particular attention to a Kan’ei cultural phase (Kan’ei bunka), which they defined as extending one or two decades before and after the Kan’ei era (1624–1644), roughly the first half of the seventeenth century. According to Hayashiya and his academic cohort, three elite social groups shaped Kan’ei culture: ranking warriors, Kyoto aristocrats, and a select set of commoner townspeople (machishita) — a cohesive group of wealthy, educated artisans and merchants who affiliated with aristocrats in cultural salons. Thus, in the estimation of these historians, artistic activities allowed individuals of commoner background to transcend class barriers in the Kan’ei cultural phase.

Hayashiya’s interpretation of a Kan’ei cultural revival, while influential, is only one of a number of scholarly approaches to early Edo art. It did, however, share with others an emphasis on a particular precedent for classicism: court
culture of the Heian period. In fact, members of Hayashiya’s circle seem to have initiated the use of a key phrase, “rebirth of dynastic traditions” (ōchō dentō no fukkatsu), to characterize the Kan’ei classical revival as a return to Heian courtly traditions. But, we should ask, did seventeenth-century artists and patrons actually embrace the Heian aristocratic epoch as a singular “golden age”? This volume contends that they did not. We maintain that the conception of Heian classicism dominating current Japanese art history is a modern myth. According to a standard reductive explanation, Heian arts reached a peak with the flowering of courtly culture in Kyoto during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This aristocratic taste, inclined toward delicacy and aestheticism and perceived as distinguishable from Chinese taste, was supposedly eclipsed in the Kamakura period when warrior patrons came to favor Chinese cultural forms.

Several underlying presumptions make this received interpretation of Heian classicism problematic. One presumption is that Heian-period culture gave rise to a discrete artistic sensibility; in actuality, a variety of artistic currents emerged from Heian culture. Another presumption is that this singular Heian aesthetic can be isolated from foreign precedents; in actuality, scholars have identified Chinese models for many of the varied forms of Heian artistic production. There is still another presumption underlying the received notion of Heian classicism—namely that a break occurred in late-twelfth-century patronage with newly dominant Kamakura warriors favoring bold and realistic art over refined and stylized Heian types. But as Miyajima Shin’ichi recently wrote: “This common but simplistic construction [of a shift from courtly to warrior taste] misconstrues both art and its social context. In fact, the imperial court and Kyoto nobility continued to monopolize the cultural mainstream and to set the standards for ‘high culture.’ ”

These assumptions about Heian artistic classicism inhere in one of the discourse’s central terms—yamato-e (literally “pictures of Yamato”)—with Yamato, the Nara region, being remembered as the ancient heartland of the Japanese people. Although scholars posited a uniquely Japanese yamato-e, thus supporting a nationalistic agenda, this tradition of illustration clearly owes much to Chinese painting and literature. It is also reductive to maintain, as did writers of the mid-1900s, that yamato-e went into decline in the early fourteenth century at the end of the Kamakura period; recent findings indicate, to the contrary, that post-Kamakura artists continued to innovate and to incorporate new subjects, festivals and revelries, for example, into their yamato-e repertoire. The designation of early Edo paintings by Tawaraya Sōtatsu (d. 1643?)—
the “pioneer artist of Rimpa” (see the appendix)—as works of a “yamato-e revival” (that is, a classical revival) is therefore arbitrary, based on the retrospective identification of ruptures and a concomitant denial of continuities. More accurately, these paintings are a “yamato-e continuation.”

The nineteenth-century revival of yamato-e (fukko yamato-e) spearheaded by the painters Tانaka Totoryu (1760–1823) and Reizei Tamechika (1823–1864) should similarly be called a further development in an evolution of Japanese-style painting.

While the classicizing elements of seventeenth-century art are not completely novel—in fact, most make an appearance in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art—references to the past began to carry a new relevance and weight in the early Edo period. In seeking a reason for this tendency, a central matter to consider is the social setting in which classicizing currents developed. In the period under discussion, Tokugawa military lords were putting to rest the terror and political convulsion of the previous century. But as Eiko Ikegami comments: “The Tokugawa pacification was, in many ways, a classic case of state formation through monopolizing the use of violence.” Although Tokugawa leaders claimed that their dominance ensured peace and tranquility under heaven (tenka taihei), opposition to Tokugawa rule, while decreasing over the course of the century, indicates that their governance was not universally appreciated. Many sectors of society had reason to resent the imposed order. And although aggrieved parties probably felt reluctant to voice their protests directly, hints of their discontent are seen in art. Describing a Kyoto renaissance of the 1580s to the 1630s, John Rosenfield perceptively notes that it

seems to have been affected by a strong undercurrent of resistance to the Tokugawa military government. The new regime, highly authoritarian and fearful of rivals, sought to dominate the main political factions in the old capital: the imperial family, hereditary aristocrats, Buddhist clergy, and samurai whose loyalty to the Tokugawa family was not absolute. Allied culturally to the ancien régime were members of the newly enriched bourgeoisie. Thus art that referred to a classical past—whether an age of elegant aristocrats, an age of thriving townspeople, or an age of valiant warriors—came to convey diverse messages about imagined bygone eras, at times attracting those who covertly resisted a repressive regime.

For courtiers who experienced ever greater erosion of their practical political power, classical arts bolstered their pride in a vaunted cultural heritage. Early Edo nobles could express a nostalgic desire to resurrect a golden age by surrounding themselves with images of a glorious imperial past. Classicizing
arts also proved useful as status symbols for wealthy members of commoner classes: the nonruling urban artisans and merchants who saw their options for social mobility narrowing. Just as courtiers reminisced about a long-gone era of imperial power, townspeople treasured an era of past prosperity and respectability, which for them had occurred only a generation or two earlier. Yet references to a classical past could at the same time bolster the new military regime’s claims to status and legitimacy. As sponsors and collectors of art, elite members of warrior society were motivated by various impulses—dynastic, economic, religious, personal—and most significant of the warrior patrons were the Tokugawa lords themselves. With wealth and social connections, the Tokugawa were able to commission and collect a range of classicizing art forms, which they employed in a propaganda campaign as they struggled to establish a legitimizing ideology.

Many other social factors contributed to the emphasis on the past in art. Thanks to economic expansion resulting from agricultural development, as well as growth in transportation and communication infrastructures, people enjoyed new levels of wealth and stability—and, consequently, many could set aside time to become literate and pursue activities such as art, theater, and literature. Higher literacy rates depended on the birth of a publishing industry, as well as the enhancement of lending libraries and book merchandising. With new printing technologies, publishers could produce large numbers of books and augment them with illustrations, allowing for a stream of popular printed material including prose literature written in Japanese (kana zoshi). From the 1630s, commercial printing flourished in Kyoto, which was later surpassed by Osaka and then Edo as the foremost center of printing. Concurrently, growing numbers of professional intellectuals and instructors emerged from various social strata, some accepting almost any student able to pay tuition. With greater public access to instructional texts and trained teachers, cultural activities like No chanting and poetry composition flourished, as did academic interests such as Confucian readings and historical studies.

Spurred by such developments, a new sense of historicism emerged in seventeenth-century Japan—seen in the urge to document and collect old works of art. In order to deal with a burgeoning antiquities market where forgeries periodically made an appearance, Edo-period collectors turned to specialists purportedly able to authenticate items. A number of these specialists were scholar-aristocrats; others were artists. Kano Tan’yū (1602–1674), for example, wrote certificates of authentication for paintings and recorded information on artworks in his notebooks. Several other Kano artists contributed to
early Edo connoisseurship through such texts as *Biographies of Japanese Painters* (Tansei jakubokushō), *Private Guidelines for the Way of Painting* (Gado yōketsu), and *A History of Painting in This Realm* (Honchō gashi).\(^{31}\) Whether composed to transmit information on technique and theory or to promote the Kano school, the treatises testify to a new historical consciousness with art objects as a focus.

This cataloging impulse coincided with an upsurge in the popularity of collecting various types of old paintings and antiquities, a trend quite evident by the middle of the seventeenth century. Paintings from the Muromachi period (1392–1573) attracted much attention, as did Chinese painting of the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). Just as Greek art was appreciated as classical in Renaissance Italy, Chinese painting was embraced as classical in Edo Japan. Among the leading art collectors in seventeenth-century Japan were warrior leaders, priests from courtly temples (*monzeki*), and wealthy townspeople—diverse individuals with diverse tastes and aims. They collected lacquerware, tea ceremony utensils (*chadōgu*), paraphernalia for the incense game (*kōdō*), items for the scholar’s desk, books, calligraphy, paintings, and more. As Kihara Toshie has observed, collectors recognized that such possessions “enhanced their social status and became property that could be passed on to their heirs.”\(^{32}\)

Thus a new historicism developed in seventeenth-century Japan, and interest in art of the past was one of its facets. It is unlikely, however, that this was the sort of historicism we are familiar with today. As visual and textual sources from seventeenth-century Japan demonstrate, many people knew something of the past, whether of heroic personalities or intriguing events. Yet even individuals steeped in learning did not conceive of the past in terms of detailed, linear chronologies or coherent periods as do modern academic historians. Herbert Plutschow explains that the notion of time in premodern Japan depended on periodicity, or a cyclical understanding, which

contrasts with our [modern, Western] linear concept of time according to which all time past is time lost, never recovered other than perhaps in historiography or the theatre. Cyclical time assumes that past time can be recuperated . . . [and] forces people to see their actions as repetitions and imitations of the past.\(^{33}\)

In a culture that views time as cyclical, the past is integral to the present in preserving people’s sense of a common identity and social normalcy. In Edo Japan, artists and patrons shaped a generalized classical repertory and used its
forms and associations not only to comment on the past but also to situate themselves advantageously in the changing social order of their day.

Artists from virtually every school and workshop selected subjects and styles that drew upon tradition, some dedicating themselves exclusively to classical approaches and others sporadically selecting classical manners. Complemented by contemporary styles and themes, classicism was without question a leading movement in art of the seventeenth century. Indeed, artists produced classicizing art in a variety of mediums including painting, ceramics, lacquer, architecture, and garden design. Although this book deals primarily with painting, a comprehensive analysis of the early Edo classical revival would incorporate works in so-called decorative mediums such as ceramic pieces by Nonomura Ninsei (d. ca. 1694) and lacquer objects by Igarashi Dōho (ca. 1643–1678). Ninsei, Dōho, and other artists made use of tradition in their own ways, responding to varied audiences with varied understandings of the past, and their output launched a host of creative efforts in later centuries.

Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Hon’ami Koetsu (1558–1637) would later come to serve as models for successive generations of painters today categorized as Rimpa artists; the new synthetic manner of Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691) would be passed down to a long line of followers in and out of the court atelier; and the innovative approaches of Kano Tan’yū spread among the bakufu painters and beyond to town painters (machi-eshi). In addition, Kano Sanraku (1559–1635) and Kano Sansetsu (1589–1651) established a lineage that prevailed in Kyoto; Sumiyoshi Jokei (1599–1670) and Sumiyoshi Gukei (1631–1705) provided impetus for scores of Sumiyoshi artists; Iwasa Matabei (1578–1650) trained a group of pupils and played a role in launching the artistic movement of ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world). As Edo culture unfolded, the classicizing work of many seventeenth-century artists became canonical in its own right, setting a standard and providing a model for future generations.

With the dawn of the Edo period, therefore, a new historicism blossomed in a country exhausted by war. Just as the Tokugawa leaders recognized the need to quell military and political turbulence, they saw the value of shaping a new social order and sponsoring traditional cultural forms that could express their dominance. Other constituencies in Edo society also looked to time-honored cultural forms to ensure their elite status on a shifting cultural terrain. Thus warriors on the one hand and aristocrats and commoners on the other came to appreciate—for different reasons—arts glorifying the past. The arts of old that artists and patrons chose as models did not share a fixed manner or a set thematic repertory, but they provided a grammar and a vocabulary that could be
adopted wholly or selectively for a certain situation or a particular audience. Various agents encouraged the development of historicizing art, although they showed little commitment to historical accuracy as we might define it today.

Seventeenth-century art came to be labeled “classical” only in the modern period, and the contributors to this book reject the purported equivalence between seventeenth-century references to the past and modern notions of an early-Edo classical revival. Modern writers who first identified Edo artistic classicism followed Western notions of canonicity and cultural authority—contributing to the invention of a timeless, unchanging aesthetic category that had direct ties to the emergence of a modern national identity. These modern constructions of Japanese classicism occurred against the backdrop of a Western-led colonial order in Asia and carried many problematic connotations. Yet despite its internal contradictions, its manifest anachronism, and its ideological assumptions, classicism persists as a dominant paradigm in cultural studies of both the West and the East. Using classicism as a point of departure, the essays in this book therefore contribute to a significant current debate around the globe.

All eight contributors to this volume question what is “classical” about early Edo artistic production. Certain authors focus on the scholarly reception of artworks venerated as classical, taking a historiographic approach to clarify when terms and concepts related to classicism were introduced and uncovering hidden structures of the modern Japanese discourse on classicism. These chapters add to recent critical investigations of ideological motives embedded within cultural studies and shed a skeptical light on claims of neutrality made by modern scholars. Other authors inquire into the communities of artists and patrons who participated in the classical revival, demonstrating the inadequacies of received explanations for the functioning of Edo classicism. The final two chapters consider artworks not previously designated as classical but for which the term—broadly understood to connote strategic reference to the past—is equally valid. Despite a shared interest in reappraising classicism, however, the contributors do not agree on the applicability of the term to seventeenth-century Japanese art.

Some contributors think that classicism distorts our understanding of the ways Japanese artists and audiences of the seventeenth century viewed art; others find the term useful in describing artistic developments and concerns of the day. The latter writers could easily substitute the phrases “uses of tradition” or “the authority of various pasts,” which are, in fact, common working defini-
tions of classicism. Contributors may differ in their attitudes about classicism, but all agree that the modernist handling of classicism as an exclusively aesthetic, value-free indicator of taste presents us with difficulties. We recognize the relevance of recent scholarly currents such as postcolonial, postimperialist, and feminist studies, which call into question totalizing or essentializing approaches that privilege dominant segments of Western culture. Therefore, with a host of varied backgrounds and diverse outlooks, this volume presents a range of approaches to the study of early Edo art and culture. In the end, however, we leave it to the reader to decide whether classicism is problematic to seventeenth-century art.

The first two chapters focus mainly on artists active in the early decades of the seventeenth century—the phase that modern scholars most commonly associate with a classical revival in Edo art. Chapters 3 through 7 carry the exploration of classicism into later decades of the seventeenth century and open up new avenues for investigating classical art in context. These chapters consider both the faithful preservation of certain time-honored traditions and the reworking of past models for specific audiences and clients. Several of the chapters carry us into the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when various novel currents were just beginning to make themselves known—trends such as the emergence of popular ukiyo-e prints and the inception of Chinese-inspired Nanga (literati) painting. With these developments, elements derived from classical art came to play a seminal role in creating waves of innovation that would sweep through later Edo art—such as, to name just one case, ukiyo-e artists’ incorporation of classical references as witty parody or playful metaphor (mitate).

In Chapter 1, “Terminology and Ideology: Coming to Terms with ‘Classicism’ in Japanese Art-Historical Writing,” Melanie Trede deconstructs artistic classicism and canon formation. She begins by discussing the role of classicism in Western culture, where it has long been associated with social and ideological notions of cultural value. Next Trede explains ways in which late Edo authors borrowed terms related to classicism from Chinese aesthetic discourses to construct a protonationalist argument for the superiority of native styles of Japanese art and how, in the process, they laid the foundation for modern Japanese notions of canonicity. Finally, Trede exposes the twentieth-century discourse on Japanese artistic classicism—specifically, its use of Western terms such as “classical revival” and “renaissance” to defend Japaneseness as a singularly important development in Edo art. Uncovering links with nationalism, she thus places classicism under suspicion.
In Chapter 2, “Tawaraya Sōtatsu and the ‘Yamato-e Revival,’” Satoko Tamamushi focuses on four paradigmatic artworks considered central to modern concepts of Edo classicism. She describes the convoluted process by which early-twentieth-century researchers came to credit Sōtatsu with restoring sections of the Heian-period Sutra Scrolls of the Taira Family (Heike nōkyō)—suggesting Sōtatsu’s direct contact with early yamato-e and supposedly proving that the humble town painter was in a position to revive ancient elite traditions in Japanese painting. Many scholars have claimed that the results of Sōtatsu’s contact with early yamato-e can be seen in his later large-scale compositions, such as the three pairs of screens analyzed by Tamamushi. These screens—little known in the late Edo period—were introduced to the public just as a Sōtatsu rage began to hit in the modern period. Imagining Sōtatsu as a great revivалиst and catalyst, modern scholars identified the screens’ subjects as themes resurrected from Heian courtly culture. But in Tamamushi’s estimation, the screens are layered with meanings, some from popular culture of Sōtatsu’s own day.

In Chapter 3, “The Patrons of Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Ogata Kōrin,” Keiko Nakamachi reconstructs patronage networks established by two leading Rimpa painters said to have contributed to early Edo classicism and examines the function and status of their art. Sōtatsu’s sponsors came from a variety of backgrounds, but thematically and stylistically his painting was most closely associated with the imperial court. Kōrin (1658–1716), born several decades after Sōtatsu’s presumed death, had fewer opportunities to receive commissions from elites in Kyoto, driving him to seek an alternative clientele among prominent warriors in Edo. Nakamachi makes a significant point about the subjects that Sōtatsu and Kōrin chose to illustrate: according to a hierarchy of images upheld by warrior lords, scenes with imported subjects of Chinese figures and flowers-and-birds held the foremost place whereas native Rimpa themes held a low status. Nevertheless, as Nakamachi explains, the classical Rimpa repertoire was an effective platform on which Sōtatsu and Kōrin could innovate.

In Chapter 4, “Japanese Exemplars for a New Age: Genji Paintings from the Seventeenth-Century Tosa School,” Laura Allen explores the incorporation of traditional artistic themes into early Edo discourses on moral conduct for women. For centuries the education of women at court had centered on such classics of Japanese literature as The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari), and familiarity with such narratives was de rigueur for women from wealthy warrior and merchant families as well. Allen informs us, however, that early Edo proliferation of Genji illustrations owes a great deal to the formation of new para-
digms of moral and literary cultivation for women, along with the recent re-
lease in print of The Tale of Genji. From the mid-seventeenth century on, pub-
lishers increased production of didactic books for women with texts printed in
Japanese script, often accompanied by illustrations. Later in her chapter Allen
attends to Genji paintings by Tosa Mitsuoki, who honored stylistic orthodoxy
and selected female characters based on their decorous behavior, refined taste,
artistic accomplishment, and worthy progeny.

In Chapter 5, “A New ‘Classical’ Theme: The One Hundred Poets from Elite
to Popular Art in the Early Edo Period,” Joshua Mostow considers album
paintings of the One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each (Hyakunin isshū), a col-
lection of verse compiled in the thirteenth century by Fujiwara no Teika. Al-
though this collection was prized as a literary classic within a century of its cre-
atation, it seems that visual artists adopted its subjects only in the seventeenth
century. Mostow focuses on three Hyakunin isshū albums produced in the
Kano and Tosa ateliers, one clearly dating to the Kanbun era (1661–1673) and
the other two probably dating either to the same era or shortly thereafter. As
Mostow reveals, Kano and Tosa yamato-e styles converged by midcentury in
the illustration of these albums—Tan’yū borrowing Tosa approaches and Mit-
suoki adopting Kano techniques. Kano school painters produced many such
albums for courtier-warrior weddings in the second half of the seventeenth
century, and Mostow suggests that these albums conveyed prayers for the peace
of the nation.

The final two chapters address developments commonly omitted from the
canon of classical arts: a Tokugawa classicism formulated by Kano painters and
a populist classicism bolstering imperial prestige. In considering the classical
dimensions of these developments, the volume expands upon a little-studied
aspect of classicism—namely its operation as an expression of social and cul-
tural authority on the part of two elite groups, the ruling military regime and
the ancient imperial family. In Chapter 6, “Classical Imagery and Tokugawa
Patronage: A Redefinition in the Seventeenth Century,” Karen Gerhart looks
into the decorative program for two compounds of Nijō Castle in Kyoto: the
emperor’s Visitation Palace—built for retired emperor Gomizunoo (1596–
1680; r. 1611–1629) and his wife for their five-day visit to a residence of former
shogun Tokugawa Hidetada (1579–1632; r. 1605–1623)—and the adjoining Ni-
omaru Palace. Commissioned by the Tokugawa and executed under the di-
rection of Kano Tan’yū in the mid-1620s, these paintings were weighted with
political messages and, as Gerhart reveals, were chosen because they could
convey and enforce Tokugawa hegemony. She proposes that the warrior class
constructed its identity upon a glorified image of their martial heritage, which differed from concepts of a golden age of Heian court culture. Intending to give visual expression to warrior ideals in a new age, the Kano artists fashioned a unique version of classicism: a “Tokugawa classicism.”

In the final chapter, “Uses of the Past: Gion Float Paintings as Instruments of Classicism,” I look at the conjunction of art and politics by examining a set of paintings once displayed in the retirement palace of Tofukumon’in, wife of Emperor Gomizunoo and daughter of Tokugawa Hidetada. These paintings depict the Gion Festival, a joyful celebration of the masses held each summer in Kyoto. Although not a subject from age-old verse or narrative, these Gion paintings are unmistakably classical in their reference to the social relations of past eras. Initiated by a mid-ninth-century emperor, the festival later came to express the vitality of commoner townspeople, a vitality that supposedly depended on imperial sustenance. Thus as an image that pointed to traditional notions of imperial responsibility for maintaining harmony in the land and ensuring the well-being of the people, these Gion Float paintings served the goals of the imperial family in terms of cultural clout if not legal or political power.

The book concludes with an afterword by Quitman Phillips, who reconsiders the problematic designation of a classical revival in seventeenth-century Japanese art. A glossary, an appendix listing artists and schools, and an extensive bibliography offer further background on classicism in seventeenth-century Japanese art.

Notes

I would like to thank Laura Allen, Karen Gerhart, Paul Jaskot, Joshua Mostow, Melanie Trede, and Patricia Fister for valuable suggestions on revising this introduction, as well as Britt Salvesen for editorial suggestions.

1. Although often referred to as the Edo period, based on the name of the capital city of Edo (present-day Tokyo), this era is alternatively called the Tokugawa period. In addition, it is alternatively dated 1615–1868.

2. Modern art historians have applied the term “classicism” to several other types of Japanese art, including Buddhist sculptures of the Hakuhō (645–710) and the Tenpyō (710–794) periods. For more on this question see Chapter 1 by Melanie Trede. Art historians are not alone in drawing such analogies; political historian Kenneth Alan Grossberg, for one, posits that Japan experienced a political renaissance in the Muromachi period (1392–1573) like that experienced by states in Renaissance Italy. See Grossberg, Japan’s Renaissance: The Politics of the Muromachi Bakufu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 13.

3. Similarly, in his groundbreaking study of classicism in Western architectural his-


9. For more on visual imagery and the cultural colonization of Japan by the West see Gennifer Weisenfeld, ed., Positions 8(3) (Winter 2001).

10. Okakura and Ernest Fenollosa, a Harvard graduate who went to Japan in 1878, fostered the study and preservation of ancient Japanese arts. Okakura posited that Asian art history, like that of the West, has followed three developmental stages: the formalistic, the classic, and the romantic. For Okakura, arts of the classic age in Asia exhibit an “objective idealism” and “beauty is sought as the union of spirit and matter,” comparable to works sculpted by the ancient Greek masters. See Okakura Kakuzo, The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1971), 165.


25. The earliest known use of the term “yamato-e” occurs in a description of folding screens from an entry dated to the thirtieth day of the tenth month of Chōhō 2 (999) in the Gonki (Record of rights) written by Fujiwara no Közei; however, the current conceptualization of yamato-e was largely formed in the early twentieth century. Two studies helped lay the foundation of current yamato-e studies: Akiyama Terukazu, Heian jidai sezokuga no kenkyū (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1964), and Ienaga Saburō, Jódai yamato-e zenshi, rev. ed. (Tokyo: Bokusui Shobō, 1966).


27. For more on this question see Chapter 2 by Satoko Tamamushi.


