Introduction

In Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader, I presented English translations of major works on aesthetics by leading Japanese aestheticians who applied their theoretical knowledge of the philosophy of art to discussions of Japanese art, literature, religion, and philosophy. Each translation in the Reader is preceded by an introduction in which I try to shed light on the historical context of each text while also attempting some sort of interpretation—a task made particularly difficult by the scarcity of hermeneutical attention paid to these texts even by Japanese specialists. While working on the Reader, I felt that readers would have benefited from at least an outline of the history of Japanese aesthetics; but this, unfortunately, was not to be found in any language, including Japanese. Japanese scholars of aesthetics had copiously and learnedly written on topics related to Western aesthetics—especially German—but had seldom historicized their efforts to explain themselves and their culture by using the language of aesthetics. It was possible to find scattered articles in scholarly journals and in book chapters, however, outlining the achievements of Japanese aestheticians in articulating discourses on the philosophy of art in relationship to Japan. The present book brings together a selection of such articles in order to provide readers with a "History of Japanese Aesthetics."

The reader might wonder why I relied on the work of others rather than writing my own history of Japanese aesthetics. Since, in order to write such a history, I would have had to rely on the works presented in this book, I thought the reader would benefit most from being given direct access to important secondary sources. Once the reader becomes familiar with the major issues introduced in this book, the interpretation of these issues will become a shared responsibility and, hopefully, a ground for discussion among all those who take an interest in
Japan. Above all, my choice was determined by my personal views of the field of aesthetics—a field I consider a footnote, albeit an important one, to the larger discipline of hermeneutics (in the sense of “transmission and translation of messages”). In my opinion aesthetics is a major stage in the history of interpretation—a stage that has shaped modern perceptions of art since, at least, the mid-eighteenth century. As a believer in the fundamental role played by interpretive acts in the formation of what we tend to perceive as “objective” realities, I consider the writing of a history of aesthetics another example of interpretation. Therefore, how could a chain of interpretations be better presented than by having major contemporary hermeneuticians from Japan interpret the founding fathers of the field of aesthetics? Readers should pay attention to this double narrative. On the one hand, they might benefit from being introduced to a series of issues that make up the field of aesthetics in Japan. On the other, they are confronted with the act of creating what today we call “Japanese aesthetics,” which is the result of the hermeneutical efforts of writers such as those presented here. In a sense, readers are confronted with a dialogue of aestheticians talking to and about other aestheticians and, in the process, creating the field of Japanese aesthetics.

Although it would be presumptuous to seek a common denominator among the many aestheticians discussed in this book, all of them to a certain degree were faced with the paradox of voicing what they felt to be at the core of their subjectivity—the specificity of a local culture, a local art—by relying on a supremely alien language: the Western language of aesthetics. It is not only that Japanese thinkers are caught in the dilemma of articulating themselves through the otherness of an aesthetic discourse that was born in the West as a secularized version of theology. These thinkers also found themselves in the odd situation of relying on hermeneutical frameworks of foreign origin in order to represent to themselves, as well as to the world,
their own innermost “otherness”—their past and their ancient idioms. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) has potently described such an impasse in his “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache” (“Out of a Conversation from Language,” 1954), which he included in his Unterwegs zur Sprache (On the Way to Language, 1959). Written as a fictional dialogue between a Japanese and an Inquirer, this work was allegedly inspired by Heidegger’s brief encounter with Tezuka Tomio (1903–1983), a professor of German literature at Tokyo University and a member of the Japanese Academy.³ It might be more correct to say that Tezuka’s visit at the end of March 1954 reminded Heidegger of the many conversations he had had in the past with Japanese thinkers who in the 1920s flocked to Marburg and Freiburg in order to study philosophy with him.⁴ In the dialogue Heidegger—the Inquirer—highlights the danger of reducing the facticity of Japanese existence to European conceptual systems,⁵ and he struggles to elicit from the Japanese answers that might help him understand how the articulation of otherness—in this case, Japan—can take place in spite of what Heidegger calls “the danger of language.”⁶

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⁵ “Inquirer: Here you are touching on a controversial question which I often discussed with Count Kuki—the question whether it is necessary and rightful for East-asians to chase after the European conceptual systems.” The English translation is by Peter D. Hertz. See Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 3.

⁶ “Japanese: Now I am beginning to understand better where you smell the danger. The language of the dialogue constantly destroyed the possibility of saying what the dialogue was about. Inquirer: Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than East-asian man” (ibid., p. 5).
Moved by the anxiety of a technological rationalism that is leading
to the objectification of being and to “the complete Europeanization
of the earth and of man,” Heidegger points out the paradox of im-
prisoning the Japanese world in the “objectness of photography” by
having the Japanese past framed by Western cinematic conventions
as in Kurosawa Akira’s movie Rashômon.7

By being doubly critical of the aesthetic project in general, which
according to Heidegger is deeply enmeshed in the metaphysics of
objectification,8 as well as the value that can be derived from casting
a non-European reality into the language of aesthetics,9 Heidegger
framed the major questions that all the aestheticians cited in the
present book had to confront head-on—beginning with the issue of
compensation that led to the replacement of God with beauty and
the work of art and to the displacement of the temple in favor of the
museum.10

The aesthetic adventure began in Japan in the 1870s. At the time,
the country was in the midst of a cultural revolution spurred by the
threatening presence of the West—a presence that inspired attentive
members of the Japanese intelligentsia to make “civilization and
enlightenment” (bunmei kaika) their civil mission. Steeped in the
cultural framework of Neo-Confucianism, these ambitious thinkers
suddenly faced a reformulation of local artistic practices (such as
theatrical performances of nô and kabuki) and ritual acts (such as the
tea ceremony) in the new languages of Western philosophy. Japanese
thinkers were confronted with a flood of thoughts and ideologies—
idealism, positivism, materialism, utilitarianism—which provided

7. “Japanese: This is what I have in mind. Regardless of what the aesthetic quality
of a Japanese film may turn out to be, the mere fact that our world is set forth in the
frame of a film forces that world into the sphere of what you call objectness. The
photographic objectification is already a consequence of the ever wider outreach of
Europeanization” (ibid., p. 17).

8. “Japanese: Meanwhile, I find it more and more puzzling how Count Kuki could
get the idea that he could expect your path of thinking to be of help to him in his
attempts in aesthetics, since your path, in leaving behind metaphysics, also leaves
behind the aesthetics that is grounded in metaphysics” (ibid., p. 42).

9. “Inquirer: The name ‘aesthetics’ and what it names grow out of European think-
ing, out of philosophy. Consequently, aesthetic consideration must ultimately remain
alien to Eastasian thinking” (ibid., p. 2).

10. On this issue see Odo Marquard, Aesthetica und Anaesthetica: Philosophische
Überlegungen (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989).
them with methodologies to discuss their own performative and ritual past in terms of "culture" (bunka) and "art."  

One among these thinkers was Nishi Amane (1829–1897), who introduced modern aesthetics to Japan in a series of lectures titled Bimyōgaku Setsu (The Theory of Aesthetics, 1877). Nishi was confronted with the task of reconciling eighteenth-century views of aesthetics, which stressed its autonomy from the spheres of ethics and logic, with modern, nineteenth-century utilitarian concerns that explained aesthetics’ alleged lack of “purpose”—the Kantian “purposiveness without a purpose” or “finality without an end” (Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck)—as a project contributing to the formation of a civilized society. Nishi was forced to synthesize in a few pages centuries of Western aesthetic thought with all its paradoxes resulting from the combination of conflicting theories. At the same time, he was compelled to present convincing arguments to his listeners—members of the imperial family and leading bureaucrats of the Meiji period—on the “usefulness” of a science that was born as a form of knowledge free from pragmatic concerns of utility. Apart from the difficulty of providing heterogeneous theories with some sort of coherence, Nishi was also challenged by the lack of a vocabulary with which to discuss “beauty” in the context of a philosophy of art. New words had to be devised for conveying in Japanese the notions of beauty (bi), art (geijutsu), and fine arts (bijutsu).

At the beginning of the Meiji period, “beauty” was usually indicated with the word “birei.” Inamura Sanpaku (1759–1811) used this word as a translation of both the adjective “schoon” (beautiful) and the name “schoonheid” (beauty) in his Dutch-Japanese dictionary Haruma Wage (A Japanese Rendition of Halma’s Dictionary, 1796).
Nishi Amane still used “birei” in his *Theory of Aesthetics* of 1877. An alternative expression to indicate “beauty” (*schoonheid*) in Japanese was “utsukushisa”—the word used in *Oranda Jii* (Japanese-Dutch Dictionary, 1833), published in 1855–1858 under the name of Katsuragawa Hoshū (1751–1809). The same word “utsukushisa” appears written with the Chinese character for “beauty” (“bi” in contemporary Japanese) as the Japanese translation of “beauté, beauty, and *schoonheid*,” in *Sango Benran* (Handbook of Three Languages, 1857) by Murakami Hidetoshi (1811–1890), who is considered the founder of French studies in Japan. It was not until the late 1880s that the Japanese word “bi” became the standard translation of “beauty,” as we can see in the series of articles “Bi to wa Nani zo ya” (“What Is Beauty?”, 1886) by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1858–1935).  

Prior to 1872 the word “geijutsu” was usually employed to indicate arts and crafts and to emphasize the technical skills (gijutsu) required in the creation of such arts. When “art” came to be defined as an activity pursued for its own sake, another word had to be created: “bijutsu,” which appears as a translation of “fine arts,” for the first time, in the catalog written in 1872 under the auspices of Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922) listing the objects exhibited at the Vienna Exposition of the following year. In his *Theory of Aesthetics*, Nishi Amane included in the category of “bijutsu” painting, sculpture, engraving, architecture, poetry, prose, music, Chinese calligraphy, dance, and drama. As late as 1883–1884, however, there was neither consensus nor clarity on the meaning of “art.” In his translation of Eugène Véron’s (1825–1889) *L’Esthétique* (Aesthetics, 1878), *Ishi Bigaku* (The Aesthetics of Mr. V.), Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901) used several expressions to indicate “art”—such as *gijutsu* (skills), *geijutsu* (art and craft), *gigei* (skillful art), and *kōgei* (ingenious art)—without ever explaining the different meanings these expressions conveyed. They were all variations of the basic notion of “skill” (*gijutsu*)—an indication of the unlikelihood that in the early 1880s the distinction between practical skills and autonomous arts was generally accepted.  

Considering the confusion that the Western notions of “beauty” and “fine arts” were introducing to Japan, Nishi’s struggle to find a

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proper equivalent in Japanese for the word “aesthetics” comes as no surprise. As early as 1867, in an attempt to reconcile the ethical and aesthetic spheres, he called aesthetics “the science of good and beauty” (zenbigaku), using this expression again in Hyakuichi Shinron (New Theory of the Hundred and One, 1874). A redefinition of aesthetics in terms of the faculty of taste (and a judgment of taste) led Nishi to revise his translation as “the discipline of good taste” (kashuron), which he used in Hyakugaku Renkan (Encyclopedia, 1870). After being drawn into the modern philosophy of utilitarianism, he further revised his translation of “aesthetics,” finally settling on “the science of the beautiful and mysterious” (bimyōgaku) in Bimyōgaku Setsu. But Nishi did not have the last word on this matter.\(^\text{15}\) The word currently used in Japan to indicate “aesthetics”—“bigaku”—was created by Nakae Chōmin for his translation of the title of Eugène Véron’s book (Chapter 1).

On the practical side, the official Meiji impulse toward modernization led to the foundation in 1876 of the Technological Art School (Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō) within Tokyo’s Engineering College (Kōgakuryō) and the invitation of several foreign scholars and artists to Japan. In 1876 the Italian painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818–1882) arrived in Tokyo with a teaching contract from the Japanese government; he was followed in 1878 by the American art historian and philosopher Ernest F. Fenollosa (1853–1908). The two men spearheaded opposite movements in the field of aesthetics. A painter in the style of the Barbizon school, Fontanesi was a driving force behind “Japanese painting in the Western style” (yōga) and the appeal to realist sketching that young Japanese painters, such as Yamamoto Hōsui (1850–1906), Asai Chû (1856–1907), and Koyama Shōtarō (1857–1916), eagerly embraced.\(^\text{16}\) In contrast, Fenollosa played a


major role in convincing the Japanese authorities of the greatness of their own artistic heritage, thus promoting a renaissance of “painting in the Japanese style” (nihonga). In 1882, the year of Fenollosa’s famous speech to members of the Dragon Pond Society (Ryūchikai), “Bijutsu Shinsetsu” (The True Conception of the Fine Arts),17 the Technological Art School was closed and the government’s interest in painting in the Western style began to fade. Seven years later, in 1889, the Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō (Tokyo School of Fine Arts) was founded and the country’s artistic heritage was put at the center of the teaching curriculum. Okakura Tenshin (1861–1913), a disciple and collaborator of Fenollosa, was appointed head of the new school.18

With the establishment of art as the object of aesthetic contemplation, secularized versions of temples housing beauty were built in the form of museums in order to accommodate demands for the worshiping of art. Thanks to the efforts of Fenollosa and Okakura, who saw in the Asian counterpart of the Hegelian spirit the driving force behind the idealism of Japanese paintings, the entire country came to be seen as an art museum of Asiatic civilization: the privileged setting for preservation of cultures that had already disappeared from their country of origin. The “revalorization” of Asia’s artistic heritage at a time when Japan was launching its victorious army against China (1893–1894) further underscored the deep political implications of aesthetic discourses and proved to the Japanese authorities that the Western language of metaphysics and idealism could be easily channeled into political action (see Chapter 2).19


Such a language, however, did not go unchallenged, as Tsubouchi Shōyō’s vehement attacks in “Bi to wa Nani zo ya” against both Fenollosa’s idealism and Véron’s anti-idealism amply demonstrate. Convinced that aesthetics should have a normative value and, therefore, should contribute concrete ideas to the formation of a modern literature, Tsubouchi took issue with the imponderable notion of “idea” (myōsō) that Fenollosa was espousing in his lectures. A series of debates ensued—based on a semantic confusion with the notions of “idea,” “ideal,” and “thought,” which, when they are translated in Japanese, share the same second character: “myōsō,” “risō,” “shisō.”

The debate on “paintings of thought” (shisōga) between Shōyō and the educator Toyama Masakazu (1848–1900) was spurred by a lecture Toyama delivered in 1890, “Nihon Kaiga no Mirai” (The Future of Japanese Painting). Failing to properly interpret Fenollosa’s notion of “idea” (myōsō) in the Platonic sense of “ideal” and the Hegelian sense of Idee, as Fenollosa himself had intended, Toyama took myōsō to convey the English notion of “idea or thought.” As a result, he misconstrued Fenollosa’s appeal to artists to give “ideal” representations of reality as an invitation to portray concrete ideas and thoughts. Therefore, Toyama argued that Japanese painters should portray “ideological paintings,” or painting based on thought, thus inviting artists to turn to actual events and social problems when choosing the subject matters for their paintings. An early practitioner of naturalism (shizenshugi), Tsubouchi rejected Toyama’s reasoning. Rather than paying attention to ideology, he said, artists should “reproduce human emotions as they are” (Chapter 3).

Different interpretations of the notion of “ideals” (risō) by Tsubouchi Shōyō and Mori Ōgai (1862–1922) led to the debate of 1891–1892 between the two writers known as “the dispute on hidden ideals” (botsurisō). In this dispute between a “realist” and an “idealist,” Shōyō argued in favor of the former: although realist art reflects the reader’s ideas, it is not the purpose of art to accomplish the task of a philosophical work. In his view, rather than searching for greatness in Shakespeare’s ideas, as if he were a great philosopher, we should admire Shakespeare’s ability to convey his ideas imaginatively through the impartial representation of characters. Shōyō concluded that we should admire Shakespeare for his “submerged ideas.” Ōgai accused Shōyō of underplaying the power of ideas in the formation of art, presenting Shōyō’s theory of “submerged ideas,”
perhaps unfairly, as if this were a call to deny the necessity of ideals in the creation of art.\textsuperscript{20}

Ōgai based his critique of Shōyō on an array of German philosophical works—above all the second part of Eduard von Hartmann’s (1842–1906) \textit{Aesthetik} (Aesthetics), or \textit{Philosophie des Schönen} (The Philosophy of the Beautiful, 1888), which Ōgai translated in 1892 as \textit{Shinbi Ron} (Theory of Aesthetics). This publication was followed by \textit{Shinbi Köryō} (Outline of Aesthetics, 1899), which Ōgai coauthored with Ōmura Seigai (1868–1927), and \textit{Shinbi Shinsetsu} (A New Interpretation of Aesthetics, 1898–1899), in which Ōgai introduced the aesthetics of Johannes Volkelt (1848–1940). Ōgai was obsessed with “the subtle thoughts of novelists’ imaginative life” and with the intuition that gives meaning to the analytical work of a writer. As he argued in \textit{Shōsetsu Ron} (On the Novel, 1889), he realized that as a medical doctor he was committed to the search for truth: “The scalpel is never out of my grasp for long and my test tubes are always at hand. But this desire to seek real facts has never hindered dreams of visiting the infinite” (Chapter 4).\textsuperscript{21}

Debates between defenders of naturalism (\textit{shizenshugi}) and idealism (\textit{kyokuchishugi}) informed Japanese cultural life at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. While the field of aesthetics was following the path of academic institutionalization, promoters of naturalism and idealism were divided into separate academic camps: Waseda University (then known as Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō), the University of Tokyo (then known as Tokyo Imperial University), and the University of Kyoto (then known as Kyoto Imperial University).\textsuperscript{22} Shōyō was among the founders of the Department of Letters at Waseda University, as well as the journal \textit{Waseda Bungaku} (Waseda Literature), from which he launched his attacks


\textsuperscript{21} Quoted in Bowring, \textit{Mori Ōgai and Modernization}, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{22} The development of aesthetics from within the walls of academia explains the overwhelming presence in the history of Japanese aesthetics of writers and scholars dealing with the fine arts from an academically oriented aesthetic perspective. The reader should be aware that there were Japanese thinkers from other disciplines writing on a variety of aesthetic issues—such as, for example, the geographer and political commentator Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927), the folklorist Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), and the philosopher of religion Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889–1961).
against Mori Ōgai. We find in the pages of the same journal articles by Waseda scholars who shared with Ōgai a belief in the importance of idealism, such as the Christian thinker Ōnishi Hajime (1864–1900). Perceiving a weakness of inner spirituality in the Japanese subjectivity, Ōnishi inquired into the work of thinkers of the Edo period, such as the literary scholar Kagawa Kageki (1768–1843), who had addressed the issue of the inner self. Ōnishi pointed out the need to complement the theory of interiority, which Kageki had developed around the notion of magokoro (“true, sincere heart”), in light of the findings of modern epistemology. Psychology and modern philosophy’s emphasis on the notion of consciousness prompted him to revise Kageki’s thought by pointing out the need to replace the belief that reality is the result of a natural process with the realization that the world is nothing but the product of a thinking mind. Ōnishi encouraged modern Japanese philosophers to reconcile traditional thought with the new ideas coming from the West.23

The same concern for a renewed spirituality led Ōnishi to launch his program of poetic reform: poetry, he urged, should express “religious thought”—a characteristic he thought was lacking in traditional waka. In his opinion, the inability of Shintoism and Buddhism to inspire such lofty thoughts in Japan should make people turn their attention to Christianity’s potential to supplement the domestic religious heritage in this regard. Aesthetics was called to the task of promoting a “sense of beauty” in order to deepen the spiritual life of the Japanese people (Chapter 5).24

The issue of “inner life” was much debated in Japan in the 1890s when the poet, critic, and pacifist Kitamura Tōkoku (1868–1894) wrote the essay “Naibu Seimeiron” (The Inner Life). Here interiority is presented as the discovery of idealistic philosophy that, once it is translated into literature, incorporates ideas into reality. Tōkoku explains the inner life as the emanating spirit of the universe that penetrates the human spirit. Inspiration is crucial to such a life, since

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24. Ōnishi developed these ideas in the essays “Waka ni Shūkyō Nashi” (There Is No Religion in Waka, 1887) and “Kinsei Bigaku Shisō Ippan” (Outline of Early Modern Aesthetic Thought, 1897). For a complete English translation of the former see Marra, Modern Japanese Aesthetics, pp. 83–92.
it works as an echo bringing the two spirits in communication. Thus the absolute idea shows itself in concrete form in the interiority of the human heart, while transcendence is finally found in immanence.\textsuperscript{25} The naturalists persistently condemned the idealist notion of transcendence—as shown in the critique of the poet and critic Iwano Hōmei (1873–1920), a vehement anti-Christian: “At the beginning of the nineteenth century, readers were satisfied only with the Wordsworthian view of nature. Poets saw the immortality of the soul in the rainbow, they heard the whisperings of gods in the rustling of the leaves; the view of nature changed completely. Yet this kind of religious tendency sacrifices the fecundity of nature to an insipid abstract concept.”\textsuperscript{26}

The idealism of Ōnishi Hajime left a deep mark on thinkers of the Waseda school, foremost among them Ōnishi’s two most famous students: Tsunashima Ryōsen (1873–1907), who pursued his teacher’s interest in ethical matters, and Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871–1918), who further studied the issues of aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic pleasure. Hōgetsu applied his knowledge of aesthetics to a parallel study of the beauty of the fine arts and the beauty of sentences in a major work on rhetoric titled \textit{Shin Bijigaku} (New Rhetoric, 1902). After 1905, Hōgetsu became greatly influenced by the “philosophy of life” (\textit{Lebensphilosophie}), whose popularity was rapidly increasing in Europe—a philosophy that reconciled Hōgetsu with naturalism in the latter part of his life (Chapter 6).

Perhaps no one at the time was more vocal in Japan on the issue of “life” than Takayama Chogyū (1871–1902), who replaced Ōnishi at Waseda University as lecturer in aesthetics after Ōnishi’s departure for Europe. In 1898 Chogyū engaged in a famous debate with Tsubouchi Shōyō on the issue of “historical paintings.” While promoting paintings “in the Japanese style” (nihonga), which had found in Fenollosa one of its earliest advocates, Chogyū defended the representation of historical themes on the ground that such paintings grasp the ideal beauty of history. According to Chogyū, the power of historical paintings resides in the beauty of the painting itself, not in

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\footnotetext{26}{Quoted in Earl Jackson, Jr., “The Metaphysics of Translation and the Origins of Symbolic Poetics in Meiji Japan,” \textit{PMLA} (March 1990):264.}
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the historical events portrayed. Historical events, he said, were simply expedients that artists used in order to express beauty. Shōyō, however, argued that since history preceded the beauty of poetic thought, the purpose of historical paintings was the representation of the beauty of history. Such a “historical beauty” was allegedly endowed with a greater degree of objectivity in comparison to other works of pure fantasy.

In this debate Shōyō confirmed once again his position on the issue of the subject: he believed the subject was a simple mirror reflecting an objectively reproducible external reality. Chogyū, by contrast, joined those who privileged the working of consciousness in the act of perceiving external reality—thus locating the beauty of historical paintings in the aesthetic perception of beautiful historical acts. Aesthetic consciousness played a major role in Chogyū’s creation of an aesthetic state—a program that he called “Japanism” (Nihonshugi), in which the state was considered an expedient to make human happiness concrete.27

Chogyū’s encounter with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), which he helped introduce to Japan, led him to envision a concrete implementation of his aesthetics in a momentous article, “Biteki Seikatsu wo Ronzu” (Debate on the Aesthetic Life, 1901), that made a deep impression, especially on younger readers. The subordination of morality and knowledge to the power of instinctual life (bonnō)—as well as the assertion that the purest aesthetic value is the satisfaction of the instincts—could hardly go unnoticed by the avid readership of the popular journal Taiyō (The Sun) (Chapter 7).28

Japan’s adoption of the field of aesthetics during the Meiji period drastically changed the way that Japanese thinkers and readers thought of their own historical past. By applying to their own cultural heri-

27. On this issue see Chogyū’s article, “Bikan ni Tsuite no Kansatsu” (Observations on Aesthetic Pleasure, 1900), a complete English translation of which appears in Marra, Modern Japanese Aesthetics, pp. 98–111.

tage categories derived from Western aesthetics, Japanese thinkers ended by “creating” an indigenous past modeled upon the past of Europe—especially Greece, the land to which Johann J. Winckelmann (1717–1768) and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) had turned in order to develop their aesthetic theories. Following the same approach taken by European aestheticians who had transformed ancient Greece into a comforting land, a safe utopia free from the anxieties of a burgeoning modern world, thinkers such as Fenollosa, Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), and Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) searched for a land free from the ills of modernity in the past of the ancient capital Nara. Nara was transformed from a site of religious worship into an object of aesthetic contemplation, a symbol of human beauty, as we can see from Watsuji’s best-seller *Koji Junrei* (Pilgrimage to Ancient Temples, 1919). Aestheticians worked together with literary historians in the creation of a “classical Japan” in which the southern capital of Nara was modeled on the image of classical Athens. Aizu Yaichi (1881–1956), a renowned second-generation aesthetician from Waseda University, saw in the land of Yamato the “South” of Japan in the same spirit that had led German romantic poets to “discover” Greece as the South of Europe (Chapter 8).

On September 7, 1893, the University of Tokyo (Teikoku Daigaku Bunka Daigaku, or “Imperial University, Faculty of Letters University”) established a chair system on the model of Western universities. The Chair of Aesthetics was created together with the first twenty chairs forming the Division of Letters and Sciences (Bungakubu). In fact, this became the first university Chair of Aesthetics in the world. The first Chair of Aesthetics in Europe was established at the Sorbonne of Paris in 1919 with the appointment of Victor Guillaume Basch (1865–1944). At first the University of Tokyo hired several foreign lecturers, entrusting them with teaching a course in aesthetics: Ernest Fenollosa from 1883 to 1886, Ludwig Busse (1862–1907) from 1886 to 1892, and Raphael von Koeber (1848–1923) from 1893 to 1914. In 1900, however, Ōtsuka Yasuji (1868–1931) was offered a permanent, tenured position (Chapter 9).

Ōtsuka undertook a massive project in the study of “patterns” (*ruikei*)—types of clothes, architectural patterns, and the like—leading to typological studies of the structures, forms, and correlations of artistic phenomena. He also provided a solid foundation for a comparative method that led to the comparative typological explanation
of Eastern and Western aesthetic categories (*biteki hanchū*) on the part of his student and successor at the University of Tokyo, Ōnishi Yoshinori (1888–1959). Ōnishi authored perhaps the most original *Aesthetics* (*Bigaku*, 2 vols., 1959–1960) ever produced by a Japanese scholar. His analysis of expressions taken from the field of pre-modern poetics (*kagaku*) made words such as “yūgen,” “aware,” and “sabi” popular terms in the aesthetic vocabulary of Japan. His commitment to provide local epistemological categories with a universal foundation reflects Ōnishi’s efforts to translate Japanese culture into an idiom that could be understood by an audience trained in Western hermeneutics. Ōnishi’s work made a huge impression on Japanese historians of literature—who relied on his theoretical treatment of aesthetic categories in their classifications of literary texts—as well as on other Japanese philosophers who developed their own analyses of local aesthetic categories (Chapters 10 and 11).

Ōtsuka and Ōnishi’s preoccupation with adopting “scientific” methods to discuss Japan, and their drive toward systematic classifications, had a long-lasting effect on scholars of the University of Tokyo, who produced an array of typological studies beginning with Ōnishi’s *Shizen Kanjō no Ruikei* (*Types of Feelings for Nature*, 1949). In this work the author classifies a variety of pathic approaches to nature, which he calls “sympathetic sensitivity, religious sensitivity, sentimental sensitivity, romantic sensitivity, and haikai-esque sensitivity.” In *Fūdo: Ningengakuteki Kōsatsu* (*Climate: An Anthropological Inquiry*, 1935), Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960), a student of Ōtsuka Yasuji and Okakura Tenshin and, later, a professor of ethics at the University of Tokyo, undertook a typological study of climato-

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logical patterns in which he related differences in climate to social and cultural differences (Chapter 12). 31

A typological approach to the arts of the Tokugawa period can be found in *Tokugawa Jidai no Geijutsu to Shakai* (Art and Society in the Tokugawa Period, 1948) by Abe Jirô (1883–1959), a graduate of the University of Tokyo and the author of a very popular *Aesthetics* (*Bigaku*, 1917) (Chapter 13). 32 A concern for typological studies is also at work in the writings of Ônishi Yoshinori’s disciple and successor, Takeuchi Tosho (1905–1982), who in *Bungei no Janru* (Genres of the Literary Arts, 1954) applied the notion of “aesthetic patterns,” such as linguistic forms, experiential content, and expressive attitude, to a classification of literary genres. Takeuchi blended Otôka Yasuji’s idea of *Literaturwissenschaft* (*bungeigaku*) with Ônishi Yoshinori’s notion of “aesthetic categories” in his systematization of “the science of art” (*geijutsugaku*). In 1979 Takeuchi published a monumental synthesis of his aesthetic system titled *Bigaku Sôron* (Survey of Aesthetics).

Takeuchi’s successor to the Chair of Aesthetics at the University of Tokyo, Imamichi Tomonobu (b. 1922), has applied the typological/comparative method to the study of cultures. 33 At the same time, he has aimed at creating a new ethics derived from the combination of ethics, aesthetics, and science. The synthetic approach, which has characterized the discipline of aesthetics at the University of Tokyo from its inception, is very strong in Imamichi’s thought. We see it sustaining his aesthetic project, which he has called “calonology” — a combination of “beauty” (*kalon*), “being” (*on*), “mind” (*nous*), and “discourse” (*logos*). Calonology, therefore, is an inquiry into the

31. On the complicity of universalism and particularism in creating a totalitarian subject, as well as the role played by Watsuji in developing such issues, see Naoki Sakai’s articles “Return to the West/Return to the East: Watsuji Tetsurô’s Anthropology and Discussions of Authenticity” and “Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism.” Both articles are presented in Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 72–116 and 153–176.

32. On the popularity of Abe Jirô’s aesthetic thought during the Taishô period see Stephen W. Kohl, “Abe Jirô and *The Diary of Santarô,*” in Rimer, *Culture and Identity*, pp. 7–21.

33. See, for example, his explanation of the West in terms of “representation” (mimesis) and the East in terms of “expression” in his lecture “L’Expression et Son Fondement Logique” (“Expression and Its Logical Foundation,” 1962), translated in Marra, *Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, pp. 220–228.
realms of beauty, existence, reason, and science. Recently Imamichi has pointed out the need to replace “metaphysics,” or the study of the transcendental explanation of the natural world of physics (physis), with a “metatechnica,” or a philosophy that answers the questions facing cities in an age of technology (what Imamichi also calls “urbanica”). In Eco-Ethica: Seiken Rinrigaku Nyûmon (Ecological Ethics: An Introduction to the Ethics of Livability, 1990), Imamichi insists on the need to reassess the notion of oikos (house) in order to redefine what he calls “the sphere of livability” (seiken) (Chapter 14).

The postmodern reader will undoubtedly take issue with the rigidity of aesthetic categories and the hermeneutics of comparative typologies that reduce the variety of particularity to absolute super-categories such as East and West. While still refusing to reject the heuristic value of such categories, Sakabe Megumi (b. 1936), a professor of philosophy at the University of Tokyo, has called attention to the need to put aesthetics to the task of diluting totalitarian descriptions of categories and subjectivities and constructing “weaker,” “softer” versions of philosophy that escape the temptations of totalization and essentialization. Sakabe has fully embraced Heidegger’s challenge to interrogate language. In his philosophy of the “Yamato language,” Sakabe has developed original interpretations of ancient words that he has recently incorporated into his formulation of a new ethics (Chapter 15).

Research in aesthetics was no less active in the ancient capital, Kyoto. The Kyoto Art Society (Kyôto Bijutsu Kyôkai) was founded in 1890 as the Kansai area counterpart of the Tokyo-based Dragon


36. See, for example, his recent book “Furumai” no Shigaku (The Poetics of “Behavior”) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997).
Pond Society (Ryūchikai), which in 1887 had been renamed the Japanese Art Society (Nihon Bijutsu Kyōkai). Local newspapers and art journals became common venues for Nakagawa Shigeaki (1849–1917), a prolific writer and a popularizer of the philosophy of art. Nakagawa introduced major issues of contemporary Western aesthetics to readers who, thanks to his translations, became familiar with Karl von Lemcke’s (1831–1913) *Populäre Aesthetik* (Popular Aesthetics, 1873) and *Aesthetik in gemeinverständlichen Vorträgen* (Aesthetics in Popular Terms, 1890). Newly imported ideas, such as the notions of “aesthetic category” (biteki hanchū) and “emotional sphere” (kanjō-ken), allowed Nakagawa to develop his own aesthetic analysis of the art of Edo literati, especially their drawings (haiga) and prose in the style of haiku (haibun), in *Heigen Zokugo Haikai Bigaku* (The Aesthetics of Haikai in Plain and Popular Words, 1906) (Chapter 16).

Academic aesthetics began in Kyoto in 1910 with the appointment of Fukada Yasukazu (1878–1928) to the first permanent position in aesthetics at the Imperial University of Kyoto—a chair he occupied until the time of his death. A student of Raphael von Koeber at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Fukada received the call to Kyoto after returning from a three-year stay in Germany and France from 1907 to 1910. Fukada, who was also acquainted with the writer Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916), grounded his humanism in the belief that beauty is the result of cultural characteristics and universals are needed to combat people’s loneliness (Chapter 17).

The teaching of aesthetics in Kyoto soon fell under the spell of the university’s most distinguished philosopher: Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945). Nishida modeled the notion of “aesthetic experience” on what he called *junsui keiken* (pure experience)—“a present consciousness of facts just as they are” prior to the separation of subject and object. Nishida attempted to synthesize Ernst Mach’s (1838–1916) “analysis of sensations” and William James’ (1842–1910) concept of “pure experience” with the Buddhist ideas of “selflessness” (muga) and “unity of body and mind” (shinjin ichinyo) that he had

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learned from practicing Zen. We find such a synthesis in the following statement at the conclusion of Nishida’s essay “Bi no Setsumei” (An Explanation of Beauty, 1910):

If I may summarize what has been said above, the feeling of beauty is the feeling of muga. Beauty that evokes the feeling of muga is intuitive truth that transcends intellectual discrimination. This is why beauty is sublime. As regards this point, beauty can be explained as the discarding of the world of discrimination and the being one with the Great Way of muga; it therefore is really of the same kind as religion. They only differ in the sense of deep and shallow, great and small. The muga of beauty is the muga of the moment, whereas the muga of religion is eternal muga. Although morality also originally derivates from the Great Way of muga, it still belongs to the world of discrimination, because the idea of duty that is the essential condition of morality is built on the distinction between self and other, good and evil. It does not yet reach the sublime realms of religion and art.38

In his definition of art, Nishida moves toward an Eastern mystical experientialism: the secret of art, he contends, is found in the point of unification of subject and object. Nishida calls this point the “place of nothingness” (mu no basho), or “the experience of seeing the form of the formless and hearing the voice of the voiceless.” According to Nishida, the true nothingness of artistic intuition culminates in the absolute free will of the artist (Chapter 18).

Nishida’s thought had a profound impact on the philosophers and aestheticians of the University of Kyoto. One of his junior colleagues in the philosophy department, Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), relied on Nishida’s notion of “nothingness” (mu) and the Buddhist idea of “emptiness” (kū) as means to provide a positive response to the Western nihilism that had penetrated Japan during the cultural revolution of the Meiji period.39 Nishida’s philosophy also informed Nishitani’s thought on aesthetics and the arts, as we can see from

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his interpretation of haiku in light of “emptiness” and “the logos of unhindered reason.”

Ueda Juzō (1886–1973), Fukada’s successor and holder of the Chair of Aesthetics at the University of Kyoto until 1947, developed a philosophy of “visual perception” (shikaku) that is a blending of Nishida’s transcendental aesthetics and the “theory of pure visibility” developed by the art historian Konrad Fiedler (1841–1895). Nishida’s notion of “experience” returns in Ueda’s phenomenological hermeneutics of vision, which addresses the formation of the work of art, as we can see in his Geijutsu Shi no Kadai (The Subject of Art History, 1936), Shikaku Közō (The Structure of Visual Perception, 1941), and Nihon no Bi no Seishin (The Spirit of Japanese Beauty, 1944) (Chapter 19).

Not even Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941)—who grew up in Tokyo, was educated at the University of Tokyo, and lectured in Western philosophy at the University of Kyoto only later in life—could escape the magic spell of Nishida. Kuki’s education in the Kantō area is evident in his compulsion toward a geometrical systematization of aesthetic issues—a practice which is typical of the Tokyo school and which Kuki took to the highest level of sophistication. Kuki combined the Buddhist notion of “resignation” (akirame), the military tradition of “brave composure” (ikiji), and the idea of “erotic allure” (bitai) to transform iki into an aesthetic category—a universal encompassing the particular elements of the cultural life of the Edo citizen. At the same time, Kuki was indebted to Nishida’s philosophy when he described the love relationship between a man and a woman of taste (iki) as

40. See, for example, Nishitani’s article “Kû to Soku” (Emptiness and Sameness), translated in Marra, Modern Japanese Aesthetics, pp. 179–217.

41. See, for example, his use of the hexahedron in summarizing the aesthetic values of the Edo period and the octahedron in discussing all the aesthetic categories that make up the notion of “refinement” (fûryû) in Japan. The use of the hexahedron is found in Kuki’s essay “Iki no Közō” (The Structure of Iki, 1930). The octahedron makes its appearance in the essay “Fûryû ni Kansuru Ikkōtsu” (An Investigation of Elegance, 1937). For an English translation of the first essay see Kuki Shûzō, Reflections on Japanese Taste: The Structure of Iki, trans. John Clark (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997). The English translation of the second essay is still in manuscript form: Kuki Shûzō, “A Consideration of Fûryû,” trans. Michael Bourdaghs. See also Hajimu Nakano, “Kuki Shûzō and The Structure of Iki,” in Rimer, Culture and Identity, pp. 261–272.
“transcendental possibility” (chōetsuteki kanōsei) rather than a “necessity of reality” (genjitsuteki hitsuzensei). According to Kuki, the latter relationship characterizes the Western experience of love, one which culminates in fulfillment. Yet the tension that must be maintained to prevent the relationship from stagnating or becoming inauthentic was a guarantee of freedom from the shackles of love. While examining the aesthetics of the pleasure quarter during the Edo period, Kuki was actually confronting the same issues addressed by Nishida Kitarō and, later, by Nishitani Keiji. He was attempting to overcome the anxieties of Western modernity by searching in the local intellectual tradition for an antidote against Western nihilism. Kuki later engaged Nishida’s “place of nothingness” in a dialogue with the Western idea of “negation” in a study on freedom and chance: Gûzensei no Mondai (The Problem of Contingency, 1935) (Chapter 20).42 To this day Nishida’s presence continues to influence aestheticians working at the University of Kyoto, as we can see from the work of Fukada’s and Ueda’s successors to the Chair of Aesthetics: Ijima Tsutomu (1908–1978), Yoshioka Kenjirō (b. 1926), and Iwaki Ken’ichi (b. 1944) (Chapter 21).

Japan continues to play a major role in the field of aesthetics. The fifteenth International Congress on Aesthetics—the first of its kind to take place in the twenty-first century—will be held in Tokyo. Sasaki Ken’ichi, president of the organizing committee, has indicated that topics for discussion will include cultural heterogeneity in the experience of art, the conflict of values in postmodern society, and the aesthetics of urban design in the midst of ecological challenges.43 In this conference Japanese aestheticians will be called upon once again to confront the Heideggerian “bearing of message and tidings”


43. The congress is scheduled to take place on August 27–31, 2001. Sasaki Ken’ichi has summarized the main issues of the congress in an announcement titled “Aesthetics in the Twenty-First Century.” The announcement was distributed at an international conference, “Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation” (December 13–15, 1998), that I organized at the University of California, Los Angeles.
coming from different “houses of being.” Like the Japanese person-age in Heidegger’s dialogue with the Inquirer, they will be challenged to find in the indigenous “house” the means to dilute the effects of what Heidegger called “the complete Europeanization of the earth and of man.”

44. “Inquirer: Because I now see still more clearly the danger that the language of our dialogue might constantly destroy the possibility of saying that of which we are speaking. Japanese: Because this language itself rests on the metaphysical distinction between the sensuous and the suprasensuous, in that the structure of the language is supported by the basic elements of sound and script on the one hand, and signification and sense on the other. Inquirer: At least within the purview of European ideas. Or is the situation the same with you? Japanese: Hardly. But, as I indicated, the temptation is great to rely on European ways of representation and their concepts. Inquirer: That temptation is reinforced by a process which I would call the complete Europeanization of the earth and of man” (Heidegger, On the Way to Language, p. 15).