

Ōmura Seigai's Conception of Oriental Art History and China

Olivier KRISCHER

University of Tsukuba

“One of the most remarkable achievements in the study of Chinese art lies hidden, and for most Western readers inaccessible, behind the Japanese text of Omura Seigai's history of Chinese sculpture (...). Not all of the material presented in its 661 pages is equally useful to the student today, to be sure. Archaeological discoveries have made Omura's account of Shang and Chou art obsolete; while for later periods much of his description and criticism has been superseded by more detailed studies. The book remains unique, even so, as an anthology of source material on Chinese sculpture, an inexhaustible mine of quotations from texts or inscriptions, usually contemporary with the monuments themselves. The great number of sources cited bespeaks an astonishing degree of familiarity with Chinese literature. Hardly less remarkable is the evidence given on every page of the author's tireless diligence and accuracy. Omura's history will unquestionably never be translated as a whole. Even stripped of its comments in Japanese, and so reduced to a collection of quotations from Chinese sources, its dimensions are heart-breaking.”

Alexander Soper, 'Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China',
Artibus Asiae - Supplementum, Vol. 19, (1959), xi

In this way the work of one well-known scholar introduces the valuable research of an earlier foreign scholar, writing in another place, time, and language. Soper's introduction to his selective translation of Japanese art historian Ōmura Seigai's monumental study of Chinese sculpture,¹ published over four decades earlier, eloquently hints at many of the points of interest in Ōmura's work, its motives and influences, that intersect in this paper. Too often these intersections are at best relegated to the footnotes or miscellanea of History, leaving the more refined and safely taxonomized facts for the main body of the text. This paper highlights the background to Ōmura's earnest and pioneering development of an historical model for an “Oriental,” touching not only on contemporary aspects of his collaborative or creative strategies to embody that history, but also wondering about its afterlife or legacy, in the work of other scholars before and after Soper. Ōmura's *tōyō* Orient, even whilst it was earnestly and thoroughly researched, was and continues to be selectively engaged,

1 Ōmura Seigai, *Shina bijutsu shi: Chōso ben* [History of Chinese Art: Sculpture edition] (Tokyo: Butsusho Kankōkai Zuzōbu, 1915); with the accompanying volume of plates, *Shina bijutsu shi: Chōso ben fuzu*.



Fig. 1 Professor Ōmura (2nd row, third from left), at the 14th Tokyo School of Fine Arts graduation ceremony, July 1905. (In Yoshida et al., eds., *Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku Hyakunenshi*, Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō Hen (1992), Image 28.)

graduated in July 1893 from the first class of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (TSFA) specializing in sculpture. However, even as a student Ōmura had excelled in the study of history and aesthetics rather than art production, and within a few years after graduating had become a lecturer in sculpture and history at the TSFA, being promoted to professor of “Oriental Art History” (Tōyō Bijutsu Shi) in 1902, under the school’s new director Masaki Naohiko (1862–1940). He went on to teach there for almost thirty years (Fig.1). Ōmura’s decades of research culminated in a concise yet encyclopedic reference work, aptly titled *Tōyō bijutsushi*, published in 1925.² It was intentionally created to continue teaching the fruits of Ōmura’s research and theories to future generations of students in the course he had established even after his death, being used as a reference text by his young hand-picked successor, Tanabe Kōji (1890–1945).

In *Tōyō bijutsushi* Ōmura proposed a Sino-centric “Orient” (*tōyō*) or East-Asia (*tō’ā*) due to the length of Chinese civilization (as he put it) and the amount and quality of extant historical materials, both texts and artifacts. These formed a tangible history in which China, and Japan, emerged as contemporary “Asia”. This was in contrast to India, for example, which though once important long ago—for the foundations and transmission of Buddhist art—was, according to Ōmura’s introduction, “almost entirely void of history”.³ However, as a historiographical comment, this may reflect what “history” constituted for Ōmura, who was otherwise certainly aware of the cultural and artistic achievements of the Indian subcontinent, yet saw these as merely past, over. The “history” China represented for Ōmura was a continuum, strongly tied to the writ-

and often developed according to disparate agendas, even in the process of Sino-Japanese relations. In this sense, his practice of an Oriental art history is treated as a juncture within a broader set of problems that cannot be adequately understood if limited to the typical bounds of art history or aesthetics.

Ōmura Seigai (大村西崖, né Shiozawa Muneyoshi, 1868–1927) was not trained as an art historian, but rather

2 *Tōyō bijutsushi* [Oriental Art History] (Tokyo: Zuhon Sōkankai, May 1925).

3 See the first paragraph of Ōmura’s introduction to *Tōyō Bijutsushi*, *ibid.* Ōmura did include sections regarding some aspects of Indian art history in a broad sense. Much earlier he had co-written *Ashoka ō jiseki* [Vestiges of King Ashoka] (Tokyo: Shunyōdō, 1909) with Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), which treated some Ashoka related Buddhist art and architecture of the 3rd century BCE.

ten word as both cultural and historical artifact. It thus made sense, as it were, to focus such an Oriental history on the longest and richest culturo-historical continuity (i.e. China), while dynamically locating Japan as a later, perhaps younger, more dynamic and distinct development, with respected and stimulating input from the former yet by no means inferior to it any longer. The final point was that based on modern, hitherto impossibly direct access to materials in China proper, despite an ostensibly lengthy history of cultural contact, much more profound treasures, and knowledge, awaited.

Ōmura's 1925 book was influential in a teaching capacity, yet its aim was to cover a vast amount of material, chronologically and thematically, in a concise format. It was thus the synthesis of a longer, more complicated process. What were the factors surrounding the development of Ōmura's art historical work; and how should we understand its influence or afterlife?

Ōmura's Research among Euramerican "Orientalists"

Although Soper's translations of Ōmura's work date from immediately after the Second World War, some of Ōmura's work had already become a standard reference for Euramerican scholars of Chinese art in his lifetime, with this recognition continuing in subsequent decades.⁴ This was particularly the case amongst scholars of Chinese sculpture, overwhelmingly limited to Buddhist sculpture (then and now), including scholars such as Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) and Osvald Sirén (1879–1966). It is typical that the very first citation in Sirén's monumental, multi-volume work *Chinese Sculpture* (1925) references Ōmura's book on the subject, published ten years prior.⁵

Through such citations an image of Ōmura's research emerges as having been a reliable, or even standard source, particularly publications such as the *Tōyō bijutsu taikan* series and others by Shinbi Shoin publications, in addition to his *Shina bijutsushi: Chōso hen*. A contemporary review of Leigh Ashton's introduction to Chinese sculpture, published in 1924, highlights the permutations such art histories could traverse, blurring the boundaries between an East and a West within the very mechanisms through which they were being projected.

"The first book to treat of carvings in stone at any length was the *Chin shih so*, published in 1822, and there the authors were concerned chiefly with archaeological and literary interests. It was left to a Japanese to make a systematic inquiry into the subject. In 1915 (not 1921, as stated by Mr. Ashton) Mr. Omura Seigai [sic] published his *History of Chinese Sculpture* in two stout volumes of 978 illustrations and Japanese text. As Mr. Ashton acknowledges in the preface, his book owes its being primarily to this comprehensive treatise, made accessible to him in translation by Mr. Arthur

4 See his earlier articles: Alexander C. Soper, "Foreign Images and Artists", *Oriental Art*, Vol. 2 (1949); and "Pseudo-foreign Images", *Artibus Asiae*, No. 15, 1–2 (1953).

5 Ōmura Seigai, *Shina bijutsushi: Chōso hen*.

Waley's help."⁶

Hence we might modify Soper's earlier lamentations about the English reader's lack of access to Ōmura's Japanese language research, since at least part of these texts had already been revealed to non-Japanese audiences through the work of intermediary scholars such as Ashton, relying in turn on translations or summaries by scholar-translators such as Waley.⁷ Other English language publications in which one finds references to Ōmura's works (up to the 1950s in this sample) include *T'oung Pao*, *Artibus Asiae*, *The Art Bulletin* and the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. The fact that such journals have now been digitized into online databases emphasizes the notion of afterlife mentioned above. We might note here however, that the selective use of Ōmura's research reflects the bias toward Buddhist art in Euramerican scholarship, which remains strong even now. In that respect, Soper's translation, for example, removed those parts of Ōmura's original work that set it apart from previous (and many later) approaches to the entire concept of "sculpture" in China, by including as it did monuments, architectural objects and other inscription-bearing objects, of Daoist, Confucian or more esoteric derivation, and considering these in terms of technique, style, subject and period.

Formations of Ōmura's Oriental Art History

Why did Ōmura write a compendium of Chinese sculpture in 1915? The straightforward influences on this process further unpack the background to Ōmura's "Orient", in which Buddhism, and an understanding of the cultural significance of such works in Japan and overseas, was prominent. Despite being brought up in a devout Buddhist home, it was not until later, as a student at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, that Ōmura began to approach Buddhism more broadly as a subject of serious scholarship, and as a bridge between various aspects of his art historical work. The intensification of Ōmura's Buddhological studies is difficult to separate from other aspects of his scholarship, which also revolved around the study of Sinic artifacts and texts. In art and Buddhist scholarship "China", as a civilization or text (文 *bun*) to which Ōmura typically deferred, was not simply an object of study but a medium of learning. In fact he developed his research of Oriental Art History and Buddhist history virtually in parallel, his key textual sources being in both cases available to him in classical Chinese. For example, although his *History of the Development of Esoteric Buddhism*, published in 1918 had occupied more of his time in the three years previous, and marked the highpoint of his Buddhist studies, he published the last of the "Chinese art" volumes in the Shinbi Taikan series in the same year, directly preceding his concentration on *bunjinga* literati painting from 1919 onwards.

6 Percival Yetts, "An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Sculpture, by Leigh Ashton", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 44, No. 245 (May 1924): 257.

7 Incidentally, Arthur Waley (1889-1966), member of the Bloomsbury Group and well-known translator of many significant classical Japanese and Chinese books and poetry collections, was still working in the Oriental Prints and Drawings section of the British Museum throughout the 1920s, largely cataloguing the Aural Stein collections and writing an introductory volume to Chinese painters. This further illustrates the early reach of Ōmura's work.

In this respect an instrumental influence on Ōmura as a student was Imaizumi Yūsaku (1850–1931).⁸ Imaizumi was an expert connoisseur turned historian, who was of a generation to have received a classical education in Japan, before pursuing further study of foreign languages and classical history overseas, in his case in France. He had a scholarly and personal interest in Buddhism and Buddhist art, and was part of the group that had lobbied to establish the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. He took part in the first stage of the Kinai Surveys of cultural properties, largely to temple collections between May–September 1888.⁹ In France, Imaizumi had studied and worked in Lyon between May 1877 and January 1883, acquiring a working knowledge of Latin, Sanskrit and Egyptian hieroglyphs, and being employed as an expert in Asian antiquities in the collection that now constitutes the Musée Guimet in Paris. When Ōmura was a student Imaizumi was teaching “Archaeology” at the TSFA. Yet Ōmura did not take Imaizumi’s classes, instead attending occasional lectures or seeking out his would-be mentor’s personal guidance.

Imaizumi became director of the newly renamed Kyoto School of Applied Arts in November 1894, shortly after Ōmura had started teaching there. Ōmura’s diaries show that not only were they in regular contact, but when Imaizumi arrived Ōmura offered him his complete assistance.¹⁰ Imaizumi also became a mentor to Ōmura’s brother, Shiozawa Katsugorō (also known by his *gō* Kanzan), a keen scholar of Buddhism at the time. The brothers had even undertaken to study Sanskrit from the older teacher in late February 1893.¹¹ In the next couple of years they co-authored a book on the various Buddhist sects, featuring sections on India, China and Japan, published in May 1896.¹² It is unclear to what extent this was Ōmura’s work beyond writing the introduction, yet notably this may have been the first time Ōmura attempted to deal with Asia or “the Orient” as an integral discursive space.¹³ The book’s tripartite thematic structure reflects the then common understanding of Buddhism’s eastward trajectory, from ancient India, through China, to Japan. Noticeably absent is the role of Central or Northern Asia or of course the Korean peninsula. Such a formula not only conceptually structured the historiographical treatment of art and culture, but also the very object of archaeology and empirical art history, which even today tend to envisage their task as the uncovering of an evident past to the present “imagined” or experiential community.

It was in fact Imaizumi who taught the first classes of “Oriental art history” at the TSFA, albeit for

8 For Imaizumi’s biographical details and relationship to the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, see Yoshida Chizuko, “Imaizumi Yūsaku den” [A Biography of Imaizumi Yūsaku], *Izura Ronsō*, No. 6 (1999): 29–77.

9 For an outline of the two stages of the Kinai Surveys and their participants, see Murakado Noriko, “Meijiki no kobijutsu shashin – Kinai hōmotsu torishirabe wo chūshin ni” [Photographs of Antiquities in the Meiji Period: Focusing on the Survey of Treasures in the Kinai Area, 1888–1889], *Bijutsushi*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2002): 146–165.

10 Yoshida Chizuko, “Shiryō shōkai: Seigai nikki” [Introduction of Research Materials: Seigai’s Diaries], *Kindai Gasetu*, No.8 (1999): 86, and Yoshida, “Imaizumi Yūsaku den”, *ibid.*, 54.

11 Yoshida, “Imaizumi Yūsaku den”, *ibid.*, 64.

12 *Shakkyō shoshū roku* [“Chronicles of the Various Buddhist Sects”] (Tokyo: Kōbōkutsu, 1896). Ōmura’s brother published another book the following year, by the same publisher (perhaps created by the brothers?) about the 13th century Zen monk Dōgen, *Dōgen zenji den* (Tokyo: Kōbōkutsu, 1897), for which Ōmura again wrote the preface.

13 See Ōmura, 1–4 January 1894. In Yoshida, “Shiryō shōkai: Seigai nikki”, *ibid.*, 76.

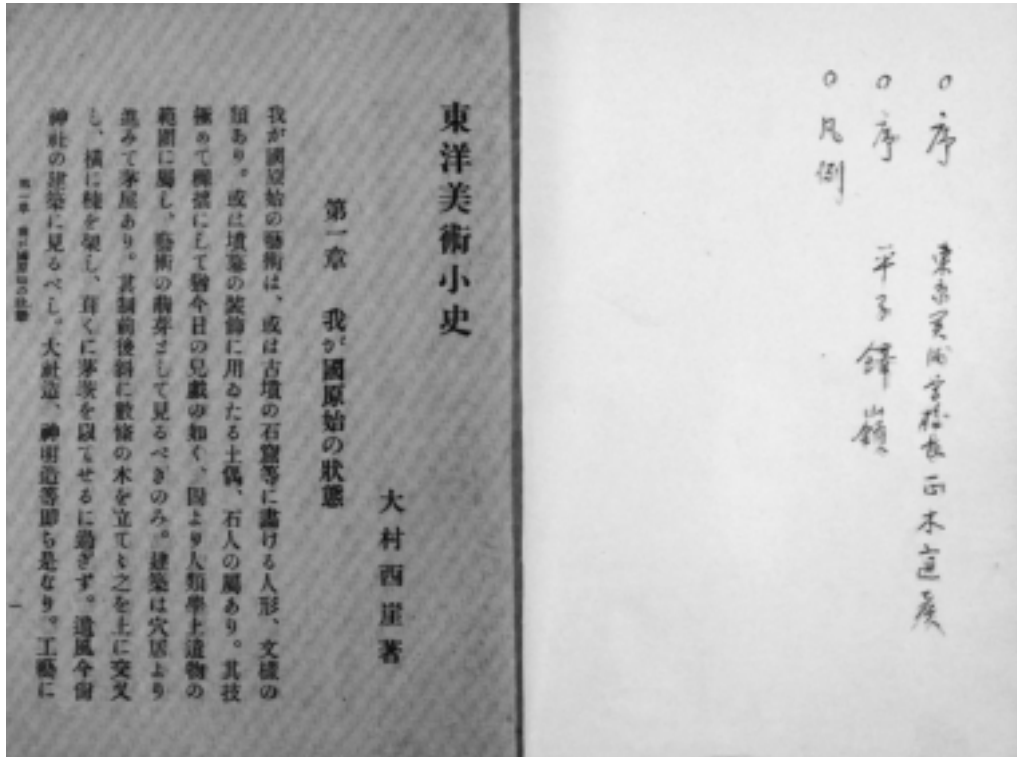


Fig. 2 Corrected pre-press copy of *Tōyō bijutsu shōshi* (1906). Collection of Tokyo University for the Arts, photographed by author, 2010.

less than a year, from 1899, before Ōmura took over and developed a fuller course of study. Significantly, Ōmura’s appointment had been partly at the new dean Masaki Naohiko’s stipulation that he developed research of “*tōyō bijutsu shi*” as a course of study at the TSFA. Hence in hindsight Ōmura’s research appears to have certainly benefited from, if not been directly influenced by Masaki’s personal and political agendas, as he was known—even criticized—for his bias toward East-Asian arts and antiquities.¹⁴

However, prior to this period Ōmura had taken an avid interest in the study of aesthetics, as taught by the writer and critic Mori Ōgai (1826–1922), who was recently returned from Germany. In many respects Ōgai made his name through the debates in which he introduced aspects of Edoard von Hartmann’s aesthetics to Japan. The late nineteenth century philosopher Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) is relatively unknown today, yet was one of the most popular European philosophers of his day. Ōgai introduced Hartmann’s aesthetics in a well-publicized critique of Toyama Masakazu’s (1848–1900) speech “The Future of Japanese Painting” (*Nihon kaiga no mirai*).¹⁵

14 Masaki’s preference for older, self-consciously “traditional” Japanese and Asian art forms, coupled with his connoisseurial acquisition of antiques, led some contemporary critics to dismiss him as a mere “antique collector”, unfit to lead a modern art school. See [Ishii?] Hakutei, “Fuhai wo kiwamataru Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō” (The Tokyo School of Fine Arts is corrupted), *Chūō Bijutsu*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (March 1916): 2–12.

15 See Kambayashi Tsunemichi, “Ōgai, Schelling, and Aesthetics”, ed. M. F. Marra, *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates*

Ōmura's intellectual involvement with Ōgai and his circle even led, for example, to the joint authorship of a manual on the history and practice of "Western Painting", only a couple of years after the course was established at the TSFA. The apparently dissimilar subjects of Buddhist history and iconography versus contemporary German aesthetics might be understood, in Ōmura's case, as tools or systems to consolidate a holistic theory of "Japan within the Orient", yet one more empirically and theoretically rigorous ("scientific") than the generation of Ōmura's teachers, such as Okakura Tenshin (ne Kakuzō 1862-1913) and Imai-zumi. It was through his appointment as Chief Editor at the Shinbi Shoin publishing company that Ōmura had an outlet through which to realise and develop this consolidation, in a series of *shōshi* "concise histories" and *taikan* "overviews" of Chinese, Japanese and Oriental art history. Many of his very first publications at Shinbi Shoin appear to have been related to the courses he gave at the TSFA, including a "Concise History of Oriental Art".

Although he first contributed to the Shinbi Taikan series in 1904, having befriended the publication's director Tajima Shi'ichi at the St. Louis Worlds Fair that year, Ōmura did not become Chief Editor until 1906, when the company changed hands and was moved to Tokyo.¹⁶ Ōmura's experience in St. Louis is worth noting separately here for what his diarized reflections reveal of his experience of cultural differences, and how these personal experiences came to bolster the perceived cultural exclusivity of aesthetic systems in his work. This was his first chance to travel overseas, going as an official art expert and judge in the Japanese delegation. However, like many Japanese who made the trip to St. Louis at that time, he traveled back through the United States and Europe, primarily to visit well-known museums, art galleries and even art schools. Ōmura's diary describes his personal encounter with things structured as "Japanese" or "Western". This included various iterations of Japanese culture produced by Japanese or non-Japanese for consumption at the fair. The self-conscious "Japanese-ness" he encountered was a form of cultural performance by Japanese participants; such as a troupe of Japanese "geisha" dancers he met on the day he arrived. He derisively noted: "Everyday, from afternoon to night, dressed in brown *hakama* style outfits, they go about the exhibition areas, giving dancing performances. I saw these - they were not interesting."¹⁷ A few days later however, it was he who was offering colour illustrations of Japanese artworks from *Kokka* magazine (presumably woodblock prints) to a foreigner he met there, as representative of Japanese culture.¹⁸ On the other hand, he

on *Aesthetics and Interpretation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002): 110, and Satō Dōshin, "*Nihonbijutsu*" *tanjō: Kindai Nihon no "kotoba" to senryaku* [The Birth of "Japanese Art": The "Words" and Strategies of Modern Japan] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996): 69–71.

16 In May 1899 the Nihon Bukkyō Shinbi Kyōkai (lit. Japan Buddhist "True Beauty" Association) was formed at at Kenninji temple, by affiliates of a number of Kyoto temples, with the explicit purpose of launching an ambitious series of illustrated art books showcasing Japanese Buddhist art to further the cause of Buddhism both in Japan and overseas. Hence *Shinbi taikan* was launched bilingually, English-Japanese. For details on the origins and fate of the Shinbi Shoin publishers, see Murakado Noriko, "Shinbi Shoin no bijutsu zenshū ni miru 'Nihon bijutsu shi' no keisei" [The Formation of 'Japanese Art History' as Seen in the Collected Art Publications of Shinbi Shoin], *Kindai gasetu: Meiji Bijutsushi Gakkai shi*, No.8 (1999): 33–51.

17 Ōmura, 7 July 1904; in Yoshida, "Ōmura Seigai no tō'ō nikki", *Kindai gasetu*, No.17 (2008): 109.

18 See 11 June 1904; in *ibid.*, 110. This episode suggests the *Kokka* images were brought by Ōmura for just such occasions.

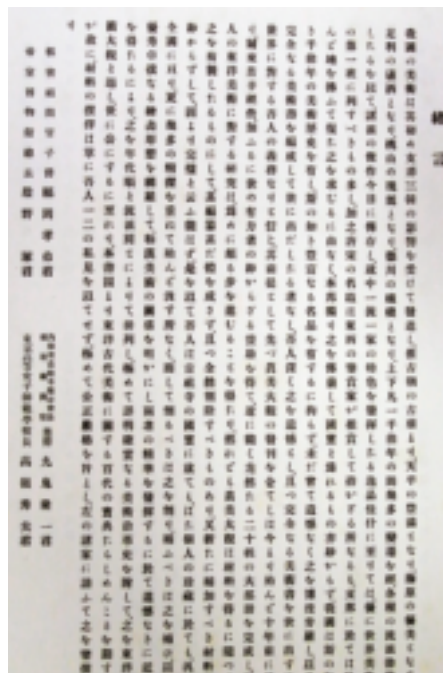


Fig. 3a–c: *Tōyō Bijutsu Taikan*, Vol. 1 (1908) cover and introduction. Fig. 3d: colour woodblock copy of “Portrait of Prince Shōtoku,” from the Imperial Household Collection (Vol. 1, Plate 3).

also experienced typical Euramerican appropriations of an exotic Japan, such as when he and Tajima Shi'ichi (editor at Shinbi Shoin publishing house) went to the local Imperial Theatre. Ōmura's experience of the spectacle was two-fold however:

“It was a Japanese play put on by Westerners. The words were unintelligible, the costumes and actions were all wrong; I watched, enduring the absurdity and idiocy to the very end. And yet, I was moved by the excellence of the props and backdrop. Although using electric lights, the scene appeared as though in reality; the way the clouds moved, the rippling waves reflecting the moon, and so on, simply appeared like nothing short of the real thing.”¹⁹

Did such experiences overseas reinforce his sense of Japanese or Oriental particularity? Certainly, in his later work “Western” is used as a dialectical opposite to the Orient (*tōyō*), East-Asia (*tō'ā*), or Japan. One more episode from the fair illustrates the seductive simplicity of this dichotomy as a way of reassuring oneself of cultural or even epistemological difference. After a visit to the fair's large park area, Ōmura commented on a lack of subtle aesthetic appreciation amongst Westerners there, that he considered common in Japan. “People here do not appreciate fireflies (*hotaru*)” he lamented. “Sometimes you see children catch them, cut off their tails, and stick these on their neckties or earlobes, joking ‘Oooh, diamonds’, and so on.” Or, again: “In the fountain's ponds, frogs croak. That croaking is extremely beautiful, but this too is not appreciated by people here.”²⁰ These incidents highlight the personal dimension, the identity politics, struggling within Ōmura's broader art historical work.

It was in the subsequent decade, between 1906-1918, that Ōmura wrote his best-known works of Chinese and Japanese art history, including *Tōyō bijutsu taikan* (published from 1908-1918)(Fig. 3). These large-format series became known for their mixture of scholarship with high-quality reproduction, using multi-pass colour woodblock and collotype photographic prints of sculptures, paintings and other artworks. It is in this series that the Sino-Japanese character of Ōmura's “Orient” becomes more developed, which was to become focused on a specifically ‘China-as-the-essence-of-Asia’ cultural ideal, where Asia is understood in contradistinction to the Euro-American “West”. This concept would finally be articulated as a practice through Ōmura's research and practice of *bunjinga* literati painting.

Bunjin(ga): Embodying the Subject of an Oriental (Art) History

The area of Ōmura's work which has until recently had a decidedly limited afterlife is precisely the research he developed in the last years of his life, namely literati painting. This was the culmination of his work on an Oriental art history, which he steadfastly advocated from 1919 until his death in 1927. It was also in this period that he undertook his first trip to China, at the age of fifty-three, developing relationships with

19 Ōmura, 20 August 1904; in Yoshida, “Ōmura Seigai no tō'ō nikki”, *ibid.*, 119.

20 Both quotes from 28 June 1904; in *ibid.*, 113.



Fig. 4 Ōmura during his first trip to China, between October 1921 – January 1922. Caption reads, “Portrait of Professor Ōmura, now touring in China”. From *TSFA Alumni Monthly*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (January 1922): 9.

Chinese counterparts, such as Chen Shizeng (ne Chen Hengke 1876–1923). It is a renewed interest in probing modern Sino-Japanese relations that has made such interactions the subject of recent scholarship, giving this period of Ōmura’s work particular contemporary relevance.²¹

What we must immediately note is that virtually all of the research for which Ōmura has been widely recognized had been completed by 1918, in other words before he traveled to China (Fig. 4). This includes the *History of the Development of Esoteric Buddhism*, for which he was awarded the Japan Imperial Academy prize for scientific research, in 1920.²² If we are to judge by the volume of his output in these later years, and the manner in which he focused his energies in its pursuit, the advocacy of a literati painting discourse represents to be the culmination of his development of his conception of Oriental Art History. While he pursued other subjects in the refinement of his Oriental Art History, the principle vehicle or expression of his understanding was literati painting (which included calligraphy and poetry in

the form of colophons) as a manifestation of literati intellectual culture. As a practice literati painting gave his “history” contemporary relevance, acting as a bridge or continuum between the past and a possible future; simultaneously a history and a program. Moreover, his collaborations with Chinese painters and scholars should also be considered as a part of this pursuit of *bunjinga*, as it formed the basis of his relationships and research in China. More broadly, it marked a significant shift in Ōmura’s approach to his subject, from defining and synthesizing historical models through empirical research, to actively attempting to reenact and perpetuate them by returning to the practice of art making—as an embodiment of History. This was a theory of practice to overcome historical time.

Despite Ōmura’s specialist approach, his interpretation nevertheless reflects what was a trend in many painting genres (including *yōga* oil-painters, *nihonga* and *nanga* painters too). Of course, there had also been a general increased cultural interest in things “Chinese” and “Asian” during the 1910s and 1920s. Japanese presence on the mainland was aided by convenient travel on boat and train, typically (as in Ōmura’s

21 Recent published studies in English include Aida Yuen-Wong’s *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006). Several more recent yet unpublished doctoral theses have also begun to treat particular agents in these relations in a more nuanced fashion. See for example Lai Kuo-sheng, “Learning New Painting from Japan And Maintaining National Pride in Early Twentieth Century China, with Focus on Chen Shizeng (1876–1923)” (2008) and Walter Davis’ excellent thesis, “Wang Yiting and the Art of Sino-Japanese Exchange” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Ohio State University, 2008).

22 *Mikkyō hattatsu shi* [The History of the Development of Esoteric Buddhism] (Tokyo: Butsusho Kankōkai Zuzōbu, 1918).

case) via ports in Japanese annexed Korea or North-China.

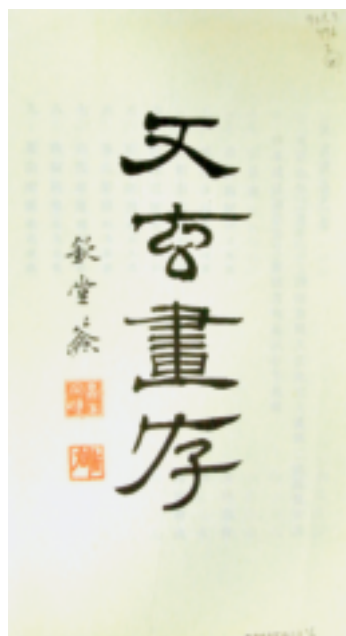
Ōmura sought to embody the subject of his Sino-centric Oriental (art) history as a final development of his earlier research, a dynamic synthesis that would make historical interpretation into a contemporary alter- or counter-position. Although it was pitched as a revival or “renaissance” (*fukko*), and drew on a virtually unprecedented richness of historical sources, his essay “The Revival of Literati Painting” (1921) constituted a new interpretation. In it he chose not to dwell on particularities and differences in what had historically constituted literati *bunjin* (Ch. *wenren*) style practices in Japan and China. Instead he emphasized a more general concept of refined literate culture, rooted in the scholar-official elite, yet historically reinterpreted by generations of educated men, through the vehicle of *ki'in* (氣韻/韻 Ch. *qi yun*), often translated as “spirit resonance”. Historically this refers to part of the first principle in a set of six canonical principles or laws of painting that have dominated Chinese painting aesthetics (including calligraphy) seemingly since they were written sometime in the 5th or early 6th century.²³ On the other hand, despite the history of the term, its very poetic ambiguity, suggestive of personal inspiration, made it attractive to Japanese art writers in the early twentieth century as a venerably ancient yet potentially equivalent concept to contemporary European non-realist and individualistic theories of painterly expression. Even Ōmura, who doggedly maintained that Chinese and Japanese painting traditions were entirely independent of the European tradition, remarked: “One wonders if the reason the so-called Impressionists and Futurists have appeared is not because of the penetration of ideals from East Asian painting?”²⁴ arrogating their claims of innovation and creative power.

The negation of dogmatic naturalistic realism, allegedly epitomized by a Hellenistic Western artistic tradition, was claimed by Ōmura to be the hallmark of Oriental ink painting's independent development. This, along with the notion of a cultivated *ki'in* feeling allowed Ōmura to retrospectively claim various schools of Japanese painting as having unconsciously possessed *bunjin* literati qualities, having been founded by adequately cultivated men—regardless of their stylistic divergence from monochromatic, ink on paper, Southern Song style that he personally preferred and emulated. On the other hand, he specifically derided the Maruyama school, known for its naturalism, as nothing more than, “some after-effects of a Ming period leaf-daubing style”; claiming, “the self-taught [Maruyama] Ōkyō (1733–95) simply wasn't enough to be the founder of a school of painting.”²⁵ This derision, based on a lack of literati cultivation is reiterated later

23 The six principles or laws (J. *rikubō* or *roppō*, Ch. *liufā*), appear in the *Gu Hua Pin Lu* (J. *Koga Hinroku*), “A record of the classification of old painters/paintings”), attributed to the painter Jin dynasty painter Xie He (J. *Sha Kaku*, 479–?). A simplified set could read: (1) 氣韻生動, lively *qiyun* (in painting, or painter), often called “spirit resonance”; (2) 骨法用筆, structural brushwork, or linework; (3) 応物象形, formal resemblance to the object; (4) 随類賦彩, and appropriate colouring; (5) 經營位置, painting composition/construction; (6) 伝模移写, copying to transmit old painting models. These are developed based partly on Susan Bush's translations, in *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1971): 13–22.

24 Ōmura, “Bunjinga no fukko” [The Revival of Literati Painting], *Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō Kōyūkai geppō* [Tokyo School of Fine Arts Alumni Monthly], Vol. 19, No. 8 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō, February 1921): 213.

25 *Ibid.*, 218.



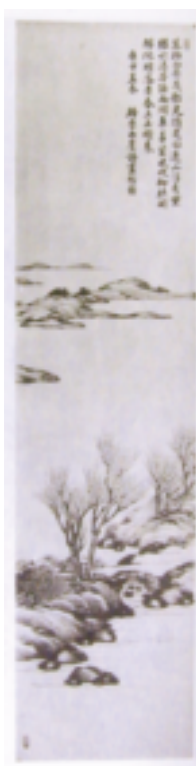
a



b



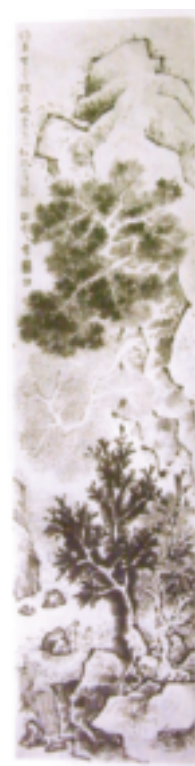
c



d



e



f

Fig. 5a-5b: *Yugen Gazon* Vol. 2, title page calligraphy (by Kuroki Kindō) and index. **Fig. 5c:** Ōmura. 仿閑同懸崖飛泉, ink on silk (Plate 1). **Fig. 5d:** Ōmura. 仿邵瓜嶠秋山独歩, ink on silk (Plate 2). **Fig. 5-e:** Kuroki Kindō, 天門雲磴, ink on silk (Plate 17). **Fig. 5f:** Kojima Dokuzan, 疏林乱嶂, ink on silk (Plate 22).

when Ōmura considers his contemporary Nanga painting circles as overly concerned with visual styles and lacking earnest study, hence being unfit to claim the *bunjinga* mantle for their art. The keys to bunjin artistic expression were worldly travel, bookish learning and “history” in the sense of accessing a cultural continuity. These were all assets Ōmura not only possessed but embodied as a published professor, commissioned art expert and practicing artist.

However, returning to Ōmura's actual practice, rather than the ideals of his theory, we note that some of the painter friends in his own group exhibited styles that reflect a diversity of interpretations even within Ōmura's ostensibly exemplary coterie. Kuroki Kindō (1866–1923) for example consistently displayed brushwork more akin to experimental Nanga works of the time, significantly different to Ōmura's consciously conservative, measured approach (Fig. 5). The works Ōmura chose to collect, or was given, by Chinese artists, similarly illustrate the variety of interpretations that, while being disparaged in theory were pragmatically accepted in practice. This relativity, while not surprising, does remind us of the crucial limitations, willful contradictions and at times problematically elitist ideals in Ōmura's re-evaluation of literati painting. “Literati painting” was also a convenient, powerfully ambiguous yet historically validated theoretical mantle under which Ōmura and a certain coterie could choose to align themselves in the interest of consolidating a viable, contra-distinct position vis-à-vis Euro-American artistic modernity. But it was also a way of maneuvering and experimenting, as artists, within their respective artworlds.

Above we have discussed ways in which Ōmura's position was integrated into other discourses selectively, as well as the contemporaneous quality of its theorisation and practice. This contemporaneity is not always clear in hindsight, due in part to the weighty research that historicized his theory. However, if we consider Ōmura's 1921 outline of his position, in “The Revival of Literati Painting” (first published as a booklet in January under the auspices of his painting group, then in slightly simpler language as an article in the TSFA Alumni Monthly the following month), it is not difficult to recognize that it was, true to its time, a manifesto—aimed at an allegedly shared Oriental cultural spirit, bolstered by art history and an ongoing *bunjinga* art practice. Other theories of a literati style art had tended to fuse the popular “Nanga” genre with some poetic interpretations of literati painting in its Chinese origins. A number of interpretations followed Tanaka Toyozō's (1881–1948) essay on “A New Theory of Nanga,” serialized in *Kokka* throughout 1912–1913.²⁶ The first major exhibition of specifically “Southern School” Chinese paintings was organized at the Imperial Museum in 1917, by Ōmura's friend and TSFA graduate, Mizoguchi Teijirō.²⁷ Such were the years in which Ōmura's concept was germinating so to speak, however none traced literati painting as a specifically personal history, in the way Ōmura would, in the name of his Yūgen Gasha painting group.

The contradictions in Ōmura's main text now appear to be due to the breadth of his appeal. He cites

26 Tanaka Toyozō's serialized seven-part essay “*Nanga shinron*” (A New Theory of *Nanga* Painting), appeared in the *Kokka* journal between March 1912 and October 1913.

27 That year the museum also edited *Nanshūga shū* (“Collection of Southern School Paintings”), published by Saitō Shobō in July 1917.

history, acting as a foil to the European avant-garde, arguing for a so-called return to pre-Meiji Japanese aristocratic culture, yet simultaneously proposing literati painting as a complex, robust cultural manifestation of centuries of learning and practice developed in contra-distinct independence from *seiyō*, “the West”. Westernization was seen as the cause of a loss of Asian elite intellectual practices and values. By locating an elusive “spirit resonance”, from the historical terminology of Chinese painting theory, at the heart of a proposed Oriental intellectual cultural history, he could even suggest that innovative European painting (i.e. Impressionism) was “Oriental” in origin, as well as nominally overcoming the problem of modern nationalized “spirit”. The uncanny truths in such a claim should not distract one from noting rather the remarkable discursive oscillation at work, once again, between times and spaces, as well as the reflexive process of claiming total independence from the (in this case Western) Other, while evoking that Other in turn to fully substantiate one’s subjectivity.

Ōmura the historian earnestly tackled the orthodox history of the literati ideal, re-investing it with power yet challenging its contemporary status:

“The division of painting into two schools, Northern and Southern—the Southern school being painting of scholar-officials (*bunjin shifu*), the Northern school, those of the academy professionals (*intai senka*)—was initiated in the Ming dynasty, by Dong Qichang and Shen Hao. It is a shame however, that both of them possessed a narrow historical perspective, showing little discernment. While singing the praises of literati painting, they couldn’t explain its Ultimate Truth. They considered it in terms of styles and schools of painting, thus starting an erroneous trend.”²⁸

It was this erroneous trend that Ōmura thought was prevailing in Japanese Nanga painting, as painters were overly concerned with questions of style rather than spiritual or intellectual refinement. Two decades earlier he had vehemently attacked the stylistic experimentation of the Nihon Bijutsuin’s so-called New Nihonga painters, coining the term *mōrōtai* originally as a derisive description of the hazy, atmospheric blocks of pigment shading through which these painters—such as Yokoyama Taikan (1868–1958), Hishida Shunsō (1874–1911), etc.—were abandoning linework altogether, for spatial and tonal depth effects.²⁹ In “The Revival of Literati Painting” he concluded, that the group Yūgen Gasha was thus formed to maintain

28 Ōmura Seigai, “Bunjinga no Fukkō”, *Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō Kōyūkai geppō* [TSFA Alumni Monthly], Vol. 19, No. 8 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō, February 1921): 216. Shen Hao’s role in the development of this Northern/Southern schools theory has since been recognized by some contemporary scholars, citing Ōmura’s earlier proposal. See for example Yoshizawa Tadashi, *Nihon nanga ronkō* [Theory of Japanese Nanga], (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977).

29 According to Yoshida, the term first appeared in Ōmura’s article, “Bijutsu tenrankai wo hyōsu” [A Review of the Art Exhibition], *Tōkyō Jiji Shimbun* (10 April 1900), critiquing the “8th Joint Exhibition of the Japanese Painting Society and the Japanese Painting Academy” (*Dai hachikai Nihonkaiga Kyōkai, Nihon Bijutsu’in Rengō Kaiga Kyōshinkai*). There is, of course, an irony in the younger Ōmura’s critique of this non-naturalistic painting development, when such a concept, though perhaps not in this formal outcome, was central to his idea of *bunjinga* and Oriental art. See Yoshida Chizuko, “Ōmura Seigai no bijutsu hihyō” [Seigai Ōmura as an Art Critic (*sic*)], *Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku gakubu kiyō* [Bulletin of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music], No. 26 (March 1991): 46–48.

the authentic lineage of literati painting, disavowing the name *nanga*, with its connection to the erroneous “Northern/Southern” schools theory, and claiming instead *bunjinga*.

In this respect, Ōmura's earnest and positive engagements with China appear to have been focused on an agenda that was well formed in Japan prior to his trips. In his first article recounting his 1921 trip he noted having transported around four hundred kilograms of photographic equipment for the copying of old and new artworks.³⁰ Many of these images reappeared in print or exhibition after his return. The recent availability of his China travel diary now makes clear the very systematic way he went about photographically copying worthwhile old paintings.³¹ He quite obviously sought to meet artists, scholars and collectors in China with the aim of gathering necessary resource materials, in the form of photographic copies, old books and actual art works. He was assisted by the Chinese-speaking TSFA graduate Kurihara Makoto (1888–1974), who was working for an antiques company in Beijing. On a number of occasions Ōmura simply met the collectors or artists in question, briefly assessed which works if any warranted being photographed (sometimes curtly noting “No interesting works”), and if these were numerous, then he would continue to another appointment, leaving Kurihara to oversee the remaining photography, with the professional Japanese photographers Ōmura hired in Beijing and Shanghai. His greatest assistance however was from Jin Cheng and Chen Shizeng, leaders of the Beijing painting circles, who literally gave Ōmura a list of important collectors and artists to meet in both cities, with Chen even facilitating access to part of the stored ex-imperial collections, for which a museum was not completed until 1925. Eventually, Ōmura sent back to Japan some 700 exposed 12 x10 inch plates of images, the later fate of which unfortunately remains unknown.

Literati Painting in an Age of Photo-mechanical Reproduction

Ōmura's use of the media, and production of his own “media”, in the form of catalogues, articles, photographic copies of paintings and calligraphy, and of course the collection of art works themselves, bespeaks a career developed amidst “new” imaging technologies. Photographic reproductions of far away places and objects were indispensable to Ōmura's pre-1921 research; indeed where photographs of China compensated for what was in fact a subject in absentia.³² Here China was not so much a geographical locality as much as

30 Ōmura, “Shina rekiyūdan” [On touring in China], in *Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō Kōyūkai geppō*, Vol. 20, No. 7 (March 1922): 1–5.

31 I thank Yoshida Chizuko for allowing access to the diary Ōmura meticulously kept during his first trip, amongst other materials that have only recently come to be kept at the Tokyo University of the Arts.

32 In his preface to *Shina bijutsu shi: Chōso ben* [History of Chinese Art – Sculpture edition], Ōmura notes the various collections of China photographs he accessed during research, as well as ink rubbings of inscriptions made *in situ*. Some of these were reproduced in the accompanying image volume, that became a key reference for European scholars of Chinese sculpture, as well as Buddhist art and culture. Incidentally, as early as the 1930s exegetical captions for artworks featured in the well-known *Kokka* journal were also written based on photographic reproductions. Art historian Tani Shin'ichi later recalled: “... [I]n most cases I hadn't seen the actual art work, I had only been handed large photographic prints. As I was writing expositions without having seen [the object myself], I was always writing in a cold sweat; but I had no choice at the time.” Tani, “Reminiscences of art and art history circles: Taki Sei'ichi and Ōmura Seigai,” Part 1, *Hōshun*, No. 315 (Tokyo: December, 1981): 7.



Fig. 6: Advertisement for Shinbi Shoin (left), for the 1907 National Exposition for the Promotion of Industry, held at Ueno Park. From *Tōkyō Annai* (Tokyo: Shōkabō, 1907): 24–25.

a cultural history that could be copied piecemeal and transported, to be pieced together in another place at another time.

Ōmura's best-known art historical work was produced during his chief-editorship at the Shinbi Shoin publishing company, specifically to accompany some of the highest quality collotype and multi-pass (multi-coloured) woodblock reproductions then available anywhere in the world.³³ Shinbi Shoin was however a commercial affair offering an array of products, such as postcards or fans, that in some instances reframe Japanese and Asian art history as popular culture (Fig. 6). Later he shifted to semi-private publishing, which although not being as lavishly bound, often maintained the art-print collotype process, primarily to print ink and wash paintings or reproductions of black and white photography. Ōmura would continue to use these techniques to print the catalogues of his literati painting group and subsequent research collections. Hence we can see that the Yūgen Gasha's exhibition catalogues, *Yūgen Gazon*, were the forerunners of the publication he would later make for contemporary (in the sense of current) Chinese literati painters after his first trip to China, titled *Uiki kingaroku* [A Collection of Contemporary Chinese Painting] (February 1922). This introduced the artwork and artist profiles of leading and younger artists he had met between Beijing and Shanghai (Fig. 7). Due to the subject matter, literati painting, it may be easy to overlook the fact that by using collotype reproductions, which had by then been superseded in general publishing, these publications

33 The Shinbi Shoin publishing company won a medal at the 1900 Paris Universal Exhibition. The unsurpassed quality of the large collotype and woodblock prints has made these books valuable collectors items nowadays.



Fig. 7a-d: Chen Shizeng's *kanbun* profile and three artworks, from *Uki kingaroku* (February, 1922): unpaginated.

were employing the same high-end print technology of the top photographic magazines. Yet this method of printing also most faithfully reproduced the ink-wash tones and detailed brush strokes of *bunjinga*.³⁴

Besides this use of image media, the development of Ômura's advocacy for literati painting can also be traced through the press. This includes newspaper articles that appeared both before and after his "The Revival of Literati Painting" was republished in the TSFA Alumni Monthly magazine. For example, certain arguments in favour of a reappraisal of literati painting's reputation already appear quite clearly in an article Ômura wrote in October 1921, ostensibly commemorating the death of Ernest Fenollosa. This was incidentally within a few weeks of establishing the Yûgen Gasha literati painting group, and only a month before the group's first exhibition. After praising Fenollosa's study of Japanese and eventually Chinese art, Ômura lamented that the American's understanding never progressed "far enough" for him to appreciate literati style paintings.³⁵ This appears to have been a clear attempt to rectify the mid Meiji era rejection of literati painting, in the immediate wake of its recognised critic. Ômura's comments suggest what remains

34 In a letter from Chen Shizeng to Ômura dated 26 October 1922, in Japanese, Chen's discussion of publication specifies colotype printing—in English as "coal type". This suggests that, although Chen may have been less familiar with the process (?), specific details regarding the print technology to be used for their joint publications were part of their ongoing discussion of future collaborations. I am grateful to Yoshida Chizuka at the Tokyo University of the Arts for showing me some of these letters.

35 Originally published in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, it was republished the same month as, "Waga bijutsukai no onjin – Fenollosa wo omou" [Our Art-world's Benefactor – Remembering Fenollosa], *Tôkyô Bijutsu Gakkô Kôyûkai geppô*, Vol. 19, No. 6 (Tokyo: Tôkyô Bijutsu Gakkô, October 1921): 155.

to some extent a common belief, namely that Fenellosa's vehement critique of literati painting in his 1882 lecture "Bijutsu Shinsetsu", or "The Truth of Art", that otherwise championed Japanese artistic traditions, had cast Chinese-inspired literati painting out of accepted practice.³⁶ Fenellosa's personal criticism remained it seems, and was (posthumously) published decades later in his well-known *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912), a passage from which reminds us of Ōmura's object.

"The enormous evil of this impudent 'bunjinga' hypothesis, that soon stamped itself as orthodox in the belief of all Chinese scholars, was a degeneration of art so rapid that by the end of the Ming [dynasty] hardly a respectable piece of work could be done except in a weak sort of pretty flower painting."³⁷

After Ōmura returned from his first trip to China (late October 1921 to mid January 1922) he anonymously published articles reiterating his literati manifesto, in the popular journals *Kokka* and *Tōyō*. For example, in the "Miscellanea" (*zatsuroku*) at the back of the March 1922 issue of *Kokka*—the first issue to be published following Ōmura's return from China—there appears an article titled "*Bunjinga no shinkō*", anonymously advocating the "promotion" (*shinkō*) of literati painting. In these years however, his publication of literati style paintings and introductory texts tended to use Japanese, presumably to appeal to a less specialist and domestic audience.³⁸ Whereas the earlier Yūgen Gasha group's exhibition catalogues, including artist profiles, had been written entirely in *kanbun* classical Chinese. Using some of the numerous old books he had purchased in China, some hundreds of years old, he republished dozens of old Chinese texts, historically significant for the study of literati painting. These included technical manuals, monographs, and catalogues of paintings and calligraphies.³⁹ In short, this was a kind of media campaign, developed before and after his trip, to publicize his definition and practice of literati painting.

36 It is difficult to ascertain the details of Fenellosa's original English comments as only the rather nuanced Japanese translation of his talk remains. Moreover, J. Thomas Rimer convincingly questions the extent of the newly arrived Fenellosa's comments. See Rimer, "Hegel in Tokyo: Ernest Fenellosa and His 1882 Lecture on the Truth of Art," ed. Michael F. Marra, *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

37 Ernest F. Fenellosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline history of East Asiatic Design*, Vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1912): 146. Incidentally, in July that year (1921) Ōmura had proofread Ariga Nagao's Japanese translation of *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, titled *Tōa bijutsukō*: literally "Classes of East-Asian art," in the taxonomic sense of class.

38 For example, published between July 1921 to November 1922, *Bunjinga sen* [Selected Literati Paintings] (Tokyo: Tanshisha) reached 17 volumes, entirely in Japanese. These systematically introduced literati art and artists through selected images and artist profiles, including detailed large-format colotype reproductions of ink paintings and seals.

39 A number of these books are listed (along with many contemporary paintings he acquired) at the end of his article "Shina rekiyūdan" [On touring in China], in *Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō Kōyūkai geppō*, Vol. 20, No. 7 (March 1922): 4–5.

Chinese “Exchanges”

In Chinese sources Ōmura's work towards a revival of literati painting has remained relatively well known, even more so recently that his chief collaborator, Chen Shizeng, has received greater critical attention in China. Previously overlooked figures in the sensitive early twentieth-century period have begun to be re-evaluated by Chinese art historians, perhaps eager to reinstate the modern history of their field. This is particularly the case for many intellectuals and artists amongst the earliest overseas students, who tended to be sent to Japan. While being crucial for the nascent Nationalist government, they were tarred by their Japanese experiences in the subsequent political climate. Chen Shizeng is a prime example of these figures, often brilliant yet historically difficult to politically define. The artistically gifted son of a politically progressive literati family, Chen received education in traditional arts as well as attending Western style schooling in China already in the late nineteenth century, before being amongst the earliest foreign students to be sent to Japan, in 1906. It is well known that he was at one time fellow student Lu Xun's (1881–1936) roommate at the Kōbun Gakuin, and the two remained close in later life. Returning to China he taught at the progressive Tongzhou Normal School, established in Jiangsu by well-known entrepreneur and educationalist Zhang Jian (1853–1926). He also contributed items to the school's associated museum, recognized as China's first such institution.⁴⁰ It is at this time that Chen was mentored by the innovative and commercially successful Shanghai senior painter, Wu Changshuo (1844–1927).⁴¹ Moving as a bureaucrat to Beijing he nevertheless kept painting, in a style that synthesized Wu's characteristically expressive, loose brushwork. He was soon asked to teach Chinese Painting at Beijing University, balancing a Western inspired progressive education with the earnest belief in the viability of native ideas to create a locally fashioned modern alternative to what was perceived as wholesale Westernization (whether Academy Realism or an avant-garde “-ism”). Hence Chen was well-positioned to respond to Ōmura's theories regarding literati painting, and conveniently fluent in Japanese.

By late 1921 to 1922 Chen and Ōmura seem to have reached a similar point in their advocacy of literati painting as a theoretical position, even as their actual painting practices differed. In June 1922 Chen Shizeng published *Zhongguo wenrenhua zhi yanjiu* (Chinese Literati Painting Studies). This volume included Ōmura's essay “The Revival of Literati Painting”, translated by Chen from Japanese into classical Chinese, alongside Chen's own essay, “Wenrenhua zhi jiazhi” (The Value of Literati Painting)—itself a reworked classical Chinese translation of his original colloquial Chinese article.⁴² Recently, scholars in China and Taiwan have debated the exact timing of these texts, to either prove or refute the influence of Ōmura and

40 Lisa Claypool, “Zhang Jian and China's First Museum”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Aug, 2005): 567-604. For Chen Shizeng in particular, see 579.

41 On Wu Changshuo, including his complex relationship with Japan, see Matsumura Shigeki, *Go Shoseki kenkyū* [A Study of Wu Changshuo] (Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan, 2009).

42 See Chen Shizeng, “Wenrenhua de jiazhi” (*Huixue zazhi*, January 1921). Both versions are reprinted in Gu Sen, Li Shusheng eds. *Zhongguo Chuantong Meishu* [Traditional Chinese Art] Vol. 1, 1896-1949 (Shenzhen: Haitian Chubanshe, 1998).



Fig. 8a–8b: collotype reproduction of Wang Yiting’s portrait of Ōmura in *Uiki Kingaroku*; **Fig. 8c–8d,** another Wang portrait of Ōmura, with colophon by Wu Changshuo (Ōmura family collection, photographed by the author, 2010). On Wang’s portraits of Japanese patrons, including these paintings, see Walter Davis, “Wang Yiting and the Art of Sino-Japanese Exchange” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Ohio State University, 2008).

Japanese contacts on Chen Shizeng’s significant essay.⁴³ That question aside, clearly we should not see their positions as synonymous, as Ōmura argued for a revival, where Chen appealed to the evident value of an existing, ongoing practice. Chen’s *Zhongguo Wenrenhua Zhi Yanjiu* seems to have caused a stir in Chinese painting circles, being reprinted seven times by 1934. Coupled with his previous histories of Chinese painting and sculpture, Ōmura’s name and work has thus remained better known in China than many of his more famous Japanese or European contemporaries. Okakura Tenshin for example, while renowned in Japan,

43 Zhang Shengjie, “Ye tan Chen Shizeng he *Zhongguo wenrenhua zhi yanjiu*” [Also Discussing Chen Shizeng and *Chinese Literati Painting Studies*], Li Yunheng et al. eds., *Chen Shizeng hua lun* [Chen Shizeng’s Painting Theory] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shudian, 2008), 175–177; see also Lai Kuo-sheng, “Learning New Painting from Japan And Maintaining National Pride in Early Twentieth Century China, With Focus on Chen Shizeng (1876–1923)” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Maryland, 2006): 110–124.

Euramerica and India for his turn of the century pan-Asianism, despite his professional and personal travels throughout China, seems to have left no lasting effect on Chinese art historical discourse in China itself.⁴⁴

Between Chen and Ōmura there was, besides a genuine friendship, as with other such “exchanges,” there was also the good-will to collaborate in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Chen and other eager Chinese collaborators provided an authentication of Ōmura's Sino-centric *tōyō* ideal, a kind of “living proof” (Fig. 8). Ōmura represented an expert from Japan who genuinely valued Chinese heritage, having devoted a lifetime of study to the production of lavishly illustrated and rigorously researched volumes showcasing Chinese cultural achievements. This likewise reinforced local Chinese attempts to reinterpret the site of tradition as worthy of modern intellectual and creative development. While conservative academic painters or radical avant-gardists argued over which foreign inspiration to follow, here was a senior foreigner researcher advocating Chinese tradition, articulated by earnest study and genuine practice.

Conclusion

Despite working within most dominant art institutions and ventures at the time (schools, exhibitions, universal expositions, surveys of cultural properties), Ōmura seems to have maintained a degree of scholarly independence, or at least a peculiar distance from the more official ‘exchanges’ then taking place, such as the Sino-Japanese Joint Painting Exhibitions.⁴⁵ As we revisit the rich legacy of such a figure, we can bear in mind that this “Orient” was accessed or invoked by different people, for different purposes. Just as Ōmura and Chen each had their separate if complimentary agendas, so too subsequent scholars have stressed certain parts of Ōmura's “Oriental art history” to service their respective agendas—such as Chinese art history, Buddhist art history, “Asian” art history, or modern Sino-Japanese art relations.

To contrast the earlier positioning of Ōmura's work in past Euramerican scholarship, the relatively few positive postwar reassessments of Ōmura's work in Japan have highlighted his synthesis of formerly disparate materials, particularly for the section of Japanese art in the *Tōyō bijutsu taikan*.⁴⁶ Alternatively praise has been given to his five-volume history of Esoteric Buddhism published in 1918 and written entirely in *kanbun*, a feat of rigorous classical Chinese scholarship.⁴⁷ These limited appraisals have presented Ōmura as

44 For a sensitive comparison of Okakura and Ōmura's approach to “doing” Chinese art history, see Okada Ken, “Ryūmon sekkutsu no ashiato – Okakura Tenshin to Ōmura Seigai” [On the Trail of the Longmen Caves: Okakura Tenshin and Ōmura Seigai], in ed. National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, *Kataru genzai, katarareru kako: Nihon no bijutsushigaku 100 nen* [The Present that Tells, The Past that is Told of: 100 Years of Art History in Japan] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999).

45 See Tsuruta Takeyoshi, “Nikka (Nicchū) kaiga rengō tenrankai ni tsuite” [On the Joint Sino-Japanese Collaborative Painting Exhibitions], *Bijutsu kenkyū*, No. 383 (August 2004): 1-33, and also Aida Yuen-Wong, *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China*.

46 Tani Shin'ichi, “Bijutsu • Bijutsushikai kaisō zakki—Taki Seiichi • Omura Seigai no koto (Parts I–VIII)” [Reminiscences from the Worlds of Art and Art History—Taki Seiichi and Ōmura Seigai (Parts 1-8)], *Hōshun*, No.315–321 (December 1981–June 1982).

47 Yashiro Yukio, “Wasure'enu hitobito, sono hitotsu—Ōmura Seigai” [One of Those People Who Should Not Be Forgotten—Ōmura Seigai], *Yamato bunka*, No.14 (June, 1954): 64–76.



Fig. 9: Ōmura Seigai (centre), 13 January 1925, Zhongyang Park (now Zhongshan Park), Beijing; with faculty members from Beijing University, where he had lectured on Chinese folk art two days earlier. From left: Ma Yuzao 馬裕藻, Ye Han 葉翰, Shen Jianshi 沈兼士, Hu She 胡適, Jiang Menglin 蔣夢麟, Qian Daosun 錢稻孫, Ōmura Seigai 大村西崖, Shen Yinmo 沈尹默, Iwamura Shigemitsu 岩村成允 [Secretary to Japanese Embassy, Beijing], Deng Yizhe 鄧以蜚, Ma Peng 馬澎, Chen Huan 陳桓, Zhang Fengju 張鳳舉. (Collection of Tokyo University for the Arts, photographed by author, 2010; with thanks to Yoshida Chizuko.)

representing a certain model of art historical methods in the context of Japanese scholarship more broadly, contrasting his approach to that of his well-known and influential contemporary Taki Seiichi (1873–1945). What is perceived as Ōmura’s rigorous empiricism, encyclopedic knowledge of Chinese texts and constant publication practices has thus been contrasted to Taki’s political savvy and personal charisma, which greatly impacted the structure of the Japanese art world yet did not (so his critics conjecture) leave behind an integral theory or history of art.

Meanwhile, we mustn’t forget that Ōmura’s steadfast pursuit of Chinese art history hinged on a belief that “China” could be an open discourse, to which he too could claim access. Ōmura’s *tōyō* provided the space in which to negotiate and realise such supra-national coalescence. From the availability of artifacts, images and books, to the facility with which he traveled through a network of Japanese helpers in China, or Japanese-speaking Chinese go-betweens, so too was his access to this material—the raw material from which he could refine literati painting as the apex of his “Oriental” art history—facilitated by the fact of Japanese imperial expansion and semi-colonial power in China. Naturally, neither should this tarnish the results of Ōmura’s research outright. It would not be until the 1930s—after Ōmura’s death in 1927—that even pragmatic or hopeful collaborations such as his would become increasingly difficult, or even dangerous,

to maintain.⁴⁸

While it is essential to highlight the important relationships that formed between these groups of Chinese and Japanese artists, students, scholars and officials, it is also dangerous to ignore the various agendas that *intersect* in these relationships, rather than simply defining them. Concentrating only on the points at which these people came together in collaborative solidarity, is like studying the commemorative photos they left to posterity as straightforward illustrations of common intent, rather than scrutinizing the broader networks such groups represented (Fig. 9). Such photographs are indeed remarkable, for their prescient use of media and resolute declaration of purpose: Here we were, on this day, consciously assembled before the lens of history, they seem to be saying. Yet, obviously the reality they memorialize was, even as they stood side-by-side, highly contingent and often only momentarily focused. It was a shared construction, real yet unreal. Such sites should be studied, but not merely assimilated as History into contemporary agendas. Neither should they be leveraged to postulate alternative historical trajectories, or to validate such relationships as a fashionable kind of colonial hybridity for example. Such “history” seems to only obfuscate the past status quo (and its legacies) against which these complex exceptions remain so remarkable and potent today.

48 However, some artists with longstanding ties to Japanese artists, business or charities, such as Wang Yiting continued to aid Japanese colleagues or causes even as late as 1934, for example through Buddhist Associations or charitable auctions. See Davis, *ibid.*, 202–205.